

from FACTORY

Thus as the foreman watched me from the corner of his eye
as I watched him from the corner of mine
pretending to be doing my best
as if I didn't know I was under inspection,
I relished the words I would write
intoned in this factory where no one could hear them,
swallowed in the shrill-greased ecstasy of machine
as I led processions of naked acolytes
sopranoing Athenian epitaphs, candles in their hands.

To write this poem, to bring the word beautiful into
Factory
You must never forget when the lids first come from the
press
they are hot, they are almost slippery.
You must never forget since each tube holds 350 lids
and each crate holds 20 tubes and each day I fill
40 crates
From my work alone 280,000 each day--
huge aluminum worm wriggling one mile long
into the cadaver of America.
You must never forget 14 million cans each day
from a single factory!
5,100,000,000 cans each year from a single factory!
More throwaway cans each year than human beings on this
planet!
Every high, every heartbeat of your life
the machines have been running.
Every time you heard a pianissimo
the earsplitting machines have been running.
You've already spent more time working here
than making love,
More time working here than lying on hills
looking at the sky.
Each of your favorite books you must pilgrimage here to
age,

to absorb and exude wisdom,
To think of those who worked here before you
and those who will work here after you.
You must say to yourself--"If I don't work here
this poem won't be able to write me."
And asked--"What's that smell?" you must remember
on your clothes, on your skin, in your lungs
and when the breeze is just right through your
bedroom window
the smell of the factory.
You must brainstorm machines and workers are like poets
and readers:
the poets eat sheets of steel and press them into
words
that are the ends of containers,
The reader stands in one place shifting from foot to foot,
crating and crating,
Searching for defects so the noisemaker can be shut down
and while white-coated mechanics scurry to fix it
like doctors around a sick president, he can take
a break,
get a drink, take a crap, unwrap some butterscotch
to suck on,
glimpse a glimpse of second-shift sunset,
watch the guard lower the flag.
To birth this womb, to do for Continental Can Company
what Walt Whitman did for America,
You must celebrate machine-shop-rendezvous!
You must loafe observing a disc of aluminum!
You must sing the security of treadmills
remembering where you are today
you were yesterday
you will be tomorrow.
So, after suicide invites you through the naked mirror
and poetry dares you to dive headfirst into the sky,
After memorizing the discovery of fire, tools, speech,
agriculture, industry,
And all the inventors, inventions and dates

of the last 10,000 years you got a 100 on in History,
And after the ceaseless history of human war
reads the eyes in your face,
Faced with the obituary of man,
Caught in the deathrattle of the world,
from the deathblows of pollution,
from the deathknells of overpopulation,
from factories which are the deathbeds of Nature
and the seedbeds of bombs,
After contemplating the graveyard of elegies,
the immortality of maggots
and the immolation of the sun,
Then, Antler, or whatever your name is,
Enjoy returning prodigal to your machine
to forget the view from the skyscrapers of money,
to forget the hosts of human starvations
belly-bloated or brainwashed in Mammon,
to forget the sign over the entrance to Auschwitz
WORK MAKES MAN FREE,
to forget that working here you accomplice
the murder of Earth,
to forget the birds that sing eight hours a day
daydreaming the salaries of worms,
to forget how old you must be
to be rich and young before you die,
to forget your mother waking you
from this nightmare
is only a dream--
So nothing called life can torment you with undertakings
and your only responsibility toward mankind
is to check for defects in the ends of cans.