The Manhunt

SUMMARY

The speaker starts telling a story about a relationship, and describes how intense the romance was when it began. She explains how it was only after the first passionate flush of the relationship that she was allowed to touch a long, winding scar on her partner's cheek.

She was then allowed to stroke his broken jawbone, which is compared to the hinge of a door that's been blown open.

After that, she could gently touch his fractured collar bone, which is likened to porcelain that has been damaged.

Then she attended to his shoulder-blade, which is compared to a rudder that's been fractured.

The speaker's relationship with her partner becomes even more intimate as she seems to travel inside his body, pinching together the punctured edges of a hole in his lung, which is compared to the silk used in parachutes.

She fixes the metaphorical struts of his broken ribs, and then, again speaking metaphorically, climbs up his ribs as if they were rungs of a ladder.

Upon reaching her partner's scratched heart, she feels the pain that he feels.

As she continues to move around inside his body she is able to imagine the X-ray image of a small piece of metal which is lodged in his chest.

The speaker reveals that this piece of metal is a bullet, which ricocheted around her partner's body before stopping just below his heart.

The narrator continues to move around her partner's body, searching for something in particular. She follows the trail of her partner's internal injuries until she finds the root of his problems.

This is a bomb ready to explode in his mind, tightly wrapped up by all the nerves in his body.

Here, the speaker says, she finally came "close" to her partner, maybe meaning that she found the person she was searching for in her "manhunt," or that she has become closer with her partner on an emotional level.

THEMES

THE LASTING TRAUMA OF WAR

"The Manhunt" explores the lingering effects of wartime trauma on soldiers. By describing the many ways in which the speaker's husband has been physically and psychologically transformed as a result of his military experience, Armitage critiques the powerful, sometimes debilitating, changes that often follow active combat.

Despite his return to civilian life, the speaker's husband is still described using military imagery. This implies that the soldier continues to carry his military experiences with him. The "blown hinge" of the soldier's jaw, for example, suggests the door of a house being blown out by a bomb—literally, of the invasion of warfare into a domestic setting. A "blown hinge" can't keep a door shut, and this inability to function echoes the *soldier's* inability to block out the trauma he experienced in combat—which has now invaded the speaker's home life.

Similarly, the soldier's "lung" is metaphorically described as being made of "parachute silk." While extremely strong, parachute silk is also finely woven. This comparison thus evokes the contrast between the tough outer persona often expected from service-people and the soldier's fragile mental state. The "puncture" in the silk would also render the parachute useless, again suggesting the soldier's inability to escape from the horrors of combat.

At the poem's climax, the speaker discovers the "sweating unexploded mine" in the mind of her husband. Again, a piece of war has figuratively travelled back to civilian life with the soldier, and again this metaphor emphasizes how close to self-destruction he is. What's more, if stored incorrectly, dynamite begins to "sweat" nitro-glycerine, its explosive component. This crystallizes on its surface and can be detonated with just a gentle touch. The fact that the mine is "sweating," therefore, further heightens the sense of danger and volatility present within the mind and body of the soldier. It locates him on the reactive knife-edge of active combat rather than the safe environment of civilian life.

The imagery of warfare and mechanics utilized throughout the poem is also often directly associated with brokenness, suggesting that those who come into contact with war are likely to be damaged by it. For instance, the soldier's ribcage is comprised of "struts" in need of binding and of broken "rungs"; the "rudder" of his shoulder blade is "fractured." What's more, the use of inanimate objects to describe parts of the soldier's body make this body both unfamiliar and inanimate. The soldier is, in fact, the passive participant throughout the poem, as his wife "traces," "explores," "mends," and "handles" the various parts of his person. This passivity is indirectly attributed to the numerous broken elements with which he has returned from war, which, in a sense, have paralyzed him.

Finally, the "source" of the soldier's damage is found "deep in his mind." While, up until this point, the physical changes in her

husband have been spotlighted, the most significant "scarring" is mental. "Every nerve" in his body has "tightened and closed" around the "unexploded mine" of his neurosis. Nerves' function is to convey impulses to and from the brain. The implication, therefore, is that the key pathways to communication within the soldier have been impeded and inhibited by his experiences, and reflect his limited capacity to fully communicate with his wife and the outside world.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 3-5
- Line 6
- Lines 7-8
- Lines 9-10
- Lines 11-12
- Lines 13-14
- Lines 15-20
- Line 22
- Line 23
- Lines 23-25

TRAUMA AND RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the poem, the speaker is faced with the simultaneous familiarity and distance of her husband—a person so changed by wartime trauma that he is now almost unrecognizable to his wife. The "manhunt" of the poem's title is a reference to the speaker's exploration of her husband's dramatically changed body and self, and the poem demonstrates the difficulty of reconnecting with loved ones after they've returned from traumatic military combat. In doing so, the poem highlights the wider effects of personal trauma on those who are close to it.

The poem is told from the perspective of the soldier's wife. This narrative decision invites empathy for both parties by providing a close description of the damage done to the soldier and the effect this has on those close to him. For his wife, this means confronting a new person in place of the man she married.

The speaker begins by situating the poem after the "first phase" directly following her husband's return, thus highlighting how his homecoming has changed the nature of their relationship. The "passionate nights and intimate days" of this first phase are reminiscent of a honeymoon period, the euphoric early stage of a new relationship. The speaker's relationship to her husband is, therefore, redefined. The discharged soldier assumes the position of a new lover after returning from war, the implication being that the subject's experiences have changed him so much so that he has become a different person altogether.

The speaker's physical exploration of the subject's scars brings her face to face with the soldier her husband has become. Familiarizing herself with his external injuries is the first step to exploring his changed mental state, and her physical journey around the injured parts of the soldier's body mirrors the journey that the relationship must negotiate to regain stability.

At first, the speaker's exploration of her husband's body is limited to superficial sexual contact. As they spend more time together, however, she begins to explore the physical effects of his experience in combat: his scars. She is permitted to "trace" his facial scar and to "hold" and "attend" his broken clavicle and shoulder. When the speaker crosses the border between external and internal, entering deeper into her husband's form, she "feels the hurt" of his heart.

This is, on one level, a literal reference to the fact that Eddie Beddoes, on whom the poem is based, was shot. This image also demonstrates how the speaker's physical journey is becoming part of a mental voyage for both husband and wife. By feeling her husband's "hurt," the speaker is being allowed inside the emotional source of his pain and, consequently, is able to empathize with him.

The speaker's expedition around her husband's body is described in challenging terms, thus expressing the difficult journey that their relationship, too, must undertake. Much of the terminology suggests demanding physical activity. The speaker must "explore," "climb ... rungs," and "skirt along" the precipice of her husband's psychology. The speaker's progress through her husband's body, too, emulates the peaks and troughs of mountaineering expeditions: the journey begins with his face, descends through his torso, then ascends to his heart and, ultimately, mind.

The poem thus ultimately invites empathy for both service people and those closest to them by underlining the cautious, painful, and often confusing process of re-learning a person who has been so profoundly changed. This journey is likened to a "manhunt"—the organized search for a person, highlighting how challenging it is for those close to trauma victims to reconnect with their loved ones.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-10
- Lines 11-12
- Lines 13-26

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

After the first ...
... and intimate days,

The poem opens at a very specific point in a relationship: directly after the soldier's return home. The reference to "passionate nights" and "intimate days" reads like a traditional love poem, suggesting that both parties are enjoying spending

time together after a long period of time apart.

This is undercut, however, by the use of the word "after" in the first line, which tells the reader that this romantic "first phase" is now *over*. The repetition of the term in the second line definitely situates the poem *after* this seeming honeymoon period, suggesting that the couple's loving reunion may be short lived and that some form of disruption lies ahead. This is further enhanced by Armitage's use of the words "after," "phase," "nights," and "days," all of which relate to the passing of time. Emphasizing this in the first stanza of the poem immediately prepares the reader for the important role that time has to play both in the poem and the healing process the poem describes.

