



Frozen Desire: The Meaning of Money

James Buchan

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"The best single book I have ever seen on the history, sociology, literature, cultures and philosophy of money. This learned book is my pick of the year for any intelligent and broadly curious reader". -- "Worth Magazine".

Frozen Desire: The Meaning of Money Details

Date : Published October 24th 2001 by Welcome Rain Publishers (first published 1997)

ISBN : 9781566491808

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Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : History, Economics, Nonfiction, Philosophy, Currency, Money

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Steve Daykin says

It has been more than ten years since I read this, and now I want to re-read it as soon as I can find my copy...

Boweavil says

Original thought, brilliant writing. Will never forget it.

Omar Ali says

A great read. Not a systematic history of money, but hugely interesting and well written.

Mac says

This is an interesting book. Faint praise, perhaps, but it really is *interesting*, in that it forced me to write down a bunch of notes on an index card and purchase my own copy (this one's from the library) for reference at a later date.

If you haven't already read the synopsis, Buchan's book is a sort of narrative history of money, both as a concept and an object. That's not really a good description, to be fair, but it's the best I can do right now. By taking us through episodes in money's history, he examines some of the modern notions about money and how they intersect with how money has worked in the past. In many ways, this becomes a list of curious facts about money's history. A "did you know..." compendium that is told via historical narrative.

This is not, to be clear, a book about "economics," so anyone looking for equations or explanations of phenomena should seek her fortune elsewhere. There are no theories and no proposals – it really is a more "personal" history of an impersonal subject. *Memoirs of a Dollar*. In this way, Buchan seems to attempt to make a larger point about what money is by telling its story, with some asides and (somewhat literary) analysis, throughout human history.

This is where the book is not as successful – at the macro-level. The whole never quite surpasses the sum of the parts, and the book remains a collection of thought-provoking facts about the history of money. There is also a problem with some of Buchan's analysis – though he largely rejects Marx's views, his own conception of how money exists in society isn't so terribly different from the "money" chapter of *Capital*.

But for the most part, though it lacks a certain coherence as a book, it's an engaging read. The prose can be a little gummy as Buchan lets his breeding get the best of him now and then, but he's good with a turn of phrase, and made me laugh out loud a few times.

Martha says

Hard to read. I could not finish it.

Bill says

James Buchan's *Frozen Desire* is an occasionally riveting history of money. It is a critical narrative history; each chapter is devoted to a specific time period or historical figure. The reader sees how money was created and how it has evolved to its present exalted status. The author fearlessly takes on a diverse array of figures, including Adam Smith, John Law, Christopher Columbus, Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes, and even Jesus Christ. In each analysis, Buchan falls into the pattern of introducing someone in order to eventually point out precisely where each of these important figures got it wrong or came up short. Some of his criticisms are fascinating, others seem a bit harder to defend. To attack Marx for being naive and idealistic seems sort of pointless - if your agenda is to promote a utopian society, you've got to make it sound good, right? Also, to introduce Keynes as a "childless homosexual" has nothing to do with his economic theories, so why bring it up?

Kate says

Money is an object of desire, like women. Money is worth what people think it is, like sex, which is, uh, women. The author has desired money and women. Oh, and by the way, here is a brief history of the monetary system which could have been ever so much better - and briefer - had the author spent less time on desire. I am glad to have had my way with this book without it costing me a dime except in library overdue fees.

Patricia L. says

Unthawing stories to help the reader to understand the faith in the god of money.

Anna Rohleder says

An examination of something we take for granted that is as clear-eyed as it is open-hearted. And Buchan can write...

Steve says

Mid 2. Of spasmodic interest, this book attempts to provide a narrative history of the ascent of money and its

psychological importance to human existence. The book is structured around chapters devoted to different periods of history or to figures of renown in the development and systematisation of currency. Of the latter, perhaps the most fascinating and colourful was John Law, proponent of the mass issuance of bank-notes, and creator of the Mississippi bubble which brought France to its economic knees. One central focus developed by Buchan is on money's psychological impact in terms of its loss or acquisition, with references from all theatres of the arts. However, his scope is too broad and his need to evidence the extent of his research means that the interest of the reader wanes.

Converse says

Money is strange stuff- besides acting as a means of exchange, it can breed (earn interest), and because a great many of our desires can be satisfied with it, it itself becomes a central focus of desire.
