

The Rouge is a Ford Motor Company factory built between 1915 and 1927 on the Rouge River in Dearborn, Michigan. It was the first manufacturing site that included everything needed to produce a car: a steel mill, a glass plant, a power plant, auto parts, and an assembly line. Over 100,000 workers were employed at the Rouge in the 1930s. One might say, a river of humanity runs through it. "I Am the Rouge" is the Working People's Poetry Contest Winner of 2011 [[www.partisanpress.org](http://www.partisanpress.org)].

### I AM THE ROUGE

Long hours in the factory  
have transformed me.  
I have become the assembly line  
crawling like a centipede  
through the concatenation  
of time clock rhythms  
and pneumatic sighs.  
I whisper and hiss,  
clang and grate,  
squeak and groan.  
I am the song of tired bones and  
worn out shoes on concrete floors.  
I am the dream of youth forsaken.  
I am the sprocket of fear  
I can't escape.  
I am the teeth in the gear.  
I am the cog, the shaft, the wheel  
of the conveyor.  
I am the block and tackle,  
pulley and cable.  
I am the hourly drone  
of monotonous doom.

I bow to the Madonna of Machinery  
whose nipples are like grease fittings,  
whose crankcase is a womb.  
I am the fire in the foundry.  
I am the pit.  
I twist nuts, shoot screws,  
and spit rivets like slang.  
My fingers are pliers,  
my wrists are wrenches,  
my fist a stubborn  
ball peen hammer.  
I am the numb brain  
and the long drive home.  
I am the lone neon sign  
blinking in the rain  
-- Last Chance -- Last Chance -- Last Chance --  
My eyes are tail lights fading in the distance.  
I am the strain in the torsion bar.  
I am the harness.  
My arms bear the scars of my labor  
like randomly tattooed emblems of honor.  
I have become the soul of production,  
the powertrain of perpetual motion,  
the chassis of suspended mobility.  
I am the thunder in the die,  
the blue flame of the weld,  
the fume in the lung of the painter.  
I am a centerless grinder,  
a lathe, a drill.  
I am tinnitus, carpal tunnel,  
the copper coil of repetitive trauma.

I am the key in the ignition,  
the spark plug,  
the throttle.

My blood is thicker than oil.  
My saliva more toxic  
than cutting fluid.

I am the heart of the engine,  
the phallic piston,  
the cam of accelerating continuity.

I am the hub  
of mechanical wisdom  
and spiritual ingenuity.

I am steel toed, hard headed,  
and hydraulic.

I lift and crank and twist  
and laugh at pain.

I am the still point of torque.

I am the fender, the axle, the bolt  
in the tie rod.

I am the strut and swagger  
of the driver  
as he pops the clutch and  
pushes the pedal to the floor.

I am the grumble of the muffler.

I am the Rouge.

I was here, Mr. Ford,  
before you were born.

I will be here, Mr. Ford,  
when you  
are a long time gone.

Gregg Shotwell