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Dan Davis

Elizabeth Marlow

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Spring 2011



Special Features
Preview Issue

Masthead

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Table of Contents

Note from the Editor	5
Vehicle Award Winners	6
James K. Johnson Creative Writing Award Winners	7
Dan Davis, <i>Gravel</i>	9
Elizabeth Marlow, <i>Thankful</i>	15
Featured Artist: Sarah Gillespie	16
Introspection	cover
Good Observation	19
A Oneness	20
Life Mandala	21
Flora Universal	22
Creative Writing Graduate Student Interviews	23
Dan Davis	24
Chris Houchens	26
Clint Walker	28
Daniel Paquin	30

Note from the Editor

The word “vehicle” comes from the Latin noun, “vehiculum”, meaning a wagon-like apparatus used for transporting goods. Our journal *The Vehicle* is so named because it is a mode of transportation itself: it provides a medium through which the ideas and creations of our talented writers and artists can be shared with their community.

In order to ensure that our journal is the best mode of transportation for these creative works that it can be, the staff of *The Vehicle* has recently been implementing some changes. Starting next Fall, *The Vehicle* staff will be joined with the creative writing club Writer’s Ink, whose members will then be the primary students working on the journal. *The Vehicle* is and will remain a product of Sigma Tau Delta, but by assimilating with Writer’s Ink, students outside of Sigma Tau and the English Department who are interested in working on *The Vehicle* will have more opportunity to do so.

The Vehicle also has an improved online submission form, which can be found through its new website, www.thevehicle.org. Students can now submit their works year ‘round (although there will still be deadlines for specific issues). Since it has taken quite a bit of time and effort to execute these changes this semester, the next full issue of *The Vehicle* will be released next semester, Fall 2011. This Special Features Preview issue is a “sneak-peek” of the new design that we have for the journal.

As *The Vehicle* moves rapidly in this exciting new direction, I find myself in a similar situation as I prepare to graduate this coming May. These past four years at Eastern have truly been some of the greatest years of my life, and my experience working on *The Vehicle* has been one of the best aspects of my college career. I’m quite sad to leave, but I know that *The Vehicle* is passing into excellent hands, and that it will continue to grow as Eastern’s literary journal.

Thank you, everyone, for your continued interest in and support of *The Vehicle*. I’m sure you’re as eager as I am to see how the journal continues to mature in the years to come!

—Lisa Myers, Editor-in-Chief, 2010–2011

Fall 2010 Vehicle Award Winners

Best Overall (Winnie Davis Neely Award)

Solomohn Ennis, *Fatal Distraction*

Best in Poetry

Kathy Decker, *Variations*

Best in Prose

Patrick Hall, *The Shooter*

James K. Johnson Creative Writing Award Winners

This Spring, two winners were chosen for the James K. Johnson Creative Writing Award, named in honor of the retired dean of the College of Arts and Humanities. Dan Davis and Elizabeth Marlow were both honored with a cash prize and the opportunity to read their works in the Tarble Arts Center. Their winning entries can be found on the following pages.

Gravel

Dan Davis

The body was still half on the road by the time we got there. In our headlights, the blood was a black puddle, frozen static in the cool autumn air. I could see some lumps that might have been intestines or other organs.

“Five bucks says we have to put it out of its misery,” Rick said.

The deer’s back was twisted, but it usually is. We’d put a doe out of commission just a few days earlier. The animal had looked exactly like this.

After a few seconds, I shook my head. “It’s gone.”

“The guy said it was still alive, didn’t he?”

“Fifteen minutes ago.”

“Things don’t just die in fifteen minutes.”

Before we got out of the cruiser, I turned the flashing lights on, highlighting the corpse in a rotating strobe of red, white, and blue. Patriotic carnage, I thought. I didn’t say it, because Rick would just give me one of his fat, confused glances. The man couldn’t understand a knock-knock joke if it wasn’t properly spelled out and diagrammed.

Rick reached the corpse first. “You called it,” he said, but didn’t hand over the money.

I bent down over the body. The flies hadn’t yet accumulated; that was one of the few good things about late autumn in Illinois: it took the insects longer to find the kill. The deer—a young buck, by the looks of it—had been hit by a pick-up; the man had called it in at the scene, but hadn’t waited around for us. I hadn’t expected him to; few people cared about the fate of road kill.