The initial romantic imagery will quickly be juxtaposed against violent imagery of scarred faces and "blown" jaws. This contrast may serve as a metaphor for the relationship's dual nature. On a surface level, the relationship is a loving one, but there is a troubling undertone regarding the soldier's experiences in war which runs counterpoint to this throughout the poem.

The first stanza is a rhymed couplet; "phase" is a perfect rhyme with "days." Rhyming couplets are often used in love poetry, and their use at the outset of the poem could, therefore, support the initial view of the relationship as following traditional, predictable patterns, highlighting its strength and stability at this point. The meter, too, adheres to this. While the poem, strictly speaking, is written in free verse, Armitage intersperses more rhythmic metrical devices in certain lines. In the second line, for example, he uses a trochee (stressed-unstressed) / dactyl (stressed-unstressed-unstressed) pattern:

af**ter** | **pas**sionate | **nights** and| **int**imate | **days**

This strong emphasis on the first syllable gives the second line a feeling of continuous forward motion, perhaps signifying the head-over-heels feeling encountered in the early stage of a new relationship. The consonance of the poem's initial line does the same thing, with the rush of /f/ sounds in "**A**f**t**er the **f**irst **ph**ase" suggesting abundance, an initial overflow of love and happiness.

LINE 3

only then would ... let me trace

The repetition of "only then," first demonstrated in line 3 and used throughout the poem, is an example of anaphora. This repeated phrase emphasizes the step-by-step nature of the healing process, its gradual progression toward an unclear point in the future. Only after the "first phase" can the next step to recovery be made. This demonstrates the slow, arduous process of healing which both the soldier *and* his wife are undertaking.

The wife is gentle and tender in her approach, carefully "tracing" her husband's scar, thereby demonstrating her sensitivity to his injuries. To "trace" is to delicately touch, often something fragile or easily breakable, and the term thus implies the soldier's fragile mental state. "Trace" can also mean to make a copy of something, further suggesting that the wife has found an alter ego in this first exploration: the mentally compromised version of her husband.

The poem's context is helpful in understanding what's going on here. The poem is part of a 2008 documentary film: *Forgotten Heroes: The Not Dead*, which investigated the after-effects of combat on the lives of discharged service-people. In an interview with Eddie Beddoes, on whom this poem is based, Beddoes says, "I was a different person before I got shot. I was a young lad, 19, outgoing, happy. By the time I got out of hospital, I was depressed, I was disfigured, I was injured, disabled, useless."

The soldier in the poem is clearly sensitive about his injuries. The soft, tentative nature of his wife's touch suggests that she is aware of this, and at this point, both she and her husband are only comfortable with very light, almost superficial interactions with his scars. Also note how line 3 is enjambed, further drawing attention to the word "trace." The reader is pushed forward down the page by this enjambment, in effect mimicking the speaker as she traces her husband's scar.

LINE 4

the frozen river ... through his face,

Throughout the poem, the physical changes in the soldier's body are aligned with his emotional inability to connect with others. This is first made evident in line 4, when the speaker's initial point of physical contact with her husband's injuries is the "frozen river" of a scar on his face.

This obvious physical change in the soldier's appearance—a long, white scar on his cheek—is enhanced by its metaphorical comparison to a frozen river. A freely running river suggests fluid, fluent communication. If the river is frozen, however, the communicative channel is obstructed. This suggests that the soldier's ability to talk freely about his experience in war has been inhibited by trauma and his desire to forget. A frozen surface is also inherently dangerous in its capacity to crack easily and its unpredictably under pressure, suggesting that it would be unwise to attempt to unpack the soldier's trauma before he is ready.

As frozenness is a temporary state, however, there is *potential* for healthy lines of communication to be re-established and for the "river" to thaw over time. This metaphor may, therefore, hint at a promising outcome to the soldier's story. The alliteration and consonance of the /r/ sounds on the stressed syllables of the line: "**fr**ozen **r**iv**er** which **r**an th**r**ough ..." give it a rolling, fluid motion, further reinforcing the promise of more fluent communication to come.

The poet uses mostly dactylic meter (DUM da da) in line 3:

> the frozen river which ran through his face

Dactylic meter is sometimes known as "falling" rhythm, as the stress comes at the first beat of each metrical unit before "falling off" for the rest of the meter's length—"river which," "ran through his"—evoking the feeling of emotions that peak and trough repeatedly, much like those of the soldier. Dactylic meter also has strong connotations with military imagery. Alfred Lord Tennyson famously used dactylic meter in "The Charge of the Light Brigade" to evoke consistent, repetitive forward motion, resembling horses galloping or soldiers marching. The use of this metrical form here, therefore, suggests the juxtaposition of two elements of the soldier's persona: on the one hand, the automatic physicality of the military symbolized by marching, and on the other, the more thoughtful waveform movement of the soldier's emotions (which, again, are linked to the imagery of the river).

LINES 5-6

> *only then would ...*
> *... his lower jaw*

Line 5 repeats the phrase "only then would he let me ..." This repetition re-enforces the concept of a step-by-step process of discovery and healing, further emphasized by the use of the word "explore" in the place of "trace." This simple change marks the progress which has been made over the last two lines. While the term still evokes a certain caution, to "explore" shows determination and purpose, even if the final destination is unknown. The enjambment echoes this, as line 5 spills over into blank space on the space, the reader unsure of what comes next to complete the phrase.

The communicative difficulties between husband and wife are emphasized when the speaker encounters the "blown hinge" of her husband's jaw. If someone's jaw is broken, it becomes extremely difficult to speak. This metaphor thus implies that usual communication has been compromised, and what the husband *can* say is likely to easily be misinterpreted.

The stark, mechanical connotations of a "blown hinge" also serve to reduce the soldier down to a number of automated parts, reminiscent of clockwork or robotics. The soldier, here, is being equated to a body which moves mindlessly, directed by the intent of others. This image is highly suggestive of the movements of an army, expected to unquestioningly obey faceless higher powers for an unknown purpose. And again, the fact that the hinge is "blown" underlines the compromised nature of the soldier's physicality. A "blown" hinge undermines the function of the mechanism, meaning that the hinged object cannot close. This inability to function echoes the soldier's inability to block out the trauma he experienced in combat, locating a part of his mind firmly within the field of battle.

This is also the first clearly violent image in the poem. It suggests fragility, damage, and pain, and marks a turning point in the poem's tone. Until this point, "The Manhunt" has been more reminiscent of a love poem, expressing the tenderness of a relationship and veiling the realities of war in suggestive metaphors. Waiting until the sixth line of the poem before introducing a visceral image of violence suggests that the speaker herself was incapable of seeing or comprehending her husband's wounds, or their devastating effects, until that point.

In this third stanza, the rhyme scheme begins to fall apart:

> only then would he let me explore
> the blown hinge of his lower jaw

The subtle slant rhyme between "explore" and "jaw" is a departure from the perfect rhymes of the first two stanzas. The sudden change is jarring, highlighting the unpredictability of both the relationship at hand and the soldier's mental state.

The use of enjambement heightens this further. Line 5 is broken at a crucial point, creating a pause between the word "explore," which is often suggestive of exploring feelings or emotions, with the highly graphic image of a "blown ... jaw." This creates a feeling first of suspense, and then of surprise as the unexpected metaphor is introduced. A parallel is drawn between the surprise felt by the reader, and the constant surprises encountered by the poem's speaker as the journey to help her husband continues.

LINE 7

> *and handle and hold*

Line 7 consists almost completely of two paired verbs, "handle and hold." At this point, the couple's relationship is becoming more physically present and intimate. The importance of this verb pairing is evident: it takes up virtually the entire line, and is evocative of a cradling motion. As such, it expresses the care and attention demonstrated by the speaker towards the soldier. This is further emphasized by the wordplay employed by the poet at this point. "Handle and hold" is an allusion to the traditional vows used in a Christian marriage ceremony, "to have and to hold." That the speaker has transitioned from *having* her husband to *handling* him reflects his damaged state.

