



THESE TENDER HOOKS

EDNA O'BRIEN YOUNG
WRITERS BURSARY 2022

AND YET....

THESE TENDER HOOKS

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**EDNA O'BRIEN YOUNG
WRITERS BURSARY 2022**

**MOI
EDITIONS**

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FOREWORD

The Edna O'Brien Bursary launched three years ago, and was barely announced when the Covid-19 pandemic forced it online. This year we have finally realised our vision for the Bursary as a week-long residential immersion for a lucky group of talented young writers from across the country.

MoLI is a cheerleader for writers, for writing, for reading and for words. That work takes in exhibitions, events, lectures, conferences, workshops, podcasting – the whole gamut of museum activity. But nowhere does it find a more joyous expression than in this bursary, this publication, and the value it holds for our annual troupe of 'bursarinos.'

This bursary is made possible by our visionary patron Suzanne Lopez, whose generosity and creativity are visible across the entire programme. Also due our thanks are our judges and speakers who gave so generously of their time to the students. This year's writer-mentor, Colm Keegan, had inspired us all long before the bursary started - thank you Colm. As to the wild energy harnessed during this bursary week – a huge thank you to Jennie Ryan and our Learning team for keeping the fireworks going.

For our young writers – thank you for applying, for coming to MoLI against the odds, and for working together to make this beautiful publication. We hope it's light and dark will remind you of the rich, kaleidoscopic time you spent here among kindred spirits.

Simon O'Connor

Director, MoLI, *October 2022*

A NOTE FROM THIS YEAR'S MENTOR

Firstly I would like to describe for you, the reader, what led to "These Tender Hooks," that you have in your hand. The pieces here are important benchmarks, points of light along the individual paths of sixteen careers, sixteen dawns. Here we mark sixteen becomings with sixteen pieces that manifested themselves through an intense five day process of learning, writing, thinking, talking, workshopping, craic, games, debate, play, bonding and more - and each piece here is only a fraction of what the bursary awardees achieved. I think this fact is worth noting, because yes, this book is an achievement in itself, but here is only one part of the small body of work each writer created. There is a diverse display of choices and styles here because these writers seized the opportunity to explore writing so much - a sequence of poems, some non-fiction prose, a short story, or all of these options. What you have in your hands reflects the way we rotated through these different types of writing, and also how the writers gave everything to each task, stretching themselves both in form and content, bringing forth these pieces that are so beautiful and unafraid.

Each of these single pieces was worked in consultation with me and the rest of the group. And I would like to commend the writers for their grace in how they took on suggestions, changes, choices (AND YET rejected them when they wanted to), and how together as a team they all supported each other to make this gorgeous thing.

And secondly I would like to give huge thanks to Simon, Jennie, Lily, Sean, Colm and all the staff at MoLI, not just for being a huge support, not just by caring for myself and the writers so

kindly (adverb alert!), but more importantly for all they have done in making the EOB Bursary an award that works so hard to seek out and support not just talent, but talent that goes overlooked in the harder to reach sectors of our country. It is hard work, and it should be done, and more places should be doing it like this! MoLI is an incredible space, the place is alive with the joy of writing as a creative force for good in the world, and I am delighted to be part of this amazing initiative which strives to be as inclusive as possible, making MoLI a truly open museum available to and amplifying the voices of all parts of Irish society.

Also, it was a real joy to be the first EOB programme to work in real life. Outside the confines of zoom and locked down bedrooms, kitchens and living rooms, we really felt at home in MoLI, welcomed by all who worked on this unbelievable, generous programme. A generosity that couldn't exist without the bursary's instigator and greatest champion, who I would also like to thank deeply and acknowledge, Susie Lopez.

And so to finish with one word. Forward. This is a ForeWORD btw, not forward, I always have to correct myself. Or maybe I shouldn't correct myself. Maybe this is the biggest forward I get to give, the big first push that all writers deserve. Forward, into usurping, into rooms where you turn over the tables and grab the microphone, forward into standing against all who refuse to listen, forward into standing up for anyone who hasn't gotten a voice as strong as yours yet, forward into the rooms where people like you are ignored, forward into listening, into places you don't understand but want to understand, forward into each other's lives, each others writings, each others dreams. Forward into the future, that some already describe as inevitable, but that like the twisting and turning sentences we played with all week is open to your intervention and redirection.

