

NOTES FROM: *Zen in the Art of Writing*, by Ray Bradbury

SUMMARY: One of my favorite authors *ever*, Ray Bradbury, wrote a *book...on writing!* I'm *so* there! *No one else could have written this book*, and every page is stamped with his singular personality and passion for stories and the written word. To put it another way: this book is *alive*.

Bradbury is the author of one of my favorite books of all time, *Fahrenheit 451*, a dystopian novel about a future in which books are banned and firemen don't fight fires - *they burn books*. It's a damn good book - one of the best, in my opinion - and Bradbury's created world was, in a very real way, alive too. At least it was alive *to me*. Part of me *still lives there*.

So it didn't take very much convincing at all to get me to read Bradbury's book on writing, and it definitely didn't disappoint! It's all about grabbing hold of inspiration and finding *magic* on the printed page; it's about developing and embracing the writer's passion for creating fictional worlds and getting *nonfictional* people to live in them; and it's about mastering something that means more to you than anything else in the entire world.

Part memoir, part writing guide, *all* Bradbury, *all* books, *all the time!* That's *Zen in the Art of Writing*. It's split up into 11 separate essays with *one* singular theme: the joy of writing about the true, magical nature of the real world we live in.

"We must earn life once it has been awarded us."

"You must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you."

"We use the grand and beautiful facts of existence in order to put up with the horrors that afflict us directly in our families and friends, or through the newspapers and T.V. The horrors are not to be denied. Who amongst us has not had a cancer-dead friend? Which family exists where some relative has not been killed or maimed by the automobile? I know of none. In my own circle, an aunt, and uncle, and a cousin, as well as six friends, have been destroyed by the car. The list is endless and crushing if we do not creatively oppose it. Which means writing as cure. Not completely, of course. You never get over your parents in the hospital or your best love in the grave. I won't use the word 'therapy,' it's too clean, too sterile a word. I only say when death slows others, you must leap to set up your diving board and dive head first into your typewriter."

"The first thing a writer should be is - excited."

"That will raise the temperature of your typewriter thirty degrees."

"So why not enjoy the first draft, in the hope that your joy will seek and find others in the world who, reading your story, will catch fire, too?"

“Everywhere you look in the literary cosmos, the great ones are busy loving and hating. Have you given up this primary business as obsolete in your own writing? What fun you are missing, then. The fun of anger and delusion, the fun of loving and being loved, of moving and being moved by this masked ball which dances us from cradle to churchyard. Life is short, misery sure, mortality certain. But on the way, in your work, why not carry those two inflated pig-bladders labeled Zest and Gusto. With them, traveling to the grave, I intend to slap some dummox's behind, pat a pretty girl's coiffure, wave to a tad up a persimmon tree. Anyone wants to join me, there's plenty of room in Coxie's Army.”

Write a list of nouns, by free association, and see which ideas come up.

“In order to convince your reader that he is THERE, you must assault each of his senses, in turn, with color, sound, taste, and texture. If your reader feels the sun on his flesh, the wind fluttering his shirt sleeves, half your fight is won. The most improbable tales can be made believable, if your reader, through his senses, feels certain that he stands at the middle of events. He cannot refuse, then, to participate. The logic of events always gives way to the logic of the senses.”

“Everything I’ve ever done was done with excitement, because I wanted to do it, because I loved doing it.”

“Nothing is ever lost.”

“Who are your friends? Do they believe in you? Or do they stunt your growth with ridicule and disbelief? If the latter, you haven't friends. Go find some.”

“I learned that I was right and everyone else wrong when I was nine. Buck Rogers arrived on scene that year, and it was instant love. I collected the daily strips, and was madness maddened by them. Friends criticized. Friends made fun. I tore up the Buck Rogers strips. For a month I walked through my fourth-grade classes, stunned and empty. One day I burst into tears, wondering what devastation had happened to me. The answer was: Buck Rogers. He was gone, and life simply wasn't worth living. The next thought was: Those are not my friends, the ones who got me to tear the strips apart and so tear my own life down the middle; they are my enemies. I went back to collecting Buck Rogers. My life has been happy ever since. For that was the beginning of my writing science fiction. Since then, I have never listened to anyone who criticized my taste in space travel, sideshows or gorillas. When this occurs, I pack up my dinosaurs and leave the room.”

“There you have it. There are one hundred stories from almost forty years of my life contained in my collected stories. They contain half the damning truths I suspected at midnight, and half of the saving truths I re-found next noon. If anything is taught here, it is simply the charting of the life of someone who started out to somewhere - and went. I have not so much thought my way through life as done things and found what it is and who I was after the doing. Each tale was a way of finding selves. Each self found each day slightly different from the one found twenty-four hours earlier.”

"I write all of my novels and stories, as you have seen, in a great surge of delightful passion. Only recently, glancing at the novel, I realized that Montag is named after a paper manufacturing company. And Faber, of course, is a maker of pencils! What a sly thing my subconscious was, to name them thus. And not tell ME!"

"Trains and boxcars and the smell of coal and fire are not ugly to children. Ugliness is a concept that we happen on later and become self-conscious about."

"And after all, isn't that what life is all about, the ability to go around back and come up inside other people's heads to look out at the damned fool miracle and say: oh, so that's how you see it?! Well, now, I must remember that."

"Self-consciousness is the enemy of all art, be it acting, writing, painting, or living itself, which is the greatest art of all."

Work, Relaxation, Don't Think. Now all together in a process.

"What do you think of the world? You, the prism, measure the light of the world; it burns through your mind to throw a different spectroscopic reading onto white paper than anyone else anywhere can throw. Let the world burn through you. Throw the prism light, white hot, on paper. Make your own individual spectroscopic reading."

"Remember: Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations. Plot is observed after the fact rather than before. It cannot precede action. It is the chart that remains when an action is through. That is all Plot ever should be. It is human desire let run, running, and reaching a goal. It cannot be mechanical. It can only be dynamic. So, stand aside, forget targets, let the characters, your fingers, body, blood, and heart DO."

"Be what no one else can be."

"Ten thousand futures share your blood each instant."

"All this, this, this, all this - too much! It cracks the heart! And so? Find art."