Ray Bradbury, *The Illustrated Man*: Major Themes

“Prologue”:

Body Art
- Art (including body art) as storytelling
- Art/body art changes lives
- Taboos and inability to resist breaking them
- Curiosity
  - Society, acceptance, and exclusion of individuals
- Self-fulfilling prophecy

“The Veldt”:

Parenting styles
- Consumerism and its effects on society, culture, families, values
- Tackling lives’ problems vs. relying on technology to solve them
- Materialism vs. intellectual endeavor
- Imagination: is it a natural human ability/characteristic or a product supplied by technology
- Humans as a spiritual, advanced beings vs. humans as animals. In both cases, the theme of what makes us either or both is prominent
- Human nature and the process of losing one’s humanity
- Humans as predators and humans as victims of predators (metaphorically and physically)
- Humans’ place in nature
- How naturalistic/realistic can technological inventions become? Is it a gain or a loss for us?
Do we control technology or does technology control us?

Avoidance and acceptance of responsibility

The role of a home in a child’s and an adult’s development

Does nature (the environment, the organisms in it) have ethics? Is it subject to human ethics?

Human attempt and failure to rule over both nature and technology

Visual technology, 3D projection, design, environment simulation

“Kaleidoscope”:

Coming to terms with one’s mortality

Despair vs. perseverance

End-of-life crisis

Do our final moments define us or do the individual moments of our lives?

What is the meaning of life? Does life have a meaning at all? Does death? Do they gain meaning in relation to each other?

Reality vs. memory vs. dream

Man’s place in the cosmos

The human condition

The mechanics of space travel

“The Other Foot”:

Prejudice, racism, segregation, Jim Crow South

Revenge vs. forgiveness

“Sins of our fathers”

Integrationism vs. Separatism
Minority and majority trading places
Letting go of the past
Learning from history/the past
Mob mentality
The power of independent thought and action

“The Highway”:

The Other: cultural, linguistic, social class, and worldview differences
Chaos vs. stability
“The End of the World” and its effects on human behaviors and thinking
Hysterical fear/mass hysteria
Threats of nuclear war as they appear to people of different cultures/countries/political allegiances
Running from threats as opposed to continuing “business as usual” in mortal danger
Reverting to working the field as a “we should tend our own garden” commentary or, perhaps, as a way to preserve/maintain life
What does “the end of the world” mean to an individual as opposed to a society
Who gets to escape and who does not
Potential effects of a “nuclear holocaust”

“The Man”:

Faith as opposed to denial of faith
The commander-subordinate dynamic
Cynicism as opposed to open-mindedness, acceptance

The extent to which science and technology can take us

Conforming to others, following orders, etc. as opposed to individual dissent, following one’s heart, curiosity, ethics

A clash between logos and mythos

Stubbornness as motivation as opposed to stubbornness leading to failure

Need for tangible evidence as opposed to readiness to believe the unbelievable

“The Road to Damascus”

Faith in the age of science and space exploration

“The Long Rain”:

   Endurance in an unfriendly/inhospitable environment
   Physical and psychological effects of the environment on humans
   Determination, perseverance, not giving up despite the seeming unattainability of the goal
   The human psyche
   Motivation: what keeps us going?
   Human colonization of Venus
   Adopting to life and work on a different planet
   Descent into despair and then insanity
   Is water life? In this story, it is death and “Chinese water torture”

“The Rocket Man”:

   Being torn between one’s calling and one’s home
   Being torn between adventure and one’s area of comfort
Duty to one’s family as opposed to one’s professional obligations and personal passion
Responsibilities of a parent, a spouse, the son.
Other people’s expectations as opposed to our own desires
Restlessness, inability to find peace, to be content
Dealing with the absence of a loved one
Father figures and role models
Acceptance of death
Acceptance of duty
Leaving a legacy and living with someone else’s legacy
The experience of an astronaut/ space travel

“The Fire Balloons”:

The meaning of a soul
The meaning of sin
Can one be sinful without a typical human body?
Encountering a different, unexpected life form
Adapting to working with the unexpected challenge
Are there new sins, ones that previously have not been committed?
As a different life form, will the Martians’ sins be different from those of humans?
The futility of measuring others’ behaviors and spirituality by our own yardstick

