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When conjurer William Wilson gets booked for a string of cabaret gigs in Berlin, he's hoping his luck's on the turn - there were certain spectators from his last show who he'd rather forget. But secrets have a habit of catching up with him, and the line between what's an act and what's real starts to blur.

The Bullet Trick Details

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From Reader Review The Bullet Trick for online ebook

Alison Hardtmann says

William dropped out of university years ago. He was convinced that magic was due for a comeback and as a conjurer, he was headed for the big time. It wasn't and neither was he. A decade later he's drinking too much and taking the small jobs his agent sends his way. One of these leads to a side job to steal an envelope after a job at a strip club. He still had the envelope when the people who hired him are murdered and he flees to Berlin, to a steady gig at an *Erotische Cabaret*.

Welsh wrote an excellent debut novel, *The Cutting Room* and this book continues in the same dark vein. William is a man who has come not to expect much from people or life, and is rarely disappointed. He's still basically an ethical man, no matter the ease at which he accepts the odd bribe to look the other way, and willing to confront his own incriminating acts if necessary.

Kirsty Darbyshire says

I'd put this somewhere on the up side of average. A bit slow in the beginning and not an author I'm going to race around looking for, though perhaps one I will read again. So it quite surprised me when I found her mentioned online as one of the big new names taking crime writing into the literary bit of mainstream fiction. I liked the plot and some of the characters (bit players better drawn than the major parts) but didn't think the writing was anything to get excited about.

Sharon Bidwell says

I've read one of Louise Walsh's books before (though the title escapes me) at the recommendation of a friend. I do recall not being particularly taken with it. This book I enjoyed more. The writing is slick and I like the way the story jumps back and forth between settings and time. The big reveal, not so big, but an enjoyable, cosy thriller. One I liked for the writing and presentation more than the plot.

Adrian says

I thought I had the end all figured out, obviously not... Very nicely played

inbetween says

Good book. I have to accept that despite turning my back on "literature" after my teens, I do need "real" books. I'm not actually at home with mainstream books and probably never will be. I was looking for what I

want and need in genre fiction, but a good book always has elements of mystery in it, a real book deals with sex in some way at some point. Welsh does so very obliquely in this novel (I'm not sure how one reviewer characterised the protagonist, and I'm hesitant to judge on his reaction to others *no spoilers*), but that's all for the good, since I couldn't stand any of the many slim girls peopling its pages and the nightclubs William traverses.

Equally I thought I detested multiple flashbacks, but most of my good authors have them, see also: mystery-revealed, see also: Gale. Twice I think Welsh could have cut and merged, but overall it worked well - and of course she's a truly good writer.

I hate the cover, wish I had the other one, but oddly enough the text managed to make the obviousness of it seem less so. Two further plus points are the two older women (the missing woman's sister's ire at everyman thinking it was always about sex) and that the protagonist ends up drinking and gambling just as in the beginning - if this was his journey into the heart of darkness, as one review-line said, it didn't change him, nor explain to us why he is like he is (which, incidentally, is a good person). It's also not "slick" as another review-line said, because slick implies superficial, and while assured this is not fake.

ETA: some words about the main theme - it did seem too close to Welsh's famous first novel, but then again there is a real lack of critique at the pleasure (mostly) men get from seeing females hurt, and it is a different story to the historical search of the gay auctioneer in *Cutting Room*. If her second novel is also about a gay man, then that's another thread I don't mind in Welsh's case - she is a very different caliber to the many female authors writing gay men these days. Fingers crossed (for Maria McCann as well).

Ape says

Louise Welsh has a very compelling way of writing. This is the second book of hers I've read, and again, I've just rattled through it. The seediness is back again that I vaguely remember from the *Cutting Room*. This time it's the world of conjurers in the night club scene, dancers and exotic dancers, slightly less than legal business men and so forth. The book is set in three places and times, London, Glasgow and Berlin, and it skips between the three so that you don't find out what went on in each place until the end. Although I did kind of see the Berlin bit coming (ho ho ho, aren't I the perceptive one), although I still don't really get why someone would pay a lot of money for the kind of pathetic performance that was given at the end. Anyway... William Wilson is a Glaswegian magician working in London. He gets hired as a warm up act for a couple of exotic dancers at a policeman's retirement do, and in the duration of the evening is "persuaded" by the club owner to lift something out of one of the policeman's jackets. Of course no one tells William the truth about exactly what it is, but because of this little thievery, he's dragged into a decades old mystery. One that gets more contemporary when he finds out a few days later than the club owner has been murdered. By this point he's taken a job in Berlin even though he doesn't speak German and isn't a star, and believes himself to be safely out of the way. But the London mystery seems to be tracking him to Germany and then onwards to Glasgow, whilst at the same time he gets mixed up in what I will only describe as perverted oddness in Berlin.

Peter Weissman says

A noirish book whose conjurer/scam artist protagonist flashes forward and back in time between demimonde London, Glasgow, and Berlin. I liked it enough to order Welsh's two other (not part of a series) books: *The Cutting Room* and *Tamburlaine Must Die*.

kingshearte says

When down-at-heel conjurer William Wilson gets booked for a string of cabaret gigs in Berlin, he is hoping his luck is on the turn. There were certain spectators from his last show he'd rather forget.

Amongst the showgirls and tricksters of Berlin's scandalous underground William can abandon his heart, his head and, more importantly, his past. But secrets have a habit of catching up with him, and the line between the act and reality starts to blur.

Bringing the seedy glamour of the burlesque scene magnificently to life, Louise Welsh's deft contemporary tale is her richest and most macabre yet. The Bullet Trick is also an unputdownable thriller that will keep you guessing till its final explosive flourish.

