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Subverting Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in Sarah Waters's

Tipping the Velvet

A Thesis submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.

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Letter of Recommendation

Sushma Bagale has completed her thesis entitled “Subverting Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet*” under my supervision. She carried out her research from October 2018 to April 2019. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

Mr. Shiva Raj Panta

Supervisor

April 2019

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Subverting Conventional Gender and Sexuality: Lesbianism in Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Sushma Bagale has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

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Date: _____

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Abstract

This paper attempts to take an indepth study of Sarah Waters's Tipping the Velvet in order to illustrate how the conventional gender and sexuality has been challenged by the performative nature of gender. With the evidences from novel on the concepts of drag act, male impersonation and cross-dressing, the researcher comes to a conclusion that gender is a matter of construction based on performance which dismantles the traditional views of gender as fixed heterosexual category. Moreover, this paper mainly focuses on the fluid identity of the main character Nancy Astley or Nan who is also a lesbian, performs the role of both as male and female through cross-dressing. It further discovers how the drag and male impersonation acts of Nan and Kitty shape their gender identity and shows how the gender can be performed, especially in the context of music hall in 1880s. Similarly, Nan cross-dressed as opposite sex and works as male prostitute in the street of London. Also, the acceptance of Nan's true identity as masculine lesbian in the end shows the constructed nature of gender. Thus, the researcher has brought Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity specifically referring to her theory Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, where she states gender is merely a social construct phenomena. She further acclaims it can be constructed through performance based on drag act, cross-dressing and butch / femme identities. To support this view, the researcher has further borrowed the ideas of drag king and cross-dressing from Judith Halberstam and Marjorie Garber respectively.