Chapter 3

The Return of the Repressed:
Psychological Approach to Same-Sex Pairing

While Id Psychology model emphasises on the sexual instincts trying to find representation in images and symbols, Psychoanalytic Character Analysis focuses primarily on the interpretations based on the fictional characters. As Kaplan and Kloss put it:

Fictional characters are representations of life and, as such, can only be understood if we assume they are real. And this assumption allows us to find unconscious motivations by the same procedure that the traditional critic uses to assign conscious ones. (4)

In a way, the author’s approach to literature can be explored through a psychological study of his characters and the effects his texts display. Some of Wilde’s works are remarkable for the way they can be practically used to illustrate what psychoanalysis has to do with the text and its fictional characters. The return of the repressed happens in the text at the level of narration, structure of plot and characterisation. “Freud discovered that psychoanalysis has to deal with the body caught up in the tropes and figures of language. The relation of psychoanalysis to language and literature is patent, even though its explanatory power is different” (Wright 175).

A psychological study of certain fictional, semi fictional and non fictional characters of Wilde and the way in which these characters relate and react to one another will help us unravel homosexual undertones in the text. The close interaction
between these characters comes across as homoerotic in some ways. The characters seem to know certain things about themselves which are hidden from the rest of the world because this realisation is full of terror and fear of being exposed.

The psychological reading of same-sex pairing provides more freedom for the subtle treatment of so called ‘deviant’ sexuality. In order to escape the social stigma associated with the portrayal of explicit same sex pairs in literary works, Wilde seems to have experimented with their symbolic manifestations. The psychological approach to same-sex pairing explores the ways in which the literary characters and situations can be analysed using various principles and theories of psychoanalysis. Different components of psychoanalytic theory are employed as tools to examine the presence of unintended depiction of same-sex pairing in the literary text, which in fact works more on the principles of unconscious mind.

One of the most prominent and perhaps, the most controversial ideas proposed by Freud is ‘Oedipus Complex’, whereby Freud says that “the male infant conceives the desire to eliminate the father and become the sexual partner of the mother” (Barry 93). Though Oedipus Complex is often considered as the corner stone of psychoanalysis “it is certainly its most fundamental and reprehensible error, and is probably theoretically incoherent as well” (208), says Dollimore in the light of its failure to accommodate homosexuality in its paradigm of signification. ‘Transference’ and ‘Projection’ are the two defence mechanisms of mind identified by Freud. Transference is “the phenomenon where by the patient under analysis redirects the emotions recalled in analysis towards the psychoanalyst” (Barry 93). Projection is a mechanism by which “the negative aspects of ourselves are perceived in or attributed to another” (Barry 93). The two dream work mechanisms identified by Freud are Displacement and Condensation. In Freudian dream interpretation displacement is the
mechanism by which “an element in a dream might stand for something else” (Barry 107). In condensation “several things might be compressed into one symbol” (Barry 107). Another important mechanism explained by Freud is what he calls ‘Parapraxis’. ‘Parapraxis’ is a mechanism of mind whereby the “repressed material in the unconscious finds an outlet through such everyday phenomena as slips of tongue, slips of the pen, or unintended action” (Barry 98). Parapraxis, says Wright, “represents the return of the repressed, a mechanism that marks both the emergence of the forbidden wish and the resistance to it” (12).

Lacanian psychoanalysis begins with the slogan ‘Unconscious is structured like language’. Lacan interprets Freudian Condensation and Displacement as corresponding to Metaphor and Metonymy respectively. Lacan’s classification of Imaginary (pre-linguistic stage) and symbolic (realm of language) as unconscious and conscious mind describes how social insistence on controlling desires, emphasised by the structures of language, effects the split between conscious and unconscious: “the repression that is the tax exacted by the use of language” (Wright 109). Ehrenzweig argues that “when ego has been the servant of the superego for too long the ego collapses, or ‘decomposes’ and falls back on the id for sustenance, getting new sensory evidence, new material for image-making” (230).

The works analysed in this section are “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime”, “The Fisherman and his Soul”, A Florentine Tragedy, A Woman of no Importance, “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.”, “The Decay of Lying” and the poem “Charmides”

His short story “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” and his prose work “The Decay of Lying” can be subjected to a psychological approach in the demonstration of the psychoanalytic model of dividing mind into Conscious mind and Unconscious mind.
In “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” there is a psychological approach to same-sex pairing in the sense that the bonding is between Lord Arthur and his Unconscious mind, which is personified in Mr. Podger’s form. Freud’s bipartite division of mind into Conscious and Unconscious assumes that “the unconscious was chiefly, if not entirely, derived from repression, and therefore consisted of impulses, thoughts, and feelings, which were unacceptable to the conscious Ego” (Storr 59). Mr. Podger in the story thus represents the socially unacceptable Unconscious mind of Lord Arthur.

“Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” is a story about Lord Arthur, who meets a chiromantist, Mr. Podger at Lady Windermere’s party. Podger reads Arthur’s palm and discloses that he is destined to commit a murder. Arthur is about to marry Sybil, but he thinks that he has no right to do so until he has committed the murder. Otherwise it would be like cheating Sybil.

He decides to kill some lesser important person whose death will not affect the affairs of the world. First he attempts to murder Aunt Clemntia who suffers from heartburn. He gives her a poison pill and asks to consume while she has another attack of heartburn. But she dies a natural death; and he searches for a new victim. He obtains a bomb from a jovial German and sends it to a distant relative, the Dean of Chichester. But the bomb fails to cause harmful explosions. Arthur now believes that his marriage plans are doomed. Finally he decides to kill the same palm reader and pushes the man off a parapet into the river where he dies. Having committed the murder and his destiny fulfilled Arthur Savile returns home in relief. The story ends with Arthur getting married to Sybil. Wilde subverts the conventional expectations of moral values in the story and challenges the notion of poetic justice in it.
The whole plot represents a comic inversion of the traditional devices of moral justice, for here it is the act of murder (rather than the unmasking of the murder) which brings about the restoration of social order: the murderer becomes the hero (and ironically is rewarded through a happy marriage) and the victim becomes the villain (and equally ironically is punished by death). The consequence of this inversion is that the reader’s attention is focused not on the traditional triumph of good over evil, but rather on the kind of society where murder is justified on the grounds of right conduct, where ‘right’ means observing the codes of gentlemanly behaviour. (Small xxi-xxii)

Lord Arthur and Mr. Podger, the palmist form the same-sex pair in the story. More than being just an acquaintance their relationship has a psychological implication. Mr. Podger reminds Arthur of his baser instincts. He is constantly warned of a call for committing a ‘sin’. The prophesy mirrors to Arthur what he is or what he could be. The very presence of this character prophesies a social evil.

All the time Lord Arthur Savile had remained standing by the fireplace, with the same feeling of dread over him, the same sickening sense of coming evil... he thought of Sybil Merton, and the idea that anything could come between them made his eyes dim with tears.

(“Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” 174)

Homosexuality, like murder, was considered as a crime during the Victorian period, Wilde himself being a victim before the law. Mr. Podger’s warning about the crime and Arthur’s fear of getting caught before the society can be read as suggestive of Arthur’s apprehensions regarding his alternative sexual orientation getting
disclosed. Arthur being a hypocrite wants to save his face in front of the society and tries to run away from the doom. It is stated in the story that Arthur has so far lived a life of happiness and freedom. But the arrival of Mr. Podger curbs his freedom and reminds him of the awful doom.