Forward into inspiring others with your seeking, the way you inspired me, forward into light, into art, into realising your potential, forward into your adventure.

Colm Keegan

October 2022

And yet...

We are individuals, of course, yet we make up this power of talent, fuelled by our words.

We are artists wanting to be unique yet desire to fit in as we discover ourselves through words and whispers, scribbles on a notebook.

We are different yet united, our individual interests form our piece of the puzzle and we create the full picture through one common pit in our square-passion.

We are all so different, yet we are brought together over one thing; we once felt like outcasts, but now we can speak and people will listen.

We are planting softness in to soil, that has hardened, by existing in all.

We are also sexy as hell, especially when we eat a tub of ice-cream.

We are borderline "IT". Intellectuals, writers, friends, people.
We are on the edge and over the edge it will all be so clear.

We are free in our expression, free in our thoughts;
Observers of our surroundings transforming the mundane into beautiful words.

We are the inheritors of an older, sicker earth than that of our ancestors. We are trying our best, we are, but our bones are bending from the weight of it.

We are the beauty in an unfinished love story. We are passion, like fireworks in the sky and confetti in your hair and our words are an explosion in the deepest forest.

We are the fountain of youth, reveling through endless salad days, and forever reaching for something beyond ourselves - no matter the cost.

We are 16 fishermen throwing out lines and catching some pretty cool sharks!?

We are the painting. We are the paint. We are the painter starting to create.

We are unique but we are the same, carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders.

We are each a silver link in the same chain, but this is a chain where we aren't only as strong as the weakest link, because none of us are stronger or weaker than one another.

We are exploring the freedom that words can offer us, and finding out what we can offer them.

We are chemists, searching for an exact formula of language that can cause the exterior of the soul to shift and melt, unveiling something greater.

And yet...

I Wanna Be What I Can Be

Sometimes I fear being bland.

I watch my peers, they are as bright as lightning, all shades of yellow and blue.

They have interests, hobbies, and I have one.

One I don't even think I am any good at.

I blame my surroundings.

Maybe if I was born in Oxford, surrounded by the rich, running up and down the cobblestone daily, having a better education, a better life

I could be better,
Smarter.

Maybe if I had more time,

I feel like i'm speed running life but still being the same.

I'm a tall child with a job, responsibilities

and I just wanna go back to playing in the fields at lunch break with my friends.

Being 10 and the only care in the world I had was the Friday afternoon's spelling bee.

Walt Whitman said "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may",

I don't think I have any in my garden.

I'm an infected apple amongst big, promising red ones and I don't think I can handle it.

I'm snow,
not the late winter type,
but the mid spring snow in which no one asks for.
I don't dislike myself, mind you,
I'm quite egotistical, but I know I am and I hate how I think I'm
better for knowing it.

In my imagination I'm away at Harvard or Yale or Trinity,
a well known writer,
a rememberable poet,
but i want it now.

I don't want to wait it out,
see the long run,
I want my dreams now.
I hope this mindset won't be my demise.

Caitlyn O'Reilly is a 16 year old hopeless romantic who is a little too fond of
Dead Poets Society and *The Smiths* who has a want to conquer the world with her
writing.

Tomorrow's Eve

Tomorrow's eve, I will collapse
In sycamore seeds, and juniper grass,
While shuddering, adamant, insects swoop
From dahlias to tulip shoots.

My fallen, fractured frame will stare
At cumuli in summer's air.
I'll watch the sparrows, brought by breeze
From sapphire sheets to chestnut trees.

The ivory sheep will slowly die
While clocks will shift the azure sky
To blush and copper, canary and gold,
With flecks of amethyst in its folds.

I swear to you, my heart would rise,
If I could hoard before these eyes
Lavender fields, basked in light,
And scattered moondust, lost in night.

Tomorrow's eve, I'll cascade down,
And shatter softly on stony ground.
But how could you hold every hue,
Yet leave me here, reduced to blue?

Alison Martin is a young writer from County Waterford whose admiration for
literature has only grown during her teenage years. Many of her pieces centre
around themes of resilience, nature, and hope. She aspires to continue creating
poetry throughout her life.

