

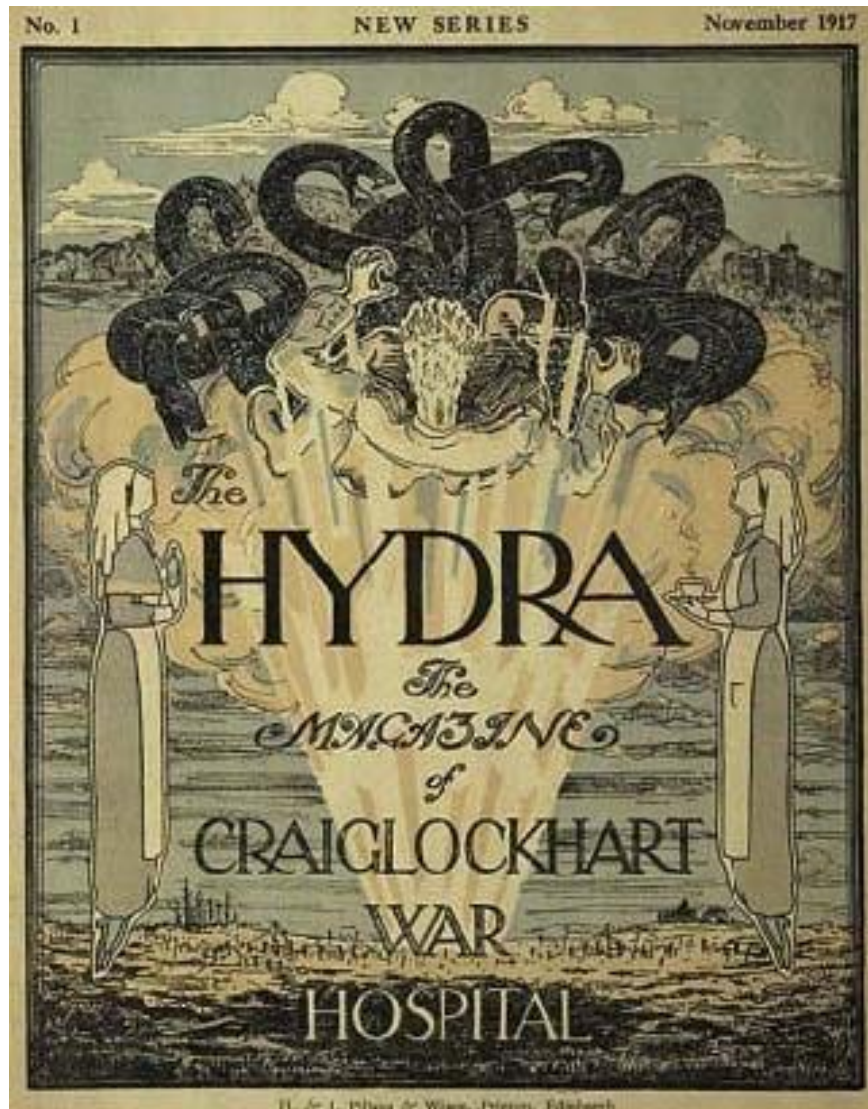
War Poets Collection



The Hydra and Beyond

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 closely at the cover illustration for The Hydra, New Series, designed by Adrian Berrington, in 1917, then answer the questions.



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Craiglockhart Military Hospital can be seen standing proudly on its hill, looking down over the City of Edinburgh. It stands like a fortress underneath a calm summer sky. The hydra – the nine-headed, poisonous monster of Greek Mythology – violently twists and snakes around a struggling patient of Craiglockhart. Blown violently into the air, he appears like an explosion far above the ground. He is suffering from a shell shock nightmare.

Two nurses calmly rise up toward the patient which might release him from his nightmare.

Question 1

Interpret!

(a) In detail, describe the patient's nightmare.

(b) Look at the nurses. How do they compare with the patient in the illustration? Think about their movement, use of colour, what they are holding.

