



## Will You Accept this Rose?

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Emphasizing the show's social norms, narrative tropes, verbal rhetorical, and construction of time and space, Hannah Freeman makes the counterintuitive but shrewd argument that the reality show *The Bachelor* should be understood as a dystopian text—one especially disturbing because of its classification as nonfiction. This essay was written for a seminar on dystopian fiction and film with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

**I**F TRUE LOVE IS A PERSON'S goal, *The Bachelor* is the show to be on. *The Bachelor* sets up a magical atmosphere for "true love." Far from the real-life dystopian situations seen in some reality television, the show is crafted in such a careful way to convince its contestants and audience that *The Bachelor* is a utopia. The producers manipulate footage to present the best possible experiences for the contestants, schedule not-so-typical dates, and encourage out-of-the-norm behavior. The contestants fall victim to canonical dystopian tropes, change their own rhetoric, adapt to a new construct of space and time, and must be willing to stay under surveillance.

*The Bachelor*, and its counterpart *The Bachelorette*, is about one person, of either sex, "dating" numerous people of the opposite sex. The bachelor's goal throughout the show is to fall in love and to get

engaged by the end of the show. To do this, the bachelor will have to go on one-on-one dates and group dates with the contestants to find “the one.” This seems like a tall order, but the producers of the show do their best to create a fantasy for the couples, a utopia. The word “utopia” is a combination of “no place” and a “good place,” and this is exactly what *The Bachelor* tries to emulate. The contestants live in a beautiful mansion during the beginning of the show, where they pay no rent, electric bills, etc. Once the numbers dwindle down, they move onto more exotic areas. Living in perfect houses without the stress of daily life creates a space where everything that is not related to the bachelor fades away. What becomes the major concern is the bachelor and the contestants’ relationships with him.

Do not be fooled: *The Bachelor* is not the utopia it is trying to pass itself off as. Before a person can even be on the show, they must provide intimate details of their life including mental, physical, and sexual history, all along knowing this could be revealed on national television. They have to subject themselves to physical and psychological testing per request of the producers. They also have to consent to being filmed at all times with open and hidden cameras (“Eligibility”). This seems to be a giant violation of privacy, and yet people are still willing to go through with this, because, on *The Bachelor*, they could be the one person to find love.

Once a contestant has made it onto the show, there are new norms to adapt to. In the real world, interrupting someone when they are speaking is rude but not considered a huge deal. On *The Bachelor*, interrupting another contestant when that contestant has already had the chance to speak with the bachelor is considered taboo. It could also be grounds for social isolation.

The fantasy suite is another norm. The fantasy suite is reserved for the final three contestants. The contestants are not told explicitly to have sex that night, but the audience perceives that that is what happens. Sexual intimacy is a very private thing for couples and is usually, in the real world, not something that is acknowledged in public.

Another new norm is the high status that comes with having a rose, given by the bachelor. Contestants can receive roses on their one-on-one dates or group dates. Receiving a rose on a date means that the bachelor thinks the relationship is worth pursuing. The rose symbolizes a commitment to the relationship, a sense of security of their status for the week, and superiority over those without a rose. The rose itself is almost a relic, sacred. It is taboo to touch a rose that has not been assigned to someone yet. Despite the fact that all of the contestants are competing for the same person, there is still a bond formed between them. If people disrupt the flow, disrespect other contestants, or don't follow these new social norms, they are no longer welcomed in the group.

*The Bachelor* also imposes an odd dichotomy dating rituals. The first kind are the magical fairytale dates. These are usually, but not always, one-on-one dates. This type of date could include prepaid shopping sprees, helicopter rides, private concerts, or even using a private jet. This allows the contestant to fall into this fairytale dream, that they are on a perfect date with the perfect person. These dates contain the recipe for love. The other type of dates are ones that induce negative feelings, like fear or humiliation. These dates are specifically designed to scare the contestants or put them in undesirable situations. Some of these dates include activities like bungee jumping, demolition derbies, physical contests, and public performances. The high stakes of the dates allow the couple to bond over their traumatic experiences, solidifying their relationship with each other.

Dystopian texts also contain common tropes solidifying their place in the canon of dystopias. *The Bachelor* is not lacking in tropes. In classic utopian and dystopian texts such as Thomas More's *Utopia* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, there is an ambassador. An ambassador in this sense is a link between the two diverging worlds. In the show, Chris Harrison, the host, is the ambassador. As the host of the show, he has access to both worlds and bridges them together for the contestants and audience.

Another classic trope is having a common enemy. The film *Blade Runner* presents an enemy, the replicants, and despite the fact that the audience may be more sympathetic to them versus the humans at the end of the film, the film starts with the antagonizing of replicants. Similarly, *The Bachelor* always vilifies some contestant, pitting women against women. The villain or enemy may be a fan favorite or may be the most hated, but there will always be one each season.