The truck had caught the buck mid-body; the animal had shot forward, as opposed to up onto the truck’s hood. The truck had continued on, tires crushing the deer’s hind legs. Then the vehicle had stopped, presumably for the driver to call in the hit. Then he left. He’d peeled out; I could see the divots his tires left in the loosely packed gravel.

The small lumps I’d seen from the cruiser were indeed intestines. Rick was purposely not looking at them; in fact, he was scanning the road in either direction. It was

one of those obscure county roads, identified solely by a number and sometimes a cute nickname bestowed upon it by the locals. No one lived here, though, at least not close by; it was forest on one side, dead cornfield on the other. It was the ideal spot to find deer; why the man had been driving along this area, I couldn't imagine. Perhaps he was one of those people who enjoyed the risk—night drives along country roads, wildlife encounters almost a certainty. I'd been like that, as a teenager. But a girl and beer had usually been involved. These roads hadn't changed much since then. Still mostly gravel, still hemmed in by wilderness. Prime real estate area, but few wanted to live this far from town.

"I'll give you credit for finding it," Rick said. "Hell, there's no one around here. Surprised the guy bothered calling it in."

"One of the few good citizens."

He laughed; I didn't bother trying to find the humor in what I'd said. I stood and went back to the cruiser to get the gloves. I grabbed a pair for both of us, and we slipped them on. The latex pulled at the hair on the back of my hands; Rick's barely fit.

"I hate these things," he said. "Did I ever tell you my old man was a doctor? You know what it's like, having your old man as your doctor? God. He still wants me to see him, too. My old man wants to put his finger up my ass. Talk about your psychological trauma, huh? I've hated these gloves since I was five years old. That's gotta be an ethical violation of some sort, having your old man as your doctor. Goes against the Hypocritical Oath or something."

"Hippocratic," I said, flexing my fingers. The latex felt confining, as though my fingers had been packaged and stored away for future use. The glove crackled against my skin. Even above the stench of blood and tissue, I could smell the gloves. The odor wasn't entirely unpleasant, but it reminded me of hospital waiting rooms. Something turned in my stomach, and I said, "I'll take the front."

Rick grunted in acknowledgement. "He wanted me to be a doctor too. I mean, he seriously wanted me to be a doctor. I guess the son of a bitch never looked at my high school report cards. Jesus. He hates the fact that I'm a cop. I tell him, 'It's the same fucking thing. People hate going to see you, and they hate me coming to see them. And we both need those damn-ass gloves.' Really, it's the same thing. Except he gets paid a shit-ton to do what we do for practically slave wages."

My father had been an accountant. So had my mother. But that is a boring story to tell someone whose father is a doctor and who uses phrases like "shit-ton," so I said, "I probably had your father, too." I couldn't think of Rick's last name.

"Yeah. He's still practicing. A whole new generation gets to feel his hand on their

balls. 'Deep breath. Now cough.' Hell. I wanted to scream."

Rick finished putting his gloves on. He gave them a theatrical crack against his skin, wincing. His face wasn't made for pain; if the Chief had let him grow a beard, it would've been okay, but cops aren't supposed to have beards—that's how you distinguish us from the people we arrest—and so Rick had to suffer through life clean-shaven. His wasn't a baby face; it was merely a plain, unexpressive face, except when he was in pain, when his too-small mouth opened wide enough to show his poor tooth-to-gum ratio. He had perhaps the smallest mouth I'd ever seen on a man his age. I wondered how he could keep so many words inside there.

I picked up the deer's front legs. The buck's head fell limply against my arm; I could feel its dying heat through my jacket sleeve. The coarse fur rubbed against the fabric. I watched Rick struggling with the broken hind legs; they bent awkwardly below the knees, and he had to put one hand under the deer's rump to keep it steady. He was wincing again, muttering with his face down. I glanced back at the deer's head. Its eyes were open, dead black marbles. Whatever it had been looking at in its moment of expiration, it had been glancing downward, because now, with its head upside down at an angle, the eyes were directed at me. I stared into them as I backed off the gravel and into the ditch. I thought I could see something deep inside of them, some lingering ember of what had once been a youthful buck, edging towards maturity. I couldn't see any surprise, as though in its final moment the deer had accepted its lack of control, resigning itself to what was coming.

I was on the other side of the ditch, starting my way up, when Rick slipped. I heard the snap of a branch, judged the size of it immediately, the implications a moment later, and let go. Rick held on—I hadn't expected him to let go, but he should have—and as such took the full weight of the deer for a fraction of a second. It was too much. He slipped in the wet grass, and the deer went with him. The animal slid down to the bottom of the ditch, but Rick stayed where he had fallen. One of the buck's hoofs landed in his crotch, but he didn't notice.

