Remains by Simon Armitage

**Context:**

The poem is written from the perspective of a soldier stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan (or any warzone really). They are on patrol and fire on some bank robbers. One of the looters appeared to possibly have a gun so they open fire. The rest of the poem is looking at the fact the solider, even long after this event, cannot leave the memory behind and carries this dead man with him in his mind.

Post traumatic stress and mental illness is very common in soldiers who struggle to come to terms with some part of their duty, normally a horrific memory of killing or being in danger which gives them nightmares and panic attacks as well as depression and sometimes suicidal tendencies.

Simon Armitage is a famous UK poet who is known for being very direct in his work. His recent poems have looked at the experiences of war and soldiers.

Themes:

The poem is originally set in a warzone and naturally looks at conflict in a direct way. However it also looks heavily at the after effects of conflict and the long term effects it has on the people involved. Power is partly shown in this as well, firstly the soldiers power over life and death but later the power over their own memory and experiences. Mental health and morality are also key in this.

**Structure:**

The poem is written in 8 stanzas, the last of which is a couplet which leaves the poem on a dramatic end note. It does not rhyme and the poem is a monologue, using very conversational **asides** and **syntax** to structure the sentences into a very conversational tone “end of story, not really”. There is also a lot of **enjambment** and **caesura** used to emphasises the natural speech patterns of the speaker. Another key factor in this poem is the use of **colloquialism** (slang) and **personal pronouns** to give it a sense of **realism,** “One of my mates,”.

There is a loose set of rhymes in the poem, often internal and used to give an almost childish aspect to the horror of the warzone. It perhaps suggests how numb this soldier is to what is happening.

On another occasion, we got sent out

to tackle looters raiding a bank.

And one of them legs it up the road,

probably armed, possibly not.

Well myself and somebody else and somebody else

are all of the same mind,

so all three of us open fire.

Three of a kind all letting fly, and I swear

Why does the poet open with this phrase?

What is the effect of the repetition in this stanza?

What tone does this create?

I see every round as it rips through his life –

I see broad daylight on the other side.

So we’ve hit this looter a dozen times

and he’s there on the ground, sort of inside out,

pain itself, the image of agony.

One of my mates goes by

and tosses his guts back into his body.

Then he’s carted off in the back of a lorry.

What does this tell the reader about the impact of war on soldiers?

Why has the poet used enjambment here?

Why has Armitage chosen to end his poem with these lines?

What is the effect of this metaphor?

he’s here in my head when I close my eyes,

dug in behind enemy lines,

not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned, sand-smothered land

or six-feet-under in desert sand,

but near to the knuckle, here and now,

his bloody life in my bloody hands.

End of story, except not really.

His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on patrol

I walk right over it week after week.

Then I’m home on leave. But I blink

and he bursts again through the doors of the bank.

Sleep, and he’s probably armed, and possibly not.

Dream, and he’s torn apart by a dozen rounds.

And the drink and the drugs won’t flush him out –

What is the effect of this informal language?

What does it suggest about the soldier’s experiences?

Why does the poet use such violent imagery?