Chapter 1

The Triumph of Mind over Morals:
Explicit Same-Sex Pairing and its Social Responses

The intense stigma around bisexuality and homosexuality compels people with alternative sexual orientation to suppress their same-sex desire. This suppression leads to the outburst of desires not always through promiscuous behaviour but also as creative exuberance. Wilde’s creative dexterity was perceptibly one of the ways by which he expressed his homoerotic consciousness and liberated his suppressed homosexual desires. Same-sex pairing in many of his works comes across as one such attempt to unleash his repressed libidinal desires.

Homosexuality has variously been a subject of philosophical discussions and deliberations. The central issue debated in the philosophical circles is basically regarding the social construction of gender hierarchies. Beginning from Plato’s application of the idea of a fixed, natural law to sex that categorises same-sex sexuality as “unnatural” to the contemporary queer theorists’ attempt to challenge the heterosexual hegemony that perpetuates the categories of sex, diverse group of thinkers on various theoretical contexts have articulated their observations on homosexuality.

Feminist criticism with its heterosexual assumptions failed to incorporate the wider possibilities of sexuality since it was centred around the category of women alone. To put it in Butler’s words, “...the category of ‘women’, the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (4). Simone de Beauvoir prefers to consider a lesbian as a
‘superwoman’ rather than a ‘failed’ woman. According to her “homosexuality can be a way for woman to flee her condition or a way to assume it” (Beauvoir 431). She criticises psychoanalysts’ attempt to interpret a woman’s natural human behaviours such as her sports, her intellectual and political activities and even her desire for other women, as ‘masculine protest’ or as her attempt to identify with the male. For Beauvoir, these are all part of a woman’s choice of a subjective attitude. An adolescent female’s fear of penetration and masculine domination creates in her repulsion for the man’s body and the feminine body becomes an object of desire for her. Hence in a way every woman is naturally homosexual, and homosexuality for her becomes an attempt to “reconcile her autonomy with the passivity of her flesh” (431). She goes on to argue that it is the absence or failure of heterosexual relations that destine women to inversion. “Many women who work among women in workshops and offices and who have little opportunity to be around men will form amorous friendship with women; it will be materially and morally practical to join their lives” (442). She concludes the chapter saying, “In truth, homosexuality...is an attitude that is chosen in situation; it is both motivated and freely adopted...It is one way among others for woman to solve the problems posed by her condition in general and by her erotic situation in particular” (448). Toril Moi has rightly observed that in The Second Sex the chapter on lesbianism is confusing “perhaps revealing the difficulty in writing it” (Rowbotham xi).

Julia Kristeva’s theory of semiotic dimension of language exposes the limitations of Lacanian premises and also offers a feminine locus of subversion of the paternal law within language. According to Lacan it is the paternal law in the Symbolic stage that structures all linguistic significations. This law creates the possibility of meaningful language through the repression of libidinal drives. It
structures the world by suppressing the multiple meanings and stating a univocal meaning. But Kristeva argues that the primary maternal body serves as a perpetual source of subversion within the symbolic. In terms of language it is the poetic language that has the potential to subvert and displace the paternal law. The semiotic according to Kristeva constitutes a prediscursive libidinal economy, and it gets manifested in language through poetic language. She thus questions Lacan’s equation of the Symbolic with linguistic meaning by defining the Semiotic as the multiplicity of drives manifest in language. Kristeva points out that poetic language is sustained culturally through its participation in the Symbolic; but she does not acknowledge the nonpsychotic social expression of homosexuality (Butler 114). According to her, female homosexuality is the emergence of psychosis into culture. She observes that homosexual cathexis can be achieved through displacements such as poetic language or the act of giving birth, both of which are sanctioned in the symbolic realm:

By giving birth, the women enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself. She thus actualizes the homosexual facet of motherhood, through which a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her psychosis, and consequently, more nugatory of the social, symbolic bond. (Kristeva 239)

Her repudiation of female homosexuality is in accordance with her reification of the paternal law. Lesbianism thus becomes a site of irrationality for her.

The contributions of queer theorists like Eve Kosofky Sedgwick, Judith Butler and Foucault expanded the scope of studies in homosexuality. Foucault’s innovative and intellectual formulations have greatly influenced queer studies. The History of
Sexuality makes an elaborate study of the social construction of gender and sexuality. The discourses of sexuality are governed by the power politics in human relationships. He criticises Lacanian attempt to consider culturally marginal form of sexuality as culturally unintelligible. Instead, he suggests dismantling of the categories of sex and power regime of sexuality.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out that a radical incoherence in the form of ‘universalising’ notions of sexuality has affected the methodology of Western sexological formulations. She maintains an anti-homophobic attitude in questioning the heterosexual normativity in identity formulations.

Judith Butler stresses on the theory of gender performativity in order to dismantle the cultural construction of gender. She traces the importance of repetition in performativity that determines gender subjectivity.

Monique Wittig is of the view that the category of sex is neither invariant nor natural:

Sex is taken as an ‘immediate given’, ‘a sensible given’, ‘physical feature’, belonging to a natural order. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, ‘an imaginary formation’ which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as others but marked by a social system) through the network of relationships, in which they are perceived. (“The Straight Mind” 105)

Wittig argues that the category of sex is “a specifically political use of the category of nature that serves the purposes of reproductive sexuality” (Butler 153).
The division of human bodies into male and female sexes is made only to lend a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality. She also claims that “a lesbian is not a woman” (153). A woman exists as a binary and oppositional relation to a man in the context of heterosexuality. Since a lesbian denies heterosexuality, it is not possible to define a lesbian in terms of this oppositional relation. A lesbian transcends the heterosexual matrix, since she is beyond the categories of sex. Instead of subverting the system Wittig suggests to overthrow it. In her work *The Lesbian Body* she gives a textual demonstration to overthrow the category of sex through a destruction and fragmentation of sexed body. In her essay “Paradigm” she suggests the possibility of a cultural field of many sexes in order to overthrow the system of binary sex. She says that, “For us there are, not one or two sexes, but many, as many as there are individuals” (“Paradigm” 119). But Wittig’s radical departure from heterosexuality, by becoming lesbian or gay, becomes politically problematic. As Butler puts it: “Wittig’s lesbian-feminism appears to cut off any kind of solidarity with heterosexual women and implicitly to assume that lesbianism is the logically or politically necessary consequence of feminism” (173).

Donald E. Hall takes a radical stand in stating that “readiness for experience” is what characterises queer theory (37). He speaks about the need to have a sexual narratology: “sexual radicals, queer theorists, and otherwise audacious iconoclasts should continue to test and critically probe narratives of instrumentality, even with and through the experience of failure, and that ‘queer’ self identity...should involve an ongoing project of enthusiastically politicised hermeneutic questioning” (9).

Similarly, Michael Warner observes that “heteronormativity can be overcome only by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world” (xvi).
It was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the gradual growth of queer theory, that the hierarchies of gender identities were challenged to pave way for heterogeneity of sexual identities. During the Victorian period, discourses on homosexuality could not find a place neither in the philosophical spheres nor in the social life. Although Sigmund Freud has made valid deliberations on sexuality, gender and alternative sexual identities remained an unresolved ‘trouble’. Homosexuality was perceived by the Victorians as a perversion to be suppressed. No wonder Wilde was left with no option than conceal his same-sex interest. Suppression of this libidinal drive resulted in the literary expression of repressed desires in the form of same-sex pairs in his works.

Pearson feels that Wilde’s homosexual strain is the result of his attraction to the idea of doing something outrageous than desirous of fulfilling his nature. He might have turned to it because he was allured by the concept of ‘sin’; it seemed to him daring, peculiar, decadent, perverse, rebellious and even aristocratic (262). In Wilde’s transgressive aesthetic the reverse discourse works through a different strategy, that is “to destabilize, subvert, and displace the binary through inversion, or a turning back upon, a transgressive reinscription within, the dominant, to destroy at base the categories responsible for one’s exclusion” (Dollimore 226). Dollimore makes a contrast between Andre Gide’s transgressive ethic and Wilde’s transgressive aesthetic. Gide is explicit about his homosexuality but Wilde conceals his deviant desires under his principles of aestheticism. “… Deviant desire is legitimated in terms of culture’s opposite, nature, or, in a different but related move, in terms of something which is pre-cultural and so always more than cultural” (15). He also observes that: “Wilde’s transgressive aesthetic, along with the lost histories of perversion and, through them, a reconsideration of Freud and Foucault and the paradoxical cultural
centrality of homosexuality, facilitate the development for cultural politics of the concept of the perverse dynamic” (33).

Of the different methods Wilde has devised to liberate the Unconscious, explicit same-sex pairing is the most striking. He has overtly dealt with this theme in his work *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In some other works he has subtly used a pro-male love discourse which is based on an idealised devoted friendship model between men. This can be traced in many of his works including short stories, plays and novel. He generally presents in his plot, two people of the same sex, most often men (owing to his own sex) who are emotionally bound to each other. Their friendship displays so much of warmth and intimacy that it almost borders on homosexuality, thus giving subtle homosexual undertones to the story. He nowhere makes a claim that his characters are homosexuals; instead presents them as two closely associated friends. Wilde has employed same-sex pairs in such a way that “its effects are dependent on an uncontrolled return of the repressed, thus privileging the unconscious of the author over his conscious mastery” (Wright 38). Dollimore gives a vivid picture of the social response towards Wilde’s attempt to give expression to homosexual drives:

Notoriously, some of Wilde’s contemporaries were not disarmed by his playfulness. In the first of the three trials involving Wilde in 1895, he was cross examined on his Phrases and Philosophies, the implication of opposing counsel being that its elegant binary inversions, along with *Dorian Gray*, were calculated to subvert morality and encourage unnatural vice. (67)

The responses towards Wilde’s attempt to give expression to his alternative sexual orientation through the depiction of same-sex pairs in his works reflect the
social fear of the connection between sexual perversion and intellectual and moral subversion. Dollimore describes the fate of Wilde thus:

After he had been found guilty of homosexual offences and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment with hard labour, the press subjected Oscar Wilde to vicious attack... the London *Evening News* accused him of trying to subvert the ‘wholesome, manly, simple ideals of English life’, and connected his sexual perversion with intellectual and moral subversion. He possessed as the Daily Telegraph conceded on 27 May 1895, ‘considerable intellectual powers’. It advocates a ‘reaction towards simpler ideas...for fear of national contamination and decay’. (240)

These descriptions of Wilde and his art echo a fear of degeneration as envisaged by writers and intellectuals of the time. Dennis Altman’s remark on homophobia seems historically correct in this context: “The original purpose of characterisation of homosexuals as people apart was to project the homosexuality in everyone onto a defined minority as a way of externalizing forbidden desires and reassuring the majority that homosexuality is something that happens to other people” (72).

Hesketh Pearson observes that Wilde’s novel has caused him a great deal of harm. People whether they read the novel or not, hated the author.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* had given such a shocking jerk to Victorian moral expectations from literature that *The Daily Chronicle* found its atmosphere ‘heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction’. The reviewer of *St. James’ Gazette* refrained
from analysing the novel because he did not want to ‘advertise the
developments of an esoteric prurience. (Ghosal 43)

Pearson shows how passages from Wilde’s novel were used as evidences
against him in Queensberry case. He says, “there are no more instructive passages in
forensic records than his cross-examination on the subject by Edward Carson, a
contemporary of his at Trinity College, Dublin” (155). Extracts from Carson’s cross-
examination clearly portray the social attitude towards the portrayal of ‘deviant’
sexual drives in literary works.

When Carson tries to interpret *Dorian Gray* as a perverted novel, Wilde
observes that such an interpretation “could only be to brutes and illiterates. The views
of Philistines on art are incalculably stupid” (155). Carson even points out that the
description of the feeling of one man towards another in the novel could be an
improper feeling. To which Wilde retorts: “I think it is the most perfect description of
what an artist would feel on meeting a beautiful personality that was in some way
necessary to his art and his life...” (156). When Carson asks Wilde whether he has
adored any young man madly, Wilde answers thus:

    Wilde: No; not madly. I prefer love; that is a higher form...

    Carson: Then you never had that feeling?

    Wilde: No; the whole idea was borrowed from Shakespeare, I regret to
say; yes, from Shakespeare’s sonnets.

    Carson: I believe you have written an article to show that
Shakespeare’s sonnets were suggestive of unnatural vice?
Wilde: On the contrary, I have written an article to show that they are not. I object to such a perversion being put upon Shakespeare...

Carson: These unfortunate people that have not the high understanding that you have, might put it down to something wrong?

Wilde: Undoubtedly; to any point they chose, I am not concerned with the ignorance of others. I have a great passion to civilise the community. (157-158)

Works of Wilde in which explicit same-sex pairing can be traced are The Picture of Dorian Gray, “The Model Millionaire”, “The Sphinx without a Secret”, “The Devoted Friend”, “The Star Child”, “The Happy Prince”, The Importance of Being Earnest, Vera, The Duchess of Padua and a few poems. Some of the representations in these works were even cited as evidences to Wilde’s homoerotic tendencies during his indictment for the same.

During the trial Carson tried to explain Wilde’s sexual behaviour by taking clues mainly from The Picture of Dorian Gray. It is a controversial novel with subtle as well as explicit homosexual elements in it. The novel does not just show how the writer’s fantasies get projected in his work, but pin points the social attitude towards the expression of such libidinal desires in literature. The novel articulates an artist’s admiration for his Muse, a young boy. Although Wilde describes this admiration as merely an expression of aestheticism, it can very well be interpreted as homoerotic. The novel features three explicit same-sex pairs. Dorian with his extreme physical charms epitomises sexual desirability. It is Dorian’s association with his friends that constitutes different male-male bonding. Wilde does not speak about the nature of Dorian’s ‘sin’, but offers innumerable possibilities of interpretation. As James Joyce
puts it, “Everyone, he (Wilde) wrote, sees his own sin in Dorian Gray. What Dorian Gray’s sin was no one says and no one knows. Anyone who recognizes it has committed it” (59).

The first same-sex pair is Dorian and Basil. Basil’s admiration for Dorian is more personal than artistic. Dorian says:

I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray. Then – but I don’t know how to explain it to you – something seemed to tell me that I am on the verge of a terrible crisis in my life. I had a strange feeling that Fate had in store for me exquisite joys and exquisite sorrows. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 13)

The language here is very suggestive, and the homoerotic feelings of the painter find expression when he describes his passionate affection for Dorian:

Our eyes met again. It was reckless of me, but I asked Lady Brandon to introduce me to him. Perhaps it was not so reckless, after all. It was simply inevitable. We would have spoken to each other without any introduction. I am sure of that. Dorian told me so afterwards. He, too, felt that we were destined to know each other. (14)

This suggests an intimate connection between Dorian and Basil. The interaction between them is not in a manner which men are expected to behave normally in a social situation. The situation presents two men sharing looks and glances, noticing the physical proximity and experiencing a strange feeling for one another. Basil showers praises on Dorian which looks flirtatious. “But he is much more to me than a model or a sitter...his beauty is such that Art cannot express it”
He goes on to say that, “I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before” (17). Dorian seems to share the same feeling towards Basil, from which it can be assumed that what is shared between them is not a painter’s artistic interest in the subject, but a man’s sexual attraction towards another man. It is further more interesting to note that Basil prefers to keep his secret within himself. He regrets for having revealed Dorian’s name to Henry: “I didn’t intent to tell it to you... I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvellous to us” (10). Basil declares his life to be embedded in secrecy after meeting Dorian. He also admits that the painting of Dorian bears the secret of his own soul (12).

Basil is very much under the magic spell of Dorian’s beauty that he says, “Every day. I couldn’t be happy if I didn’t see him every day. He is absolutely necessary to me” (16). He even pleads with Henry not to come between himself and Dorian: “The world is wide, and has many marvellous people in it. Don’t take away from me the one person who gives to my art whatever charm it possesses; my life as an artist depends on him” (21). When Dorian is too much attracted to the beauty of the portrait, he fears of losing his own beauty. Basil’s reaction when he sees Dorian in tears looks like a lover’s affection for his beloved: “Hallward turned pale, and caught his hand. ‘Dorian! Dorian!’ He cried, ‘don't talk like that. I have never had such a friend as you, and shall never have such another’” (34).

Like a possessive and jealous lover Basil gets irritated and dejected when Henry builds a relationship with Dorian. Dorian leaves with Henry from Basil’s apartment, and “as the door closed behind them, the painter flung himself down on a sofa, and a look of pain came into his face” (39). Dorian moves away from Basil once his friendship with Henry grows. He completely ignores Basil when he is in
possession of his portrait and seeks new possibilities of pleasures. He exclaims: “I have not laid eyes on him (Basil) for a week. It is rather horrid of me, as he has sent me my portrait in the most wonderful frame, specially designed by himself...” (67).

When Dorian announces his intention to marry Sybil, Basil is taken aback and fears that he will lose Dorian forever:

A strange sense of loss came over him. He felt that Dorian Gray would never again be to him all that he had been in the past. Life had come between them... His eyes darkened, and the crowded, flaring streets became blurred to his eyes. When the cab drew up at the theatre, it seemed to him that he had grown years older (94).

Dorian’s life of passion distances him from Basil, but when he meets Basil after a long while he confesses his sincere affection for him:

You have not realised how I have developed. I was a school boy when you knew me. I am a man now. I have new passions, new thoughts, new ideas. I am different, but you must not like me less. I am changed, but you must always be my friend. Of course I am very fond of Henry. But I know that you are better than he is. You are not stronger – you are too much afraid of life – but you are better. And how happy we used to be together! Don’t leave me, Basil, and don’t quarrel with me. I am what I am. There is nothing more to be said. (128-29)

Basil reciprocates his love and admiration for this incarnation of beauty.

Explicit homoerotic elements can be traced in Basil’s description of his love for Dorian:
Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain and power by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you. I grew jealous of everyone to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you... of course I never let you know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not have understood it. I hardly understood it myself. I only knew that I had seen perfection face to face, and that the world had become wonderful to my eyes – too wonderful, perhaps, for in such mad worships there is peril, the peril of losing them, no less than the peril of keeping them. (132)

The very expression of love and admiration in the above passage is something that is beyond the compass and acceptability of a heteronormative society, especially in the background of Victorian ethos. Basil’s dilemma is artfully captured in the ‘peril’ of both losing and keeping the object of his admiration. The reference to “us artists” resonates with autobiographical implications, simultaneously making an attempt to conceal his ‘love’ behind the mask of his ‘art’. Moreover, these lines prefigure Wilde’s words to Lord Alfred Douglas via his letters: “I can’t live without you” (Letters 358) and “you are the atmosphere of beauty through which I see life. You are the incarnation of all lovely things...I think of you day and night” (Letters 363). Dorian is aware of Basil’s selfless love for him which is different from Henry’s love that has more poisonous influence on him.

Basil would have helped him to resist Lord Henry’s influence, and the still more poisonous influences that came from his own temperament.
The love that he bore him – for it was really love – had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. (138)

After having disclosed his secret before Basil, Dorian kills Basil leaving no traces of his body. The inevitable doom falls on Basil who was lured by the charms of alternative sexual orientation. Basil’s death can be explained on the basis of Augustine’s observation of death as the inevitable result of deviant desires:

“Augustine regarded sin as intrinsic to human nature and always bound up with perversion, transgression, and death: the perversion of free will leads a man to transgress, and it is transgression which brings death into the world” (Dollimore 131). Death has entered the world through deviant desires.