The polysyndeton in the repetition of "and" slows down the phrase, emphasizing its significance while also awarding equal weight to both verbs—perhaps suggesting that the husband and wife should be granted equal consideration, and have equal influence over the success or failure of the rehabilitation taking place. The alliteration of the /h/ sounds and consonance of the /d/ and /l/ sound in "handle and hold" reinforce this further, again slowing the reading process down and encouraging the reader to pay attention to the implications of the phrase.

Although line 7 appears to suggest a return to a more romantic sentiment, at the end of the line the rhyme scheme remains

disrupted; "hold" and "bone" share assonance of the long /o/ sound, but are not true rhymes. As with the third stanza, this indicates unforeseen difficulties in the healing process.

LINE 8

the damaged, porcelain collar bone,

At this point readers return to the soldier's body, which is again referenced by a single part: his "collar bone." Repeatedly referring to different body parts effectively fragments the soldier, dislocating his mind from his body and suggesting the way that he feels broken and incomplete.

The soldier is made particularly vulnerable in this line. Porcelain is a type of delicate white pottery, and its immediate physical description is similar to that of the bone which it describes in "The Manhunt." In fact, one of the three main types of porcelain is termed "bone china." Unlike human bones, however, porcelain is translucent rather than opaque when held to the light. By comparing the soldier's collar bone to porcelain, an underlying delicacy, only present under scrutiny, is inferred. The "light" in this context can be read as the wife's exploration of her husband's body, which unveils the vulnerability, the translucence, beneath the hard surface.

The soldier's trauma is further developed through this metaphor, as although porcelain is superficially very robust, it also has a tendency to chip easily. The soldier's fragility is therefore made even more explicit. If mishandled, he could break at any time, regardless of his strong exterior.

The use of caesura between damaged and porcelain is also worth investigating.

> "Damaged, porcelain collar bone …"

The comma between the two adjectives effectively separates or breaks the flow of the line. This device, then, suggests that there are immovable barriers which are likely to interrupt the healing process. The pause awarded by the comma functions therefore serves to show the dissection and disruption of steady healing.

LINES 9-10

and mind and ...
... rudder of shoulder-blade,

Line 9 begins with the verb "mind," a word meaning to pay attention to or to take heed of. The next verb, "attend," means to take consistent care of somebody, and brings to mind a medical professional or caregiver. Together these verbs essentially describe the speaker's new role in this changed relationship. The structure of this line parallels the "and handle and hold" of the previous stanza, suggesting that the healing process is ongoing, something present and active. Starting the stanza with "and" further emphasizes this effect and its immediacy.

While both are ostensibly verbs which indicate caregiving, the consonance of "mind and attend" forces the reader to grit their teeth if reading aloud. This effectively indicates the challenging reality of minding and attending, and how difficult and frustrating it can be to give constant support to someone with compromised mental health.

Line 10 then compares the soldier's shoulder blade to a "fractured rudder." A rudder, the mechanism used for steering a boat, and a shoulder blade are both small parts of a larger whole. This emphasizes the position of the individual in the greater sphere of the military, bringing to mind the notion of a "cog in a wheel" which is often used to describe soldiers' function in war. This metaphor is further developed by the use of boats in a martial context: the soldier is transformed into a war machine by his association with naval military imagery. This imagery is explored further by the use of the verb "fractured," which suggests sudden and traumatic damage of the kind which is often sustained in a military environment.

The rudder's fractured nature contributes to the overall description of the soldier as being compromised both physically and mentally. Without the rudder, the guiding force on a boat, that boat is lost. In this case, therefore, the fact that the soldier is equated with a malfunctioning "rudder" implies that he is unable to steer himself onto the right course, and is in need of guidance—perhaps that of his wife.

LINES 11-12

and finger and ...
... his punctured lung.

The sixth stanza parallels the previous two, opening with a pair of verbs: "and finger and thumb." Armitage uses two words that are usually nouns as verbs here, creating action (verbs) out of what are usually sustained, static words (nouns). This may foreshadow the future reclamation of the soldier's agency.

Armitage's use of three verb couples ("handle and hold," "mind and attend," "finger and thumb") is interesting, as the number three is often considered to represent harmony, wisdom, and understanding (imagine the three united lines in a triangle, for example). This last verb couple, then, may indicate the closing of the triangle, the final step of one part of the journey that husband and wife are undertaking together.

The image of a finger and thumb suggests tentative, careful actions, which indicate how afraid the speaker is of hurting her husband mentally or physically. These words also conjure the image of a person literally pinching the "punctured lung" together as if to sew it up. Also note how the use of consonant, plosive sounds in "parachute silk ... punctured lung" creates a visceral image. When spoken aloud this phrase evokes the popping sound of bullets being fired.

While extremely strong, parachute silk is also finely woven, and thus symbolically reflects the juxtaposition of delicate and

robust mental states following warfare. The “puncture” in the silk makes the parachute useless. This ties into Beddoes's description of himself as "injured, disabled, useless" after battle: a parachute with a hole cannot perform the function for which it was made, and even constitutes a danger to those who try to use it. The parachute's brokenness also, therefore, effectively demonstrates the soldier’s inability to escape from the horrors of combat. His escape mechanism is flawed.

LINES 13-14

Only then could ...
... his broken ribs,

In line 13, readers see a return to the use of the repeated phrase "only then." This time, however, the phrase is followed by "could" instead of "would." While both are conditional words, "could" implies the ability to actually make something happen, rather than the more wishful "would." This idea is reflected by the speaker's success in mending an injury as she "binds the struts" of her husband's ribcage. Whereas prior to this moment the speaker has been lightly touching her husband, or ineffectively holding his wounds together, now she actually repairs a part of his body.

As is the case throughout the poem, the physical injuries here signify mental trauma. The speaker's success in healing this first part of her husband's body therefore also indicates the first fully successful step in her progress with regard to his *emotional* injuries.

The nouns "struts" and "rungs" combine to create the image of a stepladder. By joining the broken parts together, progressing upwards as she goes, the speaker is beginning to heal her husband from the inside out. "Struts" provide security by preventing something from falling in on itself, and "binding" means to set them in place securely. The speaker, therefore, is making her husband secure by putting him back together piece by piece and making him strong.

The struts' binding may also be indicative of a new closeness within the couple's relationship, if readers interpret the husband and wife as metaphorical struts that have to be bound. The speaker and the soldier signify two entities that must come together in order to function correctly.

This fully functioning use of the implied ladder is emphasized by enjambment, which here is used to underline a healing process of cause and effect. The struts are fixed, therefore the speaker can use them smoothly, much like the eye crosses smoothly, without the pause of a caesura, from one line to the next: "... bind the struts / and climb ..." This is reinforced by the harmonious assonance of "bind and climb," which mirrors the soldier's increasing calmness. The phrase "I bind the struts" in 13 literally forces the tongue to climb from high to low vowel sounds, thereby subtly involving the reader's own body in the poem's metaphorical journey.

The use of the metaphor of climbing a ladder has a number of different connotations. For one thing, it implies emotional as well as physical ascension. It suggests rising out of a dark place into a place of light. On a similar note, the fluid ascent up the rungs of a ladder suggests that communication is beginning to open up again between husband and wife. There is still military imagery being evoked, though, suggestive of climbing from the trenches in the First World War.

Finally, the wife is climbing the rungs of his ribcage and is therefore in close proximity to his heart. This suggests that only after attending to his *physical* wounds is she able to comprehend his *emotional* pain.

LINES 15-18

and feel the ...
... picture the scan,

This appears to be a turning point for the speaker. Line 15 opens decisively with her, finally able to "feel the hurt" of her husband's heart. Armitage's use of consonance in "hurt" and "heart" links the two words together, emphasizing the scale of the soldier's emotional pain. The fact that the soldier's heart is "grazed" suggests that it has been scratched and scarred. Because the heart is typically used to symbolize people's emotional lives, this suggests that the soldier has been hurt at his emotional core. This pain is now shared, though, by the speaker, who has finally become so close with her husband that she can empathize with him and at last comprehend the depths of the pain he has endured since his return.