(c) When the nurses reach the patient, describe what you think might happen next?

(d) Why do you think this scene is happening in the air above Edinburgh?

(e) Think about the position of the patient compared with the strong, medical fortress of the hospital below.

Explain why Craiglockhart appears like a good, safe place for the patient?

Question 2

Analyse!

The war poet Wilfred Owen was himself a patient at Craiglockhart and edited six issues of *The Hydra*, from 21 July 1917. In Craiglockhart he met fellow war poet Siegfried Sassoon and discovered his poetic voice.

Point A

From 1914-18, 80,000 men were diagnosed as suffering from shell-shock. Many were sent to Britain to be 'cured' of this embarrassing affliction. The aim was to return as many back to duty as quickly as possible. Some were sent back to the front lines, but around 80% were never able to return to duty.

Point B

In his first editorial piece for *The Hydra*, in Sept 1917, Wilfred Owen wrote:

"Many of us who came to the Hydro slightly ill are now getting dangerously well ... in this excellent Concentration Camp we are fast recovering from the shock of coming to England"

(a) Considering Point A, what do you think Owen meant by "dangerously well"?

(b) Consider the context of *The Hydra*, how does this allow Owen to 'get away' with saying this? What does it say about his relationship to the hospital staff?

On 3 November 1917, Wilfred Owen left Craiglockhart military hospital. He was declared fit and returned to the Front as an officer reinforcement in September 1918. Two months later, on 4th November 1918, seven days before the Armistice, Owen was caught in a German machine gun attack and killed while trying to lead his company across the Sambre Canal. He was twenty-five years old.

(c) Considering Wilfred Owen's fate, how true was his statement in *The Hydra*?

(d) How does Owen describe Craiglockhart? How do we know he is joking?

(e) "...in this excellent Concentration Camp we are fast recovering from the shock of coming to England".

Explain how this statement is ironic.

Question 3

Consider!

Being discharged from active service and sent to hospital with shell shock was, for a time, widely considered an 'embarrassment'. There was little sympathy for these soldiers and officers who were suffering from this traumatic condition.

This is an excerpt from a letter written by an officer on the Front called Herbert Leland, home to his wife Lena:

"You will be very sorry to see that I am in the officer's hospital I don't know how you will take it but personally I am very sick. The doctor's insist on my having a complete rest, away from the sound of guns and I am to go home for at least a month. Don't worry, it was not my fault."



Mr Leland's grandson explains his grandfather's feelings of shame:

"Being a proud, military man I think the effect of giving in to weakness and being taken out of the battle - without being physically wounded - was something that he was very ashamed of ... he was conscious that his wife and family might feel shame. It wasn't done."

A more complete reading of Mr Leland's letters and the interview with his grandson can be seen at the War Poets Collection Exhibition at Edinburgh Napier University. Kind permission was given to Edinburgh Napier University by Mr Tom Leland and also from Blakeway Productions for the use of footage from their documentary 'Shell-shock: Minds the Dead have Ravished'.

(a) Quoting from Herbert Leland's letter, describe how he felt shame at being sent to hospital.

(b) How does his grandson explain this shame?

(c) What does he mean by 'it wasn't done'?

(d) The national press communicated upbeat stories of courage, heroism and glory from the Front in order to boost the public morale. To what extent do you think this national opinion may have contributed to Mr Leland's, and many other soldiers' and officers', feelings about being dismissed from active service?

Dig deeper...

If you want to do some more digging into any of the topics introduced in this PDF, there are many interesting websites you can check out. Here are a few...

Schools - World War One

This BBC website includes activities, videos, animations and resources aimed at Secondary School pupils to help develop themes introduced in this worksheet and further the educational opportunity for studying World War One. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/>

The Early 20th Century 1901-1918

This section of The National Archives website contains a fantastic range of resources for you that make use of documents, photographs, film and sound recordings.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/sessions-and-resources/?time-period=early-20th-century>