He had lived the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance; and now for the first time he became conscious of the terrible mystery of the Destiny, of the awful meaning of Doom. (174)

After his personal talk with Mr. Podger Arthur is very much frightened “with face blanched by terror” (176). Things around him scared him as he wandered across the street that night. But “at the corner of the Rich Street stood two men, reading a small bill upon a hoarding. An odd feeling of curiosity stirred him, and he crossed over” (178). The image of “two men” is again suggestive of his indulgence in the ‘sin’. Sybil is the reason for why he is running away from the ‘sin’. Arthur believes that he cannot marry Sybil unless he puts an end to it.

He felt that to marry her, with the doom of murder hanging over his head, would be a betrayal like that of Judas, a sin worse than any the Borgia had ever dreamed of. What happiness could there be for them, when at any moment he might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in his hand? What manner of life would be theirs while Fate still held this fearful fortune in the scales? The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. (180)
He is so worried about the social evil he is indulged in that he does not want it to affect his marriage in any way. “This done, he could take her to his arms, knowing that she would never have to hang her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both” (180).

Arthur has two options before him. He can either pursue a life of pleasure which he was living or marry Sybil and become a responsible gentleman. “Many men in his position would have preferred the primrose path of dalliance to the steep heights of duty; but Lord Arthur was too conscientious to set pleasure above principle” (181). His reason reminds him that there is no other course open. To survive in the Victorian England as a homosexual is practically impossible. Arthur is “essentially practical” and “has that rarest of all things, common sense” (181). So he decides to select the path of principle instead of pleasure. “He had to choose between living for himself and living for others, and terrible though the task laid upon him undoubtedly was, yet he knew that he must not suffer selfishness to triumph over love” (181).

He is very well aware of the consequences of his sin and the pain he has to endure if he puts an end to it. So he is determined to “keep the secret of his self-sacrifice hidden always in his heart” (182). Arthur does not try to get away from the prophesied sin and makes two unsuccessful attempts. He does not restrain from committing the ‘crime’. His intention instead is to hide it from the society. He asks Sybil to postpone the date of wedding because he needs time to get rid of his “fearful entanglements”.

He told her that the marriage must be put off for the present, as until he had got rid of his fearful entanglements, he was not a free man. He
implored her to trust him, and not to have any doubt about the future.

Everything would come right, but patience was necessary. (185)

When Arthur fails in both attempts he even thinks “it would be better to break off the marriage together” (195)

He slowly withdraws from his male friends. After the postponement of his marriage with Sybil he goes to Venice and meets his friend Lord Surbiton. From there he goes to the coast of Ravenna under Surbiton’s persuasion. But he feels bored and in spite of Surbiton’s remonstrance comes back to Venice. After his second unsuccessful attempt when he goes to the club where is he obliged to dine with Surbiton and a party of young men he leaves the party all of a sudden as he loses interest in the party.

Finally he gets a chance to get rid of his guilty conscience as he throws Mr. Podger into the Thames. Mr. Podger’s death unties all the tangled knots and he is set free. Having no hindrances in his path of getting married to Sybil he rushes to her and says “My dear Sybil let us be married tomorrow!” (198). Once he is relieved of the ‘pair’ Arthur embraces Sybil and begins a new life.

It could not be just a coincidence that he is to get married to Sybil. The name ‘Sybil’ reminds one of the mythological characters, the Sybil of Cumae, who was granted eternal life by Apollo. But she forgot to ask for youth. She aged and withered, but could not die. Soon she realised that death would have been a better option for her (Parada).The twentieth century poet, T.S. Eliot has used the image of Sibyl in his *The Waste Land* to describe the death in life existence of Waste Land, where there is no rejuvenation and reproduction. Similarly, what awaits Arthur in his marriage is simply
a death in life existence. He is trying to hide his sexual orientation and thus to satisfy the social needs. This will definitely earn him name and fame but not happiness.

The pairing is psychological in the sense that it is a bonding between Arthur and his Unconscious mind. Mr. Podger is a personification of Arthur’s own conscience which is haunted by a sense of guilt nurtured by the social values. Moreover, Arthur resembles Wilde’s personality and character:

Social life was the very breath of his being, and his written work was his talk gone rather flat: solitude took much of the sparkle out of it. None the less he thought well of the longest story in this book, ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’, which is a resume of his personality. (Pearson 138)

The bonding between Arthur and Podger takes a symbolic signification since it is a reminder for Arthur about his alternative sexual orientation. Arthur’s homosexual life is a hindrance for his marriage with Sybil. Podger acts as a mouthpiece for Arthur’s conscience and warns him about the doom that awaits him. Arthur makes several attempts and slowly moves away from the men circle. Finally he overcomes his sense of guilt by putting an end to the ‘sin’ he was preoccupied with, which cost the very life of Podger.

Similarly Wilde’s much acclaimed critical dialogue “The Decay of Lying” demonstrates the conflict between the two parts of mind namely Conscious mind and Unconscious mind. The essay is composed in the form of polemical exchanges between Wilde’s own sons, Cyril and Vivian who represent Realism and Romance respectively. As Rodney Shewan puts it, “‘The Decay of Lying’ has its origin in ‘The
English Renaissance’ but was influenced by conversations with Whistler and published at the height of the controversy over realism and romance in fictions” (95).

In the essay both the superficial binary opposition between Nature and Culture, and the intrinsic binary opposition between Realism and Romance contribute much to the demonstration of the dichotomy between Conscious mind and Unconscious mind. Cyril and Vivian thus form the same-sex pair who represents the Conscious mind and Unconscious mind respectively.

The essay opens in the library of a country house where Cyril asks Vivian to go with him to “lie on the grass and smoke cigarettes and enjoy Nature” (“The Decay of Lying” 57). But, Vivian ignores Nature in order to proofread an article which deplores nature’s tyranny over modern art. He observes that “Art really reveals to us is Nature’s lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition” (57). Vivian’s arguments echo Wilde’s artistic preferences. Through Vivian he “defends his own prose techniques in poems in prose, tales, and the dialogues themselves, deliberately equating the artist and the social liar as two of a kind, performers who seek to give pleasures” (Shewan 97).

The premise for all Vivian’s theories is an aesthetic interpretation of lies. Vivian (or rather Wilde himself) discredits Nature’s authority and tries to constitute the new aesthetics. He asserts that “lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things is the proper aim of Art” (“The Decay of Lying” 87). He out rightly rejects the preoccupation of Realism in art. He insists that Realism, as a method, is a complete failure. His rejection of social realism, insistence on complete autonomy of art, and proclamation of unimpeded artistic freedom reverberate the call of the Unconscious mind.
Throughout the essay while Vivian argues with intense passion, Cyril is a weak defender or almost a passive listener. Shewan observes that Wilde has made “the younger son magister and the older the discipulus of a Socratic dialogue” (97). Vivian’s longing for passionate indulgence in Romance and freedom of imagination represents the libidinal urges of the Unconscious mind which is threatened by the tyranny of social laws.

When the conversation ends, they both decide to leave the library, and thus it ends with a return to ordinary life. It is Vivian himself who suggests:

But of this I think I have spoken at sufficient length. And now let us go out on the terrace, where ‘droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost’, while the evening star ‘washes the dusk with silver’. At twilight nature becomes a wonderfully suggestive effect, and is not without loveliness, though perhaps its chief use is to illustrate quotations from the poets.