He cursed for a few seconds, his words little more than random syllables. He sat up too soon, before he could catch his breath; I saw him swoon, but he stayed upright. He saw me standing, watching him, and he glanced down at the deer.

"Fucking thing." He brushed the hoof off his lap and said, "Goddammit, sometimes I really hate this job."

"Do you think your father gets that way, sometimes?"

"What?"

"Your father. Do you think, sometimes, he hates being a doctor?"

Rick stared at me for a moment, then laughed. I will give him this much credit: his laughter, when he truly finds something funny, is deep and full. It is a product of his simple mind, but it is admirable nonetheless.

I helped him up, trying not to gasp at his weight. We stood over the deer, and he said, "I don't suppose this is good enough?"

I shook my head. "In the trees," I said. "Has to be out of sight."

"Figured."

We picked up the deer again. This time, the head fell at an angle where I couldn't see the eyes. I could feel them, though. We started up the other side of the ditch, and I had to watch over my shoulder as we entered the forest. The trees were spaced openly, but there were a lot of fallen branches, and I stepped carefully. Sticks and dead leaves crunched beneath my feet; I felt like an inept burglar, stealing into someone's home.

We set the buck down about five feet into the trees. It landed with an irreverent thud. "That's good enough," Rick said. I wanted to ask him why he said that now—after the deer was already on the ground—but kept my mouth shut and my eyes on the body. It had landed much as it had lain in the road, as though even here, in the forest, it had been hit by a speeding vehicle. I toed the deer's head with my shoe, pushing it lightly through the accumulated forest clutter. I sensed Rick watching me, but neither of us said anything.

We dropped our gloves onto the buck—my little concession to Rick's laziness—and went back out to the road. Rick stopped as we reached the gravel.

"Shit. I forgot about the damn guts."

There wasn't much, but there was enough. The odor had grown stronger; still no flies, but they would arrive before too long. Even nighttime in November isn't enough to keep the flies away indefinitely.

"I bet you're gonna tell me we can't leave 'em here," Rick said. "That we have to move 'em."

"We do."

"Shit, Mike, you see any goddamn shovel around here? We got a shovel in the trunk I don't know about?"

"Sticks," I said. "We'll get some sticks."

We found some back where we'd left the body. I took another long look at the corpse. Then we went back to the road and began to remove the organs. Rick pushed some along, the drying blood collecting dirt and gravel along the way. I tried that as well, but found the task too tedious; I ended up stabbing the intestines with the stick, skewering them and hefting them into the ditch. I shook them off the end of the stick, and they fell with a wet plop into the grass. I was done before Rick was, and leaned against the car, watching him.

"I once had a dog," he told me. "A big dog. Black and gold and something else. Had some German shepherd in it, I'm sure. Anyway, it ran in front of a car one day, you know? Dogs like that will. It's never small ones, the fluffy ones, it's always the big ones. And it was my fault, because I let the dog off its chain. So my dad, the good doctor, made me clean up the mess. I had to shovel up that dog's guts and put them in a garbage bag." As he rolled the last of the deer's organs into the ditch, he stood, slightly bent, and threw the stick in after. He turned around slowly, not looking at me, and said, "I loved that dog, too. Hell."

I nodded, thinking of the one pet I'd owned, a cat. It was still alive at my parents' house.

Rick coughed, glanced back towards the carnage in the ditch. "Not one damn person has come along this whole time."

"No reason for them to."

"True." He looked at me finally and grinned. "Gonna break a law of my own, Mike. You might wanna look the other way." He crossed to the opposite ditch and walked a couple feet out into the field. I heard the sound of a zipper being lowered.

I stepped out of the headlights and watched his back. The flashing lights were still on, the road and roadside shifting colors, a rural kaleidoscope. I slowly pulled my service piece from my holster and hefted it in my hand, glancing at Rick. After a brief hesitation, I lifted it and aimed along the barrel. Beyond the sight, I could see the back of Rick's head, the black of his hair absorbing the colors that permeated the night. It was as though his head existed in another reality, one indifferent to our laws of light and shadow.

"It's still better than working in the city," he said. "I got a cousin up in Champaign, says all those U of I students are a damned pain in the ass. And he's got a buddy up in Chicago, who's been shot in the line of duty twice. I guess we're pretty lucky, when you think about it."

