**The Manhunt – Simon Armitage**

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 finally 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.

## The Meaning of ‘Manhunt’?

A ‘manhunt’ is an intensive search for an escaped person, often a convict. This title suggests that the poem will describe an exciting chase and be full of action.

Yet the poem opens with ‘passionate nights and intimate days’ which instead implies a romantic relationship. Phrases such as ‘handle and hold’ and ‘mind and attend’ are tender and caring. Armitage highlights the contrast between this emotional tenderness and the physical damage through line breaks.

So what does the title mean? On one hand, the speaker is ‘search[ing]’ for the man that they once knew beneath the injuries. On the other hand, the title suggests that the soldier feels as if he is still being chased by the memories of war, even though the fighting is over.

## The Soldier’s Body in ‘The Manhunt’

The soldier’s body is described in striking ways. His body is compared to things which are non-organic (man-made) and inanimate (cannot move). His bones are described as a ‘hinge’, ‘porcelain’, a ‘rudder’ and ‘rungs’. This makes his body seem unfamiliar and less alive.

The image of the ‘sweating, unexploded mine’ mixes the natural and the artificial. The mine sweats as if it is alive, as if the weapon has fused with the body. Or maybe the body itself is a weapon – the soldier’s mind is the ‘source’ of the ‘scarring’.

## The Speaker in ‘The Manhunt’

Armitage emphasises the distance between the speaker and the soldier.

‘Only then’ is repeated five times in the poem. Armitage further emphasises this phrase by putting it at the beginning of the line. ‘Only then’ suggests that the speaker can only reconnect with the soldier by taking slow, careful steps. This highlights both the patience of the speaker and the isolation of the soldier.

The last line again emphasises this distance. We might expect the poem to end with the speaker finally reaching the man they are searching for underneath the injuries. Yet in the last line the speaker still only ‘come[s] close’ to understanding or connecting with the soldier. There is no easy resolution or happy ending here. Even though the speaker has come so far, they are still unable to f