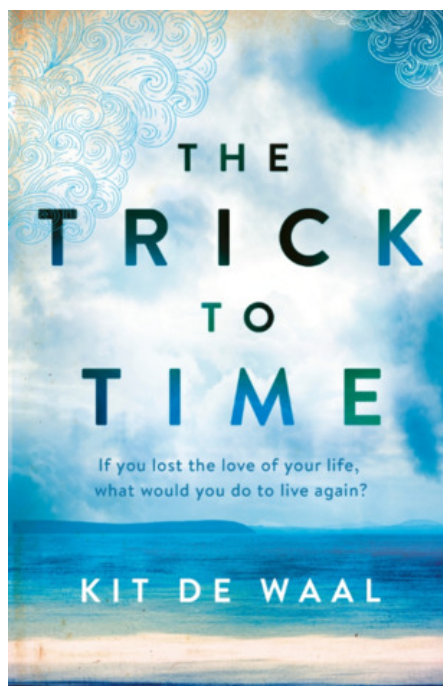




The Trick to Time

Kit de Waal

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The Trick to Time

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The Trick to Time Kit de Waal

Mona is a dollmaker. She crafts beautiful, handmade wooden dolls in her workshop in a sleepy seaside town. Every doll is special. Every doll has a name. And every doll has a hidden meaning, from a past Mona has never accepted.

Each new doll takes Mona back to a different time entirely - back to Birmingham, in 1972. Back to the thrill of being a young Irish girl in a big city, with a new job and a room of her own in a busy boarding house. Back to her first night out in town, where she meets William, a gentle Irish boy with an easy smile and an open face. Back to their whirlwind marriage, and unexpected pregnancy. And finally, to the tragedy that tore them apart.

The Trick to Time Details

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Author : Kit de Waal

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From Reader Review The Trick to Time for online ebook

Eric Anderson says

I love it when a novel surprises me. I'm not specifically talking plot twists – although, this book does have a big one towards the end which I didn't anticipate. It's more that feeling when I'm reading a book and the writing is fine, but I'm not sure I see the point of the story. But then it gets to a section where it emotionally grips me and breaks my heart and pieces it back together bit by bit. The best example of this I always go back to is Colm Tóibín's "Brooklyn" which made me flip and fall in love with it halfway through. But now I can say the same about Kit De Waal "The Trick to Time". This novel slides effortlessly between the early and later life of Mona, a girl from Ireland who eventually moves to England and spends many years making elegant handcrafted dolls as well as emotionally assisting bereaved women in their grieving process. It's a deceptively simple story that makes big statements about loss, relationships and the power imagination can play in rescuing us from the ravages of time.

Read my full review of The Trick of Time by Kit De Waal on LonesomeReader

Jennifer says

This is a beautiful book. Video review here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgZmi...>

Lucille says

It's not often that a book makes me cry but The Trick to Time did. A beautifully written story about a love affair remembered by 60 year old Mona who lives alone and works with a local carpenter crafting dolls for women who have suffered the loss of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth or cot death.

Although Mona has friends she is quite solitary and when she begins a relationship with a neighbour, Karl life looks up. But Mona spends much of her time thinking about her first love, her husband, William. They both left Ireland for a new life in Birmingham but things go badly wrong on the night of the IRA bombings. The ending of her story is as unexpected as it is uplifting and I loved the portrayal of a strong female character who is able to overcome obstacles against all the odds.

The Trick to Time will appeal to readers who enjoyed Brooklyn. I'm sure Kit de Waal's many fans will not be disappointed in her second novel and hope it is as successful as My Name Is Leon. It is undoubtedly one of my books of 2018. Thanks to Netgalley and Viking for the opportunity to read and review this remarkable story.

Emily Ross says

Thank you to the publishers for providing an ARC of this book through NetGalley.

DNF at 25%.

I loved the setting of this book. How could I not? It's where I'm from. I loved the familiarity with the area and it really felt like the author knew the area and understood the socio-cultural style of the area. I also loved the Irish aspect of the character. It brought another dimension to the character.

