

The Manhunt

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,
5 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
10 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,
15 and feel the hurt
of his grazed heart.
Skirting along,
only then could I picture the scan,
the foetus of metal beneath his chest
20 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
25 every nerve in his body had tightened and closed.
Then, and only then, did I come close.

SIMON ARMITAGE