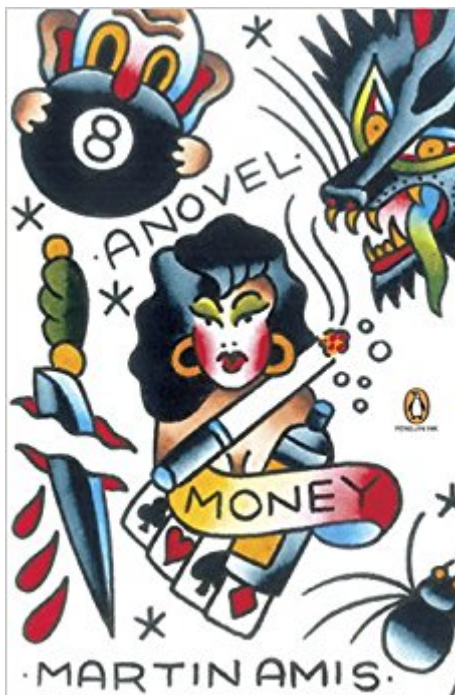


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# Money: A Suicide Note (Penguin Ink)



## Synopsis

One of Time's 100 best novels in the English language by the acclaimed author of *State of England* and *London Fields*. Part of Martin Amis's London Trilogy, along with the novel *London Fields* and *The Information*, *Money* was hailed as "a sprawling, fierce, vulgar display" (*The New Republic*) and "exhilarating, skillful, savvy" (*The Times Literary Supplement*) when it made its first appearance in the mid-1980s. Amis's shocking, funny, and on-target portraits of life in the fast lane form a bold and frightening portrait of Ronald Reagan's America and Margaret Thatcher's England. *Money* is the hilarious story of John Self, one of London's top commercial directors, who is given the opportunity to make his first feature film—alternately titled *Good Money* and *Bad Money*. He is also living money, talking money, and spending money in his relentless pursuit of pleasure and success. As he attempts to navigate his hedonistic world of drinking, sex, drugs, and excessive quantities of fast food, Self is sucked into a wretched spiral of degeneracy that is increasingly difficult to surface from.

## Book Information

Series: Penguin Ink

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (June 29, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143116959

ISBN-13: 978-0143116950

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.2 out of 5 stars 131 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #91,144 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #144 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Humor & Satire > Dark Humor #171 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Humor > Self-Help & Psychology #180 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Humor & Satire

## Customer Reviews

Absolutely one of the funniest, smartest, meanest books I know. John Self, the Rabelaisian narrator of the novel, is an advertising man and director of TV commercials who lurches through London and Manhattan, eating, drinking, drugging and smoking too much, buying too much sex, and caring for little else besides getting the big movie deal that will make him lots of money. Hey, it was the '80s. Most importantly, however, Amis in *Money* musters more sheer entertainment power in any single

sentence than most writers are lucky to produce in a career. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Martin Amis’s vibrantly dark 1985 novel, *Money*, gave us a rollicking, repulsive picture of London and New York in the late 20th century, awash in cash, corruption, pornography, junk food, junk art, self-promotion and wretched excess of every imaginable variety. More than two and a half decades later that novel’s scabrous vision of a crude, rude world reeling from narcissism and acquisitiveness seems as potent as ever. Its hilariously awful hero, John Self, is an uncanny harbinger of the willful vulgarities who would gain even more ascendancies in the reality-show, greed-is-great era of the 21st century.” Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* “Savagely hilarious. It risks, it boils with energy . . . it even manages to shock.” Jonathan Yardley, *The Washington Post Book World*

The narrator, John Self, is addicted to excess - whether it’s money, food, drink or porn - he’s also pugnacious, not as smart as he thinks he is, intentionally & unintentionally funny, overbearing & overweight. Martin Amis plumbs the depths of a society that elevates shallowness to an art form, with equal measures of ferocity & wit, whilst always keeping true to the voice of the thoroughly unlikeable narrator, who nevertheless seduces the reader with autobiographical honesty & human weakness that the braggadocio never quite hides. An extraordinary piece of writing that tells a sad tale of our capitalist uncaring excess & where that has led us. By the way, Amis inserts himself into the plot as a writer Self convinces to rewrite a movie script - it is another layer in this book of many manipulations, threaded with dark, deep humour.

