

I swivel to my right  
and there on my  
bulletin board  
is tacked a photo  
of Céline.

I swivel to my left  
and there  
hung on the wall is a  
two by three foot  
color photo  
of a World War I  
Fokker triplane ...

I've come a long way from  
New Orleans, baby, and  
I've got a long way  
to go ...

tat tat tat tat ....

GOT CHA!!

#### TRANSFORMATION AND DISFIGURATION AT THE P.O.

there were always little tragedies  
we heard about on the job  
sitting on those stools  
eleven and one half hours a night  
every bit of outside information  
was greeted by us  
much like the inmates of a prison camp

every now and then  
a courier would come by and say  
"it's 3 to 2, end of the 3rd ..."

he never said 3 to 2 who  
because if you had been listening  
from the beginning  
you were able to decipher all that

one night I heard it from two fellows  
talking:

"Harry checked out early  
when he walked into his house  
it was dark  
his wife and her lover were in bed  
they thought he was a burglar  
the lover had a gun  
and he shot Harry ...."

"where's Louie?"  
I asked one night  
I hadn't seen Louie  
in a couple of weeks  
Louie had two jobs  
when he slept I didn't know

"Louie?  
Louie fell asleep in bed one night  
smoking a cigarette  
the mattress caught fire  
he burned to death ...."

there were many deaths  
among the clerks

we all felt like  
inmates of a prison  
I also felt as if we were  
front line troops  
under continual attack and  
bombardment

when there weren't deaths  
there were breakdowns --  
people who after years of  
sticking letters  
just couldn't do it anymore

or there were dismissals  
for the slightest of reasons

it was death and transformation  
and disfiguration:  
people found  
they couldn't walk anymore  
or they suddenly  
came up with speech defects  
or they were shaken by tremors or  
their eyes blinked too fast or  
they came to work drugged or  
drunk or both

it was terror and dismemberment  
and the survivors  
hunched on their stools wondering  
who would be next

as the supervisors brutalized us  
the supervisors  
were in turn brutalized  
by their superiors who  
were in turn brutalized

by Washington, D.C.  
who always demanded  
more for less  
and the public brutalized  
Washington, D.C.  
and it was finally  
the little old lady  
pruning her garden roses  
who was the central cause  
of misery for everybody:  
Democracy at work

one night I asked,  
"where's Hodges?"

I don't know why but  
I always seemed to be  
the last to know anything  
perhaps because I was white  
and most of them were black  
even though  
they seemed to like me

there was no answer  
about Hodges  
who was one of the meanest soups  
and white  
to top it all

and I asked again  
and somebody said  
"he won't be around  
for a while ..."

and then  
in hints and bits  
it was gotten to me:  
Hodges had been knifed  
in the parking lot  
on the way to his car

and then  
it was inferred to me  
that they knew  
who did it

"would it be anybody  
I know?"  
I smiled

it got very silent  
Big George put his mail down  
stared at me

he stared at me for a long time  
then he turned  
started sticking his letters again

and I said  
"I wonder who's winning  
the old ball game?"

"4 to 2,"  
somebody said  
"end of the 4th ...."

Hodges never came back  
and soon  
I got out of there too.

#### RED MERCEDES

naturally, we are all caught in  
downmoods, it's a matter of  
chemical imbalance  
and an existence  
which, at times,  
seems contrary to  
any real chance at  
happiness.

I was in this downmood  
when this rich pig  
along with his blank  
inamorata  
in his red Mercedes  
cut  
in front of me  
at racetrack parking.

it clicked inside of me  
in a flash:  
I'm going to pull that fucker  
out of his car and  
kick his  
ass!

I followed him  
into Valet  
parked behind him  
and jumped from my  
car  
ran up to his  
door

and yanked at  
it.  
it was  
locked.  
the  
windows were  
up.

I rapped on the window  
on his  
side  
"open up! I'm gonna  
bust your  
ass!"

he just sat there  
looking straight  
ahead.  
the woman did  
likewise.  
they wouldn't look  
at me.  
he was 20 years  
younger  
but I knew I could  
take him  
he was soft and  
pampered.

I beat on the window  
with my  
fist: