

Coffee With Daniel Poirier

15 years ago, Daniel Poirier was a founding editor of *The Lyre Magazine*. Today, he is an English professor, holds an MFA in Fiction, and is published in a number of spaces. Earlier this year, he took the time to chat with our team over coffee, and discussed World Lit, translation, and the importance of student voice.

*Interview by Callie, Ria &
Yoona*

YOONA: For this edition, we're publishing under the theme *Passage*. With this, we are contemplating histories, journeys, and change, which inspired us to look into the origin of the magazine. Looking back, could you describe your initial vision? Were you thinking of the magazine's future, or were you just very present and immersed?

DANIEL: I think a little bit of both. There was another small magazine thing at SFU at the time. It was [run by] design students, called Hi Aspire. I actually joined and I worked on that one a little bit. I snuck a little bit of fiction in there, even though it was [a design magazine]. And these students, they were really just making it up too.

It was definitely Ken who put the idea out loud. For the first issue, it was really just, let's try to make this thing. Ken really wanted to be hands-off. He wanted us to do as much of it as possible. He really didn't seem like he wanted to be like, "I want to tell you what to do." I think he wanted the opposite of that. For the second issue, I think I had more of an idea of, "Okay, how can I keep this going? Who's going to do the next step?" I think my vision of the future was: Who can I give this to?

YOONA: You formed the Lyre 15 years ago, which means the magazine is now a teenager! It's been through many different hands. How do you feel about seeing it deviate so much from the original idea?

DANIEL: I'm really proud that it's still go-

ing. I was hoping that it would persist...I'm really happy that it's changed. I think even maybe the first time it had a major shift, I was like, well, wait a minute. But no, of course, that's going to be the way that it is! Things change in 15 years. I think it's a really nice form now; It looks more professional.

CALLIE: We wanted to ask you about The Lyre's logo—in the past few years, our logo has been a feather. But we looked back and realized that it used to be a bird. Where did The Lyre come from?

DANIEL: I think it was Brittany Festerbeck who designed that first logo. I can tell you where it came from, the Lyre name and logo. I think it was like an Attenborough or something I saw online. He's out in the forest seeing a lyrebird, and it's mimicking all the sounds around it. So it mimics a camera shutter and a chainsaw and all of these weird things. And I just thought that was a very cool bird. I also thought that it fit well with the idea of world-lit a little bit because there are lots of cross-cultural things, mimicry. All of these things felt world-lit to me at the time. And then also Liar/Lyre. There's that play on the word, and then it's also a musical instrument. That's the fun part for me anyway. Maybe I've passed on a legacy of having to explain yourself, but I found that really playful. I just enjoy that kinda thing.



YOONA: Print publishing in a way, makes writing finite—you can't edit it, that sort of thing. Do you ever look back on your old work and still connect with what you wrote?

DANIEL: Yeah! There's definitely that thing where once it's published it's 'finished.' And that can be paralyzing. It is one of those things where you definitely look back at stuff and wish you could change it or revise it. I think that's the nature of the thing, and I think if you didn't feel that way it would probably mean you're not developing or changing at all. So I try to filter it through the lens of "look how far I've come! This is still good." I would love to go back and change it, but let it be what it is, y'know. It's the journey, I suppose.

If I look back at old stuff I definitely still connect with it. I think it came from this place of being so immersed within all of this. There was a class with Azadeh I took one summer. There was a creative response assignment. I don't know if you read Borges in any of your classes, but there was *The Library of Babel* that she taught in that class. So I wrote a response story to it. In *The Library of Babel*, it talks about hexagons. And then it talks about how there's only so many letters in the alphabet. I wrote a story where I couldn't use four letters from the alphabet, and I was only allowed two pieces of punctuation. I made it six pages, so that you could tape it [into a hexagon] and put it on your head so

that you were in the middle. I still love that. Maybe it's not the best story anymore, but it's a fun idea. It was also cyclical, it ended and it would go back to the beginning, and then you could keep reading it! I definitely see development when I look back on things like that.

YOONA: Speaking of which, are you comfortable taking a look at some of your own work? We brought the 'letter from the editor' from the 2nd edition...

DANIEL: Oh, wow. Okay... I'll go into marking mode.

I really like this idea about *anxiety of authorship*. This idea of: Has everything been written? What new can I produce? And the 'no shy' word. I think that's important, even as undergrads, to think about your voice being important. And having a place, right? I think there's an empowering aspect to this, because it's finite, and maybe that's a little bit scary in that, but you're also putting something out in the world. You're participating. I think that's important for today, because I think World Lit was very empowering.

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RIA: This year, some students petitioned to bring back a translation class that hadn't been taught for a number of years. Have you done translation? What was your experience of translation as a World Lit student?

DANIEL: Yeah, that's great! That also sounds like a World Lit thing, to petition professors until they hear.

So translation was a very cool class. The final project for that class was some sort of translation-type project. I think a lot of people who had multiple languages did. You're not translating the whole book or anything, but did small translation projects. For *Norwegian Wood*, what I did I made it into a comic book—a different medium is how I suggested it.

When I was reading parts of that book, there are different characters that feel... different. Murakami is obviously sort of a Western author; and is thought of in that way, like a Western, Japanese author. And so I looked at how some of the characters felt more Western, and then other characters felt more traditional, as if he was painting them as traditional versus sort of modern. And so when I drew it, I drew some of them in a more modern, manga-type style. And then some of them are very traditional — so I looked at Japanese wood block prints and how characters are styled in that format.

YOONA: Any closing remarks?

DANIEL: I'm really happy that *The Lyre* is still going. Keep it going. I think it's its own little resistance.