(“The Decay of Lying” 87)

Vivian’s final return to the ordinary life represents the suppression of the Unconscious mind, which has been throbbing throughout with extreme passion.

“The Fisherman and his Soul”, A Florentine Tragedy and “Charmides” are fictional demonstrations of Freud’s concept of Ego, Superego and Id. The Ego is that part of the mind which represents consciousness. It stands for “reason, common sense, and the power to delay immediate responses to external stimuli or to internal instinctive promptings” (Storr 61-62). The Superego is the agency within the mind that stands for the cultural and ethical ideas. “The Superego can be regarded as the product of repeated conditioning by parental injunctions and criticism” (63). The Id is the primitive, unorganised realm of the illogical. “The Id is governed only by the most
basic, primitive principle of mental dynamics: avoidance of ‘unpleasure’ caused by instinctual tension, which can only be achieved by satisfaction of instinctual needs accompanied by pleasure” (61). In “The Fisherman and his Soul” the Fisherman’s oscillation between the Soul and the Mermaid explains how Ego makes compromises with Superego and Id.

In the story a Fisherman gets a mermaid in his net and falls in love with her. He expresses his intention to marry her, but is informed by the Mermaid that he can marry her only if he sends his Soul away. From a Witch he learns that he can send the Soul away by cutting his shadow from his body. The Soul tempts the Fisherman with material possessions so that he would allow the Soul to enter into his body again. Finally when Soul describes the naked feet of a dancer who lives nearby, the Fisherman falls for the temptation and the Soul enters his body. Later he longs to go back to the Mermaid but he could not send his Soul away for a second time. He calls for the Mermaid in pain but she does not respond. The Soul could not enter the Fisherman’s heart because it was full of his love for the Mermaid. One stormy day the Mermaid’s body is washed upon the shore, and he dies of grief. The priest orders that both the bodies be buried in an unmarked grave where no sweet herbs grow. Three years later the priest notices some flowers in full bloom at the Fisherman’s grave.

Wilde’s stories are highly paradoxical by being both innocent and grave at the same time. His stories are satisfying narratives for children and self-conscious literary exercises as well. In most of his stories he uses parody of sub-genres as his stylistic device. Parody is a distinctive stylistic device employed by Wilde in some of his works. Most of his short stories appropriate parodies of the sub genres. “The Fisherman and his Soul” is an example for an overt and witty parody.
In ‘Fisherman and his Soul’ they are more subtle and complex, and the line between the parodic and the serious is deliberately blurred. This last kind of story is the most self-consciously ‘literary’. And it is in this group that we find the strongest prefiguring of the complexity of Wilde’s later work. (Small xx)

“The Fisherman and his Soul” represents a complex kind of parody. “The moral of the tale centres on the familiar Christian opposition between the spiritual (represented by the conscience and the soul) and the material (represented by worldly attractions and the body) which is in turn presented in terms of the equally familiar opposition between selfless love and selfish desires” (Small xxiii). The story is about the appalling influence of the material world and sexual drives, and the ultimate victory of selfless spiritual love. Wilde has reversed the role of soul and body. When the Fisherman cuts away his soul, the Soul indulges in a life of dedicated immorality which parodies and inverts the temptations of Christ. Instead of body, it is the Soul which expresses a fascination with the sins of the flesh.

Wilde seems to suggest that the Fisherman’s ability to withstand temptation derives from the power of his love. Usually love is considered to be the prerogative of the soul or spirit, love (and the values associated with it, such as fidelity) reside in the body. The implication is that for Wilde ‘true love’ is exclusively of the body and is therefore (sexual) desire, a conclusion which completely reverses the traditional Christian understanding of the relationship between body and soul, where soul is the regulating conscience of the body. (Small xxiv)
This is perhaps the most psychological of Wilde’s short stories. “Wilde always looks upon art as subjective mode of expression” (Ghosal 150). And this story seems to be highly prophetic about Wilde’s own life. The story has a strange pairing in it, the pairs being the Fisherman and the Mermaid. Instead of a male-male bonding here the pairing is between Fisherman and the Mermaid. Mermaid is an incomplete woman, a woman with a lack or a castrated woman. Mermaid can be considered as a symbol for a man turned woman or a transgender. And their relationship is a connotative image for homosexuality. The story has psychological implication in the sense that if the Mermaid stands for his Id, Soul is the projection of his Superego. Fisherman falls in love with the Mermaid and wishes to live with her. He is so blindly in love with her that he forgets his worldly responsibilities.

So sweet was her voice that he forgot his nets and his cunning, and had no care of his craft. Vermillion-finned and with eyes of bossy gold, the tunnies went by in shoals, but he heeded them not. His spear lay by his side unused, and his baskets of plaited osier were empty. (“The Fisherman and his Soul” 117)

He learns from the Mermaid that he has to send his Soul away in order to marry her. ‘Soul’ represents his worldly possessions and commitments including family. He goes to a Witch seeking help from her to send his Soul away. She promises to help him but wonders why he is not attracted to her.

And the Witch watched him as he went, and when he had passed from her sight she entered her cave, and having taken a mirror from a box of carved cedar wood, she set it up on a frame and burned vervain on lighted charcoal before it, and peered through the coils of the smoke.
And after a time she clenched her hands in anger. ‘He should have been mine’, she murmured, ‘I am as fair as she is’. (122-23)

As a reward for her help she asks him to dance with her in the midnight and he agrees. The description of dance movements echoes sexual foreplay, suggesting her attempt to get aroused. But he is least affected and spoils the mood of the night. His lack of interest in women is again suggestive of his failure in a heterosexual relationship.

...taking the Fisherman by the hand she led him out into the moonlight and began to dance. Round and round they whirled, and the young Witch jumped so high that he could see the scarlet heels of her shoes. Then right across the dancers came the sound of the galloping of a horse, but no horse was to be seen, and he felt afraid. ‘Faster’, cried the Witch, and she threw her arms about his neck, and her breath was hot upon his face. ‘Faster, faster!’ she cried, and the earth seemed to spin beneath his feet, and his brain grew troubled... (122)

Sending the Soul away symbolises running away from the social ties and moral responsibilities. He sends the Soul away by cutting his very shadow. The Soul comes to meet him every year and tries to tempt him with such temptations like wisdom and riches. But he remains unaffected. Finally when the Soul mentions about a girl with naked feet the Fisherman is reminded of the Mermaid’s lack and falls for the temptation. His attraction towards the feet of the girl reminds us of “the post-modern anecdote about the foot fetishist who was in love with the foot but had to settle for the whole person” (Dollimore 175). Freud proposes that,
Perversions are sexual activities which involve an extension, or transgression, of limit in respect either to the part of the body concerned or to the sexual object chosen. In the first case (the part of the body) perversion would involve a lingering over the intermediate relations to the sexual object – as with the foot fetishist – relations which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim. That is reproduction via heterosexual genital intercourse. In the second case (sexual object), it would involve the choosing of an inappropriate object – e.g. someone of the same sex. (Dollimore 175)

As far as the Fisherman is concerned, the second case explains his love for the Mermaid. Mermaid is the ‘inappropriate’ sexual object which stands for same-sex attraction. And, the first case explains the call of material or cultural attraction towards heterosexual relationship. The foot is the part of the body that stands for sexual object in this context.