But the book itself was just pretty meh. It was slow, it was a bit boring and I couldn't see where it was going at all. I wasn't compelled to finish this book at all.

Lindsay says

This is a novel that makes you think and it packs a lot of feeling and depth of emotion into less than three hundred pages.

We meet Mona, in her present situation, coming up to sixty years old and living alone in a seaside town and creating and decorating special wooden dolls for her shop with the help of a local carpenter, each doll with a significance, and we meet Mona in the past, as a little girl in Ireland and then as a young woman in Birmingham in 1972, just starting to make her way in the world, and falling in love with young Irishman William, marrying and falling pregnant, and the tragedy that ensues. The threads of Mona's life are intermingled throughout the narrative, taking us back and forth, moments from the past becoming memories and reflections in the present, with the most heartbreaking moment of all becoming a memory that has been too hard to confront.

In *The Trick to Time*, Kit de Waal writes of many things, of falling in love and the joy and happiness it can bring, of loneliness and terrible sadness and immense loss, grief that lasts a lifetime, of mental health and the hidden, mostly invisible nature of this pain, of leaving home and the connections to where we come from, memories that haunt us, the excitement yet also the anxiety and doubt surrounding the forging of new relationships whilst still feeling the bonds and pull of the past strongly.

How, when there is one thing above all else in the world that hurts us to think about or see, that is so often the only thing we can seem to see and notice in the world around us.

Such a moving tale, I felt such sadness for Mona and for William, for what happened in their young lives. Sometimes I felt I wanted to be drawn closer to some of the characters surrounding Mona, but this is very much her life and her story. I feel I preferred *My Name is Leon* to this novel overall but admired qualities in the writing of both.

Two passages that I liked in particular:

...'one day, you will want these hours back, my girl. You will wonder how you lost them and you will want to get them back. There's a trick to time.'

Everything is beautiful from a distance, even our memories. Even the memories that were not once so good can be appreciated over time, don't you think?'

Thank you to the publisher and NetGalley for providing me with an advanced ecopy of this book.

Deborah Dobrin says

I was lucky enough to be given this book to read by Net Galley. It has taken me days to write this review and I am not sure I can do the book justice. A beautiful story that deals with a subject people don't talk about, the life altering grief that comes with the loss of a baby and the suffering of a still birth.

This is Mona's story but every single character in this book is beautifully drawn and has depth, each one adds a layer to the book that draws you in and creates her well rounded life, that at first could seem so empty.

I know it's early in 2018 but I am pretty sure this one will rate in my top 2010

Umut Reviews says

If I can summarise the book very shortly, I can tell it's emotionally moving and heart breaking. It's well written, touching your heart.

Mona is our main character, who falls in love with William at a very young age, and they get married. We start listening to the story from her when she's stepping into her 60th birthday and she's reflecting on her past. We go back and forth to different periods of her life and try to bring the pieces together to learn about her current state. She runs a doll shop and also helps women cope with tragic losses, knowing what it is herself. I love books in which we go back and forth in time to complete a story. So, I enjoyed it a lot. And I enjoyed De Waal's writing a lot. It was beautiful and moving. I didn't see the twist at the end of the book. That was a big surprise for me, which I thought was very clever. I loved Mona as a character.

The only criticism I have for the book is, it felt a bit incomplete by not knowing the story from William's side. I really would have loved to know more of what he's been through and how he ended up where he did. I felt it was a bit disorganised and there were gaps where we could get more out of the story completing the picture.

But, overall, I really liked the book and Mona's story.

Thanks to NetGalley and Penguin publishers for granting a copy in exchange for an honest review.

Louise Wilson says

Mona is a doll maker. She crafts beautiful wooden dolls in her workshop. Every doll has a name. And every doll has a hidden meaning., from a past Mona has never accepted.

