

# *War Poets Collection*



## **The Hydra**

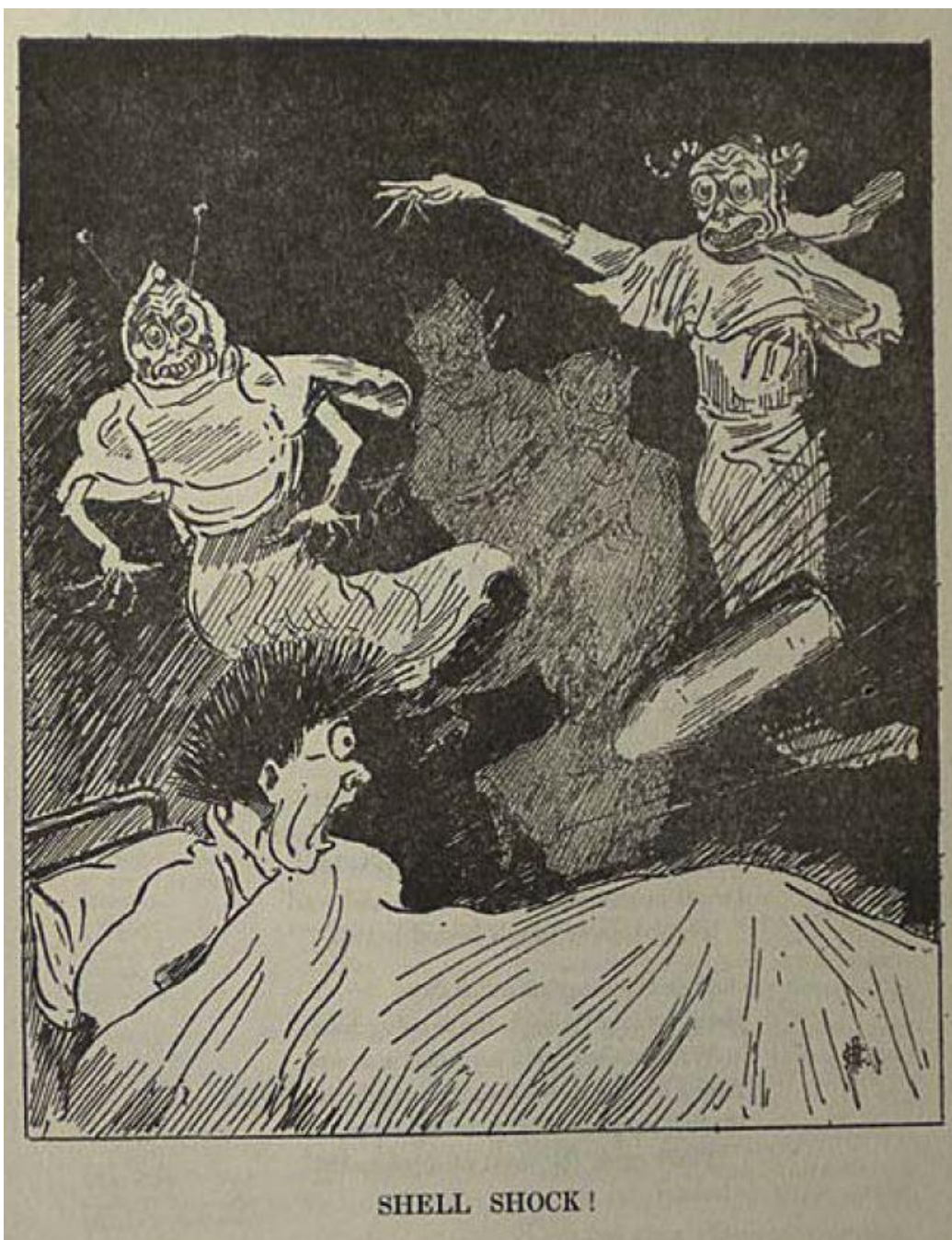
Shell shock was a serious problem during the First World War. Those who were affected suffered both physically, with an uncontrollable shaking of the muscles, and mentally with terrible nightmares.

In 1916, Craiglockhart became a war hospital for the treatment of shell shocked officers. It was here that many officers were treated and new approaches were used to try to cure these men of their afflictions.

The Hydra was the magazine of Craiglockhart Military Hospital. Begun in 1917, it was produced by the patients themselves, as a means of entertainment, keeping patients up-to-date on activities, clubs and events. The hospital doctors believed it was essential for shell shock victims to be as active as possible.