He is tempted by the Soul’s description of the feet and decides to leave the Mermaid. Hence, he allows the Soul to enter into his body and goes in search of the girl. Soon he realises that it was but a false promise. The Soul having entered his body he cannot go back to the Mermaid. Having turned to his worldly commitments he cannot go back to his life of pleasures. His life becomes more and more miserable. He lives with the soul but provides no space for the soul in his heart. “so great was the power of his love” (“The Fisherman and his Soul” 144).

He weeps for the love he has lost. He is not at peace with the life he has to live. He calls for the Mermaid all day long, but she does not come to him. Later he
dies of grief when the Mermaid is found lying dead on the seashore. Next day morning the priest seeing the Fisherman lying dead on the shore hesitates to bless him for he “forsook God for the sake of love”. He snubs the Fisherman and his ‘leman’ for having indulged in ‘sin’.

And he drew back frowning, and having made the sign of cross, he cried aloud and said, ‘I will not bless the sea nor anything that is in it. Accursed be the Sea-folk, and accursed be all they who traffic them. And as for him who for love’s sake forsook God, and so lieth here with his leman slain by God’s judgement, take up his body and the body of his leman, and bury them in the corner of the Field of Fullers, and set no mark above them, nor sign of any kind, that none may know the place of their resting. For accursed were they in their lives, and accursed shall they be in their deaths also’. (146-47)

He is buried in the corner of the Field of the Fullers where no fragrant herbs grow. After a few years some sweet smelling flowers are found in full blossom in the corner of the field: Flowers which are rare and powerful enough to cast the spell of love even in the eyes of the priest.

The story is prophetic in the sense that it closely resembles Wilde’s own life. Interestingly, Wilde himself has described in *De Profundis* the way events in his own life had been prefigured in his art. Hesketh Pearson has observed how Wilde’s personality gets painted in his works: “Wilde is one of our most autobiographical writers; his personality is paramount in all his works, nearly every phase in which is stamped with his individuality: his profundity as a critic, his superficiality as a creator” (149).
Wilde was married to Constance Lloyd in 1884 and was living the life of a family man. When he began his career he was more a media personality than a literary figure. Finding himself with a wife and young family to support he was forced to turn his hand to journalism. He earned money through book reviewing for some periodicals. It was in the year 1886 that he met Robert Ross and turned to homosexuality. Wilde was closely associated with Robert Ross, whom Ian Small describes as “Wilde’s first homosexual lover, certainly a lifelong faithful friend and his painstaking literary executor” (xvii). Like the Fisherman who went with the Mermaid, Wilde discovered his first homosexual love. Very soon we see a happy and successful writer evolving. Those were the days of happiness and pleasure. Fame and the financial and social success which accompanied it came to him in 1892 with the successful production of Lady Windermere’s Fan. But the happiness did not last for long.

Wilde always wanted to keep his family life, even when he was having homosexual relationships. He was very fond of his children and was a loving and devoted father. “...in a letter to Robert Ross Wilde reveals the importance of his children in his life – so much so that even his gay relationships had to be accommodated to them...” (Small xvii). If it was out of temptation that Fisherman returned to his Soul, it was a tragedy that happened in Wilde’s life that took him away from the pleasures of life. Wilde was sentenced to two years of imprisonment with hard labour for ‘acts of gross indecency with another male person’. He was sent to Wandsworth Prison and declared bankrupt. Out of the prison he could not be at peace with his family. The ‘Soul’ could not enter into his heart. Constance Wilde changed her name to Holland and died in 1898. She did not allow Wilde to meet his children. The door to homosexuality having been shut by the law he could not go back to his
Mermaid as well. The Mermaid of his life had a symbolic death with the verdict of the court.

Like the Fisherman who died of grief Wilde met with a tragic end. In 1900 he fell ill with blood infection and died. All his fame turned to notoriety with his awful death, like the fate of the Fisherman who was not even given a decent burial. But the rare flowers in bloom which were capable of spreading love are symbolic of the posthumous acceptance of Wilde as one of the greatest writers the world has ever seen. It could also stand for the social recognition of homosexuality and the reforms brought out by the LGBT movements. The flowers in bloom were Wilde’s prophecy about the future world.

A Florentine Tragedy is a fragmented work by Oscar Wilde. The play is about a wealthy merchant, Simone and his wife, Bianca. Simone sees his wife in the arms of a local prince, Guido Bardi. Simone extends hospitality to Guido but soon challenges him to a duel, and strangles him. The incident awakes his wife’s affection and they are reconciled.

The plot of the play offers a psychological reading of the protagonist’s mind.

Sigmund Freud’s structural model of psyche defines three parts of the psychic apparatus – Id, Ego and Superego. He says that our mental life is described in terms of the activities and interactions of these three theoretical constructs. According to this model of the psyche, the id is the set of uncoordinated instinctual trends; the superego plays the critical and moralising role and the ego is the organised, realistic part that mediates between the desire of the id and the superego. The
superego can stop one from doing certain things that one’s id may want to do. (Snowden 105-7)

The play features a conflict between these three parts of the psyche. The Id which constitutes the instinctual drives, acts according to the pleasure principles. The Superego strives to act in a socially appropriate manner which reflects the internalisation of cultural rules. The Ego is the original part of the personality that seeks to please the Id’s drives in realistic ways. Simone’s friendship with Guido forms a part of his Id, whereas his relationship with his wife is what Superego permits. The duel between Simone and Guido and the final reunion of Simone and Bianca represent the conflict between Id and Superego, where Superego triumphs when Ego suppresses the drives of the Id.

Social attitude towards homosexuality restricts the expression of alternative sexual orientations, which obviously is an instinctual drive of the Id. Since social norms do not permit the possibilities of having a homosexual relationship the desire gets suppressed to that part of the psyche which we call Id. Simone-Guido pair sets an example for a same-sex pair which is not socially permissible. A detailed conversational analysis of the exchanges between Simone and Guido brings to light Simone’s unduly adoration of Guido. For Simone, who is an ordinary citizen, looks upon Guido as a privileged prince: “The son of the great Lord of Florence whose dim towers/ Like shadows silvered by the wandering moon/ I see from out my casement every night” (A Florentine Tragedy 429). When Simone uses obscene language while praising Guido in front of Bianca, Guido reminds him of Bianca’s presence.

Simone: ...They say, my lord,/These highborn dames do so affect your grace/That where you go they throng like flies around you,/ Each
seeking for your favour./ I have heard also/ Of husbands that wear horns, and wear them bravely,/ A fashion most fantastical.

Guido: Simone,/ Your reckless tongue needs curbing; and besides,/ You do forget this gracious lady here/ Whose delicate ears are surely not attuned/ To such coarse music. (432)

Despite Guido’s indifference, Simone goes on expressing his adoration and affection for Guido. He pleads with Guido to play his lute: “Your lute I know is chaste. And therefore play; / Ravish my ears with some sweet melody; / My soul is in a prison- house, and needs/ Music to cure its madness...” (437). When Guido hesitates to play the lute Simone suggests having a drink with him at least: “If you will not draw melodies from your lute/ To charm my moody and o’er- troubled soul,/ You’ll drink with me at least?” (437). Finally, when Guido is about to leave the house, Simone asks him to stay back and not to hurry his journey: “So soon? Why should you? The great Duomo’s bell/ Has not yet tolled its midnight, and the watchmen, who with their hollow horns mock the pale moon, lie drowsy in their tower. Stay awhile” (439).

