

Teachers' Resource

for

Berni Stapleton's

*The Haunting of  
Margaret Duley*

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# Production Information

## THE STORY

Margaret Duley (1894-1968) was the first Newfoundland novelist to achieve literary success outside Newfoundland and Labrador. Her four novels -- *The Eyes of the Gull* (1936), *Cold Pastoral* (1939), *Highway to Valour* (1941) and *Novelty on Earth* (1942) – were published in Canada and in the United Kingdom. She was praised by international critics but received little acclaim as a writer at home in Newfoundland, where she was better known for her newspaper writing, her work with the Women’s Patriotic Association over two world wars, and her involvement in the Women’s Franchise League which fought for women’s suffrage.

The play opens in 1939, on the brink of the Second World War, as Margaret celebrates the publication of *The Eyes of the Gull*. We follow her through the years and see how she is haunted not only by the ghosts of her own past but by the iconic characters of her novels. In her final years, rendered nearly immobile and speechless by Parkinson’s Disease and cared for by relatives, Margaret still grapples with ... what? How to sum this up neatly?

## THE CHARACTERS

### 1. Margaret Duley

Handsome and elegant, we see Margaret in this play from her early 40s to her late 60s: she appears as the emerging and daring author, as an unconventional spiritual traveler, and as a human being ultimately undone by a relentless illness.

### 2. Mary Carew

The maid who becomes Margaret’s friend and caretaker. Mary represents that part of Newfoundland which Margaret loves.

### 3. Girl

A ghostly figure who is visible only to Margaret in the later stages of her life. She is in the bloom of young womanhood and represents the heroines of Margaret’s novels, such as Isabel, Mary Immaculate and Megeila.

### 4. Tryphena Duley

Margaret’s overbearing and snobbish mother, who also at times represents the fictional mothers of Margaret’s novels, such as Mrs. Emily Pyke and Mrs. Keilly.

### 5. Other Characters

The play’s other characters include both people from Margaret’s real life, such as her gentle, tragic brother Nelson, an alcoholic in the last stages of tuberculosis, and the fictional characters that haunt her, especially the Man who represents the love interest of the Girl in Margaret’s novels.

## THE PLAYWRIGHT

Berni Stapleton is a Newfoundland- Labrador writer and performer of unique distinction. She is the 2018 winner of the Arts and Letters award for best dramatic script. She is a recent winner of The Rhonda Payne award from Arts NL. She is a past recipient of the WANL award for best work in non-fiction for her contribution to the book *They Let Down Baskets*. Her short stories and essays have appeared in Riddle Fence and The Newfoundland Quarterly. Berni was the Artistic Director of the Grand Bank Regional Theatre Festival for 11 years.

She has been a playwright-in- residence with the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Playwrights' Workshop Montreal, Alberta Theatre Projects, CanStage, PARC, and other national companies. Her plays are regularly produced across the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Brazil Square, her homage to the iconic boarding house district of St. John's, has been produced across the island. *The Haunting of Margaret Duley* is her tribute to the woman some consider to be the Harper Lee of Newfoundland.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Persistence Theatre production of this play in September 2019 will be the world premiere of this play. This production has been developed to commemorate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Margaret Duley's birth.

## HISTORY

The play is set against the background of some key events that impacted Duley's life, some of which occurred before the time period of the play but which influenced her strongly. It may be helpful for students to have some knowledge of these events:

- **First World War, 1914-1918:** Duley had to move home to Newfoundland from England, where she was studying elocution, and drama, because of the outbreak of the war. One of her brothers was killed and another injured the war. In *The Haunting of Margaret Duley*, her brother Nelson, whose health did not permit him to enlist in the First World War, is troubled by the memory of "white feathers" – a mocking symbol of cowardice sometimes given to young men during the First World War who did not join the armed forces. At home during the war, Margaret was active in the Women's Patriotic Association, which helped to recruit and raise money for Newfoundland's war effort. She collaborated with her mother, Tryphena Duley, on a story called "A Pair of Grey Socks," a sentimental piece of writing which celebrated Newfoundland women's contribution to the war effort through knitting socks. Tryphena wrote the prose, while Margaret wrote the poetry that accompanied the piece.
- **Women's suffrage, 1925:** Newfoundland was the last country in the British Empire to give women the right to vote. Margaret Duley was active in the Ladies' Reading Room,

an organization formed in St. John's to give women the opportunity to discuss and speak on current events, since they were barred from the all-male debating and speaking clubs of the day. She also joined the Women's Franchise League, which pushed for Newfoundland women to receive the right to vote.