On the other hand, there is a “love conquers all” trope. This trope is present in the films *Logan’s Run* and *Blade Runner*. The show presents this trope in a slightly different way. Instead of the horror that often comes along with dystopias, there are suggestively dramatic and trying conversations to solidify their relationship. There are also new experiences that the couples go through together, bonding them, which is also present in *Logan’s Run*. In *Logan’s Run*, Logan and Jessica escape into an unknown world and experience new things together. The bachelor travels to exotic cities and the dates usually incorporate exploring their new world.

Another dystopian trope seen in *The Bachelor* is the restriction of creativity, which is also seen in Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* and E.M. Foster’s “The Machine Stops.” On the first night of the show, the contestants when meeting the bachelor for the first time, try to outdo each other in their introductions. However, they do not have free reign. Some of their introductions require props that they have to speak to the producers about. This stifles the contestants' creativity with rules and regulations.

One last trope is sexual restriction. *THX 1138*, another canonical dystopian film, highlights this trope. As previously mentioned, the only opportunity for the couple to be intimate is in the fantasy suite. The fantasy suite is reserved for the final three contestants. Any sexual activity, aside from kissing and some groping, outside of the fantasy suite with the bachelor is not prohibited.

The use of verbal rhetoric in *The Bachelor* is also particularly disturbing. All of the contestants will refer to the bachelor as their

“boyfriend” and say that they are “dating.” This seems like a direct violation of what those terms mean. Usually, a person’s boyfriend would not be seeing twenty other people. Despite the sisterly bond the women all claim to have formed, they still understandably proclaim their jealousy when someone else gets a one-on-one date, receives extra attention, or kisses the bachelor. However, the contestants know what they are getting into when they go on the show. The mindset the contestants have during the show must be traumatic—to see the man that they are “dating” in many ways cheating on them. This what *The Bachelor* is all about, narrowing it down to “the one,” regardless of what this process does to the contestants during and after the show. The contestants also refer to themselves as numbers, specifically when it gets down to the final four. For the final four contestants the dates start getting more personal, starting with home visits. The goal for the contestants is to be “the one” but getting to the final four is considered prestigious.

The chronotopic structure of *The Bachelor* is also relevant. A chronotope, as described by Mikhail Bakhtin, is the relationship of time and space within the text, along with the culture of time and space of the real world (Vice 200-28). How space and time is constructed in *The Bachelor* reveals how far from a utopia it truly is. The space that is constructed is supposed to be one of dreams. The contestants spend a lot of time isolated in the Bachelor Mansion. During the cocktail parties which happen before the rose ceremonies, the audience is shown a small glimpse of what actually happens. The cocktail parties and rose ceremonies start in the evening and can last until sunlight. For the audience though, this part of the show only takes up a tiny part of the episode. There is an exception to this when the chronotope of drama of is seen. The presence of drama drags out time, whether it's between the contestants or the contestants and the bachelor. This also allows the producers to erase the boring material they have—presenting a thrilling time on *The Bachelor*.

Time itself is a valuable commodity in this space. As mentioned, when regarding norms, interrupting more than once is taboo. When a contestant does this, they are stealing time away from somebody else. The stealing of time could happen during a date or a cocktail party where it is crucial for the contestants to get their time so that they can receive a rose. There is also screen time to consider. Screen time is given to contestants who are seen as villains, create drama, or act eccentrically. Screen time can also clue in the audience to who the bachelor likes, the contestants most likely to go home are the ones with little screen time. However, there is an exception; the more one stands out, the more likely they are to go home.

Another layer of the dystopian reality of *The Bachelor* is the 24-hour surveillance. Canonical dystopias often involve the use of panopticism, the surveillance of everyday life. Michel Foucault's characterizes panopticism as the idea that a person can be seen at all times, so they should always be acting appropriately. This causes people to police themselves (Foucault 195-228). On *The Bachelor*, there are cameras everywhere, and the contestants willingly subject themselves to being watched. They do this to find true love with the bachelor. However, they have to be policing their words and behaviors. In a space that makes a person censor herself, how is it possible to find "true love" where one's real self is not presented?

*The Bachelor* represents a scary reality: Dystopias are real, and people are witnessing and participating in one. *The Bachelor* is similar to the utopian presentation of society of *The Hunger Games*, which suggests that it is okay to disrupt people's lives, put them in extreme situations, and mess with their norms, all to find love. It tries to sell a fantasy of what falling in love and being in love should look like. Love is the be-all, end-all of life. It promotes surveillance and censorship so the audience can have the full story—who does not love that? *The Bachelor* manipulates real people to present a utopia in a truly dystopian setting. ▶▶

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