In contrast to the drives of the id, superego gets projected in the way Simone deals with his wife. He represents a conventional patriarchal husband who adheres to the strict social and moral codes. Heterosexuality, being a social norm acts according to the principles of Superego. He displays his insistence on sticking on to one’s moral responsibilities when he reminds Bianca of the duty to run to meet her Lord (429). He makes similar patriarchal observation about a woman’s household duties.

Simone: You jest, my lord, /She is not worthy of so great a prince/ She is but made to keep the house and spin. /Is it not so, good wife? It is so.
Look!/ Your distaff waits for you. Sit down and spin. /Women should
not be idle in their homes, /For idle fingers make a thoughtless heart. /
Sit down, I say”. (433)

The conflict between Id and Superego takes the form of a duel between Guido
and Simone. It resembles the way desires of the Id are suppressed by the moralistic
Superego. Guido is strangled to death by Simone, and his death signifies the
repression of the alternative sexual drives. Finally, the organised Ego reconciles
Simone with Bianca. Though Bianca had no love for her husband in the beginning she
too succumbs to the needs of Superego adhering to the moral codes of the society.
Initially she judges her husband like this:

How like a common chapman does he speak/ I hate him, soul and
body. Cowardice/ Has set her pale seal on his brow. His hands/ Whiter
than polar leaves in windy springs, / Shake with some palsy; and his
stammering mouth/ Blurts out a foolish froth of empty words/ Like
water from a conduit.(435)

However, once the libidinal urges are tamed by the Superego with the symbolic
strangling of Guido, she embraces the Ego wholeheartedly: “She comes towards him
as one dazed with wonder and with outstretched arms” (442).

The play, supposedly fragmented, ends with the victory of Superego over Id.
Simone explains the structural model of the psyche and shows how the three parts of
the psyche functions. The Ego mediates between the drives of Id and the principles of
Superego and works according to the moral codes of the society.
The poem “Charmides” deals with the story of a charming young Greek sailor, Charmides, who breaks into goddess Athena’s temple and makes love to her statue. As a punishment to what he has done to the statue, the sailor is drowned. Later a nymph falls in love with his pale dead body, but only to die in despair. Venus, the goddess of love, takes pity on the pair and unites them in the underworld.

The poem is notorious for its treatment of perverse erotic desire. Richard Ellman observes that “Charmides was probably the focal point of the considerable moral outrage caused by the publication of Poems” (141). It is said that “Even Wilde’s friend and most favourable reviewer, Oscar Browning, was hard pressed to find something good to say about this poem” (Varty xix).

Charmides and the persona of the poem form the same-sex pair in the poem. Although the poem is not basically a first person narration, the poet has directly addressed the readers in stanzas 19 and 23. The persona ‘I’ has crept into the poem in these stanzas. Prompted by the public reaction these stanzas were deleted in some of the editions of the poem. These are the only stanzas of this long poem in which the persona of the poem uses the first person, breaking the narrative, to address the readers. If the sailor is the projection of the poet’s suppressed Id, the persona mediates between his Id and Superego. By addressing the readers in stanzas 19 and 23, he divides them into sinners and innocents. He says he is addressing the ‘sinners’ in his poem. They alone can identify with his projected Id. For the ‘innocents’ the description of this ‘pervert’ love may look musicless:

Those who have never known a lover’s sin

Let them not read my ditty, it will be
To their dull ears so musicless and thin
That they will have no joy of it, but ye
To whose wan cheeks now creeps the lingering smile,
Ye who have learned who Eros is – O listen, yet awhile. (Charmides 52)

The persona’s inclination towards the suppressed Id can be traced in his
description of the Greek sailor. The conventional images that a poet, necessarily a
man, uses to describe a woman are used in abundance in the poem to describe the
sailor’s physical features. The sailor crowned his head with “fresh boughs of olive”
(49), “brushed from cheek and throat the hoary spray,/And washed his limbs with oil”
(49). At night he approached Athena’s statue in the temple. “And from his limbs he
threw the cloak away... touched her throat and with hands violate/Undid the Cuirass,
and the crocus gown/ And bared the breast of polished ivory,/Till from the waist the
peplos falling down/Left visible the secret mystery” (52).

Unlike a ‘normal’ heterosexual relationship the sailor cannot reach a fruitful
consummation in his erotic passion for the statue. Hence his seduction of the statue
stays outside the heterosexual matrix. It is here that the sailor becomes a projection of
the poet’s Id. Poet’s suppressed ‘deviant’ sexual orientation constitutes his Id.
Through the character of the sailor the persona tries to liberate his suppressed desires.

The sailor is well aware of the ‘sin’ he has committed and the punishment that
awaits him: “Ready for death he stood” (52), as he moved to make love. In stanza 23
again the persona intervenes to say that there could be people who may not appreciate
or understand the love he is speaking about. People, who “will never know of what I
try to sing, / How long the last kiss was, how fond and late his lingering” (53). Poet is perhaps speaking about the Victorian society who could never tolerate homosexuality. “In ‘Charmides’ Wilde pushes Victorian tolerance to the limit by telling the story of a young Greek sailor, who stole into Athena’s shrine and ravished her image. He compounds the provocation by addressing his readers in stanzas 19 and 23” (Alexis 1).

When the sailor walks out of the temple some people mistakes him for Narcissus: “It is Narcissus, his own paramour,/Those are fond and crimson lips no woman can allure” (“Charmides” 55). Reference to Narcissus reinforces the possibility of homosexual connotations. Poet’s adoration for the sailor gets reflected in his description of the sailor as: “the overbold adulterer, /A dear profaner of great mysteries, /An ardent amorous idolater” (56).

The sailor is drowned as a punishment for the sin he has committed. His body is washed to the Grecian shore, where a wood-nymph falls in love with him. She “called him soft names, played with his tangled hair, /And with hot lips made havoc of his mouth” (59). Her necrophilic attraction, like his seduction of the statue, has no social permission. She waits for him to wake up, but he does not. She moans bitterly and dies beside him: “Sobbing her life out with a bitter cry/On the boy’s body fell the Dryad maid,/Sobbing for incomplete virginity;/And raptures unenjoyed, and pleasures dead” (65). Unenjoyed raptures and dead pleasures suggest the unconsumed love. She died without experiencing the joy of passion; and not to have known this passion, says the poet, is like not having lived at all (65). He also adds that to know this passion is “to be held in death’s most deadly thrall” (65). Poet hints at the social prohibition or religious denial of this passion as a sin or crime which will be rewarded with a punishment not less than death itself.
Venus, moved by the scene of these lovers lying dead, lovers who should pass into the death’s house unloved (66), unites them in the underworld: “...all his hoarded sweets were hers to kiss /And all her maidenhood was his to slay /And limb to limb in long and rapturous bliss /Their passion waxed and waned...” (69).

Concluding the poem with a return to the ‘normal’ heterosexual relationship is in accordance with the social insistence on heteronormative values. The underworld were these lovers are united is described as “melancholy moonless Acheron,/Far from the goodly earth and joyous day” (68). This is how a heteronormative society appears for people with alternative sexual orientations. They will be happy to get social acceptance by turning to heterosexuality, but at the cost of deceiving their sexual subjectivity. Charmides and wood nymph are ‘happily’ united by the godess of love, but only after suppressing their ‘pervert’ desires. Moreover reference to ‘Lesbian waters’ and ‘Sappho’ (69) towards the end of the poem underscores the possible homoerotic connotations.

