

This research paper entitled “Subverting Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet*” foregrounds the homosexual and other nonconventional relationship between and among female characters and their rejection of traditional mode of heterosexual relationship in order to search their lesbian self. Especially, the narrator or protagonist, Nan Astley fights against traditional hetero- sexual division of gender and sexuality by transforming herself from being a young innocent oyster girl in Whistable, England to becoming a successful music-hall performer, renter, social right public speaker and confident lesbian woman in London. So, by emphasizing the queer and deviant activities of the characters, this research challenges conventional concept of gender and sexuality and dramatizes lesbian issues of homosexuality and bisexuality which are rejected by the western thought.

The study of same sex desire, attraction and female eroticism as seen in the Waters’s novel concerns with the concept of lesbianism, which refers to sexual preference of female to another female which challenges the notion of normative sexualities. The novel, *Tipping the Velvet* openly deals with the romantic love between two women: Nancy and Kitty, sexual relationship between Nancy and Diana as well as mature and balanced relationship between Nancy and Florence which is a sign of same sex desire. The sexual behavior of lesbian women in the novel does not correspond with Victorian views on female sexuality as passive and restrained. Instead, the characters have rather active, even aggressive sex and lives. Similarly, Nancy spends most of the narrative dressed as man, engaging in an oral sexual relationship with men as well.

In this way, the main character has numerous relationships with both males and females thereby challenging the traditional and patriarchal notion of

heterosexuality and subverting the single headed heterosexual relationship and advocating the possibilities of other relationships.

Through *Tipping the Velvet* Waters also reveals the awareness of nineteenth century relationship between performance and sexuality of women. The sexual and gender transformation that Nancy experienced after watching Kitty's performance suggests that viewing male impersonation may strongly influence one's life choice and subjectivity. Seeing Kitty perform on stage in man attire signals Nan, it is possible for her not only to access the stage but also to experience same sex love and desire. However, even though it was the boy's costume and manners that attracted Nancy's attention, she did not desire a boy but Kitty's feminine curves.

Furthermore, Nan reads the costume as door to power and independence. So when Nan becomes Kitty's dresser, Nan gradually reveals not only the politics of stage but also her own gender and sexuality. The costumes which Nan handles become magical tools for changing and challenging gender role and at the same time a source of erotic pleasure. Similarly, by passing female to male cross dresser, Nan continues to perform in music hall with Kitty as a male impersonator. So, Waters's use of terminology is also seen in Nan's name changed from "Nancy Astley" to "Nan King" upon her stage career as a breeches performer. Nan is also solicited by a man for sex and becomes a prostitute or renter but dressed only as man for male clients, she never let them know that she is woman.

Moreover, Diana, an upper-class widow lesbian presents Nan as "her boy" and sexually exploits her by providing expensive masculine outfits. Hence, Nan's real sexual identity is hidden behind her performance as a boy but at the same time she explores her sexual identity through cross-dressing, expressing her masculinity by dressing up in man's clothing. Here, Waters's concept of construction of gender and

sexuality through performance related to the Judith Butler notion of gender performativity which challenges the conventional gender and sexuality. In this way, Nancy Astley behaves as both, giving her ability to offer her perception of London society in Victorian era as both man and woman.

The central story of *Tipping the Velvet* is intertwined under the rubrics of queer narratology in general and lesbian narratology in particular. In order to question the traditional heterosexual and patriarchal concept of love, sex, marriage, family, gender and other male supporting ideas there by highlight the possibility of homosexual and bisexual relationships. So, this research makes use of lesbianism as primary critical apparatus.

As a lesbian writer, Waters talks very explicitly about sex and describes sexual scenes between women trying to convey a sense of naturalness about queer desire and lesbian issue. This is vividly shown in the novel by the continuous use of the term 'queer' which in the past had the meaning of "funny" or "Strange" but which has the connotations of homosexual or deviant in our contemporary societies. So, lesbian sexuality and its exploration is one of Sarah Waters's main concerns in the novel.

According to Emily Jeremaih, "The novel can be considered as combination of a picaresque novel and *bildungsroman*" (135). She says "A picaresque novel refers to "an episodic text" the "describes the adventure of a lively and resourceful hero on journey" whereas a *bildungsroman* is " a novel in which the chief character, after a number of false starts or wrong choice, is led to follow the right path" and to develop into a mature and well-balanced person"(135).So the novel is *bildungsroman* in the truest sense and follows the picaresque adventure where her main character Nan goes through three different stages in her development as a lesbian subject.

In the first stage, Kitty refers the awakening to the same-sex desire and first

love where as in second stage; Diana indicates sexual objectification and exploration. In third stage, Florence represents mature love and the acquisition and recognition of a lesbian identity. Similarly, in the same stage; the protagonist develops a sense of community so important for lesbian debate. So, as the narrator of her own story, Nan reflects her experiences and personal development in and through her erotic relationships with number of different women relationships which involves betrayal, abuse, and server emotional scares but also tender love making and steamy hot sex. It is through her encounter with male impersonator Kitty Butler that Nan first experienced an erotic awakening and imitates her psycho-emotional journey by exploring and gradually discovering her sexual identity as lesbian. Hence, the novel fights against traditional way of ordering past and defining identities by raising the questions about realism and representation.

Sarah Waters is a contemporary lesbian writer who grew up in Wales and lives in London. She came across the title of her first book, *Tipping the Velvet* through her research work. The term tipping the velvet is a slang Victorian expression which makes allusion to erotic activity known as fellation, both practices by homosexual and heterosexual couples. However, in the case of Sarah Waters, the words of the title clearly alludes to the lesbian practice known as cunnilingus, which means an oral sex act performed on female. It involves the use by a sex partner of mouth, lips and tongue to stimulate the female's clitoris, vulva or vagina. There are many slangs for cunnilingus like eating someone out, eating pussy, liking someone out and several common slang terms used are "giving lips", "lip service" or "tipping the velvet", a Victorian pornographic term for cunnilingus.