If this had been a movie, I would've cocked the hammer. There's something about that click that makes things more realistic, that cements everything into the here-

and-now. But Rick would've heard the click, and the pistol was a double-action piece. Squeeze the trigger, the hammer pulls back automatically and the gun fires. My finger tightened. I could feel everything falling into place, reaching the edge, the pinnacle, the last breath of the present and the very tip of the future.

Blood pressed against my veins, heavy and waiting. The night shifted colors, red to blue to pale yellow, but the back of Rick's head stayed the same, the one spot of consistency in the restless night. A single muscle twitch was all it would take. Just one ounce of pressure, and everything would be thrust into uncertainty and chaos.

I exhaled and lowered the gun, holstering it as Rick turned around. He didn't zip up until he reached the road. When he was just a few feet from me, he stopped and studied me for a moment. He said, "You okay?"

I couldn't answer, so I just nodded. I felt flush all over; I could feel the whites of my eyes glowing. The hair on my arms and the back of my neck stood on end. I smiled at Rick but didn't speak. He watched me a moment longer, then shook his head and walked around to the other side of the car. He said something, but I couldn't hear it over the pounding in my ears.

When I got back in the cruiser I sat there for a few seconds, letting everything settle. I turned off the flashing lights, and the world was plunged into the normal darkness I was used to. It helped.

"What was your dog's name?" I asked. My voice was wet and thick, as though I hadn't spoken in years, but had let the words build up inside of me until there were too many to utter.

"Huh?" I could feel Rick's gaze, no more substantial than the buck's had been.

"The one that got hit by the car. What was its name?"

"Oh. Rex. His name was Rex."

I wasn't surprised. It was what every kid named his dog. I put the cruiser in drive. The tires caught the last remnants of the tragedy and drug it out across the gravel, until the trail ran cold and even that was gone.

Honestly

Elizabeth Marlow

I had a dream about ABRAHAM LINCOLN's mouth as
He whispered a stern warning into MARY TODD's
Ear (lying in bed the night before the show):
The ghost in his bosom foresaw a DERRINGER SONGBIRD...

Any fifth grade child could write an essay
On JOHN WILKES BOOTH and be seen as a
Fifth grade confederate sympathizer. He was
Absent from the emancipation.

...In the dream, MARY TODD looked upon
ABRAHAM in her sweet and crazy way, she
Said with curved lips, "I do hope it doesn't
Rain". As she said it, she almost sang.

Featured Artist: Sarah Gillespie

The Vehicle is a journal for the fine arts, and while the majority of our journal consists of poetry and prose writings, we do recognize that artwork is an important aspect of the fine arts, as well. This issue, we have focused on the work of one particular artist: Sarah Gillespie. Sarah is a senior Art major who plans to continue her education after graduation and earn her Master's Degree of Fine Arts, after which she plans to teach at the university level. On the following pages is a brief interview with Sarah, along with several of her works of art.

The Vehicle: How long have you been interested in drawing? Do you remember when and why you first recognized your passion for artwork, and began to see this as your life's undertaking?

Sarah: I have been drawing since as long as I can remember. During spare moments (which are very rare nowadays while I am a senior art student.), I hold a pen or pencil in hand sketching on any scrap of paper, and it seems it has always been so. Drawing has been and is still my method of relaxation, but don't misunderstand, producing art can be for me a grueling task, highly challenging and frustrating. Yet, I love creating art. Art is very much the essence of who I am. It influences the way I look at the world.

I have always created with my hands so I can't recall a time when I began, but I do remember a time when I had to decide between two majors, biology or art. I chose art. I decided that I should choose a career that reflects my skills as well as my heart.

The Vehicle: All of these images except one feature scenes from nature. Would you tell us about your inspirations for these pictures?

Sarah: I am enticed by the beauty I see in nature. My memories of learning about the natural world while exploring the outdoors with my family are especially sweet. As a family, whether hiking or hunting or even working together, we might stop to see and talk about a specific aspect of nature, maybe a newly emerged eastern box turtle with mud still on its back in the spring. Maybe we would catch sight of the inflorescence of a bloodroot, a wildflower whose brief bloom in the springtime woodland is magnificently white. It is this ephemeral bloom that I have depicted in my painting titled "Life Mandala" and in my digital artwork, "Flora Universal." Still on days at home, my father will call me out at dusk to hear the woodcock penting or beckon me to find the mink's track in the snow at the edge of the icy pond. It is no wonder that images of nature sneak into my works of art.