This does nothing to undermine the speaker's care in handling her husband, though. In line 17 she is described as "skirting" around his heart, showing both tenderness and a degree of caution. To "skirt" is to brush over something gently, to travel lightly round the edge of it. There’s a precariousness there, an awareness of the need to be wary—either of pushing her husband too far to the point that he might snap, or of falling all the way into his pain and being consumed by it, rather than keeping the distance necessary to help him resolve it.

Interestingly, line 18 sees a return of the repeated phrase "only then could I." Now, however, the phrase is no longer at the beginning of the stanza, it’s integrated into the second line, suggesting that the wife is becoming involved in the process of healing rather than working outside of her husband's space, and that the process may even be speeding up.

The speaker's ability to empathize with her husband is then again shown in her ability to "picture the scan" (that is, the X-ray) of the bullet in his chest. This shows clear progress in her capacity for understanding and envisioning her husband's pain.

LINES 19-20

the foetus of ...
... come to rest.

Line 19 reveals that, at one point, the speaker's husband was shot. The bullet is described as a "foetus of metal." While this metaphor creates a strong image of the twisted shape of the shrapnel lodged in the soldier's chest, it also suggests that the bullet's passage into the soldier's body has forcibly inserted a new person deep within him. This new person represents the drastic change in the personality of the man the speaker married. Using the language of gestation and childbearing is also interesting: babies generally represent a huge change in a person's life, similar to the change the speaker is facing in adjusting to her new life with her husband.

At the same time, however, pregnancy is often a joyous event in a couple's life. The purity and innocence implied by the imagery of childbearing is undermined and darkened by the violence in these lines. The metaphor of "the foetus of metal" is incongruous and shocking; it feels like it doesn't belong in the sentence. This suggests that the bullet, too, doesn't belong within the body of the soldier. The implication is that this is a parasite that he carries with him as the reminder of what he's been through. Finally, the metaphor also implies that the psychological repercussions of the soldier's experiences are continuing to develop—that there's danger of this "foetus" (which represents the soldier's emotional pain) growing if left unchecked.

LINES 21-22

Then I widened ...
... to its source

Line 21 is the first point at which the poem's title is referred to directly, via the explicit description of "the search." A manhunt is an organized search for a missing person. In the context of the poem, readers can assume that the hunted man is the speaker's husband: the speaker is searching either for the man that she married, or for his pain in order to heal it.

A sense of urgency is implied by the speaker "widening" her "search." This implies that, until this point, she has been unsuccessful in finding what she seeks, and that time is running out. The large territory that this phrase implies also suggests that the soldier's problems aren't isolated or easily spotted; they're widespread.

The speaker then repeats the verb "traced," but in this context its meaning changes slightly. To "trace" something back to its source is to follow a series of clues in order to find where it began. The dual meaning of "trace" expands the significance of the speaker's actions. While she may be tracing the soldier's body, touching him delicately, she is also determined to find the "source" of his problems, hunting logically and methodically until she succeeds. The use of the words "scarring" and "source" also create a contrast between the past—the healed injuries on the soldier's body—and the "source," the root of the emotional trauma he is currently facing.

Finally, the sibilance used throughout this stanza—"search," "traced," "scarring," "source"—creates a sinister tone, implying that perhaps the speaker is approaching something dangerous or unexpected in her manhunt (and, indeed, she is—more on that in the next entry).

LINES 23-24

to a sweating, ...
... in his mind,

In the penultimate stanza, the speaker discovers the "sweating, unexploded mine" in the mind of her husband. This is of course a metaphor; there isn't *actually* a bomb hidden inside the soldier's head. Rather, this is a reference to the soldier's intense psychological pain, which seems ready to explode at any moment. The speaker is emphasizing how close to destruction—both self and external—the soldier is. If figuratively detonated, the mine's explosion could cause the soldier's mental breakdown, violence, the destruction of this relationship, or all of the above. As such, the implication is that the speaker is hoping to defuse her husband.

The speaker emphasizes the pressing danger by saying that the mine "sweating." At first glance, the word "sweating" implies stress on a human level. People sweat when nervous or stressed, and night-sweats are common in those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. However, if stored incorrectly, dynamite also begins to "sweat" nitro-glycerine, its explosive component. This crystallizes on its surface and can be detonated with just a gentle touch. The fact that the mine is "sweating," therefore, further heightens the sense of danger and volatility present within the mind and body of the soldier. It locates him on the reactive, knife-edge of active combat rather than the safe environment of civilian life.

The manhunt undertaken at the beginning of the poem thus culminates within the soldier's mind, at the root of his most significant issues. And there is an interesting double meaning of the word "mine," which also denotes possession. The speaker has found a "mine" in her husband's mind, perhaps demonstrating that she has finally found *her* husband.

There is a contradiction here, however: on the one hand the speaker has found her husband, but she has also discovered the well of pain and anxiety that has changed him. The mine's location, "buried deep," implies hidden danger, and that this explosive force could detonate at any moment with the slightest misstep. The fact that the mine is "buried" also means that it is not immediately visible to those who are not looking for it.

LINES 24-26

around which ...
... I come close.

The last stanza of the poem marks the definitive moment when the speaker seems to find what she is looking for in her "manhunt."

The speaker says that "every nerve" in the soldier's body has "tightened and closed" around the aforementioned "mine" in his mind. Nerves convey impulses to and from the brain. The implication, therefore, is that the key pathways to communication within the soldier have been impeded and inhibited by his trauma. This reflects his limited capacity to fully communicate with his wife and the outside world. The use of "tightened and closed" evokes the feeling of being constricted, rigid, unable to breathe—reflecting the nature of the soldier's pain.

The distorted image of the nerves within the soldier's body also suggests disassociation between his brain and body, or even between rational and subconscious parts of his brain, in the wake of his trauma. This seems to reflect how the brain may reinterpret usual information in unusual ways in those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The soldier cannot process things as he used to because of this "unexploded mine" in his chest.

This feeling of constriction, or of disassociation, is reinforced by the fact that line 25 is cut in half by a caesura. This comma forces a pause after "mind," adding weight to the speaker's discovery and suggesting how difficult it has been to reach this place. For a moment it is as if the speaker can go no further—she has reached a boundary of some sort, which makes sense given that "every nerve in his body had tightened and closed" around this mine. The caesura suggests the resistance she encounters upon finding the root of her husband's pain.

The use of caesura also serves to give additional emphasis to the poem's final line. When the speaker finally reaches the end of her journey, she says:

> Then, and only then, did I come close.

While this closeness may imply that there is still some level of distance between the two—that is, that the speaker is still only *close* to finishing her search, but hasn't *actually* done so— it can also be read in a more positive sense: the speaker is once again *emotionally* close to or intimate with her husband. The speaker's expedition has reinstated the couple's ability to relate to one another on a level deeper than sheer physicality.

This reading is slightly undermined, however, by the final slant rhyme of "closed" and "close," which may signify two people who are still trying to find each other. The poem is left open ended, without the satisfying closure of a final rhyming couplet, to demonstrate that this "manhunt" is ongoing—that healing isn't a neat, easy process, but rather a delicate, continuous journey.

SYMBOLS

BROKEN PARTS

The poem contains various symbolic references to broken materials and/or pieces of machinery, and these are also often associated with the military and war. The "fractured rudder" of line 10 suggests naval ships, for example, while "parachute silk" was used by military pilots in WWI. In the poem such items are always used to describe the subject's body parts. Broadly speaking, these broken materials symbolically reflect the soldier's fractured psychological state and his inability to function correctly.