Since her debut novel *Tipping the Velvet* appeared in 1998, Sarah Waters is studied extensively by many different scholars, both in the field of gender studies as

well as in literary studies with special focus on the neo-Victorian and lesbian elements in her writing. She has published five novels so far: *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), *Finger smith* (2002), *The Night Watch* (2006) and *The Little Stranger* (2009). Out of these, three are set in the 19th century while other two take place in 1940s. In addition, all of these novels feature lesbian protagonist finding various ways to engage with their sexuality in Victorian England.

Being a lesbian writer, Waters portrays homosexuality as normal in her novels where the era is used for uncovering and disrupting the seemingly smooth surface of Victorian morality as other hidden sexualities and identities outside the dominant discourse are revealed and recreated. In an interview with Abigail Dennis, Waters herself affirms, “her lesbian protagonists are capable to find ways in which to engage with their sexuality in Victorian society, at a time when the idea of lesbianism did not exist” (41). Through her many lesbian characters, Waters then offers views of what 19th century lesbianism might have been like, thus perhaps filling some gaps left by the absence of invisibility of lesbianism in authentic 19th century fiction. In this sense Cheryl A Wilson points out that “engaging the Victorian through fiction allows for reinvestigation of particular elements of Victorian culture” (286). Wilson further argues “Since *Tipping the Velvet* is postmodern Victorian text, it reveals Waters’s awareness of twentieth-century relationships between performance and sexuality for women” (286). Hence, Waters is able to employ current lesbian and queer theories in her writing in order to create a suggested version of 19th century lesbianism.

Furthermore, this study tries to highlight the homosexual and bi-sexual relationships of the characters by means of their cross gender performances as both male and female. So *Tipping the Velvet* explores the transgender and transsexual activities which are often rejected, dejected and discarded in the heterosexual male-

dominated society thereby dramatizing lesbian issues. Here researcher has brought the concept of gender performativity of Judith Butler, especially by referring to her theory of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. In her theory, she questions the concepts of gender and sex based on binary system and contests the feminist notion of the 1970s that sexes were defined by biology as male and female and gender as masculine and feminine. It means she undermines the distinction between sex as natural given and gender as an acquired cultural-social category.

Similarly, in Butler view's identity of male and female can be created through performance. She claims, "Gender as a constant performance, a series of cues observed, internalized and repeated over time" (136). In this sense, Butler's *Gender Trouble* proposed the groundbreaking theory of gender and sexuality. Moreover, Judith Halberstam's concepts of drag king and butch / femme identities, under female masculinity are heavily borrowed which counters the conventional gender and sexuality through performance and cross-dressing.

Simultaneously, in order to justify the connection between performance and cross-dressing to challenge the certain notion of binary, the notion of cross-dressing developed by Marjorie Garber is taken where she talks that, "Dressing up in the clothes of opposite sex is an important part of expressing their sexual identity" (10). Thus, on the core of all these concepts, lesbianism is celebrated as platform and primary tools in order to deconstruct hetero-patriarchal concepts of gender and sexuality. The lesbian idea developed by Lillian Faderman is drawn in the research.

Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* occupies the lesbian theme including same sex desire, attraction, female eroticism and self-exploration and through these impressions, researcher supports homosexuality, bisexuality and third gender which is also the main focus of this research. So, the researcher has brought numerous critics'

reviews and research for the study of novel. In *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, Martha E. Stone reviewed *Tipping the Waters* and acclaim:

Tipping the Velvet is the story of the narrator's rise and fall and slow re-ascent. Nancy Astley began life as a tomboyish fishmonger with a passion the music halls. After a full day of shucking oysters, she would leave her close-knit family and take herself to the nearest theatre, where she would soon fall for the diminutive Faversham masher, Kitty Butler. (48)

Martha E. Stone clarifies that Nancy Astley is guided by the ethos of lesbianism. Once Nancy visits a theater where she is encountered with Kitty Butler who performs a play and Nancy falls in love at first sight. Nancy is too much infatuated by Kitty Butler, male impersonator. Here Stone supports that gender is the matter of social construct rather than the natural phenomenon. This view is related to the Butler's notion of gender as a matter of construction that is based on performance. For Butler, gender is all about performativity where male performs as men and female performs as women. If the gender performativity would vice versa then in today's world male acts as female and women acts as men

Simultaneously, Lynette Frey critically reviewed Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* and proclaims in *Studies in the Humanities*:

The protagonist, Nan, is uncomfortable inhabiting female dress and shuns the expectations of a woman's role in a heterosexual romantic relationship. The adaptation features an additional scene in which Nan meets Florence for the first time in an elegant teahouse. This is the first conventionally feminine environment that Nan finds herself in, attired in a dress and sipping tea. (204)

Frey affirms that before meeting Florence, Nan is happy with her masculine attire and lesbian relation with Kitty, a male impersonator but when she meets Florence then she

experiences feminine environment with feminine dress. In the Victorian era, there was the celebration of hetero-sexual normativity but Nan follows homosexuality which is quiet risky task. The heroine is in a lesbian relationship that radically disrupts the conventional romance plot. So, Sarah Waters tries to break the conventional pattern of the society and raises the voice of LGBTs.

Nancy Lee-Jones reviewed *Tipping the Velvet* in *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide: The Naughtier Victorian* by averring, “Waters's first novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, was *Great Expectations* as lesbian picaresque” (56). Nancy clearly states that Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet* is her debut novel by having lesbian tone.