Mona is approaching sixty years old. She creates wooden dolls with the help of the local carpenter. The story jumps from the present to Mona's past as a young girl/woman., when she falls in love with William. They both leave Ireland for a new life in Birmingham. But things go wrong the night of the IRA bombings. There is a fantastic bunch of characters in this book who rallied round in Mona's time of need. This is a beautifully written and emotional read. This is the first book I have read by Kit de Waal but I have already downloaded three of his books to my kindle. I do recommend this book!!

I would like to thank NetGalley, Penguin Books (UK) and the author Kit de Waal for my ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Elaine Mullane says

A simple but beguiling story. 4.5 stars.

In *The Trick to Time*, author Kit de Waal takes us back to Birmingham in the 70s, during the time of the IRA pub bombings. While the events of the time are pivotal to the story of the tragedy that unfolds in this book, they occur off to the side, with de Waal, instead, bringing her focus to the personal misfortunes of two characters: 20-something Irish immigrants Mona and William. At first, this is a story of love at first sight, but it soon develops into a beautifully tender story of marriage and grief, suffering and long-term devotion.

The story is told through Mona in concurrent past and present narratives. In the present day, Mona is turning 60 and living in a seaside town in England. Childless and living alone, she runs a specialised doll-making business, the premise of which is both intriguing and heartrendingly sweet. Without giving too much away, this business helps people who are suffering from loss and eventually hints at the compelling truth of Mona's sad tale. As soon as I read about Mona's endeavors and the manner in which she creates these dolls, I was mesmerised by this book. Lovers of de Waal's debut novel may say *Leon* is a difficult book to follow but, for me, the impact of this sophomore effort is even greater.

When we venture into the past with Mona, we learn about her mother's early death from cancer and the love she had for her father, which held onto her even when she yearned to flee her stifling Wexford hometown. We witness her eventual move to Birmingham and the overwhelming guilt she feels when a shock phone call brings her home again. We see her meet William and delight in her happiness when their relationship develops into something meaningful. But, sadly for Mona, loss is never too far away.

The emotional connection I experienced with these characters was intense. De Waal has a major talent in the effortless way she makes you care about the fictional community she creates. Every character in this story has a unique voice and we want to listen to them all: the caring, grieving father, raising his young daughter alone; the busybody relation in Wexford who eventually reveals her truth; the teenage assistant who works in Mona's shop; and, of course, Mona's husband, William, who breaks our heart. The care we have for these characters translates to a genuine fear for their well-being and, subsequently, a gentle suspense, which for me is far more effective than a story reliant on cliff hangers. I needed to know what happened Mona and William, and I needed to know that Mona would be okay, which made it impossible for me to put this book down.

The Trick to Time is a simple but utterly beautiful tale that really pulls on your heartstrings. It is about love and loss, and the burden of dealing with other people's tragedies. The dialogue is authentic and snappy, the pacing is perfect. There is nothing complex about the structure and the story flows perfectly. The story is emotional but not sentimental, with enough flourishes of humour to keep it from becoming too heavy. It is a truly special story and one that will certainly stay with me. Highly recommended.

Cleo Bannister says

Love and loss are the big questions that most of us have to deal with in life which on the one hand makes them universal but of course each love is different as is each loss. Kit de Waal has penned an almost understated story populated by seriously lovely characters devoted to the subject.

Mona sits in her flat in London staring at the day dawning when she notices a man in the block across the way from her. He is also awake and looking out, perhaps reaching out to those around him.

I wanted to both be friends with Mona and mother her, an odd combination particularly as she celebrates her sixtieth birthday during the course of this book. She's a doll-maker, real old-fashioned dolls are made from wood by the carpenter and painstakingly painted and dressed by Mona and then sold, often to overseas

buyers in Japan and America. Each doll is unique with a similarly unique wardrobe. Mona has a shop too and here she works day in day out with young Joley with her big boots and crop tops assisting her. Twice a year she meets her old friend Val from Birmingham, where Mona lived in the early 70s.

