

The Manhunt

Overview: The poem is written in the voice of the wife of a returning, injured soldier. The poem details the human cost of conflict as it describes her experience on her husband's return and the effect on their relationship of the physical and mental scars that he bore. Despite the extensive physical injuries the soldier has suffered, physical intimacy is quickly resumed, however Armitage is pointing out that it is the mental impact that causes the long-term damage and is a 'sweating, unexploded mine'. The speaker is trying to both understand her husband and heal him.

Context: 'The Manhunt' was originally aired as part of a Channel 4 documentary, *Forgotten Heroes: The Not Dead*, which detailed real life stories of injured soldiers whom society had seemingly forgotten. In the film 'The Manhunt' is read by Laura, wife of Eddie Beddoes, who served as a peace-keeper in Bosnia before being discharged due to injury and depression. *'Never having been to the front line, turning the words, phrases and experiences of these soldiers into verse has been the closest I've ever come to writing "real" war poetry, and as close as I ever want to get'* (Simon Armitage)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGX4vwXvek4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtDiOsQsnRw>

Also worth considering is the archetypal image of a brave, fearless soldier, contrasted with the vulnerability revealed here.

Structure: The poem is composed of thirteen couplets that trace both the journey the bullet made through the soldier's body but also the journey the woman made trying to rediscover her husband. The occasional half rhyme and fragmented structure perhaps mirror the difficulties faced.

The poem starts with what the speaker calls the 'first phase' which is the resumption of the physical side of their relationship. It ends perhaps with real intimacy as only when she gets into his mind does she say she comes 'close'. The poem ends on an ambiguous note. She may be close to understanding and they may be closer as a couple but there is no indication that the soldier is healed.

Key Images: The idea of an actual manhunt is mirrored in both the structure and language of the poem. Verbs and phrases such as trace, explore, climb, skirting along, widened the search etc. give the impression she is looking for her husband. War imagery such as 'parachute silk' to describe his lungs and 'unexploded mine' to describe the mental trauma in his mind further link with a military war zone. This is then combined with tender, loving verbs such as hold, mind, attend, bind, to show the desire to heal and comfort. Explore the language that runs throughout to show the soldier's emotional unavailability from frozen river to grazed heart. His fragility is emphasised in adjectives like porcelain and silk.

Potential Comparisons

Imagery and metaphor:

Nettles, Valentine

First person voice:

My Last Duchess,
La Belle Dame

Sans Merci



Changing Relationship:

'One Flesh'; 'A Complaint'

Death / injury / inability to protect:

Nettles, My Father Would not Show us