



A Change of PACE

Creatively supporting young people during the coronavirus crisis

The Monologue Pod Class

Episode 6

Character: Matty
Gender: Male
Age: 19
Play: *Country Music*, by Simon Stephens (2004)
Accent: Essex (or southeast England general)

MATTY Jamie, Lynsey's moved up north.

Pause

She met a bloke.

Pause

She met some bloke and she moved up north with him and she took Emma with her.

Pause

Moved up Sunderland.

Pause

She came to, came to, came to, to tell us. Came round to the house. She wouldn't tell me where she was going exactly but she promised she'd try and phone me. Let us know.

Pause

It was a month ago.

Pause

She wanted me to come and see you. To tell you. She isn't going to come and see you herself, she said. She doesn't want Emma to come and see you. She doesn't want that.

Pause

I never met him. I don't know who he is or what he's like. Or what he does. Or anything.

Pause. JAMIE nods over and over.

[JAMIE Right. Right. Right. Right. Right.]

MATTY I haven't been able to sleep. Thinking about how I was going to tell you.

[JAMIE Right.]

MATTY Jamie, I'm really sorry, mate.

Very long pause. Two staring at each other. MATTY finds it difficult.

Extract from *Country Music*, by Simon Stephens, published in *Simon Stephens Plays 2*, (2009), Methuen Drama, London.

Character: Jean Brodie
Gender: Female
Age: mid 20s
Play: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, from the novel by Muriel Spark
 adapt. Jay Presson Allen
Accent: It's set in a well-to-do Edinburgh girls school, but I don't think her own accent is specified

I have given most of this scene (in purple) for context. The monologue starts at 'I will not resign and you will not dismiss me!'

LIGHTS up on MACKAY's office. MACKAY faces BRODIE and LOWTHER from behind her desk. She is outwardly grim but within there beats a pulse that is pure pleasure, pure triumph.

MACKAY. *(She waves a dirty, crumpled sheet of blue paper at BRODIE.)* Now, Miss Brodie. Do you know what this is?

BRODIE. It appears to be a scrap of paper.

MACKAY. It is, in fact, a *letter*, Miss Brodie. It was found by the gardener, concealed among the pots by the greenhouse. He glanced at it... He said after the first sentence he dared not actually *read* it. He brought it instantly to me.

BRODIE. *(All polite interest)* Is it addressed to you?

MACKAY. No, Miss Brodie, it is addressed to Mr Lowther. I propose to read it to you.

BRODIE. Should you, Miss Mackay? If it is addressed to Mr Lowther –

MACKAY. *(Grimly)*. It is *signed by you*, Miss Brodie. Of course I realise it is a forgery. It is the work of a child... I shall begin.

BRODIE. Please do.

MACKAY. *(Gives her one last killing look, then begins to read)*. ‘My Dear, Delightful Gordon, Your letter has moved me deeply as you may imagine. But alas, I must ever decline to be Mrs Lowther. My reasons are twofold. I am dedicated to my girls as is Madame Pavlova, and there is another in my life. He is Teddy Lloyd! Intimacy has never taken place with him. He is married to another. We are not lovers, but we know the truth. However, I was proud of giving myself to you when you came and took me in the bracken while the storm raged about us. If I am in a certain condition – I shall place the infant in the care of a worthy shepherd and his wife. I may permit misconduct to occur again from time to time as an outlet because I am in my prime. We can also have many a breezy day in the fishing boat at sea. We must keep a sharp lookout, however, for Miss Mackay, as she is rather narrow which arises from an ignorance of culture and the Italian scene. I love to hear you sing ‘Hey Johnnie Cope.’ But were I to receive a proposal from the Lord Lyon King of Arms I would decline it. Allow me in conclusion to congratulate you warmly on your sexual intercourse, as well as your singing. With fondest joy, Jean Brodie.’ *(As if handing over a box of snakes, MACKAY leans across the desk and hands the letter to BRODIE, ignoring the shrunken MR. LOWTHER)*. Is this what your girls – your ‘set’ has learned under your auspices, Miss Brodie?

BRODIE. *(Carefully, curiously, minutely, she goes over the letter. Finally she hands it back to MACKAY)*. A literary collaboration. There are two separate hands involved. One of the authors slants her tail consonants in an unorthodox manner, the other does not. Also, judging from the condition of the paper I should think it has been in the greenhouse quite a wee while.