- **Second World War, 1939-1945:** Margaret Duley lived in Newfoundland during the Second World War, and three of her four novels were published during the war years. The outbreak of this war, and the tension between Newfoundlanders and the British Empire for which they fought and died, provides the setting for the opening scenes of *The Haunting of Margaret Duley*. During the war, Duley again volunteered with the Women's Patriotic Association as well as with the Saint John Ambulance. She volunteered at the Caribou Hut, a hostel which fed, housed and entertained more than 16,000 soldiers of the many soldiers stationed in St. John's during the war. These experiences formed the basis for Duley's last book, her only major work of nonfiction, *The Caribou Hut* (1949).
- **Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, 1953:** Elizabeth II was crowned queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth on June 2, 1953, after the death of her father, King George VI. Margaret Duley, who had done a number of radio broadcasts for CJON in St. John's, was sent to England to broadcast four stories on the Coronation.

## LITERATURE

- *Cold Pastoral* is the best-known and most highly acclaimed of Duley's four novels. It was re-released in a new edition in 2014 by Breakwater Books.
- Duley's other four books – *The Eyes of the Gull*, *Highway to Valour*, *Novelty on Earth*, and the nonfiction *The Caribou Hut* have not been reprinted in recent years and may be more difficult to find, but are all available through the public and university libraries.
- Duley's short story "Mother Boggan," which took a more critical view of the First World War than did the writing of most of her contemporaries, is reprinted in the 1996 collection *Tempered Days: A Century of Newfoundland Short Fiction* (again, readily available in libraries).

## Curriculum Connections & Suggested Learning Strategies

Live theatre is a valuable support to overall teaching and assessment strategies and helps teachers:

- Create a **dynamic and motivational experience** by taking students out of the classroom and into the community
- Respond to student differences by offering a **live, visual-based learned opportunity**
- Provide an **enrichment opportunity** for students to experience the power of storytelling beyond the page

This production of Berni Stapleton's *The Haunting of Margaret Duley* supports the following **Essential Graduation Learnings for Newfoundland and Labrador**:

Aesthetic Expression	Communication	Citizenship
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Teachers of the following subject areas will be able to make direct curriculum connections to this production:

1. English Language Arts 1201/02, 2201/02, 3201/02
2. Writing 2203
3. Drama 2206
4. Theatre Arts 3220
5. NL Studies 2205

**Note:** *The script of the show, as written by playwright Bernie Stapleton, can be provided upon request to classes attending the performance.*

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

*The Haunting of Margaret Duley* supports two main **General Curriculum Outcomes** for English Language Arts across all high school grade levels:

**GCO 1** - Speaking and Listening: Students will be expected to speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.

**GCO 4** – Reading and Viewing: Students will be expected to select, read, and view with understanding a range of literature, information, media, and visual texts.

For English 1201, the show also addresses the following themes:

- Relationships
- Conflict
- Perspectives

For English 2201 / 2202 / 3201 / 3202, the show also addresses the following themes:

- Relationships
- Power of Art
- Identity
- Strength and Struggle
- Loss and Endings

### **SUGGESTED TEACHING STRATEGIES**

#### **BEFORE seeing the play**

- Discuss:
  - Have you heard of Margaret Duley before?
  - What Newfoundland writers, if any, do you know of?
  - Why do you think it was important that she was the first Newfoundland novelist?

#### **AFTER seeing the play**

- Discuss:
  - What were some of the challenges Margaret Duley faced?
  - How did you feel about her as she was portrayed in the play?
  - The play is called *The Haunting of Margaret Duley*. Why do you think the playwright chose this title? What was Duley “haunted” by?

### **SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

- Write a review of the performance, focusing on both strengths and weaknesses.
- Read an excerpt from one of Margaret Duley’s novels. In a journal entry, analyze how the piece you read connects to themes explored in the play. Do you see the figures of

Girl and Man portrayed in the piece you read?

## **WRITING 2203**

*The Haunting of Margaret Duley* addresses all three **General Curriculum Outcomes** for Writing 2203:

**GCO 1** - Students will be expected to create, both independently and collaboratively, a variety of texts to communicate ideas effectively, clearly, and precisely, for a variety of audiences and purposes.

**GCO 2** - Students will use inquiry to integrate information, using a variety of strategies, resources, and technologies, to create texts.

**GCO 3** - Students will be expected to create a variety of media texts.

## **SUGGESTED TEACHING STRATEGIES**

### **BEFORE seeing the play**

- Discuss:
  - Have you heard of Margaret Duley before?
  - What Newfoundland writers, if any, do you know of?
  - Why do you think it was important that she was the first Newfoundland novelist?

### **AFTER seeing the play**

- Discuss:
  - What struggles did Margaret Duley face as a Newfoundland writer?
  - Why do you think her novels weren't as popular here in Newfoundland as in other places?
  - What did you think of the idea of having her book characters come back to "haunt" her at the end of her life? How might an author be haunted by her own characters?

## **SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

- Write a critical review of the play, focusing on strengths and weaknesses

## **DRAMA 2206**

*The Haunting of Margaret Duley* addresses three **General Curriculum Outcomes** for Drama:



GCO 5 - Students will be expected to examine, in local and global contexts, contributions to the arts by individuals and cultural groups.

- SCO 16.0: Use drama to examine events and issues
- SCO 17.0: Interpret dramatic works from a range of cultures and perspectives
- SCO 18.0: Demonstrate appropriate theatre etiquette

GCO 6: Students will be expected to analyze the relationship between artistic intent and the expressive work.