“The Last Night of the World”
Knowing that the world is ending and being unable to do anything about it
Routine as a source of comfort, stability, and safety.
Routine as decay and death.
Acceptance of the inevitable
Acceptance of death
“The living dead”: going through the motions of life, but being “dead inside”

“The Exiles”:
What does it take to keep literature, knowledge, culture alive?
Censorship and its effects on the society
Living and dying through one’s intellectual creation
When a work of literature dies, what and who else dies with it?
Systematic destruction of knowledge, intellectual life, and creativity

“No Particular Night or Morning”:
The relative meanings of sanity and insanity
Retaining sanity in a desperate situation
The death wish: becoming part of emptiness, nothingness
The wish for belonging: becoming part of the larger universe
Doubt and skepticism as opposed to optimism
Need for tangible proof
Suicide
Having more questions than answers in the age of space exploration
The experiences of astronauts and the mechanics of space travel
“The Fox and the Forest”:

Fighting for freedom in an oppressive, totalitarian society

Is time dynamic or static?

Escape as a form of rebellion and resistance to oppression

Time travel as a vehicle for escape

Despite all the progress we have achieved, oppressive governments persist in the future

Nostalgia and Romanization of the past

The meaning of freedom: freedom to travel, freedom to make choices, freedom to leave, etc.

Time travel

“The Visitor”:

The meaning of health and disease

The way we treat those with deadly illnesses

Inability to share, greed, selfishness

The value of illusion

Knowing that something is illusory does not stop us from craving it

Human capacity for destruction

Paradise Lost (yet again)

Willingness to hurt and kill others and risk one’s own life for an illusion

Acceptance of disease and death

“The Concrete Mixer”

Materialism, imperialism, and the lengths to which we will go for profit
Exploitation of others and justifications of/excuses for it
Cultural supremacism
The hunter becoming the prey
The role of imagination, popular culture, literature, and cinema in the formation of society’s values, its approach to other civilizations, and its own role in the world
Physical warfare as opposed to commercial warfare
The many ways of winning a war: conquering, fighting off invasions, or turning one’s enemy into one’s customer
War and Peace and their changing definitions

“Marionettes, Inc.”:
The meaning of a marriage
Does reliance on technology in marriage make us less human?
Outsourcing marital responsibilities and traditional gender roles
The way our society perceives men and women and their role as marriage partners
Man vs. machine
Running from responsibility
If machines are capable of love, how does that redefine technology?
The symbolic punishment fitting the crime
What is a robot?

“The City”:
Long-awaited revenge and its effects on an entire civilization
The psychology of revenge

Biological warfare, psychological warfare, and the dangers of any warfare going too far

Mutually assured destruction

Revenge potentially destroying the avenger as well as the target

“Sins of our fathers”

Inability to forgive and let go of the past

“Zero Hour”:

Game theory

Do games imitate life or shape life?

The future is in the hands of the children

Complexity of games

Tension and power struggle between adults and children

Nostalgia, envy

Uniting against common enemy/opponent

The danger of dismissing children as simple-minded, naïve, just playful

Preservation and loss of innocence

Understanding of evil

Remaining untainted by evil

“The Rocket”:

Parenting

Does lack of material resources take away from one’s ability to achieve his/her dream?
High costs of having a dream in a capitalist society

The inability to choose

High stakes and high responsibility

Resisting breaking up the family and working to strengthen familial bonds

Determination and ambition

The power of illusion and suggestion

The role of creativity in a materialistic world

Creating memories

Art as the antidote for materialism and consumerism

“The Illustrated Man”:

The difficulty of reinventing oneself

Fear of the Other and ostracizing, marginalizing the Other

Body art as storytelling

Visionary art and self-fulfilling prophecies

Self-loathing as opposed to the loathing of the other

One’s descent from a law-abiding citizen and participant in the community to a murderer and an outcast

Attraction, repulsion, and marriage

What drives us to hurt and kill others?

What is beauty? What is the line between the beautiful and the frightening, between curiosity and terror?

Objectification of the human body

The meaning of being a “freak” on display for public entertainment