

**‘Ar Lorg na Gaoithe’:
Death, the Quest for Immortality, and the Pursuit of the Unjustified Self in Séamas
Mac Annaidh’s Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí.**

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Year of Entry: 1994

A Minor-Thesis Submission for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy in Irish Studies
by
Anthony T. McCann
for the academic year
1996-1997

I wish to thank the following people for their assistance in completion of this thesis: Dr. Mícheál Mac Craith, my Advisor of Studies, for his enthusiasm, guidance, patience, and belief that this project could be completed; Dr. Riana O'Dwyer, Convenor of the Department of Irish Studies; Prof. Thomas Bartlett, ex-Convenor of the Department of Irish Studies; Séamas Mac Annaidh, for his cooperation and inspiration, and for writing the novel in the first place; Fachtna Ó Drisceoil, Gobnait Nic Sleimhne, and Brian Ó Conchubhair, for their friendship, advice, and good sense; and my family, especially my Mother and Father, for their love and faith, their tolerance in times of chaos, their generosity with the computer, and for keeping me on the straight and narrow.

Foreword

My aim in this thesis is to analytically examine Séamus Mac Annaidh's first novel, Cuaifeach mo Londubh Buí, in an attempt to show the thematic unity that supports the text. It is my belief that this novel is one of the major works of twentieth century Irish language literature, and that it would favourably compare with the great works of other languages. To this end I have often sought comparison with the works and themes of the Spanish author Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) in a bid to highlight the complexities of Mac Annaidh's text.

In the introduction I shall place Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí in context, showing how its style and inventive attack are the natural culmination of development, of an international awareness in the Irish language literary scene, and how its chosen form of autobiography also fits into a discernible trend in prose in Irish. A brief biographical note on Mac Annaidh will then be followed by a brief summary of the narrative structure for those with little knowledge of the text. With a view to further development I shall here introduce the writer Miguel de Unamuno, in particular concentrating on his personal sub-genre of the novel, the *nivola*, which I shall explain by highlighting its major distinguishing characteristics as taken from critical literature on the subject. It is my belief that a deeper understanding of Mac Annaidh's novel may be attained through an understanding of Unamuno's work.

In my first chapter I shall examine the presence of references to death in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. I feel it necessary, however, to place this in the wider context of modern ontological security and in particular the tradition of The Absurd, showing how, in the words of Heidegger, confronting death "can become an integrating factor in an authentic existence." I shall show how Mac Annaidh incorporates the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh into his narratives as the perfect compliment to a modern meditation on death. I hope it will become clear that there is an all-pervasive Death Awareness in the style, narrative and characterisation of the text that accurately reflects the uneasiness and angst of the Human Condition. As part of this general awareness I shall include an examination of the use of the Garden of Eden motif, chiasmus, and the self-conscious aspect of the Irish language.

In my second chapter I shall examine the presence of strategic responses to the death experience in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. The first of these is the *Carpe Diem* philosophy, the desire to 'seize the day', to live each moment to the full. It is in this context that I shall examine the references to Punk in the novel, the use of the words 'cuaifeach', 'guairneán', and 'charybdis', and the metaphorical significance of the blackbird. In an attempt to further elucidate Mac Annaidh's methods I shall draw comparisons with both Abstract Expressionism and the intended spontaneity of Unamuno's *nivola*, both of which may be seen to affirm the vital pulse of life as a defense against death. I shall then examine the function of humour in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, specifically the use of the Gilgamesh Epic and the story of Gilly Mac Gréine, and the way in which the use of nonsense humour can be linked directly to the death experience. I shall follow this by highlighting the act of communication as a defence mechanism, concentrating on the author-reader relationship, the importance of dialogue in the text, and the significance of intertextuality in this context.

Having shown the presence of death in the text, and having examined Mac Annaidh's primary responses in this text to the challenge of death, in the third and final chapter I hope to show the way in which Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is escapist in the most profound sense: an attempt to shed the shackles of mortality through Mac Annaidh's recreation of self in autobiography, in fame, and as a self-contained textual world, a solipsist haven. Having first established the quest for immortality as one of the basic human drives, I hope to elucidate Mac Annaidh's personal quest by way of reference to the use of the Gilgamesh Epic, the

structure of the Frankenstein myth, and through comparative analysis of Unamuno's own quest for immortality in his *nivola*. As in the case of Gilgamesh we will find that Mac Annaidh's quest will also end in failure, that the ultimate acceptance of the reality of life is in the acceptance of the reality of death.

Introduction

When Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí was published in 1983 it was widely acknowledged, despite its failure to impress the judges at the annual Oireachtas literary competition, that here was a special addition to the canon of Irish language literature. Máirín Nic Eoin wrote, "Is leabhar ar leith an leabhar seo, leabhar a mbeifear ag trácht air go ceann i bhfad"(19), and many critics have been attracted by the book's allure, with varying degrees of success.

In many ways Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí was, at the time of its publication, the culmination of literary development in both poetry and prose in the Irish language. This development, however, took place in a linguistic milieu that was, for many years, in no way conducive to the nourishment of creative freedom;

". . .sa tríú ré, 1921-1976, tharla go raibh an Ghaeilge agus litríocht na Gaeilge faoi ghlas i ngeiteo idéalach ag an dream sa tír ba mhó a chothaigh an Ghaeilge. Cuireadh ualach neamhriachtanach ar an teanga, ualach leatromach an idéalachais náisiúnta, agus tugadh moladh oifigiúil do thréithe gan tábhacht a bhain leis an Ghaeilge agus leis an litríocht araon. Ba mhór an dochar a rinne an polasaí oifigiúil seo don chaighdeán liteartha. Bhí an saol liteartha Gaelach i bhfostú ag dearcadh inbhreathnaitheach a bhain le go leor de lucht riaracháin na Gaeilge, idir theanga agus litríocht. Ba bheag nár imigh an muintearas agus an caidreamh a bhíodh idir litríocht na Gaeilge agus litríocht an Bhéarla anseo i léig ar fad agus laghdaíodh go mór ar an leas a bhíodh le baint as an teangmháil sin.

D'ainneoin na caolaigeantachta seo tháinig glúin chumasach chun cinn sna daichidí agus sna caogaidí. Ina measc bhí scríbhneoirí ar nós Mháirtín Uí Chadhain, Mháirtín Uí Dhireáin, Sheáin Uí Ríordáin, Mháire Mhac an tSaoi agus Sheáin Uí Thuama. Bua na filíochta a bhí ag cuid acu agus bhí dúil acu sa léirmheastóireacht agus san úrscéalaíocht freisin. Tháinig siad faoi anáil an nua-aoiseachais idirnáisiúnta. Toisc na caolaigeantachta atá luaite cheana ba bheag an méid aistriúchán a deineadh ar a gcuid saothair agus b'fhíorbheag líon na n-aistriúchán a foilsíodh. Is trua a rá gur mhinic a bhí foilsitheoirí Gaeilge in aghaidh a leithéide."(Cassidy 38)

Despite the difficulties, or maybe even because of the difficulties, many of these writers embraced modernism to herald a new era in Irish language literature; "The specific features signified by "modernism" vary with the user, but many critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture. . . A prominent feature of modernism is the phenomenon called the avant-garde (a military metaphor: "advance guard"); that is, a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors who deliberately undertake, in Ezra Pound's phrase, to "make it new." By violating the accepted conventions and proprieties, not only of art but of social discourse, they set out to create ever-new artistic forms and styles and to introduce hitherto neglected, and sometimes forbidden, subject matters. Frequently avant-garde artists represent themselves as "alienated" from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy; a prominent aim is to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and to challenge the norms and pieties of the dominant bourgeois culture."(Abrams 120) Writers in the Irish language found themselves engaged in an act of reappropriation, attempting to wrest the language from the stultifying grasp of bureaucrats and nationalistic ideologues¹, and from

¹ An interesting echo of nationalistic concerns was to be seen in one of the recent analyses of Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí; "Tá ceist bhunúsach . . . faoi úsáid eipic Ghiolgamais: canathaobh nár baineadh leas as ceann de mhórscéalta an traidisiúin Ghaelaigh? Nárbh ionann cáilíochtaí Táin Bó Cualinge mar eipic agus scéal Ghiolgamais? Tá sé fíor go pointe áirithe ach i ndeireadh na dála is í eipic Ghiolgamais an scéal is sine i litríocht an domhain uile." (Ó Cearnaigh 25)

an associated dominant, and rather tame 'social realism', viciously parodied in Myles na gCopaleen's² An Béal Bocht (1964), in a quest for literary and philosophical self-expression;

"Ón mbliain 1960 ar aghaidh ní amháin go bhfuil méadu substaintiúil tagtha ar líon na n-úrscéalta ach tosaíodh freisin ar bhealaí nua a thriail, ábhair agus timpeallachtaí nua a léiriú agus a phlé, foirmeacha turgnamhacha a thastáil agus fealsúnachtaí liteartha éagsúla a fhorbairt agus a chraoladh trí mheán na húrscéalaíochta Gaeilge. A bhuíochas sin, ní do bhunú irisí nó clubanna leabhar nó comórtas liteartha, (cé gur dócha go raibh tionchar tánaisteach ag na nithe sin) ach ar thriúr scríbhneoirí Gaeilge a tháinig chun cinn go mór i gcúrsaí próis ag an am sin - Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, Diarmaid Ó Súilleabháin agus Breandán Ó Doibhlin. Is í an tréith ata i gcoitinne acu triúr ná a n-iltíreachas, an léargas leathan domhanda a eascraíonn as an léitheoireacht fhairsing agus an oscailteacht intinne is an fhiosracht intleachtach a ghabhann léi. Cé nach ionann an dearcadh liteartha atá léirithe acu triúr . . . is ionann, áfach, a misneach agus a ndánacht, agus arís is arís eile ina saothair chruthaitheachta agus sna hailt fhealsúnachta agus chritice atá scríofa acu, tugann siad dúshlán lucht liteartha agus lucht léite na Gaeilge trí chuid de na seantuisicintí stóinsithe ar chúrsaí litríochta agus ealaíne a chaitheamh san aer nó a cheistiú ó bhonn."(Nic Eoin 15)

This climate of literary reawakening was consolidated by pioneering literary criticism from St. Patrick's College, Maynooth's Irisleabhar Mhá Nuad;

"Chuidigh na léargais nua a craobhscaoileadh ó Scoil Mhá Nuad (mar a tugadh ar scríbhneoirí an Irisleabhair tar éis tamaill) freisin le hugach a thabhairt do na scríbhneoirí laincísí an réalachais shóisialta a bhí chomh mór sin san fhaisean sa Ghaeilge roimhe sin, agus an oibiachtúlacht sheasc a ghabh leis, a chaitheamh díobh agus braistintí níos leithne, níos doimhne agus níos iomláine ar staid an duine, an phobail, an naisiúin agus an chine a thóraíocht trí chiútaí agus theicníochtaí inste a thriail a thabharfadh an léitheoir isteach i gceartlár an téacs seachas é a fhagáil ag breathnú isteach go fuarchúiseach ar an scannán cáipéiseach arbh é an t-úrscéal Gaeilge go dtí sin é. D'éirigh an litríocht, no an chuid is fearr di ar chaoi ar bith, i bhfad níos pearsanta, níos caolchúisí, níos féincheistí, níos machnamhaí."(Nic Eoin 16)

By the early nineteen-eighties the modern Irish language literary revival had received another injection of pace, although for the most part the initiative seemed to come from the country's young poets, led by the flagship Innti magazine run from University College, Cork, rather than from novelists;

"Cúis mhór dóchais don tír ar fad na scríbhneoirí cruthaitheacha Gaeilge atá ag éirí aníos faoi láthair, glúin atá sáite i litríocht ár sinsear ach san am céanna a bhfuil aird agus meas acu ar scríbhneoirí Béarla ár linne anseo. Baineann an nua-aoiseachas leis an dream seo agus tá cuid acu a leanann lorg an iarnua-aoiseachais. Ba mhaith leo uile a bheith measta de réir na gcaighdeán idirnáisiúnta. Fáiltíonn siad roimh an litríocht agus an ealaín as ceithre hairde an domhain. . . Tá an geiteo fágtha laistiar díobh. Dhiúltaigh siad géilleadh don idéalachas iomarcach agus don dearcadh caomhnaitheach a ghabhann le litríocht na Gaeilge."(Cassidy 38)

It was into this internationalist awareness, which engendered a profound sense of place, that Séamas Mac Annaidh's debut work was received, and out of which it was born.

Máirín Nic Eoin has found autobiography to be one of the most common elements in the Irish language novel; "Gné ghinearálta. . .a thabharfadh léitheoir faoi deara in úrscéalta na Gaeilge

² A.k.a. Briain Ó Nualláin, Flann O'Brien, etc., etc., . . .

ná cé chomh coitianta agus atá an nóta dírbheathaisnéiseach iontu,"(17) and it is interesting to view the hyper-autobiographical³ Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí in this light.⁴ Nic Eoin suggests that autobiography might be an easy option for many writers, an escape from the complexities of traditional storytelling;

"Cén fáth an luí seo le hábhar is le múnla na dírbheathaisnéise in úrscéalta Gaeilge? An mbaineann sé le flúirse na ndírbheathaisnéisí atá le fáil sa Ghaeilge agus leis an gcáil a bhain cuid acu amach dá n-údair? Nó an éalú é ó dhua, ó dheacracht na údarachta? Is fusa go mór do dhuine scéal a bheatha féin a scríobh ná domhan ar fad a chruthú, rud a theilgeadh glan amach as a shamhlaíocht. Is léiriú ar easpa tinfidh, ar laige na físe, ar sheice na samhlaíochta go minic ag an scríbhneoir an fhéinfhaisnéis agus an tromthuairimíocht ina iarracht liteartha. Uaireanta eile, easpa scile is cúis leis."(18)

She does, however, concede that this is not necessarily the case; "Níor ghá, ar ndóigh, go loitfeadh úsáid na staire nó an eolais dhírbheathaisnéisigh úrscéal ach fios a bheith ag an údar conas tairbhe a bhaint astu."(18) By the end of this analysis of Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí I hope it will be clear that autobiography, far from being an easy way out, is in fact an essential aspect of the text's thematic profundity, and a crucial structural element.

James Patrick McCanny was born in the Coombe Hospital, Dublin, on the 11th January 1961, the son of bank clerk James Patrick McCanny (1912-1991) and doctor Ita Mary Briscoe (1924-). His father came from Omagh and his mother from Dublin, and they were to have three other children; Paul (1963), Peter (1964) and Mary (1967). After periods in Monaghan (1961-64), and Dundalk (1964-66), the family moved to Enniskillen, where James went to St. Michael's Primary and Grammar Schools. He completed his A-levels in June of 1979, and graduated in Irish and English from the New University of Ulster, Coleraine, in 1982, now known by his Irish name of Séamas Mac Annaidh. Sections of his first novel, Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, had been written as submissions for that degree, and the book itself was published on the 23rd of December, 1983, by Coiscéim Press when Séamas was only twenty-two years old. It was soon followed by another two books, Mo Dhá Mhicí (1986) and Rubble Na Mickies (1990), which together with the first form a trilogy. Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí was republished in 1995 with minimal changes. Works since then have included a collection of short stories, Féirín, Scéalta agus Eile (1992), and his most recent novel, Deireadh (1996).⁵

³ Use of this newly coined adjective will become clear in due course.

⁴ It is also interesting to note the publication, a year before Mac Annaidh's debut work, of another autobiography in Irish connected with the University of Ulster, Coleraine; "Saol an mhic léinn dhrabhlasaigh atá faoi chaibidil. . . sa leabhar Iomrall (1982) le hIarla Mac Aodha Bhuí. . . Ollscoil Nua Uladh i gCúl Raithin an Coláiste atá i gceist agus coimhlintí polaitiúla an Tuaiscirt sna seachtóidí mar chúlra soceolaíoch." (Nic Eoin 18)

⁵ For the purposes of this thesis I will be considering Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí as a text in isolation, ignoring its position as the first work of a trilogy.

Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí can easily be separated into four definite narrative streams. In writing the novel Mac Annaidh uses these interchangeably and in no apparent ordered sequence - if he runs out of ideas for one he just switches to another and keeps writing.⁶ This would account to some degree for the speed with which the novel was initially written. The actual dates of composition are included in the text;

“Cúil Raithin 3.10.81.
Inis Ceithleann 28.07.82.
Inis Ceithleann 28.8.82 - 28.10.82.
Eanach Mhic Dheirg 10.1.83 - 31.1.83.”(256)

Approximately 9 weeks for 256 pages. As Mícheál Mac Craith writes in his essay 'Ag cur rudaí as a riocht ar mhaithe le héifeacht'; "Chaith an t-údar trí mhí ag gabháil don leabhar, cúig leathanach san oíche, cúig oíche sa tseachtain. . . Chuir sé an t-iomlán de in aon ráig amháin, cuaifeach samhlaíochta agus cuaifeach scríbhneoireachta."(Mac Craith 45) Each narrative is written in a markedly different style, making it somewhat easier for the reader to identify with the rapid change of perspective.

The first narrative strand follows Séamas Mac Anna, in what is quite obviously a case of autobiographical fiction, time-checked throughout, on a day-in-the-life account of events in Enniskillen, for example, collecting the dole and wandering around town, all leading to a bizarre meeting between characters from a separate narrative strand (The Gilly Narrative - see below) and Séamas, as narrator, in the town square, a meeting scheduled for three o'clock. It is written as an omniscient third person narrative, privy to Séamas' thoughts. The sentences are generally short, and often without verbs, following on from each other in simple succession, never allowing the reader to dwell too long on the thoughts as they are presented on the page, conveying an immediacy of action. Oft times they resemble stage directions. This is highlighted, deliberately or otherwise, by the use of single spaces after every full stop as opposed to the standard double spacing. The name of the protagonist is virtually identical to that of the author, the events are placed at a specific time, and the text is full of domestic and local detail, which suggest an air of realistic representation. This 'realism'⁷ is, however, undermined in subtle ways. Take for example the name that Séamas and his father are purported to share, "Séamas Caoimhín Mícheál Mac Anna". They do share the same name, but in Irish it would be Séamas Pádraig Mac Annaidh. The realism is tinged with a hint of deliberate fiction, dare I say magic. As the book progresses, as we shall see, the representations of fiction and reality in this strand merge.