Richard Ellman in his essay, “Overtures to Salome” after having discussed in detail about Wilde’s adoration for Ruskin, draws parallel between Dorian’s relationship with Basil and Wilde’s admiration for Ruskin. Ellman observes that:

The painter Hallward has little of Ruskin at the beginning, but gradually he moves closer to that pillar of aesthetic taste and moral judgement upon which Wilde leaned, and after Hallward is safely murdered, Dorian with sudden fondness recollects a trip they had made to Venice together, when his friend was captivated by Tintoretto’s art. Ruskin was of course the English discoverer and champion of Tintoretto, so that the allusion is specific. (88)

The second pair is Dorian and Henry. Henry is also attracted to the extreme physical charm of Dorian. He not only praises Dorian but makes him aware of
youthful desires and worldly pleasures, “You, Mr. Gray, you yourself, with your rose-red youth and your rose-white boyhood, you have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day dreams and sleeping dreams whose memory might stain your cheeks with shame” (The Picture of Dorian Gray 26). He allures Dorian in such a way that Dorian gets very much influenced by the fresh knowledge of secret pleasures. “The few words that Basil’s friend had said to him – words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with wilful paradox in them – had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses” (26).

Dorian ponders on the new knowledge that frightens him. Henry speaks about the absurd moral codes of the society that hinder men like Henry to live life fully and openly according to their wishes. Dorian is very much fascinated by Henry’s words which cast a spell on him. He says, “Yes Harry, I believe that is true. I cannot help telling you things. You have a curious influence over me” (63). Henry subtly suggests to him the possible same-sex relationships other than conventional heterosexual marriages: “As for marriage, of course that would be silly, but there are other and more interesting bonds between men and women. I will certainly encourage them” (88).

Dollimore points out Richard Ellmann’s suggestion that “the ‘monotonous’ association between Wilde and Douglas was rather like that in Dorian Gray between Dorian and Lord Henry Wotton – ‘in effect Wilde spiritually seduced Gide’” (5).

Dorian is torn between two different ways of life. On the one side there is the hetero-normative pull and on the other side there is instinctual homosexual drive:
There were moments, later on, when it had the wild passion of violins.
You know how a voice can stir one. Your voice and the voice of Sybil Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don’t know which to follow. (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 62)

When Dorian moves closer to Sybil Vane he is distanced from Henry’s strange ideas of life. It could be that the hetero-normative principles frighten him of the ‘dangerous’ homosexual drives. Dorian says, “I believe in this girl” and “Harry is so cynical, he terrifies me” (96). It is obvious that he is caught between two extremes – his fear the society and the call of his body. But when Dorian loses his interest in Sybil, he turns closer and closer to the ‘sinful’ relationships.

Dorian finds solace in Henry’s presence. Henry in fact triggers those feelings in Dorian which he himself is afraid of. Slowly their friendship grows more and more intimate. He falls for Henry’s temptation and decides to lead the paths of pleasures.

He felt that time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him – life, and his own infinite curiosity about life. Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins – he was to have all these things. The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that was all. (122-23)

When Dorian decides to put an end to his secret life, Henry discourages him saying that, “There is no use your telling me that you are going to be good...Pray, don’t change” (240). Dorian expresses his desire to go back to a normal life succumbing to the cultural norms of society: “‘Culture and corruption’, echoed
Dorian. ‘I have known something of both. It seems terrible to me now that they should ever be found together. For I have a new ideal, Harry. I am going to alter. I think I have altered’” (240).

Henry’s broken family life also comes to discussion at this crucial period of time. His failure in keeping relationship with his wife, Victoria, echoes the failure of a heterosexual relationship. Marriage is a mere habit for him:

Poor Victoria! I was very fond of her. The house is rather lonely without her. Of course married life is merely a habit, a bad habit. But then one regrets the loss even of one’s worst habits. Perhaps one regrets them the most. They are such an essential part of one’s personality. (243)

Henry persuades Dorian to pursue life of pleasures disregarding Dorian’s wish to change his habits. He asks Dorian not to spoil his life by renunciations. But Dorian is determined to change. He says, “Life has been exquisite...but I am not going to have the same life, Harry. And you must not say these extravagant things to me” (248). Dorian tries to change, but in vain. Suspecting his soul being so corrupted, he finds no escape. Having failed to regain his ‘pure’ life Dorian takes his own life.

The third pair is Dorian and Alan Campbell. Campbell represents all those men with whom Dorian is leading a life of debauchery and immorality. It is said that when Dorian is at his great house in Nottinghamshire he entertains fashionable young men of his rank who are his chief companions. Basil expresses his sincere concern for Dorian’s increasingly bad reputation, which gives a clear picture of Dorian’s secret life:
Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England, with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable. What about Adrian Singleton, and his dreadful end? I met his father yesterday in St. James Street. He seemed broken with shame and sorrow. What about the young Duke of Perth? What sort of life has he got now? What gentleman would associate with him? (173)

This gives an elaborate account of what kind of relationships Dorian maintained with numerous young men in the town. His shameful interactions with these men ruined their good names in the process. It is reported that people of greater ranks, who were worried about their reputation ignored Dorian’s company.

Curious stories became current about him after he had passed his twenty-fifth year...His extraordinary absence became notorious, and, when he used to reappear again in society, men would whisper to each other in corners, or pass him with a sneer, or look at him with cold searching eyes, as though they were determined to discover his secret. (163)

Dorian’s evil influence on other men and the way he adversely affects their reputation remind us of Dollimore’s recollection of Andre Gide’s fear of getting associated with Wilde:

In Blidah, Algeria in January 1895 Andre Gide is in the hall of a hotel, about to leave. His glance falls on the slate which announces the names of new guests: ‘suddenly my heart gave a leap; the two last names...
were those of Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas’ (Gide, If It Die, 271). Acting on his first impulse, Gide ‘erases’ his own name from the slate and leaves for the station. (3)

It also reminds us of Jean Delay’s biography of Andre Gide where he describes Wilde’s evil influence on Gide. He says that Gide’s belief that his homosexuality was the corner-stone of his personality was ‘fallacious’ and that, had he not met Wilde, while there is no reason to think he would not have become homosexual, nevertheless he would probably not have adopted ‘the attitude of the arrogant pederast, determined to assert his anomaly as a norm’ (437).

More instances from the novel point to the homosexual relationships among other characters. Dorian seeks Campbell’s help to dispose Basil’s body. They were good friends once, “almost inseparable, indeed” (The Picture of Dorian Gray 190). They were always found together, and their intimacy lasted for eighteen months. Then, they got separated for some unknown reason. “Whether or not a quarrel had taken place between them no one ever knew. But suddenly people remarked that they scarcely spoke when they met...” (190). It could be moral conscience that drove him away from Dorian. He stopped talking to him.

Campbell at first refuses to help Dorian because he does not want to become a part of Dorian’s crime. He says, “I entirely decline to be mixed up in your life. Keep your horrible secret to yourself. They don’t interest me anymore” (193). Campbell keeps himself away from Dorian and tells him, “Don’t speak of those days, Dorian. They are dead” (195). Finally Dorian resorts to blackmail for Campbell’s help. Dorian scribbles something on the paper and hands it over to Campbell. The content of the
letter is left to the reader’s imagination. This again opens up the possible homosexual undertones in the text.

The secrecy of shame is a feature of homosexual community since men with alternative sexual orientation live in fear of being exposed of their sexuality. Nunokawa observes “the threat of blackmail” as reality for homosexual men during Wilde’s time (183). Moreover, Blackmailer’s Charter is a name of the law that made Sodomy punishable during Wilde’s time (Norton 2000).

When Campbell opens the letter and reads it his face becomes “ghastly pale”, “horrible sense of sickness came over him” and he “felt as if his heart was beating itself to death in some empty hollow” (The Picture of Dorian Gray 195). Campbell shivered and a groan broke from him. He felt as if “the disgrace with which he was threatened had already come upon him” (196). In tears Campbell agrees to help Dorian. Once it is done he leaves saying, “Let us never see each other again” (200). Later in the novel readers are informed of Campbell’s death: “Alan Campbell had shot himself one night in his laboratory, but had not revealed the secret that he had been forced to know” (252-53). Campbell’s death underscores the inevitable doom of homosexuality. His death only points to the intense homophobia prevalent among the people during Wilde’s time and is also indicative of the social suppression of homosexuality.

The name of the protagonist, ‘Dorian’ is highly significant. It is not a common English name. Wilde seems to have made a careful selection of name for his protagonist. ‘Dorians’ were a tribe who inhabited Greece:

Those scholars who prefer the historical approach are convinced that pederasty originates in Dorian initiation rites. The Dorians were the
last tribe to migrate to Greece, and they are usually described as real
he-men with a masculine culture. According to the proponents of this
theory, pederasty came to being on the Dorian island in Crete, where
grown-up men used to kidnap (consenting) adolescents. (Dolen)

Undoubtedly, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a work much discussed for its
treatment of homosexuality as an important theme. The controversies it has raised
during the time of Wilde himself, as evident from Carson’s attempt to dissect the
novel for its erotic content, points out the crude social stigma attached to
homosexuality during the Victorian period. Wilde’s short story “The Model
Millionaire” resembles *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the way it associates the same-
sex pair with an artist’s aesthetic attraction towards his object. As in *The Picture of
Dorian Gray* here also Wilde’s subjective participation in his character’s life as an
artist cannot be ruled out.

