

All / Perspectives / February 26, 2016

Love, Brevity, and the Wisdom of Dr. Seuss



“Only the Moon Howls” at Theatre Unleashed.

by DEAN FARELL BRUGGEMAN

How did it get so late so soon? It's night before it's afternoon.

Dr. Seuss would've been the last place I'd expect to find inspiration when writing a play about my marriage. Hemingway, maybe; Jonathan Franzen, sure. But there it was: a whimsical philosophical statement penned by Theodor Geisel that perfectly distilled the surreal wonder with which I view my 15-year relationship.

December is here before it's June. My goodness how the time has flown.

Sometimes the old adage “write what you know” applies like crazy; I needed to explore the emotional journey of two people who met in a coffeehouse in 2001 and suddenly found the calendar heralding 2016. Yes, I know that's what happens in all relationships, in all lives: *time passes*. But the *'til death do us part* element fused with my healthy sense of fatalism to create *Only the Moon Howls*, in which middle-aged spouses Whitney and Jake find themselves at the end of their shared 15-year journey thanks to a pre-dawn distracted driver. Which memories will last, which regrets will haunt... and—

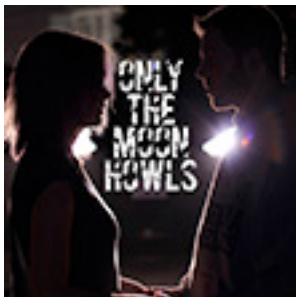
How did it get so late so soon?

Because in my heart it feels like only yesterday that we first visited each other's hometowns and learned about each other's childhoods... and how can we be sharing our home with our 4th and 5th dogs already? Impossible that there have been so many holidays, anniversaries, vacations... and that our morning on the couch frozen, holding hands watching 9/11 unfold has already receded into distant memory. Inconceivable (pun, *sigh*, intended) that we let our window of opportunity slip away without jointly, definitively deciding to pass on (or pursue) parenthood. All this, seemingly in the blink of an eye, from a chance encounter in a public place on a random Tuesday night? Surely this is the very essence of what it means to *find your soul mate*.

Or not. Maybe I'm of the opinion you get what *you get based on who you choose and who chooses you*, as Aunt Minnie says while criticizing Whitney's romantic ideals with a cynical wave of the martini glass. Clearly the issue's a spiritual one, with no quantitative answer available in the real world. But theatre... that's another story. The stage can provide a prism through which to view the highlights and low points of our lives and to show us where we've been and who we were/are in a way that yields semi-objective self-awareness. Hence, the magical realism of Whitney and Jake's otherworldly guides: ever-mindful of the ticking clock, they navigate the couple's 15 years together in a brisk 60 minutes, charged with the unenviable task of delivering them to the screeching tires that will spell the end of the marriage. Okay, so for some relationships, 15 years is a drop in the bucket (e.g., my grandparents' union). But sometimes it's all you get, and some people never get even that. And maybe it's an apt metaphor to view the many folks who come into, and sometimes leave, our lives as our very own guides, here to give us perspective on, well, anything/everything... and to occasionally remind us that time is passing and we should slow down to fully appreciate each day for the gift it is.

The cynical may consider that idea a clichéd worldview in this social-media era of instant gratification via on-demand everything... but is it? I don't think so; not in a time in which drivers pay less attention to the road than to the technological gadget in their hand, and not in a world where the only guarantee we're given is this very moment. *Only the Moon Howls* has taught me that the opportunity to share your life (and hopefully grow old) with someone you love is indeed a gift, one that will never go out of style, or pass into oblivion. Even though we, ourselves, eventually must.

NOW PLAYING: [ONLY THE MOON HOWLS](#), produced by Theatre Unleashed, through March 12.



Jake and Whitney were that perfect couple, certain to defy the odds and actually grow old together...except, they didn't. Though it's never easy to say goodbye after 15 years of love and marriage, what if you never even get the chance? Which shared history morphs into warm nostalgia, and which into bitter regret?