Mona also offers a personalised service for bereaved mothers and this is her side-line. Not one that is advertised or has a website like the dolls, but one where people are referred for help when a baby has died. In short Mona is a lovely lady with a big heart and whilst that had probably always been the case, we learn what led her to both professions by going back to the beginning when a young girl crossed the Irish Sea and made a life for herself in Birmingham. Living in a boarding house over time she meets William and so this becomes their story.

This is a gentle book which doesn't mean boring, in fact far from it. The Trick to Time is fearsomely well-written and despite the subject matter it never descends into mawkishness, but rather I was impressed by Mona's strength, although like her friend Val couldn't help but feel that perhaps she should put herself first once in a while.

The book shifts backwards and forwards in time pulling in the details of Mona's childhood, her mother's illness, her father's steadfastness and the ongoing sense of obligation to her distant relation Bridie. Ireland was too stifling for many youngsters at the time and so they moved to Birmingham where they stayed in boarding houses and missed their homes. Mona's time in Birmingham is full of colour, of love and telephone calls across the water, but nothing stays the same, the trick to time is making the most of the good times.

Although this review mentions just a few characters, there are lots, all exquisitely detailed, and on the whole they are lovely people, unlike the majority that perhaps populate my normal reading matter. This is, like My Name is Leon, undoubtedly a character led novel with a message, but not one that the author feels she needs to force, her writing gives us all and I think that The Trick of Time will touch many people's lives on a personal level, after all, most of us will love and lose throughout our lives.

Gumble's Yard says

I read this book due to its longlisting for the 2018 Women's Prize.

The book is written from the third party viewpoint of Mona, starting just before her sixtieth birthday in an English seaside town where she runs a toy shop and an internet business selling hand-made dolls, crafter by a local carpenter (a loner with whom she has an ambiguous relationship) and then painted by her and beautifully dressed in clothes she makes from second hand clothes.

At the book's start she spots an elderly and seemingly elegant man in a flat opposite and the two start a slow-burning friendship, marked by the man Karl (a German, who over time reveals that his almost lifelong friend - a rich man - died recently) who is as dapper and refined as she first imagined him. Their relationship becomes more awkward as they explore it turning into more of a relationship (Mona's ambiguous relationship with the carpenter seemingly being one of the blockers).

Occasionally her shop is visited by women sent by a counsellor - reluctantly revealing a birth weight to her and giving her a precious keepsake. We quickly realise that Mona gets the carpenter to craft a doll in the weight of the women's stillborn baby and uses the doll (which inevitably reminds them of holding their bay shortly after its death) to help them to therapeutically explore the life their child might have led.

Mona looks back across her life: her mother dies when she was a child just before which her father urges her

to make the most of her time with her mother and shares his trick of time (“You can make it expand or make it contract. Make it shorter or make it longer” - as Mona later adds “You can make the most of what you have”); later when she emigrates to Birmingham from Ireland in the 1970s, meeting and marrying William and becoming pregnant with his child (something William panics about - seemingly concerned he will be as bad a parent as his own largely absent and often mentally ill father).

A key part of the book is Mona’s habit of invention and her clear affinity with those who will share that habit with her: of imagining with a quite joy the future (as she does with William when they are first married - walking past rich houses and imagining the life they would lead there); or exploring a possible alternative present (with Karl she visits an antiques fair and the two pretend to be living in a house containing the antiques); or most poignantly re-inventing an alternative past (as she does with mother’s of still born babies and at the book’s end with her own child).

The book is well if not brilliantly crafted, deeply affecting with some heart-wrenching scenes and some memorably sketched side characters (particularly Mona and William’s female relatives) and with a plot which just about manages to avoid crossing the boundary into melodrama, but which relies a little too much on a third party viewpoint withholding crucial information.

Fatma says

A middle-of-the-road read. Good, not great. Very lukewarm feelings about this.

