

<b>Institution: University of Manchester</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 29 (English Language and Literature)</b>
<b>Title of case study: Challenging Cultural Assumptions about Multiple Sclerosis</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research carried out at The University of Manchester by the award-winning author Maria (M.J.) Hyland has both illuminated and challenged cultural assumptions about Multiple Sclerosis. Hyland's autobiographical and self-reflective writings have impacted on the public sphere in two ways: 1) they have opened up an international debate in the mass media, literary magazines and among those suffering from the condition about its relation to the practice of writing; 2) they have been used to train future practitioners outside academia such as authors and editors, enhancing the public understanding of writing as a profession and contributing to the success of the editorial consultancy company Hyland &amp; Byrne, which she established in 2011.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>This research started in 2007 and has been led by M.J. Hyland, a Lecturer in Manchester's Centre for New Writing (2007–present). She came to the University after the success of her Man Booker Prize shortlisted novel, <i>Carry Me Down</i>.</p> <p>The key research outcomes are:</p> <p>1) 'Hardy Animal' [3.1] was published by <i>Granta Magazine</i> as part of their Medicine Issue (London: August 2012). Excerpts from this long essay were prominently featured in <i>The Observer Magazine</i> (12 August 2012) and <i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i> (25 August 2012), leading to a veritable explosion of media coverage in the UK, Ireland, and Australia (details below, under 'Reach and significance of impact'). In this long essay the personal experience of being affected by Multiple Sclerosis does not generate a simple confessional narrative but leads instead to a reflection on how to engage in a public debate about illness and literature. This piece focuses especially on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the language of diagnosis</li> <li>b) the loss of control over one's body</li> <li>c) the use of a voice recognition software for the writer of fiction</li> <li>d) the use of experimental drugs</li> <li>e) the problems of 'coming out' as a writer with Multiple Sclerosis</li> </ul> <p>2) On 23 October 2011, as part of their 'Bookseason', <i>The Guardian</i> published M.J. Hyland's essay, 'Revising and Re-Writing' [3.2]. The piece was reprinted in October 2011, edited by Geoff Dyer, in <i>How to Write Fiction: A Guardian Masterclass</i> in 'The Guardian Shorts' series, and made available as a Kindle edition. In 2012, the essay was reprinted in the hardback volume <i>WRITE</i>, edited by Phil Daoust, also published by <i>The Guardian</i> and boasting pieces from leading practitioners around the world. The essay is a handbook for writers and writers to be, a witty critical meditation on the craft of writing, and an ironic reading of how previous writers have engaged with didacticism.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research (AOR – Available on Request)</b></p> <p>The two pieces of self-reflective writing underpinning the case study are closely connected to M.J. Hyland's practice as a writer of fiction while at Manchester, especially her novel <i>This is How</i> (2009) [3.4], longlisted for both The Orange Prize and the Dublin International IMPAC prize (2009) and her short story, 'Rag Love' [3.3], shortlisted for the BBC National Short Story award in 2011.</p> <p><b>Key Publications:</b></p> <p>[3.1.] M.J. Hyland. 'Hardy Animal', in <i>Granta</i> 120, ed. John Freeman, Medicine Issue (London and New York: Granta Books, 2012). Shortlisted for the William Hazlitt Essay Prize 2013. ISBN-10: 1905881614; ISBN-13: 978-1905881611 (AOR)</p>

[3.2.] M.J. Hyland. 'Revising and Rewriting' published by The Guardian in October 2011. Republished in *How To Write Fiction: Guardian Masterclass* (Kindle edition, 2011) and in *WRITE*, ed. Phil Daoust, (London: Guardian Books, 2012), pp. 35–41. ISBN 97808 526 532 89 (AOR)

#### Additional Publications:

[3.3.] M.J. Hyland. 'Rag Love', *The BBC National Short Story Award 2011*, ed. Sue MacGregor (Editor) (Manchester: Comma Press, 2011). ISBN 978-1905583416. First published as 'First-Class Passage', *The Monthly*, 'Society' section (December 2010 / January 2011), also available as a BBC audio download and as a BBC National Short Story Award 2011 Audiobook (AudioGO, 10/8/2011), ISBN-13: 9781445816425. It was broadcast on the BBC Radio 4 programme *Front Row* in September 2011. (AOR)

[3.4.] M.J. Hyland. 'This is How' (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2009). ISBN-10: 184767383X; ISBN-13: 978-1847673831 (AOR)

## 4. Details of the impact

### Context

M.J. Hyland arrived at Manchester just after the successful reception of her novel *Carry Me Down* (2006), which was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Man Booker Prize in its publication year and was the winner of both the Hawthornden Prize and the Encore Prize in 2007. She is based at the Centre for New Writing, which is building towards a tradition of public engagement, dissemination and active contribution to the local, national and international creative economy through external partnerships. The centre has boosted M.J. Hyland's long-term commitment to educate in the craft of fiction beyond academia.

