



Alfred Kazin: A Biography

Richard M. Cook

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Born in 1915 to barely literate Jewish immigrants in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, Alfred Kazin rose from near poverty to become a dominant figure in twentieth-century literary criticism and one of America's last great men of letters. Biographer Richard M. Cook provides a portrait of Kazin in his public roles and in his frequently unhappy private life. Drawing on the personal journals Kazin kept for over 60 years, private correspondence, and numerous conversations with Kazin, he uncovers the full story of the lonely, stuttering boy from Jewish Brownsville who became a pioneering critic and influential cultural commentator.

Upon the appearance of *On Native Grounds* in 1942, Kazin was dubbed "the boy wonder of American criticism." Numerous publications followed, including *A Walker in the City* and two other memoirs, books of criticism, as well as a stream of essays and reviews that ceased only with his death in 1998. Cook tells of Kazin's childhood, his troubled marriages, and his relations with such figures as Lionel Trilling, Saul Bellow, Malcolm Cowley, Arthur Schlesinger, Hannah Arendt, and Daniel Bell. He illuminates Kazin's thinking on political-cultural issues and the recurring way in which his subject's personal life shaped his career as a public intellectual. Particular attention is paid to Kazin's sense of himself as a Jewish-American "loner" whose inner estrangements gave him insight into the divisions at the heart of modern culture.

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