Another reviewer, Katharina Linder wrote, “*Tipping the Velvet* highlights the ‘problems’ that representations of lesbian sex constitute both in relation to notions of ‘quality’ and ‘authenticity’ central to (British) period drama, and the ways in which both programs negotiate those tension by sidelining lesbianism in favor of a hetero-normative overall frame” (120). This depicts there is huge difference in the representation of sex in the past and in present. In the past there was only hetero sexuality practiced but now both, homo and hetero and the world of the novel is also filled with various lesbian issues.

Similarly, Miranda Seymour reviewed Sarah’s *Tipping the Velvet* in *The New York Times* by professing, “But, as Nancy soon becomes painfully aware, her love will always be hidden away. ‘Toms,’ as Kitty teaches her to call openly lesbian girls, are to be avoided. Kitty is ready to respond to Nancy's love, but not to risk her reputation. Nothing, she insists must ever be revealed” (7). Here, Miranda tries to exhibit that there is lesbian relationship with Nancy and Kitty where Kitty teaches Nancy to make it secret because Victorian period could not digest it and the name and

fame they earn all go in vain. Kitty is ready to respond Nancy's love but without risking her career and reputation. For society Kitty gets married with her manager, Walter Bliss which makes Nancy broken.

Another renowned critic, Mariaconcetta Costantini comments on 'Faux-Victorian Melodrama' in the *New Millennium: The Case of Sarah Waters* published in *Berghahn Books* and acclaims:

Narrated in the first person by the protagonist, the novel dramatizes a woman's search for freedom and sexual identity in a male-centered world, whose power apparatus caused a number of social inequalities. Their encounter, which is triggered off by a criminal plot and an even more devilish counterplot, results in a lesbian love story, which is opposed by a corrupted, hypocritical society.

(17)

Constantini contends that the novel dramatizes women's quest for freedom and sexual identity in male centered world. At first, lesbian love story goes smooth but in a secret way latter, the complication arises and the balanced world gets disturbed. Hypocritical society prevails during Victorian age in London. Moreover, Mariaconcetta Constantini asserts "Waters attempts to 'bring back to life the secret yearnings and the anxieties that plagued the Victorians' minds and, in different ways, still haunt our existence in the new millennium" (20). Thus, inspired by the male impersonators of nineteenth century and the music hall's transgressed space, contemporary author Sarah Waters explores and recovers the erotic charge in her neo-Victorian novel *Tipping the Velvet*.

Additionally, Harriet Malinowitz mentions, " Waters ties Nan's shifting gender identity to her sartorial choices: drawers, bonnets, petticoats... and ties mark her early life while freedom and pleasure beckon in the form of silk waistcoats, serge jackets,

Oxford bags and boaters[...]” (11). Harriet advocates the variable nature of Nancy. Nancy sometimes plays the role of male impersonator and sometimes female. Nancy shows the male prejudiced traits and sometimes submissive. These fluctuating identity challenges the patriarchal notion during Victorian dusk.

Mandy Koolen’s review entitled, “Historical Fiction and the Reevaluating of Historical Continuity in Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet*” argues, “The female-to-male cross-dressing provides insight into Nan’s link between the disavowal of her feminine gender identity and sexual gratification she experiences when she participates in cross-dressing act alongside her partner”(380). This shows when Nan meets Kitty, her eyes are opened to a new world of possibilities and her gender identity slowly develops. When Nan joins Kitty in her act where she starts cross-dressing herself, her gender identity and performed gender starts increasingly align.

In “*The ‘I’ inside ‘her’*”, Emily Jeremiah identifies, “the source of Nan’s gender trouble and the ‘queerness’ of her appearance that her costume is “too real” (118) and that she looks “too much like a boy, and not enough like a girl dressed up as a boy” (136). This approach challenges the belief of boundaries between the sexes. So, every indication of Nan’s gender performances challenges the established boundaries between the sexes in Victorian era, as her performativity dismantles the notions of sex as fixed category. In Nan’s case, although she dresses in traditional male attire and has adopted a male dominated manner in order to express herself, she is not perceived as a girl who dresses as boy or not enough like a girl dressed up as a boy as implied by Jeremiah.

Another critic, Rachel Wood comments that the performance of a male impersonator permitted the actor to cross-dress as “Kitty parodied masculinity as well as allowing women in the audience the playful fantasy of appropriating masculine

freedom' and allowed the women witnessing the performance 'an imitation of heterosexual desire and love to take place between women'"(307). Thus, the boundaries between heterosexual attraction and lesbian desire are challenged when Nancy watches Kitty perform as man, and it allows her act on her sexual instincts and fantasies since she perceives Kitty's on-stage persona as not entirely female.

Based on the Butler's notion of drag act and performativity, Allison Neal reviewed *Tipping the Velvet* and acclaims, "Waters exploits the complexities, both explicit and implicit produced by the drag act of male impersonation" (60). Here, Neal affirms that drag king and the male impersonation act can directly challenge the biological basis of gender differences.

The aforementioned literature reviews by different critics mostly deal with the concept of lesbianism and same sex attraction, gender performance, cross-dressing, music hall, neo-Victorian, prostitution, female same sex erotic, queer, the picaresque, drag king, multiple meanings of the text, homosexuality and so on and the researcher totally agree with these concept mentioned by those critics in their reviews. Though these critics discuss how Sarah Waters's novel *Tipping the Velvet* is a lesbian text or how the cross-dressing and the performance of the character shape their identity or how they involve in same sex erotic relationship but they did not focused on how the activities and the behaviors of the characters challenge the conventional gender and sexuality. So, this research paper takes those concepts like lesbianism, cross-dressing and performance, female eroticism as a means to question the conventional notions of gender and sexuality. Similarly, this research paper takes the study of lesbianism as a core issue in the text.

In Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*, the protagonist exemplifies the gender blending figure of cross-dresser. In the first phase, Nan adopts male clothing in order

to join Kitty Butler on stage as part of double act. Later on when Kitty betrays Nan by marrying Walter, she then changes herself into male through cross dressing and performs as a 'renter', a young male prostitute. In the second phase, Nan is effectively dressed like a boy and kept as a sexual prisoner by Diana Lethby. Likewise, in the third phase, Nan has accepted her identity as a transvestite and assumes masculine clothing for more pragmatics purposes of the Banner household duties.

Here, the triple layers and the phases of the narrative therefore reveal the multiple layers of gender, personified by cross-dressing, drag act and male impersonation. It means throughout the novel, Nancy performs the role of both male and female through cross-dressing that shows the constructed nature of gender, based on performance. Thus, the ideas and the claims that are coined by the queer theorist Judith Butler is used in relation to the themes of the novel in order to demonstrate in what way it represents the social construction of gender and illustrations of the performance of gender as self- representation.

Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* argues gender is merely a social construct phenomenon and the division of gender is not a natural process. In this sense, Butler asserts, "Gender is not simply the 'casual result of sex' but rather the 'cultural meaning that the sexed body assumed'" (6). Here, she undermines the distinction between sex as cultural given category and gender as an acquired cultural-social category. Similarly, she understands, "Gender along with sex and sexuality to be performative" (22). It means Butler is asserting an identity of male and female through performance, especially by the help of drag act, cross-dressing and butch/femme identities.

Further, Butler claims, "The notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag act, cross-dressing, and the

sexual stylization of butch/femme identities” (137). Here, she means to say that drag act, cross-dressing and butch/femme identities are the tools to create or construct gender identities, which also counter the conventional gender and sexuality as fixed category. So, Butler’s notion of gender construction through performance is applicable in the novel. Through drag act, or the act of dressing as another gender and adopting the performance, the main character Nan, easily alter her realities and her intersections with other.

In the novel, the protagonist Nancy who used to be a regular girl once turns herself into boy through drag performance or male impersonating act after joining Kitty at theater. When Nancy wears male attire for the act, Kitty says, “She looks like a real boy” (134). This line shows that how her gender identity is created as male through the act of dressing as another gender. Similarly, her name changes from Nancy to Nan King, “the professor said ‘Nan King’, and I liked it” (142), also based on the performance, which counter the gender as natural or original category. Moreover, Nan works as male prostitute through cross-dressing and shape her gender identity as male. The given line, “to walk as a boy, as a handsome boy in well-sewn suit, whom the people stared after only to envy, never to mock” (221), shows how Nancy represents herself as male in the London streets. Additionally, in the end, she once more creates her identity as female through women costume and then turns herself into masculine lesbian again through masculine attire, “I kept my hair short, I wore my trousers” (462). It shows how changing or wearing opposite sex’s costumes shapes one’s gender identity. In this way, Nan performs different gender role time and again, both as male and female, which shows the constructed nature of gender through drag, cross-dressing and butch / femme identities as claims by Butler.

Butler takes this discussion even further, arguing that the different gender

roles are performed. She mentions, “Gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender and without those acts, and there would be no gender at all. Gender is thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis” (140). This concept of gender construction is based on the act or the performance is accurately recognized by above given lines that are applicable in Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet*. Nancy Astley’s first encounter with Kitty Butler occurs when she visits the music hall where the male impersonator performs in a female to male cross-dressing act. So, this is the example of how gender can be performed, especially in the context of music hall of 1880s. Kitty Butler performs as drag and Nancy immediately infatuated with the masculine appearance of the actress and describes:

She wore a suit-a handsome gentleman’s suit, cut to her size, and lined at the cuffs and the flaps with flashing silk. There was a rose in her lapel, and lavender gloves at her pocket...when she took topper off-as she did now to salute the audience with a gay ‘Hallo’-one saw that her hair was perfectly cropped...she strode like a boy, and stood like one, with her feet far apart. (13)

Here, Nan provides the detail of Kitty’s masculine dress, hair and how she speaks and how she stood. Even though it was the boy’s costume and manners that attracts Nancy’s attention, she did not desire a boy but Kitty’s feminine curves. So, Nan’s attraction and desire towards the cross-dressing Kitty can be interpreted as a way for her to discover her own identity as masculine female but also as a person with gender identity that is non-conforming with her female sex.

Later on, both Nancy and Kitty become sweethearts and are in a secret lesbian relationship. Nancy claims “ And so the day that I became Kitty’s sweetheart was also the day that I joined her act, and begins my career- my brief, unlooked –for, rather wonderful career---on the music-hall stage”(126). It means they both are employed

and put on display as male impersonator. When Nan puts on trouser for the first time to perform as Kitty's partner, she realizes the impact of their double act together and states, "Whatever successes I might achieve as girl, they would be nothing compared to the triumphs I should enjoy clad, however girlishly, as a boy. I had in short found my vocation"(140). In other words, Nan feels like being boyish comes naturally to her and it is the masher performance that enable her to find this out about herself.

In the novel, Waters has combined elements of both 19th century male impersonating acts as well as the more recent drag king performance in describing Nan and Kitty's male impersonating. As Halberstam offers "The meaning of male impersonating in the 19th century was not to produce too plausible a mimicry of maleness: Instead, boyish women were often assigned with so called 'boy' role where they 'represented an immature masculine subject'" (233). In Halberstame's view, male impersonation directly concerns with the boyish looks of performer which also helps to shape or create the person's identity. The given line "Four nights before I had stood in the same spot, marveling to see myself dressed as a grown up women. Now, there had been quit visit to a tailor's shop and here I was, a boy – boy with buttons and a belt" (133). This line projects, even Nan accepts boyish look through cross-dressing to involve in male impersonating act and she looks too real as boy. In this context, Kitty asserts, "She's too real" (134). In male attire, Nancy looks like a real boy, which is good for both Kitty and Nan to perform on stage as male impersonator.

While performing in the theatre, Kitty goes by the name of Kitty Butler and Nancy's name is changed into 'Nan King' and also make her hair short. At that time Nancy claims, "I seemed to want her more and more, the further into boyishness I venture" (141). The more boyish she looks, the more comfortable in her body she feels. When her hair is cut short and she adopts new stage name 'Nan King', she

desire Kitty all the time. So, through performance, Nan slowly comes into terms with her sexual identity as masculine lesbian. This directly concerns with concept of butch define by Halberstam. He contends “Because masculinity has seemed to play an important and even a crucial role in some lesbian self-definition, we have a word for lesbian masculinity: butch” (119). Actually, Butch is a lesbian whose appearance and behavior are seen as traditionally masculine. In novel, Nan loves to wear male costume and performs respectively. In this sense, we can call Nan as masculine lesbian. Butler also articulates, “The existence of butch and femme identities actually questions the notion of ‘an original or natural identity’” (120). It means butch / femme concept question the gender as fix category and challenge the heterosexual notion.

Furthermore, Kitty and Nan on-stage also sing many songs that are meant to be singing by men to women or a group of men. Some of the songs like ‘Sweetheart and Wives’ and ‘Drink up boys!’ clearly reinforce the masculine role played by Kitty and Nan. So their hair cut, name change, songs, dresses all are imitated by male to performs on stage. This view is somehow related to the concept of Butler’s notion of performance. Butler argues, “The understanding of identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation, however, it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealize, and that this idealization is an effect of corporeal signification” (136). This means when gender identification is considered enact able, it is still important to achieve coherence; in other words, to reproduce a convincing version of that which is enacted. For example, when performing masculinity, certain gesture, acts and desire typically associated with masculinity which can be used to achieve this kind of coherence.

This type of case in the novel is also pointed out. When Kitty and Nan have moved to London for performance, Kitty’s manager Walter Bliss makes the girls “go

about the city and study man” (93). This line suggests that it is possible to study masculinity in the street and then transfer it into the theatrical act. Subsequently, novel seems to reinforce Butler’s views on gender being per formative instead of being fixed category that can only be attached to corresponding sex.

Moreover, Waters exploits the complexities both directly and indirectly produced by the drag act of male impersonation. Throughout the novel, she employs her knowledge of gender and queer theory to emphasize the performativity of gender through her cross- dressed protagonists. Drag act and the male impersonation act directly challenge the biological basis of gender difference. As Butler contends:

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - As well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configuration of casual unites that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. (137)

Waters’s protagonist Kitty and Nan represents this ‘radical contingency’. They exemplify the very concept of alternative gender and alternative sexuality. But these alternatives must be confined to the music hall stage as the only acceptable place for transvestite to be performed.

Though Kitty and Nan proudly perform as male on stage to entertain the audience but kitty never presents her real identity off stage. In other words, Kitty does not want to be associated with Tom. In Harberstam’s view, “some terms that were used to refer to different kind of lesbian identities in 19th century and most importantly ‘tommy’ or ‘tom’ was used to the masculine female” (51). It means ‘tom’ or the ‘tommy’ is other word that people used in 19th century to refer lesbian but in novel, Kitty does not want to be called by that name so Kitty says to Nan, “Nan! She

said, They're not like us! They're not like us, at all, They're toms" (149). It means she does not want to relate herself with lesbian though she loves Nan. Therefore, she completely denies her sexual identity as lesbian in order to protect her heterosexual status and married to her manager Walter Bliss.

Actually, lesbianism is defined as female to female sexual- orientation or behavior or homosexual relationships between women and this can be seen throughout the novel between and among the characters. Lillian Faderman in her overview "Surpassing the Love of Man: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present" precisely define lesbianism and writes:

Lesbian describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other. Sexual contact may be part of the relationship to greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspect of their lives with each other. (17)

Above excerpt thus focuses on romantic and erotic attraction of female to other females, where sexual relationship between them may be optional. As they spend most of their time together and live together, they maintain a distance with male and this type of relation can be seen among the characters in the novel. Same sex relationship in the novel, not only seen between the Nan and Kitty, but also seen between and among the characters like Nan, Diana, Zena and Florence.

The relationship between Nan and Kitty, "Here, shy again, I let my hand lingered-until, with her face still tilted from my own and her eyes hard shut, she took my wrist and gently led my fingers to her breasts. When I touched her here she signed, and turned; and after a minute or two she seized my wrist again, and moved it lower" (120), demonstrate that their relationship is quite feminine. The relationship is

mostly tender, sweet, quite innocent and romantic and there is no sexual contact between them, Nan says, “I had not fucked, we had not frigged; we had only ever kiss and trembled” (303). It shows that Nan and Kitty’s relationship is based on pure love sexual contact is entirely absent as assumed by Faderman. Whereas Nan and Diana’s relationship is totally based on the sex, is proved by presence of dildo. “You’re the boldest bitch, with the cleverest quim, if fucking was a country-well, fuck me, you’d be its queen...!” (303). Here, Diana uses unsentimental and rather harsh words like fucking, bitch which shows the sex between them is quite aggressive and no romantic feelings are allowed.

Similarly, the nature of relationship between Nan and Florence is balance, mature and romantic. Nan says, “I love you; over how to say that you are my all the world to me; that you and Ralph and Cyril are my family, that I could never leave-even though I was so careless with my own kin” (540). This projects that idea of Faderman that lesbians spend most of their time by sharing the love and care. Nan and Florence also live as family without hiding their relationship and this is different in comparison to those between Nan and Kitty and between, Nan and Diana. So, these relationships between women in the novel show the existence of homosexual relationship that challenges the conventional notion of gender and sexuality.

Furthermore, in Butler’s view the drag performance reveals all gender identity as performative rather than expressive. She acclaims, “The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance” (137). This claim about drag act and performing gender as the theatrical act indicates the difference between sex, gender and performance that creates three varieties while

performing gender. In Kitty's case, her sex, gender and gender identity she performs do not align as she appears seemingly masculine on-stage but is conventionally more feminine outside the theatre. "Every time she stepped from behind the screen, clad as girl, small and slim and sharply, a false plait smothering the lovely, ragged edges of her crop" (41). Nan claims after every male impersonation act, Kitty carries more feminine looks than other characters in the novel. She even uses artificial hair to hide military shape.

Regarding Nancy's layers of gender identity, it can be determined that before she acquainted with Kitty and theatre world, She is perceived as the traditional feminine girl who feels the pressure of marrying and helping her parents within the family business. But when she meets Kitty however her eyes opened to a new world of possibilities and her gender slowly develops. When she joins Kitty in her act and starts cross-dressing herself, her gender and performed gender starts to increasingly align. So, the concept of drag performance as mentioned above by Butler is relatable in Nan and Kitty case as drag performers.

As novel progresses, Nan's gender identity begins to become more fluid. After Kitty's betrayal, she starts to perform both gender role as male and female. When in her lodging room of Mrs. Best house, depressed about Kitty's betrayal, Nan stops wearing false pant and lets her hair grow. Nan utters, "Let my hair straight greasily about my ears" (208). Here, she stays in feminine dress and play a role of female. When she overcomes her pain, she then begins dressing up quite often as man and performs as male prostitute through cross-dressing. It means she takes her male impersonation into the street of London. As Halberstam claims, "Some male impersonator carried over their cross-dressing practice into their everyday lives suggests that their relation to masculinity extended far beyond theatrically"(233). In

her view, male impersonating act is not only limited in theatre rather it can be perform in everyday life through cross-dressing. This concept directly unites with Nan, “ With my hair trimmed, I thought, and a pair of proper boy’s shoes upon my feet, anyone- even Kitty herself- might meet me on the street of London, and never know me for a girl, at all” (217). Nan brings her male impersonator act into London Street. She wears male attire and makes her hair short as she used to do in music hall. This way, she performs as renter. In another word, Nan starts transitioning from being traditionally female into being perceived as man through cross-dressing.

In Marjorie Garber’s view “Cross-dressing is a crucial ways of challenging certain notion of binary as like Butler’s notion of performativity, it shows the constructed nature of gender” (10). She asserts through cross-dressing, the notion of the original and of stable identity can be questioned. If a man can dress up as women and women as man, and if the supposed original can thus be constructed and reconstructed, there cannot in fact be an original. In the case of Nan, she is passing female- to- male cross-dresser and continues to perform. Instead of going about as herself, a masculine lesbian, Nan’s real sexual identity is hidden behind her performance as a boy which challenges the conventional notion of gender as stable.

When Nan starts to work as male homosexual prostitute or rent boy in the London Street, she wears her old music hall outfits and pleases man sexually. She assumes a variety of roles each suited to the male customer and thus learns the role of boy. She states, “For a week or two I continued to wander, and to watch, and to learn the way and gestures of the world into which I had stumble. Walking and Watching, indeed, are that world’s keynote: you walk, and let yourself be looked at” (228). This emphasizes the fact that Nan is indeed playing yet another role instead of acting naturally and being herself.

Later on when Nan has started to cross-dress on regular basis, she betters her impersonation with some new tricks; she asserts “on every visit I found some new trick to better my impersonation” (220). For that she uses bandages to make her chest seem flat like men’s and also creates the impression of having penis by rolling up a handkerchief or a glove inside her underwear. She declares, “I experimented with bandages in an effort to get the subtle curves of my blossom more subtle still; and at my groin I wore a handkerchief or a glove, neatly folded, to simulate the bulges of a modest little cock” (220). This description matches with Garber observation about “rolled-up socks” to the “inside crotch of your underwear”, being a typical way for cross-dressing. She asserts, “Self-help manual for female-to male passing transvestites (for example how to pin rolled-up socks to the inside crotch of your underwear to enable to pass in the man’s room)” (120). So, making a false penis also gives someone a real look that can challenge a stable identity.

In this way, Nan’s transition goes fairly unnoticed by the people she meets, especially her customer, which are all men. Her first customer comments on her feminine appearance, despite the fact that she is disguised as man, “Your mouth is such a perfect one – quite like a girl” (225). Here, Nan chooses to never let the customer know of her true identity and gender. She further articulates, “A girl! There is a girl, here, in boy’s clothing” (220). This means, she successfully performs as male and no one even suspects her of being cross-dressed as a man.

As Garber argues, “The cross-dresser can see as ‘the third’ that disrupts the harmony of certain seemingly fixed categories, such as, male/female, gay/straight and sex/gender” (133). It means cross-dressing is another way of constructing and deconstructing gender. In the novel, Nan poses as man by presenting herself into male costumes that questions her true identity. “Then a woman with frizzed fringe put her

hand upon my arm, and tilted her head and said: ‘Well now, pretty boy, you look like a lively one. Fancy payin’ a visit, to a nice Little place I know...?’ (220). It proves that Nan manages to successfully pass a man. A man greets her as a fellow man and prostitute sees her as possible client. So as Garber says the looks of the Nan challenge the fixed categories of ‘male/female’, ‘gay/straight’ and ‘sex/gender’.

Furthermore, when she needs to find a new place to live after Mrs. Best has kicked her out, she sees an advertisement that mentions, “Respectable Lady Seeks Fe-Male Lodger” (238). Here, Nan finds the advertisement intriguing because of the word choice ‘Fe-Male’ and asserts that “there was something very appealing about that Fe-male, I saw myself in it-in the hyphen”(238). In other words, because she performs two different genders on a daily basis, Nan is not sure how she should define her gender anymore as she spends time both as a girl and boy. As a result, she is a combination of two. So, this concept of multiple gender identities directly concerned with view of Butler. Butler claims “it is possible for one sexed body to have several different genders at the same time” (141). For Butler, gender is a ground for endless opportunities and different identities. Thus, Nan’s cross-dressing and passing brings out the per-formative nature of gender.