“The Model Millionaire” is basically a sharp criticism on society’s
materialism. Like many of his stories here also a simple moral framework is adopted
in which good and evil are rigidly and unambiguously defined. Hence, the plot has a
suitable ending where the virtue is properly rewarded. The story is about a young
man, Hughie who is handsome, but unlucky as far as financial matters are concerned,
or to borrow Wilde’s own words, “he was a delightful, ineffectual young man with a
perfect profile and no profession” (“The Model Millionaire” 235). He has tried his
luck in several different businesses, but in vain. He is in love with Laura Merton. But
her father Colonel Merton does not want Hughie to marry his daughter unless and
until Hughie earns ten thousand pounds of his own. One day Hughie happens to see
his artist friend Alan Trevor making a portrait of an old beggar. Although he does not
have much money with him Hughie is moved to pity by the pathetic sight of the
elderly beggar and gives him the coin that he has in his pocket. The young man’s act of kindness brings him unexpected reward – a check of ten thousand pounds. Baron Hausberg, one of the wealthiest men in Europe, who was the beggar model, presents him with the amount as a wedding gift.

The male-male bonding in the story takes the form of a painter’s artistic interest in a ‘thing of beauty’. It is evidently seen in the friendship between Hughie and Trevor. Hughie is presented as a handsome, charming and popular young man.

Poor Hughie! Intellectually, we must admit, he was not of much importance. He never said a brilliant or an ill-natured thing in life. But then he was wonderfully good looking, with crisp brown hair, his clear cut profile, and his grey eyes. He was as popular with men as he was with women, and he had every accomplishment except that of making money. ("The Model Millionaire" 235)

Trevor is a gifted and successful painter. It is stated in the story itself that Trevor is attracted towards Hughie’s personal charms. “He had been very much attracted by Hughie at first, it must be acknowledged, entirely on account of his personal charms” (236). Trevor believes that painters like him should know “people who are an artistic pleasure to look at and an intellectual repose to talk to” (236). No wonder Hughie the handsome young man who was popular among men develops a strong friendship with Trevor who has a deep admiration for things of beauty. There was such a strong bonding between them that Hughie is given a permanent space in Trevor’s life. “However, after he (Trevor) got to know Hughie better, he liked him quite as much for his bright buoyant spirits and his generous reckless nature, and had given him the permanent entree to his studio” (236).
Pearson makes an interesting observation about Wilde’s intimacy with the painters of his time: “In the year 1884 Wilde used to often drop in at the studio of a painter, Basil Ward, one of whose sitters was a young man of exceptional beauty. Incidentally, Wilde must have been a godsend to many painters of the time, as his conversation kept their sitters perpetually entertained” (149).

Moreover, the friendship between Hughie and Trevor reminds us of the controversial relationship between Douglas and Wilde himself. Just like Trevor the artist Wilde was attracted by Douglas’ personal charms.

‘Cigarette’ is an important image used in the story that can be seen as a phallic symbol. It is mentioned thrice in the story as part of the exchanges between Hughie and Trevor. The image of cigarette appears whenever the two meet. In psychoanalytic terms “there is a common identification of the male sexual organ with upright objects, though it is sometimes labelled as vulgar Freudian symbolism” (Wright 25).

When Hughie comes to meet Trevor at his studio Trevor is busy, making the portrait of the old beggar. Trevor enjoys Hughie’s presence in his studio and he does not want Hughie to leave though it will give him a chance to concentrate more on his work. Instead he asks Hughie to smoke a cigarette and wait for him. “... But you mustn’t chatter; I’m very busy. Smoke a cigarette and keep quite” (“The Model Millionaire” 237).

Again in the story, the same night when Hughie strolls into the Palette Club at about eleven o’clock Trevor is sitting by himself in the smoking room drinking hock and seltzer. Hughie lights a cigarette when he joins Trevor in the smoking room. “‘Well, Alan, did you get the picture finished all right?’ he (Hughie) said as he lit his cigarette” (237). Still later, Hughie gets angry when he learns from Trevor that he has
revealed all his private affairs to Baron Hausberg. Hughie is so desperately sad that he decides to leave the club at once. But Trevor wants Hughie to stay back and asks him to have another cigarette: "Nonsense! It reflects the highest credit on your philanthropic spirit, Hughie. And don’t run away. Have another cigarette, and you can talk about Laura as much as you like" (239). The recurrent references to the cigarettes during their meetings only accentuate the ‘unexpressed’ feelings between them.

Hesketh Pearson has interestingly observed cigarette smoking as one of Wilde’s indulgences. He points out one of Wilde’s aphorisms to support his observation: “A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want” (172). Though the story is primarily about Hughie and his love for Laura, Wilde has beautifully painted a male-male bonding between Hughie and Trevor with the undertones indicating more than just friendship.

Like The Picture of Dorian Gray, in The Importance of Being Earnest also there are explicit references to alternative sexual orientation. The word ‘Bunburying’ from the play gained general acceptance as a code word for gay relationship. The Importance of Being Earnest is Wilde’s funniest and most attractive play which tries to rediscover lost innocence. One of the main characters in the play is Jack Worthing who lives a double life. In the country he is the respectable Jack Worthing, a very serious and upright young man, and is in charge of the upbringing of Cecily Cardew. He makes frequent trips to London, where he assumes the name of Earnest Worthing and pursues a life of pleasure. In London he has a friend Algernon Moncrieff (Algy) who lives in a luxurious flat. It turns out that Algy too leads a double life. He has invented a friend called Bunbury who resides in the country and is a permanent
invalid. Because of Bunbury, Algy is able to go on a pleasure trip to the country whenever he wishes.

The same-sex pairing in the play can be traced in three different steps. Initially, Wilde establishes the unconventional nature of his heroes, Jack and Algernon, both having invented alter egos to facilitate their social mobility and pleasure fulfilment. Secondly, he portrays their friendship as a product of the secret life they lead. Their meeting becomes possible because of their conjured up imaginary alter egos. Finally, the intimacy of their relationship earns them the status of explicit same-sex pair.

Wilde establishes Algy’s unconventional or ‘anti-moral’ attitude at the very outset of the play. By calling marriage as something “so demoralising” (The Importance of Being Earnest 363) he questions the Victorian notion of sanctity of the institution of marriage. Jack’s attitude towards life is also brought to light when he says it is pleasure that brings him to town. Algy goes on to observe that it is quite romantic to be in love, but the excitement ends when one makes a definite proposal (365). Hence he feels it is better to be in love than to get married and take up familial responsibilities. He even points out that “divorces are made in heaven” (365).

Similarly, Jack leads a double life to pursue pleasure. He is Earnest in the town and Jack in the country. The possibilities of Jack having a secret life have actually brought Algy closer to him. Algy has suspected of Jack having a double life. He says: “I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist, and I am quite sure of it now” (367). Jack observes how moral values, precisely Victorian, curb one’s happiness. He says high moral tone hardly conduce to one’s health or happiness. Jack has thus invented a younger brother of the
name Earnest who lives in Albany. Similarly Algy has a fictitious friend who is an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury in order that he may be able to go down into the country whenever he chooses. Both of them have invented a secret world away from the moral constrains of society so that they can happily lead a life of pleasures uninhibited. Algy makes interesting observations on Victorian society while encouraging bunburying even after marriage. He says: “In marriage three is company and two is none” and that the happy English home has proved it (369). While justifying the act of Bunburying Algy says that it is possible to manage his roles as both a gentleman and a pleasure seeker: “My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasure in the smallest degree” (391).

After having established his characters’ unconventional attitude towards social and moral life, Wilde shows how these two men meet each other as part of their secret lives. Jack comes to the town under the pretext of meeting his brother and spends time with Algernon. Similarly, Algy manages to roam around with Jack under the pretext of meeting his invalid friend. For instance, Algy escapes from the family dinner for which Lady Bracknell invites him with the excuse of meeting Mr. Bunbury, and asks Jack to dine with him that night. He asks Jack: “...Now if I get her (Lady Bracknell) out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willi’s” (370). This shows how Algy makes use of invalid Bunbury to meet Jack. The very use of the word ‘invalid’ by Wilde is striking and the pun on the word does not go unnoticed. More than the incapacitated nature of Bunbury, it seems to suggest the very imaginary position he holds. It also indicates the attitude of the Victorian society that sought to negate such same-sex relationships.
Though Jack and Algy are best buddies both of them discourage the other having a serious relationship with a woman. Algy tells Jack “the way you (Jack) flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you” (364). He hesitates to give his consent for Jack’s marriage with Gwendolen, he being privileged to be her first cousin. Similarly Jack tries to keep all the information related to Cecily a secret from Algy. When Algy expresses his wish to meet Cecily, Jack replies that he would take good care so that Algy would never meet Cecily. Moreover, there are instances of implicit sexual overtones in certain exchanges between Jack and Algernon:

Algernon: What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

Jack: Oh no! I loathe listening

Algernon: Well, let us go to the club?

Jack: Oh no! I hate talking

Algernon: Well, might trot round to the Empire at ten?

Jack: Oh, no! I can’t bear looking at things. It is so silly

Algernon: Well, what shall we do?

Jack: Nothing.

Algernon: It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don’t mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind. (379-80)

Jack could not stand Algy’s presence in his country house where he puts on the mask of a gentleman. He exclaims “Your (Algernon) presence in my garden is utterly absurd” (392). Algy’s presence invites a clash between Jack’s secret life and
moral life. In the country he is a morally upright gentleman, but with Algy he has an entirely different attitude towards life. So Algy’s presence in his country house leads to a conflict between Jack’s Id and Superego.

Lady Bracknell acts as the society’s mouth piece when she says, “He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now that we have finally got rid of Mr. Bunbury...” (408). She hints at the necessity to put an end to the secret life of pleasures he is leading. It becomes more evident when she says, “Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or die” (371). Here again, like the death of Campbell in The Picture of Dorian Gray, the reference to the ‘living or dying’ of Bunbury by Lady Bracknell is yet again an attempt to portray the society’s desire to bury the existence of homoerotic tendencies.

