

KAVANAGH A LA CARTE

Patrick Swift's portrait of Patrick Kavanagh:
Dining-room, Great Southern Hotel, Galway

*Scowling above the table-clothed room
Your eyes, truth-greedy, ask nobody's pardon
For peering out of their poetic context.*

*Here where men gobble, discreet waiters glide,
You hover like a poacher netting salmon,
Checking each fork en route to every mouth.*

*You know the count, you've heard the conversation
Often before: in every pub in Dublin
You gutted every vendor of untruth*

*With grunt, belch, growl, deliberate phlegm-clearance;
Borrowed a bob for your gas shilling meter;
Used it to buy a chop, your belly empty*

*Of food; unable to take whiskey
Much longer without stomach pain or spasm;
Your number up, you kept the score a secret;*

*Composed your composed sonnets of composure
Upon the green banks of the Grand Canal,
Weed-choked but still a nesting place for swans.*

*Dead now, you're elevated: an Old Master;
Black-shirted, balding, eyes out of alignment
You crouch, caged poet, in your gilded frame.*

*But you have your disciples; a half-dozen?
Fifteen? Twenty? Numbers are unimportant;
To look on, like you, for love's sake, is what counts.*