John Self, named such by Amis to represent all of humanity, is a man whose world is controlled by money and sex. Afraid of what life might bring him if he freed himself from his addictions, he succumbs instead to the mantra that just a little more money will fix your problems, that it seems to be working for everyone else so it will work for you too. Like all members of a capitalist system about which Amis seems to be prophesying, Self believes deep down that once he hits the money, his problems will disappear, his obesity, his loneliness, his addictions, and all the rest. The problem is he already has the money. He has had the money, spent the money, and still has the money. Money is not the issue. The mindset of the people in his world is that if he would "relax, . . . sink a couple of thou into [his] backhand, . . . quit smoking, drink less, eat right . . . go to high-priced health clubs and fancy massage studios . . . undergo a series of long, painful and expensive operations"

then he (and you, the universal Mr. Self) will be ready for success in today's society. It is an alluring dream, is it not? Reviewed by Jonathan Stephens

In "Money", Martin Amis shows us John Self, a director of TV commercials who is moving up professionally to direct his first movie. The producer of this movie, Fielding Goodney, treats John as THE key player in the deal, despite John's serious drinking problem and his continuing embarrassing and bawdy misbehavior. Until the book's final section, John lives this crazy can't-be-real opportunity, with hilarious Hollywood-style production problems and apparently limitless funding. In reading this novel, I kept wondering how Self's producer could overlook-even encourage-his personal shenanigans, which would obviously undermine a movie project in the real world. But in the last section of "Money", Amis explains, as he shifts his focus from John Self's hilarious debauchery to plot analysis. Then, a character named Martin Amis, a writer brought on board to salvage a disastrous script, unravels the mystery and reveals the true dynamic of John Self and Fielding Goodney. At the book's end, the achievement of Martin Amis, the author, is clear. He has written a brilliant, entertaining, risky novel, telling a funny and implausible story that ultimately makes perfect sense. Bravo!

In "The Vagrant Mood: Six essays, old W. Somerset Maugham, in an essay oddly praising detective novels, complains that modern "serious" novelists often have little or no story to tell, and they thus abandon something which appeals to our human nature, "for the desire to listen to stories is surely as old as the human race." Maugham further observes that modern novelists are "often intolerably long-winded," and that they take four hundred pages to tell what could be explained in a mere hundred. That's the problem with "Money." The first hundred pages of the novel depict the protagonist, John Self, getting drunk and being an oaf over and over. Maugham suggests that modern novels dispense with a plot so as to provide "psychological analysis," but Self getting trashed and being as offensive as imaginable, then doing the same thing again on the page after next provides no great insight into character. There's a running joke about pigs, but we already get it. He's a pig. The plot is about Self's efforts to get a movie made, a movie based on his life, but at about page ten, you just knowwww that movie's never gonna get made. The first hundred or so pages can easily be skipped without missing anything of significance. The characters are all stereotypes (phonies -- American phonies, the worst kind), and it's thus not necessary to keep track of the names. About halfway through the book, an odd thing happens. The protagonist changes from being an utterly disgusting drunk to a somewhat sympathetic drunk, but he still manages to

offend everyone else. There are subplots of a mysterious death threat against him and even a hit contract taken out on him, but neither of those threads eventually amount to much. After progressing at a snail's pace (a drunken snail) with frequent descriptions of the sky, the denouement occurs in a sudden jumble, then the book drags on for too long. Will he kill himself or not? Enough already. As for psychological insight, who is this metaphorical "Self"? Is it Martin Amis depicting HIMself and his party-hearty life with pal Christopher Hitchens? Certainly not, because Amis performs the conceit of writing himself into the novel, and the depiction of himself is that of a paragon of sobriety, tolerance, and a Buddha-like composure. The fictional Amis also plays a masterful game of chess against the suddenly-sober protagonist, but this is about as plausible as the silly horse race previously described. Nor is "Self" the notorious (former) stoner and Amis imitator Will Self. I would venture to say that "Self" represents . . . \*you,\* dear reader. YOURself, America. John Self lives in London, but he was raised in New Jersey. That must've warped him. The British characters are all disreputable (which, true, is typical of most of the novels of Amis), but they're nowhere near as loathsome as the Yanks. Hardly a nuanced view, but who am I to argue against Amis's (and the world's) perception of the USA as the heart of all greed, corruption and shallowness? The dialogue and the interior monologues which make up most of the book are superb. There aren't many writers with an ear to equal that of Martin Amis, and some of it makes for great reading, but that's not enough to support 363 pages of threadbare plot. Reading the novel feels as if you've sold your Self short.

There is amusement aplenty in *Money*--lots of deft touches that bring a chuckle as the story zips along. Unfortunately, the novel suffers from a lack of substance. The points Amis makes about greed and unbridled lifestyles are fairly obvious, the targets of his venom are too easy, and the superficiality of his characters is overblown. I nonetheless found the novel worth reading for its comedy which, when it works, works very well. I would give *Money* 3 1/2 stars if that option were available.

one of my favorites!

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