Moreover, Nan is exposed as passing cross-dresser by an upper class widow called Diana Lethaby. As a lesbian, she recognizes Nan as a masculine woman and turns Nan into sex slave with her consent after sensing her suppressed desire for women. When she starts living with Diana, a decadent Sapphic, Nan is allowed to experiment with her clothes as well as her sexuality. It means Nan steps further into her gender performativity as she becomes acquainted with richer Diana. While living with Diana, she only wear male attires and be a Diana’s boy. Nan asserts, “I’m living as a boy, with a lady who takes care of me...” (327). She also provides sexual

pleasure to Diana with dildo. Even though she is given the active sexual role as she is one wearing Diana's leather dildo, her position in Diana's home is that of prisoner.

The presence of 'Monsieur Dildo' in their sexual encounter which Nan describes as "a kind of harness, made of lather: belt like, and yet not quite a belt, for though it had one wide strap with buckles on it, two narrower, shorter bands, were fastened to this and they, too, were buckled"(274). These lines demonstrate that there are other ways of living the lesbian desire and experience that are not linked with love and respect for the other. This view matches with Halberstam's thought of lesbianism. He states, "It is important to bear in the mind that lesbianism refers to various kind of sexual desire and acts" (56). In other words, there are difference within lesbians and how they express their sexual passion or sexual identity.

Diana also restricts Nan's freedom of movement, decides on her daily activities and significantly provides and chooses her clothes. Nan declares, "It becomes a kind of sport with her, to put me in a new costume and have me walk before her guests, or among them, filling glasses, lightening cigarettes" (318). It means Diana is a one who shapes Nan's identity according to her sexual tastes. This shows that the construction of Nan's gender identity is seems to be in the hand of Diana and Diana here represent the society. In this case, Butler also states, "When imitating and performing gender, the act and/or the performer reveal the fabricated structure of gender as social construction" (187). It shows that gender is a matter of social construction based on the performance or act and Nan goes through the same situations. In addition, Butler articulates "Then the performance suggests a dissonance, not only between sex and performance but sex and gender, and gender and performance" (187). She argues if the biological sex of the performer is different from their gender, and both the sex and the gender have been distinct from gender

itself then it focuses on the constructed nature of gender identity based on performance. This view of Butler is applicable in Nan, who possesses as Daina's boy though she is a lesbian. Even though Nan's sexual orientation is exposed in front of Diana's lesbian friends, Nan nevertheless lives completely as herself with Diana.

Simultaneously, posing as man in front of her friends, whenever Nan goes somewhere outside with Diana, she presents Nan "her boy" (316). Nan claims, "For it was always as boy that I travelled with her now, even when we ventured into the public world, the ordinary world beyond the circle of Cavendish Sapphists" (316). In other words, Nan again plays the role of boy inside and outside the lesbian circle, instead of being herself. Even though Nan is within a community of women who indulge in same sex relationship, after almost one year she feels disgusted and bored by the constant posing and performing for Diana and her lesbian friends. Then, when she is kicked out for defending a servant girl Zena and having sex with her using Diana's private toy dildo, she ends up on the street, penniless, beaten and hungry.

After wandering for months in the streets of London without clear destination, Nan finds a point of reference in Florence Banner and her lesbian Group, whose relational model is based on mutual assistance and respect for diversity. When Nan has moved in with Florence, she tries to return to femininity one more time by repeating her previous behaviors, activities and dresses or looks which she has had while living with her parents in Kent. By repeating the performance of certain gender another gender can be created articulates by Butler is applicable in the context of Nan, who wants to be an ordinary girl through female attire. Butler states, "Gender requires a performance that is repeated" (140). It means gender is matter of construction based on the repetition of performance. In the novel, Nan declares, "I had been a regular girl once; I could be regular again-being regular, indeed, might prove a kind of holiday"

(423). Before meeting Kitty, Nan was an ordinary girl, who used to help her parents to run their oyster shop but after she meets her, Nan's sexual identity changes mostly as male through cross-dressing but now she wants to live as a female. For that, she left her old looks and male attire and repeats her feminine looks and behaviors. This way Nan transforms herself into ordinary girl once more through dressing up in typical female dress. Nan here tries to expressing her femininity by dressing up in women's clothes.

The switch from masculinity back into femininity does not go smoothly as Nan hoped. Instead of making Nan look and feel nice and clean, the new clothes have quite opposite. She views, "The truth was I had looked awful ever since leaving St John's wood; and now in a flowery frock, I only looked extraordinarily awful" (432). Thus, Nan does not feel comfortable in femininity anymore and instead longs to be male or masculine again. Her butch identity becomes clear when she realizes that going to femininity is not an option for her anymore because she feels disgusted by it herself. As a result, for the first time she is not afraid to hide her sexual identity and tries to be masculine in public through dressing up in male dress. So, the idea of cross-dressing that counter the originality of gender, proposes by Butler is relatable in this context.

Accepting masculinity all over again gives Nan a sense of relief and freedom and questions her existing sexual identity. Nan acclaims, "brought a pair of moleskin trousers and a set of drawers and a shirt, and a pair of braces and some lace- up boots... and doing haircut"(460), performs with male dress again she is free to be herself without playing female role. In this way, Nan's transition from female back to male looks happens gradually from private to public.

Likewise, Nan goes out to an East End pub with Florence in masculine outfit

without performing or passing as man rather being herself. At that time, she meets lot of lesbian people over there. She even comes to realize her true sexual identity as masculine lesbian after seeing women in masculine dress for the first time. She also identifies herself with them. She says, "I blinked, and looked again, I began to see...They were not men, but girls; they were girls-and they were rather like myself" (475). Finally, her real identity as butch questions the originality of her gender.

