

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: