

Preach

A desk, chair and a lit lamp are centred on the stage. A pile of neat paper lies on the desk.

*JOE'S MOTHER wears reading glasses, a white bathrobe and has wet hair.
She sits at the desk, brow furrowed, studying the papers.*

A spotlight focuses on the scene.

I can't bear February anymore. Always another bill to pay, always another 5K to lose. I mean, how do they think the average working family can afford all this? I understand a family of 4, of 3 even. But it's just Joe and I now, ever since... [she pauses, recollects herself]
I get a little bit from Centrelink, but not quite enough to keep us fat and healthy.

She takes a brown paper bag from the desk, pulling out a loaded chocolate doughnut.

Well, healthy.

She takes a bite.

One source of income just isn't enough. I've been nagging Joe to get a job, to get him out of this house and into work, since he's old enough. He *should* be paying rent, but he hasn't got the money for it. And heaven forbid the suggestion of earning some, *oh* no. That's too much!

She takes another bite.

He doesn't do anything anymore, just sits in *my* basement, talking to his internet friends from who-knows-where about [finger quotations] "nerfing the opps". I can hardly tell whether he has gang affiliations, or a poisoned mind from all his games! It's scary as a mother to see how out of touch your son has become. He's so submerged in this desire for escapism – you know, in his video games and his TV. In fact, *all* these kids seem to think that life's about ease! Of course they do, they don't have to pay for their electricity, they don't have to run a household.

Finishing off the doughnut, she licks her fingers, scrunching up the bag and searching for a place to hide it.

She finds the bin beneath the desk, discarding the bag and throwing scrap paper on top.

I – don't *usually* eat that delicious sugary crap. It's my cheat day. Anyway – gang member or not, Joe's turned into a dopamine addict, scabbing brain drugs off a screen. Farming synthetic joy all alone in my basement. That's as close as he'll get to manual labour. It makes me think of his father. Who was he at 17? *He* was a man. He had more knowledge, more experience, more character than Joe does. I was there to see it. He wasn't up late every night drinking whatever the hell Joe drinks to stay awake - Monster and such. He was living, he was doing life. He'd

always be out, doing something or other – train hopping, breaking up fights. When he was much younger, of course. He'd always have a story to tell.

She takes out a pack of cigarettes, pauses to light one and puts it between her lips. She lets out a stream of smoke.

And yet here's his son, wasting away, rotting in a room while his mother suffers – struggles to keep his belly full. The *least* he could do is help bring in some income!

She takes a long drag of the cigarette, coughing as she exhales.

I think he needs to realise that life isn't gonna hand itself to him on a silver platter. He needs to get out there and seize the opportunity he's been given to be alive. Learn to be his own guide, to face hardship and take it on the chin. It's easier out there than it is in here, withering away in his padded chair, hidden from the world.

Taking one last puff of the cigarette, she throws the butt in the bin and fans the smoke away with a piece of paper.

She holds up the paper, studying it briefly. 'HEALTH INSURANCE' is written in large black print. She sets the paper down on the desk, frowning.

She opens a drawer in the desk; and pulls out a secret bottle of beer.

Technology's got the young generation with a chain around their necks, flesh merged with machine. It's killing their brains, I'm certain. I read it somewhere, that all this screen exposure turns your brain into mush – destroys your common sense. It *would* do too, I mean kids believe *everything* they see on the internet nowadays. It's all just fed to them, no human connection, just instructions. Take your pills, watch your shows, play your games. You haven't got any friends, but you got a whole lot of distractions!

She takes a swig of beer and coughs.

What's most shameful is that Joe's throwing his future away. I've seen his work. I've seen his report cards and his writing and let me tell you something, that boy's got a whole lotta brain up there. He could be a journalist, or a poet, or an author if he tried. He could *be* somebody. I don't understand – Why would he give it all to this imaginary world that gives him nothing back?

She takes another sip of beer.

