

**WARM-UP**

- 1 **DISCUSS** with the rest of the class. Nowadays, are we too dependent upon what things look like rather than what they really are?

## Basil's studio

*Oscar Wilde*

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891)

Chapter 1

What follows is an extract from the first pages of the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Two characters are portrayed: Basil Hallward, the painter, and his friend Lord Henry Wotton.

7.5



The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees<sup>1</sup> of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

5 From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags<sup>2</sup> on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam<sup>3</sup> of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum<sup>4</sup>, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted<sup>5</sup> across the long tussore-silk<sup>6</sup> curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness<sup>7</sup> and motion. The sullen<sup>8</sup> murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown<sup>9</sup> grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt<sup>10</sup> horns of the straggling woodbine<sup>11</sup>, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim roar of London was like the bourdon<sup>12</sup> note of a distant organ.

In the centre of the room, clamped<sup>13</sup> to an upright easel<sup>14</sup>, stood the full-length<sup>15</sup> portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty, and in front of it, some little distance away, was sitting the artist himself, Basil Hallward, whose sudden disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public excitement and gave rise to so many strange conjectures.

20 As the painter looked at the gracious and comely<sup>16</sup> form he had so skilfully mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed about to linger<sup>17</sup> there. But he suddenly started up, and, closing his eyes, placed his fingers upon the lids<sup>18</sup>, as though he sought to imprison within his brain some curious dream from which he feared he might awake.

'It is your best work, Basil, the best thing you have ever done,' said Lord Henry, languidly. 'You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor<sup>19</sup>. The Academy is too large and too vulgar. Whenever I have gone there, there have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the people, which was worse. The Grosvenor is really the only place.'

'I don't think I shall send it anywhere,' he answered, tossing<sup>20</sup> his head back in that odd way that used to make his friends laugh at him at Oxford. 'No: I won't send it anywhere.'

30 Lord Henry elevated his eyebrows, and looked at him in amazement through the thin blue wreaths<sup>21</sup> of smoke that curled up in such fanciful whirls<sup>22</sup> from his heavy opium-tainted cigarette. 'Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow, why? Have you any reason? What odd chaps<sup>23</sup> you painters are! You do anything in the world to gain a reputation. As soon as you have one,



3 John Singer Sargent, *Walford Graham Robertson*, 1894. Tate Gallery, London.

- 1 stirred amidst the trees. Mosse leggermente gli alberi.
- 2 saddle-bags. Tasche o bisacce per la sella.
- 3 gleam. Bagliore.
- 4 laburnum. Maggicciondolo (piccolo arbusto con fiori gialli).
- 5 flitted. Svolazzavano.
- 6 tussore-silk. Di seta ruvida.
- 7 swiftness. Velocità.
- 8 sullen. Cupo.
- 9 unmown. Non tagliata.
- 10 gilt. Dorati.
- 11 straggling woodbine. Vite del Canada rigogliosa.
- 12 bourdon. Bassa.
- 13 clamped. Fissato.
- 14 easel. Cavalletto.
- 15 full-length. A figura intera.
- 16 comely. Attraente.
- 17 to linger. Attardarsi.
- 18 lids. Palpebre.
- 19 Grosvenor. Una galleria d'arte.
- 20 tossing. Scuotendo.
- 21 wreaths. Anelli (di fumo).
- 22 whirls. Spirali.
- 23 chaps. Individui.