- MACKAY. Is that all you have to say?
- BRODIE. What else is there to say? Two little girls at the age of budding sexual fantasy concoct a romance for themselves and choose me as a romantic symbol. Is that so surprising?
- MACKAY. (*Aghast at BRODIE's aplomb*). Do you deny that you encourage these fantasies, as you call them? Do you deny that by consorting openly with Mr Lowther at Cramond you lead these poor children into the most – fevered conclusions? Not only Mr Lowther but Mr Lloyd is brought into the circle of fire! Mr Lloyd, who has a wife and six children! It is diabolical! That infants should be knowledgeable of –
- BRODIE. (*reasonably*) Eleven – twelve year old girls are not infants, Miss Mackay.
- MACKAY. How do you know they are eleven – twelve?
- BRODIE. From the handwriting – the vocabulary, and the very rudimentary knowledge of the facts of life. Surely you cannot believe this is the work of nine-year-olds?
- [...]
- I fail to understand your agitation, Miss Mackay, over a rather *antique* prank.
- MACKAY. Miss Brodie, there is a *principle* involved here. Thee principle is that teachers are the protectors and guardians of their pupils. Guardians against corruption.
- [...]
- BRODIE. There is very little for me to say, Miss Mackay, in the face of your extraordinary prejudice and hostility.
- MACKAY. I am not asking you to say anything! I am asking – demanding – that you put your signature (*with heavy irony*) – your *own* signature – on a letter of resignation.
- BRODIE. (*Her wrath finally beginning to crack the surface of her preternatural calm*) I will not resign!
- MACKAY. (*utterly taken aback*) You will not resign? You will force me to dismiss you?

BRODIE. I will not resign and you will not dismiss me, Miss Mackay. *(She rises to her full height. Sybil Thorndike would have applauded)*. I will not allow you to exercise on me your warped compulsion to persecute! I will not be slandered, hounded – you will *not* use the excuse of that pathetic – that *humorous* document to bully and blackmail me into resigning. Mr Lowther – you are witness to this. Miss Mackay has made totally *unsupported* accusations against my good name. And yours. If she has one authentic shred of evidence, just *one*, let her bring it forth! Otherwise, if any further word of this outrageous calumny reaches my ears, I shall sue. I shall take the trustees of Marcia Blaine School to the public courts, and I shall sue the trustees of Marcia Blaine School if they support her. I will not stand by and allow myself to be crucified by a woman whose *fetid* frustration has overcome her judgment! If scandal is to your taste, Miss Mackay, then I shall give you a *feast!*

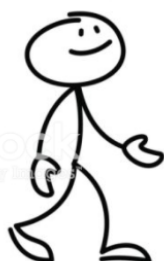
MACKAY. *(Appalled)* Miss Brodie!

BRODIE. I am a teacher! I am a teacher! First! Last! Always! Do you imagine for one instant that I will let that be taken from me without a fight? *(She is magnificent. LOWTHER can only admire her. MACKAY is stunned)*. I have dedicated, sacrificed my *life* to this profession. And I will not stand by like an inky little slacker and watch you rob me of it. And for *what* reason? For *jealousy*. Because I have the gift of claiming girls for my own. It is true that I am a strong influence on my girls. Yes! I am proud of it! I influence them to be aware of all the possibilities of life. Of Beauty, of Honour, of Courage. I do not, Miss Mackay, influence them to look for ugliness and slime where they *do not exist*. *(Takes a deep breath)*. My girls will be coming back from recreation so I shall return to my classroom. They will find me composed and prepared to reveal to them the succession of the Stuarts. *(Strides towards the door, turns)*. And on Sunday I shall visit Mr Lowther at Cramond. We are accustomed, bachelor and spinster, to spend Sundays together in sailing, in walking the beaches, and in the pursuit of music. Mr Lowther is teaching me the mandolin. Good day, Miss Mackay.

Here is a recap of some of the tools and techniques that we've covered over the six episodes of The Monologue Podclass...

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES. Establish the basic who? (characters) / what? (situation) / where? (location) by reading, then by reading again. Audiences look for this in a scene, in an improvisation, in anything. Get it clear for yourself.

FACTS AND QUESTIONS. Listing these is a great way to start. No fact is too small, no question is too big. Facts give us our building blocks around the character. Questions allow us to access some of the emotional stakes and build the world around the piece.



KEY QUESTIONS.

- what has happened just before this moment? (gives us reason to start speaking)
- who are they speaking to?
- what does my character want?
- what makes it a monologue – why doesn't anyone else interrupt?

CHARACTER WORK – ask a load of questions, then answer them. To hotseat yourself, try timing yourself for one minute while you write down as many questions as you can think of, then go back and answer them. Questions are broadly either biographical (the character's life story) or physical (to do with their body and voice) or psychological (about how they think and behave). See separate PDF document for a list of character questions.

VISUALISING THE CHARACTER – drawing them, imagining their clothing, house, food.

