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TV&RADIO BLOG



Martin Amis: for my Money, the BBC got it right

Martin Amis on why the BBC dramatisation of his novel Money is great television

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Martin Amis guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 25 May 2010 20.00 BST Article history



'Remarkable': Nick Frost as John Self in the BBC dramatisation of Martin Amis's novel Money. Photograph: Laurence Cendrowicz/BBC

Watching an adaptation of your novel can be a violent experience: seeing your old jokes suddenly thrust at you can be alarming. But I started to enjoy Money very quickly, and then I relaxed.

It's a voice novel, and they're the hardest to film – you've got to use some voiceover to get the voice. But I think the BBC adaptation was really pretty close to my voice – just the feel of it, the slightly hysterical feel of it, which I like. It's a pity one line wasn't used. Speculating about whether Charles slept with Diana, in the book the barman says, "He's the heir to the throne. I mean, he's got to know what he's getting, hasn't he?" I was waiting for it and it didn't come. But that's just a tiny lost opportunity. You sort of let it go and think it's not going to be the book, it's someone else's idea of the book, the basic difference being that a novel is about interior life and a film about exterior life, and you accept that.

The Martin Amis character isn't in it and I'm relaxed about that – I don't think self-referential stuff works on the screen. They did want me to sit on the plane but I thought it would be disgusting to have a 60-year-old me, and said, "Why don't you get a nice, handsome young actor who might look a bit like me?"

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Men's slip on canvas shoes Buy one pair, get one

There was a time when Money was going to be made in the late 80s and we'd lined up Gary Oldman for John Self. It was a great missed opportunity. Nick Frost, though, is remarkable. I found him a joy to watch. He brought a lot of pain to the role, undemonstratively, holding it in, with not a hint of self pity. In my imagination Self was not long-haired and he didn't have a moustache, but Frost has taken over from that.

I never thought of Money as a book about the 80s, except for the royal wedding and the rioting, the bunting and the barricade – that was very expressive of the time. But greed doesn't go away. And it was lovely to see Self drinking himself senseless on an aeroplane. As he's about to fall asleep, the stewardess very tenderly puts out his cigarette. It made me feel so nostalgic – you fully expected to be able to smoke on an aeroplane. That's very true to the time.

As told to Alison Flood. Money concludes tonight at 9pm on BBC2.

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speccyjowlybellend
26 May 2010, 8:11AM

[Recommend?](#) (0)
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That was my second favourite line.



crackerjack77
26 May 2010, 8:32AM

[Recommend?](#) (25)
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Absolutely atrocious - I won't be watching Part 2. Nick Frost gets John Self totally wrong. He's one-dimensional and out of his depth. Someone should have told him that he's not starring in a Carry On film.



italia90
26 May 2010, 8:37AM

[Recommend?](#) (7)
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I loved the book back in the day and partly as a consequence of that, partly because it seemed to be so technically difficult to put on screen, didn't expect to enjoy the film. Have to say I was pleasantly surprised. It looked great, the script, taken on its own merits rather than standing it up against the novel, was pretty sharp and Nick Frost did a great job of capturing John Self, the appalling slob who you still can't help feeling affection for. Against all the odds, a job well done...



finniestoncrane
26 May 2010, 8:40AM

[Recommend?](#) (22)
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It's a while since I've read Money but I remember Self having guile and being a wholly bad bastard. I was disappointed when I watched part one at the weekend. Frost looks like a terrible piece of casting to me. He's oafish rather than nasty.



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LoveisEternal
26 May 2010, 8:45AM

[Recommend?](#) (37)
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'Martin Amis on why the BBC dramatisation of his novel Money is great television.'
let me see...cos you wrote it? No..just co-incidental.

I used to love your books till one day whilst reading 'The Information' I realized that it was the basically same voice- the same view of the world- in all your works.. and it was a view that was cynical and joyless at heart.