"Good Observation" reveals a teacher as an active member in the learning process. I wanted to capture the moment when a student is enthralled by discovery. My mother, who posed for the painting, is an educator through and through, outside and inside. She teaches now at a nature center and previously taught children in public school for many years. In fact, I was one of her favorite students in her high school Earth Science class. The little girl in the picture is the grandchild of the special woman who babysat me when I was a little girl. The setting is a prairie on land my family has set aside for habitat restoration. I wanted the painting to have a historical feel that would give the viewer the impression that the moment could have happened at a time when one-room schoolhouses existed amongst the prairies of Illinois. Because I feel a strong connection to the

land, my most recent work has taken me down a path where I am striving to capture the interconnectedness of all life and land. The artwork, "Three Earthly Sisters," is my first exploration into this idea.

The Vehicle: We were particularly impressed with your painting, "Introspection", which is featured on the cover. Is there an interesting story about this piece that you would like to share?

Sarah: "Introspection" is a painting about painting. "A candidate for the Masters of FineArt degree should reveal in his or her portfolio a cohesive body of work," so says the application form. Yet, just how cohesive my varied artworks are is questionable. I have not quite figured it all out. My tendency is realism. Most often I observe carefully and depict accurately. Yet, I'd like to attempt impressionism and abstraction. I want to emulate the masters and allow myself to be influenced by the remarkably gifted artists of the past and present. Still, I want to develop a style completely my own, entirely unique.

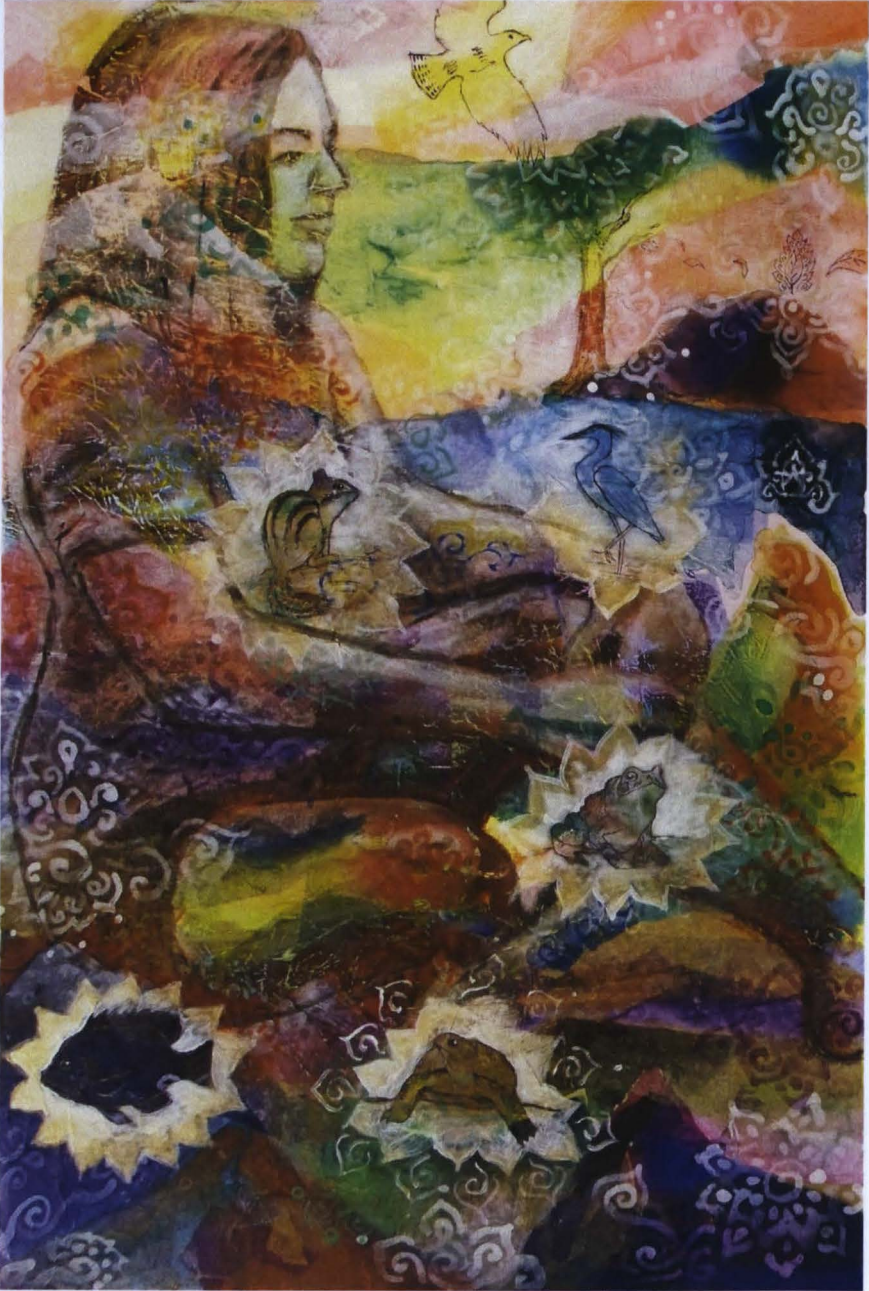
As if paint cans have accidentally left rings of paint behind and white paint has been spilled on a dropcloth, several colorful circles surround a splotch of white on newspaper in the artwork titled "Introspection." There in the center of this splotch is a portrait of myself. The bright colors and rather whimsical pose of myself casually reclining and deep in thought, are intended to emphasize the joyful preliminary step of exploring ideas for a painting. With a pad of paper and pencil in hand, I begin. What will develop? I have found that introspection is of much value during the preliminary creative process of producing art. With a pad of paper and a pencil in hand, the image gives witness to who I am. In the painting, I am both giving precedence to my creative energies and portraying myself doing so.

