

GERALD STERN

Kafeteria

I who kame late to the kafeteria
at least had one or two tastes of
apple kake and milky koffee and ah
prunes and the jus of lemons in a kracked
kommercial saucer—I guess a bowl—women
yes, with hats with feathers but mostly men;
and walked on a broad pavement karrying
a gym bag probably long before you strapped
yourself down like a walking ape and certainly
I touched everything touchable and stopped
in front of a dummy I had fallen in love with
and kried myself silly over her helplessness
an hour or so before my maiden speech
just north of Fourth where through the books I wandered
one door after another just to the west
of Klein's Department Store, a small flag
for kover, an orange crate for a stage, a
skornful audience, Amerika in Hell again.

Norman Riding

All that morning he had a merciful attitude
and this is what made him remember the swamp maple
that blocked the sunlight from his kitchen window
though it was idiotic to remember a tree that
anyhow labored over its own death and hung on
like some mad ninety-five-year-old on pills;
and the crash itself was gracious for the tree
could still bend, and when it cracked a hundred
things went flying and he who rode it he went
flying too, with bladed saw, his two arms
either cheering or keeping the branches away
from his sawdust glasses, all of which enlightened
his whole yard and set his other trees free;
though how pathetic a giant is on the ground
covered with ants he hates and here and there
a squirrel or a bird ignoring him as it nibbled
and gobbled and drank and spit and chewed as if
they all were eating and drinking at a funeral,
only the corpse was lying dead in the dirt
with his skin peeling and his hair blowing and his mouth
opening on its hinges, the great creases
clarified by the sun, the song insane.