

I AM MARGUERITE

by

Shirley Barrie

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## CHARACTERS

Marguerite de Roberval, a young woman on the brink of madness

Eugène, her lover

Damienne, her nurse

The Queen of Navarre, her mentor

Jean François, Sieur de Roberval, her older brother

## SETTING

1544

A rocky clearing on the isolated, uninhabited Isle of Demons in the Strait of Belle Isle. There is the entrance to a rough hut or cave shelter. A battered trunk. A pile of stones. A fire pit.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

This is a play for a soloist and a quartet of voices. Playing with the rhythms and interchange of the voices is fine. Finding the different shades of meaning or intonation in the same word or phrase is key. In joint dialogue, the dominant voice is in bold. The action continually shifts from Marguerite's harsh reality on the island, to visitations by tormenting phantoms, to her memories of how she got to this isolated place. Characters can magically appear and disappear, or can remain on stage after their first appearance - becoming part of the surroundings when not in the forefront of Marguerite's disordered mind.

## SYNOPSIS

I am Marguerite is inspired by the true story of Marguerite de Roberval, who, in 1542, contrived to accompany her brother who was leading a great expedition with Jacques Cartier to establish the first French colony in the New World. Onboard ship de Roberval discovered that she'd fallen in love with an unsuitable minor nobleman, and so he abandoned her, along with her lover and nurse, on an uninhabited island in the Strait of Belle Isle for daring to choose love over duty.

The play takes place over two years later. Marguerite, now totally alone and near mad, sees a ship promising rescue. But can she return to the rarified society that's abandoned and betrayed her? Beset by phantoms of her life on the island and at the court of the Queen of Navarre she struggles to decide whether to go.

The play was first produced at the Alumnae Theatre, 70 Berkeley St., Toronto  
April 10 - 25, 2015 [www.alumnaetheatre.com](http://www.alumnaetheatre.com)

Marguerite de Roberval	Daniela Pagliarello
Eugène	Christopher Oszwald
Damienne	Heli Kivilaht
The Queen of Navarre	Sara Price
Jean François Sieur de Roberval	Chirs Coculuzzi
Director	Molly Thom
Assistant Director	Meg Moran
Producer	Ramona Baillie
Production Associate	Dale Stewart
Set Design	Marysia Bucholc
Set Assistant	Fotini Paraschos
Costume Design	Peter DeFreitas & Toni Hanson
Wardrobe	Bec Brownstone
Lighting Design	Wesley McKenzie
Sound Design	Angus Barlow
Composer	James Langevin-Frieson
Choreographer	Ayesha Mansur
Fight Director	Naomi Priddle Hunter
Rehearsal Stage Manager	Margot Devlin
Production Stage Manager	Kelsey Rutledge
ASM	Kimberly de Jong
Sound Operator	Gabrielle D'Angelo
Head Carpenter	Dave Casey
Set Build	Su Martin
Set Painter	Mark Cope
Props Master	Razie Brownstone
Auditions Host/Catering	Donna Langevin
Director of Marketing	Chloe Whitehorn
Audience Development	Carina Cojeen

The sound of wind, waves, birds, wild eerie music - a place devoid of humanity.

And yet -

There's a cackle of laughter, almost inhuman. It gets louder and closer. Marguerite, ragged, disheveled and barefoot, staggers on carrying a fish.

MARGUERITE

You kept me in that stream, my friend  
Until I couldn't feel my feet  
Until they were....  
They were...

(Struggles for the word. It won't come. She  
tries to rub life back into a foot)

Cold  
So cold

She grabs a holey sock from behind a rock. Pulls it on.  
Adds a battered shoe. Starts on the other foot.

MARGUERITE

So long you kept me  
I thought I would faint from the hunger  
But I. I. I -

She acts it out

MARGUERITE

Crept near you  
Speared you

(She cackles)

And now I'm going to eat you.

She grabs the fish, and using one of the rocks as a table,  
slits it open with her knife, spilling the guts. She wipes  
her knife on her skirt before putting it back in her pocket.

Cook you and --

She stabs the fish with a stick and holds it out over the fire.

MARGUERITE

Eat---  
Heat you  
And eat---

(She notices her feet)

Feeet!!!

(She wiggles her toes)

Eat  
Heat  
Feet

She cackles uproariously at the rhymes but stops suddenly when she sees that the fire's gone out.

MARGUERITE

Holy Mother of -

She drops the stick and begins to fan the fire with her skirt. She kneels down to blow on the embers. Nothing.

MARGUERITE

No. No!

She finds a branch, begins to shave off tiny pieces with a knife from her pocket. She clutches her stomach. Looks over at the fish, lunges at it, slices off a piece and puts it in her mouth. Chews.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS (O.S.)