For example, the soldier's lower jaw is a "blown hinge," reflecting his inability to openly communicate with his wife, while his ribcage is compromised by unbound "struts" that cannot support him. His lung is akin to a punctured parachute—a lifesaving device rendered useless (further symbolically suggesting that the soldier can't *escape* this torment either). Similarly, a ship with a "fractured rudder" can't steer, a door with a "blown hinge" can't swing open and close, and a framework with broken struts will collapse in on itself.

The subject's body is thus reduced down to its barest practical function, which cannot be realized because of injuries—physical and psychological—sustained in battle. He can no longer communicate with his wife, no longer steer his life in the direction he wishes. He feels useless, fractured, out of control.

The poem isn't criticizing the *soldier* for any of this. On the contrary, by associating much of this imagery with military machinery and weaponry, the poem is criticizing the devastating effects of *war* on the body and mind.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "blown hinge"
- **Line 8:** "damaged, porcelain collar bone"
- **Line 10:** "fractured rudder"
- **Line 13:** "bind the struts"
- **Line 14:** "climb the rungs"

PHYSICAL EXPLORATION

The speaker is on a journey or hunt throughout the poem, made clear by the poem's title. She is trying to find someone, and this search is presented in highly challenging physical terms. She "explores," "climbs," and "skirts along" in her efforts to locate the person she is looking for.

These references to physical acts of exploration are meant to represent how difficult and possibly dangerous the path to healing is, laden with obstacles that need to be "climbed" and dangerous precipices that must be "skirted" around in order to find "the source" of deep-rooted problems.

This language is particularly evocative of a mountaineering expedition. The most dangerous part of mountain climbing is the descent after reaching the summit, and the speaker's journey seems to finish at "source," or peak, of her exploration, where she finally "come close" to reaching the end of her hunt. This suggests that there may be an even more challenging journey ahead.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "trace / the frozen river"
- **Line 5:** "explore"
- **Line 14:** "climb the rungs"
- **Line 17:** "Skirting along"
- **Line 21:** "widened the search"
- **Line 22:** "traced," "back to its source"
- **Line 24:** "buried deep"

POETIC DEVICES

ANAPHORA

The speaker's progress on her journey is demonstrated by the anaphora that is scattered throughout the poem. For example, the anaphora of "only then" demonstrates the step-by-step nature of the relationship's healing: only after the wife completes one task can she begin another. Little by little she is starting to understand her husband again, but the anaphora underlines how tortuous the journey is.

The phrase "only then" is used five times throughout the poem, followed by two pairs of word patterns. These are:

> only then would he let me ...

And:

> only then could I ...

These repeated phrases with small differences are evocative of small repeated steps towards progress being made, almost like two feet walking. This halting progress conjures the image of a soldier recuperating as well.

While the use of the word "would" in the first two lines is suggestive of doubt or hope, the word "could" is more indicative of the ability to actually complete a task. This again demonstrates the slow and steady progression of both the soldier's healing process and the re-establishment of the relationship with his wife.

The last line of the poem also repeats the "only then," but this time is followed by a unique word pattern:

> Then, and only then, did I ...

This underlines the final, quiet success that the speaker has achieved. Instead of the modal verbs used in the previous pairs ("would" and "could"), the *definitive* past tense "did" demonstrates a successfully completed action. The speaker has finally come close to her husband again.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "only then would he let me"
- **Line 5:** "only then would he let me"
- **Line 13:** "Only then could I"
- **Line 18:** "only then could I"
- **Line 26:** "only then, did I"

CONSONANCE

Armitage utilizes consonance often throughout the poem. Take the first stanza, which features strong consonance of the /f/ sound and /n/ sound—both of which are rather soft, gentle consonants that suggest the tenderness of this honeymoon phase of the relationship:

> After the first phase,
> after passionate nights and intimate days,

This initial sense of gentleness is supported by the /sh/ and /z/ sounds as well, both of which are often considered a form of sibilance.

Consonance again reflects the content of the poem in line 4, where the repeated /r/ sound—a rather guttural, tight consonant—suggests a gritting of the teeth in "frozen river which ran ..." A frozen river cannot flow smoothly, and is instead stuck, closed off—much like the soldier himself. The consonance in line 6 is similarly evocative of the line's content: the /w/ of "blown" and "lower jaw" suggests a sort of lolling openness, reflective of the fact that the soldier's jaw has been broken.

Later, in lines 15 and 26, consonance draws a clear thematic connection between "hurt" and "his grazed heart." The sounds here reflect the fact that the soldier's pain is primarily emotional, a scar on his heart. The consonance of the poem's final two lines, in "closed" and "come close," again suggests a sort of thematic connection—implying that the speaker can only truly reconnect with her husband by understanding the root of his pain, by reaching this tender spot around which his nerves have metaphorically "closed."

The poem's consonance is also often tied to plosive sounds—/t/, /d/, /p/, /k/, etc. When read aloud, these repeated plosives create a soundscape reminiscent of warfare. The quick-fire consonants are a reminder of the rat-tat-tat of gunfire, heightening the sense that part of the soldier's mind remains on the battlefield. This can be seen with "parachute silk of his punctured lung" for example, as well as with "Skirting along ...

could I picture the scan ..."

Another consonant-heavy part of the poem is in lines 19-20, where the speaker describes the bullet which caused her husband's physical injuries:

> the foetus of metal beneath his chest
> where the bullet had come to rest.

The shooting itself is evoked by the consonance used, with the clattering /t/ and hissing /s/ sounds.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "After," "first phase"
- **Line 2:** "after," "passionate nights," "intimate"
- **Line 4:** "frozen river," "ran through"
- **Line 6:** "blown," "hinge," "lower jaw"
- **Line 7:** "and handle and hold"
- **Line 8:** "damaged," "porcelain collar"
- **Line 9:** "and mind and attend"
- **Line 10:** "fractured rudder," "shoulder-blade"
- **Line 12:** "parachute," "silk," "punctured"
- **Line 13:** "could," "bind," "struts"
- **Line 14:** "climb," "rungs," "broken," "ribs"
- **Line 15:** "hurt"
- **Line 16:** "his," "grazed," "heart"
- **Line 17:** "Skirting"
- **Line 18:** "could," "picture," "scan"
- **Line 19:** "foetus," "metal," "beneath," "chest"
- **Line 20:** "bullet," "rest"
- **Line 21:** "search"
- **Line 22:** "traced," "scarring," "source"
- **Line 23:** "sweating," "unexploded," "mine"
- **Line 24:** "buried deep," "mind"
- **Line 25:** "closed"
- **Line 26:** "come close"

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment is used frequently throughout the poem. The consistent use of this device creates a sense of forward motion and of continuous—as well as of suspense. This contributes to the overarching idea of a journey or, indeed, a "manhunt," taking place.

This can be seen, for instance in lines 3 and 5. The enjambment after "trace" and "explore" in these lines creates a moment of anticipation, of the unknown; readers aren't sure what comes next, and must indeed "trace" or "explore" their own way through the white space of the page and onto the next line.

The violent images in the poem are also emphasized by the use of enjambment. Lines 3 ("trace / the **frozen river** [a.k.a. scar] which ran through ..."), 5 ("explore / the **blown hinge** ..."), 7 ("and handle and hold / the **damaged** ..."), 9 ("and mind and attend / the **fractured** ..."), 11 ("and finger and thumb / the parachute silk of his **punctured** ..."), 13 ("Only then could I bind the struts / and climb the rungs of his **broken** ..."), and 15 ("and feel the hurt / of his **grazed** ...") all lead the reader headlong towards the revelation of yet another part of the soldier's body which has been wounded. In a way, this suggests how fractured the soldier *himself* is; even the *descriptions* of his broken body parts are all broken across multiple lines, creating ruptures and a sense of fragility.

The repetition of this same technique is also interesting because, as the reader grows to *expect* the violence directly following the enjambment, the same violence begins to grow less shocking. This underlines how easy it is to grow indifferent to upsetting images if exposed repeatedly, perhaps mirroring the soldier's own experiences.