Good Observation

esynan0 A



A Oneness



Life Mandala

It is always creative writers – whether they have officially declared creative writing as their area of study or not – who have given this journal its reputation for publishing excellent pieces of writing. In this issue, we would like to recognize four





Creative Writing Graduate Student Interviews

It is Eastern's creative writers – whether they have officially declared creative writing as their area of study or not – who have given this journal its reputation for publishing excellent pieces of writing. In this issue, we would like to recognize four of Eastern's English graduate students who have an emphasis in Creative Writing: Dan Davis, Chris Houchens, Clint Walker, and Daniel Paquin. On the following pages are brief interviews with each of these writers regarding his thesis topic and writing experience.

Interview with Dan Davis

Dan was born and raised in Charleston. Something about the cornfields and the flat, unappealing landscape must please him. After graduating, he's planning on trying to find a job doing something, which sounds like a job in and of itself. He's not looking forward to it.

The Vehicle: At what point in your life did you know that you wanted to be a writer?

Dan: I decided I wanted to be a writer while reading a Goosebumps book when I was eleven. I'd written stuff before that, going back as far as I can remember, but that Goosebumps book—about a kid who wrote stories, including one about a giant blob that ate people—made me think, “Hey, I can do this regularly.” And so I wrote a one-page knock-off of that novel, and then others. And I guess I haven't stopped.

The Vehicle: What is the best writing advice that you have been given?

Dan: Dr. John Kilgore, who used to teach here at EIU, said that “there is no such thing as a happy writer.” I think that suits me perfectly, and not just because my stuff tends to be dark and twisted. If I ever become truly “happy” with my writing, I think I might stop, because what point would there be anymore? I think you have to be unhappy with your work to some extent, in order to try and improve yourself, to top yourself.

Another great piece of advice I picked up from Stephen King's *On Writing*. He admonishes against the use of adverbs. I'm not sure why, but once I started taking adverbs out of my stuff, it seemed to work so much better.

The Vehicle: Would you tell me a little about your thesis project that you are working on now? What is your favorite/the most unique aspect about it?

Dan: I'm working on a novella-in-stories. It's basically a single plot line, revolving around two *dei ex machina*, told over the course of various short stories. I really like the concept of playing two extraordinary events off each other. It's tricky connecting the stories together, but the challenge helps keep things fresh and interesting.

The Vehicle: What is your favorite literary period and why?

Dan: I like minimalist writing; I think it's had the biggest impact on my own work, though I do enjoy very diverse genres, from old British detective stories

to children's novels. Authors like Hemingway, Raymond Carver, and Cormac McCarthy have had the biggest impact on my work. If I had to narrow my tastes down to a specific period, I would say that I tend to read American literature from the 1920s on.

Interview with Chris Houchens

Chris grew up in Minooka, IL and came to EIU in the fall of 2005. He completed his tour of duty as an undergrad and decided to sign up for a second stint to get his masters. When he isn't writing, he uses his time to fight zombies and to contemplate the future of the human race. For nearly 25 years, he has had an ongoing feud with the sun and has lost every battle held between the two. Each day he proclaims that he will finally get one over on his nemesis, and each night he returns home a failure.

