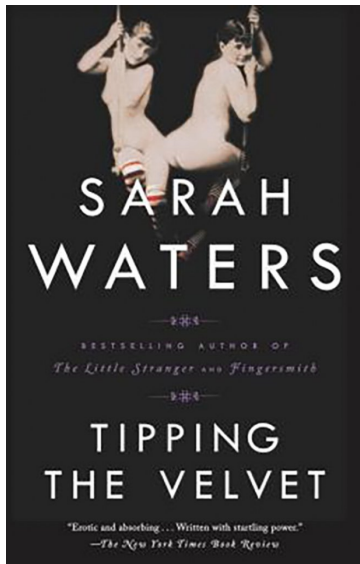


## Tipping the Velvet-Sarah Waters



This book takes place in the 1890's, at a time when same sex relationships were completely hidden, but male and female impersonators were common entertainment. Nan, the lead character, becomes enchanted with Kitty, a masher, or male impersonator, after seeing her perform in the local theatre. Nan follows Kitty to London, where the two begin to perform as mashers together.

Kitty is an older, more experienced woman and performer, and Nan learns the masher trade at her feet. During the course of Nan's tutelage, and subsequent rise to the top in the theatre, the two fall in love. When their relationship suffers, Nan strikes out alone, seeking fulfillment in other areas. She is forced to sell herself to make ends meet, and eventually finds a wealthy older woman who pays her to entertain at parties. Nan's choices and circumstances seem limited at best, but her journey of

self-discovery is just beginning.

This story is very much a story of identity and discovery. Both lead characters play with gender roles in acceptable ways in the theatre, and in taboo ways, in their relationship. Seeing the dark underbelly of society evidenced in the demarcation of what is right and wrong, is hypocritical at best, and devastating at its worst. The sheer bravery of Nan to follow her heart, and the resulting shame and ostracism when she goes it alone, are too real to be denied.

This story is both heartbreaking and joyful. The reader feels the same turmoil that Nan feels, and same exhilaration. It is beautifully written. Waters does a masterful job of portraying the development of Nan's identity and sexuality. This is a must-read.