I want you to know that Beauty is an Odyssey

Beauty is an odyssey. I am far from any optimistic explorer, instead implanted on this island, expecting the morning drizzle of the sprinkling can, the care accompanying a pair of polished hands offering a morsel of platitudes. Yet, I still find the adventure tickling at my toes. Her subtle counsel, the ancient advice of the world, leading me to areas I abandoned even before I uttered a word. Her appearance adaptable like soil. Her lips are antique compasses and earnest whispers. Her hands uplift me needless of a nudge. To me, she is the occasional cicada, scarce yet exclusive. Who on her tinted glass wings, my dreams soar the sky, pretty paradisaal views of the Pacific they provide. This azure ocean is now different: tropical. Peach trees oscillate like please partners, the oasis blurring between the warm breeze.

I've witnessed the unknown to each almanac and every dictionary, the secrets behind blizzard climates to barren scenery. And when the moon slithers into the crook of her sleeve, when there is no light, just dark, and I'm left to endure this disquiet distance. Blindly, I must grasp the feeling, the touch and rekindle the elation of exploring - eager to learn another language. French, I'll speak fluently someday, I swear. And when daylight wakes, I'll wake with her. I'll set sail my barge over some unceasing river of change, erratic and restive. I'll know the ancestry of the temple, watching its sooty aroma eventually dilate. I'll believe that fate does indeed love the fearless, that maybe there's so much more beauty waiting for me to behold.

Alicia Okeke is a 16 year old artist of african descent, who likes to create cool images when reading, drawing and writing. She also enjoys having her own latitude on long days off, lying lazily, like a lioness embracing the scorching heat.

Allow Me To Remind You of Bygone Times While We Run Down The Banks of The Shannon River With The Mass Cards Still Clutched In Our Hands.

The church bells toll
playing a solemn rendition of "Ode to Joy"

Mud splatters your
pristine shoes now a mimic of Jackson Pollock

When we dipped our feet
in the cool stream,
the water amber in hue,
mixed with the mud; the minerals
from the mountains
that frame our horizon,
startling the tadpoles that have settled nearby
between rocks and mossy algae
*(do you remember this memory
now hidden
in the depths of your mind?)*

Burdock seeds adorn
your clothes and hair promising to never let go

We press the pods
of Japanese Knotweed showering us with seeds

Biting down on unripened flesh
we picked fruit until our pockets were full,
we sat in sun-dappled shade
the sour tang of crabapple
lingered on our teeth; our tongues,
wind whipped through
fields of golden wheat
creating ripples like a raindrop falling
on a still reflection of your face
*(is it possible to discern
what was written in your expression?)*

Piercing fuschias
with my nails searching for nectar honeyed by spring

Water murky
iodine-hued rushing between the bull reeds

Pigeons sang to a quiet statue
of the Virgin Mary,
her marble lips called out for
the vixen and her cub
she has created a bed for them,
between thistles and crumbled walls of her grotto
we donned our heavy raincoats,
patiently waiting with bated breath
for the sight of a white-tipped tail
*(I still have your old gloves
safely tucked away in the bureau by my bed)*

That's when I see
in the midst of cigarette butts and empty cans

Four leaf clover
a distant reminder of our summer days gone past.

Anna Harney, 17, lives in Limerick and spends her time haunting her local library, playing hockey and trying to understand physics.

Death by Desire

Ants crawl out of cracks in the paint,
the sun and heat welcoming their arrival.

Their armoured black bodies glint
in the sunlight as they scurry up,
in and out of holes in the wall.

They wander around frantically,
pursuing the sweet scent of honey being dropped
to the ground from a silver teaspoon
my brother holds.

They get stuck in the thick, oozing substance,
like melted gold on the hot concrete.
Lured to death,
by a simple sugary desire.

Sat on the step, hugging my knees,
I watch as they all move around hectically.

Gently flicking off any that decide to investigate my brown,
strappy sandals
and crawl onto my feet and ankles.

Too entranced by the irregular and discontinuous
movement of the colony
to notice an itchy red spot forming on my shin.

Elise Carey-McGibney is 16 years old, and lives in a small village by the sea in Kerry. She loves romance books, art, writing poetry and her cat Nova. Most of the time you can find her straining her eyes while writing at 4am on her bed using her phone's torch as a light.