When I started *The Trick to Time*, I was optimistic. I loved the polished, concise writing style. I was intrigued by the fact that its protagonist was a doll-maker (how cool is that!). As the novel's story progressed I was like *okay, this could be interesting. let's wait and see how this pans out*. **So I waited, and waited, and then waited some more, but the standout moments I wanted to see just never materialized.** Even worse, I got increasingly bored and restless. **At the heart of *The Trick to Time* is an exploration of the acute mental and emotional effects that losing a baby can have—that I thought was poignantly done. The rest, however, was wishy-washy more than anything.** The characters weren't anything special—there was one in particular that felt completely superfluous to the story, not to mention irritating. The plot, which is split into present and past sections, was fine, though I thought the "present" sections were far inferior to the "past" ones. **As a whole, *The Trick to Time* was just okay. I can't really say much more about it other than that.**

Rebecca says

I read the first 70 pages. There’s nothing *wrong* with the book per se; I just wasn’t compelled to read more. Mona is a lonely 60-year-old who runs a toy shop in a seaside town and devotes herself to making custom-designed dolls. There are some major losses in her past, at first just hints and then whole stories. Her father once told her there’s a trick to time: “You can make it expand or you can make it contract.” In memory Mona can relive the limited moments she had with her loved ones. I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend this to fans of Rachel Joyce – the story line is particularly reminiscent of *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* and *The Snow Garden* – but I wonder if de Waal’s previous book would feel more original.

Joanne says

Towards the end of last year I wrote about books I was looking forward to reading this year. Kit de Waal's new book, *The Trick to Time*, was among them. I loved her previous book, *My Name is Leon*, but I absolutely adored reading this wonderful book.

"One day, you will want these hours back, my girl. You will wonder how you lost them and you will want to get them back. There's a trick to time. You can make it expand or you can make it contract. Make it shorter or make it longer."

Mona is approaching her 60th birthday and is a dollmaker. She lives a solitary life with only a few friends. She works with a carpenter who makes the dolls, to very exact specifications, while she creates their clothes and paints their features. Many of the dolls she makes have a hidden meaning known only to the people who buy them. Mona arrived from Ireland as a young girl, so excited to be living in Birmingham and with a new job. When she meets William at a dance, it is love between them almost instantly and they soon marry. A tragedy tears them apart and woven through the chapters of this book, Mona looks back at significant moments in her own and their life together.

In *Mona*, Kit de Waal has created a character I think many women can empathise with. She has known hardship, has known joy and has known great sorrow and loss. The subject matter may be very close to home for many women and for that reason might be difficult for some to read as it could bring back painful memories. It was at times hard to read as I knew that something terribly sad was going to happen. Yet, Kit de Waal has written with such insight and sensitivity that the book is never overly emotional but instead is moving and powerful.

Although *Mona* is the main focus of the book, it would not be right to review this without mentioning just some of the other characters who add so much to the story. In particular, William's aunts Teresa and Margaret, (who he dubbed Pestilence and Famine!) proved to be a true support to Mona in her time of need, as did Bridie a family friend. The compassionate Nurse Archer showed much emotional intelligence at a time when women who had experienced loss were just supposed to get on with things.

The Trick to Time is a beautifully written, powerful and poignant account of loss and grief yet above all an account of enduring love. Without doubt, this will appear on my Top Reads list at the end of this year.

PattyMacDotComma says

4★

"... one day, you will want these hours back, my girl. You will wonder how you lost them and you will want to get them back. There's a trick to time."

...

"You can make it expand or you can make it contract. Make it shorter or make it longer," he says."

Mona is a little girl who wants to play on the beach instead of spend time with her sick mother. Perfectly natural for a child.

The story follows Desdemona, Mona, a young Irish girl, only child, and young William, a young Irish lad she meets when she leaves her widowed father at home to try her luck in England. They are a happy pair, absolutely penniless, but so content in each other's company. They are like a pair of puppies, rumbling and

tumbling and cuddling and walking hand-in-hand without a brass razoo between them, as the saying goes in Australia.