As a sub-narrative here we might include the re-telling of the assassination of Anwar el Sadat, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt from 1970-1981, by Muslim fundamentalists;

"Bhí teas ag éirí ón ghaineamh sa staid. Bhí an tUachtarán sceirdoileánach ina sheasamh ar an ardán, agus éide mhíleata air. Choimhead sé ar na sé scairdeitleán os a chionn a bhí ag comóradh a bhua in éadan an tsean-namhad, iad ag lomlúbadh, ag spréacharnaigh faoi sholas na gréine. Leath aoibh ar cholmhagaidh dhóite an Uachtaráin. Luigh na saighdiúirí isteach ina ranganna rialta roimhe ar gach taobh, iad uilig ag tabhairt omóis don Stát agus d'íomhá dhaonna an Stáit sin, an tUachtarán.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the structure of the novel see Ó Muirí (1991).

⁷ The issue of 'realism' and the implicit epistemological assumptions in its usage do not concern us here; "Realism can never fully offer up the world in all its complexity, its irreducible plenitude. Its verisimilitude is an effect achieved through the deployment of certain literary and ideological conventions which have been invested with a kind of truth value." (Keep, 1995, source: internet) "The prime allegiance of [the traditional novel] is to verisimilitude: the author enters into a silent agreement with the reader to create a world which will give the illusion of being 'real life'." (Josipovici 111)

Sheas an rialtas, an chléir agus na haíonna thart timpeall air gan tacaíocht dá laghad á tabhairt acu. Ardaíodh deannach leis na gluaistrucailí a bhí ag treabhadh thart os comhair go réidh. Dílseacht. Seasmhacht. Diongbháilteacht. Ord. Eagar.

Chrom an tUachtarán le cúpla focal a rá le státrúnaí a bhí taobh leis. Chuaigh ceann de na gluaistrucailí beagán den bhealach agus stad sí mar a bheadh rud éigin cearr léi. Ba bheag an aird a tugadh uirthi. Léim saighdiúirí aisti.

Caitheadh gránáidí.

Phleasc siad agus thosaigh na saighdiúirí a scaoileadh leis an ardán. Thit na hairí, thit an chléir. Thit an tUachtarán."(9)

The reason I think this should be considered as part of the primary autobiographical narrative is that the inclusion of an account of the assassination of Anwar el Sadat as part of the text is purely a result of the incident occurring as the book was being written, a result of the incident being part of Mac Annaidh's day, as it were. This is an actual and well-known historical event from the early eighties, and our knowledge of this event as something that really happened adds to the verisimilitude of Mac Annaidh's autobiographical narrative as Mac Anna. This is undermined, however, in much the same fashion as shown above, by an apparent mistake in the text.⁸ Mac Annaidh reports; "Maraíodh Anwar el Sadat ar an tríú lá de mhí Dheireadh Fómhair 1981"(23), while history records that Sadat was shot on the sixth, not the third of October. In style this passage is similar to the previous one, although the impact is heightened by the 'reportage', as though seen through the eyes of a television camera. Again the short sentences convey immediacy, but also add to the sense of chaos as the event takes place.

The second narrative strand is that based on the Gilgamesh Epic⁹, a Sumerian epic from approximately 2500 BC that tells of the quest of the King of Uruk, Gilgamesh, for the gift of immortality. For the most part the Irish text has been taken from the N.K.Sandars' translation. The epic has been described as "the finest surviving epic poem from any period until the appearance of Homer's Iliad,"(Sandars 7) and it is arguably the earliest written narrative we know, "rud a fhágann gur seo an chéad sampla den chaidreamh idir scéalai/scríbhneoir agus éisteoir/léitheoir atá ar eolas againn."(Ó Muirí: 1991; 88) "The story is divided into episodes: a meeting of friends, a forest journey, the flouting of a fickle goddess, the death of the companion [Enkidu], and the search for ancestral wisdom and immortality: and through them all runs a single idea, like the refrain of the medieval poet, "*Timor mortis conturbat me*"(Sandars 22). At the end of his quest Gilgamesh meets Utnapishtim, who eventually concedes the secret of immortality, which happens to be an herb or plant, but Gilgamesh pauses to wash himself on his way down-river, and a snake sneaks on board his boat and eats the plant. "With empty hands, his quest in vain, Gilgamesh finally returns to Uruk. The moral of his failure needs no underlining. Man is by nature mortal and he must learn to accept his fate and adjust his view of life accordingly."(Brandon 161) Eventually the use of the Gilgamesh Epic lapses from almost direct translation, which retains the noble and dignified tone of the original, into low burlesque;

Agus dúirt Utnapáistim Imigéiniúil leis:

'Deux points,' ó bhí sé den bharúil go raibh sé ina fhear tí ar chomórtas Amhránaíochta na hEoraifise.

'Níl Fraincis ar bith agam,' arsa Giolgamais. 'Theip orm san ábhar sin ag 'O' Level.'

Agus dúirt Utnapáistim Imigéiniúil leis:

⁸ In a personal interview (Nov. 1996) Mac Annaidh denied knowledge of this inconsistency.

⁹ "In a standard sense, the term epic or heroic poem is applied to a work that meets at least the following criteria: it is a long narrative poem on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centred on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depend the fate of a tribe, a nation, or . . . the human race." (Abrams 53)

'Can we have the votes of the Enniskillen jury?'
 Ní bhfuair sé freagra ar bith agus mar sin de d'iarr sé ar Ghiolgamaís amhrán a cheol.
 Thit Ghiolgamaís síos ar a aghaidh agus dúirt Utnapáistim Imigéiniúil leis:
 'Aha, tuigim anois é, sin an fáth go mbíonn do leicne leonta, is d'aghaidh caite snoite;
 más headbanger den tsaghas sin thú ní hiontas ar bith é.'
 'Nee nocky noo,' arsa giúiré Bhéal Feirste, 'ní nach ionadh.'"(173)¹⁰

“Burlesque has been succinctly defined as “an incongruous imitation”; that is, it imitates the manner (the form and style) or else the matter of a serious literary work or of a literary genre, but makes the imitation amusing by a ridiculous disparity between the manner and the subject matter . . . If the form and style are elevated but the subject is low and trivial, we have “high burlesque”; if the subject is high in status and dignified but the style and manner of treatment are low and undignified, we have “low burlesque”.” (Abrams 17) In this particular case we can see how the epic, a traditionally dignified subject, high in status, of great historical importance, dealing with a theme of great profundity, i.e. death and immortality, is intermeshed with the Eurovision Song Contest, an event renowned as the epitome of kitsch and cultural bad taste, failure at O-level, and arguably also Monty Python’s ‘Knights of Nee’, from the film Monty Python’s Holy Grail.

The third narrative is the story of a mysterious doctor, Siamais Mac Gréine, who arrives in Dublin from the Middle East with a bundle of ancient parchments. After a visit to Newgrange, where it seems he discovers the secret of eternal life, and, following a series of unfortunate accidents, he takes the brain of an old man, Patrick Ó hUltánaigh, the body of a young boy, also Patrick Ó hUltánaigh (the old man's great-nephew), and the face of a paperboy, he puts them together and re-animates the lot to create a new person that he names 'Gilly'. This is an obvious and deliberate re-telling of the Frankenstein myth. We then follow Gilly as he makes his way through school. In the process he meets his old sweetheart, Sally Holme, from whom he has been separated in bitterness for many years since their idyllic childhood days on her father’s estate. This narrative in many ways runs parallel to the Gilgamesh Epic, e.g., the quest for immortality, the companionship and death of a close friend, Fánaí, and the confrontation with Humbaba in the forest. Eventually Gilly forms a punk band, and he meets his death at Sally’s hands during what turns out to be his first and final performance. For the most part this strand is told in the voice of an omniscient third person narrator. It is an odd mixture of Frankenstein, schoolboy antics, Bildungsroman¹¹, heightened fantasy, cross-references to the previous two narratives, and a rather unconventional love story.

The fourth narrative strand is another apparently autobiographical tale relating a summer on an unspecified island in the Gaeltacht where Séamas worked as a *ceannaire*, or group leader, following completion of his B.A. degree, concentrating in particular on his strained relationship with one particular student, Mícheál, who refuses to speak in Irish. It is presented to us primarily through the medium of dialogue;

“Séamus (It's Séamas, a Mhícheáil), is it true that you get drunk on coke? Coke-ólta. Honestly? You put aspirins in it?

Ordinary coke? That's impossible. Is it that seaweed you're chewing that makes you high as a buckin' kite? Ah no, a Mhícheáil, ní thuigeann tú cén sórt duine atá ionam. Is

¹⁰ It could be argued that it even descends into travesty; “The travesty mocks a particular work by treating its lofty subject in a jocular and grotesquely undignified manner and style.” (Abrams 18)

¹¹ “The primary meaning of Bildung is the individual’s quest or journey in pursuit of inner wholeness, inner maturity. In the nineteenth century German aestheticians appropriated this word in order to describe a particular kind of novel, the Bildungsroman, which had at its centre the Bildung of its hero, his journey towards fulfilment.” (Kilroy 68)

lon dubh mé. Séamas, arsa Buckó, if you're a blackbird, then I'm a great tit. Thuig Buckó an cluiche i gceart.

Dá mbeinn i mo lon dubh bheinn ag feadaíl is ag ceol,
Is leanfainn an long 'na bhfuil mo chéadsearc ag seol.

Delia Murphy. Séamus did anyone ever tell you that you were mad? A Mhícheáil, tá an 11-plus agam, deich O'levels, trí 'A' levels, agus céim onórach ó Ollscoil Nua Uladh. But Caoimhín says you get drunk on coke? A Mhícheáil, I've more wit than you'll ever have - to-wit, to-woo. Séamus, you really are mad. I just knew that I'd end up livin' with a pack of weirdos. A Mhícheáil, aithníonn ciaróg ciaróg eile. And what the hell does that mean? Beidh a fhios agat roimh i bhfad.

. . . Séamus, I never met anyone like you before. . . Séamas, did you really play in a punk group called 'Hot Vomit'? When did they let you out, really? Séamus, why are you combing your hair at that wall? The mirror's on the other wall. Tá a fhios agam, a Mhícheáil, ach bhí an scáthán ar an bhalla seo anuraidh. I don't understand. My God, I must be livin' with a loonie. . . a spare. . . a . . . A Mhícheáil, ná bí buartha, ní leagfainn lámh ort. Níl tú ach trí bliana déag d'aois. Tá cuid mhór le foghlaim agat. fan go mbí an Ghaeilge agat is go lé tú an leabhar is deireanaí uaim, tuigfidh tú domh ansin. You write books? In Irish? Agus i mBéal-rá chomh maith. Seans go mbeidh an chéad cheann eile sa Laidin nó san Iodáilis. But Latin's a dead language. Tá na teangacha uilig marbh, a Mhícheáil. Tá mo chuid Béarla ag fáil bháis; ní bheidh mo chuid Gaeilge i bhfad ina dhiaidh. Ní mhaireann teanga go brách, beidh teanga eile de dhíth orm. You're only saying that to make me think you're good at languages, just because you've got a degree in Irish. Agus i mBéarla chomh maith. Parlez-vous français? Je ne parle pas français, Michel. Theip orm ag 'O' level. Aidhe, and you probably failed a good many more. This dinner's cat. Bíodh múineadh ort, a Mhícheáil. But it is cat. Ar mhaith leat mo phiseanna, a Shéamais? Níor mhaith, a Sheáin, go raibh maith agat. Big lick, that's what you are, Seán. A Mhícheáil, bíodh múineadh ort. Ná bí ag caitheadh glasraí. Mura bhfuil dúil agat iontu, tig leat iad a fhágáil ar imeall an phláta. What'll we be doin' after dinner, Séamus? Rang Ceoil. Not another buckin' wrong keyhole. Whatever happened the ladogue tawbla?"(60-61)

One of the fulcrum moments of this narrative is when Séamas pretends to be gay in attempt to exact some sort of revenge on the particularly homophobic Mícheál. The tone of this narrative is unashamedly playful, incorporating slang, English, and pidgin Béarlaga, and it reads like the script of a radio play, the external environment or setting being of negligible importance compared to the emphasis on dialogue and aural stimulation.

One might argue that there is another narrative thread, that of the interjecting narrative voice, Séamas Mac Annaidh himself speaking in the first person, in the role of both illusory intermediary between reader and text and that of Creator of the story and the characters. This is characterised by pleas for communication, "Déanamais teangmháil. Cumarsáid. . . please."(48), extracts from songs, wordplay, punning, and an almost malicious bilingualism;

"Anyway, to get back to the story . . . and just in case you're reading this, Mickey, though I very much doubt it, I'll put in a few more lines in English to give your dog-eared dictionary a rest. . . twill annoy the facists too. Brucellosis an Bhéarlachais. Look into my eyes. All the same back to front."(61)

Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as a 'traditional' novel, and it would be tempting to assume that its almost flippant approach is indicative of a lack of thematic depth. Indeed, Robert Alter has warned us that "an astute critic, impelled by his own professional concern with formal experiment, can easily make a

piece of self-conscious fiction sound more profound, more finely resonant with implication, than it is in fact."(220) I would still hold that in this case we are faced with a text of startling complexity and profundity, despite, perhaps even because of its lighthearted and irreverent approach to language and form, and that we are more than justified in treating Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí as a prolonged meditation on death, the nature of self, the nature of reality, and immortality. Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is Séamas Mac Annaidh's quest for immortality in his pursuit of an unjustified self.

As an aid to the examination of the text I shall occasionally draw comparisons between Mac Annaidh's debut work and, among others, the works of Miguel de Unamuno, including much Unamuno literary criticism. In so doing, I feel that we can come to a clear and perhaps even startling understanding of Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, undoubtedly one of the most enigmatic works in the Irish language in the twentieth century.

Miguel de Unamuno was a Christian Existentialist, one of the leading lights of the Catholic Modernist movement, and one of the twentieth century's major original thinkers, greatly influenced by the works of Kierkegaard. Born in Bilbao on September 29th, 1864, Unamuno's political, literary and philosophical life was characterised by a typically modernist struggle against external formalism; "He wrote in all literary genres but submitted to none of them. He was never concerned with writing a novel, a lyric, a drama or a philosophical essay as such. In each case he attempted to remake the form in order that it might express not his personality, but his "personalism", that is to say, his basic belief that the will of the individual person and the spiritual conflicts produced by his passions contained the final sense of his and of all existence."(Gilman 582) He died in virtual isolation at his home in Salamanca on December 31, 1936.

". . .the lassitude of some readers in accepting his works with the author's own high estimation led to Unamuno's search for ways to get around the apparently sacred precepts of the critical establishment. Turning to one of his favourite pastimes, the invention of new words, Unamuno tried to confound his unenthusiastic critics with a new genre, the "nivola". In a prologue-epilogue which he wrote for a new edition of his second novel, Amor y Pedagogía (1902), the novelist speaks of having applied the term to one of his works that was slow in winning acceptance:

"a esta novela precedió otra de las mías, que fue Paz en La Guerra, relato histórico de la guerra civil carlista de 1874, y le siguieron otras ya en tono distinto. De estas que para dar asidero a terrible pereza mental de nuestro público - no de nuestro pueblo - llamé en un momento de mal humor nivolos. Relatos dramáticos acezantes, de realidades íntimas, entrañadas, sin bambalinas ni realismos en que suele faltar la verdadera, la eterna realidad, la realidad de la personalidad."

[This novel was preceded by another of mine, Paz en la Guerra, an historical tale concerning the Carlist civil war of 1874, and others were to follow, albeit in a distinctly different tone. In a moment of bad humour, and in order to prise the public, not the people, out of a dreadful mental stupor, I called them nivolas; dramatic tales to leave you breathless, concerning intimate realities, that delve deep into lives, without the theatrical backdrops or intimations of realism that usually lack the true, eternal reality, that of personality.]¹²

"It is interesting to note that Unamuno's term was adopted, not only by the reading public in general, but also by specialists in Unamuno criticism. The latter have continued to use it as a

¹² The translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

perfectly functional and meaningful tag in the discussion of Unamuno's work, as useful as any other generic denomination of literary history."(Foster 13)

Unamuno, however, maintained a somewhat ambivalent relationship with the whole issue of form and classification. Paul R. Olson writes that "it is well known that he profoundly disliked the establishment of any rigid categories, whether of human beings through application of partisan or sectarian labels, or of works of literature in the conventional names of modes and genres. . . It can be said concerning Unamuno's conception of the novel and of literary genres that it was, indeed, arbitrary, but this was largely because he regarded all definitions of genre as arbitrary and all genres of prose as open forms, to which no rigorous definition can be given. Equally as arbitrary as any definitions, he obviously believed, are the names of things to which they are applied."(Olson 13)¹³ In support of this, in the year before he died, Unamuno declared;

"Esta ocurrencia de llamarle nivola - ocurrencia que en rigor no es mía, como lo cuento en el texto - fue otra ingenua zorrería para intrigar a los críticos. Novela y tan novela como cualquiera otra que así sea." (Niebla 59)

[The decision to call it a 'nivola' - which in fact was not my idea at all, as I relate in the text - was just another ingenious trick with which to mislead the critics. It is a novel, and as much a novel as any other.]

claiming that coining the term 'nivola' was simply an act of provocation. Despite these disparaging remarks he nonetheless continued to use the term, first in 1902, as shown above, applying it often to perhaps his most famous novel Niebla, written in 1907 but not published until 1914. "In Niebla the central narrative is the life story of Augusto Pérez, principally in the relatively short period between his reaching adulthood and his death while still a young man. The structure of the narrative is primarily that of the sequence of events constituting his own life's experiences, and we may therefore regard it as a Bildungsroman, or novel concerned with the protagonist's development through successive 'stages on life's way'." (Olson 20)

Niebla could be described as a somewhat unconventional love story, concerning Augusto's romantic attraction to a young piano teacher, Eugenia Domingo del Arco. Unfortunately for him she is engaged to be married, but he persists, to the point of paying off the mortgage on a house she owns. Following what seems to be a definite rejection he turns his attention to Rosario, the laundry girl in his own house. The romantic intrigues continue, Eugenia finally consents to marry him, telling him that she has broken off the engagement, and she asks him to find a job for Mauricio, her ex-fiancé. This Augusto does, only to find himself jilted three days before the wedding as Mauricio and Eugenia elope.