Hot Blood

That day, I reached a level of anger I didn't think existed. I could physically feel the fury forcing its way through my veins, veins far too young to feel this type of rage.

Of course, I didn't want to stand up there, in the middle of Patrick's Street, facing a sea of eyes, welling up, stifling sobs. We were grieving the theft of a life, but also the safety we knew we had to fight for. I didn't want to stand up there. I did it anyway. I owed it to her, and to all the other women whose lives had been stolen from them in the night, the day, at home and on the streets. I owed it to the women who went out to buy food for their kids, who went out to the nightclub to dance, and to the women who simply stayed at home, black eyed and broken ribbed.

So I put my nerves to the side, I'll deal with them later. I walked up there, picked up the mic, coughed into it, went red, saw my mother and began.

I didn't comment on her beauty, her youth or her talent. Why must a woman be beautiful and young to be valued? Why can't existing just be enough?

Instead I spoke of her lungs, they took a breath in, expanding, a breath out, shrinking back. I spoke of her heart, beating, pushing blood through her muscle walled arteries. Her. She was a breathing human. Now she is not.

I am a breathing human. A speaking human. A writing woman. I do not have guns, knives or violent arms. I have my words, and my rage and I will use them. I must use them. I will use them as long as my beating heart beats, my breathing lungs breathe and until the red hot rage coursing through my veins stops flowing so fast.

Elsa Forrest will usually be found angrily pacing her room, or her page. She enjoys making poetry that makes you squirm and patronising people far more qualified than her.

Chrysalis

I imagine her on tiles
Planting forests in her nail beds
Wrestling with the word
Caterpillar
She loves beads
Small,
 hard
 like bones
I imagine
She is filled with them
Then she comes
Rattling to my door
It was dark
The mirror contemplated a raindrop
The mirror lets it fall
I wake up when a creature
Fuzzy thing
 Green thing
 (Thing thing thing)
Pulls and pushes on my brow
The caterpillar won
Kindness is sand she packs into jars
And sells in markets to fellow gods
The sea is swept up with a mop
Birds swoop and soar and stop
What does this look like?
Me and an insect
Visceral and gaunt
She can see what she wants.

Hannah Clancy is a 16 year old Paddington fan. She is well known among her fellow scholars for revolutionising the verb “yolo”.

June 16th 2021

A Canon printer in the ditch
The day Dylan died
It was smashed into little pieces
On the side of the long road

Perhaps it printed stories
About people before us
Stories unknown to others

Dylan's story had finished that day
His printer had stopped printing
The final draft had been made.

John Dunne

I Am At Home Here

I find my roots by growing a tree in the autumn.

Pushing past blank walls put up behind grandparents, I see lines of ancestors stretching back and back and back in this place where I have never fitted. I find roots because I owe it to those who came before me to know this place. They worked earth they never owned and so I will live on streets I might never love.

As the end of summer bleeds into autumn and autumn sinks into winter like a stone in water, we continue to put off the end of this journey. The graveyard visits, learning to read a map as we drive between tiny villages (each a little different from the last, but all undeniably English), the pizza with my cousins afterwards. I am finding my roots. I do not want to let this feeling go, this feeling called belonging. I may not have the surnames inscribed on these gravestones and I may never have heard of these ancestors before I stood above their bones but I realise that I belong in this place. Their bones are here and so are mine.

I am not scared of graveyards. I search the stones for names I recognise, wishing I'd not worn sneakers as water seeps between my toes. I do not think of ghosts or moving skeletons. These places- these gardens for the dead- do not scare me.

This winter, I am at home here.

Christmas rolls around and we realise that the tree has finished growing. We cancel our Ancestry subscription, the journeys come to a stop. I move on to other things.

But it's left its mark, this knowledge. I know now that an ancestor of mine was a ferryman on the river in this town which I do not hate and do not love, but have a home in. I think that I deserve to be here, even if this place does not deserve me. The same biting easterly wind which I do truly hate once drove the ships

built by my ancestors upon the angry, shallow North Sea.

The summer before I leave Suffolk, I make my peace with that easterly wind. If I want to sail then I need it, and on a boat I much prefer it to stillness- to drifting with the tide towards the muddy riverbank. The best afternoon of the summer is driven by this easterly, which I realise as I sail faster than I ever have before.