This book did not live up to the hype. At all. And, in addition to the last sentence of the blurb there, there are also five very effusive endorsements from other authors, all of which make me very dubious about the quality of their writing, if they're so impressed by Welsh's. Because really, it was not only not as exciting as they all promised, but it was actually quite dull.

For one thing, the blurb kind of implies that the really horrible thing happened before he went to Berlin, and that he went to Berlin to escape it, only to have it catch up to him there. But the really horrible thing happened in Berlin, and he went back to Scotland to try and drown his sorrows about it.

In basically an entirely separate and unrelated story, there's the thing he was actually trying to escape in Berlin. Which didn't even have anything to do with him. Now, people frequently get embroiled in things that have nothing to do with them in books, but when that happens, usually whatever the thing was will somehow become entwined in whatever the character's current situation is, and it will end up having to do with the character in question. This one didn't. There was this secret about the disappearance of the mother of the boyfriend of an old friend of the narrator's. And that's as close as it ever gets, except for the fact that William does end up in possession of a piece of evidence in the matter, and thus finds himself marginally involved. But never in a thrilling sort of way or anything. It's just there, and he's a practically disinterested bystander.

The other thing, the one that happens in Berlin, barely really fits into the story at all, except that it's the reason he's back in Glasgow, drinking himself into oblivion. Then the twist at the end happens, and it's not quite "and then he woke up," but it has almost that kind of feel to it. It certainly wouldn't qualify as an "explosive flourish."

All of which led to the book feeling very aimless for at least half the duration. We didn't know anything about the horrible thing that was going to happen in Berlin (although I did start to guess), and not much about the other thing, either. And it alternated most of the way between chapters in Berlin, in the past, and chapters in Glasgow, in the present. With a few chapters of even older past thrown in to help confuse matters further, so the first part of the book was not only a little dull, but a touch confusing and disorienting, too.

So all in all, not one I was fond of, and one that falls pretty firmly on the "Don't bother" list.

Penny Taylor says

Interesting set of disreputable characters in steamy, down-at-heel environments.

Richard Kunzmann says

The Bullet Trick is Louise Welsh's second novel, which deftly follows up on her first The Cutting Room. Like her first book, this is a story that shoots for the gothic and carnivalesque, but it doesn't quite hit the mark.

William Wilson is a magician on the last leg of a faltering career when an old friend asks him to do a second-rate show in a London strip club. What happens during the show drags Wilson into the violent aftermath of a dusty missing person's case.

The story is set in three cities – Glasgow, London and Berlin – and Welsh effortlessly shifts between locations without losing the reader. Her depiction of these places and Wilson's burlesque underground world is commendable, while the quirky showmen and grifters he meets along the way are appealing, if not memorable.

Louise Welsh's writing is concise, and her style is playful in a way that makes the language itself alluring. In places the novel drags a bit, but the only real disappointment is William Wilson's eventual show-down with the killer hunting him. One is left with a sense that the back story was more powerful than William Wilson's awakening as an unlikely hero. Taken as a whole, it's a fine read to pass the time, but chances are you won't remember the details a week from now.

Carole says

I picked up this book from my library, the picture first caught my eye and then the title, and when I read the blurb and noticed that some of it was set in Berlin I was travelling to Berlin soon I just had to borrow it. And I'm really pleased that I did as I absolutely loved it.

The story starts in present day Glasgow and travels back and forth in time to Berlin and London narrated by William Wilson, Mentalist and Illusionist, who was

the warm-up act for a whole troupe of comedians and stand ups. The guy nobody came to see.

When his agent sends him to a London club for a gig he somehow gets mixed up in a missing persons mystery, involving the police and blackmail, and where, shortly after, two men are found shot to death, he decides it would be a good idea to disappear and take another job in a cabaret club in Berlin..... but, unfortunately, his troubles have only just begun. As the chapters alternate between the different cities and the

different times, I loved the way Louise Welsh built up the suspense, we knew something terrible had happened to William earlier but the clues are slowly dragged out and the story never slows or gets boring.

Even though William is not the most endearing of characters, he drinks too much, smokes too much, and at the beginning of the book he gambles too much, but his witty and dry humour had me laughing out loud a couple of times and I found myself liking him more and more as his life starts to unravel in the darkly gothic world of glamour and magic.

The descriptions of his illusionist acts were fascinating, all the various larger than life characters were well-defined and I was totally engrossed from start to finish.

J says

Disappointing because I loved *The Cutting Room* so much. The main character just didn't have what the other guy had.

E.R. Yatscoff says

A slow moving story and just interesting enough to keep me reading, albeit in small periods. Wilson and other characters weren't very interesting but at least the Berlin part was better. When Wilson returns to Glasgow he becomes a different man and also, the police are strange people. We are not 'in' on a lot of stuff so it is a bit of a surprise when things happen.

Linda Boa says

Although I read this book 11 years ago, I still remember enjoying the unexpected twists and turns of the plot, and the decadence of Berlin. I've always been a huge fan of Louise Welsh, who lived in my friend's flat when she was at Glasgow Uni. I particularly adore *The Cutting Room*, as that reminds me of how wonderful the West End was in the late '80s, with its mixture of (sometimes very distinctive) characters, great bars and unusual shops. Now it's full of wankers, and the unique shops have gone. This isn't quite as good as her creepy debut, but is still worth a read, as is anything by one of Scotland's most talented authors. Perhaps I'll give this one a re-read soon...

Kerri says

The blurb makes it sound more lavish than it is so I was a little disappointed but it's easy to read and has a good ending.
