In a collection of lectures, the author recounts his development as a writer, his experiences in wartime England, his exchanges with such literary figures as Hart Crane, Allen Ginsburg, and Flannery O'Connor, and the enduring value of literature. UP.

My Personal Review:
The world lost a truly remarkable man of letters when Alfred Kazin died in 1998. Fortunately he left behind a trail of criticism, essays and memoir that allow us to enjoy him ad infinitum. WRITING WAS EVERYTHING is the text of lectures he delivered at Harvard in 1994, an amalgam of criticism, history and personal anecdote that celebrates the massive energy in literature and intellectual discourse that took place in the 1930s, the war years and its aftermath.

Born in 1915 to Jewish immigrants and raised in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, Kazin experienced the world and gained a ticket to it through reading. Using his own passion as a guide, Kazin tours the major American and European writers' experience and the ways in which they interpreted the 20th century cultural and historical earthquakes. It was a time when writing was living and readers were affected by what they read. It was a time when people beyond the academy talked about philosophy, when it was still connected to daily life. It was a time when people debated religion, not the political machinations or social prescriptions of a few denominations but the questions of pursuing faith in the face of war, genocide and cultural upheaval. It was a time when people took seriously the need to find a social and political order that could right wrongs.

Kazin's voice is most fluent and vivid. It is full of wonder and awe. It is obvious that he is not thrilled with the hegemony of lit crit or the dispassion with which contemporary academics treat texts, but he does not waste time attacking the current mode; rather he foils it with remarkable stories and assessments of Orwell, Joyce, Elliott, O'Connor, Weill, etc., etc.