
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

They Write by Night: “Bullets”

Suzanne Lummis · Tuesday, April 18th, 2023

Some things, no matter the time of year or current fashions, just never go outta style. And we know what those things are: sex, love, birth and death, motherhood and fatherhood, friendship and loss, war, the natural world, the mysterious, unknowable world, and overarching these, all that can be observed or remembered, or imagined.

And in this country — more this one than certain others around the globe — day-to-day gunfire. Never goes outta style. About the time of the release of this newest They Write by Night, coming in after a long hiatus, there was a big shooting in this big country. And another one since.

But like I say here, guns don’t kill people. Bullets kill people. Poet Natalie Diaz melts all bullets down to one, one master bullet, one bullet that tells the story for all the others. It exits, it returns, is lost, is found. It gets under her brothers’ skin. It gets into other’s brothers’ bones. But “Catching Copper” isn’t a bullet, it’s a poem.

That’s something else that never goes out of style. Great poems.

You can’t kill a great poem—though, sure as heck, some have tried.

— Suzanne Lummis

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Truth Among Happiness

Christian Lopez · Monday, April 17th, 2023

Happiness has often been described in a seemingly infinite amount of ways, though through one particular instance in the form of Charlie Chaplin's 1940 film *The Great Dictator*, the actor, writer, and director bravely cries, "you the people... have the power to create happiness." Happiness is a ubiquitous and wholly universal element of life — while its presence may roost and fleet time and again, its unprecedented power echoes throughout one's life endlessly. As commonplace as happiness is, the method with which it is achieved has often been a great point of discussion among psychologists and researchers alike. Whether happiness can be more easily attained naturally through one's own genes or by a more intimate, conscious effort is made apparent by Elizabeth Landau and Suzanne Degges-White, respectively. Landau notes how "there seems to be a certain level of happiness that individuals have generally, to which they usually gravitate" (para. 14) whereas Degges-White notes "being able to offer a sunny disposition to the world, regardless of your inner state, actually encourages you to physically feel better" (para. 18) emphasizes how there are differing ways to achieving happiness — an emotion wholly necessary to living the best, truest life possible.

When it comes to the reaching a state of happiness, Landau notes the immense role genetics may play in our emotional well-being, acknowledging how some individuals may already be at a disadvantage, before taking into consideration the daily stressors and unexpected tragedies that inevitably occur. Her reasoning for this is largely due in part to parents and the environment in which they raise their children; "if you have happy parents and happy children... people usually assume it's because the children are modeling the parents. But that's not really so. You need to make the point that parents pass on both genes and the environment" (para. 14). Landau further elaborates how no two individuals can reach the same level of happiness — it may take more effort for a person whose baseline mood is low compared to a person who is able to reach the same state of contentment without less of a genetic disadvantage.



Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*

Landau further notes the importance of money, or rather, the negative impact it may have upon the individual if the income isn't enough — “more money does not necessarily buy more happiness, but less money is associated with emotional pain” (para. 21). While a less than desirable income may be detrimental to one's enthusiasm, some materialistic possessions can induce a sense of happiness, albeit for a moment. While the purchase of a new car may promote happiness, the sensation will likely fade as time passes — instead, an object carrying sentimental value possesses the ability to instill fond memories, where happiness can derive from. In the end, Landau notes how happiness can be tilled from a comfortable flow of income and some materialistic items — depending on the individual's genetic baseline for happiness.

While Landau bases how happiness can be achieved through genetics, steady income, and sentimental items, Degges-White notes otherwise. She offers a more intrapersonal and intrinsic approach on the subject. Happiness, especially in an era where we rely heavily on instant gratification catalyzed by technology and materialism, is a state of being and not a misguided sense of pride over possessions — “down-sizing, right-sizing, or de-cluttering all reflect the same realization that is gaining momentum — possessions simply won't bring lasting happiness to our lives” (para. 6). Degges-White suggests practicing the “Big Four,” ideals which generates happiness. Friendliness, cheerfulness, compassion, and gratitude are attitudes one should be conscious of in order to better hone their personal development, which is crucial to contentment.

Friendliness, according to Degges-White, is defined as “offering warmth and good humor to those around you” (para. 11) — showing an openness to the world complemented with an inviting temperament, regardless of how low one may feel. Exuding compassion, such as taking notice of someone's humanity despite their flaws, also promotes a positive influence upon the giver.

