We Wear the Mask

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1896)

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.
We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world think other-wise,
We wear the mask!

GLOSSARY
Guile: deceitful, sly
Myriad: many
Subtleties: meanings; can be meanings that are difficult to define
Vile: gross, immoral