4.2. “Buna”

**Primo Levi,** born in 1919, was an Italian Jew who trained as a chemist prior to the war. Because of his expertise, he was put to work at Buna-Monowitz (Auschwitz III), the synthetic rubber factory mentioned in this segment of the series. This poem was written nearly a year after the liberation of Auschwitz. After the war, Levi continued to work as a chemist and author. He died in 1987.


Torn feet and cursed earth,
The long line in the gray morning.
The Buna smokes from a thousand chimneys,
A day like every other day awaits us.
The whistles terrible at dawn:
‘You multitudes with dead faces,
On the monotonous horror of the mud
Another day of suffering is born.’

Tired companion, I see you in my heart.
I read your eyes, sad friend.
In your breast you carry cold, hunger, nothing.
You have broken what’s left of the courage within you.
Colorless one, you were a strong man,
A woman walked at your side.
Empty companion who no longer has a name,
Forsaken man who can no longer weep,
So poor you no longer grieve,
So tired you no longer fear.
Spent once-strong man.
If we were to meet again
Up there in the world, sweet beneath the sun,
With what kind of face would we confront each other?

28 December 1945