Offering gratitude unto the universe or acknowledging gratitude for yourself, such as persisting a difficult task rather than giving in, is the final practice of the “Big Four.” Ultimately, these four factors of happiness instill greater well-being unto the individual by providing less stress and more happiness, which in turn invites protection against chronic illnesses, thus breathing more years into one’s life.

Landau and Degges-White offer different approaches on how happiness is achieved, though cross paths when they discuss the lasting benefits of the emotion. Landau expresses genetics, steady income, and sentimental items as contributing factors to promoting happiness; genetics can be used to identify what an individual’s baseline mood is, which gauges how far off they generally are from reaching a state of happiness. In addition to receiving a steady income, sentimental items can positively affect mood by reducing stress and promoting a sense of security, in turn generating a sense of happiness. Degges-White counters Landau by deviating away from genes, monetary, and materialistic value by offering a more social, humanistic method; by utilizing friendliness, cheerfulness, compassion, and gratitude on a daily basis, satisfaction will find its way within the individual’s life. Both authors note a common principle of happiness: the value of experience over materialism. Possessions are variables, whereas experiences are constant – sharing intimate moments with others preserves greater happiness through life over the ownership of something, which is bound to lose its luster with repeated exposure. Ultimately, keeping one’s attention honed in on the now diminishes stress and increases emotional well-being, encouraging the individual to persist in maintaining this mindset and substantially increasing both their happiness and physical health.

Happiness is a precious element of life, both easy and rare to find, valuable yet impossible to determine its value. Authors Elizabeth Landau and Suzanne Degges-White both note the different roads one could take to achieving happiness – through genetics, financial security, friendliness, cheerfulness, compassion, and gratitude — yet find common ground in the principle that happiness is critical to living a prosperous life. Happiness cannot be measured in the traditional sense, though it can be identified through life experiences and the relationships formed with those around the individual. To wear your heart on your sleeve is to be daring, inviting, and warm all the same; being selfless to make others happy will in turn make the individual bloom freely beyond compare. To spread happiness is to further contribute to a cycle of recycled compassion — a world of shared humanity and happiness, where nothing matters except life and the love you make.

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CBD Flowers for Pain Management: A Natural Alternative to Pharmaceuticals

Our Friends · Monday, April 17th, 2023

Suffering from pain and discomfort can have a huge impact on your life, meaning you might not be able to do the things you love as easily as you once could. Pain can also affect your quality of sleep and your mood. But this is where CBD comes in. CBD is an all-natural product with a range of health benefits with pain relief and anti-inflammatory properties being the most notable. Below, we'll take a closer look at [CBD flowers in the UK](#) and how this versatile product can help you manage pain daily.

What are CBD flowers?

CBD flowers are one of the most versatile CBD products on the market. They're the dried, cured, and trimmed buds of the cannabis plant which are naturally high in CBD and [low in THC](#) – meaning you don't have to worry about feeling any mind-altering effects. CBD flowers come in various strains and strengths. They can have different appearances and aromas, so you can choose a flower to suit your needs. CBD flowers can be ground and rolled into a joint to be smoked or used in a vape. If smoking isn't your thing, you can add CBD flowers to food to reap the benefits. Whilst smoking CBD flowers allows you to feel the benefits more quickly, ingesting CBD makes the results last longer.

How do they interact with the body?

Just like any CBD product, when you take CBD flowers in the way you prefer, it interacts with the [endocannabinoid system](#) within the body. This is the system that's responsible for regulating mood, appetite, and sleep. Some of the most notable benefits that come with taking CBD flowers includes the natural anti-inflammatory effect it can provide, as well as having the ability to reduce discomfort and swelling by changing the way receptors respond to pain. CBD can also interact with chemicals produced by the brain to balance mood and reduce feelings of anxiety. The list goes on – but it's evident why so many are choosing CBD to help them enhance their health and well-being.

CBD Flowers for pain management

Whilst CBD Flowers can manage anxiety, stress, and sleep, they can also be used to help manage pain without the need for traditional medication. Here are a few ways in which CBD flowers can help with pain management.

Reduces inflammation

This is one of the most notable benefits of CBD. As the compound interacts with the ECS, it produces a response that creates an anti-inflammatory effect around the body. It also changes how receptors in this system respond to pain, which means relief from injuries and pain caused by chronic illness. CBD is all-natural, so you don't need to worry about potentially nasty side effects.