And most of your work was simply about saying 'hey look how succinctly and deftly I can express this experience/phenomena'.. a linguistic firework display, and whilst that is enjoyable its not worth the negativity of the content.

It's like going out with a partner that is witty, engaging etc. but ultimately leaves you feeling worse about yourself and life. You have to break it off.. sorry martin ..it's over.

It's like that Larkin line in *Aubade* that you admire.. 'courage is not scaring other people'

This is the key misunderstanding of reality. Courage is being true to who you really are- no matter what effect it has on others.

It's like you see all the futility and emptiness of consensus reality without ever looking long or deep enough to receive any of the love that constitutes ultimate reality.

Anyway. my tuppence..



Pens
26 May 2010, 9:06AM

[Recommend?](#) (10)
[Report abuse](#)
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Bollocks, I missed this. Did they not advertise it?



SamCaine
26 May 2010, 9:12AM

[Recommend?](#) (16)
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[Clip | Link](#)

Nick Frost seemed to me like an over-indulgent clown, rather than John Self.

Coming from Frost, Self's casual approach to violence seemed unnatural, and he just doesn't seem like the kind of man that would start a fight, never mind win one.

I pitied him much more than I did in the book, but it was the kind of pity I'd give to an injured sparrow, the kind of pity John Self doesn't deserve.

Overall, I thought it was decent enough telly, but a mediocre adaptation.



huntaaar
26 May 2010, 9:21AM

[Recommend?](#) (4)
[Report abuse](#)
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Why was it all so god damn orange???

I haven't read the book. This was poor drama (from the UK, never?!)



lierbag
26 May 2010, 9:23AM

[Recommend?](#) (6)
[Report abuse](#)
[Clip | Link](#)

Lacked depth, persuasive characterisation, and anything resembling a compelling narrative. Otherwise, a perfect reimagining of the 80s - for anyone born after 1990 with undemanding viewing habits.



unexceptional
26 May 2010, 9:30AM



[Recommend?](#) (10)
[Report abuse](#)
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I liked Nick Frost too, I thought he was very good. But the show as a whole was a bit disappointing - it wasn't quite as bombastic and fully degenerate as I'd expected. The excess seemed to have been toned down quite a bit, and I get the feeling that without having read the book I'd have had no idea what was going on and wouldn't quite have gotten the Self character.

In that way, it felt more like a companion piece than an actual standalone piece of television. Ironically, I suppose a lack of money stopped them from making it a majestic, 6-hour long series that would've done the book full justice.



rh1968
26 May 2010, 9:34AM

[Recommend?](#) (21)
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@loveiseternal - well said sir or madam. I loved Amis in my very early teens, devouring his novels, but then I learned about proper writers and realised, like you, that he is lacking in any real heart or human understanding. Essentially he writes about shallow, unpleasant, empty-souled urbanites and those are the people who worship his writing. And clearly there are some on the Guardian - devoting a whole piece to an author telling us why the adaptation of his novel is great?



7barrels

26 May 2010, 9:44AM

[Recommend?](#) (6)

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[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

I struggled to maintain interest, in fact I couldn't.



CrewsControl

26 May 2010, 9:47AM

[Recommend?](#) (4)

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Wee Martin? Kingsley's boy? Wrote a novel? Oh that's lovely! But I thought he died in

High Wind in Jamaica

. Fell off a balcony or high horse or something.



TimFootman

26 May 2010, 9:48AM

[Recommend?](#) (15)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

They should have kept in the Martin Amis character, but played by Will Self.



edinamikie

26 May 2010, 9:50AM

[Recommend?](#) (12)

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[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

I've watched three dramas recently on the BBC: The Boy George drama, Luther and Money. All three dramas were very average with Luther being the worst because of the fact that well, nothing memorable happened. Perhaps its because I'm too used to watching the Sopranos, The Wire and even Battlestar but I'm not talking about the writing, acting or budget spent...I just seen each of the above dramas as actually pointless because they didnt entertain or grip. They reminded me of rich tea biscuits.



