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BBC2's version of Martin Amis's Money: amazing. It's even worse than I expected

By [Michael Deacon](#) | [Celebrities](#) | Last updated: May 21st, 2010

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Martin Amis, the prospective victim of a televisual mugging. Photo: Eleanor Bentall

For today's paper I wrote a piece explaining why BBC Two's adaptation of Martin Amis's *Money* is a cack-handed travesty – even more so, in fact, than I'd imagined it would be when I wrote this blog post in November last year. I didn't write today's piece in a spirit of unkindness but rather one of frustration, because there's every possibility that people who haven't read the novel will tune in and think, "Good God. If the book's as unfunny, hackneyed and trivial as this, I certainly won't waste my time reading it." Which would be, go on let's break out the capital letters, an Outrage Against Literature, because actually the book's really funny.

There was an illustration I couldn't find room for on the page but which I'd like to cite here. One of the best passages in the book concerns a tennis match between the narrator John Self (who is wheezingly obese) and his colleague Fielding Goodney (who is fizzingly dynamic. Sorry about these adverbs, by the way – if you've just been reading or rereading a Martin Amis novel it can be hard to help falling into his style, or at any rate a puny imitation of it).

What makes this passage so enjoyable is not the action but the richly vivid comic lyricism with which that action is described. For example:

"His opening serve I didn't see at all. It fizzed past me, losing its definition for a moment on the centre line, before thwacking first bounce into the green canvas behind my back. The passage of the ball seemed to leave a comet's trail of yellow against the artificial green of the court."

And, a couple of paragraphs later:

"Fielding chose this moment to untether a two-fisted topspin drive. The



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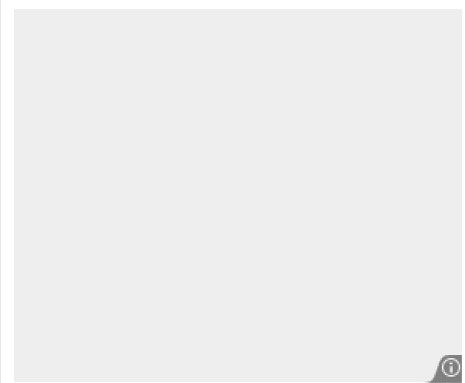
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ball came screaming over the tape, skipped a beat, regathered its tilt and momentum – and punched me in the face. I toppled backwards and my racket fell with a clatter. For several shocked seconds I lay there like an old dog, an old dog that wants its old belly stroked.”

The pleasure is all in the language. But if you're making a TV version, and you've decided not to use this narration as a voiceover, then all you've got to offer the viewer is the action. And what is the action, really? It's just a fat guy v a fit guy. Basic, hackneyed slapstick. Nothing clever or witty about it. The cleverness and wit were in the words. And on screen the words aren't there. All we see is a man who is bad at tennis playing a man who is good at tennis, and losing. "LOL", eh kids?

As I say in my piece in the paper, I'm sure the producers of the TV version are perfectly sincere when they say they love the book. But is that justification enough to adapt it for TV? Why does Money need to be a TV show, any more than it needs to be, I don't know, a video game or a musical or the inspiration for a range of children's toys by Mattel?

It's a book. And a very enjoyable one at that. Call me fusty but I think that's enough.

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