Algy and Jack decide to cease the secret life together. It is only their mutual presence that makes the secret life worth living for both of them. So if one decides to put an end to it the other naturally decides the same. When Jack decides to ‘kill’ his invented brother so that he can propose to Gwendolen he advises Algy to do the same with Mr. Bunbury so that both of them will be relieved of their double life simultaneously. A change in one’s life style will disturb the other. So the change, if it happens, should happen in both their lives. This evidently suggests the strong bonding between the two men. When Jack chooses to enter into a heterosexual relationship he confesses that he would kill his imaginary brother if Gwendolen accepts his proposal. Since the institution of marriage demands high moral tones on all subjects, he would have to give up his life of pleasure after marriage. He advises Algy to do the same with his invalid friend. He warns Algy that the secret life may one day lead him to
trouble: “Jack, if you don’t take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day” (381). He feels relieved of worries when Algy too is forced to stop his secret life: “Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won’t be able to run down to the country quite as often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very good thing too” (402).

Although the strict norms of society insist on leading a morally upright life the desire to relish a life of pleasure takes shape in different forms. Jack and Algy offer moral satisfaction to the society only when their social environment forces them to, but disappears for long periods during which they give expression to their real self. Bunburying offers them the freedom of an ‘another world’ where the moral codes do not restrict them from being true to themselves. They enjoy their masked second life that takes them to the zenith of pleasures. Jack and Algy appear to be two such characters that Wilde has paired in his play so as to give expression to his own suppressed desires. They are not definitely presented as homosexuals but as two individuals who are intimately associated with each other. They seem to be perfectly content and comfortable in each other’s company. It is amusing to observe two grown up people grabbing muffins from each other and having silly fights at a crucial period of their life. Pairing of the two characters, Jack and Algy, thus acts as a device which offers the playwright a space where his unacceptable desires get sublimated into an acceptable literary image. Wilde, in the play, has thus paradoxically given expression to the ‘deviant’ sexual orientation, while satisfying the Victorian moral needs as well.

Similarly, in the short story “The Devoted Friend” there is perhaps somewhat more explicit pairing between two individuals. But unlike The Picture of Dorian Gray, here the homoerotic elements are not overtly displayed. Wilde has enjoyed,
“coupling the erotic with the ephemeral, and setting both in the immortal pantheon of art” (Bayley 7).

“The Devoted Friend” is all about the friendship between two men, Hugh, the Miller and Hans. Little Hans makes a living by selling the flowers and fruit from his beautiful garden. Hugh the wealthy Miller claims to be a good friend of little Hans. He always takes a lot of little Hans’ flowers or fruit whenever he visits him. But he never shows any concern for Hans during the difficult time of the year. Miller offers Hans his old wheelbarrow, for Hans has sold his during the winter. Miller demands more and more from Hans in return for his wheelbarrow. He tells Hans that it would be unfriendly to refuse him the flowers or the plank since he has promised him his wheelbarrow. On a stormy night Miller sends Hans to fetch the doctor to treat his injured son. Hans wanders onto the moor and drowns in a pool.

It is not so uncommon to have a faithful friend like Hans, but friends like Miller who live like parasites also do exist. Their friendship cannot be called mutual love, instead one exploits the other. Masochism, the tendency to derive sexual gratification from one’s own pain or humiliation, is often considered by psychoanalysts as a form of perversion. Freud describes it as “the most common and most significant of all the perversions” (The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works 70). Masochism is one focus of Leo Bersani’s The Freudian Body, a study which shows how perversions work. Bersani observes that an aberrational ‘part’ of sexuality called masochism, may become the ‘whole’ as a result of which there occurs a centring of what was constructed as marginal (89). For him “the marginality of sadomasochism would consist of nothing less than its isolating, even its making visible, the ontological grounds of the sexual” (41). The Miller
dominates the relationship and Hans is a deliberately passive partner who considers it his duty to be submissive. Miller never misses a chance to exploit Hans and gives him nothing in return. The most ironical part of the situation is that Hans himself is not worried about Miller’s selfishness. “Hans never troubled his head about these things” (“The Devoted Friend” 26).

The Water-rat who appears in the beginning of the story acts as the writer’s mouthpiece when he comments that “I know of nothing in the world that is either nobler or rarer than a devoted friendship” (24). In the story Wilde speaks about devoted friendship which is nobler than love, but shows how it ruins one’s life. Prophetically enough, it comes true in the life of author himself.

Hesketh Pearson’s description of Wilde’s relationship with Douglas in his work The Life of Oscar Wilde clearly reminds us of Hans’ friendship with Miller. Miller is both a friend and an enemy to Hans. Hans is very much devoted to Miller, but Miller ruins Hans’ life. Similarly, it is Wilde’s affection and devotion to Douglas that ruins his life.

For nearly three years – so runs his story – Douglas had been by his side except at rare intervals. Throughout that period he had kept the young man in luxury, buying him whatever he wanted, and even paying his gambling debts... Douglas had ruined him both ethically and artistically...Several times a year Wilde had ended their friendship, only renewing it after tearful entreaties, pitiful appeals, and threats of suicide...he (Douglas) had gambled with Wilde’s life as he had gambled with his money...he was in reality Wilde’s enemy...and he had completed Wilde’s ruin in less than three years. (Pearson 324-5)
Like Wilde who keeps Douglas in luxury and pays his gambling debts, Hans also offers all his flowers to Miller and even gives his plank which leaves him in trouble. Wilde could not cease his friendship with Douglas though it destroyed his artistic career. Similarly, Hans tries to say no to Miller on several occasions, but in vain. Miller uses the wheelbarrow as a means to exploit Hans. The devoted friendship, in fact ruins both the lives of Hans and Wilde. Even Wilde’s relationship with his first male lover, Robert Ross can be said to have ruined his life. “He (Robert Ross) himself was Wilde’s first male lover and so could be seen to have set Wilde on the path which led to his humiliation and imprisonment for the practice of homosexuality” (Varty 5).

The same-sex pairings in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and “The Model Millionaire” are very much explicit where the characters express their attraction towards their male pair through their words and deeds, where as in the story “The Star Child” the same-sex pairing takes a different form. Instead of the characters who try to form an intimate relationship with their pairs, here there are only subtle references to their intimacy which only a critical eye can decipher. Wilde has “preferred to leave his audience to do the work of drawing their own conclusions for themselves” (Bayley 7).

“The Star Child” is a moral fable that teaches the value of goodness and virtue. The title character, the Star child is found by two woodcutters in an awful storm. One among them brings him up with his own children. But the Star child who is extremely handsome believes that he is superior to others, and becomes arrogant and cruel. Once, his real mother, a beggar woman, comes to his village, but he denies her and mocks her for ugliness. As a result he becomes ugly with the face like a toad and skin like an adder. He realises his mistake and goes in search of his mother. After three years he reaches a city gate where the guards sell him as a slave to a magician, who

...
uses him to get three pieces of gold. The Star child fetches the gold but gives them to a leper who begs for it, for which he is mercilessly beaten up by the magician. Finally it is disclosed that the beggar woman and the leper are his mother and father, and they are the queen and king of that city.

The pairing occurs in the very beginning of the story. Instead of a woodcutter getting an abandoned baby from the woods, Wilde has used a pair of woodcutters. Though the number of woodcutters makes no remarkable change in the story Wilde seems to have preferred a pair of woodcutters. The story begins with these two woodcutters making their way home through a pine forest in a deadly winter. The description of the weather is highly ambivalent. A paradoxical situation is created by addressing the nature as both “dead earth laid out in her white shroud” and “the earth in her bridal dress” (“The Star Child” 150). It gives a ‘romantic view of the situation’ where they make merry amidst their pathetic plights.

The woodcutters are good companions who share their days of happiness and destitution. Poverty caused by the deadly winter has made them equally miserable and they sympathise with each other. Slowly one seems to dominate the relationship and the other acts like a submissive partner with maternal instincts. This happens when they discover the baby in the forest. One of them thinks of leaving the child in the forest itself and to get rid of this unexpected burden. But the other woodcutter rejects this idea and is kind enough to take the baby home. He behaves like an affectionate mother who showers unconditional love on her children. In the preface to Gender Trouble Butler has referred to this tendency among the butch and femme lesbians/gay to play the role of ‘dads’ and ‘moms’ respectively (Preface 1999 xii). The woodcutter’s wife is at first reluctant to receive the child. She accepts the child only when he convinces her.
It looks quite accidental that the product of the woodcutters’ companionship is a baby. They went to the forest together and came back with a baby. This boy, the star child, later becomes a boy of beauty and Narcissistic pride. Though seemingly two unimportant characters, the woodcutters acquire a prominent meaning in the way they are paired. The writer has spared not many words to describe and develop these characters. But the description of nature and weather and the subtle references to the woodcutters’ relationship widen the dimensions of interpretation.

“The Sphinx without a Secret” is another story like “The Star Child” where the prime focus is on the title character, but the relationship between the narrator and Lord Murchison, though not explicitly homoerotic, offers homosexual connotations.

“The Sphinx without a Secret” is centred on the relationship between Lord Murchison and Lady Alroy. The narrator meets his friend Lord Murchison in a cafe after a long while. Murchison dines with the narrator and tells him the reason of his sorrow. He was in love with a widow named, Lady Alroy and wanted to marry her. One day Murchison happened to see her enter a lodging house, with veiled face. When he asked her about it she denied the fact. She looked like a woman with a secret; and he was frustrated by the mystery which surrounded her. He was unwilling to believe that she does not have any secret. So he broke up their relationship and left the country. Later he read in the newspaper that she died after catching a chill. He also learned from the land lady of the lodging house that lady Alroy was a woman without a secret.

The pairing occurs between the narrator and Lord Murchison. Though the story is primarily about the title character, the sphinx without a secret, she is presented as an object of discussion for the narrator and Murchison. The narrator describes the
nature of his friendship with Murchison in the very beginning of the story. He says he was attracted to Murchison because he was handsome and frank.