DRAWING A STORYBOARD – if you think visually and enjoy drawing, this may help you to get into the sequence of the thoughts. Try going thought-by-thought, or if this is too much, draw an image for each section or major change of thought.



WALKING THE PUNCTUATION (or PHYSICALISING THE PUNCTUATION)

This helps you to go thought-by-thought through the text, turning thought and the movement and changes of thought into physical movement. Try walking and then: stopping and changing direction at a full stop; stamping for a question mark (because questions are demands for answers); clicking for a comma.

IMAGING

- an image that helps you get to each thought. Create an image – write it in note form or draw it, making sure you create it in detail in your mind's eye – that takes you to the thought of each phrase/line. Then go through the speech image-by-image without speaking, then with speaking, trying to make sure you 'see' each image *before* you speak, giving you the impulse to speak, and only speaking when you have that impulse. This works particularly well when a character is telling a story or recounting memories.



PUBLIC/PRIVATE

– as an exercise, make the choice for EVERY PHRASE between it being a big, public announcement (loud, physically expressive) or a private, direct whisper to one other person. Some choices will be obvious but don't worry about making the 'right' choice – it's about releasing and discovering things.

STABBING/BLEEDING – again, as an exercise, make the choice for EVERY PHRASE between stabbing (in mime) the person you're talking to, or bleeding profusely. Make each of these really physical.

THE POST-IT NOTE EXERCISE

– write out each phrase/line/thought on a separate post-it note on your pad. Then go through the speech landing each one on either (1) the person you're talking to, or (2) yourself, or (3) the space you're in. Explore how you land each one – speed, manner, style – and what it might mean to pile them on top of each other too. This is good for helping you really go one thought at a time, and to get the targeting of each one really clear.

ACTIONING with transitive verbs phrase-by-phrase.

- These are tactics: they are what a character (your character) is *doing to another character* in pursuit of an objective. (Sometimes a character might play a tactic on a set of other characters, or on someone absent or in their memory, or occasionally on themselves or, in quite specific circumstances, on the audience). Go thought-by-thought, phrase-by-phrase, line-by-line, breath-by-breath, and do these **physically, vocally, psychologically**. Below is a list of good, actable transitive verbs to start you off and make it easier to think of them. It's interesting and can be useful to try to pick the 'right' verb for the line, but often there isn't a 'right' one and it is more important to just pick one and have a go at acting it.



abolish abuse accept acquaint acquit address affirm afflict affront aid alarm
alert allow allure amaze amend amuse anger antagonize anticipate ape appeal
approach arouse arrange assess assist astound attack authenticate baby
badger baffle bait bear beckon befuddle beg beguile belittle berate beseech
bewitch bid blame bless bluff boost brainwash bribe cajole calculate call catch
caution censure challenge charge charm chastise cheat check cheer chide
clarify cloak coax coddle coerce collude command commend conceal
concern conciliate condemn condescend confide confirm confound confuse
consider consign contest convince correct corroborate court cover criticize crucify crush
curse damn dare deceive declaim deduce defame defraud defy delight delude demean
denigrate deny detect deter devastate dictate direct disconcert discourage discredit
disencumber disgrace disgust dishearten dispirit displease dissuade distress divert divine
dodge dominate dramatize draw duck ease educate elevate elicit elucidate embroil enchant
endear endure enflame engross enkindle enlighten enmesh ensnare entangle entertain
entice entrap entreat entrust eradicate eschew estimate evade evaluate excuse execute
exploit facilitate feed force frame free frighten frustrate fuddle gag gauge gladden goad
graft gull hallow harangue hassle help henpeck hoodwink humble humiliate humour hurt
hush hypnotize imitate impair implicate indict indoctrinate induce indulge insinuate inspire
insult interview intrigue invite judge lambast lampoon lead lecture libel liberate lure
tantalize tarnish tease tempt terrify thwart tickle titillate tolerate torment torture trammel
trick trouble tyrannize magnetize manipulate marshall mask mend mimic mislead misuse
mobilize mortify motivate muffle muster mystify nag nauseate negotiate notify nullify
obliterate offend oppose organize orient orientate overlook panic parrot patronize perform
perplex persecute peruse placate plan please pledge pontificate pose pray preoccupy press
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reprehend repress reprimand repulse resist retract revolt ridicule sanctify satisfy scheme
scold scrutinize sedate seduce settle shake shame shroud shun sicken simplify slander slur
smother snare sober soothe spellbind spoil spur spurn squash squelch startle still stir stretch
strike strip study stymie substantiate suffer suggest summon supplicate support suppress
surprise swindle unburden understand uproot urge warn wheedle woo worry worship
wrangle