

## Wrong Stage

by Gaylord Brewer

You're late, late by minutes, meaning forever.  
 Drop the coat, snag the claim, tumble toward  
 stygian entrance. Yet as you clamber hand and foot  
 that wrongness grows, until you arise at last  
 not in the attentive dark of mezzanine,  
 but backlit on the set. Anyway, where the elms,  
 where desire except to be anywhere else in the world?

Where a squirely gentleman hot for the hot wife  
 of his older friend? By now you'd happily settle  
 for the easy ticket, hell-shaded bowels of a ship,  
 one barking ape bent to the coals of his destruction.  
 But your play, already begun, is all pastels—  
 blue, yellow, even pink. A man in stiff collars  
 turns from the bed where he sits, frowns.

Elsewhere, tease of a noisy entrance, mistrust,  
 muffled anger. Elsewhere, you sense, children  
 in childish pantomime. The man looks away,  
 back to his glowing boudoir, its distorted angles.  
 You sense a hidden knife. But the *chutzpah* to use it?  
 The nerve to risk his precious life to claim it?  
 You lurch again into movement—little director

in the head urging *get out, get out* before the others—  
 and pray never to know for sure. They're nearly  
 arrived now, fevered fellow players, but the audience  
 can't take its eyes off you, spiraling right to left  
 as the man—perhaps?—reaches furtively  
 toward a shoe. Was this scripted all along,  
 it had to start? They never expected how, not like this.