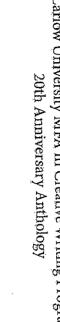
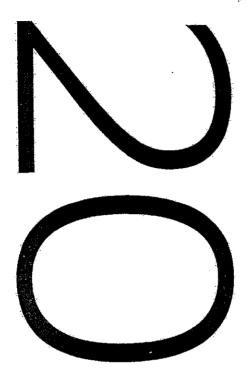
Carlow University MFA in Creative Writing Program 20th Anniversary Anthology



Davoted to the Future of You.

MFA in Creative Writing



From Ireland

by James Heaney

God's bodkin! ... Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?

devotee of theatre, and something of a writer himself - has instructed that they should be "well one which earns him the above-quoted rebuke. actors "according to their desert"; a cheeky response for a councillor to make to a prince, and used" (well treated) during their stay there. Polonius, however, has replied that he will "use" the Bard's most famous play. A troop of actors has just arrived to Elsinore Castle, and Hamlet – a These are among my favourite lines from Shakespeare. They're spoken in Act II, Scene ii, of the

"What a piece of work is a man" soliloquy, Hamlet refers to humans as angelic, God-like even. equanimity of the sentiment, which serves as a sobering counterpoint to the beautiful, but at of their behaviour - they deserve whipping! Humans are far from perfect, angelic or God-like, Hamlet recognises here. Judged on the basis In this exchange with Polonius, however, he brings us down to earth with a postlapsarian bump. times hubristic, eulogy that the troubled prince offers a little earlier in the play. In his famous the world were run along Polonius' lines (which of course it is) - we all would. I also like the I like the egalitarian underpinnings of Hamlet's put-down: it isn't just the actors who'd suffer if

gives us something else." So I carried on. Nye's advice to writers: "Start anywhere" when you begin your writing adventure. "Each thing fiction, and creative nonfiction, rather than dramatic writing? Then I remembered Naomi Shihab programme that moves between the U.S. and Ireland, and which focuses on the genres of poetry, from a Renaissance-era drama set in Denmark got to do with a 21st century Creative Writing for the 20th anniversary anthology of the Carlow University MFA. What, after all, has a scene I was surprised when these lines popped into my mind, uninvited, as I started writing this piece

the programme is designed to foster, all falter. as any other. Hospitality is the sine qua non of the whole project. Without it, the workshops, come to Ireland (or Pittsburgh) for their residencies is as important an element of the programme aspect of the Carlow University MFA. That students feel welcome - "well-used" - when they strangers who come knocking at our door looking for refuge. Hospitality is a vitally important prince and his councillor in Shakespeare's play turns on the question of how we should treat related senses. The first has to do with the idea of hospitality. The disagreement between the Now that I've finished my mini-adventure, I think Hamlet's words are relevant in at least two lectures and excursions, the literary readings and, most importantly of all, the creative writing

daughters out of it as they left. We probably shouldn't push comparisons to our MFA students carry the plague-virus into your house if you let them enter it, and carry one of your sons or programme, we've had our fair share of it nonetheless, down the years, as the students and too far in this respect, but it's certainly true that although drama doesn't form part of the official viewed with great suspicion in Renaissance-era Europe: as vagabonds; reprobates who might mentors who attended the Irish residencies at Carlow College, in particular, would attest The strangers in Shakespeare's drama are actors, a class of people who – let's not forget – were

call-outs, automated college-gates that clanged unceremoniously shut just as last-orders were rooms in the spartan-like surroundings of Lennon House, kitchen-fires and 3 a.m. fire-brigade The best of the drama in Carlow was tragic-comic in nature: the cold (communall) shower and the enduring friendships that were forged in that venerable old college. worthy of the procrastinating Dane himself. I suspect, though, that most all of the students who being called at The Irishman's, leaving students (and a few mentors) with a moral quandary underwent the 'Survivor'-like trials of those early residencies look back fondly on the experience

and supererogatory acts of hospitality. great works, where the programme has been blessed by Ali and Seona's organisational prowess Isle of Innisfree itself, and then to Dublin, the noisy sounding-box that inspired all of Joyce's College in Sligo, Yeats's land of heart's desire, our 'digs' a mere stone's throw away from the Lake The quality of the facilities certainly improved when we upped sticks and moved to St Angela's

one which has little to do with the question of whether people actually deserve compassion or mercy in the sense of forgiveness for offences committed. That's more King Lear's 'bag'. It is, has to do with the idea of mercy, the need for which is clearly implied in his dismissal of Polonius A second way in which Hamlet's rebuke to his ungenerous councillor relates to these reflections rather, mercy as a kind of life-ethic that attracts him; mercy as a compassionate attitude of mind, (and the world's) 'carrot-and-stick'-type authoritarianism. I don't think Hamlet is interested in

the prophet Cohen sang. us human, and literature, as Achebe noted, helps us to do just that. There's a curious sense, also, stupid we know we have flaws." Our flaws - in so far as we can recognise them - help to make us, because we're not angels; but we can recognise a hero who has a flaw, and unless we are very novelist (poet, and non-fiction writer), Chinua Achebe, once remarked. "It's not of any value to other human beings. "There's no point writing about a hero whose an angel", the Nigerian way or another, and consequently none of us is in a position to judge (or perhaps even forgive) It's an outlook that's predicated on a recognition that we are all flawed or 'damaged goods' in one in which they can serve as a catalyst for growth. It's through these cracks that the light gets in, as

courage to try to live - and write - this way, "with wide-embracing love" as Emily Brontë put it emotionally and intellectually. It's about staying attuned to "the music of what happens", as in her poem 'No coward soul is mine' - more courage than it takes to fight. that music makes us feel uncomfortable, inadequate, or 'undeserving' in Polonius' terms. It takes Seamus Heaney (magpieing lines from the old Irish sagas) wrote in his sonnet 'Song', even when ideological stance. It's about staying open to life when the easier option is to shut-up shop Mercifulness, in a literary context, isn't about being soft, or woke, or anti-woke, or any other

comes around), but also in terms of how our mentors engage with students, and their writings. readings by mentors, guest-writers, and students that I've been privileged to attend (I'll resist the I've seen this quality manifested many times at the Irish residencies; not only during the temptation to name my personal favourites or I'll still be writing by the time the 30th anniversary As Carlo Gébler noted at our most recent residency in Dublin, the relationship between mentor

and writer is unlike any other kind of teacher/student dynamic because of its reciprocal nature. in these classes errs from time to time. Everyone (to paraphrase Beckett's well-known lines): session, is there as a learner rather than as an instructor and subordinate. Everyone involved Everyone participating in a Carlow University creative writing workshop, or in a one-on-one whipped! It's for these kinds of reasons - and on account of the many enduring friendships it's tries, fails, and tries again, in the confident expectation that they can "fail better." Nobody gets professional life. brought my way – that I look upon my involvement with this programme as the highlight of my

More music, Maestro, please! Whatever challenges the future brings, sound and effective leadership won't be found wanting for her, personally, during last year's residency. The Carlow University MFA is in good hands the 'Covid years', and remained at her conductor's podium when the going got very tough again that role, and has already proved a more than capable successor. Tess brought us safely through replicated. Tess Barry, however, has now brought her own effervescent personality and style to Ellie Wymard. Ellie was a 'one-off'. What she brought to the programme couldn't possibly be to life under the always-attentive baton of our much-loved and sorely-missed, first Director, As we know, most of the 'music' that has happened over the last 20 years of the programme came