The Vehicle: At what point in your life did you know that you wanted to be a writer?

Chris: Well, that is kind of hard to answer. I've been writing for a long time. The other semester I happened upon a comic I wrote when I was about 10. It was heavily influenced by Ren and Stimpy, and needed some work, but it wasn't half bad. I can't really pinpoint an exact moment of my life that made me decide to write.

The Vehicle: What is the best writing advice that you have been given? Do you have any advice of your own that you would like to share?

Chris: I know this is a cliché answer, but the best writing advice I've received is to simply write—always writing means always improving. As a writer, you can never write too much. For my own advice, I would say to write different things. If you are a prose writer, write some poetry or write a play. If you stick to one genre, try writing in a genre you hate. It will help. I first took playwriting on a whim, thinking I was a prose writer. I now write plays.

The Vehicle: Would you tell me a little about your thesis project that you are working on now? What is your favorite/the most unique aspect about it?

Chris: Well, as I said in the previous response, I write plays, so I'm writing a four-act play for my thesis. It is a tragedy that draws heavily upon Shakespeare, as well as George Orwell, Richard Adams, and T.H. White. My favorite aspect about writing this and writing plays in general is the fact that even when I am done with it, the play isn't done. It takes a director, actors, a costume designer, stage designer, and a ton of other people to actually finish a play. I just love the idea that no two productions will ever be identical.

The Vehicle: What is your favorite literary period and why?

Chris: I can't pick one period. Just give me the entire British catalogue. I know that my answer is cheating, but it's honest. You can't go wrong with Bill Shakespeare

or Horace Walpole or Samuel Taylor Coleridge or Agatha Christie. It's all great. I guess it's a good thing that I'm not Literary Studies emphasis. I would never be able to settle on a thesis topic.

Interview with Clint Walker

The Vehicle: At what point in your life did you know that you wanted to be a writer?

Clint: That's a deceptively hard question to answer. I think all creative people say "oh wouldn't it be great to be a writer" at some point, but we all realize that chances are that's not going to happen. I mean, what does it mean to "be" a writer anyway? Getting paid? Getting published? Hell if I know. I had a guitar teacher who once told me that the second I could put enough chords together to make something even resembling a song, that meant I was a musician, whether anyone heard me or not. Maybe that's what being a writer is like.

The Vehicle: What is the best writing advice that you have been given? Do you have any advice of your own that you would like to share?

Clint: I think the best skill that a writer can develop is the ability to look back on what you were writing say, maybe six months previous, and feel embarrassed by it. We've all got those stories that we like even though every workshop reaction to it is negative, and we think we're going to dig our heels in and never change them despite the critics. Nothing wrong with that at the end of the day, because yes, sometimes you do have to stand your ground. But, and this is just me, I'm surprised even after a year at just how silly my influences were or how played out the things that I wanted to write about were. That's helped me a lot because now I look back at all those stories I used to think I'd never change and now it feels like I can't change them fast enough.

The Vehicle: Would you tell me a little about your thesis project that you are working on now? What is your favorite/the most unique aspect about it?

Clint: When I realized I was going to change my emphasis from poetry to fiction, I sort of panicked because I didn't feel like I had any stories to tell, plus I had a misconception of how fiction writers operated. I always suspected that fiction writers made up 100 percent of everything they wrote, and not only that, but were in full control and fully aware of every bit of meaning in their stories, be it symbolic or not. The first step was realizing that I pretty much communicate entirely in story form anyway, so it was just a matter of taking that impulse and discovering that there's a grey zone between fiction and non-fiction where you have license to play around with lots of different elements. My thesis? It's just a bunch of stories based on little observations that I've noticed in my years of living around this area, using games as a linking device. Does that mean I consider it non-fiction? Nah. To me the simple act of ripping these stories out of life and getting them on paper fictionalizes them because they're being filtered through my world-view. Unless how I see the world really is reality, in which case we're all screwed.

The Vehicle: What is your favorite literary period and why?

Clint: I'm probably the last person you should ask about this. You can throw a rock and hit about twelve people here who are more boned up on literary history than I am, even after almost completing my graduate degree here. I don't say that as a boast or anything; it's something I'm genuinely sensitive about. Reading's fun and all, and necessary if you want to "be" a writer, but good lord, there are so many books out there and there are more coming every day; I don't see how it's possible to keep up with them all. And when you read as slowly as I do, it's hard not to feel like being a creative person, especially in a college setting, isn't something you're always having to "chase." That rant out of the way, what it means about me is that so much is still so new to me that I get insanely excited about literature that everyone else has already moved on from, so I suppose you could say that my favorite literary period would be that week from yesterday I spent with the last book I read.