It's also this summer that I am able to move forward. I know- although it is a tentative sort of knowing, full of uncertainty- that I am coming home, leaving England. As I begin to lay my roots here to rest, I let my tree grow across the sea. I try to fix things with my father by tracing his line, but I think it helps me more than him. I finally have answers to the questions which I know he's known all along- the names of his parents, his grandparents. I know he enjoys doing this with me, but in the end it's me who finds his sister, who learns the language he never taught me.

Spanish fits in my mind so well that I find myself wondering if there is a deeper reason for this than its proximity to English. Perhaps there is some ingrained aptitude in me for it, although by that logic I should also be able to speak Welsh. I tend to think rather selectively about this kind of thing.

In Ireland now, I practice telling people that I am from Limerick. When they ask whereabouts, I say, 'Adare. The posh Tidy Towns village?' and it's true. I'm Irish, despite my accent and my parents. Ireland is their adopted home, although under massively differing circumstances.

I find closure in England with my mum, but there seems to be little with my father. I used to wish that Uruguay would win the World Cup so that my soccer-loving dad would *have* to talk about it. Of course, tracing our family tree meant I did talk a little with him about his childhood. In the end it pales in comparison to what I am left to imagine.

This morning, the 20th of July, I look on Facebook. My aunt Laura has posted about the moon landing. She was eight years old then, my father five. It's a strange thing, but since I realised that my father was alive during the moon landing I've always wondered if he was aware of it at the time. Now I know, thanks to Facebook of all things, that his sister believed then, at eight years old, that one day she would be living in the stars.

Eva Garayalde - (*pronounced ehva, not eeva, and the surname is more phonetic than you might imagine*) is a fifteen year old writer from Limerick, via Suffolk, based in Mayo. She writes off-the-wall fantasy involving witches, dragons and tax evasion. However, she has recently discovered that she has a lot to say about her experiences in the non-magic (?) 'real' world.'

forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit

The windows catch my attention. 'fore anything else does. Despite the colour filled room. There's a plush ochre armchair and a paint splattered couch, florid floral decals line the walls and playful plastic chairs sit expectantly. Like school children, backs straight, fingers on their lips. The blinds, a light grey, in that comforting shade that feels like a signet's feathers or a dirty lake at dusk.

They cast the room in a golden, mid July glow, creating patterns on the soft textured carpet, a kaleidoscope of light, a peacock boasting his feathers, a child's imagination.

It reminds you, duty-bound Aeneas, of an Egyptian sun, shining elegantly between Corinthian columns in a library that time would never dare to forget.

The beauty is in their humility.

It's self-effacing.

Their role is not to stand out, but to open up the world for writers inside. It's a pious responsibility. To show them what they write for. They display, with a gallant air, treetops and lavender and Edwardian brickwork. The most beautiful parts of a city that has raised and annihilated writers since the dawn of civilization.

They are not oblivious to this duty. They carry it with pride. They abandoned a flaming Dido long before the days of Joyce and Wilde and Stoker 'n' Swift. They march onwards as dutiful Aeneas did. With Troy in his heart,

Stringing Beads Together

I was stringing beads together
to make a bracelet.

Most sparkled, some twinkled.
A few smooth and cool to touch,
others almost too
small to hold.
I marvelled at their magic,
so delicate, tinier even
than my pinky fingernail.
I made sure not to let them slip
under and away from me, and
roll
beneath the couch,
where even St. Anthony
wouldn't be able to find them.
I held onto them,
creating a pattern,
matching the colours.
I wanted everything to match.
Everything was a pattern
to be created,
and ordered,
and sorted.

I look at this bracelet now
and appreciate the eyes of
six-year-old me.
I envy them a little too.

All she saw was beauty.
Little sparkly beads
could well have been jewels to me.

I still like patterns.
Still try to
connect the dots,
and paint within the lines,
and match the beads by colour.
But the older I grow,
the harder it gets,
and more and more things
won't match.
These days,
the beads make their own patterns,
patterns I'll just have
to learn to love.