Chambazi

26 May 2010, 9:55AM

[Recommend?](#) (4)

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loveiseternal:

"Essentially he writes about shallow, unpleasant, empty-souled urbanites..." maybe he's trying to comment on these people? Maybe that's the point?

I like money because it is grotesque, but I don't think I'm grotesque (but maybe I am, I'll let you be the judge).



AlexJones

26 May 2010, 10:00AM

[Recommend?](#) (21)

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[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

@rh1968: "Essentially he writes about shallow, unpleasant, empty-souled urbanites and those are the people who worship his writing."

Well, you've got me bang to rights there. I really enjoy Amis's books (though not so keen, admittedly, on The Pregnant Widow) and I am indeed a shallow, unpleasant, empty-souled urbanite.



plymsoul

26 May 2010, 10:00AM

[Recommend?](#) (2)

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[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

Self should definitely be a badder bastard than Frost. The hair adds a softness that one might say is Frosts contribution. One can be fat and mean, Frost appears vain with his hirsutism.

Can't wait to see the showdown and carnage, tonight.

The audiobook is unbeatable, fyi.



farknash

26 May 2010, 10:01AM

[Recommend?](#) (2)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#) | [Link](#)

not convinced. agreed; i read the novel a long time ago, but i echo sentiments above - self was a ba5tard. a self aggrandising, self indulgent self.

whilst i enjoyed elements of the first part and thought frost did a good job overall, he really missed this element to the character; he played it too sympathetically.

i hope that, as the madness escalates around self 's character that this narcissistic element can be more fully realised, but i suspect from the trail after part 1 this might not be the case.

pretty good effort though.



Marsattacks

26 May 2010, 10:01AM

[Recommend? \(4\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

crap book from a crap man turned into a crap drama by a (now) crap corporation

et voila, succinct prose, admire me



fibmac70

26 May 2010, 10:08AM

[Recommend? \(4\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

But greed doesn't go away

As told to Alison Flood.

Nor does greed for money go away
It seems, which does not (I hope) explain
Amis's enthusiasm for the telly-play.
I loved the book, the show's a pain.
And 'as told to Alison Flood'?!
This usually covers celebrity crud!



segurola

26 May 2010, 10:08AM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

I thought the book was great, his best and most entertaining, but I wouldn't want to see a TV adaptation. I'd prefer to see an adaptation of his memoir Experience. I've always found the man slightly more interesting than his work.



Elitist

26 May 2010, 10:13AM

[Recommend? \(3\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Don't live in the UK, so haven't seen this.

No-one's mentioned Vincent (Mad Men) Kartheiser as Fielding Goodney.
Sounds like perfect casting - when I first read 'Money' in the early 90s, I thought of James Spader for the role, as he's played so many yuppies-from-hell.



nottingberry

26 May 2010, 10:15AM

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

There IS a Marty lookalike on the plane - in fact I thought it was him in a wig!
Something about the lips and eyes.

As at 1.21 mins of i-player:

www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00sky6j/Money_Episode_1/



LaVache

26 May 2010, 10:16AM

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

I really loved the book and the adaptation isn't too bad but I just don't feel the same level of hatred of Nick Frost's Self as I did for the written character.



mileycyprus

26 May 2010, 10:23AM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Having read this article over on Culture Wars, I can only wonder how Martin Amis has come to his praise? Has he been bought another set of teeth?

http://www.culturewars.org.uk/index.php/site/article/the_omission_of_amis



digitaldai

26 May 2010, 10:43AM

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Vincent Kartheiser is well suited in his role, but as said above Nick Frost is to cuddly for the role. I may however watch part 2 tonight, why because it is TV and we all are addicted. But overall I think we heap too much praise on pretty bad TV drama to make us so called cultured people feel ok about watching TV and not

reading books so much.

