

THE WORKSHOP

– TITLE –

There's rich territory to explore in this world full of scheming, righteous Christian moms, hypocritical pastors, and closeted gay teens, and the script does a nice job of skewering these sanctimonious characters. The Reverend's death seems like it will set a number of interesting conflicts and plotlines in motion, and as a reader, I was especially curious to see how Rachel's story would play out.

But it does feel like there's a lack of focus in the opening, something echoed in the synopsis. Even in an ensemble series, we almost always get a focused entry into the world, a POV that takes us through the story. Here, it's more like the story jumps between characters, showing us their individual situations without building a forward-moving narrative. There's a disconnected feel to the scenes in this first act, and it seems like it's related to that lack of focus.

What you might consider is picking one character to function more in a traditional protagonist role, and allow them to be our eyes into the larger world of the story. Rachel or Hank are probably the most natural choices, as both have significant personal conflicts. Rachel with her experience of abuse at the Reverend's hands might be the more relevant choice—culturally, we're still dealing with the fallout of MeToo and the question of what to do with abusers and their legacies, and it's easy to see how revelations of sex workers and abuse might throw a church and community like this into chaos, forcing everyone to reexamine long-held beliefs.

Hank, meanwhile, is gay in a community that doesn't accept it (and has a mother against the “homosexual agenda”), but this is an element that actually feels a *little* dated. Yes, there are still churches and people railing against the “homosexual agenda,” but it's a battle they've largely lost in a cultural sense, and the idea that someone like Marsha is writing this strongly worded letter about a cable show feels a bit like it's out of another era. In 2021, Hank may have more cultural support and examples of living as an out gay man than Marsha does for her agenda, and it makes the point the script is trying to hit come off somewhat heavy-handed. If Hank's conflict is going to work, you'll probably want to emphasize just how cloistered and claustrophobic this community might be. How small is this town that the family lives in? What sort of consequences have others faced if they strayed from the righteous path? Is he trapped there, even after he turns 18, for some reason? If Hank has access to gay porn, if he's self-aware enough to be able to tell Bryant it's unlikely that a high school relationship sealed with a promise ring is going to last, it seems as if Hank probably knows he's fine as a person and that he's surrounded by bigots and just has to bide his time until he can leave for college or otherwise. But we're past the point, culturally speaking, where “being gay” is enough of a conflict for a character, unless you build out a world around them that raises the stakes.

The synopsis makes it seem as if Marsha will be driving the plot, and that might be tricky—she's the villain here. Her Mothers For Morality seems more like the kind of thing that her kids will want to work *against*. Again, it's an issue of focus and who and what is driving the story, and that *might* need to be flipped here. The themes and hypocrisy of this world feel emphasized over the characters and their narratives, so the script comes off as trying to prove a point more than tell a story.