*17-year-old **Muireann Forde** can usually be found in her garden in Cork, wearing a thick woolly cardigan, with books and daisy chains in her hands and a cat on her lap.*

Nostalgia

[2]

The first time I lit a cigarette, I was 11. I remember not knowing which end to light. I was reminded of times you were near, times when I would beg and plead you to quit doing the thing my teacher told me kills people. My young and naive childhood brain wasn't comprehending that far scarier things were going on in the dark corners of your life, that I hadn't been allowed to exist inside yet. Some endings are beautiful, the way the foundation crumbles beneath fearful feet.

There is a strength that can only be forged during the darkest of hours. The harsh toxic smoke filled my virgin lungs and I didn't cough once, maybe because that was the biggest most honest piece of you, I had ever been allowed to carry. The desperate breath of fresh air that followed reminded me of what it felt like, to have you suddenly stolen again and again and again, until eventually I stopped looking forward to you coming back. You fall into a black hole of mourning, drowning beneath the sorrow of midnight, fighting back tears, searching for reasons to run back, but the road behind you is a dead end.

The taste of cigarettes made me sick, so I shoved my stupid idea of closure and relief, in with the skeletons you caged in my closet when I was too young to understand. I finally went searching for those skeletons years later, once I had accumulated some of my own. The beauty is that somehow you figure out how to love yourself again, despite feeling shattered.

They told me stories, scary stories where the bad guy does things that the good guys can't fix, by the way, an apology built on a lie isn't accountability. The taste didn't make me sick after that,

[34]

it felt like a comfort. I remember dragging so long and hard; as I filled my lungs, with enough cancerous chemicals, they would stop expecting the good and clean air to come back, things that are good and clean typically don't come back once they've been dirtied...

The first time I put a finished one out, I crushed the burning tip into my windowsill with spite, and watched the red, and the smoke turn to nothing but ash. I imagined I was putting out fire inside myself, because in that moment the fire inside me felt like the only thing in the world we had in common.

Of course, there will be moments when you feel as though you are completely out of options, but there will be one option to always start with: *forgive yourself*.

I am in awe of you, an open prairie among an ever-changing cycle of wind.

Sy, 17 – *she's that girl who doesn't believe in herself all that much, and for the life of me I can't understand why, because my belief in her goes beyond the sky. <3*

[35]

Smiles

She was always quite quiet
A fumbling delight
Her eyes were whiskey
Rimmed in morning's bleeding sky

Despair crept in like the candy
She hid in the kitchen press
Her sobs ran up the stairs at night
The night a swallowing black mess

She wants to see the sun
With eyes that cannot see
A hand to hold when the night falls
Does she not remember me?

Siobhán McGrath *is a person, a friend, a laughter and a joker, attempting to construct sentences.*

My Brother, Sleeping

"What else can a mother give to her daughter but such beautiful rifts in time" – Eavan Boland

Capillaries, those vein dancers
Twirl under his skin coat
Eyelashes quivering
He is sleeping
At last, he is sleeping

His bulb lungs breathe in-out
In a milk bone chest
Moving like the hand of a clock
His legs propelling him
round the bed

He is one, two days away from knowing
his own face in the mirror
It is before he can say 'book'
After he learns to clap
Before he learns to listen for the sound of turning pages
It is before his hair is cut
Before he ever falls

Move closer
Draw the curtains
See the two of us
In a warm feather bed
Without matches

Riin McLave *can be found reading, writing or gesticulating wildly about something she's passionate about while simultaneously spilling some hot drink on her lap.*

Lot

I see him again
All I do these days is see
Rushing out the door
To go marvel at the women
With the beautiful words,
Who talk and feel and think
And articulate so nice

Nothing like the husk at home
Who might have thought once
Of the fresh wind and the stars,
But hoarded it away
‘Til the air stagnated.

He sips honey from the muse's mouth
A sacred ritual to domestic gods
Nowhere in his mind could the mute widow interrupt
Not sad, not scorned, not sour.
Nothing, a fundamental part of a soul
Simply missing
Withered, burnt or stolen.

Wasn't the shell once a girl?
He simply could not see it.
No, he thinks, this woman must have crawled from the ground
No future, no past, barely a present
To fill my home with dank musk.

He can't see it, but I can.
I just can't bring myself to speak.

Nina Devine is a 16 year old from Ardpatrick, Co. Limerick. She loves writing, watching movies and bad TV.



MOLI
EDITIONS