(with disdain)

Look at her

DAMIENNE (O.S.)

(with pity)

Look at her

EUGENE (O.S.)

(with sorrow)

Look at yourself, Marguerite.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS (O.S.)

Look at her

DAMIENNE (O.S.)

Look at her

EUGENE (O.S.)

Look at her

Jean-François appears before her.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

Look at her

Like a demented savage

Marguerite tries to ignore her demon. Perhaps she whirls away from one only to be confronted by another.

DAMIENNE

You know how to make a fire, my girl

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

(from another position)

Demented savage

EUGENE

Look at yourself, Marguerite

Covered in gore

MARGUERITE

Don't think, don't think, don't think...

Eat!

She cuts off another piece of fish and eats it.

JEAN-FRANCOIS

Little more than a  
Beast

EUGENE

Covered in  
Gore

Don't think  
Don't

MARGUERITE

Covered in--

EUGENE

JEAN-FRANCOIS  
A beast

DAMIENNE  
**Build up the fire**

Don't, don't  
Think

MARGUERITE

Fish will give you milk

DAMIENNE

Don't remember

MARGUERITE

The Queen of Navarre appears, gently regal.

The mind, my dear  
Is a gift from God

NAVARRE

Little more than a

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

JEAN-FRANCOIS  
Demented

EUGENE  
Gore

Damienne shakes a rough rattle made from a gourd and a stick. Marguerite becomes fixated on the rattle, moving towards it.

JEAN-FRANCOIS  
Beast  
A savage  
Demented

EUGENE  
---Gore  
---Gore  
---Covered in

Your punishment, Marguerite

JEAN-FRANÇOIS



Damienne disappears. Marguerite tries to shut out the voices.

MARGUERITE

No!

MARGUERITE

Don't, don't, don't

EUGENE

If this is all there is...

MARGUERITE

Think

NAVARRE

A gift from God

MARGUERITE

Don't remember

JEAN-FRANCOIS

Your punishment

EUGENE

If this is all there is...

JEAN-FRANCOIS

Punishment

The distant cry of a wolf cuts off the voices. Marguerite starts. Looks around.

MARGUERITE

If this is all ...

Another wolf cry.

MARGUERITE

I know what comes next  
The leaves fall off the trees  
Snow...  
Cold  
Biting  
Bitter cold  
I can't ---(endure another)

Damienne is back

DAMIENNE

You have responsibilities

JEAN-FRANCOIS

You never had any discipline. None.

MARGUERITE

Memories

EUGENE

Unbearable cold



NAVARRE

Consider the consequences

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

(snorts)

She has never done that, my Queen

The wolf howls again. Joined by another.

MARGUERITE

You're right  
No knife

She puts the knife in her pocket. Navarre sighs with relief.

MARGUERITE

I'll throw myself into the sea before I give you fiends the satisfaction of picking my bones -  
-

NAVARRE

Blessed Virgin

MARGUERITE

I'll walk into the sea

JEAN-FRANCOIS

You see  
She adds sacrilege to her sins

NAVARRE

Hear us now  
In our hour of need

MARGUERITE

**The cold, dark sea**

EUGENE

Blessed darkness

MARGUERITE

**I won't let you  
Pick my bones**

DAMIENNE

You have responsibilities

MARGUERITE

**Pick my bones in the cold, white snow**

NAVARRE

Don't damn yourself, Marguerite

The wolves join the voices. All voices marked (a)'s speak together, all (b)'s, etc.

---

MARGUERITE  
 (trying to rise over the voices)  
 (a) **I'll walk into the sea**

NAVARRE  
 (a) Pray to God

DAMIENNE  
 (a) Cook the fish

EUGENE  
 (a) Blessed darkness

---

MARGUERITE  
 (b) The sea

JEAN-FRANCOIS  
 (b) Certain damnation

DAMIENNE  
 (b) You are strong

---

MARGUERITE  
 (c) **And find silence**

NAVARRE/JEAN-FRANCOIS  
 (c) Damnation

DAMIENNE  
 (c) Too strong to....

EUGENE  
 (c) Darkness

---

Silence! MARGUERITE

The voices cut out

Blessed silence MARGUERITE  
 Peace and silence

The sea! (beat)

She runs toward the edge of the playing area. Musical ship motif or sound. She sees the ship. She stops. Gasps.

Is it...? MARGUERITE  
 Do I see...?

The other voices join in. Some supportive, excited, reassuring. Jean-François is scoffing.

VOICES/MARGUERITE

A ship!

MARGUERITE

Rescue  
Is it possible?

NAVARRE/DAMIENNE

Rescue

Navarre, Damienne and Jean-François fade away.