Similarly, Florence's appearance emphasizes the idea that lesbians can and often do balance both femininity and masculinity instead of limiting themselves to strict gender role. At first, it is difficult to Nan as well to decide whether Florence is a tom or not because she looks and acts unlike masculine lesbians. Nan claims, "She really can't be a tom, I would say to myself-for, if she never flirted with me, then there were plenty of other girls who passed through our parlor, and I never saw her flirt with a single one of them, not once. But the, I never saw her flirting with fellow, either. At last, I supposed she was too good to fall in love with anyone"(432). In this sense, Florence is femme, a lesbian having a feminine quality, who does not want to hide her sexual identity as well as her relationship with Nan. As Halberstam suggests, "If butch refers to lesbian masculinity, it is counterpart femme, is used accordingly to refer to lesbian femininity" (121). In her view, Femme is opposite of butch identity, who carries more feminine roles. It means Femme is a lesbian with feminine qualities. In the novel, Nan and Florence are opposite to one another in terms of their behaviors, looks and so on. Nan poses masculine qualities whereas Florence poses feminine qualities. Instead she is proud of who she is and refuses to cover her relationship with another women.

She suggests, "If Frank doesn't like my habits, he can stop visiting. Him and anyone else with a similar idea. Would you have people think we were ashamed?"

(495). Hence, the fact that Florence is not interested in hiding her sexual identity makes it possible for Nan and Florence to have an out relationship and thus live as family just like everyone else. So, Florence and Nan relationship seem more mature and balance than Nan's previous relationship in many ways.

At the end, Kitty comes back to Nan who is still married to Walter and wants to start a new relationship with Nan but in secret. She says, "Nan, come back to me" (534). But in return Nan proudly rejects her proposal and shouts, "I have a new girl now, who's not ashamed to be my sweetheart" (534). While Kitty still wants to be in a secret, Nan is ready to leave hiding behind. She is not interested in covering her identity anymore. She further says, "You are wrong, I said I belongs to here, now these are my people. And as for Florence, my sweetheart, I love her more than I can say, and I never realized it, until this moment" (535). So in replying to Kitty, Nan realizes that the love she feels for Florence is more than a sentimental and erotic bond. Additionally, her passionate relation fosters her partnership with a completely lesbian community.

Likewise, she rejects her old name Nan. When Kitty calls her by that name, she screams, "Don't call me that, I said pettishly. No one calls me that now. It ain't my name, and never was" (535). By giving up her stage name, Nan also gives up playing anymore roles. Instead she wants to live her life as herself and be called by her real name 'Nancy Astley' again. Finally, Nan finds a way to balance her previous roles in the end, she is not the traditionally feminine woman that she was in Whitstable nor does she play the part of man like the one she did in the music hall with Diana. Instead, she is a mixture of both gender and supposedly continues her life as masculine lesbian. Nan is indeed an example of someone whose gender identity is not limited to her sex but indeed it is possible for her to be both female and male or

female or masculine at the same time. So, Butler's idea on gender performativity and gender as social construction as well as sexed body to have several gender identities at the same time is heavily applied in the Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*.

In a nutshell, by looking at different depiction of gender and sexuality in *Tipping the Velvet*, this research discusses whether the novel succeeds in escaping the traditional perceptions of gender and sexuality. It also deals with how Waters plays with stereotypical male and female identification, appearance and behavior in order to deconstruct gender. And also investigates in what way the heterosexual discourse is questioned in the novel. Moreover, by subverting heterosexual concept of sexuality and gender, it turns the concepts of marriage, family, sex, love and morality upside down providing multiple alternatives. Thus, *Tipping the Velvet* illustrates that instead of perceiving gender as either male or female, it is possible to remark gender as a performance.

So, as discussed in this study, there are several indications of homosexual or bisexual relationships which are depicted throughout the novel and it works as contributing factors in determining Nan's gender and sexual identities. Nan's sexual awakening arises when she finds herself drawn to the masculine characteristics of the male-impersonator Kitty and it continues as she finds comfort and independence in cross-dressing. Having the opportunity to act, live, and dress as a man allows Nan to discover her own place in the unfixed gender binary. The constant changeability in her gender expression indicates that Nan experiences discomfort in identifying with and relating to femininity and her assigned gender.

Even though Nan's gender identity is not clearly determined, the novel presents her gender identity to be fluid and therefore non-conforming with the norms that is the gender binary. By cross-dressing, Nan finds comfort and confidence and

she becomes more aware of the male privileges of freedom that is provided when people starts perceiving her as man. In terms of her sexual identity, it is clear that Nan is lesbian with no interest in man. Throughout the novel, she experiences sexual attraction and romantic love towards women and she serves man only as her customers. She also expresses her disgust when working as a rent boy or male prostitute. Furthermore, Nan's attraction and desire towards the cross-dressing Kitty and socialist Florence can be interpreted as a way for her to discover her own identity as masculine female and also as a person with gender identity that is non-matching with her female sex.

In closure, the researcher applies the concept of gender performativity in the novel *Tipping the Velvet* which challenges the notion of conventional gender and sexuality as fix category. Additionally, *Tipping the Velvet* as Waters's later-published novel set in the Victorian period, is more openly exploitive of gender as performance and the method of exploitation of drag, a concept discussed by Judith Butler in her exploration of gender performance. However, the issues depicted in the novel are still relevant for the queer people of any gender identity and sexual orientation. Even though, the novel set in the Victorian era and written hundred years later, Waters describes the experiences of queer people which can still relate to those people. Alienation and the inability to relate to the norms of the society, the sufferings of gender blending and, love and desire between same-sex are as common in the late 1890's as they are today. Thus, the theory and the idea of Judith Butler are referred in this research and applicable to analyze the Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*.

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