Relaxation

It can be hard to relax and unwind when you're in pain, leaving you feeling tense and irritable. But

CBD flowers can help with this. CBD flowers have a calming effect on the body by producing their own relaxation compounds. This can result in a feeling of calm when you need it most, as well as allowing you to release the tension from your body which can exacerbate pain and discomfort.

Aids sleep

When suffering from pain and discomfort, getting a good night's sleep can be difficult. But this is where CBD flowers can help. These flowers can aid sleep by allowing you to relax and drift off more easily. They also provide a sedative effect which means you'll begin to feel drowsy and fall into a natural, deep sleep. This can benefit your sleep cycle, and allow you to wake up feeling rested, with an improved mood.

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Life of Pi, Coast Starlight: Theatrical Journeys

David Sheward · Tuesday, April 11th, 2023

Theater is the ultimate medium of the imagination, more so than film or TV. With the latter two, there is the potential to travel literally anywhere in the world (or the universe in fact), but the audience must work their minds to transform the four corners of the stage into the four corners of the earth. The stage provides more magical experiences than the ones offered before the large or small screens since you are a collaborator on making the trip and not just a viewer looking through the cinema camera lens.



Hiran Abeysekera with Fred Davis, Scarlet Wilderink, and Andrew Wilson (puppeteers) in *Life of Pi*.
Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

Two current productions take us on thrilling journeys employing metaphorical means and imaginary dialogue. *Life of Pi* at the Gerald Schoenfeld, adapted by Lolita Chakrabarti from Yann Martel's classic novel, chronicles the harrowing voyage of the title character, a charismatic, intellectually curious young East Indian, from a zoo in his native country to a lifeboat in the Pacific shared with a hungry tiger named Richard Parker to a hospital bed in Mexico. (This production arrives on Broadway after debuting in Sheffield, followed by an acclaimed, Olivier-winning run in London and a stint at ART in Cambridge, Mass.) Keith Bunin's *The Coast Starlight*, at Lincoln Center's Mitzi Newhouse, focuses on a sextet of strangers, each at the end of their respective ropes, sharing a coach car from Los Angeles to Seattle. Both works feature sojourns of self-discovery and sublime stagecraft. Directors, designers and cast combine to transport us emotionally and spiritually.



Rowan Magee, Celia Mae Rubin, and Nikki Calonge manipulating the Richard Parker puppet in *Life of Pi*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade.

Pi is one of those novels that seemed impossible to bring to the stage not only because it features a menagerie of animals, but also because of its deep ruminations on philosophy, religion, biology and the nature of storytelling. Ang Lee won an Oscar for his inspired direction of the 2012 film version which used spectacular cinematic effects, but how could similar wizardry be accomplished in the theater? The main answer is provided by Max Webster's multi-dimensional staging, Tim Hatley's amazing globe-spanning set, and the incredibly lifelike puppet creations of Nick Barnes and Finn Caldwell. *Pi* ranks with *Lion King* and *War Horse* as Broadway's most memorable puppet shows.



The company of *Life of Pi*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade.

Chakrabati's contribution is just as vital. She compresses the action, paring down Pi's colorful backstory and framing the action as a flashback (In the novel, the author meets the protagonist who relates his tale). As the play begins, Pi (a magnificently complex and magnetic Hiran Abeysekera) is being interviewed by Mr. Okamoto (brusque Daisuke Tsuji, concealing seething emotions), an investigator with a Japanese shipping line, and Lulu Chen (ably played by understudy Celia Mei Rubin at the performance attended), an official with the Canadian embassy. They have come to question Pi, the sole survivor of the wreck of the freighter belonging to Okamoto's company. Through the magic of Hatley's set, Tim Lutkin's lighting and Andrzej Goulding's video projections, we relive Pi's incredible story. His hospital room melts away, the bed becomes a boat, and the stage a vast ocean.

Pi and his family were transporting the occupants of their zoo to start a new life in Canada because of political unrest in 1970s India. After a storm at sea, Pi and the oddly-named tiger are the only ones left. Or are they? As the tale becomes more fantastic, questions of God, humanity and narrative are introduced and Pi's adventure takes on troubling ambiguities. What's real and what's imaginary? Just as in life, no clear answers are offered and we must ponder the intentions of God and his various manifestations.



