Antler

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.