

PHOENIX: Explanations to the poems and to the translation

P. 22: A Black Nurse Tends to Wounds

The colours ran from war, Ceylon to Coventry:

In the First World War, many units from the then world empire were deployed on the British side; they often had quite colourful uniforms. Several companies from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) were in action, including a medical unit.

P. 24: The Homeless Paratrooper

Mach-two fire: Mach 2 is the speed of a bullet when it leaves the barrel.

P. 34: Postman in the Smoke

Amnion of new Coventry: Allusion to the present ring road around the center of Coventry (cf. p. 46, Fat Man, "prophetic ligature").

Martha's House: Allusion to Antony Owen's grandmother who was also bombed out.

The King is stuttering from the news: King George V stuttered in public appearances for a long time.

S. 44: Evacuee

children sent from Coventry: Allusion to the idiom „to send [someone] to Coventry“, it means as much as "to isolate socially, to ignore"..

S. 46: Fat Man

Ribbon weaver: Ribbon weaving was a major industry in 19th century Coventry.

Fine sky-blue yarns: Coventry was famous in the late Middle Ages for "Coventry blue", a particularly colourful light blue.

The prophetic ligature: Allusion to the present ring road around the center of Coventry (cf. above, "amnion").

The Nagasaki bastard / they named after you: The atomic bomb on Nagasaki was called "Fat Man"; the naming was sometimes understood as a reference to Churchill.

S. 62: The Last Minute of Wilfred Owen's Life

The fib of poppies: Poppies are the symbol of remembrance of the fallen of wars in Britain.

Pawn me the mad metal cross at Jewelers across Wirral: After his death just a week before the Armistice in 1918, Owen was posthumously awarded the Military Cross; he knew he was nominated for it. The Wirral peninsula was where Wilfred Owen spent part of his childhood and youth.

S. 68: A Polish Pilot dances Over the Sea

Polish pilots of the Royal Airforce flew many missions in WW2 and played a significant role in the outcome of the war.

merlin: Rolls Royce named aircraft engines after birds of prey, the "Merlin" was used in various fighter planes of the Second World War.

Vera Lynn (1917 – 2020), later Dame Vera, was a well-known singer during the Second World War. Often imitated, she sought to boost the morale of the troops with her songs.

S. 73: How to Find the Falklands / The Raising of the Exocet:

"Exocet" is the name of an anti-ship missile used by Argentina in the Falklands War, on 4 May 1982 the British destroyer HMS Sheffield was sunk by an Exocet. For a time following this incident, "exocet" in English slang referred to an unexpected event. (A similarly cynical allusion to a horrific wartime event is "hot as Dresden 45" for great heat).

The painting alludes to the raising of the "Mary Rose", Henry VIII's flagship, on 11 October 1982, the year of the Falklands War.

S. 76: The Surprise Welcome Home Party

do not think a salmon with cucumber fins will save him: A whole salmon with cucumber slices as fins was a particularly popular feast among the working classes in England.

S. 78: Valentine's Day for Invisible People

Fought over Miley Cyrus and if she'd gone too far: In the video for her hit song "Wrecking Ball" (2013), Miley Cyrus was seen swinging naked on a wrecking ball.

Agrigento: Airfield on Sicily, from August 1943 command centre for the allies' landings.

S. 84: The Falling Man

They spoke of the falling Man: Photo of a man throwing himself from the burning World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. The photo was highly controversial.

S. 88: 43rd Birthday

bring you home in a wooden birdhouse: According to a tradition of Jewish mysticism, all souls originate as blossoms on the tree of life in the Garden of Eden and fall into the treasure house of life. In some traditions, the souls resemble birds; the treasure house is then imagined as a dovecote or birdhouse.

S. 94: Instructions on a Successful Remembrance

Poppies: Poppies are a sign of remembrance in Britain. Red poppies commemorate those who have died in war; white poppies are a sign of resistance to war; purple poppies commemorate animals injured or killed in war.

Poppies can be pinned down by the wind: Allusion to a famous poem from the First World War, "In Flanders Fields", here the first two lines read "In Flanders fields the poppies blow / Between the crosses, row on row".