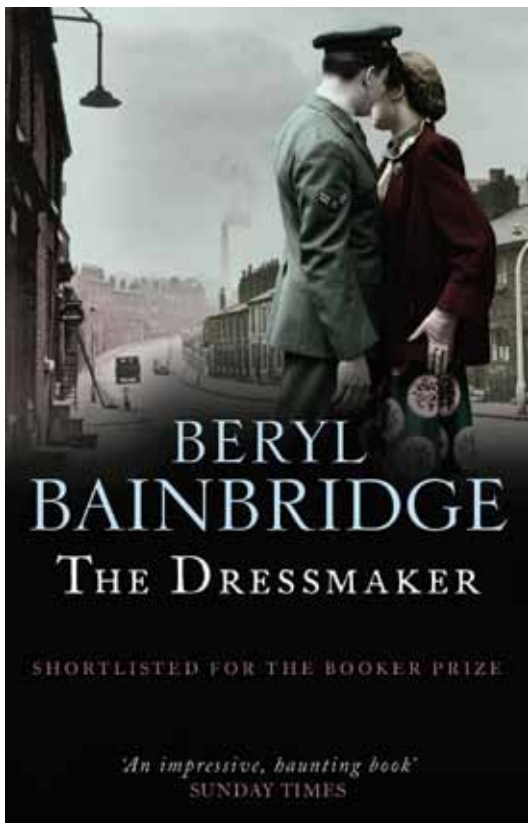




## Reader's Guide



# The Dressmaker Beryl Bainbridge

Abacus  
Price £8.99

[www.themanbookerprize.com](http://www.themanbookerprize.com)

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## **The Dressmaker**

If Liverpool in 1944 was grim for Rita and her aunts Nellie and Margo, Rita knew that life in America was gay and rich – she'd seen it in the movies. So when a GI came to call, she was sure that love and escape would follow. But Nellie knew different – the boy would have to go.

## **Discussion points**

*The Dressmaker* begins: “Afterwards she went through into the little front room, the tape measure still dangling about her neck, and allowed herself a glass of port.” Afterwards, after what? What devices does Beryl Bainbridge use to make the reader think that something bad has happened?

To what extent do you agree with Mavis Cheek’s review in *The Guardian* “It is so refreshing to read prose that assumes its readers are as intelligent as its writer”?

*The Dressmaker* is considered to be a prime example of Beryl Bainbridge’s minimalist writing style. How does this style affect the pace of the narrative and the depiction of the characters?

How do you think that the deprivation and destitution caused by World War II affects the characters and their actions in *The Dressmaker*?

In what ways do you see that there is a ‘clash of values’ between Nellie and Margo in the way that they raise Rita?

## **Background information**

Link to the Man Booker Prize website  
<http://themanbookerprize.com>

Link to the publisher’s website  
<http://www.littlebrown.co.uk>

Mavis Cheek’s *Guardian* review  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/apr/26/fiction.berylbainbridge>

The novel was adapted for film in 1988 starring Jane Horrocks as Rita, Billie Whitelaw as Marge and Joan Plowright as Nellie. The screenwriter was John McGrath and Billie Whitelaw won the 1988 *Evening Standard* British Film Award for best actress for her role.