MARGUERITE

No. No! You see things, Marguerite. You know you do

(She looks again)

It's dropping the sail  
A ship!  
You said, Eugène  
Over and over, you said, you said...

EUGENE/MARGUERITE.

We'll keep a signal fire

MARGUERITE

You said

EUGENE/MARGUERITE

A signal fire

MARGUERITE

You said

She tries desperately to make shavings with her knife.

MARGUERITE

You said--

Eugène comes close to her. Comforting. Sensual. She relaxes into him.

EUGENE

They'll come for us, Marguerite  
 At the end of the summer  
 While the leaves are still on the trees  
 And the sun kisses the rocks  
 Like my lips kiss yours

(She reaches her lips up to be kissed but he  
 continues)

With a ship full of gold, Marguerite  
 Your brother will come  
 While the leaves are still on the trees  
 We'll leave this lonely island  
 And sail...

EUGENE/MARGUERITE

To France!!!!

EUGENE

We'll move  
 From court to court, Marguerite

MARGUERITE

And you'll sing

EUGENE

(looks around, faltering)

But the trees are bare of their leaves

MARGUERITE

(encouraging)

You'll sing  
 Of the sun kissing the rocks  
 Like your lips kiss mine

(She closes her eyes expectantly. But he  
 disappears)

Like your lips kiss mine

(She whips around, looking for him)

Kiss mine. Kiss mine, Eugène. Kiss...  
 No!!

She runs to the trunk, flips it open and takes out a battered lute.

MARGUERITE

I saved your lute  
 So you can sing  
 I saved your lute  
 And you abandoned me  
 Abandoned me  
 No kisses  
 Abandoned me  
 No songs  
 Abandoned me  
 No rescue. No ship. No rescue  
 Nowhere for me to go

She sees the fish, abandoned in the dirt. Leaving the lute, she lunges at it.

She brushes off dirt. Goes for her knife. She's wolfing down a piece of fish when Navarre enters.

NAVARRE

I taught you better than this, Marguerite!  
 The mind, my dear, the mind  
 Is a gift from God  
 A precious gift

She moves as if to take the fish and the knife from Marguerite but can't quite bring herself to touch it.

NAVARRE

And it is our obligation

It is our responsibility

To use it

Look

She points to the ship offshore. Marguerite looks, shakes her head.

MARGUERITE

It's a - it's a mirage  
You taught me that word

NAVARRE

(smiles)

I did  
But this is no illusion  
Now make yourself presentable, my dear

(Marguerite looks at her in confusion)

You must - clean yourself  
And dress for rescue

MARGUERITE

Rescue?

NAVARRE

Rescue

MARGUERITE/NAVARRE

Rescue!!

MARGUERITE

Noooo

NAVARRE

Rescue

MARGUERITE

No rescue

NAVARRE

Rescue

MARGUERITE

My Queen is not here  
The Queen of Navarre can't be in this place

NAVARRE

Enough of this foolishness, Marguerite  
Look  
There's a ship



DAMIENNE/EUGENE (O.S.)

A ship  
A ship

MARGUERITE

No

NAVARRE

(gesturing)

A ship

Marguerite looks.

MARGUERITE

It *is* a -  
Dropping its anchor

(tries to yell, but her voice breaks)

Here!

She tries frantically to build up the signal fire. Leaves it.  
Cups her hands and calls.

MARGUERITE

Here!

NAVARRE

Louder

MARGUERITE

(To Navarre)

It *is* a ship!

(She waves her arms and calls)

Here!!!

Damienne – get the baby ready. They’ve come for us!!

Marguerite goes to get the lute.

MARGUERITE

I’m packing your lute, Eugène!  
Hurry

She puts the lute in the trunk. Navarre looks with worry at the small fire, then at the boat.

NAVARRE

Marguerite  
Call again

MARGUERITE

He(re)-- -  
It flies the flag of France!

She stumbles back in horror.

NAVARRE

In this case, the rules of propriety don't apply  
You must call louder

MARGUERITE

My brother's ship flies that flag  
Jean-François' ship ...  
No fire

Jean-François appears.

MARGUERITE/JEAN-FRANÇOIS

No fire!  
No fire

She kicks aside the signal fire.

NAVARRE

Marguerite!

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

Well done, Marguerite

Navarre fades away.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

Well done  
You've come to your senses  
And seen the folly of a signal  
You've come to your senses  
And know that rescue is not for you

You...  
 MARGUERITE  
 Not for you  
 JEAN-FRANÇOIS  
 You...  
 MARGUERITE  
 Not for such as you---  
 JEAN-FRANÇOIS  
 Abandoned me!  
 MARGUERITE  
 Please  
 JEAN-FRANÇOIS  
 You abandoned me  
 In this place of emptiness  
 And death  
 MARGUERITE  
 Don't waste my time---  
 JEAN-FRANÇOIS  
 MARGUERITE  
 (she looks around her)  
 Everywhere death  
 JEAN-FRANÇOIS  
 With your girlish complaints  
 MARGUERITE  
 You abandoned me!  
 JEAN-FRANÇOIS  
 I'm on a quest, Marguerite  
 Commissioned  
 To found a colony for France  
 In the great New World of the West  
 MARGUERITE  
 (laughs and gives an exaggerated curtsy)  
 The King of Canada!

