

## Ending Up (NYRB Classics)



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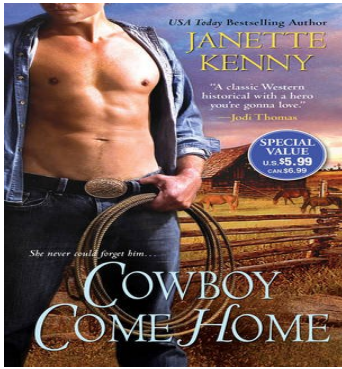
## Ending Up (NYRB Classics)

Ending Up is a grimly hilarious dance of death, full of bickering, bitching, backstabbing, drinking (of course), and idiocy of all sorts. It is a book about dying people and about a dying England, clinging to its memories of greatness as it succumbs to terminal decay. Everyone wants a comfortable place to die, and Kingsley Amis's characters have found it in Tuppy-happen Cottage, where assorted septuagenarians have come together to see one another out the door of life. There's grotesque Adela, whose sole passion is her cheapness; her brother Brigadier Bernard Bastable, always strategizing a new retreat to the bathroom before sallying forth to play some especially



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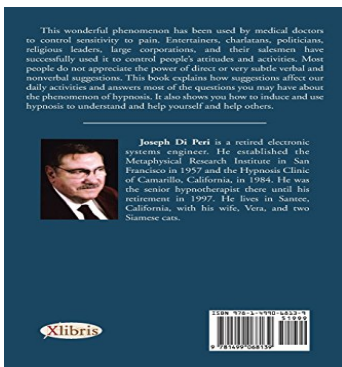
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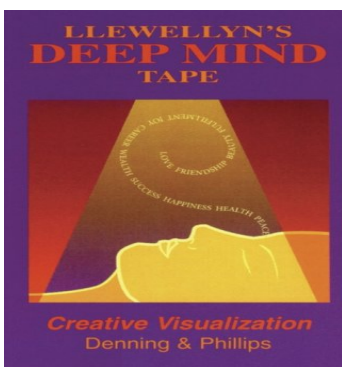
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What others say about this ebook:

**Review 1:**

The book was short but I really enjoyed it.

**Review 2:**

An exceptionally dark look at a small group of people near the end of life, *Ending Up* is unique among Amis' oeuvre in that it does not contain a central character through which we view events. At least one character is exceptionally unpleasant and a couple are quite pathetic. It was written when he was still far from aged and seems based on a distant view of decrepitude. The horror is thus unsweetened by any humor other than the most cruel sort. While the story seems realistic the ending is savage farce. All in all a painful read, and I put off rereading this one for years. Amis was at the peak of his powers when he wrote it, which means the observation is relentlessly keen and the use of language breathtaking. A small masterpiece, but not recommended for anyone who is depressed or worried about old age.

**Review 3:**

British author Kingsley Amis' 1973 novel of two old women and three old men living out their last days in Tuppenny-hapenny Cottage nestled among the trees and fields in a delightful English countryside. Sound quaint and perhaps charming? It is anything but quaint and charming? for the most part these five septuagenarians? Adela, the one squarely in charge, her brother, former army officer, Bernard, Bernard's past sexual partner, a servant nicknamed Shorty, Marigold, an oldster becoming progressively more senile and finally George, an emeritus history professor who has suffered a serious stroke? are at eat others' throats. But being well-mannered modern day Brits, their hostility seethes beneath an ironic, sarcastic, understated and occasionally humorous surface, especially Bernard, who is both the most malicious and the most interesting of the five, a stark fact that speaks volumes about the nature of fiction. Wisdom, anyone? Hardly in evidence at Tuppenny-hapenny. In support of this observation, here are several quotes from Greco-Roman Stoic philosopher, the emperor Marcus Aurelius, coupled with incidents from the book:

?Dwell on the beauty of life. Watch the stars, and see yourself running with them.?

Over 200 pages with numerous references to listening to the wireless, taking time out to smoke, spending time planning one's alcohol consumption and, of course, zeniths of zeniths, ultimate elixir to allay frustration and boredom, imbibing booze. However, must unfortunately, not one reference to the beauty of the natural world or the beauty of any of the arts or literature. Sure, somewhat begrudgingly, there's singing a few songs together on Christmas day, but other than this thin musical gruel, plodding through life devoid of aesthetic experience.

?The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury.?

Bernard gets his kicks and jollies from making life miserable for everyone else, not only Adela, Shorty, Marigold and George, but Marigold's cat and George's old dog. Damn those two for owning animals they actually have affection for and love tenderly! At one point Bernard soaks Marigold's cat with his squirt-gun to frame Shorty and at another time sets off a stink bomb to frame George's dog. Thus, in a way, we have a tale of caution. It is as if Kingsley Amis is asking readers of his novel to consider extracting a kind of Marcus Aurelius-style revenge by not turning out to be anything like Bernard.

?Accept the things to which fate binds you, and love the people with whom fate brings you together, but do so with all your heart.?

Turns out, the bedridden stroke-victim is the one who gracefully accepts his fate and expresses his gratitude for those gifts life does offer to him. We read George's words of thanks for his newly restored ability to speak fluently, word he speaks whilst downstairs (he has to be carried from his bedroom) conversing with others in the parlor: "You've no idea how marvelous it feels. I don't mind being half paralyzed now, except that it's a nuisance to other people. The gift of language us a very precious thing." And, almost predictably, George's heartfelt sentiments are received with sarcasm by, you guessed it, our former military officer, ultimate black-bile stinker and relisher of others' misery - Bernard.

"You are a little soul carrying about a corpse, as Epictetus used to say."  
This is secular 1972 England. Religion plays little or no part in the lives of these old people. Unfortunately, along with religion, the spiritual dimension is conspicuously absent, one of the tragedies of our modern world - the experience of the inner light, the eternal aspect of our human nature linking us with the cosmos is either a very minor cord or an entirely forgotten cord. And the alternative? Habitually asking that most modern of questions: when can I have my next drink.

Final note: this is my second Kingsley Amis novel. I read but did not enjoy his "One Fat Englishman" finding any stabs at humor forced and artificial. In contradistinction, the humor in "Ending Up" arises naturally from the characters and the action; nothing struck me as forced to produce a laugh. Similar to B. S. Johnson's "House Mother Normal," I highly recommend this Kingsley Amis novel since odds are we will all live to see old age and a little bit of knowledge of this subject via literature isn't a bad thing.

#### Review 4:

Kingsley Amis is a really major writer, and always funny as hell if you find "major" intimidating. Lucky Jim is still probably the best academic novel of all time, and there are millions of them, given writers live in academia and take their own advice to write about what they know. Amis is incisive and what he chooses to include is always fresh and illuminating. Like many really important writers he has not only an original style but a niche or vision. He's cornered the market on meanmindedness. That is, part of everyone's reaction to to other people is irritation and schadenfreude, hoping they will mess up and pleased when they do. Amis has that human quality completely covered. Characters are not only mean but sympathetic in an odd way, in that it is fairly easy to imagine yourself having similar reactions at least some of the time. The situation in Ending Up, a group of elderly down at the heel English forced to live together for financial reasons, even though they really do not like each other or get along, is perfectly drawn, and each character is sharp and realistic. You probably want to give Amis a rest between books--it's hard to hang out with that many nasty people for too long--but you will go back to read another and another down the road because they are so funny and on the mark.

#### Review 5:

If you and your friends share a sense of dark humor, this makes a fun birthday present for someone of advanced age.

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