This did not seem much better than other 80's revival trash available. Where are the nuances and seething underbelly evident in the book.



mike65ie

26 May 2010, 11:16AM

[Recommend? \(4\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

What I want to know is why did the beeb film this as a two parter? Its an obvious one-shot drama. Will Self is an inspired idea.



mastershake

26 May 2010, 11:20AM

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

frost is just too nice - without self's constant self-aggrandizing, it's hard to work out how he ever got anywhere, Frost plays him as so stoopid. without self's voice, too, the story is just so obvious. it was never a novel about plot, after all.

i can't remember where I've seen it, but I'm certain that Amis has filmed the 'meeting Martin Amis in a pub' scene before, possibly for Arena or something like that.

am glad that amis has reiterated what he said in the 80s - the novel is about greed, not 80s greed. a shame amis's fans don't notice that.



williamthoth

26 May 2010, 11:20AM

[Recommend? \(0\)](#)

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[Clip | Link](#)

@SamCaine

Nick Frost seemed to me like an over-indulgent clown, rather than John Self.

Ok, now re-read this line. You got the two names the wrong way around.



MsLazarus

26 May 2010, 11:23AM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

This is a joke, surely. Just as the TV adaptation of Money completely fails to give us the *sine qua non* of Amis's novel, which is Amis's voice, so Alison Flood fails to make her little piece sound anything remotely like Amis. 'It was lovely to see Self drinking himself senseless on an aeroplane'. Can you imagine the arch stylist and master of the voice novel saying that? I don't think so.



Digitagit

26 May 2010, 11:31AM

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Money completely missed the seething energy and self-loathing that drives John Self and which courses through the book; Frost just came across as an oaf.

I wholly endorse edinamiekie's comment. Money, Luther, and Worried about the Boy are/were all deeply mediocre, lacking ambition, vigor or insight. Sadly that's true of most British TV drama these days. There have been some high spots - I thought Five Daughters was exceptional, and Red Riding too - but (cliche'd though it is to say it) there's absolutely nothing that approaches the consistency, sophistication or depth of the best American output.



tropicalia

26 May 2010, 11:51AM

[Recommend? \(0\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Better than I imagined but then again after raising hopes for Luther that's not saying much.



Stewpot6

26 May 2010, 11:56AM

[Recommend? \(4\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

It's sweet of Martin to support it but he must know it's not a very good adaptation. The problem is that John Self, in the novel, is not an idiot. He's lost, and he's swimming in bad hedonism, but he's also assaulted by self-loathing and a sense of another life. All this complexity has gone. Any attempt to push the envelope of the character has gone. And the poetry - the Self who thinks how sad it is to see the rain and not know how it falls - has gone. Still not as bad as Abi Morgan's terrible drama about the Royal Wedding though.



e5c4p31981
26 May 2010, 12:22PM

[Recommend?](#) (5)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Did Nick Frost base his look on David Seaman or Ron Jeremy?



charlie52
26 May 2010, 12:24PM

[Recommend?](#) (5)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

A truly disappointing effort by the BBC. Nick Frost's cuddly persona, could in no way live up to the character of John Self. A wife beating, junk food addicted sleaze bag. In keeping with their '80's season' theme, the BBC have simply chopped and completely remoulded the original and probably best Amis novel to date. Is his support for this second rate pap even remotely surprising though? For me the idea of the author sitting in his slippers, enjoying a bag of Mint Imperials, guffawing at the bastardisation of his best novel, is perhaps a far darker comedy than this piece of third rate television could ever hope to achieve.



lordsovereign
26 May 2010, 12:25PM

[Recommend?](#) (0)

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[Clip | Link](#)

@mslazarus

master of the voice novel

not read much Faulkner?



lordsovereign
26 May 2010, 12:27PM

[Recommend?](#) (0)

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[Clip | Link](#)

oh, and incidentally, if you think the adaptation's bad now, wait till you see what they've done to the ending.

for my money, if you can put the novel out of mind, the drama's quite enjoyable.



globalnomad
26 May 2010, 12:40PM

[Recommend?](#) (0)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Gary Oldman as John Self - now THAT I would have loved.