We have met Mona as a little girl and as a young woman, but the main character is the adult Mona, turning 60. Her good pal tells her:

“We’re still young, Mona, for God’s sake.”

‘Are we?’

‘Sixty’s the new forty they say, even if it feels like fifty-nine.’”

How can you not have a chuckle? But tragedy struck her in her youth (why does it always ‘strike’, I wonder?), and the adult Mona is alone. For readers who don’t live in the UK or Ireland, it’s easy to forget how violent things were for the Irish in England. We can be dreadful to each other for all sorts of reasons, can’t we?

She now makes dolls of a quite specific nature. They seem to be made according to some baby’s birthweight, and the clients are sent by a counsellor of some sort. Mona simply chats to them a bit, draws them out, and finally asks for a weight. We have to figure this part out ourselves.

There is a carpenter not far away who is pretty taciturn but meticulous with his selection of the right colours and weights of timber for each doll, depending on how light or heavy, how pale or dark Mona wants. He won’t take “payment” as such, but she manages to reimburse him somehow. It’s an odd relationship, but it works, and Mona spends a lot of time painting the dolls and making intricate clothes.

[Disclaimer: I have a friend who makes dolls which look like real children – I mean eerily like real children, and people clamour to get them and take them home. People will push them around in prams, the smaller dolls. They are gorgeous, and a little scary. But I digress.]

Meanwhile, Mona often wakes early, goes to her window, high above the street with her coffee, and one day notices an older gentleman in a nearby building doing likewise. He nods, they salute cups, and they gradually develop a relationship. He is a dapper German, while she tends to be more casual.

“He has a cashmere coat over his shoulders, impossibly elegant, and Mona wonders if she has dresses enough to keep up.”

He calls by unannounced one day, and she’s in old clothes with paint-spattered arms from working on a doll. He sits on the sofa and she joins him.

“The cushions feel hard and unused and she realizes it is many years since she sat on the sofa, maybe only when she bought it and when was that? She looks at her chair and sees that differently too. It looks like a pathetic throne, taking up too much space with the delicate nest of tables at an angle, with the lamp and the TV remote control just at hand, as if an invalid sits there alone night after night, watching quiz shows and shopping channels. She is ashamed again and wonders if he sees her like that.”

I think anyone who’s lived alone (or doesn’t have visitors to speak of) will identify with this. I, too, have a comfy armchair with everything, including all digital devices, at hand, and it’s been referred to as my “nest”, which it very much is! But yes, it is a bit of an embarrassing mess sometimes.

The narrative weaves back and forth between Mona’s childhood, her young womanhood with William, and her adult life now, entertaining the thought of getting to know a new man. As an older woman once said to

her:

“I had the chance of him, my darling. I had the chance of him. And let me tell you this. The chance of something is a good meal when you’re starving.”

As an adult, Mona still loves the beach and the sea, although the kind of weather there doesn’t appeal to me.

“Mona never covers her hair. Cold. She pulls her scarf round her neck, too tight, and has to ease it off a little. Wet. Sea-sodden air and giant curls of water pushing in, over and over, black-and-white slaps of sea as loud as a train, as a thousand trains. She loves the sting of wet sand on her skin and the sharp lick of salt on her tongue.”

There was a place in the early part where I thought this might end up some kind of cloying romance, but I very much enjoyed the author’s earlier **My Name is Leon**, and I know her background in Social Services, so I trusted there would be more to it. And there was.

I do hope the finished version has clearer breaks between chapters or sections, as the preview copy didn’t. It wasn’t all that hard to tell which part of her life we were in, but it helps me to have a demarcation.

I very much enjoyed this and am looking forward to her next one, as I’m sure others will, too. Thanks to NetGalley and Penguin Books/Viking for the preview copy from which I’ve quoted.

P.S. The author just tweeted that she’s got a book of short stories coming out next, one of which is Bridie’s - yay! She’s the one who made the comment about the chance of something being a good meal when you’re starving. Good character.