In the poem's penultimate stanza the speaker finally finds the source of her husband's pain. This climactic point in the poem contains repeated use of enjambement, adding to the urgency of this discovery and heightening its significance:

> traced the scarring back to its **source**
> **to** a sweating, unexploded **mine**
> **buried** deep in his mind, around **which**
> **every** nerve in his body had tightened and closed.

The openness of the line endings encourages the reader to skim faster and faster through the poem, increasing the tension, until, finally, the image is fully revealed and the line is closed abruptly with a period.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "trace / the"
- **Lines 5-6:** "explore / the"
- **Lines 6-7:** "jaw / and"
- **Lines 7-8:** "hold / the"
- **Lines 9-10:** "attend / the"
- **Lines 11-12:** "thumb / the"
- **Lines 13-14:** "struts / and"
- **Lines 15-16:** "hurt / of"
- **Lines 19-20:** "chest / where"
- **Lines 22-23:** "source / to"
- **Lines 23-24:** "mine / buried"
- **Lines 24-25:** "which / every"

METAPHOR

Metaphor is often a means of translating difficult emotions into terms which others can understand. In the case of "The Manhunt," the consistent use of metaphor throughout the poem highlights the breakdown of communication between the speaker and her husband. Theirs is a situation in which both people may not be talking frankly or directly about their

emotions. The soldier's experiences in war and the wife's feelings of estrangement are, therefore, both veiled under a layer of metaphor, of figurative language.

The journey undertaken by both the speaker and the soldier is also made much more visceral by the poem's generous use of metaphor. By describing the speaker as climbing around her husband's body, the challenging nature of her journey is made all the more evident to the reader. This also demonstrates the couple's emotional bond and the speaker's growing ability to empathize with the pain her husband is experiencing.

The metaphors Armitage uses in connection with the soldier are mostly reminiscent of warfare. For example, take the "blown hinge" of the soldier's jaw, the "fractured rudder" of his collar bone, and the "unexploded mine" in his brain. The use of these warlike terms increases the impression that the soldier is unable to leave his military experiences behind him, and that a part of his subconscious is still stuck on the battlefield.

The imagery created by all these metaphors also undermines the stereotypical image of a hard, emotionless soldier (something often depicted in war films and propaganda). By associating the subject of the poem with "parachute silk" and "porcelain," the poem is underlining how fragile the soldier really is, thereby re-enforcing his humanity.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "the frozen river which ran through his face"
- **Line 6:** "the blown hinge of his lower jaw"
- **Line 8:** "the damaged, porcelain collar bone"
- **Line 10:** "the fractured rudder of shoulder-blade"
- **Line 12:** "the parachute silk of his punctured lung"
- **Lines 13-14:** "Only then could I bind the struts / and climb the rungs of his broken ribs"

PARALLELISM

Parallelism is used to particular effect in the fourth, fifth, and sixth stanzas of "The Manhunt." The first lines in each stanza are also technically an example of polysyndeton. Each stanza follows the pattern "and + [verb] + and + [verb] / the + [broken body part described in metaphorical terms]." Here is stanza 4:

> and handle and hold
> the damaged, porcelain collar bone,

Stanza 5:

> and mind and attend
> the fractured rudder of shoulder-blade,

And stanza 6:

> and finger and thumb
> the parachute silk of his punctured lung.

The first lines in each of these stanzas are highly reminiscent of traditional Christian marriage vows ("to have and to hold," "for richer for poorer," etc.), as if the speaker is renewing her vows to her husband, promising to take care of him despite the problems they are clearly facing. The repeated use of the word "and" reinforces this further, adding the significance of each verb to the one before it, creating an overwhelming feeling of care and tenderness directed towards the speaker's husband. The meter of these first lines is the same as well, an iamb (da DUM) followed by an anapest (da da DUM), which makes these verb couples all more the similar-sounding and memorable:

> and handle and hold
> and mind and attend
> and finger and thumb

The second halves of these stanzas are clearly parallel as well, with the speaker again and again comparing her husband's body parts to broken materials. In effect, this parallel structure emphasizes her husband's delicate state and his inability to "function" as he should. The sense of repetition created by this parallelism also suggests how slowly and tenderly the speaker must approach her husband; nearly every part of his body seems to have been affected by trauma, and she must repeatedly, gently approach each damaged part of him.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Lines 7-8:** "and handle and hold / the damaged, porcelain collar bone,"
- **Lines 9-10:** "and mind and attend / the fractured rudder of shoulder-blade,"
- **Lines 11-12:** "and finger and thumb / the parachute silk of his punctured lung."

CAESURA

Caesura is a rare but key feature of "The Manhunt," and creates a number of different effects throughout the poem. The Latin word "caesura" literally means "cutting off," reflecting how a caesura can create disorder within a seemingly straightforward metrical structure. This is demonstrated once in "The Manhunt," in the eighth line:

> Damaged, || porcelain collar bone,

This line is part of a pattern (discussed in this guide's entry on parallelism) and, as such, *should* be an exact match for the metrical pattern of line 10:

> the fractured rudder of shoulder blade

However, the caesura midway through line 8 causes the reader's eye to pause on the comma after "damaged." This creates a jarring moment, as the pause gives a more disjointed and uneven feel to the sentence.

Additionally, the natural pause after "damaged" effectively causes the reader's eye to spend more *time* on the word, slowing down the rhythm of the line. Caesura is often used to stress important words in the middle of a line which might otherwise go unnoticed. The dramatic pause of the caesura slows the reading pace, adding an emotional, often theatrical touch, to the sentence. Thus, as the reader focuses on the word "damaged," two things happen. Firstly, the word takes on a greater significance, creating a more visceral understanding of the soldier's injuries. Secondly, as the flow of the line itself is "damaged," a subconscious association is created between the fragmented line and the soldier's fractured body.

The caesura in line 8 is a "feminine" caesura. This type of caesura appears after an unstressed syllable. Feminine caesuras often make a line sound softer and longer, and in this case, underline the soft, delicate steps the wife is taking to heal her husband. This feminine caesura is contrasted in the very last line by the poet's use of a "masculine" caesura (that is to say a caesura which appears after a stressed syllable):

> Then, || and only then, || did I ...

Masculine caesuras typically give a more staccato, jumpy feel to a line of poetry. This is certainly the case in this last line of "The Manhunt." The juddering, stop-start feel highlights that the soldier's journey is one that will continue to move in a series stuttering steps; it won't be one smooth curve towards wellness.

Having two caesuras in the last line also forces readers to slow their pace, and gives extra emphasis to the length of time it took for the speaker to even come *close* to helping heal her husband. The same goes for line 24, which features a mid-line caesura:

> buried deep in his mind, || around which

This caesura, combined with the enjambment at the end of this line, causes the reader to initially *slow* their pace, then to *speed up* as the enjambment encourages the eye to skim right over the line break. The caesura also reflects the depth at which the figurative "mine" is buried within the soldier's mind; it's as if the speaker reaches this spot only to butt up against "every nerve in his body." She meets resistance when approaching this tender core of her husband's pain, reflected by the comma in the middle of this line.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "damaged, porcelain"
- **Line 24:** "mind, around"
- **Line 26:** "Then, and," "then, did"

ASSONANCE

The poem makes consistent use of assonance throughout, with almost every stanza containing repeated vowel sounds in close proximity. Assonance, of course, plays a role in the poem's rhyme scheme. More broadly, as with alliteration and consonance, assonance often adds to the poem's rhythm and musicality. It imbues the poem with melody, perhaps evoking the sense that the speaker is gently reciting a sort of lullaby as she tends to her husband's scars.

Assonance also can slow down and speed up language, thereby holding the attention of the reader. This is much like how speed variation in speeches will hold the attention of the audience. For example, take stanzas 2 and 3:

> only then would he let me trace
> the frozen river which ran through his face
> only then would he let me explore
> the blown hinge of his lower jaw

The quick /eh/ and /ih/ sounds speed up the pace of these lines, which are promptly slowed down again by the long vowel sounds of "trace" and "face" and, to a certain extent, "explore" and "jaw." This is emphasized even further across both stanzas by the long long /oh/ sounds of "frozen," "blown," and "lower." The speaker makes progress in stops and starts. And by slowing down the pace, these longer vowel sounds emphasize the violent content, implicit and explicit, of both stanzas.

