



Patrick Kavanagh and The Leader: The Poet, the Politician and the Libel Trial

Pat Walsh

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The story of how Patrick Kavanagh, The Leader magazine and the former and soon to be Taoiseach Liam Costello held the attention of Dublin in one of the most exciting and revealing Irish literary trials of the last century. One of the most traumatic episodes in the poet Patrick Kavanagh's life was played out in public over two weeks in February 1954. By suing The Leader magazine for defamation, Kavanagh initiated a sensational courtroom showdown with John A. Costello, noted barrister and twice Taoiseach of Ireland.

The country was electrified as Costello's masterful, relentless cross-examination dissected Kavanagh's public and private life, and revealed the tensions within Dublin's literary circle in the 1950s.

When Kavanagh took the case against The Leader he could not have anticipated either the furore it would cause, or that the strain of the trial would shatter his considerable confidence and damage his health.

Pat Walsh is originally from Mayo, but lives and works in Dún Laoghaire. He is the author of The Curious Case of the Mayo Librarian.??

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