Augusto decides to commit suicide, but before doing so, he goes to Salamanca to discuss the matter with Miguel de Unamuno, whose essay commenting on suicide he has read.

"He is astonished to learn that the author knows all about him and his intended suicide. Unamuno tells him he cannot kill himself because he is not really alive, being only a product of the author's imagination and therefore a mere fictional character.

¹³ It is interesting that Ó Muirí has expressed exactly the same opinion about Séamas Mac Annaidh; "Tá Mac Annaidh ag iarraidh a ráiteas féin a dhéanamh faoin saol agus faoin litríocht agus ní mian leis go gcuirfí aon cheangal air. Sa mhéad sin tá muid ag plé le frithghníomhú in éadan an chlaonadh atá ann lipéad a chur ar gach aon ní, nó gach saothar a chur in aicme chinnte liteartha." (1991; 82)

"When Augusto suggests that perhaps it is actually Unamuno who does not really exist, the author is so annoyed by this impertinence that he decides not merely to forbid his committing suicide but to kill him himself. This makes Augusto plead for his life, but the author is inflexible. Augusto therefore returns home feeling already near death, but when Liduvina [his cook] gives him a supper he eats voraciously, crying "Edo, ergo sum!" Finally he is overcome with weakness and asks Domingo [his servant] to put him to bed. He has a telegram sent to Unamuno, saying 'Se salió con la suya. He muerto' ['You got your way. I'm dead.], and shortly thereafter he cries out the name of Eugenia and falls dead.

"The author then tells us that when he received Augusto's telegram he wondered if he had done the right thing with his character, and even thought of reviving him so that he could commit suicide as he wished. That night Augusto appears in a dream to tell him such a thing would be impossible. With a final warning that it might, in fact, be Unamuno who is the fictional being, Augusto disappears into the dark mist of his own - and Unamuno's - unconscious."(Olson 20-26)

It seems that, narratively speaking, there is little common ground, between the love-story-of-sorts that is Niebla, and Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, a book about brain transplants, high-jinks in an Irish-College during a summer vacation, and wandering Mesopotamian kings in the desert. Points of comparison can, however, be found if we examine Mac Annaidh's energetic novel in the context of the *nivola*¹⁴, and of Unamuno's particular brand of literary theory. Unamuno's previously cited claim that it was not he who coined the term 'nivola' refers to the fictional Víctor Goti, "curioso prologuista situado simultáneamente en el mundo de la ficción y en el universo real, capaz de hablar y comportarse como si ambos constituyeran una sola esfera vital"(Stevens and Gullón 7) [a curious prologuist situated simultaneously in both the world of fiction and in the real universe, with the ability to speak and behave as though both made up the one vital sphere], a character who has since gained recognition in the list of authors in the British Library, and who, in the prologue to Niebla, claims credit for inventing the term, for inventing a new genre, which then allows him, theoretically, complete freedom from literary convention and expectation;

"Pues le he oído contar a Manuel Machado, el poeta, el hermano de Antonio, que una vez le llevó a don Eduardo Benot, para leérselo, un soneto que estaba en alejandrinos o en no sé qué otra forma heterodoxa. Se lo leyó y don Eduardo le dijo: «Pero ¡eso no es soneto!. . .» «No, señor - le contestó Machado - no es soneto, es *sonite*.» Pues así es como mi novela no va a ser novela, sino. . . ¿cómo dije?, *navilo*. . ., *nebulo*, no, no, *nivola*, eso, ¡*nivola*! Así nadie tendrá derecho a decir que deroga las leyes de su género. . . Invento el género e inventar un género no es más que darle un nombre nuevo, y le doy las leyes que me place. ¡Y mucho diálogo!"(Niebla 120)

["You see, I've heard it said of Manuel Machado, the poet, Antonio's brother, that he once gave a sonnet to Eduardo Benot to read which he had written in iambic hexameter or some other unorthodox form. Upon reading it Don Eduardo said to him; "But this isn't a sonnet!" "No, Señor," replied Machado, "it's not a sonnet, it's a *sonite*." In the same way my novel won't be a novel, but a . . .what was it again?. . .*navilo*. . ., *nebulo*. . ., no, no, *nivola*, that's it, *nivola*! So now no-one will have the right to say that it breaks the rules of its genre. It is I who invent the genre, and inventing a genre is no more than giving it a new name. I can insist on whatever rules I please, and lots of dialogue!"]

¹⁴ See McCann, A.

But, whatever Víctor Goti's aspirations to reality, it is clear to many critics that the *nivola* is, in fact, indicative of at least a sub-genre of the novel, radical at the time of its inception, and seen now in the wider context of revisionist, avant-garde, modernist, or even post-modernist literature, art, and culture. "Despite [Unamuno's] later attempts to de-emphasize the difference between the *nivola* and the novel, it is clear that the former has its own characteristics"(Olson 82), and that Niebla constitutes his most concrete statement of literary work as *nivola*.

Again it is Olson who is most explicit in his attempt to quantify exactly what characterises a *nivola*, (although he warns that, considering Unamuno's urge to continually 'indefinir, confundir', "any attempt to give a rigorous definition of Unamuno's conception of the novel will necessarily be highly problematic"(10)), and he summarises it by identifying the following criteria:

- The appearance that the work is vivíparo, 'a lo que salga', without previous preparation, brought forth in a burst of spontaneous creativity, with a plot consisting of events which seem to move in simple succession, not linked by rigorous determinacy either of logic or of an apparent 'plan previo' of the author.¹⁵
- The creation of names, "Redende Namen" ('Speaking Names'), which symbolise or in some way signify something about each character's personality, condition, or position in the structure of interpersonal relationships.
- Meta-literary as well as self-reflexive, becoming conscious of itself not only in its general literariness but in its specific textuality.
- Apparent confusion of the planes of fiction and reality.
- Frankness concerning the realities of physiological existence, especially characterised by an awareness of death.
- Predominance of talk - an almost total absence of description of material setting and historical background.
- Profoundly humorous as well as profoundly serious. Its humour is that of the absurd, of disparity and contradiction, contradiction ultimately between the seriousness of its literary, psychological, existential, and metaphysical themes and the absurdity of its characters and situations.

To these may be added a final criterion, that the *nivola* is characteristically autobiographical. In fact, as we shall see later, Unamuno regarded all novelistic works as essentially autobiographies.

It seemed obvious to me that these criteria, this basic framework, could be applied equally well to Mac Annaidh's Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, as outlined in my essay "Cuaifeach Mo Lionndugh: Athfhéachaint ar Chuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí Mhic Annaidh mar Nivola" (An tUltach Feb. 1997)¹⁶, and on further study it became evident that an increased understanding

¹⁵ "Despite [Unamuno's] reluctance to establish conventional generic distinctions among his prose works, he has, nevertheless, made one basic distinction which has proved useful to his critics who seek to enhance understanding of his work by identifying and analyzing its basic types. This is the distinction he made a decade before the publication of Niebla, between the work of what he called an *escritor ovíparo*, who does the research into the historical background of his novel, writes preliminary sketches of his characters, and carefully plans the structure of his entire work, and that of the *escritor vivíparo*, who writes *a lo que salga* ['according to whatever comes out'], without previous conscious preparation, in a burst of spontaneous creativity." (Olson 13) Viviparous - from the Latin *vivere*, to live, and *-parus*, from *parere*, to produce, bring forth. Oviparous - from *ovum*, egg, and *-parus*.

¹⁶ In this essay I take each of the characteristics of the *nivola* in turn and apply them to Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, including a brief examination of the role of metafiction in the text. I found startling correlation between Unamuno's sub-genre and Mac Annaidh's novel. This thesis takes a slightly different approach, preferring to maintain a singularly thematic focus on death and immortality.

of the work of Miguel de Unamuno is relevant, even crucial, to a deepening of our awareness in relation to Mac Annaidh's text.

Martin Esslin has written of the plays of Samuel Beckett; "Instead of a linear development, they present their author's intuition of the human condition by a method that is essentially polyphonic; they confront their audience with an organized structure of statements and images that interpenetrate each other and that must be apprehended in their totality, rather like the different themes in a symphony, which gain meaning by their simultaneous interaction."(45) Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is a similarly fascinating, complex, and multifaceted work, a 'book-web' in much the same way as Flann O'Brien's At-Swim-Two-Birds has been described (Clissman 90). Its words and images echo and resonate through the pages, providing for the text a structural unity that is complemented, I hope to show, by its thematic unity, as Mac Annaidh rises to the challenge of death in his quest for immortality and his pursuit of the unjustified self.

Chapter One

'Todo al fin es muerte . . . distintos modos de morir.'
Clara Passafari

'Nuestras vidas son los ríos que van a dar
en la mar que es el morir'.
Jorge Manrique

The central unifying factor in Cuairfeach Mo Londubh Buí is the theme of death. Through narrative, metaphor, characterisation, and allusion Mac Annaidh weaves a web of fatality through the lines of this complex text. Before examining references to death in the text I think it necessary to place these references in the context of a century that has found death and a particularly fruitful source of inquiry in literature.

One thing is certain. We are all going to die. Modern life, however, has complicated the issue. In the last century so many of our support structures have been shaken at their foundations. Those things that provided the warmth of security - mystery, morality, faith, family, community - have been assailed by urbanism, anxiety, and a continuous feeling that 'the centre cannot hold'.

"Life in cities was not merely a shift from habits, usages and routines; it involved a strain on the sense of adequacy of city dwellers to face the more intangible problems. Most devastating was the break in the ways in which individuals associated with each other, in family relations, in social gatherings, in the mutual interests or separation of youth from their elders. The strain of adjustment made itself felt, then, both in superficial and materialways, also on social and psychic levels.

It was not alone the cities which felt the impact of industrialism or even of urbanism. The city, invaded from the small towns and the open country, developed the seeds of a new culture, and with them, in turn invaded the rural areas from which its inhabitants had come. Science flourished in the concentrations of people, and so also did the centers of art and culture. For these the non-city folk were as eager as their urban cousins. Science and technology along with other advances made transportation and communication rapid, easy, and extensively available. Railroads, highways, automobiles, airplanes, telegraph, telephone, radio, television, motion pictures, brought the words, actions, problems and strains of the city to the rural areas. Today the latter are "citified", only in less degree than the cities. Urbanism is at present not a matter of city as over against the country side, but a matter rather of degree, with its most intense concentration in metropolises, its least in the out of the way places." (Bowman in Jackson 154)

There has been a massive shift in the focus of experience; "The problem of mankind today . . . is precisely the opposite to that of men in the comparatively stable periods of those great coordinating mythologies which are now known as lies. Then all meaning was in the group, in the great anonymous forms, none in the self-expressive individual; today no meaning is in the group - none in the world: all is in the individual."(Campbell 388)

This is at the heart of the paradox. While the group structures have been disintegrating on one hand, the level of emotional and psychological support for individuals decreasing, on the other hand the idea of self-as-unity has become distilled - unity in multiplicity. Where on the

one hand we feel as though the fabric of life is disintegrating, on the other hand we are being drawn closer together, superficially at least, by the power of the world communications network - unity through multiplicity.

In this world we are faced with two distinct choices in our treatment of death; ". . . one may either accept death as qualifying all one's possibilities, or else exclude it from consideration for as long as possible."(MacQuarrie 196) The typical response is that of avoidance, evasion of what Heidegger called "the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all"(MacQuarrie 196), giving the general impression that death is not something of any great concern to the greater number of people. "But there is . . . something curiously paradoxical about this attitude of mind. At another level, death has 'many terrors' for us . . . If life is so precious death cannot but be dreaded, and most people, I suspect, think that way if they are confronted with imminent death themselves. To know that you, like everyone else, are bound to die some day is one thing; it appears to be quite another to be faced with the stark reality within a short and measurable time . . . The reason for this may be a curious inability, woven, if one may so put it, in a cunning and kindly way into our nature, to envisage the passing of time in any realistic way. . . . This may account in part for the curious way in which we take our own mortality, as part of the general lot of mankind, so lightly, while also, in another vein, thinking of death as a dread and terrible eventuality."(Lewis 3)

For those that confront the reality and presence of death in their own lives there is an accompanying sense of powerlessness; "Broken as persons in the face of death we wilt before its sting and waste away from lack of nourishment. We yearn to be embraced in our aloneness, but feel only the depths of the void. The touch of death appears to offer blank non-existence as the fruit of our labours on life's journey. We so desperately require life-giving food to revitalise our spent forces. We are incapable of saying "Yes" to the facts of our experience. We cannot willingly, personally accept nor embrace circumstances of such pain and suffering."(McCann, J. 45), and with this powerlessness comes an ontological insecurity¹⁷, a deeply rooted anxiety; "Man is anxious because he is agonizingly aware of the threat of annihilation to his precious individuality, a threat from which there is no final and positive escape except death, the thing he most fears."(McElroy 5), a sense of 'stoiteachas'(Ó Direáin), the uprootedness that has become associated with the modern condition, typified by Malraux's Condition Humaine.

Perhaps it is the 'tradition' of the Absurd that has managed to capture the zeitgeist of the modern era at its extremities more than any other - embracing its terrors, making them familiar. "A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. He is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. The divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity"(Camus qtd. in Esslin 23). "'Absurd' originally means 'out of harmony', in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition: 'out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical.' In common usage 'absurd' may simply mean 'ridiculous', but this is not the sense in which Camus uses the word, and in which it is used when we speak of the Theatre of the Absurd. In

¹⁷ "Ontology is concerned with the objects of knowledge, with reality considered in the widest, deepest, and most fundamental aspects under which it is conceived by the human mind: with the being and becoming of reality, its possibility and its actuality, its essence and its existence, its unity and plurality; with the aspects of truth, goodness, perfection, beauty, which it assumes in relation with our minds; with the contingency of finite reality and the grounds and implications both of its actual existence and of its intelligibility; with the modes of its concrete existence and behaviour, the supreme categories of reality as they are called: substance, individual nature, and personality; quantity, space and time, quality and relation, causality and purpose."(Coffey 23)

an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defined his understanding of the term as follows: 'Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.'(Esslin 23) The heart of the Absurd would seem, then, to be one of absolute despair, but the saving grace of the Absurd has been the driving motivation behind it:

"The Theatre of the Absurd . . . bravely faces up to the fact that for those to whom the world has lost its central explanation and meaning, it is no longer possible to accept art forms still based on the continuation of standards and concepts that have lost their validity; that is, the possibility of knowing the laws of conduct and ultimate values, as deducible from a firm foundation of revealed certainty about the purpose of man in the universe.

In expressing the tragic sense of loss at the disappearance of ultimate certainties the Theatre of the Absurd, by a strange paradox, is also a symptom of what probably comes nearest to being a genuine religious quest in our age: an effort, however timid and tentative, to sing, to laugh, to weep - and to growl - if not in praise of God . . . at least in search of a dimension of the Ineffable; an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to instil in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primal anguish, to shock him out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical, complacent, and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness."(Esslin 399)

The writers of the Absurd integrated death, meaninglessness, silence and isolation into their system, stripping them, if only momentarily, of their strangeness, their sense of threat, making them ordinary, a sort of negation through affirmation.¹⁸ Only by coming face to face with Death could they feel complete in their incompleteness. As Heidegger says; "Death, honestly accepted and anticipated, can become an integrating factor in an authentic existence. . . . Death is not merely a negative phenomenon. To anticipate death with resoluteness is to find a certain wholeness in it. It sets a boundary to my existence and so makes possible a unity of existence. Furthermore, as that possibility that is above all my own and that I must take upon myself, death sets me free from the 'they'."(qtd. in MacQuarrie 198, 218)

Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí can be seen in this light. Death is an all-pervasive and multifaceted presence in the text. In recreating death in and through the text he attempts to objectify his experience of it for himself, whereby he can examine its role in his own life and his responses to it, and objectify it for for the reader, whereby we can perhaps accept the shared legacy of mortality.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, one of the major structural components of the work, is also one of the main ways in which death is maintained as a constant concern throughout the text, both in the re-telling of the epic in translation and in the use of the parallel narrative of Siamais and Gilly. Being the first recorded example of the storyteller-listener or author-reader relationship, and bearing in mind Sandars' claim that "if Gilgamesh is not the first human hero, he is the first tragic hero of whom anything is known"(7), it is clear how the Gilgamesh Epic can stand out as an archetype story, symbolic of human mortality, and it is from this that the use of the epic in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí draws much of its weight. As we have seen, the epic is dominated by "a single idea, like the refrain of the medieval poet, 'Timor mortis conturbat me'", and the tone of the original text, in large part carried over virtually unchanged into Irish, is profoundly shaped by the Mesopotamian world view:

¹⁸ It could be argued that film director Quentin Tarantino has tried the same, through overkill and bloodshed, in Reservoir Dogs (Polygram, 1991) and Pulp Fiction (Miramax, 1994).

