Here is the authorized, definitive biography of one of the most controversial figures of twentieth-century literature, renowned for his blistering intelligence, savage wit and belligerent fierceness of opinion: Kingsley Amis was not only the finest comic novelist of his generation—having first achieved prominence with the publication of Lucky Jim in 1954 and as one of the Angry Young Men—but also a dominant figure in post—World War II British writing as novelist, poet, critic and polemicist.

In The Life of Kingsley Amis, Zachary Leader, acclaimed editor of The Letters of Kingsley Amis, draws not only on unpublished works and correspondence but also on interviews with a wide range of Amis’s friends, relatives, fellow writers, students and colleagues, many of whom have never spoken out before. The result is a compulsively readable account of Amis’s childhood, school days and life as a student at Oxford, teacher, critic, political and cultural commentator, professional author, husband, father and lover. Even as he makes the case for Amis’s cultural centrality—at his death Time magazine claimed that “the British decades between 1955 and 1995 should in fairness be called ‘the Amis era’”—Leader explores the writer’s phobias, self-doubts and ambitions; the controversies in which he was embroiled; and the role that drink played in a life bedeviled by erotic entanglements, domestic turbulence and personal disaster.

Dazzling for its thoroughness, psychological acuity and elegant style, The Life of Kingsley Amis is exemplary: literary biography at its very best.

Features:
My Personal Review:
This a hefty read -- there are relatively few biographies of literary figures that are as long. But, the length is worth it. Leader writes gracefully and interestingly about a man who often is hard to like but difficult not to admire. Most of us know Amis either as the author of "Lucky Jim" (book and movie) or as the father of the Booker Prize winner Martin Amis. Kingsley's career, however, is more important than those two claims to fame. He was one of the initiators of the Angry Young Men who had a major impact on English writing from the 1950s on. And, he brought back to English, and American poetry, an emphasis on accessibility to the average reader, although his effort is not always visible today. Further, he was the model of the hard-drinking, womanizing author that populates so much of popular fiction and film. In that story, we find a lot of what makes his life so sad as well as so interesting. And, this is an interesting book that takes you inside the creative process of writing and the destructive process of hard living.

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