We had not met since we had been at college together, nearly ten years before, so I was delighted to come across him again, and we shook hands warmly. At Oxford we had been great friends. I had liked him immensely; he was so handsome, so high-spirited, and so honourable. We used to say of him that he would be the best of fellows, if he did not always speak truth, but I think we really admired him all the more for his frankness. (“The Sphinx without a Secret” 200)

They were meeting after a long while. Murchison looked upset and narrator easily guessed the reason for his anxiety as ‘woman’: “He looked anxious and puzzled, and seemed to be in doubt about something...I concluded that it was a woman, and asked him if he was married yet” (200). The narrator very well knows Murchison’s discomfort with women and concludes it to be the reason for his tension. Murchison’s uneasiness with women and the narrator’s ability to read his friend’s mind give a different shade of colour to their friendship. They are quite comfortable with each other and enjoy their mutual presence. Murchison chooses the narrator as a companion to discuss his problem. To open up his heart Murchison takes him away from the crowded city so that they can sit and chat without much disturbances. As the narration progresses one gets the picture of their intimate friendship.

In the story ‘marriage’ does not actually take place. Murchison loves Lady Alroy and wants to propose to her. He is infatuated by her beauty but the mystery around her troubles and maddens him. He withdraws from the marriage because he suspects that she is involved in some secret. He wonders why chance has put him in
its track (203). Perhaps, the unconscious has played a role in deciding his fate. His thoughts seem to have been controlled by his unconscious drive to follow his alternative sexual orientation that he himself finds out a reason to revoke the marriage with Lady Alroy. Final revelation of Lady Alroy as a sphinx without any secret strengthens the argument that the cancellation of marriage was actually a play of the unconscious. It is his unconscious wish to withdraw from the marriage. Consequently he digs out a reason for not marrying Alroy, though he was much fascinated by her.

Another important feature of the story is the death of the title character. Death of Lady Alroy erases the heterosexual possibilities in the life of Murchison. It binds him closer to the narrator, thus strengthening the intimacy of their friendship. The friendship between Murchison and narrator seems to be as interesting in the story as the Sphinx without a secret. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines the word ‘sphinx’ as “an enigmatic or mysterious person.” In the context of this definition, the title becomes an antithetical statement or an oxymoron of sorts. The sphinx without her secret is definitely shorn off her mystery. The title thus makes a guarded statement that the ‘secret’ after all resides with the narrator. It probably indicates his hybrid sexual orientations.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, one of the most influential queer theorists, has explored the narrative and thematic elaboration of sexual issues. In her *Epistemology of the Closet* she proposes that culture can be better understood through an epistemology of the closet, or an exploration of the ‘secrets’ surrounding sexual subjectivities:

The gradually reifying effect of this refusal meant that by the end of the nineteenth century, when it had become fully current – as obvious
to Queen Victoria as to Freud – that knowledge meant sexual knowledge, and secrets sexual secrets, there had in fact developed one particular sexuality that was distinctively constituted as secrecy: the perfect object for the by now insatiably exacerbated epistemological sexual anxiety of the turn-of-the century subject. (73)

In the play *Vera* also there are only subtle suggestions of homoerotic possibilities. There is an explicit pairing in the play, but the intimacy of their friendship takes only a contextual meaning of homosexuality. *Vera*, Wilde’s first play, is a tragedy set in Russia. Vera, a barmaid joins the Nihilists group to avenge her brother who was killed by the soldiers of the Czar. She becomes the top assassin of the Nihilists group. She adores a fellow nihilist, Alexis, but hides her love since nihilists have sworn never to marry. Soon it is revealed that Alexis is actually Tsarevich, heir to Russian throne. Prince Paul, a cruel minister of the Czar criticizes Alexis’ feelings for democratic uproar. Alexis ascends the throne when Michael assassinates the Czar. Prince Paul joins the nihilists once he is expelled by Alexis. Vera is entrusted with the task of killing Alexis. She is instructed to stab him and throw the dagger out as a signal to the nihilists. Alexis asks her to marry him. Her love for Alexis pulls her back from committing the murder. She stabs herself and throws the dagger out.

The Czar and Prince Paul form the male sex pair in the play. Prince Paul is shown as a man who is very much fond of food. He relates food with the burning political issues and varying human temperaments. He says, “...a prison where one is allowed to order one’s own dinner is not at all a bad place” (Vera 20). He also claims that the only immortality that he desires is to invent a new sauce (21). Similarly he brings the analogy of food whenever he converses with people. Prince Paul’s
obsession with food gives the audience a different impression of him, who is already a villain.

Gluttony is considered as a crucial sin that may trigger other deadly sins. Christian morality condemns it because the pleasure of the stomach is associated with the pleasures of the loins, namely the sin of lust. The 1973 film, *The Big Feast* features gluttony as an extravagant pleasure of the stomach and the loins, combining the sin of eating and the sin of flesh together. Prince Paul’s extensive interest in food connotes to his secret lustful desires. His bonding with the Czar opens up the possibilities of his same-sex interest.

Alexie considers Prince Paul as the ‘evil’ influence on Czar who misguides him. He observes: “Evil genius of his life that you (Prince Paul) are! Before you came there was love left in him. It is you who have embittered his nature...” (21). Prince Paul himself is aware of his influence on Czar. He says, “Yes, I know I’m the most hated man in Russia, except your father, except your father, of course, prince...” (23).

Although an emperor who dictates tyranny, the Czar presents himself as a fragile and submissive friend to Prince Paul. He trusts not even his son, but Prince Paul. The exchanges between Prince Paul and Czar give a vivid picture of their friendship:

Czar: What do you startle me like that for? No, I won’t. (Watches the courtiers nervously) Why are you clattering your sword, Sir? (To Count Rouvaloff) Take it off, I shall have no man wear a sword in my presence (looking at Czarevitch), least of all my son. (To Prince Paul) You are not angry with me, Prince? You won’t desert me, will you?
Say you won’t desert me. What do you want? You can have anything—anything.

Prince Paul (bowing very low): Sire! ’tis enough for me to have your confidence... (24)

Freud states that all elongated objects “such as sticks, tree-trunks and umbrellas (the opening of these last being comparable to an erection) may stand for the male organ - as well as all long, sharp weapons, such as knives, daggers and pikes” (The Interpretation of Dreams 470). This definition places the sword on par with the other phallic symbols. The Czar does not entertain any man wielding his sword before him, least of all his son. But his immediate response to Prince Paul after making the statement is one of passivity and passion. The shift in the imperative tone addressed to the others indicates their exclusion from the realm of his desires with the exception of Prince Paul.

Moreover, Vera is a ‘feminine threat’ to people like Czar and Prince Paul; and they are determined to destroy her. She stands for the hetero-normative social insistence that threatens people with alternative sexual orientations. Czar in his outrage exclaims, “Am I emperor for nothing, that a woman should hold me at bay? Vera Sabouroff shall be in my power, I swear it, before a week is ended, though I burn my whole city to find her...” (28). Czar knows that Prince Paul’s company is inevitable for him to defeat Vera: “Ah, Prince, if every king in Europe had a minister like you” (28). Czar’s tyranny is in fact a result of his submissiveness before Prince Paul which in turn reflects his ardent affection for the Prince.

The climax of the play portrays the social reality of same-sex relationships. Czar fails in his mission to destroy Vera and meets with his own death when Michel
shoots him. Prince Paul joins the nihilists whom he was once determined to destroy. Having no other choice before him, he succumbs to the social demands. But he nurtures his unconventional nature within himself, which is made evident when he says, “A family is a terrible encumbrance especially when one is not married” (35). The Czar and the Prince form a pair whose relationship, though apparently political, gives indications of mutual homoerotic sentiments through their dialogues, thus, leaving space for a homosexual reading of the text.

The play *The Duchess of Padua* features two different pairs, of which one has more homoerotic connotations than the other. It tells the story of Guido who was brought up by his uncle. Guido meets Moranzone in Padua in order to know about his parentage. Moranzone advises him to leave his best friend Ascanio so as to begin his mission of revenging his father’s death by the hands of Simone Gesso. But Guido falls in love with Beatrice, which she reciprocates. Guido withdraws from his mission and decides not to kill the Duke. He spares him, but Beatrice takes the Duke’s life so that she can marry Guido. Guido is shocked by the sin she has committed and rejects her. In her anger she puts the blame on him. Guido is brought to trial. Guido protects her by admitting that he has murdered the Duke; and so the date is set for his execution. Beatrice visits Guido in his cell and asks him to forgive her. She drinks the poison that was kept for the prisoner and dies. Guido kisses Beatrice and kills himself with her knife.

The play features two same-sex pairs. The first is Ascanio and Guido. Ascanio comes in the initial expository phase of the play where the central character, Guido is also introduced. Ascanio’s presence offers to give a vivid picture of Guido’s character and the nature of their friendship. Ascanio is Guido’s soul-mate with whom he shares all the secrets of his life. Guido has brought him to Padua in his mission to know
about his father. But Moranzone insists on disclosing the secret to Guido alone, and Guido unwillingly sends Ascanio away:

Guido: This is my dearest friend, who out of love has followed me to Padua; as two brothers. There is no secret which we do not share.

Moranzone: There is one secret which we do not share. Bid him go hence

Guido (to Ascanio): Come back within the hour. He does not know that nothing in this world can dim the perfect mirror of our love. Within the hour come.

Ascanio: Speak not to him; there is a dreadful terror in his look.

Guido: Nay, nay, I doubt not that he has come to tell that I am some great Lord of Italy, And we will have long days of joy together... (The Duchess of Padua 55)

When Moranzone asks Guido to banish his friend from his heart, he expresses his difficulty in doing so: “From Padua, not from my heart” (63). The final exchanges between Guido and Ascanio resemble the farewell of two lovers:

Guido: Why, that we two must part, Ascanio.