But I just couldn't believe Nick Frost in this role. I kept seeing him beating up zombies...

Now can we have an adaptation of London Fields? Please?



italia90
26 May 2010, 1:32PM

[Recommend?](#) (1)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Elitist, Vincent Kartheiser was great in the role, and one of the best things about the show.

Just for the record, Selina was pretty damn hot too...



badrobot
26 May 2010, 1:41PM

[Recommend?](#) (0)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

how can you write this off without watching it in full as mr Amis has done?



acme
26 May 2010, 1:49PM

[Recommend?](#) (4)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

The programme is dull, pompous, pedestrian, without grace or style and not as clever or attractive as it thinks it is.

So it's not surprising Martin Amis likes it. They have a lot in common.



Tespo
26 May 2010, 1:56PM

[Recommend?](#) (3)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

We settled down to watch it quite eagerly, both having read the novel when it was published and thought it good. Sadly, twenty minutes in, we were dying of boredom, so switched away to a proper drama on the hard drive. When you deliberately create a thoroughly unpleasant character; the sort of person one would not choose to have a drink with, or probably cross the road to avoid, you have to offer some other distraction to keep people interested. This is one of the first rules of narrative, isn't it?



judierucie

26 May 2010, 2:34PM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

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[Clip | Link](#)

It wasn't bad, as simple as that. Problem is book adaptations, for me anyway, never live up to expectations.

I enjoyed Frosts performance, wasn't how I imagined Self when reading the book but nobody ever is.

As for the comments on BBC drama in general? They are a public service broadcaster so at prime time have to appeal to what they perceive to be the largest demographic.

I don't know why as they are not dependant on advertising revenue?

Reminds me of the argument I heard for justifying Jonathan Ross' 6 mill a year salary. Some BBC exec said words to the effect of "If we didn't pay it then we'd lose him to ITV" So? Let him go.



getgate

26 May 2010, 2:39PM

[Recommend? \(0\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

John Self is just Kingsley if he'd been born when Martin was.



shellyrunyon

26 May 2010, 3:26PM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

Just to get the record accurate, Gary Oldman was never, ever, "lined up" or in any way shape or fashion connected with this project. Martin is not accurate—or at least wrongly informed.

I DO recall a dinner at my house where Gary and Martin were present (along with Christopher Hitchens, Salman Rushdie, and Ian McEwan) where the project was vaguely discussed in a passing way. Additionally, over the years, various producers—who did not have funding—made a fly by call or two to see if they could attach Gary to the project. However, Gary's busy schedule and availability made this impossible.

I hope this sets the record straight at last.

cordially,
Douglas Urbanski



ProvisionalName

26 May 2010, 3:34PM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

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[Clip | Link](#)

LoveisEternal, if what you are looking for in a novel is (as your moniker would appear to suggest) inarticulate, happy clappy shiat, perhaps Amis is not an appropriate choice?



LoveisEternal

26 May 2010, 5:11PM

[Recommend? \(2\)](#)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip | Link](#)

aah Provisional..bad day?

Of course Jesus, The Buddha, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, David Bohm, Einstein etc. were all wrong about the nature of ultimate reality and you are right.

I've been so foolish.

.. and in 2000 years time people will still be reflecting on the deep and nourishing view of life contained in your Cif comments (and in 'Money') and no doubt it won't be that long before the main cultural festivals will be used to remember your birth and death

yeah living a life centred around love is just happy clappy bullshit.
good luck...



burningmarl

26 May 2010, 5:14PM

[Recommend? \(3\)](#)

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[Clip | Link](#)

Team Terry Eagleton!



edinamikie

26 May 2010, 5:17PM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

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- Shellyrunyon.

Perhaps they did discuss the project in more depth when you were attending to the parsnips. Also, I wonder what your dinner party gave you out of 10 in the taxi home...

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