

The Living Death

By Oscar Wilde

Out into God's sweet air we went,
But not in wonted way,
For this man's face was white with fear,
And that man's face was grey,
And I never saw sad men who looked
So wistfully at the day.

I never saw sad men who looked
With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue
We prisoners call the sky,
And at each careless cloud that passed
In happy freedom by . . .

Like ape or clown, in monstrous garb
With crooked arrows starred,
Silently we went round and round
The slippery asphalt yard;
Silently we went round and round,
And no man spoke a word.

Silently we went round and round,
And through each hollow mind
The memory of dreadful things
Rushed like a dreadful wind,
And Horror stalked before each man
And terror crept behind.

The wardens strutted up and down,
And kept their herd of brutes,
Their uniforms were spick and span,
And they wore their Sunday suits,
But we knew the work they had been at
By the quicklime on their boots.