



# The Fur coat

By Sean O'Faolain





# About the author Sean O'Faolain,

- ▶ Original name **John Francis Whelan**, (born February 22, 1900, Cork, County Cork, Ireland.
- ▶ He was a member of Irish Republican Army (IRA). IRA was fighting for independence against Great Britain.
- ▶ He studied and taught in the US after which he returned to Ireland. Upon his return he became a writer who wrote a lot of books.
- ▶ He is best known for his short stories about Ireland's lower and middle classes.
- ▶ As a writer, his aim was to depict the obscure and gallant lives, the simple farm and town people of Ireland. His first novel placed him in the front ranks of current writers.



# About the author ...

- ▶ He is interested in forms but he is praised for his compassionate understanding of Irish life.
- ▶ He often examined the decline of the nationalist struggle or the failings of Irish Roman Catholicism.
- ▶ His work reflects the reawakening of interest in Irish culture stimulated by the Irish literary renaissance of the early 20th century.
- ▶ He died in 1991 in Ireland, Dublin his native country in April 20, 1991.



# Summary

- ▶ A fur coat is a garment that is worn to keep warm during the winter season. However in the context of the story, is more than that.
- ▶ The fur coat contextually symbolises wealth, prosperity and an elevated social status.
- ▶ In many European countries, a fur coat is still perceived by women as a garment that reflects the affluent social that she belongs to.
- ▶ Thus it is due to this immense value of a fur coat, that Molly, who is our protagonist in the story demands her husband, Paddy Maguire to buy her this fur coat as they had now been elevated to a high social status after her husband, Paddy had obtained a new position as a Parliamentary Secretary to the minister of Roads and Railways.
- ▶ It is therefore imperative to understand the importance or symbolism of the FUR COAT in the story.



# Summary ...

- ▶ Molly in the story begins to outline all her reasons for “needing” a fur coat.
- ▶ Firstly, she states that she needs a fur coat not for “grandeur” (to show off) but she needs it to look presentable for meetings and gatherings that she will attend with her husband, now that she is of a high status in society (p75).
- ▶ Her second reason for wanting a fur coat is that, with a fur coat, she won't have to spend a lot of time and money on matching outfits (page 76).
- ▶ Lastly Molly, states that she needs this fur coat because she deserves one after the years of hardship that she has endured (page 74).
- ▶ It is important to note that during this discussion that Molly is having with her husband (Paddy) he is very preoccupied with his new job of reducing the pier so that the state can save money which is very ironic in the story.



# Title

- ▶ **Literally:** It's an expensive coat made of fur usually worn in winter.
- ▶ **Figuratively:** A fur coat is a symbol of financial stability, power and wealth. This can mean either a stable position in society, or a solid purchase and acquisition. In this story it represents success, elevated social class and conformity. It would provide a sense of comfort after years of hardship (keep her warm).

# Themes

## Conformity

Molly makes reference to other women such as deValera and General Mulcahy. She feels she has to conform to the standards of these women.

## Love and generosity

Paddy agrees to buy Molly any fur coat that she desires and love is depicted by Molly and Paddy in the beginning of the story when Molly “adoringly” puts her arms around her husband and Paddy looking at her in an admiring and loving manner (page 74).

# Themes ...

## **Elevated social status/class**

Molly feels that her appearance needs to change because of the new social status that she has obtained hence the need for a Fur Coat which would reflect her elevated status in society.

## **Change/ Transformation**

Regardless of the change/ transformation of the political landscape of Ireland and the appointment of her husband as Parliamentary Secretary; Molly struggles to let go of her life of struggles.



# Themes ...

## Aspiration

Molly strongly wants the fur coat. She believes that she would be properly dressed should she own a fur coat. However, her basic instincts stop her from getting the coat.

## Internal/Self-conflict (indecisiveness)

Having spent so many years struggling, Molly deeply desires and feels that she deserves the fur coat. She then realises that the fur coat symbolises the spoils of war and vanity. A war that has caused so many innocent lives and resulted in Maguire's imprisonment.

# Themes ...

<b>Selfishness</b>	<b>Molly Maguire demands her husband ,Paddy to buy her the most expensive Fur coat that money can buy yet she does not consider that her children have torn pyjamas which she attempts to mend.</b>
<b>Guilt</b>	Molly despises the fact that she yearns for a fur coat. She feels guilty and uncomfortable with the idea of wearing a fur coat (symbol of wealth); when others have sacrificed so much for 'her freedom'.
<b>Hardship &amp; suffering</b>	The effect of hardship and poverty has damaged Molly's perception of herself. She sees herself as no more than an ordinary housewife.



# How the story is told

## ➤ **Setting**

- The story is in Ireland in Maguire's house during the time of Independence from the Great Britain.

## ➤ **Structure and plot development**

- **Exposition:** Paddy has been in and out of jail due to his involvement with politics hence the financial strain in the family.
- **Rising action:** Paddy gets a promotion and the wife, Molly, sees this as an opportunity to get herself a fur coat.
- Paddy encourages his wife to get TWO fur coats if she wants to.
- Paddy becomes sceptical when he learns what other fur coats are from i.e from unborn lambs.
- Also, he doesn't agree with the reasons Molly gives for buying the coat.