The title of the poem is significant in the context of homosexual interpretation. Wilde, an admirer of Greek art and life, has taken the name of one of the students of Socrates. Socrates was fascinated by the beauty of young charmides. “Socrates was attracted to teenage boys as is evident in the encounter with Charmides in a palaestra” (“Male Homosexuality” 3). Palaestra means a wrestling school which was also a place to pick up a lover. Socrates always preferred to substitute his homoerotic feelings with philosophical deliberations. He was determined to keep his relationship with young men on an intellectual love: “Socrates recommended to his associates that they substitute love of the mind and moral character for purely sensual love” (“Male Homosexuality”).
When Socrates was in the company of beautiful boys, he lost his senses. Some sort of mania (divine madness) took possession of him and he was almost unable to resist it. He often complained about the fact that he was helpless towards adolescents, and said that he could only cope with the situation by asking difficult questions to these beautiful boys and teaching them philosophy. So, according to Plato, Socrates sublimated his passion”. (Dolen)

Philosophy thus becomes an erotic enterprise for him. By raising such a relationship to philosophical dimension, Wilde seems to vouch for a sublimation of homoeroticism. This is also precisely the reason why the Victorian academia and the moral apparatus that was in ruling attempted to do away with the stanzas 19 and 23. By choosing Charmides, Wilde presents same-sex pairing cryptically. Direct allusion to Socrates is deliberately avoided. The persona’s inclination towards the projection of his suppressed Id and the final submission to the demands of Superego facilitates the psychoanalytic reading of the same-sex pair in the poem.

The same-sex pair in A Woman of no Importance redefines Freud’s concept of Oedipus Complex from a gay perspective. The play begins with a party hosted by Lady Hunstanton. In the party Gerald announces that Lord Illingworth has agreed to take him as his secretary, which could be a turn to his successful financial career. Lord Illingworth and his amoral relationships become a topic of discussion in the party.

Macey’s Dictionary of Critical Theory explains Oedipus complex thus:

The existence of the Oedipus complex explains the child’s sexual attraction towards the parent of the opposite sex and jealousy of the
parent of the same sex...In a letter to Fliess dated 17 October 1897, he (Sigmund Freud) remarks that Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* has such ‘gripping power’ because being in love with one’s mother and jealous of one’s father is a universal event in early childhood... (280-81)

Laplanche and Pontalis describe its negative and positive forms like this:

In its so-called positive form, the complex appears as in the theory of *Oedipus Rex*: a desire for the death of the rival – the parent of the same-sex – and a sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex. In its negative form, we find the reverse picture: love for the parent of the same sex, and jealous hatred for the parent of the opposite sex. In fact, the two versions are to be found in varying degrees in what is known as the complete form of the complex. (282-3)

Freud’s definition of Oedipus complex is made from a hetero-normative perspective; and psychoanalysis has made attempts to explain homosexuality as a series of unsuccessful resolutions of Oedipus complex:

It is still widely believed that a boy turns out to be homosexual when he identifies with his mother and becomes effeminate ... or, by identifying with his mother, he later wants to repeat the joys he experienced with her by choosing boys whom he can treat as his mother treated him...or whether he loves her or hates her, on discovering she has no penis he develops a ‘castration complex’ that forces him to turn to other males in need for sex-with safety. (Tripp 78-9)
“The attempts to account for homosexual diversity have pushed psychoanalysis theory into inconsistency and even absurdity; this is most acutely the case in relation to the Oedipus complex” (Dollimore 197). There is yet another possible explanation for Oedipus complex by incorporating homosexuals to the defining paradigm. Freud speaks about the male child (heterosexual by norm) who is sexually attracted towards his mother. But, if the boy is supposedly homosexual, the attraction has to be directed towards his father. Andre Green has made a valid observation on the homosexual reading of Oedipus Complex where he discusses the other side of the Oedipus Complex, “always present in some form, where a firm identification with the ‘right’ parent (for a man the father, for a woman the mother) is undermined by an identification with the parent of the opposite sex” (Wright 103). The possible existence of Oedipus complex for a homosexual can be observed as a theme in Wilde’s *A Woman of no Importance*. The gay perspective of Oedipus complex opens up wider scope of examining Lord Illingworth and his son, Gerald as a same-sex pair.

The play discusses the life of a fallen woman, Mrs. Arbuthnot, the charming young gentleman, Gerald, the powerful and flirtatious hypocrite, Lord Illingworth and the intense puritanical morality of the young American girl, Hester. Wilde seems to make no moral statements in judging these characters. Varty observes that “Wilde can be seen to be adjusting the conventional meaning of moral terms such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’. So in this play he argues for an amelioration of absolute but hypocritical judgements meted out by society and religious orthodoxy” (xix). Wilde tries to break the conventional social practice of making hierarchical division of morally ‘good people’ and ‘bad people’. Varty points out that “…the display of emotional and ethical extremes in this tableau shows the paradox on which the whole drama hinges. The
only character with conscience, moral vision and ethical depth in this play is the so-called fallen woman” (xix).

Wilde has taken utmost care to portray the hypocrisies of Victorian moral life through the exchanges between his characters, who make valid observations on marriage, family and human relationships of that period. The Victorian insistence on hetero-normative social behaviour is evidently shown when Lady Caroline says, “It is not customary in England, Miss Worsley, for a young lady to speak with such enthusiasm of any person of the opposite sex. English women conceal their feelings till after they are married” (A Woman of no Importance 222). This statement rules out the possible existence of homosexuals who are attracted not to the opposite sex, but to the same-sex. Later when she remarks that “it is perfectly scandalous, the amount of bachelors who are going about society. There should be a law passed to compel them all to marry within twelve months” (235), she exhibits the Victorian apprehensions regarding unmarried men. Moreover, certain statements in the play like “The world was made for men and not women” (225) and “Women are always on the side of morality, public and private” (226) try to tie women to the codes of morality and set men free to explore the paths of pleasures.

Lord Illingworth is presented as a man of high distinction who is hopelessly wicked. He is a rebel who criticises the rigid moral principles and shows interest in seeking pleasures of life. The characterisation of Lord Illingworth is another instance of what Dollimore points out as trangressive aesthetic of Wilde which takes the form of creative liberation (Appendix). Victorian society’s strict adherence to the moral values is brought to light through the exchanges between Kelvil and Lady Stutfield, in which Kelvil describes Illingworth as an immoral being:
Kelvil: Lord Illingworth is, of course, a brilliant man, but he seems to me to be lacking in that fine faith in the nobility and purity of life which is so important in this century.

Lady Stutfield: Yes quite, quite important, is it not?

Kelvil: He gives me the impression of a man who does not appreciate the beauty of our English home life. I would say that he was tainted with foreign ideas on the subject.

Lady Stutfield: There is nothing, nothing like the beauty of home-life, is there?

Kelvil: It is the mainstay of our moral system in England, Lady Stutfield. Without it we would become like our neighbours (229).

Kelvil appreciates the moral system that is prevalent in England of that time. He says that it is the existence of these moral values that add beauty to the English home life. He also observes that Illingworth does not fit into this society because he is more an immoral being, than a brilliant gentleman. He goes on to say that Illingworth is tainted with foreign ideas on the subject that makes him disregard the moral values of England. This observation considers the possibilities of Illingworth’s homosexual life. Illingworth’s same-sex orientation is also hinted at when he says, “I took a great fancy to young Arbuthnot the moment I met him, and he will be of considerable use to me in something I am foolish enough to think of doing” (226). He also confesses to Gerald that it is his love for Gerald that tempted him to appoint Gerald as his secretary: “It is because I like you so much that I want to have you with me” (232). Gerald also admires Illingworth and expresses his desire to accept Illingworth’s offer:
“He (Lord Illingworth) knows more about life than anyone I have ever met. I feel an awful duffer when I am with you, Lord Illingworth...He has been good to me, mother” (247).