“The inhabitant of ancient Mesopotamia . . . was instructed to believe that the gods had created mankind to serve them by building temples and offering regular sacrifices. But that was mankind's only *raison d'être*; beyond that there was nothing for which its members could strive or hope. To their human servants the gods were generally thought to be benevolent and to prosper their undertakings, provided that men in turn were loyal and diligent in their service. Disobedience would result in the withdrawal of divine providence, and the disobedient would thereby be exposed to the assault of maleficent demons who brought disease and other misfortunes. But divine providence extended only to this life; for the gods had withheld immortality from their creatures.”(Brandon 151)

There is another contributing factor to the profoundly pessimistic tone of the epic, being "at least in part, a consequence of the insecurity of life in Mesopotamia, and of those 'overtones of anxiety' which Henri Frankfort described as being due to 'a haunting fear that the unaccountable and turbulent powers may at any time bring disaster to human society'. In the character of Gilgamesh, from the beginning, we are aware of an over-riding preoccupation with fame, reputation, and the revolt of mortal man against the laws of separation and death."(Sandars 22), or, as Sandars again writes, "The cause of the pervasive pessimism of Mesopotamian thought lay partly in the precariousness of life in the city-states, dependent on vagaries of flood and drought and turbulent neighbours; dependent also on the character of the gods, who were powers held responsible for such conditions."(22-23)

This pessimism echoes the over-riding spirit of modern society, Auden's Age of Anxiety (1947), where support systems are few and far between, and where God has been pronounced dead by Nietzsche;

“Feeling alone in an alien world is now the emotional property of Everyman. So many individuals feel not only isolated, cut off from friendship and acquaintance, to say nothing of love, but alone even in their intimacies that sociologists and psychotherapists are recognizing . . . that loneliness is a major distress of our time and one peculiarly related to that part of the identity problem which may be called the division between the individual and his world.” (Ruitenbeek 23)

The Gilgamesh Epic would seem, then, to be the perfect complement to a modern meditation on death, which is what I believe Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí to be. "Man's attempt at different ages and in various cultural environments to make sense of his experience of life and to understand his own nature and destiny is a subject of deep and abiding interest and one of basic concern to the historian. Thus the Epic of Gilgamesh is a document of unrivalled value for the insight that it affords into the *Weltanschauung* of the ancient Mesopotamians" (Brandon 162), and, I would argue, of modern western civilisation when viewed in the context of the Cuaifeach.

"Possibly some innate realism prevented the Mesopotamians from seeing death other than objectively. But the Epic of Gilgamesh remains an eloquent witness to the poignancy of their interrogation of the meaning of human life and destiny."(Brandon 164) Mortality is the abiding awareness in the Gilgamesh Epic; "Throughout the narrative of the adventures of Gilgamesh the presence of the underworld can be felt."(Sandars 28), and it remains so when used in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. Gilgamesh is never far from death. In the Sandars text he loses his best friend Enkidu;

"He touched his heart but it did not beat, nor did he lift his eyes again. When Gilgamesh touched his heart it did not beat. So Gilgamesh laid a veil, as one veils the bride, over his friend. He began to rage like a lion, like a lioness robbed of her whelps.

This way and that he paced round the bed, he tore out his hair and strewed it around. He dragged off his splendid robes and flung them down as though they were abominations."(Sandars 95)

Enkidu's death in the Cuaifeach echoes Oates' death on the Scott Expedition; "Agus ansin oíche amháin, nuair a bhí an sneachta ina luí go domhain taobh amuigh agus gála geimhridh ag screadadh an dín den phálas shiúil Enkidú amach ag rá le Giolgamais cróga nach mbeadh sé i bhfad amuigh. Níor phill sé."(125) The death is, however, retold as part of the parallel Gilly narrative, with Fánaí (Seán de Paor), almost a caricature of adolescent angst, standing in for Enkidu, and a car-crash the agent of his destruction;

"Chonaic sé anois go raibh an bás i ndán don duine. Bhí a chara óg marbh agus bheadh sé féin sínte sa chré leis roimh i bhfad; níorbh ionann an saol úr seo agus biseach an bháis. Tháinig an codladh air i ndiaidh tamaill agus bhí an bás ag bréagadh an tsaol mhóir agus a shaol óg ag bréagnú an bháis. Ba chuma leis, áfach, ó bhí Seán dílis de Paor marbh."(147)

Both the death of Enkidu and the death of Fánaí in the Gilly narrative serve to resign Gilgamesh and Gilly respectively to the reality of Death. But only when the secret of immortality has been snatched from his grasp does Gilgamesh finally accept his inevitable fate;

"Gilgamesh saw a well of cool water and he went down and bathed; but deep in the pool there was lying a serpent, and the serpent sensed the sweetness of the flower. It rose out of the water and snatched it away, and immediately it sloughed its skin and returned to the well. Then Gilgamesh sat down and wept, the tears ran down his face . . ." (Sandars 117)

Mac Annaidh has, of course, got his own version of events;

"D'fhág sé céad slán ag an oileán inár bhraith sé a shaol, agus ó tharla go raibh an ghrian ag spalpadh anuas air bhí sé den bharúil nach ndéanfadh sé dochar dá laghad an planda a thriomú. Leath sé amach ar an deic é agus luigh sé féin síos ar an taobh eile den bhád a dhéanamh bolg le gréin, agus thit sé ina thoirchim suain. Nuair a mhúscaill se, áfach, bhí an planda sciobtha ag duine éigin, ach níl insint ar cé a ghoid é. Dúirt bean liom go ndúirt bean léi gur ghoid nathair nimhe ón úllord é, ach tá mé féin den bharúil gur thóg céirseach aerach aigeanta é. Nach é sin an fáth a mbíonn siad ag síorcheiliúradh sa choillidh chraobhaigh ar maidin is trathnóna? Nuair a d'amharc Giolgamais lena shúile féin ar an deic fholamh, bhris an gol amach air, bhí a chuid súl ar maos sna logaill aige, chaoin sé uisce a chinn agus thuig sé nach raibh I ndán dó ach an bás. Bhí Enkidú marbh, is é sínte sa chré, agus bheadh sé féin ina luí taobh leis roimh i bhfad."(202)

"With empty hands, his quest in vain, Gilgamesh finally returns to Uruk. The moral of his failure needs no underlining. Man is by nature mortal and he must learn to accept his fate and adjust his view of life accordingly."(Brandon 161)

Another one of the ways in which this mortality, epitomised by long-suffering and weariness, is communicated is in the use of the description motif of the traveller who has struggled long and hard:

"Then Siduri said to him, 'If you are that Gilgamesh who seized and killed the Bull of Heaven, who killed the watchman of the cedar forest, who overthrew Humbaba that

lived in the forest, and killed the lions in the passes of the mountain, why are your cheeks so starved and why is your face so drawn? Why is despair in your heart and your face like the face of one who has made a long journey? Yes, why is your face burned from heat and cold, and why do you come here wandering over the pastures in search of the wind?

Gilgamesh answered her, 'And why should not my cheeks be starved and my face drawn? Despair is in my heart and my face is the face of one who has made a long journey, it was burned with heat and with cold. Why should I not wander over the pastures in search of the wind . . . ? Because of my brother I am afraid of death, because of my brother I stray through the wilderness and cannot rest.' (Sandars 101) [My emphasis]

or again:

"Now Utnapishtim, where he lay at ease, looked into the distance and he said in his heart, musing to himself, 'Why does the boat sail here without tackle and mast; why are the sacred stones destroyed, and why does the master not sail the boat? That man who comes is none of mine; where I look I see a man whose body is covered with skins of beasts. Who is this who walks up the shore behind Urshanabi, for surely he is no man of mine?' So Utnapishtim looked at him and said, 'What is your name, you who have come here wearing the skins of beasts, with your cheeks starved and your face drawn? Where are you hurrying to now? For what reason have you made this great journey, crossing the seas whose passage is difficult? Tell me the reason for your coming.'

He replied, 'Gilgamesh is my name. I am from Uruk, from the house of Anu.' Then Utnapishtim said to him, 'If you are Gilgamesh, why are your cheeks so starved and your face drawn? Why is despair in your heart and your face like the face of one who has made a long journey? Yes, why is your face burned with heat and cold; and why do you come here, wandering over the wilderness in search of the wind?'

Gilgamesh said to him, 'Why should not my cheeks be starved and my face drawn? Despair is in my heart and my face is the face of one who has made a long journey. It was burned with heat and with cold. Why should I not wander over the pastures? My friend, my younger brother who seized and killed the Bull of Heaven and overthrew Humbaba in the cedar forest, my friend who was very dear to me and endured dangers beside me, Enkidu, my brother whom I loved, the end of mortality has overtaken him. I wept for him seven days and seven nights till the worm fastened on him. Because of my brother I am afraid of death; because of my brother I stray through the wilderness. His fate lies heavy upon me. How can I be silent, how can I rest? He is dust and I shall die also and be laid in the earth for ever.' Again Gilgamesh said, speaking to Utnapishtim, 'It is to see Utnapishtim whom we call the Faraway that I have come this journey. For this I have wandered over the world, I have crossed many difficult ranges, I have crossed the seas, I have wearied myself with travelling; my joints are aching, and I have lost acquaintance with sleep which is sweet. My clothes were worn out before I came to the house of Siduri. I have killed the bear and hyena, the lion and the panther, the tiger, the stag and the ibex, all sorts of wild game and the small creatures of the pastures. I ate their flesh and I wore their skins; and that was how I came to the gate of the young woman, the maker of wine, who barred her gate of pitch and bitumen against me. But from her I had news of the journey; so then I came to Urshanabi the ferryman, and with him I crossed over the waters of death. Oh, father Utnapishtim, you who have entered the assembly of the gods, I wish to question you concerning the living and the dead, how shall I find the life for which I am searching?'

Utnapishtim said, 'There is no permanence. Do we build a house to stand for ever, do we seal a contract to hold for all time? Do brothers divide an inheritance to keep for ever, does the flood-time of rivers endure? It is only the nymph of the dragon-fly who

sheds her larva and sees the sun in his glory. From the days of old there is no permanence. The sleeping and the dead, how alike they are, they are like a painted death. What is there between the master and the servant when both have fulfilled their doom? When the Anunnaki, the judges, come together, and Mammetun the mother of destinies, together they decree the fates of men. Life and death they allot but the day of death they do not disclose.'

Then Gilgamesh said to Utnapishtim the Faraway, 'I look at you now, Utnapishtim, and your appearance is no different from mine; there is nothing strange in your features. I thought I should find you like a hero prepared for battle, but you lie here taking your ease on your back. Tell me truly, how was it that you came to enter the company of the gods and to possess everlasting life?' Utnapishtim said to Gilgamesh, 'I will reveal to you a mystery, I will tell you a secret of the gods.' (Sandars 107)

This is retained in the Irish version at the beginning of the novel, translated more or less verbatim. It is interesting to contrast the following passage with the low burlesque passage referred to in the introduction¹⁹:

"Bhí teas ag éirí ón ghaineamh sa staid. Bhí Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil, seanlaoch uaibhreach uasal, ina shuí istigh faoi leac mhór agus chonaic sé lena shúile féin duine ag teacht chuige ach níor aithin sé é, bíodh go raibh súil aige mar a bhí súil an iolair ann. Chuir sé ceist air:

'Cad is ainm duit, tusa a bhfuil seanchraiceann á chaitheamh agat, tusa a bhfuil do leicne leonta agus d'aghaidh snoite? Cad é an deifir seo atá ort? Oscail do shúile romham. Déanamais caidreamh.'

D'fhreagair an duine é:

'Giogamais is ainm domh. As Cathair Uruk domh. De shliocht ársa uasal Anna mé.'

Agus dúirt Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil leis:

'Más tú Giogamais, cad chuige a bhfuil do leicne leonta agus d'aghaidh caite snoite? Cad é an galar dubhach seo ar do chroí? Tá tú mar a bheadh duine a mbeadh turas fada déanta aige. Tá d'aghaidh dóite leis an ghrian. Cad chuige a bhfuil tú ag siúl san fhásach ar lorg na Gaoithe?'

Agus dúirt Giogamais leis:

'Cad chuige nach mbeadh m'aghaidh caite snoite agus mo leicne leonta? Tá galar dubhach ar mo chroí agus is í m'aghaidh aghaidh an duine a bhfuil turas fada déanta aige. Tá mé dóite ag teas is ag fuacht. Cad chuige nach siúlfainn san fhásach?'

Agus dúirt Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil leis:

'Is mise Rí Uruk, agus ní sheasfaidh aon neach saolta romham nach leagfainn gan stró ach anois tá mé faoi chrann smola. Mharaigh mo chara óg, Enkidú, Tarbh na bhFlaitheas agus threascair sé Humbaba sa choill chéadrais agus bhí sé mar a bheadh deartháir agam, agus is iomaí sáinn ina raibh muid ach anois tá an chríoch i bhfeidhm air. Tá a tháin déanta. Chaoin mé é ar feadh seacht lá agus chaoin mé é ar feadh seacht n-oíche go dtí gur thosaigh na péisteanna talaimh air. Mar gheall ar mo dheartháir, tá eagla orm roimh an Bhás; is mar gheall ar mo dheartháir a shiúlaim san fhásach. Tá a chrann, a dhán, ina luí go trom orm. Cad é mar is féidir liomsa a bheith ciúin? Is dusta anois é agus gheobhaidh mé féin bás agus beidh mé sínte sa chré taobh leis.'

Agus dúirt Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil leis agus é ag amharc go géar air lena shiúil a bhí mar a bheadh súil iolair ann:

'Ní bhaineann do scéal sa liomsa. Imigh anois óir níl dúil dá laghad agam sa chine dhaonna.'

Agus dúirt Giogamais leis:

¹⁹ It might be argued, indeed, that the later descent into kitsch casts a cold eye on the earlier passages, in retrospect, as linguistic constructs of mere convention.

'Tháinig mé le cuairt a thabhairt ar Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil. Shiúil mé an domhan. Tá mo chuid éadaí caite agam agus níl aithne ar chodladh milis agam a thuilleadh. Mharaigh mé an Traonach is an tIolar, an Lon Dubh is an Chailleach Oíche. D'ith mé an fheoil; chaith mé an craiceann agus na cleití.'

Chaith sé na cleití ar an ghaineamh roimhe agus dúirt sé:

'A Athair Utnapáistím, más tú atá i do shuí sna Flaithis, is mian liomsa ceist a chur ort i dtaca le bás is le beatha - cad é mar a gheobhas mé an saol síoraí mar atá sé de dhíth orm?'

D'fhreagair Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil é, ag baint taca as bata righin láidir chun éirigh ina sheasamh:

'Níl aon buanseasmhacht ann a thuilleadh. An mairfidh an teach go brách? Imíonn focal le gaoth. Ó bhí na seanlaethanta ann tá deireadh le buanseasmhacht. Tá an codladh agus an Bás in aon leaba amháin. Gineann siad beirt beatha. Tá an bás i ndán don uile dhuine ach ní inseofar lá nó uair.'

Agus dúirt Giolgamais leis go tarcaisneach:

'Bhí mé ag déanamh gur laoch a bhí ionat ach bhí tú i do shuí anseo ag glacadh do scíthe. Inis domh, mar sin, cad é mar a d'éirigh leat fáil isteach i nDáil na nDéithe?'

Chaith Utnapáistím an bata uaidh agus dúirt:

'Nochtfaidh mé rún, fógróidh mé rúndiamhra na ndéithe.'"(9)

The description "aghaidh caite snoite agus . . . leicne leonta . . ." is extended by analogy as a marker for the mortal condition of other characters in the Cuaifeach, across the narratives: Séamas himself; "Amharc ar mo leicne - nach bhfuil siad leonta, agus m'aghaidh caite, snoite?"(86), Siamais; "Bhí a aghaidh caite snoite, a leicne leonta, a éadan cruptha is na súile ar maos sna logaill aige."(35), the paper-boy; "Bhí leicne leonta ar an ghasúr, bhí a aghaidh caite snoite is a éadan cruptha craptha. Marbh a bhí sé."(22), Oisín mac Fhinn (68), Sally Holme (96), and Enkidú (125). This description motif in the 'call and answer' format performs another function as well; "In the case of the words with which Gilgamesh is greeted by the various characters whom he meets in his search for Utnapishtim, and his long replies, the effect is cumulative; each repetition enhances the sense of weariness, frustration, and obstinate endeavour, and must be retained; or again where repetitions in similar words, with slight variations, increase tension and lead to a climax . . ." (Sandars 48) Gilgamesh leaves us in no doubt that he is deeply troubled by our mortal fate.

Whereas the Gilgamesh Epic might seem to be the most obvious reminder of mortality in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, Mac Annaidh has managed to weave a Death Awareness into the fabric of the text. One of the simplest ways in which this is done is by relating deaths in the text, almost at random; "Dúradh gur maraíodh gasúr amháin, laoch ceart, nuair a thit sé ó bhinn an samhradh sin a chuaigh thart agus é stiúgtha ólta"(95) - deaths of the anonymous and of the famous - in such a way that death is confirmed as The Great Leveller; "Sciostar iad a sheasann ar ardán, roimh i bhfad."(200) It does not discriminate. Mac Annaidh incorporates twenty-eight deaths into the text in this fashion, in a litany suggestive of Petrarch's Trionfi. (Bergin 146) In most cases no evaluation or judgement is made on the deaths, they are simply stated, stated simply.

There is, however, a more subtle intimation of the human condition throughout the text, and that is the way in which restlessness is seen to be all-pervasive; in the narration, in the lives of the characters, and in the style and structure of the novel. In the general thematic context of death this restlessness can certainly be linked to the imminence of the final hour.

Ursula LeGuin has written that "narrative is a strategem of mortality. It is a means, a way of living. It does not seek immortality; it does not seek to triumph over or escape from time . . .

It asserts, affirms, participates in directional time, time experienced, time as meaningful."(qtd. in Huston 713) Our "curious inability, woven, if one may so put it, in a cunning and kindly way into our nature, to envisage the passing of time in any realistic way"(Lewis 3), as noted above, is challenged in the narration as Mac Annaidh insists on continually marking out an illusory real-time in his day-in-the-life autobiographical narrative at irregular intervals: 8.30am, 9.50am, 10.30, 11.00am, 12.44, 13.50, 14.18, 14.27, 14.39, 14.45, 14.57, 15.07, 15.11, 04.38. The passing of time, instead of being a comfort, even a deception, becomes a reminder that life is always movement forwards, onwards, towards an inevitable conclusion, leading to the age-old metaphor of the river; "Téann an aois i bhfeidhm de réir a chéile agus imíonn duine mar a imíonn sruth na hÉirne."(200), a reminder that we, like Séamas, have an appointment to keep; "Bhí coinne ag Séamas Caoimhín Mícheál Mac Anna le seanchairde dá chuid i lár chearnóg Inis Caillí ar a trí"(126). Séamas' narrative interjections are sprinkled with statements of haste; "Tá fuadar fúm"(26), "I've no time to explain, tá an t-am ag sleamhnú thart."(164), "Bhí mún cait ar an chlósscríobhán agus bhí an t-am ag sleamhnú thart. Tempus fugit . . ." (192), very much loyal to the spirit of Lewis Carroll's White Rabbit.