# How the story is told ...

- **Climax:** Molly says Paddy is mean and cries.
- They have a misunderstanding and do not talk for three days.
- **Denouement:** On the fourth day Paddy leaves Molly a cheque of one hundred and fifty pounds to buy a coat.
- Molly is excited but soon tears the cheque into four pieces.
- Molly apologises to Paddy for saying that he is mean.
- Paddy asks if she really wants Molly wants the coat
- However, when he tells her to go buy it she says she cannot but can't give the reasons why she doesn't want to.



# Characterisation: Molly

- ▶ She has a tremendous **desire/love for fur coats**-Upon the promotion of her husband, Paddy, she then requests that Paddy buys her a fur coat.
- ▶ She is very **indecisive**- she wants the fur coat yet she has so many doubts and she is questioning her choice.
- ▶ **Self-conflicted**- she criticizes how fur coats are made yet she wants to own one.
- ▶ **Short tempered**- she overreacts and judges Paddy as mean if he questions her choice/reasons for her requesting a fur coat.



# Characterisation: Molly

- ▶ **Selfish**- she thinks the promotion of her husband qualifies her to have a fair coat yet the conditions in the house haven't changed. She is still mending the clothes of her children. The money could be used to buy clothing for the children. A fur coat is an expensive purchase; Molly wants to spend it all on herself.
- ▶ **Hardworking mother**- she took care of the children while Paddy was in out and out of prison. She still mends her children's pyjamas.
- ▶ For the first time she gets a chance to focus on what she needs (spoil herself), after what she has gone through she deserves better.



# Characterisation: Paddy

- ▶ He is a **loving, supportive and generous** husband; initially he wants the wife to have 2 fur coats.
- ▶ He is **economical with finances** as he reduces the map of the pier in order to save the government funds.
- ▶ He is **calm**; he doesn't get angry when the wife snaps at him.
- ▶ He is **sensitive**; when Molly called him 'mean' he decided to give a cheque for her to buy the fur coat (which she did not).
- ▶ He is **practical and considerate**- He gives Molly other options instead of buying the fur coat.




# Characterisation: Paddy

- ▶ **He lacks the understanding** of his wife. Over the years he has somehow become detached to his wife. He doesn't understand the likes and the dislikes of his wife.
- ▶ **He is oblivious** to the fact that Molly is not being extravagant but she deserves a fur coat for her patience and struggles. A fur coat is a consolation to her as she just need ONE item.





# Narrator's point of view and style.

- ▶ **Narrator's point of view**
  - ▶ Third person narration
  - ▶ **Style**
  - ▶ There is humour and mockery towards Molly and a sense of sympathy for Paddy.
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# Diction and Figurative language

Identification	FOS	Discussion
<b>Simile</b>	'...put the children to bed as if she were throwing sacks of turf into a cellar' (page 76)	The figure of speech shows Molly's anger. She does not tuck the children into bed gently but does so in a rough manner just as one would throw turf into a cellar.
	'...like all the Irish, you have that peasant...' (p.79)	It emphasises that Molly compares Paddy to a common Irish citizen who is poor and of a lower social while Paddy's social class has been elevated as he is now the Parliamentary Secretary.
	'...crying like a kid.' (p.79)	It emphasises Molly's maturity and lack of control of her emotions.

# Diction and Figures of speech

<b>Metaphor</b>	'The years had polished her hard' (p.74)	The years are given human quality of being able to polish and refine. This emphasises that the years of hardship that Molly had to endure had moulded her into a strong and resilient woman.
<b>Euphemism/ understatement</b>	'We've had some thin times together...'	Paddy politely speaks about poverty that they have been through. It also suggests that that time is in the past now.
<b>Metaphor</b>	'...her diamond – bright eyes.' (p.74)	
	'...her heart leaped...died in her.' (p.79)	

# Diction and Figurative language ...

<b>Personification</b>	<b>'The years had polished her hard' (pg. 74)</b>	<b>The years are given human quality of being able to polish and refine. This emphasises that the years of hardship that Molly had to endure had moulded her into a strong and resilient woman.</b>
	'He addressed the room.' (p.78)	He gives his attention to the issue and talks like a politician. He lacks affection and views his family affairs as if they were politics.
	'He addressed the armchair' (p.78)	He addresses his wife in a formal and authoritative tone which is contrary to the expected husband and wife conversation.
	'For a moment her heart leaped. The next moment it died in her.' (p.79)	This literary device emphasises that Molly excitement was short-lived and a sense of guilt emerged.

# Diction and Figurative language ...

<b>Hyperbole</b>	'...donkeys' years ago.' (p.79)	This literary device is used to emphasise the fact that her conscience is long gone over the years. She feels guilty and unsure of herself.
<b>Irony</b>	Molly says Paddy is 'mean' yet she is the one that behaves in a mean way towards her husband, despite the fact that he is generous and loving towards her. o	
	Molly accuses Paddy of having a 'peasant streak', yet she can be regarded as having a 'peasant streak' because she cannot imagine herself wearing an expensive fur coat.	



# Tone and mood

- **Tone**
- **Angry/dissatisfied tone** -Molly speaks to Paddy in a disgruntled, angry and dissatisfied tone. She is angry and dissatisfied with the difficult life she has lived while Paddy was involved in the revolution.
- Molly feels that other women have better lives. She is dissatisfied with the clothes she has and with her role as a housewife.
- **Light-hearted tone** – the narrator uses humour which reduces the seriousness of the story. Molly talks about the future that has plastic pyjamas that will need less energy to clean and mend. (page 76)
- **Mood:**
- Tense/depressing.
- Humorous