### Pathways to impact

M.J. Hyland regularly attends international literary festivals and reading series to promote her novels and sits on judging panels for a number of literary prizes, such as the Somerset Maugham Prize from 2008-2011, the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2011 and the Lightship First Chapter Award in 2012/13. Her recent self-reflective and pedagogical nonfiction output has been based on exporting her academic practice outside the higher education sphere. The volume of readership generated by her essay 'Revising and Re-Writing' led to an invitation to teach several Guardian Fiction Masterclasses in London and Manchester, which have trained future writers, journalists, and editors in addition to contributing to the local and national cultural economy [5.1].

M.J. Hyland's work has also been disseminated through literary events such as the Centre for New Writing's high profile Conversation on Short-Story Writing with Martin Amis and Tessa Hadley in December 2010, which had an audience of 139. Her growing reputation as a practitioner and a teacher with a strong commitment to the craft of writing led to the establishment of a part time editing firm, Hyland & Byrne, and to an invitation from Granta to write for their special issue on medicine, which in turn generated an international debate on writing and illness. 'Hardy Animal' is now compulsory reading for second-year students on the new MSc Medical Humanities Degree Programme, which the Centre for New Writing has developed with the Manchester Medical School.

### Reach and significance

#### Impact on the public's perception of Multiple Sclerosis

M.J. Hyland's essay 'Hardy Animal' draws on her experience of being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. It had a significant impact on people with the condition and opened up a debate on the role of medical language to a much wider audience. As Hyland writes in her 2013 *Guardian* article: 'In August 2012, I wrote for the first time about my MS and, soon after, hundreds of emails poured in from fellow sufferers. These emails came from academics, GPs, scientists, teachers, athletes, writers, nurses and PhD students, many of whom have been so stunted by fatigue that they've quit work (and play) altogether.'

**a) Impact on People with the Condition.**

'Hardy Animal' actively challenges assumptions about Multiple Sclerosis more generally, and the complexity of medical language more specifically. It has enriched the lives not only of individuals but of self-defined groups, as indicated by the invitation to contribute to *MS Matters* (vol. 107, January/February 2013), the UK MS Society Members' bi-monthly magazine, which counts 70,000 subscribers, but estimates its actual readership figures to be higher than this (there are 120,000 estimated MS sufferers in the UK) [5.3]. The piece created a debate among readers, which took place via twitter in the first instance, but which led the editor of *MS Matters* to publish a number of letters which disagreed with Hyland's view of the illness in the subsequent issue, and further letters in support of Hyland's position in the issue after. In the words of a reader: 'I am often confronted with strong language. Shall I walk away from people (including myself) who have got fears similar to those Maria Hyland describes? No, I believe listening and trying to find a solution is the only way' [5.3]. As the editor of *MS Matters* puts it, after the piece 'we received more responses to it than we do with most articles and the resultant correspondence has run over two successive issues' [5.9].

**b) Raising awareness of Multiple Sclerosis and of the implications of medical language.**

M.J. Hyland was interviewed by a number of national and international media outlets about the condition. She featured on the front page of *The Observer Magazine* in August 2012, participated in the RTÉ Radio 1 primetime show *Arena* [5.5], was interviewed on Ian McMillan's BBC Radio 3 programme *The Verb* in September 2012 [5.6] and on the BBC World Service programme, *The Forum* [5.7]. 'The Drugs Do Work: My Life on Brain Enhancers' appeared in *The Guardian* on 3 May 2013 and gave rise to over 1,000 twitter feeds and comments.