But where we find the effect of passing time in one of the narrative strands, it is clear that when we examine all of the strands together the actual structure of the novel, the multi-planed narratives, and their apparently random sequence militate against even passing time acting as a comfortable yardstick or support. The constantly changing narratives add to an overwhelming sense of panic and uneasiness. "Is cuma faoin scéal" becomes from the start one of the many mantras of the book, hinting that maybe the process is the priority, that maybe it is more important to convey unease, and ultimately to communicate something about the nature of the death experience, than to participate in the unfolding of a strictly linear and 'traditional' narrative, despite the fact that the 'traditional' narrative itself is sometimes seen as indicative of mortality; "No one can make up good stories without accepting the idea of death. Stories *per se*, stories by their very nature, evolve through time and bespeak their own mortality."(Huston 713) "Is cuma faoin scéal" is also highly suggestive of "the need to write and the meaningless of all writing [which] is the paradoxical law under which the modern artist seems to operate."(Josipovici 110)

This apparently haphazard approach is also to be found in the style of the autobiographical narratives and the primary narrator's voice, a style that has come to be known as 'stream-of-consciousness'. Mac Annaidh's writing style here has been greatly influenced by the writings of Peigí Rose in An t-Ultach magazine, themselves often characterised implicitly, and explicitly, by unease²⁰;

"Pé áit ionam a bhfuil an corraí, an suaitheadh seo, tá sé ann. Míshuaimhneas domhain. Angst. Isteach i mo ghluaisteán. An ród suas. Iompú ag crosbhealach. An ród anuas. Mar bhó ar dáir. Aoibheall. Ó tuigim an teoiric. Ní mór domh bheith mature. Fág síos do pheann. Tarraing ort De Bhaldráithe. Scríbhneoir greannmhar thusa ag scríobh amach as foclóir. Mature - aibí, in inmhe, in aois fir (mná). An bhfuil Gaeilge ar bith ar 'mature'? Tá an fear sin iontach aibí. Niuc! Ní sin é go dearfa. Ní mór domh bheith mature. Gach cor i mo shaol a chur go séimh réidh faoi dhéin mo réasúin. Sin é a dhealaíos sinn ó na hainmhithe. An réasún. Saintréith na daonnachta. Tuigim an teoiric. Is é ár ndualgas a bheith daonna, iomláine ár ndaonnachta a bhaint amach. Céard é sin? Pé rud é tá na réasúin ann. Don't cry for me, Argentina.

Tá an fharráige idir mé is tú. Goirteacht. Goirteacht na mara. Sáile. Cáitheadh. Cearrbhach Bheité ag tóin Ros na Searrach. Tá an tEarrach linn. Fás. Bás. Fás. Cáisc. Hopkins. Tolstoy. Romantic Russia lives on. Solzhenitsyn. Pasternak, Zhivago. Sneachta. Fairsingeacht. An Plaza, Sráid Dorset. Isteach liom in oíche na

²⁰Mac Annaidh admitted being influenced by Peigí Rose in a personal interview, Nov. 1996.

cathrach. Ar lasadh le dánta Lara. Scríobhfidh dánta duit, a ghrá. On Raglan Road. I gave her poems to say. And her own dark hair. Tá an fharraige idir mé is tú. Goirteacht an chroí. Griofad. Guairneán. Guairdeall. Grá?"(Peigí Rose 2)

Mac Annaidh's style is often identical; "Cloch. Súil. Uachtar. Deora. Cliabhán na gCloch."(17), "Tá fuadar fúm . . . Tá mo shaol ag imeacht le sruth. Puth sa ghaoth. Tantum ergo."(26), "Cleite ar an talamh. Dubh agus bán. Thosaigh Beite a scríobh litreach leis an chleite gandail. Thosaigh Beite a scríobhadh leite leis an chleite gandail. Thit an cleite síos sa leite is thosaigh Beite a dhamhsa. Ó brochán lom, tana lom. Gliondar milis agus siúcra air."(73) Thoughts, words, and language are never allowed to settle. All is restlessness.

Mac Annaidh borrows the idea of the 'Guairneán' ("Whirling motion; whirl, spin; swirl, eddy . . . Tossing about, restlessness, uneasiness", 'whirlpool' (Ó Dónaill)) directly from Peigí Rose, and in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí this has rich metaphorical possibilities in terms of personal rootlessness; "Rug sé ar stoc an chrainn agus tharraing sé amach as an talamh í. D'amharc sé idir na duilleoga. 'Níl sé ann,' arsa an fathach agus díomá air. 'Stoiteachas at its most bunúsach,' arsa Giolgamaís leis féin . . ." (93), the 'stoiteachas' of modern society, where we have nothing solid to hold on to; "Guairneán gasta seo an tsaoil"(218); "Modern man is cut off from the roots of past society . . . This shallowness in turn strengthens the tendencies towards relativism, the relaxation of morals and manners, the ebbing and flowing of fads, the decline of loyalties - and toward a loss of identity in an existentially indeterminate present."(Murphey 154) All life spirals downwards to inevitable death; "Bhí gach aon rud ag teacht chun críche. Guairneán gliondrach gairdeasach gaireachtach gránna"(169), "Bhí siad ar ais sa tsaol réalach gan amhras, saol na scoilteanna, saol na smidirneachta. Guairneán na beatha."(211)

Mac Annaidh also widens the metaphor to include both the image of the Charybdis, "a ship-devouring monster in classical mythology, identified with a whirlpool off the coast of Sicily"(Funk and Wagnalls) , and the 'cuaifeach' of the title; "tempest', 'squall', "eddying wind, whirlwind; blast of wind"(Ó Dónaill); "Cuaifeach guairneánach. Charybdis."(120) The extended metaphor conveys the confusion and tumult of life; "Chuaigh na piollairí i bhfeidhm air de réir a chéile agus thit sé síos trí am, trí chuaifeach na beatha."(55), and the ever-present threat of death. Life is a "time-bomb, Mícheál, like a volcano or a whirlpool. If you want to come away with your life you must stay with us and together we can break our way out of it."(248) He also incorporates the image of the 'poll séideáin' or blowhole; ". . . agus ina lár siúd bhí an poll séideáin, poll domhan caol nach bhfuil aon bhealach éalaithe as, as a dtig an taoide ina geit mhíorúilteach am ar bith a mbíonn sé ag líonadh go garbh."(120) As a result the sound 'ssss' becomes a recurring reminder for us, repeated eleven times at random in the text, of the threat of death, whether as 'guairneán', 'Charybdis', or 'poll séideáin'; "Sssssss arssssa an busssss"(210), "Tá-tá-tá blub-blub sssssss blackbirds of the wurl"(194).

One of the more subtle ways in which Mac Annaidh adds to this general presence of death is in the occasional use of blood imagery to convey a sense of threat or forebodings of horror, at seemingly inappropriate times; "Cuma neamhshíuráilte ar an lá, na néalta ar dhath an uachtair agus braon beag fola tríd . . ." (7), "Bhí sí den bharúil gur fuil a bhí sa chaife agus thosaigh sí ag smaoinreamh ar an bhean rialta a tháinig ar an Phapa Eoin Pól I ina shuí marbh sa leaba sula raibh mí istigh aige mar phápa."(38), "Bhí dath na dreancaide a bheadh lán fola anois uirthi agus d'ímigh sí faoi dheifir."(42) This threat is consolidated by phrases such as "Caveat"(42), or Dante's "Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate"(147)²¹. Occasionally the

²¹ It is interesting that Mac Annaidh here manages to cleverly associate this with Oscar Wilde through the use of the word 'speranza', one of Wilde's mother's names, Oscar Wilde being one of the many intertextual and extratextual constants in the novel. In a personal interview (March 1997) Séamas Mac

threat erupts into full-blown violence, "Ansin bhí sé ar ais sa tsuanlios ag stróiceadh na ngasúr eile as a chéile, le scian, le huirlisí saotharlainne agus le sábh. Fuil ar na bráillín"(147), "Sciob sé an scian go gasta trasna na haghaidhe aige, agus osclaíodh a leiceann go cnámh. Tháinig an fhuil gheal dhearg amach as an bhéal aige, í measctha le seile, agus thit sí ina dábaí móra ar an urlár idir an dá chos nochta aige. Leag sé le cic bhinbeach é agus ghearr sé a scornach."(252)²² This exposes death as a dread and terrible eventuality; ". . . in our unconscious, death is never possible in regard to ourselves. It is inconceivable for our unconscious to imagine an actual ending of our own life here on earth, and if this life of ours has to end, the ending is always attributed to a malicious intervention from the outside by someone else. In simple terms, in our unconscious mind we can only be killed; it is inconceivable to die of a natural cause or of old age. Therefore death itself is associated with a bad act, a frightening happening, something that in itself calls for retribution and punishment."(Kubler-Ross in Jackson 211)

In a modern context the troubled mind of Gilgamesh could easily be diagnosed as existential angst or dread; "Mar gheall ar mo dheartháir, tá eagla orm roimh an Bhás; is mar gheall ar mo dheartháir a shiúlaim san fhásach. Tá a chrann, a dhán, ina luí go trom orm. Cad é mar is féidir liomsa a bheith ciúin? Is dusta anois é agus gheobhaidh mé féin bás agus beidh mé sínte sa chré taobh leis."(10) Mac Annaidh is obviously conscious of this and creates characters who are themselves overwhelmed by an awareness of approaching death. This awareness, in many cases, is a result of a life-threatening sickness, typified in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí by angina. All of the older characters in the novel; Siamais, Sally, Humbaba, suffer from it, and it is a recurring concern; "Tá amárach anois ann,' arsa an Dochtúir go suaimhneach. Mhothaigh sé an t-angina ina ucht agus shuigh sé síos ar bhun na leapa."(51), "Bhí sé ina stonaire nuair a chuir sé aithne uirthi den chéad uair ach d'éirigh sé as nuair a thosaigh an aois a ghabháil i bhfeidhm air, agus nuair a bhíodh pianta angina air ar theacht ar ais ón Aifreann dó maidineacha fuara geimhridh d'óladh sé puins."(97), "Mhothaigh sé pian uafásach ar chúl na súl aige, bhí mearbhall ag teacht air agus bhí pian ag preabadh síos a sciathán clé. Bhí a ghaidh corcra te."(134), "Bhí inní ar Shiamais nach ndearnadh aon dul chun cinn, mar bhí na míonna ag sleamhnú thart agus bhí an t-angina pectoris ag gabháil in olcas an t-am ar fad. Bhuail taom trom tinnis Sally chomh maith, ach tháinig sí tríd de thairbhe an chúnamh a fuair sí ó na gasúir agus go háirithe ó Anna."(216) Aodan's suggestion for a name for the punk group is 'Angina agus an Taom Croí'(168), and one of the verses that Mac Annaidh has lifted from a song proves particularly appropriate;

A londubh nach furus do do chroí a bheith slán
Is éadrom a chodlaíos tú oíche agus lá,
Ní hionann sin is mar bhímse, bídh na piantaí 'mo chrá
Mo chroí dá loscadh leis an fhortún nach baol domh a fháil.(85)

This anguish is a physical manifestation of the psychological anguish of doubt, isolation, and fear in the novel. Nothing is ever certain, except death; "In ifreann a bhí sé gan aon amhras. In ifreann a bhí sé toisc go raibh sé in amhras."(46), "Mhothaigh sé go raibh a neart ag imeacht uaidh, agus bhí sé den bharúil go raibh an bás ag bagairt anois air."(156) There is the continuous pressure of time on the characters, "Bhí an aois ina luí go trom uirthi."(80) Everyone is a prisoner of the inevitable, a prisoner of time, a prisoner of suffering, and Mac Annaidh uses Ó Direáin's ". . . ina chime mar chách"(48, 54 . . .) as a repeated allusion,

Annaidh has admitted to having read little of Wilde's work, but of being very aware of the fact that Wilde, and Samuel Beckett, had gone to Portora Royal School in Enniskillen. The influence of Wilde and Beckett in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is an area that merits further study, but which remains outside the remit of this thesis.

²² One of the defining characteristics of Unamuno's nivola, if you'll remember, is a 'frankness concerning the realities of physiological existence'.

adding his personal twist as “Na Sclábhaithe Síoraí”(167) is Gilly’s suggestion for a name for his punk group. Fánaí becomes the epitome, even the caricature of an angst-ridden teenager;

“Shiúladh sé amach leis féin san oíche agus bhíodh sé páirteach i gcóisirí leann úll i dtaobhlaigh iarnróid agus ar bhruacha na canála. Cuireadh troid air uair amháin nó dhó agus buaileadh go dona é an dara huair. Tháinig cuma phianta chráite thinn air i ndiaidh tamaill. Ní bhíodh a chuid gruaige riamh cíortha nó nite aige, agus tháinig sé isteach lá amháin agus bhí dath deargbhán air agus fáinne cluaise á chaitheamh aige. Fós féin bhíodh an éide oifigiúil á caitheamh aige, ach bhí bróga dearga aige, carbhat an-tanaí agus crios trom leathair aige thart ar a choim sholúbtha thanaí. Bhí an nicítín go soiléir ar a mhéara agus bhíodh droch-chasacht phianmhar air an t-am ar fad. Thug na múinteoirí na hathruithe seo faoi deara agus bhí sé mar ábhar comhrá acu sa tseomra rúnda acu, ach ní dhearna siad a dhath fá dtaobh de toisc nach raibh sé ag cur isteach ar ghnáthoibriú na scoile. Bhí sé ina chúis mhór ghrinn acu nuair a scríobh ábhar múinteora ar thuarascáil oifigiúil rúnda, ‘This boy is in need of psyiatric (sic) investigation.’ Ar ndóigh níor tugadh síceolaí isteach chuige toisc nach raibh aon dochar déanta go fóill aige mar Phaorach.”(136)

Gilly’s own peculiar situation leaves him open to the experience of the Emptiness;

“Mhóthaigh sé go raibh sé cailte ar fad istigh faoin phluid sa dorchadas . . . Tháinig eagla air nach raibh anam aige. Smaoineamh scanrúil ba ea é, agus ó tharla go raibh sé scanrúil ba dheacair an smaoineamh a ruaigeadh amach as a intinn. Sin an fáth a raibh sé contúirteach bheith ag smaoineamh air ach ba é sin an fáth nach raibh an dara smaoineamh aige. Bhí a bheith i mbaol.”(82)

These sentiments echo forcefully the words of Davis D. McElroy; “Man is anxious because he is agonizingly aware of the threat of annihilation to his precious individuality, a threat from which there is no final and positive escape except death, the thing he most fears.”(5) We see the depths of Gilly’s angst at a later stage as well; “Den chéad uair ó d’aimsigh sé é féin bhí inní fhadtéarmach air, inní neamhghéiteach a bhí ag síorbhorradh ina bholg, na putóga, in allas a chraicinn.”(159) Angst produces physical symptoms of illness while being also exacerbated by physical symptoms of illness in an ever-decreasing vicious circle.

Another way in which death, la Condition Humaine, finds its way into Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is in the Garden of Eden²³ analogy as played out through the love-story-that-isn’t between Patrick Ó hUltánaigh, later to be Gilly, and Sally Holme.²⁴ The Garden of Eden story is one of the most powerful archetypes in the Judaeo-Christian world. The parallels are obvious, even overstated; “The plot of the first two books [of Genesis] can be summarized as follows: in the midst of a marvellous garden, a young couple experience the innocent happiness of an idyllic way of life; the man is a simple, unsophisticated creature,

²³ “Eden: The word means 'delight', 'enchantment', 'pleasure'. But perhaps it is intended only as a proper name, a place-name. Some have connected it with the Babylonian edinu, a plain. Attempts to locate a geographical site of Eden are as foolish as trying to identify the spot on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho where the traveller was attacked by robbers in the parable of the Good Samaritan. To the Hebrew mind the phrase would suggest 'garden of delight' . . . Man was created by God to dwell in 'paradise', that is, in blessed fellowship with himself and in the enjoyment of the manifold riches of his creation.”(Richardson 62)

²⁴ As is made clear in the text on numerous occasions ‘Sally Holme’ is a thinly-veiled pun on ‘Salomé’, an agent in the death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:25), immortalised in Oscar Wilde’s play of the same name. As a woman, associated with temptation, who brings death to a man she can be neatly paralleled with the figure of Eve. There is also a Salomé present at the Crucifixion in Mark (15:40), paralleled in the presence of Sally at the ‘crucifixion’ of Gilly. It has been suggested that the pun might extend to ‘Home Rule’ and Sally’s role as a mild caricature of an Anglo-Irish ‘Big House’ inhabitant.

who is induced to commit an offence by his companion, the woman, who loves him; their happiness is lost, and the guilty pair are punished.”(Brunel 403) In the *Cuaifeach* we find; “Aon bhliain déag a bhí sí, agus í ina cailín tanaí bríomhar. Dhá phonytail a bhí uirthi agus gúna fada ciotach bán, agus bhí lúchair uirthi a bheith ábalta saibhreas an úllgharraí a roinnt leis. Stócach ciúin adhnáireach i gceann a shé bliana déag ba ea é féin.”(45) Sally’s garden is described as an “Úllord críon críonna a ligeadh le faillí chun fáis nádúrtha ba ea é.”(27) Gilly’s nostalgic yearnings are for a past of innocence, but Mac Annaidh makes sure that the myth of Eden encroaches upon his dreams; “Thosaigh sé a ghuí agus ghuigh sé go dúthrachtach an Dia a bhí aimsithe aige anois agus níorbh fhada ina dhiaidh sin gur thit sé ina chodladh, ina thoircim suain, agus é ar ais san úllord. Bhí sé leis an bhean ab ansa leis. Bhí siad beirt óg in éineacht le chéile. Comhbhaill den chorp amháin, gan ainmneacha, gan éadaí, gan córas sóisialta, gan íomhánna, go díreach mar a bhíodh nuair a bhí an domhan fós óg.”(82) Every apple becomes filled with the juices of symbolic intent; “. . . shuigh sé síos a bhaint plaice as an úll neamhcheadaithe.”(29), Eden Street is found to be in the centre of Enniskillen town, “Má bhí stair ag baint le Sráid Eidin - ainmníodh í as gairdín álainn a bhí ann tráth - bhí an chearnóg níos stairiúla fós.”(193), and Sally Holme’s final murderous act by which she robs Dr. Siamais Mac Gréine of eternal life is seen in the light of Eve’s temptation of Adam in the garden, whereby eternal life was also denied him; “Tá síol Éabha beo ar fad. Is tusa an nathair nimhe a ghoid an tsóraíocht uaim. Mharaigh tú m’aonmhac. Seo mo mhallacht, agus mallacht an chine dhaonna ort, a chailleach is lofa.”(249)

The garden was an idyll, a sanctuary²⁵, (consider the chapter title ‘Tearmann’), which was eventually shattered, besmirched by the death of the young Patrick Ó hUltanaigh, the old Patrick’s grand-nephew; “Ní ón chathair mé, ar ndóigh,’ ar sí ag osnaíl go trom, ‘agus b’fhearr i bhfad liomsa a bheith amuigh faoin tuath áit a raibh cónaí orm mo shaol ar fad go dtí anuraidh nuair a tharla tubaiste mhillteanach a mhill draíocht na háite sin, agus gur tháinig mé anseo.”(97) to which they could never return.