Ascanio: That would be news indeed, but it is not true.

Guido: too true it is, you must get hence, Ascanio, And never look upon my face again

Ascanio: ...cannot I be your serving man? I will tend you with more love than any hired servant.
Guido (clasping his hand): Ascanio!

Ascanio: ...Shall we never more sit hand in hand, as we were wont to sit...must I go hence without a word of love?

Guido: You must go hence, and may love go with you...let us part now.

(64-65)

The second pair is Guido and the Duke. Guido leaves Ascanio’s company when he enters into a relationship with the Duke. When Moranzone informs Guido that his father was betrayed and sold by the Duke, Guido impulsively decides to kill the Duke. But, Moranzone advises Guido to present the Duke a slow death, because he believes that sudden death causes less harm: “…death comes best when it comes suddenly. Thy father was betrayed, there is your cue; for you shall sell the seller in his turn... Thou shall o’ nights pledge him in wine, drink from his cup, and be his intimate, so he will fawn on thee, love thee, and trust thee in all secret things” (57).

Consequently, Guido tries to establish an intimate relationship with the Duke. Utmost care is taken in the description and establishment of the duke’s character as well. His dialogues display his hypocrisy, secrecy, and interest in men: “if you would have the lion’s share of life you must wear the fox’s skin... I would have men about me. As for conscience, Conscience is but the name which cowardice fleeing from battle scrawls upon its shield...” (62). Ironically enough, Guido “forswears all love of women” (66) when he decides to make a relationship with the Duke. When the Duchess sees the Duke walk leaning on Guido, she observes that Guido is so affected by the Duke that “he never leaves his side, as though he loved him” (73).
Guido falls in love with the Duchess. But, when Moranzone sends him his father’s dagger he is reminded of his mission to avenge his father. He then asks Duchess to banish him from her heart. He tells her, “there lies a barrier between us two we dare not pass” (81). Duchess identifies the barrier as her own husband, and hence kills the Duke. After murdering the Duke she tells Guido, “For you! I did it all for you: have you forgotten? You said there was a barrier between us; That barrier lies now in the upper chamber, upset, overthrown, beaten and battered down, and will not part us ever” (96). If it is Guido’s love for the Duke that pulls him away from the Duchess, then again the Duke could be the barrier between them.

But contrary to expectations, when it is time for Guido to avenge his father’s death he resolves not to kill the Duke. He confesses that he would have killed the Duke the moment he saw him in the open square, but Moranzone wanted him to form an intimate relationship with the Duke: “Guido: ‘T was thou that hindered me; I would have killed him in the open square, the day I saw him first” (89). When the relationship became more and more intimate Guido could not kill the Duke. Moranzone is shocked to know that Guido has withdrawn from his mission. He exclaims: “...what bastard blood flows in your veins that when you have your enemy in your grasp you let him go! I would that I had left you with the dull hinds that reared you” (92).

Duchess has killed the Duke with the intention of getting united with Guido. In a way Duchess has fulfilled Guido’s mission of avenging his father’s death. But instead of appreciating the Duchess he blames her for the crime she has committed:

Guido: O damned saint! O angel fresh from hell! What bloody devil tempted thee to this! That thou hast killed thy husband that is nothing-
hell was already gaping for his soul— but thou hast murdered Love, and
in its place hast set a horrible and bloodstained thing, whose very
breath breeds pestilence and plague, and strangles Love. (95)

Guido would have accepted the Duchess, but when he learns that she has killed the Duke he denounces her. It gives subtle suggestion to the fact that Guido’s love for the Duke is greater than his love for the Duchess. Guido admits that his love for the Duchess ceased the moment she killed the Duke: “Get thee gone: The dead man is a ghost, and our love too...that when you slew your lord you slew it also. Do you not see?” (99).

Out of anger and despair the Duchess betrays Guido, who is then arrested and produced before the court for trial. Later on Duchess regrets for what she has done to Guido. She tries to help him, but in vain. The play ends with the tragic union of Guido and Duchess in their death.

Guido reminds us of Hamlet who procrastinates his act of killing king Claudius. Earnest Jones in his essay “Hamlet and Oedipus” tries to give a psychoanalytic reading of Hamlet’s procrastination. Hamlet sees his own alter ego in Claudius who has killed his father and married his mother. Hamlet could not hurt his alter Ego, hence he spares Claudius on several occasions. Similarly Guido fails to carry out his mission of avenging his father’s death. Unlike Hamlet, Guido’s difficulty is his love for the Duke. He is caught between his love for the Duke and his moral responsibilities as a son.

Wilde’s “The Happy Prince” is his only short story where the pairing is between two non-human entities. Wilde has explored the possibilities of a love story through the emotional bonding between a statue and a bird. The fact that he has
attributed male gender to both of them is of grave importance in analysing the statue and the bird as a pair.

Wilde’s characters, whether animal or human, in his fables are specifically referred to as either male or female. Thus a rabbit or even a rose in his story is either ‘he’ or ‘she’ rather than being just an ‘it’. Attribution of specific pronouns seems to have a serious role to play in the realm of signification than simply amusing the children. “The Happy Prince” is ostensibly a fantasy story for children. It is about a beautiful statue of Happy Prince covered in gold and jewels. The Prince appears to be happy but feels greatly for the underprivileged. He seeks assistance from a Swallow to help the people who are living in poverty. At first the Prince gives the ruby of his sword, then sapphires of his eyes, finally pieces of his gold leaf to those who are in need, until all of the gold is gone. At the same time the Swallow also suffers as the weather gets steadily colder, and he dies at the statue’s feet. The statue being no longer beautiful is removed and melted down. However, the Prince’s lead heart is thrown into a garbage heap with the dead Swallow.

The description of the statue of Happy Prince focuses mainly on its physical charm and greatness. People greatly admire the beauty of the statue. “High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword-hilt. He was very much admired indeed” (“The Happy Prince” 3). Although a mere statue, tender emotions like love, pity and kindness are attributed to it. Moreover the reference to the ‘sword with the red ruby’ does not seem coincidental in the context of reading Wilde. Red ruby has been always been held parallel to the heart.
The characterisation of the Swallow is also done with careful specificity. Firstly, it is a male Swallow. He falls in love with a beautiful Reed and decides to marry her. But his courtship does not last long and he begins to tire of his lady love. He thinks of her as a coquette who is flirting with the Wind. He does not want to continue his relationship with her, and hence finds fault with her. His loss of interest in the Reed in a sense opens possibilities for him to develop a new relationship with the statue.

The Swallow meets the statue and finds solace ‘between the feet’ of the Happy Prince. “Then he saw the statue on the tall column. ‘I will put up there’, he cried; ‘it is a fine position with plenty of fresh air’. So he alighted just between the feet of the Happy Prince” (4).

He soon develops an intimate relationship with the Happy Prince. The Prince asks Swallow to stay with him for some nights. Despite the fact that the Swallow has to reach Egypt to join his friends he stays back to help the Prince. He fulfils the Prince’s wish to help the poor and the needy. Gradually their friendship grows to such an intimacy that the Swallow disregards his pathetic health condition and decides to stay with the Happy Prince. When the Prince becomes blind, having given his eyes to the poor, Swallow becomes the apple of his eyes.

Then the Swallow came back to the Prince. ‘You are blind now,’ he said, ‘so I will stay with you always.’ ‘No, little Swallow,’ said the poor Prince, ‘you must go away to Egypt.’ ‘I will stay with you always’, said the Swallow, and he slept at the Prince’s feet. All the next day he sat on the Prince’s shoulder, and told him stories of what he had seen in strange lands. (9)
The Swallow is supposed to be in Egypt in the winter, where the “sun is warm” (5). But, for the Prince he decides to endure the chilling winter.

The poor little Swallow grew colder and colder, but he would not leave the Prince, he loved him too well... But at last he knew that he was going to die. He had just strength to fly up to the Prince’s shoulder once more. ‘Good-bye, dear Prince!’ he murmured, ‘will you let me kiss your hand?’

‘I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow,’ said the Prince, ‘you have stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you.’

‘It is not to Egypt that I am going,’ said the Swallow. ‘I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?’

And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet.

At that moment a curious crack sounded inside the statue, as if something had broken. The fact is that the leaden heart had snapped right in two. It certainly was a dreadfully hard frost. (10)

Like two ardent lovers they part kissing on the lips. The story has a typical ending of a tragic love story where both the lovers meet with their tragic death for the cause of their love. The Swallow sacrifices his life for the Prince whom he loved a lot. And the Prince dies of a broken heart. The ending becomes more dramatic as the workers throw the Prince’s heart “on a dust-heap where the dead Swallow was also
lying” (11). The lovers are finally ‘canonised’ when the Angels of Gods rightly chose them as the “two precious things in the city” (11).

The innocent children’s story gains a different insinuation while analysing the intimate friendship between the Swallow and the Prince. On the superficial realm it is just a relationship between a bird and an inanimate object, but their friendship implicitly displays the features of male-male bonding.