The conflict between social insistence on hetero-normative behaviour and the libidinal pull towards homosexuality gets projected as the arguments between Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Arbuthnot. Both of them assert their claim over Gerald, and this leads to a repartee between them.

Lord Illingworth: But I did not leave him with a mere longing for things he could not get. No I made him a charming offer. He jumped at it, I need hardly say. Any young man would. And now, simply because it turns out that I am the boy’s own father and he my own son, you propose practically to ruin his career...

Mrs. Arbuthnot: I will not allow him to go

Lord Illingworth: How can you prevent it?...

Mrs. Arbuthnot: I have brought him up to be a good man

Lord Illingworth: ...You have educated him to be your judge if he ever finds you out. And a bitter, an unjust judge he will be to you...

Mrs. Arbuthnot: George, don’t take my son away from me. I have had twenty years of sorrow; I have had only one thing to love me, only one thing to love. You have had a life of joy, and pleasure, and success. You have been quite happy, you have never thought of us...Leave me the little vineyard of my life...leave me that...don’t take Gerald from me. (250)
Mrs. Arbuthnot’s claim over Gerald is what Freud describes as Oedipus complex. She has genuine affection for him and expects him to reciprocate it. Lord Illingworth’s claim reflects the gay reading of Oedipus complex where the boy’s attraction has to be towards his father. He says it is a charming offer that he extents to Gerald, which no young man would deny. This offer, though it lacks social permission, seems quite attractive for Gerald and he jumps at it. Mrs. Arbuthnot on the other hand tries to pull Gerald back from this temptation which she considers may ruin him. She thinks of him as the only happiness in her life and does not wish to part with him. She believes that she has brought him up as a good gentleman and therefore he will not violate the rules of society. However, Illingworth warns her that he is educated enough to make sensible judgement regarding the moral principles. He assumes that Gerald may listen to his Id and leave with his father. Illingworth’s interest in Gerald crosses the border of paternal affection and takes homoerotic undertones when he says: “All I have got to say now is that I am very, very much pleased with our boy. The world will know him merely as my private secretary, but to me he is something very near, and very dear. It is a curious thing, Rachel; my life seemed to be quite complete” (248).

Cigarette is a recurrent motif in many of Wilde’s plays and short stories. The habit of smoking cigarette is often associated with the same-sex pairs in his works. In this work as well, Illingworth takes Gerald to “smoke a cigarette on the terrace together” (251). Later when Illingworth informs Lady Hunstanton that he was having a cigarette with Gerald, homosexuality is hinted at:

Lady Hunstanton: Ah! Here you are, dear Lord Illingworth. Well, I suppose you have been telling our young friend, Gerald, what his new
duties are to be, and giving him a great deal of good advice over a pleasant cigarette.

Lord Illingworth: I have been giving him the best of advice, Lady Hunstanton, and the best of cigarettes. (255)

Illingworth tempts Gerald with the wonderful possibilities of pleasures which they can explore together:

Lord Illingworth: Don’t be afraid, Gerald. Remember that you have got on your side the most wonderful thing in the world- youth! There is nothing like youth. The middle-aged are mortgaged to life. The old are in life’s lumber room. But youth is the lord of life. Youth has a kingdom waiting for it. Everyone is born a king, and most people die in exile like most kings. To win back my youth, Gerald, there is nothing I wouldn’t do –except take exercise, get up early or be a useful member of the community. (252)

His temptations are so strong and attractive that Gerald falls for it. He questions the old- fashioned principles of life, and inspires Gerald to be modern: “Ah! She (Mrs. Arbuthnot) is not modern, and to be modern is the only thing worth being nowadays. You want to be modern, don’t you Gerald? You want to know life as it really is. Not to be put off with any old-fashioned theories about life. Well, what you have to do at present is simply to fit yourself for the best society” (253). He teaches Gerald to live life differently, away from the shackles of moral codes: “...And now, Gerald, you are going into a perfectly new life with me, and I want you to know how to live” (255).
Lady Hunstanton expresses society’s anxiety when she says: “...You and I, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, are behind the age. We can’t follow Lord Illingworth. Too much care was taken with our education, I am afraid. To have been brought up is a great drawback nowadays. It shuts one out from so much” (256). Illingworth does not belong to the period in which he lives; or his attitude towards life takes him to a futuristic world. He describes himself as a pleasure seeker; and for the society he crosses the borders of morality: “I (Lord Illingworth) have been discovering all kinds of beautiful qualities in my own nature... there is no secret of life. Life’s aim, if it has one, is simply to be always looking for temptations, there are not nearly enough. I sometimes pass a whole day without coming across a single one...” (258).

Initially Gerald gets attracted to the marvellous possibilities of Illingworth’s temptations. He says, “Lord Illingworth is a successful man. He is a fashionable man. He is a man who lives in the world and for it. Well, I would give anything to be just like Lord Illingworth” (262). But when the final decision is left to Gerald to choose between his father and mother, he follows the conventions of the society.

It is Hester who changes Gerald’s mind. Getting married to Hester, and thus beginning a heterosexual relationship demands a breakup from his father, Illingworth.

Hester: (waving him back) Don’t, don’t! You cannot love me at all unless you love her also. You cannot honour me, unless she is holier to you...

Gerald: Hester, Hester, what shall I do?

Hester: Do you respect the man who is your father?

Gerald: Respect him? I despise him! He is infamous. (273)
Then he chooses his mother and leaves his father succumbing to the expectations of society and reinforcing Freudian interpretation of Oedipus complex. Moreover, it seems interesting to note that “young Oscar was very much his mother’s son” (Julian 29). Ian Small makes a supporting observation on the play about its gay undertones:

The plot of *A Woman of no Importance* appears to be concerned with a familiar tension between child and parents...However the cancelled drafts of the play confirm the suspicions of some gay critics that Wilde’s original concern was with plotting the dynamics of male-male desire between an older and powerful man (here Lord Illingworth) and a younger, attractive ingénue (Gerald Arbuthnot). (xxvii)

In his non-fictional work, “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” Oscar Wilde speaks about his passionate attempt to unravel the mysterious identity of Shakespeare’s ‘master-mistress’, W.H. Wilde himself has thus set before us an example of dissecting the creative oeuvre of a writer to learn more about his ulterior motives and interests. It is easy to draw a parallel between Shakespeare and Wilde who were both alleged to have homosexual interest in young men. Wilde supports and asserts Cyril Graham’s argument when he says that W.H. could be a young boy actor of Shakespeare’s time.