Assonance can also draw attention a line's imagery. Take line 19, with its /ee/ and /eh/ sounds:

> the foetus of metal beneath his chest

This one line has two separate instances of matching assonance, creating a pleasing symmetry within the line. This, added to the intense figurative imagery here, makes this particular metaphor all the more memorable and striking for the reader.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "phase"
- **Line 2:** "days"
- **Line 3:** "then," "let," "trace"
- **Line 4:** "frozen," "face"
- **Line 5:** "then," "let," "explore"
- **Line 6:** "blown," "lower"
- **Line 7:** "and handle and," "hold"

- **Line 8:** “damaged,” “bone”
- **Line 10:** “fractured rudder,” “shoulder”
- **Line 11:** “finger,” “thumb”
- **Line 12:** “silk,” “punctured lung”
- **Line 13:** “I bind,” “struts”
- **Line 14:** “climb,” “rungs”
- **Line 19:** “foetus,” “metal,” “beneath,” “chest”
- **Line 20:** “bullet,” “rest”
- **Line 21:** “I widened”
- **Line 23:** “mine”
- **Line 24:** “mind”
- **Line 25:** “closed”
- **Line 26:** “close”

ALLITERATION

Though "The Manhunt" details some pretty harrowing descriptions of physical violence, the poem is also surprisingly melodic in places. The poem contains some notable examples of alliteration which, especially when combined with consonance and assonance, enhance its sound and texture.

The first important instance of this comes in the very first line of the poem, with "After the first phase." The immediate gentle /f/ alliteration suggests both softness and abundance, reflecting the loving nature of this initial honeymoon phase. The /f/ sound then reappears in line 4:

> the frozen river which ran through his face

The /f/ sounds, made at the front of the mouth, contrast with the guttural, back of the throat /r/ sounds—sounds that almost make the line feel as though the soldier is gritting his teeth, that his jaw is clamped shut as his wife gently touches his scar.

Later, line 7 includes the pleasingly alliterative /h/ sounds of "handle and hold." At first glance, this gives a melodic, sing-song feel to the line, almost like a lullaby being sung to a child. This adds to the sense of gentle care that infuses this part of the poem. The breath needed to actually *say* handle and hold out loud, though, imbues the line with a sense of physical *effort*. This underlines the nervous tension that cuts through the whole poem. While the speaker is, on the surface, calm and collected, there is certainly a clear element of caution and pressure running beneath her movements.

Alliteration can also be a very effective way of evoking the imagery of a line. For instance, in line 12, there is a forceful repetition of two /p/ sounds:

> the parachute silk of his punctured lung

These repeated /p/ sounds, known as plosives, are reminiscent of the popping sound made by far off gunfire. This hints at an ever-present echo of the gunshots that reverberates around the soldier's mind (and it makes that echo resonate for the reader, too).

Skipping forward, lines 23 and 24 use clear alliteration (as well as consonance and assonance) in "mine" and "mind." This connects the unexploded mine, or bomb, to the soldier's mind itself. The sonic similarity between these two words suggests just how difficult it will be to extract this metaphorical mine from the soldier's brain—that is, to free him of his trauma.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “After,” “first phase”
- **Line 2:** “passionate nights and intimate”
- **Line 4:** “frozen,” “river,” “ran through,” “face”
- **Line 5:** “would”
- **Line 6:** “blown,” “hinge,” “lower,” “jaw”
- **Line 7:** “handle,” “hold”
- **Line 8:** “porcelain collar”
- **Line 9:** “and mind and attend”
- **Line 10:** “fractured rudder,” “shoulder,” “blade”
- **Line 12:** “parachute,” “silk,” “punctured”
- **Line 13:** “could,” “bind”
- **Line 14:** “climb,” “rungs,” “broken,” “ribs”
- **Line 15:** “hurt”
- **Line 16:** “his,” “heart”
- **Line 17:** “Skirting”
- **Line 18:** “could,” “picture,” “scan”
- **Line 19:** “beneath,” “chest”
- **Line 20:** “bullet,” “rest”
- **Line 21:** “search”
- **Line 22:** “traced,” “scarring,” “back,” “source”
- **Line 23:** “sweating,” “unexploded,” “mine”
- **Line 24:** “mind”
- **Line 25:** “closed”
- **Line 26:** “come,” “close”

VOCABULARY

Trace (Line 3, Line 22) - To lightly run one's fingers along something, often from top to bottom. The poet uses the word twice in order to extend the metaphor of a manhunt. The second time it is used, it signifies an investigation or search for a person or place.

Mind (Line 9) - To look after or to take care of, often in the context of childcare. Another connotation is the "mindfulness" with which the speaker is treating her husband by thinking about and being sensitive to his needs.

Rudder (Line 10) - The mechanical part which changes the direction of a plane or water vessel (a ship, boat, or yacht, for example). A rudder is positioned at the front of a nautical vessel and is controlled by a person on board.

Struts (Line 13) - Supporting beams that stop a construction

from falling in on itself or collapsing.

Skirting (Line 17) - To travel round, or past the edge of something, often out of a desire to avoid it. The word is often used in the context of mountaineering. For example: "to skirt along the edge of a precipice."

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Manhunt" is comprised of 13 couplets (two-line stanzas). The consistent use of couplets throughout the poem suggests the consistency of the speaker's relationship with her husband. In a way, their unity as a couple, a pair, is made clear in the visual form of the poem.

Other than that, however, the poem does not fall into any traditional poetic form. The couplets themselves sometimes rhyme, sometimes do not, and are also often enjambed, with phrases cut off and spilling over into the next line or even the next stanza. Thus even as the couplets reflect the bond between the speaker and her husband, the poem still feels wobbly and unpredictable. This reflects the speaker's tentative exploration of her husband's body and emotions.

The order and regimen of the rhyming couplet could further be interpreted as reflecting the strictly ordered and ranked system of the military, from which the soldier has just returned. The poem's attempt at organization may allude to a lack of freedom of expression and fluidity on the part of the soldier. At the same time, the fact that these couplets are often enjambed or unrhymed suggests the *inability* of the soldier to stay in line with this expected order.

On a similar note, though the stanzas are always couplets, the lines *themselves* within those stanzas are uneven in length and mostly unmetered. This implies the choppy, perhaps unsteady nature of the couple's relationship; they are bonded to each other, yet still must navigate new hurdles. Some stanzas even seem to mirror the highs and lows that the couple are experiencing. For example, the couplets that consist of a shorter first line and a longer second line create an uneven, jagged image on the page. Take lines 17-18:

> Skirting along,
> only then could I picture the scan,

It is also interesting to note how the poem appears to be divided into two parts. The first part, from lines 1-12 ("After the first phase ... punctured lung.") is one complete sentence. The second half, from line 13 until the end of the poem, is much more disjointed; there are multiple sentences designated by full stops. This change—from a sprawling opening sentence to a series of choppier, shorter sentences—is similar to a traditional learning curve, in which progress is made quickly to begin with and then plateaus with small increases over a long period of time. While the speaker's knowledge about her husband may have increased rapidly to begin with, the second half of the poem marks the plateau, the frequent full stops showing the points at which her ability to learn more is paused.

METER

The poem's meter is technically free verse as it doesn't follow a strict metrical pattern. "The Manhunt" is essentially a story being told, and the lack of strict meter gives the poem a conversational tone. This gives the impression of hearing an anecdote from someone who has thought about their feelings in depth, but who is describing them spontaneously.