How does this fit into the overall pattern of the death experience in the novel? Eden is mythically the source of all sin, death, and self-consciousness, and “. . . the final terror of self-consciousness is the knowledge of one’s own death, which is the peculiar sentence on man alone in the animal kingdom. This is the meaning of the Garden of Eden myth and the rediscovery of modern psychology: that death is man’s peculiar and greatest anxiety.”(Becker 70)

“‘To be born,’ says Otto Rank, ‘is to be cast out of the Garden of Eden.’ . . . With the exception of his death, man’s birth is the most painfully anxious experience which he undergoes. The experience of being born causes a profound shock to the helpless organism; a shock which involves not only physical separation from the mother, but also physiological hazards and changes of state. This painful experience sets up or carries with it the first and most fundamental feeling of anxiety which the individual ever experiences. Rank calls it the ‘primal anxiety’.

For Rank this ‘primal anxiety’ is the source of all the anxieties of death, doubt, and guilt which perplex man throughout his painful existence. But he goes even further: he states that “not only all socially valuable creations of man, but even the fact of becoming man, arise from a specific reaction to the experience of his birth.””(McElroy 2)

So, Eden can be seen as a metaphor for the birth experience, which, as we shall see, is a major thematic element of this text, as well as tying in with the theme of mortal angst and restlessness, providing another thematic and structural support for the novel.

²⁵ It is interesting to note the role of the cloistered garden in Eoghan Ó Tuairisc’s play *Lá Fhéile Míchíl*, with the same implications of innocence and sanctuary.

Potentially one of the most perplexing elements of the Cuaifeach is the use of chiasmic structures and chiasmic references. Chiasmus is defined in the dictionary as follows: “In rhetoric, a contrast by parallelism in reverse order.”(Funk and Wagnalls) In practice what this means in the Cuaifeach is the presence of phrases like; “All the same back to front.”(61), “Tá gach rud mar an gcéanna droim ar ais.”(67), “Dáta atá mar an gcéanna droim ar ais, 28/7/82.”(219), the name ‘Siamais’, or the insistence that ‘An Tús’ be placed on the last page. The author-reader relationship is seen as a reversible relationship; “Tá tusa ar oileán chomh maith ach tá mé ag tógáil droichid ar mhaithe leatsa. Tá muidne mar an gcéanna droim ar ais. Beirt ag amharc amach, beirt ag amharc isteach.”(121), and doing things in reverse is the done thing; “Ní raibh aon tábhacht leis seachas go bhfuil muid anois ag triall síos bóthair aontreo is ní hé seo an treo atá i gceist.”(144), maybe even the natural thing; “Ní bheadh sé mar an gcéanna droim ar ais, ní bheadh sé nádúrtha, ní bheadh sé oiriúnach do ghrian.”(165) On one level it could all be interpreted as part of a generally contrary stance in relation to style, narrative, and character, or it could be seen as a simple extension by association of Siamais’ act of turning death into life; “Ansin tháinig an dochtúir seo agus bhí an mícheart ina cheart, an deireadh ina thús agus an bás ina bheatha.”(240)

But chiasmus was something which Miguel de Unamuno made wide use of in his writings, and it is this context that we might appreciate the way in which the chiasmus is yet another link in the chain of death in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. For Unamuno “. . . death is a kind of return to the mother's womb, in what [he] on occasion called a *desnacer*, or mirror-image of birth . . .”(Olson 33)

One of the paradoxes of death is that we are dying from the moment we start living, and in the works of Unamuno, “. . . death is seen not as an event, but rather as an approaching force that is the counterpart of being. Death is at every moment negating being, moving toward non-being which is not a point nor a conclusion; it is a direction, a negating direction. (It is not reached because of the counterpart which is being). Just as man is making his future he is also unmaking his existence in that he is approaching death. Thus at the same time the personal *yo* is weaving his destiny, the possibility of annihilation of the personal consciousness is bringing the *yo* closer to his destiny and unweaving life. This is the struggle of man.”(Valdés 89) Ultimately, if we allow death to qualify our existence we must start living back to front;

“Por debajo de esta corriente de nuestra existencia, por dentro de ella, hay otra corriente en sentido contrario: aquí vamos del ayer al mañana, allí se va del mañana al ayer. Se teje y se desteje a un tiempo. Y de vez en cuando nos llegan hálitos, vahos y hasta rumores misteriosos de ese otro mundo, de ese interior de nuestro mundo. Las entrañas de la historia son una contra-historia, es un proceso inverso al que ella sigue. El río subterráneo va del mar a la fuente.”(Niebla 83)

[Beneath this flowing current of existence, deep within it, there runs another, going in the other direction: here we go from yesterday to tomorrow, there one goes from tomorrow back towards yesterday. We weave and unravel at one and the same time. And from time to time we sense odours, breaths, and even murmurs from that other world, deep down inside our own. The entrails of history are a counter-history, an inverse process. The subterranean river flows from sea to source.]

As we have seen:

“The cause of the pervasive pessimism of Mesopotamian thought lay partly in the precariousness of life in the city-states, dependant on vagaries of flood and drought

and turbulent neighbours; dependant also on the character of the gods, who were the powers held responsible for such conditions.”(Sandars 22)

Precariousness is something not unknown to speakers of the Irish language. Already one book has been entitled ‘The Death of the Irish Language: a qualified obituary’(Hindley), and, like any minority language, it finds itself under constant threat of extinction from the dominant language, in this case English; “Tá scamall an bháis os cionn na Gaeilge i gcónaí. Ní féidir féachaint timpeall ná romhat ná in airde gan é a fheiceáil. Ba dhall an té a dhéanfadh neamart ann. Ach más dídean é an ealaín aonair i gcoinne an bháis aonair is cosaint í litríocht teanga in aghaidh bhás na teanga sin.” (Titley 1995: 74) Mac Annaidh is not at all slow to acknowledge this; “Tá na teangacha uilig marbh, a Mhícheáil. Tá mo chuid Béarla ag fáil bháis; ní bheidh mo chuid Gaeilge i bhfad ina dhiaidh. Ní mhaireann teanga go brách, beidh teanga eile de dhíth orm.”(60) The Scottish poet Iain Crichton-Smith, in his selection of essays Toward the Human, intimates that the threat to language is in fact a threat to self, that “a language in a deep sense is inextricably intertwined with what one really is and that the loss of it would be not only a diminution but a death.” (62) The fact that the Cuaifeach has been written in Irish, and especially that it occasionally lapses into English²⁶, serves to deepen the overall impression of unease, of precariousness, of threat, and of imminent extinction. That the bilingual dialogue is, in my own experience, an honest representation of Irish College conversations is a source of both familiarity and unease. ‘Negation through Delay’, a reference to an official report by Colmán Ó hÚllacháin forecasting the fate of the Irish language (Mac Craith 44), is yet another mantra throughout the text (205, 245, 246 . . .). The threat to the Irish language, the medium of communication, also strengthens the reader-writer relationship, ensuring that the text is of immediate concern and relevance.²⁷

I think it is patently clear that death constitutes a major presence in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, from sickness, through existential angst, through the portrayal of physical death. Through coming face to face with death Mac Annaidh hopes, like Fánaí, to come to an understanding of the ultimate truth of experience;

“Bhí scanradh gliondrach le brath ar aghaidh dheoirbhreactha Fhánaí, seoda fliucha ionraice sna súile áille aige, agus bhí a chorp ar fad i riocht an tsásaimh.

Bhí an tuiscint tagtha.”(146)

knowing that we can only truly live from the moment we accept that we are dying. All great Art in the twentieth century (arguably, of any century) would seem to me to be an attempt to simulate the escape from the Emptiness, that awareness of non-being as the soulmate of being, and simultaneously an attempt, in some fashion, to quantify it, to reclaim for ourselves even a semblance of control, for "not only may we subdue life by our art, but death too, for that loses its terrors as our consciousness embraces it."(Ellmann and Feidelson 15) As Blumenthal writes, "This has throughout the ages been one of the achievements of art: to exorcise the powers of night and deliver the artist and those of his time and situation from their grip and fascination . . . In artistic creation, through the mystery of style, darkness is not merely challenged, it is transfigured,"(vii, xii) “The remedy is to consider it face to face, fixing our gaze on the gaze of the Sphinx, for that is the way to break the spell of its evil eye.”(Unamuno, trans. Kerrigan 48)

Batchelor has written of the work of Unamuno;

²⁶ “I am not in a position to say whether the introduction of English words etc. is a defensible development or a masochistic mutilation of the language. I suspect the latter.” (Peigí Rose 140)

²⁷ It is interesting to note that Unamuno, a Basque, preferred to write in Spanish, indeed championed the cause of Spanish, rather than support the persecuted Basque language.

“The contradictory aspect of Unamuno’s thought lies in his unbridled obsession with death and his refusal to come to terms with it. He perceived the deepest irony of all in his exasperating fascination for a phenomenon that makes nonsense of life. The exasperating feature of the death experience fills the *nivola* with the most vital and penetrating awareness of dying.”(193)

This has also been shown to be the case in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. In the following chapters I hope to examine the ways in which Mac Annaidh responds to the death experience in and through the text.

Chapter Two

'The key to life is to make light of a grave situation'
G.K Chesterton (attributed)

Having established the way in which the death experience permeates the text of Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, in this chapter I wish to look at some of the ways in which Mac Annaidh has responded stylistically and thematically to the challenge of non-existence.

Carpe Diem. Seize the day. Live for the moment. Live each day as though it were your last. Make the most of it while you can. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. All of these are responses to death, responses in life. In its original context, Horace's *Odes*, *Carpe Diem* was explicitly associated with the passing of time, the onset of death: "Dum loquimur, fugerit invida / Aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero."²⁸ [While we're talking, envious time is fleeing: seize the day, put no trust in the future.] The phrase, indeed the attitude, plays a significant role in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. Consider the following passage, where anagrams of *Carpe Diem* are playfully incorporated into a section of the text which is loosely based on a passage from the Gilgamesh Epic where we find Siduri as the bearer of the *Carpe Diem* message;

"PRIDE CAME
MADE PRICE . . .

Bhí Giolgamaís, rí cráite Uruk ag cuartú theach Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil agus shiúil sé trí na fásaigh do dtí go dtáinig sé faoi dheireadh chuig teach tá(bha)irne (a nail house) faoi scáth an chrainn is iargúlta ar an tsaol, a bhí i ndiaidh bás a fháil le hualach a uaignis nó le galar francach éigin. Bhí bean fhásta ag fanacht ag féachaint air, a lámha trasna a chéile ar a brollach mór agus bhí an doras oscailte taobh thiar di. Os a cionn bhí fógra in dhá theanga oifigiúla an stáit lena chur in iúl go raibh ceadúnas seacht lá den tseachtain ag an *Carpe Diem* deochanna meisciúla a chur ar fáil do sprideanna agus thaistealaí de gach saghas a bheadh ag gabháil thar bráid.

'Phwat iss yer nam, a bhean chóir?' a cheistigh Giolgamaís sa dóigh is nach mbeadh na ceisteanna céanna le freagairt arís aige. D'aithin an bhean cad é a bhí ar siúl aige áfach agus dúirt:

'Is mise Síodúirí, bean an leanna agus ní bréag a chanaim. Cad é an deifir seo atá ort? Níl aon bhuanseasmhacht ann a thuilleadh agus mar sin de ní fiú duit a bheith ag briseadh do mhuiníl thiubh ag gabháil sa tóir uirthi. Tá an codladh is an bás in aon leaba amháin, má thuigeann tú mé.'

Is beag an fonn a bhí air géilleadh chomh réidh seo di.

'Inis dom, mar sin, a bhean chóir, an iasc fásaigh é an *carpe diem* seo a bhféadfainn mo bholg a líonadh leis?'

'Mo bhrón! Ní thig leis an chine dhaonna an rud is bunúsaí a thuiscint, fiú nuair atá sé scríofa síos os a gcomhair. Féach na focail sin.' Sheas Giolgamaís agus d'amharc sé ar na focail a bhí sa chló rómhánach. Labhair sé amach faoi dheireadh.

'An PRIMED ACE é seo?'

Tháinig aoibh aisteach uirthi agus mhol sí dó triail eile a bhaint as.

'Seo an MEDIC RAPE mar sin - agus muid ag tagairt do na nithe a thit amach ag tús an leabhair ina bhfuil muid.'

'Nach ainm aisteach le haghaidh teach tábhairne é sin . . . Ach ar ndóigh nár dúradh liom gurb aistí an fhírinne ná an chumadóireacht?'

²⁸ Odes bk. 1, no. 11, 1.7 (as cited in Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 349)

‘Tá sin fíor,’ arsa Giolgamaís agus níor thug sé faoi deara gur fhreagair sí a cheist le ceist eile nó bhí sé ag baint suilt as an choimhlint seo toisc gur laoch é. ‘Nach baolach gur ag caint fút féin atá an comhartha sin? I MAD CREEP?’

Lig sé scread phléisiúir.

‘Anois, a bhodaigh, abair I MAD CREEP ach ná bí ag tabhairt creep ormsa.’

‘Maith go leor,’ arsa Giolgamaís. Ansin go tobann, gan choinne tháinig coinnle i súile an rí agus d’fhógair sé amach os ard -

‘Is é an t-ainm atá ar an teach seo ná an DREAM EPIC nó EPIC DREAM, más fearr leat.’

‘Mo ghrá thú,’ ar sise, agus shín sí a lámh amach chuige sa dóigh is go rachaidís isteach sa teach le chéile.

Níl sé’n lá, níl a ghrá,
Níl sé’n lá, ná baol ar maidin,
Níl sé’n lá, níl go fóill,
Solas ard atá sa ghealaigh.

. . . I RECAMPED.”(160-2)

In the original epic Siduri’s *Carpe Diem* message was intimately associated with the experience of death;

"Gilgamesh, where are you hurrying to? You will never find that life for which you are looking. When the gods created man they allotted to him death, but life they retained in their own keeping. As for you, Gilgamesh, fill your belly with good things; day and night, night and day, dance and be merry, feast and rejoice. Let your clothes be fresh, bathe yourself in water, cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your wife happy in your embrace; for this too is the lot of man."(Sandars 102)

For the Mesopotamians this was much more than an offer of good advice; "In these words is set forth the quintessence of the Mesopotamian philosophy of life - a practical guide to living that was necessitated and coloured by the accepted eschatology . . . *carpe diem*."(Brandon 158) In a modern world increasingly devoid of purpose *Carpe Diem* has once more become the motto for an age,²⁹ nowhere more so than in the punk movement; "Punk celebrated chaos and a life lived only for the moment . . . The point was not to create a new world, just to mess up the old one."(Street 175), "The point was to have a good time. This meant causing havoc, not reading Marx; it meant celebrating the moment, not the future; it meant mocking the established order, not working for a new one."(Street 176)

The punk element is an important part of the colour of Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí;

“Bhí cuid gruaige Ghilly spíceach aige agus dath beo deargbhán uirthi nuair a shiúil sé isteach chuig rang Shéamaís a’Chaca. Bhain Séamas a mhéar amach as a ghaosán agus d’amharc sé go fiosrach ar an rang ar fad.

‘Féach,’ ar seisean ag tagairt do Ghilly a bhí anois ag dréim le tagairt tharcaisneach uaidh. ‘Sin gasúr a bhfuil ciall aige.’ D’amharc an rang ar fad ina threo ag dúil le habairt eile a chuirfeadh na focail sin bunoscionn. Ní dhearna Séamas ach osna fhada a ligean. D’amharc sé i dtreo an chláir dhuibh agus ansin thiontaigh sé chucu arís. ‘Bhí mo chuid gruaige mar sin agam nuair a a bhí mé sna blianta uachtaracha sa scoil

²⁹ Take for example the way in which the phrase was used as the battle-cry in Peter Weir’s film Dead Poets’ Society (Touchstone, 1989), a rites-of-passage film that examines the personal development of a group of students as they explore their individuality and creativity, lead by their English teacher Mr. Keating. It is interesting that this film is also imbued with an overhanging presence of death.

seo. Bhí mé mar bhall de phunkghrúpa a raibh ‘Aiseag Te’ mar ainm air.’ Ansin lig sé osna eile agus chuaigh sé amach.”(167)

Although very much a product of its time, a passing fad in fashion terms, punk informs many of the stylistic devices of the Cuaifeach, and it is this light that we might well draw upon associations with the term anti-novel;

“The term anti-novel prescribes the artist as a cultural terrorist who is ideologically devoted to the anarchic disavowal of fiction. On this scheme the anti-novelist wantonly destroys in a spirit of gleeful abandon, and seemingly fails to offer any alternative aesthetic other than the tactics of aleatory shock.”(Hopper 8)

It is my belief that Mac Annaidh’s approach is considerably more life-affirming than the term ‘anti-novel’ would allow, as we shall see later.