Cyril argues that W.H. could not be either Lord Pembroke or Lord Southampton. Cyril cites ample evidences from Shakespeare’s sonnets to prove his argument. He infers that ‘W’ stands for Will, because it is said in the punning sonnets CXXXV and CXLIII that the Christian names of Shakespeare’s friend is the same as his own. The surname according to Cyril is ‘Hughes’ which hidden in the eighth line of 20th sonnet where Shakespeare plays on the word ‘Hews’. Cyril concludes that
W.H. is none other than the boy actor who played the female characters of Shakespeare, who lived on stage as Rosalind, Portia, Juliet and Desdemona. It was he, whose physical beauty was such that it became the very corner-stone of Shakespeare’s art; the very source of his inspiration; the very incarnation of Shakespeare’s dreams? To look upon him as simply the object of certain love-poems is to miss the whole meaning of the poems: for the art of which Shakespeare talks in the sonnet is not the art of the Sonnet themselves, which indeed where to him but slight secret things- it is the art of the dramatist to which he is always alluding;...( “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” 56)

However, Cyril’s theory cannot stand because he could not establish the existence of this young actor, Willie Hughes during Shakespeare’s time. Wilde was so fascinated and influenced by Cyril’s theory that he set out to prove Cyril’s argument right. He developed Cyril’s theory and came up with his own evidences. Sometimes he got interpretations, “which indeed Cyril Graham himself seems to have missed” (65). As Rodney Shewan observes it, “the more W.H. appears to correspond with objective historical truth, the more subjective it becomes in essence” (85). Willie Hughes became a passion for Wilde that Cyril’s argument turned out to be his own.

For two weeks I worked hard at the sonnets, hardly ever going out, and refusing all invitations. Every day I seemed to be discovering something new, Willie Hughes became to me a kind of spiritual presence, an ever-dominant personality. I could almost fancy that I saw him standing in the shadow of my own room, so well had Shakespeare drawn him, with his golden hair, his tender flower-like grace, his
dreamy deep-sunken eyes, his delicate mobile limbs, and his white lily hands. His very name fascinated me. Willie Hughes! Willie Hughes! How musical it sounded! Yes; who else but he could have been the master-mistress of Shakespeare’s passion... (69)

Wilde’s excessive interest in proving Shakespeare’s alternative sexual orientation actually is a projection of his own repressed feelings. Here, the pairing is between a non-fictional character, Shakespeare and a semi-fictional character, Mr. W.H.

Cyril here becomes an expression of Wilde’s own Unconscious. Erskine is a mere listener. Thus Cyril’s argument is more of a monologue which in turn can be developed as the interior monologue of Wilde. Through Cyril, Wilde’s Unconscious explores Shakespeare’s secret love without prying into the mystery of his sin. Shakespeare and Mr. W.H. form a pair using which Wilde tries to picture his own libidinal urges. Unlike his other works where Wilde makes use of fictional characters to liberate the unconscious, here a nonfictional character and a semi-fictional character are in function to operate the mechanisms of the Unconscious. Cyril’s theory is thus a projection of Wilde’s own Unconscious. Cyril becomes Wilde’s Id counterpart through whom Wilde attempts his wish fulfilment. This also reminds us of Freud’s concepts of ‘Transference’ and ‘Projection’. Transference is “the phenomenon where by the patient under analysis redirects the emotions recalled in analysis towards the psychoanalyst” (Barry 93). Projection is a mechanism by which “the negative aspects of ourselves are perceived in or attributed to another” (Barry 93). Wilde transfers his emotions towards Cyril, not an analyst in this context. Similarly, he projects his so called ‘deviant’ desire on Shakespeare’s fascination for Mr. W.H.
The third part of the essay where Wilde regrets for having explored Cyril’s theory to such an extent, substantiates the psychological reading of Cyril as Wilde’s Id counterpart. The interference of the ‘Conscience’ controls the projection of the ‘Unconscious’ in the ‘Conscious’ realm. Wilde speaks about a “curious reaction” that came over him after which he lost his curiosity in Cyril’s theory on Willie Hughes:

No sooner, in fact, had I sent it off than a curious reaction came over me. It seemed to me that I had given away my capacity for belief in the Willie Hughes theory of the Sonnets, that something had gone out of me, as it were, and that I was perfectly indifferent to the whole subject. What was it that had happened? It is difficult to say. Perhaps, by finding perfect expression for a passion, I had exhausted the passion itself. Emotional forces, like the forces of physical life, have their positive limitations. Perhaps I was simply tired of the whole thing, and my enthusiasm having burnt out, my reason was left to its own unimpassioned judgement. However it came about, and I cannot pretend to explain it, there was no doubt that Willie Hughes suddenly became to me a mere myth, an idle dream, the boyish fancy of a young man... (“The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” 75)

Wilde considers his idea which he shared with Cyril as “an idle dream” or a “boyish fancy” of a young man. Through this idle dream Wilde has in fact tried to liberate his repressed emotions. As Freud puts it, repressed emotions sometimes seek outlets through “dream works”, the process by which real events, desires or emotions are transformed into dream images: “Dreams, just like literature, do not usually make explicit statements. Both tend to communicate obliquely or indirectly, avoiding direct or open statement, and representing meanings through concrete embodiments of time,
place, or person” (Barry 94). Through this dream like literary imagination Wilde tries his own libidinal wish fulfilment.

Apart from Cyril Graham there is one more name mentioned in the essay, that of Erskine’s. Erskine can be read as yet another projection of Wilde’s Unconscious. Erskine’s description of Cyril Graham echoes Wilde’s creation of male-male bonding. Through Erskine Wilde expresses his emotions for the young effeminate boy. In his introduction to Oscar Wilde’s anthology of Short Fiction, Ian Small observes that:

...the most elaborate of all of Wilde’s coded reference to a gay double life occurs in the ‘Portrait of Mr. W.H.’ There Wilde’s character (once again called Erskine) describes his relationship with Cyril Graham which is reminiscent of Wilde’s representation of male-male desire, and uncannily prophetic of his own relationship with Bosie and Bosie’s father, the Marquess of Queensberry. (xxviii)

Since “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” is a non-fiction the return of the repressed happens through the non-fictional characters. In the essay, Wilde presents himself as a listener to Erskine’s description of Cyril Graham. But more than a speaker Erskine becomes a projection of Wilde’s own Unconscious. Through Erskine’s words Wilde is giving colour to his own imagination:

He (Cyril) was effeminate, I suppose, in some things, though he was a very good rider and a capital fencer... The two things that really gave him pleasure were poetry and acting...I was absurdly devoted to him; I suppose because we were so different in some things. I was rather awkward, weakly lad, with huge feet, and horribly freckled...He certainly was wonderfully handsome... I think he was the most
splendid creature I ever saw, and nothing could exceed the grace of his movement, the charm of his manners. He fascinated everybody who was worth fascinating, and a great many people who were not... He was horribly spoiled. All charming people, I fancy, are spoiled. It is the secret of their attraction.

... In fact, Cyril Graham was the only perfect Rosalind I have ever seen. It would be impossible to describe to you the beauty, the delicacy, the refinement of the whole thing. (“The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” 52-53)

Cyril and Erskine thus function as projections of Wilde’s repressed desires in two different ways. In the first case, it is through Cyril’s quest to know Shakespeare’s mystery that Wilde projects his Unconscious and in the second case it is through Erskine’s bonding with the charming young boy, Cyril that the mechanisms of Unconscious work.

The revelations of psychoanalysis may seem intolerable to a society that brands sexuality as aesthetically offensive, morally reprehensible or even dangerous. Foucault states that

Psychoanalysis stands as close as possible, in fact, to that critical function which, as we have seen, exists within all human sciences. In setting itself the task of making the discourse of the unconscious speak through consciousness, psychoanalysis is advancing in the direction of that fundamental region in which the relations of representation and finitude come into play. (374)
Psychological approach towards same-sex pairing thus becomes another important method through which Wilde has unconsciously explored his repressed libidinal urges.