- SCO 21.0: Analyze different artistic intents in a variety of dramatic works

GCO 7: Students will be expected to use critical thinking to reflect on and respond to their own and others' expressive works.

- SCO 23.0: Respond critically to their own and others' works

### **SUGGESTED TEACHING STRATEGIES**

#### **BEFORE seeing the play**

- Discuss:
  - Berni Stapleton and her contribution to the arts community
  - Margaret Duley and her works of literature. How did her work impact society?
- Discuss proper theatre etiquette with students

#### **AFTER seeing the play**

- Discuss- What were our thoughts on the experience? Is it what we expected?
  - Use a talking circle
- Discuss formatting of a theatrical review

### **SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

- Write a self and group reflection on behaviour at the performance. Did everyone follow theatre etiquette?
- Write a theatrical review of the performance.

## THEATRE ARTS 3220

*The Haunting of Margaret Duley* addresses four **General Curriculum Outcomes** for Theatre Arts:

GCO 3 - Demonstrate critical awareness of and the value for the role of the arts in creating and reflecting culture.

- SCO 3.2: Demonstrate critical awareness of the role of theatre in creating and reflecting culture both locally and globally.
- SCO 3.3: Examine and understand how significant theatrical works have been created and endure.
- SCO 3.4: Demonstrate an understanding of the power of theatre to shape, express, and communicate ideas and feelings throughout history.

GCO 4 - Examine the contributions of individuals and cultural groups to the arts in local and global contexts.

- SCO 4.1: Support and advocate local theatre.
- SCO 4.2: Recognize the contributions of local theatre artists to their communities.
- SCO 4.6: Evaluate and synthesize how the cultural, historical and political information had an effect on individual artistic choices.
- SCO 4.7: Demonstrate an understanding of the cultural impact of theatre on society.

GCO 5 - Analyze the relationship between artistic intent and the expressive work.

- SCO 5.1: Reflect on ways in which theatre expresses the history and the cultural diversity of local, national, and international communities.
- SCO 5.2: Demonstrate an understanding of the role of theatre as an historical record of human experience.
- SCO 5.4: Produce a style specific piece relevant to the historical roots of theatre.
- SCO 5.5: Respond to a variety of theatrical styles and traditions.
- SCO 5.7: Critique the work of significant playwrights from a variety of styles and periods
- SCO 5.8: Explore the role stagecraft plays in realizing the artistic direction of a production
- SCO 5.9: Recognize the subjectivity of artistic interpretation

GCO 6 - Apply critical thinking and problem-solving strategies to reflect on and respond to their own and others' expressive work.

- SCO 6.1: Analyze theatrical performances and conventions with critical awareness.
  - 6.1.1 Critique presentations of theatrical works, using appropriate terminology.
  - 6.1.2 Critique the use of technical elements in theatrical productions.

- SCO 6.2: Examine actors' interpretations in various roles in live theatrical productions.

## **SUGGESTED TEACHING STRATEGIES**

### **BEFORE seeing the play**

- Discuss:
  - Berni Stapleton and her contribution to the arts community
  - Margaret Duley and her works of literature. How did her work impact society?
- Conduct a table read of *The Haunting of Margaret Duley*
  - Discuss and analyze the playwright's interpretation of Duley's story.
  - Divide students into groups to create a lighting, sound, set and wardrobe design for the production.

### **AFTER seeing the play**

- Discuss- What were our thoughts on the experience? Is it what we expected?
  - Use a talking circle
- Discuss formatting of a critique

## **SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

- Write a self/ group reflection on the performance. Compare and contrast the table read designs and the actual performance design.
- Write a theatre critique

## **NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR STUDIES 2205**

*The Haunting of Margaret Duley* addresses the following curriculum outcomes for NL Studies 2205:

SCO 1.0 The student will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of how the arts may be used to express ideas related to culture, heritage and identity.

SCO 2.0 The student will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of economic, political and social issues related to Newfoundland and Labrador, both past and present.

### **SUGGESTED TEACHING STRATEGIES**

#### **BEFORE seeing the play**

- Discuss
  - How do Newfoundland writers express ideas related to culture, heritage and identity?
  - Why is it important for writers to write about the culture of their particular region?
- Discuss
  - Have you heard of Margaret Duley before?
  - What Newfoundland and Labrador writers, if any, are you familiar with?
- Discuss
  - How was women's participation in our public life different 100 – 125 years ago, from what it is today?
  - How did these changes in women's roles come about?

#### **AFTER seeing the play**

- Discuss
  - How did Margaret Duley's writing reflect Newfoundland culture?
  - How did Margaret Duley, as she is portrayed in this play, feel about Newfoundland and its culture?
  - What does the play suggest about the role of women at that time? How is it different now?

### **SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

- Learn more about Margaret Duley's life and her works. Present your research in the form of a poster, PowerPoint, Prezi, or other format that combines text and visuals.