Hiran Abeysekera with Fred Davis, Scarlet Wilderink and Andrew Wilson (puppeteers) in *Life of Pi*. Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade.

The ferocious feline, named after the hunter who captured him due to a clerical error, becomes a fully realized character as he and Pi fight for dominance and survival in the tiny lifeboat. Chakrabarti adds variety by introducing characters in Pi's imagination to debate him on religion, science and the nature of man versus animals.

In addition to those already mentioned, standouts in the excellent large cast include Brian Thomas Abraham's brutal French ship's cook, Rajesh Bose's domineering father, Mahira Kakkar's compassionate mother, Sonya Venugopal's whip-smart sister, Avery Glymph as the no-nonsense voice of a naval survival guide Pi reads, and the amazing ensemble who manipulate and bring the animal-puppets to life (the puppet movement is credited to Caldwell). This is a nourishing slice of *Pi* for the mind and the soul.



The company of *The Coast Starlight*.

Credit: T. Charles Erickson

While not as spectacularly flashy as *Life of Pi*, *The Coast Starlight* is just as imaginative in its staging and thought-provoking in its dramaturgy. Playwright Bunin conjures a chance meeting on a 36-hour train ride between a group of strangers. In reality, they barely exchange a few words. But Bunin places them in an alternate dimension where they converse on what they might have said and done had they revealed their true selves instead hiding behind the barriers of civility. Director Tyne Rafaeli cleverly reconfigures the seats on Arnulfo Maldonado's flexible, revolving set in multiple combinations to reflect the shifting relationships among the passengers. Lap Chi Chu's lighting and 59 Productions' projections add to the transitions and transformations while Daniel Kluger's evocative original music resonates with impact.



The company of *The Coast Starlight*.

Credit: T. Charles Erickson

Each character is faced with a crisis and is making a figurative and literal trip to find their best possible next step. T.J. (emotive Will Harrison) has deserted his naval base and must choose between leaving the train to return before it's too late or living the life of a fugitive. Jane (charming Camila Cano-Flavia) is an animator with ambivalent feelings for her current boyfriend and a strong attraction for T.J. Veteran Noah (rugged Rhys Coiro) leads an aimless existence on a friend's boat and is visiting his ailing, senile mother. Sparkplug Liz (scene-stealing Mia Barron) is fleeing a catastrophic couples weekend. Alcoholic salesman Ed (volcanic Jon Norman Schneider) explodes with frustration over his shattered homelife and nowhere job. Loving Anna (tender Michelle Wilson) is returning home from identifying the body of her estranged junkie brother.

The format of random strangers coming together in a small common space is a familiar one. Thornton Wilder's novel *The Bridge on the San Luis Rey*, Lanford Wilson's *The Hot L Baltimore*, and Tennessee Williams' *Small Craft Warnings* are three examples that spring to mind. Fortunately, Bunin's variation on this theme is a rich and varied one. He paints each passenger with vibrant colors and telling details. Mia Barron's Liz is particularly memorable as she bursts into the car, ripping all manner of personal items from her bag and broadcasting the events of her chaotic weekend in a non-stop monologue into her cell phone. The loneliness of Ed's relentless hotel-hopping work life are made stunningly specific in Jon Norman Schneider's sorrow-infused performance. In my mind, I can still see the exotic cocktails he orders at the hotel bar, served in ceramic jars shaped like skulls.



Will Harrison and Camila Cano-Flavia (center) in *The Coast Starlight*.

Credit: T. Charles Erickson

The action reaches a heart-stopping climax as T.J. must make a final decision and the other passengers lay out how harrowing and desperate a life on the lam would be. Then each traveller steps off the train and on with their lives. As with *Life of Pi*, the ending here is somewhat ambiguous. We don't know what will ultimately happen to each of the characters, but the point is to dramatize the journey that brings them to their current position. Bunin, Rafaeli and company do a masterful job of guiding us along the way, as does the team behind *Life of Pi*.

***Life of Pi*: March 30—Sept. 3. Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre, 236 W. 45th St., NYC. Running time: two hours and 10 mins. including intermission. www.telecharge.com.**

***The Coast Starlight*: March 13—April 16. Mitzi Newhouse Theatre at Lincoln Center, 150 W. 65th St., NYC. Running time: 95 mins. with no intermission. www.telecharge.com.**

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