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**MERVYN WALL** (1908-1997) was born in Dublin. He obtained his B.A. from the National University of Ireland in 1928. After fourteen years in the Civil Service, he joined Radio Éireann as Programme Officer. In 1957 he became Secretary of the Arts Council of Ireland, retiring in 1975. Known during his lifetime as a broadcaster and critic, he is best remembered for his fantastical satires *The Unfortunate Fursey* (1946) and *The Return of Fursey* (1948).

## LEAVES FOR THE BURNING

Mervyn Wall

*“Beware lest you get in middle-age what you longed for in youth.”*

Lucian Brewse Burke, a middle-aged civil servant, works in a shabby county council sub-office in the bleak Irish midlands, mired in Kafkaesque bureaucracy and petty skirmishes with locals. Upon the arrival of his old university friends on their way to Yeats’s funeral, things turn toward the eccentric. They embark on a days-long, cross-country spree brimming with booze-fueled nostalgia. To the accompaniment of juke boxes blaring a reminder of the steady of Americanisation of Europe, we see public-houses thronged with saints, senators, and sinners; while outside old stone crumbles and the thin rain drifts down on an ancient country-side. Despite its melancholy pinings for wasted youth, this mid-century portrait of Ireland is rich in grotesque humor and savage absurdity. *Leaves for the Burning* won Denmark’s Best European Novel award in 1952.

### FROM THE INTRODUCTION BY SUSAN TOMASELLI

“We Irish have always been concerned with appearances and what outsiders think of us, how we are perceived elsewhere, despite us silencing our own home voices. German author Heinrich Böll’s somewhat romantic *Irish Journal*, written in the same decade as *Leaves for the Burning*, fed, as Fintan O’Toole said, ‘into a consoling fantasy that Ireland’s underdevelopment made it spiritually rich and therefore a potential saviour for Europe’. Were we? Are we still? Early on in the novel, Lucian laments, ‘God! What an inheritance some of us have in this country!’ What an inheritance indeed. Time may not have been kind to Mervyn Wall and *Leaves for the Burning* (and this is staggering to me), but as John McGahern once wrote the stories of ‘small pinched lives, of failed chances and momentary joys’ will always be relevant, inside the office or not.”

### REVIEWS

*“Brilliantly amusing.”* – Times Literary Supplement

*“I shall long remember the many good things in this half-bitter book.”*  
– Seán Ó Faoláin, *Listener*

*“The best novel written in Ireland for several years.”*  
– Terence de Vere White, *The Standard*

*“This is a fine robust story [ . . . ] one of those biting satires on Irish life.”*  
– Daily Dispatch