

Edexcel English Literature GCSE

Poetry Collection: Relationships

The Manhunt - *Simon Armitage*

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THE MANHUNT

Simon Armitage

Brief Summary

The poem is about a soldier who has become seriously injured whilst fighting in a conflict-zone. It's written from the perspective of the soldier's wife, who is attempting to come to terms with what happened.

Synopsis

- Opens referencing the immense amount of time it took for the soldier's wife to start exploring her husband both physically and emotionally again.
- Talks about his fragile body and mind, as a result of the injuries he has suffered in the combat zone, as well as how his life now lacks direction.
- Explores the continued potential for damage that the "foetus of metal" in his chest has.

Context

Simon Armitage (1963 -)

In 2019, Armitage became the new Poet Laureate, following Carol Ann Duffy in the post. He is a playwright and novelist as well as a poet, and attended the University of Manchester as well as studying in Portsmouth. He has worked in a number of occupations, and his poetry often relates back to his Yorkshire heritage (Armitage was born in Huddersfield) and often focuses on relatable situations in order to resonate with and engage the reader.

Written for "The Not Dead" (2007)

"The Not Dead" was a Channel 4 documentary about the impact of war on soldiers returning home. It was created in order to raise awareness about PTSD and encourage more recognition of it in society. Armitage later released a poetry collection of the same name featuring the poems from the series.

The collection was based on Guardsman Tromans who fought in Iraq in 2003 and suffered from PTSD as a result of their service. The poem and documentary coincided with changing public opinion as people were starting to oppose war. At this time the Iraq war was condemned as unnecessary, and potentially due to US oil greed. As a result of these more modern conflicts the public and military started to recognise PTSD, and Armitage's poem helped raise awareness and incite sympathy

Poems featured also belong in a collection by Armitage also called "The Not Dead", and 'The Manhunt' was referred to as 'Laura's Poem' as it has a female narrator. In the documentary, the poem is read by Laura who was the wife of a peace-keeper in Bosnia in the 1990s, called Eddie Beddoes. He was discharged from service due to his injuries, both physical and mental.



The Manhunt

The immediate opening isn't very emotional - "first phase" sounds warlike or clinical - but juxtaposes with the "passionate nights" and "intimate days".

Suggests that he is physically injured as well as being unable to express his emotions to her.

Medical connotations - the wife is searching with the intent to heal her husband.

Oxymoronic - a parachute won't work if its punctured - may suggest the husband feels he has no support network, which would make the wife feel sad and highlights the distance and disconnect in their relationship, caused by the war.

Even though he has now left the warzone, the consequences of the conflict still have the potential to impact his current relationships, no matter how long lasting.

Their relationship has been forever changed, she can only "come close" to helping him or discovering him again, and the "only then" suggests it took a long time to get to this stage.

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

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**

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

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

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

Only then could I bind the struts
and climb the rungs of his **broken ribs**,

and feel the hurt
of his **grazed heart**.

Skirting along,
only then could I picture the scan,

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

Then I widened the search,
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.
Then, and **only then, did I come close**.

References the significant amount of time it takes for someone to recover from the physical and mental injuries suffered through war.

Armitage employs a semantic field of searching, to try and understand the changes war has caused for her husband.

"Porcelain" has connotations of fragility and juxtaposes the conflict of war.

He has a loss in sense of direction and can't steer himself - doesn't know what to do.

Reflects the casualties of conflict and human vulnerability.

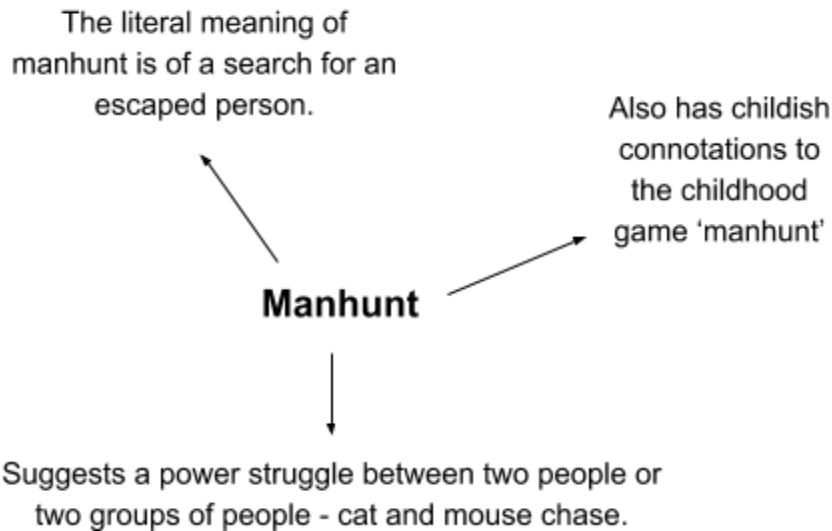
The husband is unable to connect with his wife anymore, nor express his feelings.

Suggests that the couple's relationship will be forever changed by the experience, like how childbirth changes a relationship.