Explicit same sex pairing can be traced in some of Wilde’s poems as well. In many of his poems Wilde has used images from ancient classics and myths in order to contrast the bleak Christian world with the bright pagan world. One of his long poems, “The Sphinx” reflects the typical Victorian fascination in ancient Egypt. The poet imagines a sphinx in his room, and the poem is composed as a monologue of the speaker addressed to the sphinx. Anne Varty observes this poem as an “exploration of forbidden sexuality” (xxii). There is an explicit same-sex pairing between the speaker of the poem and the sphinx. The poet addresses the sphinx as “half woman and half animal” (“The Sphinx” 127), suggesting to the reader that he is referring to the sphinx of Greek mythology. The sphinx is half woman in Greek mythology. She has a human head, body of a lion, wings of a bird and tail of a serpent. She is often presented as treacherous and merciless who eats all those who fail to answer her riddles. In Egyptian mythology the sphinx has the head of a man. Unlike the Greek myth, Egyptian sphinx is more benevolent (Cartwright 1). Although the poet calls it a ‘half woman’, there are so many references to Egypt and Nile in the poem that the Sphinx in question is undoubtedly Egyptian. The sphinx “can read the Heiroglyphs” (128), “pyramid is her lupanar” (130) and the poet’s final command to the sphinx to go back, “Away to Egypt” (133) confuse the gender of the human half. If it belongs to Egypt it has to be half man. Ambiguity in the gender of the sphinx gives the poet social
permission for masked homoerotic expressions. By deliberately confusing the readers about Greek and Egyptian Sphinx, Wilde, who has deep knowledge in ancient mythologies, is cleverly misleading the Victorian readers from interpreting his admiration for the sphinx as his love for a male lover.

Foucault, taking the case of Herculine Barbin, has explained the concept of “unregulated field of pleasures prior to the imposition of the law of univocal sex” (Butler 133). Herculine’s anatomy confuses the categories of sex. Foucault insists that in Herculine’s case it is ‘non-identity’ at play rather than a variety of female identities. He points out that “sexual non-identity is promoted in homosexual context” (137), and homosexuality is instrumental in overthrowing the categories of sex.

Moreover, the speaker’s admiration for the sphinx and the poet’s dedication of the poem to “Marcel Schwob in friendship and in admiration” (127) strengthens the possible homosexual connotations. The poet is addressing his male lover when he says, “Come forth my lovely languorous Sphinx! And put your head upon my/knee” (127), but in disguise.

The poet asks the sphinx to tell him about ‘her/his’ memories, particularly the erotic encounters s/he has witnessed. The fact that the sphinx was cursed by the priests for seizing their snake to slake her/his “passion by the shuddering palms” (129), and the sphinx’s various sexual encounters with animals like giant lizard, monstrous hippopotamus, horrible chimera and gilt-scaled dragons offer insight into the different ways in which the sphinx derives sexual pleasures, suggesting even masturbation.

He supposes that Ammon was sphinx’s lover: “Great Ammon was your bedfellow! He lay with you beside the Nile” (130). Then the speaker imagines the
sphinx’s erotic relationship with Ammon, which is in fact an attempt to acquire sexual gratification by the indulgent imagination of the speaker: “You kissed his mouth with mouths of flame: you made the horned god your own/ You stood behind him on his throne: you called him by his secret name./ You whispered monstrous oracles into the caves of his ears: / With blood of goats and blood of steers you taught him monstrous miracles” (131). Finally, when Ammon is crushed to death, the poet asks the sphinx to “make anew thy mutilated paramour!” (133), and he also asks the sphinx to “wake mad passion in the senseless stone” (133).

The poet’s final confession that the sphinx’s intimacy is arousing forbidden desires in him, evidently proves his exploration of homoerotic love which he strives to attain through his admiration of the sphinx. He says, “You wake in me each bestial sense, you make me what I would not be. /You make my creed a barren sham, you wake foul dreams of sensual life,” (135). Wilde was well aware of the Victorian populace’s admiration for exotic Egyptian allusions and Greek mythologies. By alluding to the Sphinx, he was probably trying to euphemize homonormative behaviour.

He concludes the poem by invoking the image of crucifixion, which is typical of Wilde’s poems. For Wilde pagan images stand for unrestricted sexual expression, where as Christian world represent social and religious values. He is constantly reminded of his moral responsibilities and social recognition. Hence, the inevitable return to the Christian world after an imaginary exploration of forbidden love in the pagan world.

In the poem “Endymion” the pairing is between the poet and his love. The poet asks the moon to leave his love to him. He asks the moon to be a guardian or
sentinel to his love. The “purple shoon” is a recurring image in the poem. The colour purple is often used to denote gay people. In gender lexicons, pink is associated with the female and blue with the males. Purple says C.Violette “is a blend of the traditionally gender-identified colors pink and blue, blurring the lines, subverting and challenging gender norms” (Para 3). The LGBTQ community celebrates Spirit Day to promote LGBTQ awareness and solidarity in October every year. On this day the community wears purple coloured attires. Therefore the frequent references to the colour purple by Wilde are highly connotative of his sexual inclination and attempt to challenge gender norms. The poet keeps reminding the moon that his love is “shod with purple shoon” (46) indicating his gay orientation. He describes his love thus: “...he is soft as any dove, And brown and curly is his hair” (46). He asks the moon to tell his love that he is waiting for him. But when the lover does not come back he says, “False moon! False moon! O waning moon!/ Where is my own true love gone,/ Where are the lips vermilion./ The shepherd’s crook, the purple shoon?” (47) He concludes the poem asserting that his lover is not meant for the moon. The lady moon has the young Endymion, a beautiful youth who was loved by the moon. He is put into sleep, and every night the moon embraces him. The poet tells the moon, “Thou hast the lips that should be kissed” (47). He encourages the moon to have relationship with Endymion, but asks to spare his love.

As a poet Wilde is greatly inspired and influenced by the romantic poet, John Keats. The poem “The Grave of Keats” displays the poet’s affection and admiration for Keats. The poet describes Keats the way one admires his love: “O Sweet lips since those of Mitylene!” (71). Interestingly enough, Mytiline is the capital and port of the island of Lesbos. The common term lesbian is an allusion to the Greek poet Sappho whose abode was the Island of Lesbos. Mytilene is thus closely associated with
homosexuality. The poet promises that, “tears like mine will keep thy memory green/
As Isabella did her Basil tree” (71). In Keats poem, “Isabella, or the Pot of Basil”
Isabella’a attachment with the pot of Basil tree underscores her ardent love for her
lover Lorenzo who was beheaded. By bringing the image of Isabella and Lorenzo poet
celebrates his love for Keats. The allusion to the ‘Basil’ tree also recalls the character
from The Picture of Dorian Gray who was obsessed with Dorian, thereby cementing
the hypothesis of same-sex love.

Poet’s description of his love in poems such as “Quia Multum Amavi” and
“At Verona” seems equally applicable to a boy lover. In most of these poems the
association is between the poet and a character within the poem. In “At Verona” a
hopeless prisoner grieves over his pathetic plight. He says death would have been a
better alternative for him. But at the end he consoles himself saying, “I do possess
what none can take away/ My love, and all the glory of the stars” (89). The reference
to war and the presence of love behind the “prison’s blinded bars” (89) underscore the
homoerotic possibilities. Researches on the practices associated with sex-segregated
spatial settings – prisons and other carceral institutions, the armed services, boarding
schools – to explore alterity of sexual systems expose the possibilities of homosexual
relationships among the prisoners (Kunzel 253). Christopher Hensley observes that
incarcerated men are likely to indulge in homosexual attitudes (434). Rosemary
Ricciardelli points out that “heteronormativity and homophobia are pervasive in
prisoner cultures and are reflected in how sexuality is discursively constructed and
acted out by incarcerated men” (336). The poem can be compared to Shakespeare’s
Sonnet 29 in its thematic concern. In the sonnet the speaker bemoans his status but
feels better when he thinks about his beloved. The sonnet being a part of the Fair
Youth sequence (sonnets 1-126) can very well be read as expressing the poet’s love for his male love.

“Quia Multum Amavi” leaves more scope for homosexual interpretations. The poet addresses his heart. He expresses his passion for his love. It pains him that his beloved shows only a kind of liking that could not have been mistaken for love: “hadst thou liked me less and loved me more” (92). It is quite ambiguous why there is only liking and not loving. In the concluding lines poet confesses that he is stricken with remorse though he is glad to have been in love: “Yet, Though remorse, youth’s white-faced seneschal,/ Tread on my heels with all his retinue/ I am most glad I loved thee” (92). The poet is thus speaking about a youthful love which he is guilty of.

Wilde has thus consciously or unconsciously given vent to his repressed desires through the portrayal of same-sex pairs in his works. As Wilde himself has pointed out, an artist always reveals his true self in his literary creations. The literary world offers him a space where he does not have to succumb to the moral needs of society. “Wilde states that a true artist...reveals himself so perfectly in his work that unless a biographer has something more valuable to give us than idle anecdotes and unmeaning tales, his labour is misspent and his industry misdirected” (Ghosal 49). Wilde’s works act as polyphonic narratives giving articulations to both the repressed desires of the author and also the repressive attitude of the Victorian society that considered homosexuality as a taboo. Parallel to the elucidation of same-sex pairing, the social responses to homoeroticism are also equally relevant. The recurring image of death breaking the male-male bonding, the stringent attitude of Lady Bracknell all correspond to the social insistence on heteronormativity. “The Public voice which Wilde scorns is that which seeks to police culture; which is against cultural difference;
which reacts to the aesthetically unconventional by charging it with being either grossly unintelligible or grossly immoral” (8), remarks Dollimore.

D. H. Lawrence in his work *Studies in Classic American Literature* observes that the repressed emotions get expressed as literary texts, sometimes even without the conscious effort of the author. He argues that the author has no control over the return of the repressed. “The effects of its return in the tale, however, have enabled Lawrence to catch the author out in the act” (Wright 54).

Freud also makes a similar observation when he says that though the author is unaware of his work’s rules and purposes, “nevertheless, we have not discovered anything in his work that is not already in it. We probably draw from the same source and work upon the same object, each of us by another method” (91-92). Works discussed in this chapter expose Wilde’s transgression which figures in the language, dialogues, characters and symbols; and also the various kinds of resistance to this transgression. Same-sex pairing thus acts as a tool in these works to liberate the repressed desires of the artist. Wilde has consciously or unconsciously employed same-sex pairs in his works in order to articulate the repressed desires which were not acceptable or rather forbidden in the social space.