

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.

*Source: From *The Collected Poems of Primo Levi* by Primo Levi. Trans. Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988.*

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