It is in the context of *Carpe Diem* and punk that the title “Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí” assumes most significance, incorporating two of the major recurring metaphors in the novel: the ‘cuaifeach’ and the ‘londubh’ or ‘Blackbird’.³⁰ Mac Annaidh uses the ‘cuaifeach’ as an indicator of his hyperstimulated state of mind, reflected in the nature of the book;

“Íosfaidh mé an duileasc atá i mo phóca agus réabfaidh scéal gliondrach cuaifeach m’intinne.”(26)

and again as a metaphor for the confusion and tumult of life;

“Chuaigh na piollairí i bhfeidhm air de réir a chéile agus thit sé síos trí am, trí chuaifeach na beatha.”(55)

Mac Annaidh uses the blackbird first and foremost as a symbol for that instinctive spontaneity;

“Ba é ‘Blackbirds of the world unite’ an chéad rud a tháinig isteach ina chloigeann. Ní raibh mórán céille leis ach ní raibh sé gan chiall ach oiread. Bhí an lon dubh aige mar shiombail den rud fhileata greannmhar a bhí istigh ann féin, an spiorad aerach sin nach raibh aon srian air.”(193)

‘Blackbirds of the world unite’ (with its subsequent echo; ‘You have nothing to lose but your chains’!) is Mac Annaidh’s battle-cry throughout the novel, and he links it with a feeling that his mind is bursting at the seams and needs to be contained;

“Tá m’intinn scaipthe go maith anois agus tá mé ag iarraidh gach aon rud a tharraingt ar ais le chéile - sin cuid den chiall atá le ‘Blackbirds of the World Unite’, is dóigh liom, go bunúsach. Tá mé ag gabháil as mo mheabhair, ach déanfaidh mé é go stuama,

³⁰ The title itself is a pun on a popular traditional song title and refrain, ‘Cuach mo Londubh Buí’;

Bhí mise ‘s mo bhean, lá, ‘gabháil an bhóthair,
Cuach mo lonndubh buidhe!
Cé chas dúinne acht gruagach an óir-bhuidhe,
Cuach, 7c.
D’fhiafraigh sé d’om-sa an ingean damh an óig-bhean,
Cuach, 7c.
Dubhairt mé féin gurbh í mo bhean phósta í,
Cuach, 7c.

ciallmhar, agus fágfaidh mé snáth i mo dhiaidh sa dóigh is go dtig liomsa gabháil ar ais.”(172)

It has been suggested that Mac Annaidh chose the bird for its peaceful qualities;

“Blackbirds of the world unite! an mana atá ag Mac Annaidh. Tá an lon dubh síochánta mar éan, ní bhíonn sé ag troid faoina chríoch le loin dhubha eile. Síocháiní Mac Annaidh atá ag iarraidh caidreamh a dhéanamh leis na loin dhubha eile i.e., na gnáthdhaoine síochánta sa tsaol, go háirithe sa bhaile in Inis Ceithleann.”(Ó Muirí 1992, 511)

This obviously refers to the following section in the text;

“Hey people, do not be afraid! Why behold I bring you news of a great gliondar.’...You see, everyone’s friends. You see, we’re all blackbirds. We... we... eat duileasc...an’...an’...an’...talk Irish...an’ an’ give feathers to people...to strangers like yourselves...welcome... here let me see if I might have some in my pocket. Yes, here, I have two. One for you and one for you. Go on, take it. It won’t bite. You are now blackbirds. I believe in universal brotherhood and friendship, no war, no enmity, no hatred or prejudice. Today in a small town by the lake shore a dream has been born, a dream that shall take mankind to new heights and... an’...an’...”(193)

In the context I wouldn’t take the peace connection too seriously. Neither would I support the rather tenuous link made between blackbirds and borders;

“Éan gan críoch an lon dubh, fear gan tír Mac Annaidh. Tá na loin dubha saor ón fhoréigean a fhuilangann na daoine thart orthu. Bhí siad le fáil in éirinn aontaithe sa seanré, fiú anois níl aon teorainn in éirinn na lon dubh. Ní nach ionadh go n-áiríonn Mac Annaidh é féin ina measc.”(Ó Muirí 1991, 90)

The blackbird is a symbol of playfulness, of the unfettered creative impulse, a source of fun,

“Acmhainn aisteach grinn an Loin”(154); “Is it that seaweed you’re chewin’ that makes you as high as a buckin’ kite? Ah no, a Mhícheáil, ní thuigeann tú cén sórt duine atá ionam. Is lon dubh mé. Séamas, arsa Buckó, if you’re a blackbird, then I’m a great tit. Thuig Buckó an cluiche i gceart.”(60)

The fact of its being a bird allows Mac Annaidh even further width of allusion, letting him place it on the Ark as a messenger, and the very mention of feathers or birds brings us back to the central image.

The blackbird allows him other associations;

“Bhí gasóga ar fud na háite. Jamboree ar siúl acu, Lakeland ‘82. Éide ghlas ar an bhaicle bheag seo. Protastúnaigh. ‘Hello lads, where are you from? Bangor? Here, have a feather. ‘Twill bring you luck. And remember, “Blackbirds of the world unite”. Bhí sé ag tarraingt ar mhí ó labhair sé Gaeilge le haon duine. Eisean ina éan corr.”(73)

This latter hint of loneliness, of alienation, is reinforced by the more explicit darkening of the metaphor, linked to the restlessness of the ‘guairneán’ metaphor;

“Tagann tost ómósach air toisc nach bhfuil sé cleachta leis an duine seo, Séamas. Déanann sé iarracht teorainn na haoise a ruaigeadh, ach tá droch-chuma air nuair a shíneann sé a lámha amach is a deir sé - ‘Is lon dubh mé - Blackbirds of the World Unite.’ Molann na gasúir eile do Rónán a bheith cúramach toisc go dtagann taomanna aisteacha ar an lon dhubh seo ar uairibh agus creideann sé iad. Ní thuigeann sé cad is difhostaíocht ann, ná cad is uaigneas ná easpa caidreamh. Stoiteachas athfhréamhaithe. Saoirse éigeantach. Ailse na smaointe neamhréitithe ag borradh ina sheanchloigeann. Linn dubh an chairn.”(153)³¹

This final pun makes the connection between the creative impulse and the fear of death explicit, drawing us back into the ‘Charybdis’ and ‘Guairneán’ metaphors;

“The motion of the spiral implies the recognition by the writer of the importance in his life and in the life of the work of the process of creation itself. The act and the time of writing are no longer hidden or repressed, but allowed out into the open, made part of the substance of the work. As a result the traditional relations between form and content, background and foreground, word and object, disappear, and the act of reading, like the act of writing, becomes an adventure, part quest, part prayer . . . The fragmented or spiralling work denies us the comfort of finding a centre, a single meaning, a speakable truth, either in works of art or in the world. In its stead it gives us back a sense of the potential of each moment, each word, each gesture and each event, and acknowledges the centrality of the processes of creation and expression in all our lives.”(Josipovici 136-38)

The spirit of the ‘cuaifeach’, of the blackbird, of *Carpe Diem*, of text as Punk Statement, would seem to have more in common with Psychic Automatism, Abstract Expressionism, and the work of Jackson Pollock than with the Irish language literary tradition before Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. For the Surrealists, Psychic Automatism was “neither reproductive nor illusionistic. The painting is a writing tablet on which the unconscious is materialised in signs which combine into a pictorial script. The surface is the evocative ground.”(Haftmann 268) The abstract expressionism of Pollock was very much a development of this, a celebration of spontaneity and creativity;

“The liberating idea to which [Pollock’s] pictures owe their power is the spontaneous, automatic projection of the painter’s psychic states . . . Now this method was pure psychic improvisation, set down in a completely abstract script, the direct recording of his expressive gesture . . . The canvas is placed on the ground. Casting off all intellectual control, the painter moves over it with complete spontaneity; the liquid paint dripping from the brush or from a tin with holes in it weaves the trace of his gestures into a dense filigree. The work so produced is a direct record of the psyche charged with the painter’s *élan vital*. Pollock came to regard painting as pure action, an intricate trance-like choreography fixated in colour traces on the picture surface. The choreographic trace registers the artist’s inner life. Often it suggests the hallucinated ecstasy of a whirling dervish, and always it betokens a passionate, desperate search, sometimes favoured with discoveries of a heart-rejoicing lyrical beauty.”(Haftmann 348)

³¹ The blackbird is more than a little useful as a reference point, being a common thread through much of the Irish literary and historical tradition, especially in songs and poems, and Mac Annaidh is not slow to exploit this, peppering the text with short allusions; “Fáilte don éan”, “An Lon Dubh Báite”, “Thus ends the Blackbird lark - Cuach mo lon dubh buí.”. But despite its omnipresence, and beyond being a signpost for the creative process involved in the production of the text, I don’t think there is an awful lot more we can say about it as a metaphor.

As far as Unamuno's *nivola* is concerned, it would seem that it, too, aspired to this condition of 'psychic improvisation', an aspiration encapsulated in Unamuno's invention of the adjective 'vivíparo'. As Víctor Goti states of his *nivola* in Niebla;

"Mi novela no tiene argumento, o, mejor dicho, será el que vaya saliendo. El argumento se hace solo." (Niebla 119)

[My novel has no plot, or, should I say, only that which makes its way out. The plot writes itself.]

The personalities of the plot uphold the illusion of independence;

"El plan novelesco se hace al escribirse la novela y los personajes se desarrollan de acuerdo con sus exigencias individuales."

(Nicholas 16)

[As the novel is being written the novelistic plan creates itself and the characters develop in accordance with their individual requirements.]

Writers have often commented on how novels take on a life of their own once they are in progress, but this is more - an explicitly stated intention that the writer will yield to the creative impulse, ignoring the simple causality of the 'realist' tradition. As Henry James once wrote;

"Hard and fast rules, *a priori* restrictions, mere interdictions . . . have surely served their time, and will in the nature of the case never strike an energetic talent as anything but arbitrary. A healthy, living and growing art, full of curiosity and fond of exercise, has an indefeasible mistrust of rigid prohibitions." (Booth 22)

This is much the same attitude that Stevick has identified as being characteristic of 'new fiction';

"New fiction can be differentiated from old on the basis of its fabulation, its willingness to allow the compositional act a self-conscious prominence and to invest that act with love, a sense of game, invention for its own sake, joy." (qtd. in Titley 579)

Séamas Mac Annaidh uses the wonderfully appropriate metaphor of the joyride to convey something of the rush of blood that such 'freedom' apparently entails; "Ní raibh siad ag gabháil róghasta anois - cruisin' - ó bhí a fhios acu go raibh siad éalaithe ón tsaol mar a bhí. Bhí siad anois gan srian, gan cheangal." (143) This is the viviparous spirit, the spirit of *Carpe Diem*, the spirit of Punk. But, as Foster has commented; "The illusion in general of being formless or of not possessing an *a priori* form can be seen in turn as one sort of artistic form." (11)

Intended spontaneity in the visual arts and intended spontaneity in literature will not meet with the same results. Both aspire to the condition of performance, even of life, but a painting is better suited to the communication of a spontaneous outburst, or a series of them, even if only illusory. Visual art is better suited to seizing the day, seizing the moment.³²

³² This is, in my opinion, one of the aims of metavisual or metafictional works such as Velásquez' Las Meninas or Cervantes' Don Quixote - the frozen desire for life-performance. "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. . . [It is characterised by] a celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with an

Indeed, if a choice was to be made of any literary genre with which to explore the nature of spontaneity, the *Carpe Diem* philosophy, the novel would hardly be the first choice, which makes it all the more amazing when a novel goes some way towards grasping and communicating the creative moment. To do this, novelists are required to find ways of allowing us to suspend disbelief. Robert Alter explains this in relation to Tristram Shandy;

“The act of literary communication can take place only by virtue of certain tacit contractual agreements between writer and reader - about the meaning and nature of words, about typography and pagination, about chapter divisions, about characterization and motivation, about cause and effect in narration, and much more. Whatever Sterne’s commitment to spontaneity, he knows that the attempt to transcend these conventional agreements would reduce the literary feast . . . to mere word-salad, and so instead he makes us continually conscious of the conventions, exploring their limits, their implicit falsity, their paradoxical power to transmit fractional truths of experience.”(33)

Despite Unamuno’s claims of viviparous composition in *Niebla*, “careful reading shows that it does, in fact, have a fairly complex ‘plan previo’ . . . As Ruth House Webber expresses this view: ‘That this was the effect Unamuno intended to create and that he was eminently successful in creating it is undeniable, but that this was the process of composition is quite a different matter.’”(Olson 77)

Mac Annaidh spent a while in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre rewriting certain parts of the novel, and it would be difficult to deny that *Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí* has a complex underlying structure. The illusion of the viviparous technique³³ does at the very least simulate the attempt to affirm the vital pulse of life as a defense against death, and at one and the same time, as we saw in the previous chapter, in *Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí* it also conveys something of the restlessness and existential awareness that is an inescapable part of that same life.

It is highly appropriate, possibly even inevitable, that a novel that has at its heart the illusion of spontaneity should be humorous. Theorists of humour have, in the main, tended to view it either as an assertion to superiority (Hobbes, Bain, Bergson), or as a release of tension through a situation of incongruity (Kant, Schopenhauer, Spencer). This second type of humour thrives on the latter-day conceit³⁴, the unexpected connection of two apparently

uncertainty about the validity of its representations; an extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing fictions; a pervasive insecurity about the relationship of fiction to reality; a parodic, playful or deceptively naive style of writing.” (Waugh, 2)

³³ “To be successfully decoded . . . experimental fiction of any variety requires an audience which is itself self-conscious about its linguistic practices.” (Waugh 64) This is already guaranteed if the medium is a minority language like Irish, especially considering that the majority of readers of modern Irish language novels have learnt Irish as a second language, or are engaged in linguistic analysis of one sort or another; “Cé mhéid duine in Éirinn a bhfuil nós na léitheoireachta acu - i mBéarla nó i nGaeilge? Nó cé hiad féin? Mic léinn mheánscoile agus Ollscoile a chaitheas téacsanna áirithe a léamh? Múinteoirí agus léachtóirí a chaitheas na mic léinn seo a theagasc? Scríbhneoirí ag léamh saothar scríbhneoirí eile? Ní léitear i dtithe na Gaeltachta ach *Ámarach*, má léitear an méid sin féin . . . Ní heol dom féin ach dhá leabhar Gaeilge a léadh le fonn sa Ghaeltacht: Cré na Cille agus Lig Sinn i gCathú. Agus an fáth?

Ar fhaitíos go mbeadh an léitheoir féin, duine dá chuid comharsana nó dá lucht aitheantais i gceist sna leabhair agus go mbeadh ábhar cainte ag daoine!” (Denvir 34) Coiscéim Publications informed me that of both first and second editions of *Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí* approximately 750 copies have been sold.

³⁴ “Originally meaning a concept or image, “conceit” came to be the term for figures of speech which establish a striking parallel - usually an elaborate parallel - between two very dissimilar things or

unconnected things that is completed by the reader's momentary feeling of enlightenment, joy, or discovery;

“Humour depends primarily on its surprise effect: the bisociative shock. To cause surprise the humorist must have a modicum of originality - the ability to break away from the stereotyped routines of thought. Caricaturist, satirist, the writer of nonsense-humour, and even the expert tickler, each operates on more than one plane. Whether his purpose is to convey a social message, or merely to entertain, he must provide mental jolts, caused by the collision of incompatible matrices. To any given situation he must conjure up an appropriate - or appropriately inappropriate - intruder which will provide the jolt.” (Koestler Act of Creation 92)

This is the epitome of the spontaneous reading experience; “In humour, both the creation of a subtle joke and the recreative act of perceiving the joke involve the delightful mental jolt of a sudden leap from one plane or associative context to another.”(Koestler ‘Humour and Wit’ 739)

In Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí the humour is heavily dependant on witticisms and punning; "Neicrifhilíocht"(22), "Inniskillings"(125) "Inis Scáthlán."(160), "Aontachtóirí. Iontach Tory"(154), “Inis domh. Inis mé.”(209) “Most puns strike one as atrocious, perhaps because they represent the most primitive type of humour; two disparate strings of thought tied together by an acoustic knot. But the very primitiveness of such association based on pure sound . . . may account for the pun’s immense popularity with children and its prevalence in certain types of mental disorder . . . ”(Koestler ‘Humour and Wit’ 741) The puns in Mac Annaidh’s world are often daring;

“I gceann seacht lá agus seacht n-oíche, tháinig siad go himeall na coille. Thóg Giolgamais tua ón chrios aige, chuir Enkidú faobhar uirthi agus thosaigh siad a bhaint. Leag siad crann amháin agus ansin an dara ceann. ‘Tiocfaidh an fathach amach anois,’ arsa Giolgamais, ach níor tháinig. Ghearr siad an tríú agus an ceathrú crann. ‘Tiocfaidh an fathach amach anois,’ arsa Giolgamais, ach níor tháinig. ‘Tá tuirse orm anois,’ arsa Giolgamais. Shuigh sé síos agus chonaic sé aisling nár thaitin leis. D’éirigh sé agus leag sé crann amháin eile. Thit an crann i lár na coille. Ardaíodh scread mhíofar ghránna a chuir an talamh ar crith.

‘What the fathach!’ arsa Giolgamais.

