

A conversation with writer

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What was the adaptation process like - how involved were you, how did you find the experience overall? Did you push for inclusion of certain elements, etc.?



CS: I was first approached by Thomas Kail shortly after *Tiny Beautiful Things* was published. By that time he'd directed a few plays, and he was in the beginning stage of developing *Hamilton* with Lin-Manuel Miranda. He told me his friend Marshall Heyman had given him the book, and he thought it'd make a great play. His email caught my interest, but I was so overwhelmed

at the time, gearing up to shoot the film adaptation of my book *Wild*, that I didn't respond. About eight months later Nia Vardalos posted a comment on my Facebook page. She said she and her friend Tommy Kail wanted to talk to me about adapting *Tiny Beautiful Things* for the stage. I messaged her and we decided to meet to discuss the idea. When we met, I felt an immediate kinship with her—and also with Tommy, who I met several months later. Work began in earnest about a year later, when the three of us convened in NYC, along with Marshall Heyman. We sat around a table for the better part of a week tossing around ideas, reading the first draft out loud, making revisions to the script, and talking about what it could become. There wasn't anything in particular I pushed for other than quality and fair representation of what the book was. An adaptation isn't a reiteration of the original work, but rather another artist's interpretation of it, in another form, and so I respected that. I knew that the play would have to exclude large parts of the book. I wasn't there to fight to make it otherwise. I was there to assist in any way I could in support of Nia and Tommy's vision

What is the most important or resonant thing you learned from being *Sugar*?

CS: That we are not alone. Ever, ever. All of the beauty, sorrow, struggle, confusion, joy, fear, envy, doubt, longing, lust, love any of us have ever felt has been, and is being, felt by millions of others around the world, regardless of any divisions we've imagined that separate us from each other.

What was your own emotional reaction to seeing the play onstage?

CS: It has ranged from sobbing the entire way through to watching it as if from a distance, as if that person playing *Sugar* isn't speaking words I wrote, telling stories from my own life. Most often I laugh and cry along with the audience and I think, "How on earth did it ever come to pass that these columns I wrote mostly in the middle of the night have come to be here on this stage?" It's surreal.

What would you like audiences to take away from viewing/experiencing the play?

CS: The sense that they have been moved, enlightened, and entertained.

As a writer, what do you think the major differences are between a book and a play...specifically *Tiny Beautiful Things*? What can plays accomplish that books can't, etc.?

*"We are not
alone.
Ever, ever."*

CS: Any art form is its own thing and each does something the very best. When you read *Tiny Beautiful Things*, you get to be inside the sentences and the stories in this incredibly intimate way that's extremely personal. When you see *Tiny Beautiful Things*, you

get to feel the way those words land among a crowd of people and perhaps feel a sense of community and connection.

Can you reflect on the concept/message of *Tiny Beautiful Things* in 2019, our current climate, and what are your thoughts on our culture of social media and our ability to feel empathy and human connection?

CS: Things feel so hard right now, so awful. And yet, when it comes to empathy and connection, I think there is more of that than there has ever been in the history of human existence. In fact, it's BECAUSE we are finally feeling empathy for whole communities of people who've previously been disregarded that the current climate is scary and mean. It turns out a lot of people get really, really mad when you say those in the LGBTQ community have the right to their full humanity, or that white privilege is real and racism must be honestly reckoned with, or women are not any longer going to cooperate with the toxic world that patriarchy created. That ugliness we're living with right now? It's fear and rage in the face of love. And if there's one thing I believe for certain, it's that in the end love always wins.



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