

It cannot be questioned. It has its divine right of sovereignty. It makes princes of those who have it. You smile? Ah! when you have lost it you won't smile ... People say sometimes that beauty is only superficial. That may be so, but at least it is not so superficial as thought is. To me, beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow⁵ people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible ... Yes, Mr Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you, or have to content yourself with those mean triumphs that the memory of your past will make more bitter than defeats. Every month as it wanes⁶ brings you nearer to something dreadful. Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses. You will become *sallow*, and hollow-cheeked, and dull-eyed⁷. You will suffer horribly ... Ah! realize your youth while you have it. Don't squander⁸ the gold of your days, listening to the tedious, trying to improve the hopeless failure, or giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the vulgar. These are the sickly aims⁹, the false ideals, of our age. Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing ... A new Hedonism – that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do. The world belongs to you for a season ... The moment I met you I saw that you were quite unconscious of what you really are, of what you really might be. There was so much in you that charmed¹⁰ me that I felt I must tell you something about yourself. I thought how tragic it would be if you were wasted¹¹. For there is such a little time that your youth will last – such a little time. The common hill-flowers wither¹², but they blossom¹³ again. The laburnum¹⁴ will be as yellow next June as it is now. In a month there will be purple stars on the clematis¹⁵, and year after year the green night of its leaves will hold its purple stars. But we never get back our youth. The pulse of joy that beats in us at twenty becomes sluggish¹⁶. Our limbs fail¹⁷, our senses rot¹⁸. We degenerate into hideous puppets¹⁹, haunted²⁰ by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to²¹. Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth!

Dorian Gray listened, open-eyed and wondering. [...]

Dorian made no answer, but passed listlessly²² in front of his picture and turned towards it. When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. He stood there motionless and in wonder, dimly²³ conscious that Hallward was speaking to him, but not catching the meaning of his words. The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before. Basil Hallward's compliments had seemed to him to be merely the charming exaggeration of friendship. He had listened to them, laughed at them, forgotten them. They had not influenced his nature. Then had come Lord Henry Wotton with his strange panegyric on youth²⁴, his terrible warning of its brevity. That had stirred²⁵ him at the time, and now, as he stood gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness, the full reality of the description flashed across him²⁶. Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizen²⁷, his eyes dim and colourless, the grace of his figure broken and deformed. The scarlet would pass away from his lips and the gold steal from his hair²⁸. The life that was to make his soul would mar²⁹ his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth³⁰. As he thought of it, a sharp pang of pain struck through him



1 Ben Barnes as Dorian Gray in front of his portrait in the film 'Dorian Gray', directed by Oliver Parker in 2009.

2 Hurd Hatfield and Donna Reed in the film 'The Picture of Dorian Gray', directed by Albert Lewin in 1945.

- 5 **shallow.** Superficiali.
- 6 **wanes.** Svanisce, passa.
- 7 **sallow ... dull-eyed.** Giallo, con guance incavate, e con occhi smorti.
- 8 **squander.** Sprecare.
- 9 **the sickly aims.** Le aspirazioni morbose.
- 10 **charmed.** Ha affascinato.
- 11 **were wasted.** Foste sprecato.
- 12 **hill-flowers wither.** Fiori di campo appassiscono.
- 13 **blossom.** Fioriscono.
- 14 **laburnum.** Maggiociondolo (piccolo arbusto con fiori gialli).
- 15 **clematis.** Clematide (pianta rampicante).
- 16 **becomes sluggish.** Si intorpidisce.
- 17 **Our limbs fail.** Le nostre membra diventano fiacche.
- 18 **our senses rot.** I nostri sensi si deteriorano.
- 19 **hideous puppets.** Orrendi fantocci.
- 20 **haunted.** Perseguitati.
- 21 **to yield to.** Cedere.
- 22 **listlessly.** Distrattamente.
- 23 **dimly.** Debolmente.
- 24 **panegyric on youth.** Panegirico (esaltazione) della giovinezza.
- 25 **had stirred.** Aveva turbato.
- 26 **the full ... him.** La piena esattezza della descrizione balenò dinanzi a lui.
- 27 **wizen.** Rugoso.
- 28 **the gold ... hair.** L'oro sarebbe scomparso dai suoi capelli.
- 29 **would mar.** Avrebbe distrutto.
- 30 **uncouth.** Goffo.