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

Don't mock!  
The New World is the source  
Of untold gold and unlimited wealth  
And I will claim it for my King

For my King, for my country

For my family

MARGUERITE

*I* am your family  
And you aban---

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

*You* abandoned us!  
Put self above family  
Passion above family  
Always, always, wanting

MARGUERITE

Wanting

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

Something more than what was due

MARGUERITE

(with longing)

Wanting

JEAN-FRANCOIS

(with disgust)

Wanting

MARGUERITE

Wanting to dance

Court music. Marguerite dances, without knowing how.

MARGUERITE

Dance.

Damienne enters with a brush or comb, and pulls her down.

DAMIENNE

(tuts)

Goodness me  
Look at this hair

Marguerite brushes off her hand. Jumps up.

MARGUERITE

I want to dance

DAMIENNE

Not looking like that you won't

She begins to work at the tangles.

MARGUERITE

Ouch!

DAMIENNE

(To Jean-François)

Where did you leave her for all these years  
That she comes back looking like ---

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

It's a place of God  
A holy place  
Where I had - hope  
She might be content

MARGUERITE

(with distaste)

A convent

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

But the nuns tell me

She has no vocation

DAMIENNE

I could have told you that when she was five

Jean-François glares at her.

DAMIENNE

Sorry, Sir  
I 'm just glad to have her back

(she cups Marguerite's face)

To see the babe I dandled on my knee  
To gaze again upon the child I raised

(goes back to brushing the hair)

To brush again...

MARGUERITE

Ouch!!

DAMIENNE

If you want to dance your hair needs to be neat

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

Enough talk of dancing

The music cuts out.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

If you can behave yourself  
Marguerite  
You will live here

Marguerite looks around in amazement

MARGUERITE

Here?  
It's like a palace  
Is it the King's?

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

It's the court of his sister  
My dear friend  
The Queen of Navarre

MARGUERITE

Navarre!?

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

I suppose they saw no need  
For contemporary politics  
Or geography  
In the convent  
Navarre is---

MARGUERITE

(disappointed)

She writes all those moral tales

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

I'm impressed

MARGUERITE

It was one of the few books the nuns let us read.

(Marguerite pouts)

They said she was perfect!!

Navarre enters. Damienne is the only one who sees her,  
tries to find a way to interrupt.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

You'd do well to emulate her  
To imitate her  
To be like her

MARGUERITE

But she's old...

Damienne curtseys to the Queen, hoping to get the  
attention of the others.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

I could send you home to Périgord

MARGUERITE/NAVARRÉ

Périgord!

Marguerite looks in confusion at the elegant Queen. Jean-  
François bows low. Indicates that Marguerite should  
follow.

NAVARRE

Périgord is a fine country estate, my friend  
And a most fortunate dowry  
But it's no place for a girl like this  
To find an appropriate mate

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

Your Majesty

MARGUERITE

Majesty? You're...?

NAVARRE

The Queen of Navarre  
That old woman...

MARGUERITE

Oh dear. I ---

JEAN-FRANÇOIS

I apologize for my sister, Majesty. She---

Navarre indicates that he's said enough. She circles  
Marguerite who struggles to retain her composure.

NAVARRE

I'll take this raw girl, Jean-François  
I'll take this girl and educate her

MARGUERITE

But ---

Jean-François clears his throat with disapproval. Navarre  
however, indicates that he should leave her be.

NAVARRE

(to Marguerite)

But?

MARGUERITE

Begging your pardon  
Majesty?  
But I've finished my education



NAVARRE

(laughs)

So now you think you can come to the court  
And dance and gossip  
Or gossip and dance  
Your life away?

MARGUERITE

The nuns said that I knew too much

NAVARRE

Nuns are holy women  
But not always advocates of learning  
The mind, my dear, the mind  
Is a gift from God  
A precious gift  
And it's our obligation  
It is our responsibility  
To use it

She sees Marguerite's sorry face and laughs, turns to Jean-François

NAVARRE

I'll take this girl

(Back to Marguerite)

And our first visit, my dear, will be - to my dressmaker

(Marguerite breaks into a smile)

It's possible to be modest and still be fashionable

Marguerite laughs and twirls around. Court music. Jean-François and Damienne exit.