It's as if he can't even see it. Like he doesn't even realise the potential he has, the life he could have. He could be a writer, he could *be* somebody. I'll continue to nag him, in hopes that he'll come around. But I haven't got all that long left - I'm tired. I just have to pray that someday he'll notice that he still has time. That... escaping the real world won't get him anywhere.

She pauses, contemplating.

After a moment, she stands, pushing in the chair.

And now, I must be off, to the doctor's. I've been having some trouble with my...

She glances at the beer bottle in her hand.

...knee.

She begins to walk away from the desk, and stops abruptly, thinking.

She turns back, slowly places the bottle of beer back down on the desk, and picks up the Medical Insurance bill instead.

Once more, she turns to leave, exiting the stage.

Reflection Statement

Preach draws from Jane Austen's message in *Pride and Prejudice*, exploring what it means to flourish as a human based on the values of fairness, attentiveness and self-reflection. I have specifically investigated the hypocrisy of our quickness in judging others in comparison to ourselves – not practising what we preach. Joe's Mother parallels Elizabeth Bennet in this way, as she condemns Mr. Darcy for his pride and poor manners, despite being morally disengaged herself – she observes the world with scepticism, harshness and prejudice, thus misjudging those around her (such as Mr. Darcy) due to her self-assured naivety. Likewise, Joe's Mother critiques Joe for his immaturity and addiction to virtual distraction, yet her hyperfocus and hypercriticism of him is a distraction in itself from her own transgressions, including her problems with heavy smoking and drinking.

I captured a satirical tone through the lighthearted language and ironic humour, masking a heavier message. The protagonist is solely named "Joe's Mother", epitomising her hyper-fixation on Joe's issues in neglect of her own, as if Joe is her primary concern in life. Perhaps she has stopped trying to revive her spark for life and subconsciously tries to prevent Joe from ending up like her. Through the inclusion of the doughnut, I introduced a 'flaw' that Joe's Mother ignores in herself and imply that Joe's Mother has poor eating habits through the juxtaposition of "delicious sugary crap". This common habit is relatable for the audience, evoking sympathy and perhaps pity, which segways into the more severe habits that Joe's Mother struggles with – her alcohol and tobacco addictions. The audience's perspective of Joe's Mother is constantly developed throughout the piece, as the irony in her critiques of Joe's slavery to distraction and her desire for his liberation is revealed through her preoccupation with Joe's faults. This is *her* distraction from her crippling addictions – the main reason for her low quality of life – which she can be liberated from in the same way that she expects Joe to be.

Furthermore, I chose to use dramatic monologue as my form, as I believe it is a more provocative medium, allowing for the complex definition of a character. I utilised stage directions as a literary device to introduce the issue – hypocrisy and the human tendency to pass judgment on others before examining ourselves – symbolised through the beer and cigarettes. I critique the social assumption that maturity and virtue come with age, as Joe's Mother attempts to escape from her flawed reality in the same way that Joe does, and yet she only notices the inattentiveness of her son. Humanity in general must self-reflect, regardless of age, as imperfections are present throughout our lives, despite an inclination to feel naturally morally superior and wise as we age.

Additionally, I depicted the experience of personal development through Joe's Mother. There isn't a resolution or redemption arc, but rather a catharsis, when she replaces her beer with the medical bill. This implicates a potential motivation for personal renewal for Joe's Mother – or at least the beginnings of self-reflection. I insinuated this through a stage direction as I feel that the symbolic action of an attempt at willful self-improvement leaves the audience with a sense of hope that this may be a pivotal moment for Joe's Mother. This is comparable to Elizabeth

Bennet's character development, having developed temperance through her growing fondness for Mr. Darcy.

Ultimately, *Preach* scrutinises the hypocritical nature of humanity and the commonality of escapism in society to evade reality's troubles. As sensible people, we must develop our self-awareness, reflecting on our own flaws before criticising the behaviours and actions of others.

Hypocrite! First, remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Matthew 7:5