**Look at these sources from The Hydra and then answer the questions.**

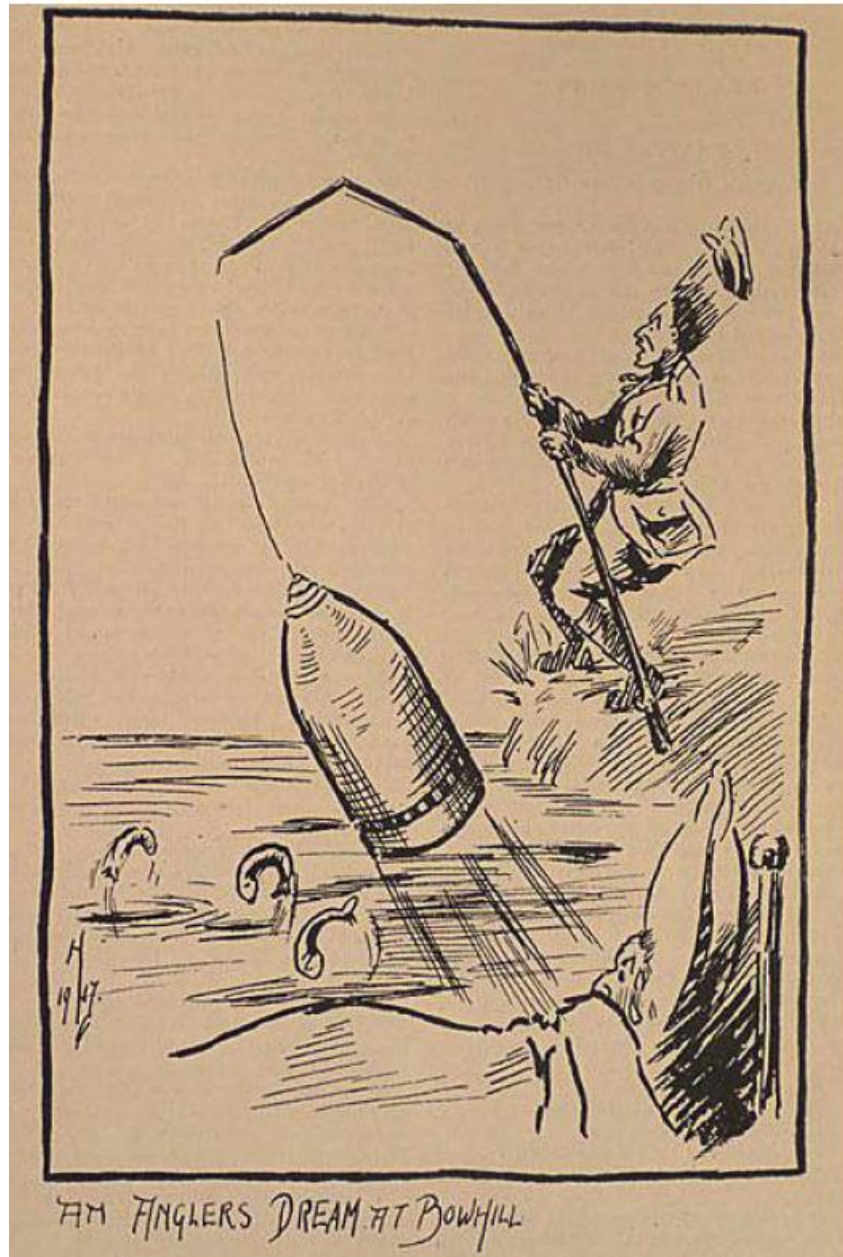
Source A



Drawing of a shell shock nightmare, from The Hydra, December 1917

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Source B



Drawing entitled 'An Angler's Dream at Bowhill' from The Hydra, 9th June, 1917

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## Source C

*I stood with my Guide outside a gate over whose portals was inscribed in letters of gold 'THE GARDEN OF BEAUTIFUL DREAMS.' ... I tried to enter, but the gate was fast locked, and the voice of my Guide told me that the peace of that Garden was not for me. I wept, and through the mist of my burning tears I saw legions of poor tortured beings crying, like myself...*

*'Phantasmagoria'*, from *The Hydra*, No1, April 17<sup>th</sup> 1917

## Questions

**Q1.** Look closely at Source A, drawn by a patient at Craiglockhart. How reliable is this source in our understanding the condition of shell shock?

**Q2.** Source B is another drawing by a patient at Craiglockhart. Look closely at the image. The patient is dreaming. What can you tell from this picture about (a) the patient's daily life (b) the patient's fears? (c) The other patients at Craiglockhart?

**Q3.** "A picture can speak a thousand words". With reference to primary visual sources A and B, how true do you think this statement is?

**Q4.** Source C is an excerpt from a prose piece entitled '*Phantasmagoria*' – a contribution from one of the patients at Craiglockhart.

Describe how sources A, B and C help to illustrate the effects of the First World War on the individual.

**Q5.** The following excerpt is part of an interview with a contemporary military psychologist, from a documentary called '*Shell shock: Minds the Dead have ravished*', by Blakeway Productions. You can see the full interview at the Edinburgh Napier University War Poets Exhibition.

*"Shell shock and the psychological reactions to the battlefields of the first world war, I think for the first time allowed us to negotiate within society, that external events could affect you internally, that perfectly normal, rational, brave, courageous human beings, could be brought to tears, could mentally break down, lose their emotions..."*

Explain how primary sources A, B and C justify this comment.

**Q6.** The war poet Wilfred Owen was himself a patient at Craiglockhart and edited six issues of *The Hydra* from 21 July 1917. It was in Craiglockhart where he met fellow war poet Siegfried Sassoon and discovered his poetic voice. Whilst editor, Owen used the opportunity to publish two of his own poems anonymously in *The Hydra*.

The following excerpt is from Wilfred Owen's famous poem *Dulce Et Decorum Est*.

*Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – an ecstasy of fumbling,  
fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...  
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.  
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,  
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.*

How relevant are the lines from this poem to visual source A? Explain using lines from the poem.

