
Senior Projects Spring 2024

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2024

American Bittersweet

Maeve F. Schrode
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024

 Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Schrode, Maeve F., "American Bittersweet" (2024). *Senior Projects Spring 2024*. 265.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024/265

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2024 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

“American Bittersweet”

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Maeve Schrode

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2024

Maeve Schrode

May 2024

“American Bittersweet”

Artist’s Statement

Celastrus scandens, or American bittersweet, is a species of staff vine—one that is non-native to upstate New York. You could also call it invasive. The plant flowers and fruits, but is inedible, poisonous. It isn’t lethal, though.

I have always been engrossed in the concept of college towns, moreso now that I inhabit one. I have found myself writing about them for most of my time here at Bard. To me, they are an apt illustration of the states of transience and permanence, and what occurs when they exist simultaneously in one space. As students make their temporary homes away from home, they cohabitate with those who were born and raised in that place. Through living in Tivoli, I have found myself thinking about those who see cycles of twenty-somethings come and go. How do we affect the town? Do we have any effect, individually, at all? What relationship can a local develop with someone whose stay has an expiration date?

College towns also are undoubtedly a space in which class must be considered. All over the country universities are built in villages and towns, often blue-collar villages and towns. When I considered Birdie and Jude’s class profiles, I decided to level the playing field and subvert the Pygmalion troupe. The characters reckon with their parents’ lives as people born from working class backgrounds. What do success and contentment look like in a society obsessed with upward mobility? I grew up around extreme wealth in Los Angeles, attending the

private high school my mother taught at on a full scholarship. Both of my parents are school teachers. As Birdie says, most people die in the class they are born into. I have often wondered if a life striving for wealth and comfortability would be less comfortable than finding peace in what I was given. In this way, Birdie and Jude represent my two ways of thinking, always in heated discourse in my mind. The truth of these characters is that neither has more potential than the other, neither is smarter. I thought of Birdie as someone who utterly rejects the American Dream, maybe sometimes to a fault. Yet, there was something freeing about writing her character—is she biting off her nose to spite her face, or will she ultimately be happier than Jude? Generational curses loom large on their minds: is a curse just a curse when it's desperately trying to be broken?

“American Bittersweet” is an amalgamation of questions that I do not have answers to, set in a space that occupies my mind: the one I now prepare to leave, just as I came.