

CHAPTER FOUR
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Beryl Bainbridge's literary career is distinctly divided into two parts as the earlier writings dealing with her own life stories and her Liverpoolian upbringing, and the latter dealing with the history of Great Britain. Most of her earlier novels tend to be autobiographical. Bainbridge has tried to focus on the problems faced by the lower-middle-class and middle-class people in the British society.

Bainbridge's novel A Quiet Life is an autobiographical novel. She has brought together the themes of exploitation, love, romanticism, escapism and alienation in the novel, A Quiet Life. The novel deals with the loss of faith in human relations after the Second World War. The novel is a real social document where the characters have their own philosophy of life and they have their own methods of escaping from the sordid realities of life. Most of the characters tend to be romantic. The novel brings forth the story of a family towards the end of the Second World War. The four members in the family: Joe, Connie, Alan and Madge are having their monotonous existences.

The story told in the novel A Quiet Life resembles the real life incidents in the life of the author. Beryl Bainbridge's father was a businessman and he eventually had gone bankrupt because of his illegal practices. As a result he failed to maintain healthy relations with his

wife. In the novel, the character of Joe resembles the own father of Bainbridge. Beryl's father had the habit of listening to radio and reading Swift's poetry. Beryl's father was an inactive man. He never cared for his family members. The same kind of nature is found in the father in the novel. The character of father in the novel shares the qualities of author's own father. Beryl's own mother was a woman with high expectations. She was a class-conscious woman. She didn't like her husband after his bankruptcy. She had married Beryl's father because of his wealth. As her husband went bankrupt, she lost faith in him and always neglected him. In the novel the same thing happens. Connie never cares her husband, Joe. She tries to escape from him and spends her nights in the deserted railway station. She reads novels alone at the railway station to remove her idleness. Out of her idleness she develops her attachment towards the artificial things. She spends much of her time in decorating the rooms and readjusting the items in the house every now and then. Her world is isolated from others and she does not allow others to be a part of her imaginative world.

Madge, the daughter, is a school-going girl. She is just 15-years-old. Her character represents the real life incidents happened in the life of Bainbridge. Bainbridge had fallen in love with a German soldier at the age of 14. To escape the quarrelsome atmosphere in the family Beryl Bainbridge, in her childhood, wandered along the beach. During the strolls along the beach she had fallen in love at an immature age. The novel brings forth the most autobiographical characters of Beryl

Bainbridge in the name of Madge. The character of Madge is Beryl herself.

The very title of the novel A Quiet Life is ironic. There is nothing in the novel which can be called as quiet. Bainbridge has used the element of black humour in the novel. Alan, the only sensible character in the novel, tries every possible effort to save his family from collapse, but he gets nothing in the end. His struggle to save his sister, his mother and his father from being unrealistic goes in vain in the end. He tries to fetch his family members to the root level realities of life, but he fails in all his motives.

Another important aspect of the novel is the relationship between the two important characters, Alan and Madge. The novel opens in Lyceum Café as Alan waits for his sister Madge. He has brought his mother's engagement ring with him to give it to Madge. However, Madge denies keeping the ring with her. Both talk about their childhood, especially the death of their father. As they enter into the flashback of the events from their own childhood, the relationship is revealed. Alan is well aware of his responsibilities towards his sister, Madge. He tries to make her cautious about the immoral activity she continues with the German Prisoner-of-War. He keeps a watch on her. He tries to stop her from meeting the German soldier. However, Madge's behaviour is totally arrogant. She doesn't care for Alan's love towards her. Thus, the novel brings forth the strained brother-sister relationship.

The Second World War and its effects on the British society are observed by Bainbridge successfully. The social mores in a lower-middle-class family are skillfully and realistically presented by intermingling the incidents from her own life by Beryl Bainbridge.

The novel Winter Garden is a comic masterpiece by Beryl Bainbridge. The novel is tale of deception and misdirection from the very beginning till the last sentence. Douglas Ashburner, the protagonist of the novel becomes the victim of deception in the hands of various other characters in the novel. The novel begins with Douglas Ashburner leaving his house at Beaufort Street. He is a member of the group of artists from England, visiting the Soviet Artists' Union. Actually, he is making a trip to Russia to enjoy the company of his mistress Nina. In the very beginning of the novel he deceives his wife and pretends that he is going on fishing holidays to Scotland. He takes the help of the fishing rod to deceive his wife.

The novel brings into action escapism, romanticism and alienation. Most of the time in the novel Douglas Ashburner tries to stay away from the flow of action. He forgets the primary purpose of

his visit to the Soviet Artists' Union. He is found lost in the thoughts of his mistress Nina. His behaviour with all other characters in the novel serves these themes. His sudden explosion in the opera hall and his eventual fight with the two Russians on finding Nina sitting between them is a very good example of his psychological depression.

Comparatively speaking, both the novels A Quiet Life and Winter Garden share a lot in common. The novel A Quiet Life is purely autobiographical in nature. In A Quiet Life Bainbridge has brought down her own life. On the other hand the novel Winter Garden is an outcome of her trip to Russia in 1978-79. The novel deals with her experiences in Russia. The characters of A Quiet Life: Joe, Connie and Madge try to escape and live in their own imaginary and romantic world. In Winter Garden the central character Douglas Ashburner tries to escape from the reality and prefers to live in his romantic world. The love theme and the extra-marital relations are common in both the novels. However, the plot of A Quiet Life is serious and deals with the death of Alan's father Joe whereas the plot of Winter Garden is light, less serious and comic in nature.

Bainbridge has used the element of black humour in both the novels. The character in A Quiet Life: Joe expresses his anger on the objects in the house. He is unable to keep control over the family. There are certain incidents in the novel where he gets into sudden fury. The breakings of the 'Grandfather Clock', the burning of 'Grandfather Chair' and the cutting of 'Sycamore Tree', all these incidents contribute to the purpose. The central character of the novel Winter Garden, Douglas Ashburner, resembles the character of Joe, in A Quiet Life. He does not behave normally. At the surface level he seems quite normal, but from within he is morally and psychologically depressed. His tendency of escaping reveals the collapse of his personality.

Symbolism is yet another important narrative technique used by Bainbridge. Both the novels have symbols. In A Quiet Life there are three important symbols: 'The Grandfather Clock', 'The Grandfather Chair' and 'The Sycamore Tree'. All these symbols stand for the integrity of the family of Joe. However, the family is ruined because of the irresponsible behaviour of its members. In Winter Garden, there are two basic symbols: 'Winter Garden' and 'The Fishing Rod'. 'Winter

Garden' stands for the back garden at Ashburner's house at Beaufort Street. It also stands for the icy Mother Russia.

The dialogues in both the novels are informal. The incidents are coherently connected to one another. Once the action opens the chain of incidents and events continue. Almost all of the novels by Bainbridge have shocking endings. The reader expects more, but her novels end shockingly. The novels A Quiet Life and Winter Garden have also shocking endings.

In both of the novels Bainbridge speaks about alienation and loss of faith. Through her characters she has focused on the dissociative human behaviour. The character of Joe in A Quiet Life and the character of Douglas Ashburner in Winter Garden are the victims of the absurd view of life.

Majority of the Bainbridge's characters are eccentric. Very few of her characters deserve sympathy. The characters are taken from the root level. They reflect the realities in the contemporary British society. They reflect the conflict between romanticism and reality, between love and art and the social mores.