Suggesting that the worst problem is mental rather than physical, and this causes the wife to have to take extra care around him. This shows the speaker as supportive and attentive, as she is aware of the effects of PTSD on the returned soldier.



The title “Manhunt”



Perspective

The poem is from the perspective of a soldier's wife, and is actually based on a real woman: Laura. Laura is the wife of a peace-keeper in Bosnia in the 1990s, called Eddie Beddoes. He was discharged from service due to his injuries, both physical and mental. This is a sort of **persona poem** in this sense. It is from the **first-person perspective** which provides a very intimate and personal experience of love in times of conflict and war.

The opening

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

only then would he let me trace
the frozen river which ran through his face,*

The immediate opening isn't very emotional. The **“first phase”** sounds warlike or clinical, showing how even though the speaker isn't a soldier she is so involved with war that she has started taking on the vocabulary of war. However, this phrase juxtaposes with the **“passionate nights”** and **“intimate days”**.

→ The **references to time** - **“nights”** and **“days”** - indicate the significant amount of time it takes for someone to recover from the physical and mental injuries suffered through war.



The **semantic field of searching** begins in the opening with the **verb “trace”**. Here, the speaker is trying to search for the ways the war has hurt and changed her husband.

The ending

*Then I widened the search,
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.
Then, and only then, did I come close.*

The ending consolidates to the reader how their relationship has been forever changed. The speaker can only **“come close”** to helping her husband and the **“only then”** suggests it took a long time to get to this stage.



<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/01/25/every-soldier-should-screened-ptsd-former-helmand-officer-warns/>

The **adverb “close”** emphasises how nobody can truly understand the trauma that war causes soldiers. It is evident that the thing which takes the longest to heal from war isn't the physical injuries sustained by soldiers but instead the ongoing mental issues sustained. The ending shows the speaker as supportive and attentive, as she is aware of the effects of PTSD on the returned soldier.

Structure

Couplets

The **rhyming couplets** used throughout the poem reflect how it takes two people working hard to complete a relationship, and how love is a union of two different people. This suggests that the relationship explored in the poem is very caring and gentle. The fact the couplets are rhyming shows that despite being physically apart, they are still close emotionally.



Rhyme Scheme

The poem opens with the first three couplets displaying an **AA BB CC rhyme scheme**. This could perhaps reflect how the soldier appears to be responding well to treatment physically at the start before the extent of the mental damage is revealed to the reader and the soldier's wife.

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

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**

However, this rhyme scheme quickly dissolves as the poem continues. The **breakdown of the rhyme scheme** juxtaposes with the idea that there was an improvement in the soldier's mental and physical health.

On the other hand, it could reflect how the wife is exposed to and discovers the true extent of her husband's injuries as time goes on, so the rhyme scheme starts to break alongside her realisation. The **theme of fragmentation** is displayed both through the faltering rhyme scheme and employment of couplets.



<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/living-with-ptsd-how-to-manage-anxiety-and-flashbacks/>

Language

Repetition

The **repetition** of **“only then”** suggests it is a very slow progress of getting returned soldiers to regain a sense of their past selves if they've been affected by PTSD. The comment also reflects the seemingly endless stages soldiers have to go through to try and recover from war.

Allusionary Language

ALLUSION | An indirect reference to a concept or theme without explicit mention.

The speaker uses a series of **metaphors** to compare the mental and physical damage inflicted on the husband through the horrors of war.



the **blown hinge** of his lower jaw

the damaged, **porcelain** collar bone,

the **fractured rudder** of shoulder-blade,

the **parachute silk** of his punctured lung.

These reflect how the wife has to go beyond the physical injuries that her husband has encountered to see the damage done to him mentally.

- Armitage uses the **adjective** “**porcelain**” to imply that the soldier is fragile and easily damaged.
- The phrase “**blown hinge**” suggests irreversible damage, which may be a comment on the massive impact war can have on relationships.
- The “**fractured rudder**” hints at the mental damage caused by the injuries and implies that he is unable to control the direction of his mind or life.

Semantic field of searching

The poet presents the wife, or the speaker, as a character **searching** for both her husband and a way to help him out of the mental terror caused by the war which is now impacting him in the form of PTSD.

MANHUNT

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Then I **widened the search,**
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Then, and only then, **did I come close.**



Medical terms

The language referencing **searching** juxtaposes with the more **medical images** implied through the language “*mind*” and “*tend*”. Here, both the **semantics of searching** and the **semantics of caring** are used in reference to the speaker. This suggests she both adheres to and **subverts the stereotypes of a patriarchal society**. She not only cares for her husband, she also researches the cause of his problems too - she is not a passive character by any means.

Symbols

The “*foetus*” is **symbolic of change**. Here, Armitage is suggesting that the couple’s relationship will be forever changed by the experience, like how childbirth changes a relationship. It could also be symbolic of the start of a new chapter of their lives.



<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/intimacy-betty-e-jo-brooks.html>

The **metaphor** of “*climb the rungs*” relates to the series of steps taken by the wife and the soldier on the journey back to being recovered. This is **symbolic of the struggles faced by soldiers** when taken by war, as well as the intense gentle care taken by the speaker to help him.