As *The Verb* put it, M.J. Hyland shared with her listeners 'the pleasures and the pains of medical language' [5.6], 'exploring the language of diagnosis, and explaining how she dealt with being told she had Multiple Sclerosis', or as Boyd Tomkin, literary editor at *The Independent*, wrote, 'the strongest pieces [in *Granta's* Medicine Issue] explore not cures and fixes and surgical wizardry but the mystery of the self's incorporation in a ramshackle, ever-failing jalopy of a bodily engine. The novelist MJ Hyland (in a courageous, heartbreaking essay) writes about her experience of multiple sclerosis, and how that slow-burn affliction ruined the "bionic" fantasy of self-creation that she (like all of us) harbours: "preternaturally strong, tougher and smarter than the faulty dictates... of my shabby genes"' [5.4]. *The Forum* too responded to the specifically literary and sociological dimensions of the debate, involving M.J. Hyland in a discussion of 'how much control do we really have over our bodies and our health?' and asking her 'why she's gone public about her life with Multiple Sclerosis'. International magazines, including the highly respected *Internazionale* (no. 983, January 2013) in Italy, have translated and reprinted 'Hardy Animal' [5.8].

As indicated by Tomkin, central to Hyland's impact on the debate on literature and medicine is a technique that is both autobiographical and self-reflective, deriving from her painstaking attention to language. Such precision is at the core of both Hyland's signature style and of her pedagogical practice. Despite her condition, drawing on her commitment to the craft of writing, Hyland now devotes the time she has outside of her writing career to the training of writers, journalists and members of the public.

**Impact on new writers**

After its appearance in *The Guardian*, 'Revising and Rewriting' has enjoyed republication as a Kindle edition and in the 2012 volume *WRITE*, whose list of contributors includes Hilary Mantel, Martin Amis, and Joyce Carol Oates. The essay generated an invitation to teach four Guardian Masterclasses throughout 2012 and 2013 in London and Manchester. The number of participants per class is 14 and it costs £400 per person. All the sessions have been sold-out and rated 5/5 by the participants, who have accompanied their ratings with heartfelt testimonials. Among the many comments received by the Guardian Masterclass Programme (2009-2013) are: 'Maria's course gave me exactly what I wanted and helped me look at my work in a different way'; 'A brilliant and inspiring two days. As someone who has written all her whole life but never shared, it was motivating and inspiring to get feedback from Maria and the other participants in an environment

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that was constructive and encouraging. What I learnt over the two days was invaluable, I feel equipped and ready to take my writing to the next level' [5.1]. The Head of Guardian Masterclasses, writes: 'M.J. Hyland has trained amateur writers [...] professional writers, screen-writers, journalists, feature-writers, BBC script-writers, editors, linguists, lawyers, medical professionals and a number of people who work both in community and mainstream theatre, including theatrical agents, producers, directors and actors. In this way, her contribution to the creative economy of the UK is undoubted' [5.1].

Applying and transferring the insights gained from her practice as a writer and teacher, as presented in 'Revising and Rewriting', led to the establishment in 2011 of a private company, the Hyland & Byrne Editing Firm, which in turn 'has helped reinforce her reputation as a writer who understands the importance of the role of the editor and teacher' [5.2]. Hyland's part-time enterprise employs at present four editorial consultants and advises 48 clients, approximately half of whom are former students from Guardian Masterclasses. The link between Hyland's creative output, her research and her pedagogy is made clear by two, very different, former clients: 'I've published two novels and never had an old-school, shoulder-to-shoulder line-edit, and I thought, it's about bloody time I saw what a decent edit looks like. Thank God I did' [5.1]; or, as Phil Kearney-Byrne, winner of the 2012 Francis McManus Prize, puts it: 'Hyland & Byrne are generous and honest, and combine real teaching and encouragement with incisive, clinical editing' [5.2].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

All claims referenced in section 4.

- 5.1 Letter from the Head of Guardian Masterclasses, Guardian News and Media, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU
- 5.2 <http://www.editingfirm.com>. The website includes this testimonial.
- 5.3 *MS Matters*. Multiple Sclerosis Society. ISSN 1369-8818
- 5.4 Boyd Tomkin, Literary Editor, *The Independent* 10/7/2013.  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/boyd-tonkin-behind-our-sexy-season-stirs-a-yearning-to--reconnect-body-and-mind-8113819.html>
- 5.5 <http://ip.podcast-directory.co.uk/episodes/arena-tuesday-28th-august-2012-19313443.html>
- 5.6 BBC Radio 3 The Verb iPlayer website showing interview with M.J.Hyland  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mny81> (PDF available on request)
- 5.7 BBC Radio 4 The Forum iPlayer website showing interview with M.J.Hyland  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01n3h6m> (PDF available on request)
- 5.8 *Internazionale* (no.983, January 2013) <http://www.internazionale.it/sommario/983/>
- 5.9 Letter from the Editor, *MS Matters*. Multiple Sclerosis Society.