Interview with Daniel Paquin

Descended from an ancient line of unicorn herders in another life, Daniel first learned the act of writing by rearranging magnetic fridge poetry at the age of twelve. Since then he has taken kindly to writing of other kinds, such as rearranging the words on cereal boxes and those little hearts that you can only get around Valentine's Day. When not writing, Daniel enjoys testing the various ways Peeps explode when put in the microwave. More than anything else, Daniel wishes that unicorns existed on this plane so he could take up the customs and traditions of his ancestors. Oh yeah, and he enjoys Funfetti cupcakes.

The Vehicle: At what point in your life did you know that you wanted to be a writer?

Dan: It'll probably sound more than a little stereotypical when I say this, but I kinda just fell into writing. I was intrigued by the idea of taking a Creative Writing Fiction class here at EIU, mostly because it seemed to be one of the few classes in which I could actually express what I wanted in the way that I wanted, and from there I just kept going. I remember at one point talking to my mom about the whole writing thing and she told me that it made sense because I always had such fantastic ideas, and by fantastic I'm pretty sure she meant weird, slightly troubling, awkward, or any of a host of other similar words. I have this talent for generating awkward ideas verbally at the worst possible times, so I try to channel a lot of that into my writing, but it doesn't always work.

The Vehicle: What is the best writing advice that you have been given?

Dan: The best two pieces of advice that I've received have come from professors here at EIU. The ever-present "Kill your darlings" is a piece of advice that I've had to fight with for a while now because I tend to throw together a story and let it be. Revision is more difficult than the initial act of writing for me, so by the time I get around to revising I'm usually more than a little connected to what's on the page.

The other piece of advice wasn't meant as advice, but it's stuck with me and kept me writing what I like writing. It boils down to, "You might as well be writing with crayons," but that's not an exact quote. This was early on when I first started writing what has come to be called "Danny" material and if you've read any of my stuff you'll probably know what that means. Needless to say, I don't write with crayons, but the joy of making someone that angry with my words is something that's stuck with me.

The Vehicle: Would you tell me a little about your thesis project that you are working on now? What is your favorite/the most unique aspect about it?

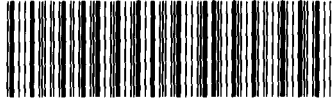
Dan: My thesis is...a mess, but it's a good mess. At the moment, it's an experimental novella that deals with the fine lines between dreams and reality, the imagination and reality, stalking and being stalked, and a few other things that I'm sure will emerge at some point. It's basically a series of non-sequential journal entries that are loosely inspired by events in my life, but those events really aren't anything that anybody other than me would know about. The whole thing is randomly broken up by a dream that fades from the page as more and more of the dream is revealed and this dream is meant to inform the reader about the rest of the story without actually revealing much of anything.

I think my favorite part of my thesis, beyond the entire experimental nature of the work, is the collection of stories that I'll be hiding in the work itself. I say 'hiding' because these stories won't be evident as stories; readers will have to figure out how to find the pieces of each story and how to put them together. A lot of these stories won't make an appearance in my thesis for a while, but by the time the whole project is done I hope to have a collection of stories from the perspectives of myself, the narrator, and at least one other character hidden in various ways throughout the text. I can't really say more because I don't want to explain how to find these hidden stories and also because I still haven't tried out each method of hiding them yet. Also, there will be a unicorn at some point, but I'm not there yet either.

The Vehicle: What is your favorite literary period and why?

Dan: I always have problems with this question because I'm never sure if the word 'period' means the labels that tend to get attached to literature or if there's a certain time period I'm supposed to be aware of. Easily said, I like postmodern literature and I've found that a lot of the postmodern literature that I've read and enjoyed has been produced during my lifetime, so a little over the last two decades. I like this kind of literature because it isn't afraid to play around with itself as a text. Postmodern literature, for me at least, presents a fun challenge, a new approach to reading that forces me to go beyond passive reading. I have to engage with the text or I won't get it. The best part of this is that I usually hate reading when I'm doing the reading because it's challenging and after I'm done reading I find the enjoyment, which sounds backwards, and it is, but that's how it works. Case in point, three words: *House. Of. Leaves.*

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“The role of a writer is not to say
what we all can say, but what we
are unable to say.”

– Anaïs Nin