That being said, there *are* parts of the poem which do follow a seeming metrical pattern. Line 2, for example, can be scanned:

> af**ter** | pas**sionate** | **nights** and | in**timate** | **days,**

The two halves of this line mirror each other, creating an alternating pattern of trochees (stressed-unstressed) and dactyls (stressed-unstressed-unstressed): DUM da | DUM da da | DUM da | DUM da da | DUM. The phrases "pas**sionate** **nights**" and "in**timate** **days**" have the *exact* same metrical rhythm, reflecting the intensity of this initial honeymoon period between the couple; *both* their nights *and* their days are marked by a sense of closeness.

Later, stanzas 4, 5, and 6 have almost the exact same metrical rhythms as well. Not coincidentally, each of these stanzas has a parallel structure in which the speaker describes gently attending to her husband's damaged body parts. Here's a closer look at the first lines of those three stanzas, each of which consists of an iamb (unstressed-stressed, da DUM) followed by an anapest (unstressed-unstressed-stressed, da da DUM):

> and **han-** | dle and **hold**
> and **mind** | and at**tend**
> and **fin-** | ger and **thumb**

Lines 8, 10, and 12 , the second lines of these stanzas, all follow nearly the exact same metrical rhythm as well:

> the **dam-** | aged, **por** | celain **col-** | lar **bone,**
> the **frac-** | tured **rud** | der of **shoul-** | der-**blade,**
> the **par-** | achute **silk** | of his **punc-** | tured **lung.**

The first two lines above consist of iamb + iamb + anapest + iamb; the final line of iamb + anapest + anapest + iamb. This second anapest is a very minor deviation, however, that still respects the general *rising* meter of these stanzas—of the beats moving from a place of *softness*, from a lack of stress, to a place of *emphasis*. Overall, these moments of consistent meter serve

to settle the poem, giving it a comforting familiarity and predictability in places where the speaker explores her husband's body. The repetitive meter reflects the repetitiveness of this exploration, the way she must move gently, unhurriedly, and in a manner that won't startle her on-edge husband.

RHYME SCHEME

There is no consistent rhyme scheme throughout "The Manhunt." The poem slides in and out of rhymed and unrhymed couplets, perhaps commenting on the relationship between the speaker and her husband: while the couple's unity is evident in the rigidly paired couplet form, the absence of a clear rhyme scheme conveys a lack of harmony.

Interestingly, the poem's first two stanzas feature two perfectly-rhymed couplets: "phase"/"days," and "trace/face." This consistency adds to the euphoric, harmonious nature of the "first phase" of their honeymoon period. The easy, full rhymes here may also suggest a *false* sense of security and ease in the first physical part of their relationship before the couple's problems begin to become more apparent. Indeed, in the very next stanza, as the speaker explores her husband's broken jaw, the rhyme is no longer perfect; "explore" is only a subtle slant rhyme with "jaw," reflecting the increasing disruption to this relationship as the speaker explores more of her husband's damaged body. In the next stanza, "hold" and "bone" are again only slant rhymes, while "attend" and "blade" in the following couplet don't really rhyme at all.

There are several other instances of slant rhyme throughout the poem as well. For example:

- "thumb" and "lung"
- "hurt" and "heart"
- "search" and "source"

These weave in and out of more perfect rhymes—i.e., "chest"/"rest"—and more completely unrhymed couplets appear as well ("mine" and "which," for instance). Though there are moments of rhyme–of harmony and connection—they remain unpredictable, reflecting the potentially volatile nature of the couple's relationship.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "The Manhunt" is the wife of a soldier who has returned from military duty and who is suffering from both physical and emotional trauma. The poem describes the speaker's process of trying to reconnect with her now changed husband by exploring and understanding his pain.

The poem is based on real people. The soldier alluded to is based on Eddie Beddoes, who was one of the main participants in a documentary that the poet, Simon Armitage, made about the trauma of war. Armitage spent many hours interviewing Eddie and his wife, Laura, trying to understand both of their personal experiences after Eddie returned from combat. This poem is in fact referred to as "Laura's poem."

Armitage's decision to choose *Laura* rather than *Eddie* as the narrator of this poem provides a wider perspective on the implications of war. Instead of focusing on the direct experience of a soldier, Armitage highlights how war can touch many people indirectly—how it can affect not just soldiers, but their loved ones as well. He gives a voice to someone who has to deal with the legacy of violence on a daily basis, and its long-lasting effects on the person closest to her.

SETTING

"The Manhunt" seems, initially, to be set in an intimate environment, with a wife exploring her husband's battle scars. The mention of "passionate nights and intimate days" and the delicate nature of the speaker's exploration imply a private, quiet space like a bedroom. The more abstract, latter part of the poem situates it within the soldier's body, thus giving a physical shape to the wounds which are still causing him pain.

The poem can also be thought of as being set at an indistinct point in the speaker's past. The story-telling form gives no indication as to whether the events happened recently or a long time ago, an ambiguity which is heightened by the use of very neutral language. There are no colloquialisms or slang to locate the poem within a particular time-frame or specific part of the world. The poem's syntax—for example "only then could I"—is actually slightly antiquated at times, making the poem's time period unclear. While the use of the word "mine" is indicative of modern warfare, the poem could apply to any war which has taken place throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"The Manhunt" was published in a 2008 collection called *The Not Dead*. The poems in the collection were included in a documentary with the same title, shown on the British television station Channel 4 in 2007. The film's aim was to highlight the unfairness with which veterans are treated in the UK. It sought to humanize the experiences of ex-service people and to show the devastating effect that war can have on mental health, especially if left untreated.

"The Manhunt" is a more recent entry into an extensive literary canon documenting the repercussions of warfare. Armitage's work is indebted to early war poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, for example, whose poems such as "Repression of War Experience," "Haunted," and "Survivors" deal directly with the

lasting trauma many soldiers dealt with after World War I. More recently, Brian Turner's "Phantoms" and Elyse Fenton's "Conversation" highlight the effects of modern warfare on returning soldiers.

Armitage often refers to the ancient poet Homer as a key inspiration. Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey" deals, primarily, with displacement and the attempt to reintegrate in the aftermath of war. Like the soldier at the center of "The Manhunt," when Odysseus finally reaches home he is unrecognizable to his wife.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Eddie Beddoes, the soldier at the center of "The Manhunt" served as a peacekeeper in Bosnia during the Croat-Bosniak conflict in the 1990s. The Bosnian War began in 1993 and would eventually result in the mass rape, ethnic cleansing, and indiscriminate bombing of Bosnian civilians. The July 1995 Srebrenica Massacre, in which more than 8,000 Bosnians were killed, has been widely accepted as the worst instance of mass murder since the Second World War. Soldiers involved in the Croat-Bosniak conflict often witnessed not only devastating casualties, but also some of the worst crimes committed by humanity in half a century. Many service-people who served in Bosnia suffered from severe mental health issues after returning home.

The symptoms described in “The Manhunt” are typical of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder that often afflicts those who have served in military conflict zones. PTSD is often characterized by nightmares and flashbacks to the traumatic incident, as well as by feelings of isolation, irritability, guilt, and depression. Statistics have shown that almost a fifth of returning soldiers have suffered from PTSD or related conditions.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "The Not Dead" — Watch Simon Armitage's documentary from 2007. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvA3K-tC6t8)
- Laura Beddoes Recites "The Manhunt" — Laura Beddoes reads the poem in footage from "The Not Dead" documentary. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGX4vwXvek4)
- Article on "The Not Dead" — More information about Armitage's documentary. (https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-not-dead-by-simon-armitage-1027690.html)
- PTSD in Veterans — An article about the prevalence and treatment of PTSD in military veterans. (https://health.usnews.com/conditions/mental-health/ptsd/articles/ptsd-veterans-statistics)
- The Bosnian War — More information about the war in which Eddie Beddoes served as a peace-keeper. (https://www.britannica.com/event/Bosnian-War)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER SIMON ARMITAGE POEMS

- Mother, any distance
- Remains

HOW TO CITE

MLA

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CHICAGO MANUAL

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