‘Tá mé ag déanamh gurb é sin an fathach,’ arsa Enkidú.” (92)

What happens in this clash of contexts that explodes in the word ‘fathach’, now doubling as a sexual expletive, is explained by Koestler in The Act of Creation;

“Primitive jokes arouse crude, aggressive, or sexual emotions by means of a minimum of ingenuity. But even the coarse laughter in which these emotions are exploded often contains an additional element of admiration for the cleverness of the joke - and also of satisfaction with one’s own cleverness in seeing the joke.” (87)

Occasionally they are frighteningly incongruous; “Chuaigh bás Enkidú i bhfeidhm go mór air. Ní raibh suaimhneas air. No more sic (sic) jokes. Thit an galar dubhach air toisc go raibh a dheartháir marbh, agus nach raibh i ndán dó féin ach an bás.”(149) The primitive resonances of the puns are equalled by the primitive fear of death.

situations. English poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries adapted the term from the Italian “conchetto” and used it (as we still do) both in a pejorative way and as a neutral identifier of a kind of figurative language.” (Abrams 32).

Much of the humour in Cuairfeach Mo Londubh Buí is to be found in the fulcrum narratives of the Gilgamesh Epic and the Frankensteinian story of Siamais Mac Gréine and Gilly. It is interesting to note that the Gilgamesh Epic is in its original form a source of much humour, containing “a number of the usual devices of poetic embellishment . . . including punning expressions, deliberate ambiguity . . . and irony.”(Sandars 49). In the Cuairfeach it initially retains its dignified and noble tone, but gradually gives way to low burlesque, as outlined in the introduction;

“Bhí teas ag éirí ón ghaineamh sa staid. Thuig Giolgamaís go mbeadh deireadh lena ríocht. Bhí sé ag cuardach Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil toisc gur mhair sé roimh an Dile agus go raibh sé fós beo. Bhí Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil ina shuí ar chnocán ar chúl na scoile ar ar crochadh easpag agus chonaic sé lena shúile féin duine ag teacht chuige ach níor aithin sé é. Chuir sé ceist air, a rá ‘Fingers on the buzzers if you know the answer.’

‘*Phwat iss yer nam, tusa a bhfuil seanchraiceann á chaitheamh agat, tusa a bhfuil do leicne leonta agat, tusa a bhfuil d’aghaidh caite snoite agat, tusa atá cosúil le punk?*’

‘Who? Me? Ó, Giolgamaís is ainm domhsa. As Inis Cailí domh.’

Agus dúirt Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil leis:

‘Deux points,’ ó bhí sé den bharúil go raibh sé ina fhear tí ar chomórtas Amhránaíochta na hEoraifise.

‘Níl Francis ar bith agam,’ arsa Giolgamaís. ‘Theip orm san ábhar sin ag an ‘O’ Level.’

Agus dúirt Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil leis:

‘Can we have the votes of the Enniskillen jury?’

Ní bhfuair sé freagra ar bith agus mar sin de d’iarr sé ar Ghiolgamaís amhrán a cheol. Thit Giolgamaís síos ar a aghaidh agus dúirt Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil leis:

‘Aha, tuigim anois é, sin an fáth a mbíonn do leicne leonta, is d’aghaidh caite snoite; más headbanger den tsaghas sin thú ní hiontas ar bith é.’

‘Nee nocky noo,’ arsa giúiré Bhéal Feirste, ‘ní nach ionadh.’ Agus dúirt Giolgamaís leis:

‘Cad chuige nach mbeadh mo leicne leonta, m’aghaidh caite snoite, m’éadan cruptha craptha cráite, agus mo shúile ar maos sna logaill agam? Tá an galar dubhach ar mo chroí agus is í m’aghaidh aghaidh an taistealaí a mbeadh turas fada déanta aige. Tá mé dóite ag teas is ag fuacht. Cad chuige nach shiúlfainn san fhásach?’

‘Oh, surely, do your own thing, masochist.’

‘Keep to the script, le do thoil,’ arsa Giolgamaís. ‘Mharaigh mo chara óg, Enkidú, Tarbh na bhFlaitheas agus threascair sé Humbaba sa choill chéadrais agus bhí sé mar a bheadh deartháir agam agus is iomaí sáinn ina raibh muid le chéile agus d’éalaigh muid astu ach anois tá an deireadh saolta i bhfeidhm air. Chaoim mé ar feadh seacht lá agus seacht n-oíche go dtí gur thosaigh na péisteanna agus na criticeoirí air. Tá a chrann, a dhán, ina lú go trom orm. Is dusta anois mé agus gheobhaidh mé féin bás. Cad é mar is féidir liomsa a bheith ciúin? Beidh me sínte sa chré leis.’ Tharraing sé a anáil agus lean sé leis:

‘Tháinig mé le cuairt a thabhairt ar Utnapáistím Imigéiniúil. Mharaigh mé an Traonach agus an Lon Dubh, an tIolar agus an Chailleach Oíche. Rinne mé mo dhícheall.’

‘I guess I’m the guy you’re lookin’ for. My friends call me the Dook, others just say ‘Sir’.’

‘Nappy naofa, tusa atá i do shuí sna Flaithis, is mian liomsa ceist a chur ort i dtaca le bás agus le beatha. Cad é mar a gheobhas mé an saol seasmhach mar atá sé de dhíth orm?’

‘On hire purchase, cosúil le gach duine eile. Níl aon bhuanseasmhacht ann a thuilleadh. How’s your credit rating? Tá an Codladh agus an Bás in aon leaba amhain.’

I've bought the exclusive film rights. Gineann an bheirt beatha. Tá an bás i ndán don duine ach ní inseofar lá nó uair.'

Agus dúirt Giolgamaís le hUtnapáistím Imigeiniúil:

'Bhí mé ag déanamh gur laoch cróga a bhí ionat, ach tá tú i do shuí anseo mar a bheadh gasúr ábharáfoch scoile ann. Cad é mar a d'éirigh leat fáil isteach i nDáil na nDéithe?'

'Simple. A good election agent. Ach éist a mhic, nochtfaidh mé rún. Fógróidh mé rún na ndéithe ó tá mé ag déanamh go bhfuil an áit seo 'bugged' ag an údar cibé ar bith. Is cuma faoin scéal. Amharc sna súile agam. Déanaimis caidreamh agus beidh an t-eolas uilig agat ansin. Ní bheidh tú ag gearán agus ansin ceolfaidh tú amhrán agus tá an seans ann go dtabharfaidh mé, conradh duit chun ceirnín a dhéanamh, nó guest-spot ag an damhsa mhór atá le bheith ar siúl ar Inis Caillí anocht mar chuid den Fhéile acu. Fiat lux, that's what I say. We'll put a spot-light on you an' make you a star.'

Fuair an Dochtúir Giolla na nAingeal Ó Caiside bás sa bhliain 1335. Bhí clú an leighis ar na Caisidigh riamh."(174)

As we saw in the introduction;

"Burlesque has been succinctly defined as "an incongruous imitation"; that is, it imitates the manner (the form and style) or else the matter of a serious literary work or of a literary genre, but makes the imitation amusing by a ridiculous disparity between the manner and the subject matter . . . If the form and style are elevated but the subject is low and trivial, we have "high burlesque"; if the subject is high in status and dignified but the style and manner of treatment are low and undignified, we have "low burlesque". (Abrams 17)

In the above passage from the Cuaifeach the dignified form of the epic tumbles into low burlesque as Mac Annaidh involves the following elements:

- a) A gameshow: "Fingers on your buzzers if you know the answers".
- b) An allusion to An Béal Bocht, a vicious parody in its own right, which itself refers to Séamus Ó Grianna's Nuair a Bhí Mé Óg; "Phwatt iss yer nam."
- c) A reference to Punk.
- d) A reference to the Eurovision Song Contest, the epitome of kitsch, and the object of mass mockery.
- e) A reference to failure in French at O-Level.
- f) A possible reference to Monty Python and the Knights of Nee, but certainly a reprise of the An Béal Bocht allusion and a jibe at the Irish speakers of Belfast; "Nee Nocky Noo".
- g) An element of frame-breaking self-consciousness and character independence; "Keep to the script, le do thoil".
- h) An allusion, by way of impersonation, to John Wayne; "My friends call me the Dook".
- i) The introduction of playful and incongruous interjections; "Nappy naofa".
- j) The suggestion that eternal life can only be achieved by hire purchase.
- k) The introduction of the idea of exclusive film rights.
- l) The suggestion that entry into "Dáil na nDéithe" can be achieved with a good election agent.
- m) The suggestion that the author has the place bugged. This is wonderfully ironic in the light of the omniscient author.

These are just some of the elements that, when placed alongside other more serious repetitions from the earlier epic version, and when compared directly with that version, allow the burlesque humour to take centre stage. As Koestler puts it: "He is walking, precariously balanced, on the borderline between two universes of experience, each governed by a different code." (Act of Creation 71) Mac Craith writes; "In ionad stíl íon uasal lom na

heipice tá dímhaorgú déanta ar an iomlán agus fágtar spraoi agus magadh in áit na tromchúise. Bí ag caint ar idir shúgradh agus dáiríre.”(Mac Craith, 48) What is particularly interesting here is the way in which the incongruity of the humour is matched by the incongruity of the final two lines, forcing the humour to sit uneasily alongside the sobriety of a reported death.

From an intellectual perspective, as opposed to an emotional one, the common pattern in humour is “the perceiving of a situation in two self-consistent but mutually incompatible frames of reference or associative contexts.”(Koestler ‘Humour and Wit’ 740) The Gilly narrative depends almost entirely on the incongruity, the suspension of disbelief, of situation comedy, nowhere more so than in the ‘shower scene’:

“Cúig nóiméad níos moille nuair a bhí sé réidh, agus an sruth ag éirí fuar arís, sheas sé go cúramach amach ar an urlár ar eagla go dtitfeadh sé. Chuala sé iomrá ar dhuine nó beirt dá sheanlucht aitheantais a fuair bás i ndiaidh dóibh titim ar leaca fliucha ina leithéid seo d’áit. Chroith sé an t-uisce amach as a chuid súl.

Chonaic sé gasúr ag teacht amach as ciotlann ar an taobh eile den tseomra. Othar eile, ba chosúil, cime eile san ospidéal neamhghnách seo. É féin ina chime mar chách. B’in an chéad othar eile a bhí feicthe aige.

Déanaimis teagmháil. Cumarsáid . . . please.

‘Ó, gabh mo leithscéal,’ arsa siad beirt le chéile. Rug siad beirt ar thuáille le caitheamh thart ar an choim acu. Aoibh fhaiteach orthu.

Bhuel, cad é tá cearr leat, a mhic?’ Thosaigh gach duine acu a chíoradh a chuid gruaige.

‘Tá na héadaí leapa céanna agat. Eisiúint chaighdeánach, heh!’

‘Cad é an t-ainm atá ort, mar sin?’

‘Patrick, Patrick Ó hUltánaigh.’

Ag labhairt leis féin sa scáthán a bhí sé. Ach in ainm Dé bhí cruth na hóige arís air, ach cruth duine eile ar fad a bhí ann. Caithfidh go raibh dul amú air, seachrán. Bhí a chló athraithe ar fad acu. Ní raibh sé riamh cosúil leis seo. Ní raibh sé fíor. Bhí sé marbh. Caithfidh go raibh sé marbh. Bhog sé isteach agus sheas sé os comhair na híomhá uisciúla.

‘Is mise Patrick,’ arsa an íomhá leis. Ní raibh aon amhras ann. Dúirt sé é agus tháinig na focail amach as a bhéal. Chuir sé a dhá lámh ar an ghloine. Rinne an gasúr amhlaidh. Bhí an teagmháil fuar. D’fhág an ghal cuid den taise dofheicthe. Thit an tuáille. Beirt acu.

‘Is mise Patrick, an dtuigeann tú? Is tusa Patrick. Óoo . . . Cogar, a mhic, an bhfuil aithne agat ar an Dochtúir Mac Gréine?’

‘Tá, leoga, agus ar na dochtúirí eile a bhí ann nuair a bhí an ghrian faoi scamail mar a deir sé féin, Niall Ó Glacáin agus Giolla Bríde Ó Caiside, agus ar na banaltraí.’

‘Cad é faoin bhean ramhar rialta sin, Rotunda, nó cibé ainm atá uirthi?’

‘Ó, aidhe, Leoicéime, Lucky Leuk, nó Bonaventura, nó cibé ainm is mian leat a thabhairt uirthi - Misadventura.’

‘Bhí rún agat an cheist sin a chur ort féin ar maidin agus rinne tú dearmad air.’

‘Pleoid air sin! Ach tá sé déanta anois agam agus is fearr mall ná choíche. Éist anois leis seo. Seo Ceacht a hAon. Is mise tusa agus is tusa mise. Tá sé sin simplí go maith. Amharc sna súile agam, agat.’

‘Fan. Bhí ‘ann’ fadó, is fadó bhí. Da mbeinnse ansin ‘ann’ ní bheinn anois ‘ann’, ach is fadó ‘bhí’ is is ‘níl’ anois.’

‘Fan. Tá mé róshean le bheith óg, agus ró-óg le bheith sean ach is maith liom do shúile glasa.’ Stán siad ar a chéile agus d’ardaigh sé na malaí coimhthíocha, d’oscail sé a bhéal agus bhog sé a theanga.

‘Tá fiacla maith agat, bail ó Dhia ort.’

‘Bail ó Dhia orm.’

‘Dia domh.’

‘Dia is Muire domh.’

‘Cad é mar atá mé?’

‘Tá tú go maith, agus mé féin?’ Scrúdaigh siad an corp le chéile.

‘Is bulaí stócaigh thú, cén aois mé?’

‘Tá mé ceithre scór agus tuilleadh leis. Déarfainn go bhfuil tú trí bliana déag d’aois.’

‘Nach bhfuil mé fuar, i do sheasamh anseo ag cabaireacht le chéile? Cuirfidh mé mo cheirteacha ar ais ort. Ní maith liom a bheith i do sheasamh os mo chomhair.’

‘Ceart ar fad agam. Ach an bhfuil a fhios agam, tá leisce ort mé a fhágáil anseo leat féin, ach ní neart go cur le chéile.’”(48-49)

The central humour of this scene stems from the dislocation of the older Patrick Ó hUltánaigh’s mind into a younger body which has a face that he doesn’t recognise. This allows Mac Annaidh to create a situation, with the aid of a mirror, where the character is able to introduce himself to himself. This also allows Mac Annaidh ample room to exploit the forms of Irish grammar to a degree that would sound ridiculous under normal circumstances, but which makes sense in this particular context; “Nach bhfuil mé fuar, i do sheasamh anseo ag cabaireacht le chéile? Cuirfidh mé mo cheirteacha ar ais ort. Ní maith liom a bheith i do sheasamh os mo chomhair.” This scene brings to mind the question; “Seafóid na saobhloighice nó saobhloighic na seafóide?”(Mac Craith 49) Compare this with Tigges’ “Nonsense can freely explore a wide range of emotions, ideas, and attitudes, and balance between the “nightmare of logic” and the “logic of dreams”.”(26) Within the context of the story this scene is self-consistent, but the humour arises when we bring the story through the act of reading into our own reality, itself self-consistent, where the two together are mutually incompatible.

Is there any way in which we can see humour as yet another response to the death experience? James Hall has written that "comedy is usually serious, however much some analysis may burlesque its kind of seriousness,"(45) Richard McBrien has written that “some philosophers believe that laughter is our way of defying the darkness of doubt and ignorance about the future.” (103) This would seem to have a lot in common with the ancient principle of fighting demons by presenting them with a caricature of themselves (Langdon 255). If you’ll remember, one of the defining characteristics of Unamuno’s *novela* is that it is "profoundly humorous as well as profoundly serious. Its humour is that of the absurd, of disparity and contradiction."(Olson 85) For Unamuno comedy and tragedy were two sides of the same coin;

“No me agradan sino los chistes lúgubres, las gracias funerarias. La risa por la risa misma me da grima, y hasta miedo. La risa no es sino la preparación para la tragedia.”(Niebla 151)

[The only things that give me pleasure are mournful jokes, funereal humour. Laughter for laughter’s sake turns my stomach, even frightens me. Laughter is but preparation for tragedy.]

He saw them as an inextricable unity. As Unamuno’s character Víctor Goti says in Niebla;

“Don Miguel tiene la preocupación del bufo trágico, y me ha dicho más de una vez que no quisiera morir sin haber escrito una bufonada trágica o una tragedia bufa, pero no

en que lo bufo o grotesco y lo trágico estén mezclados o yuxtapuestos, sino fundidos y confundidos en uno.”(51)

[Don Miguel has the worries of a tragic clown, and he has told me on more than one occasion that he wouldn't like to die without having first written a tragic comedy or a clownish tragedy, but not one in which the comedy and tragedy are mixed together or juxtaposed, only fused, confused, as one.]

Koestler has written that “. . . laughter is a phenomenon of the trigger-releaser type . . . ”(‘Humour and Wit’ 741) Koestler has also argued that threat is an essential part of humour; “There is a bewildering variety of moods involved in different forms of humour, including mixed or contradictory feelings; but whatever the mixture, it must contain a basic ingredient that is indispensable: an impulse, however faint, of aggression or apprehension.”(740) In Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí threat is, as we have seen, almost a constant. At the same time the humour is maintained side by side with this unease;

“The literary forms of sustained humour . . . do not rely on a single effect but on a series of minor climaxes. The narrative moves along the line of intersection of contrasted planes . . . or is made to oscillate between them. As a result, tension is continuously generated and discharged in mild amusement.” (Koestler ‘Humour and Wit’ 742)

As Unamuno was aware, humour could not exist without a foil against which to play it out. The ‘contrasted planes’ for Mac Annaidh are Nonsense³⁵ and Death;

"Play can be both an exploration, a statement of personal freedom, or a withdrawal, an attempt to deny upsetting realities and problems. Nonsense does not make an explicit choice between these two, but maintains them in constant tension, as part of its dialectic structure. A unique expression of this interplay in nonsense involves a basic ambivalence between the desire to present emotion, with its concomitant pain and confusion, and the tendency to refuse to admit that such discomforting realities exist. This dualism is most commonly exemplified in the tension between form and content, where ordered surface structures such as rhyme, alliteration, and number series distract attention from material which is often quite alarming."(Tigges, ed. 59)

For Mac Annaidh, Nonsense is this direct response to death, a distraction, an evasion tactic; “Bhí an fhírinne ag bagairt air agus chun í a sheachaint ní raibh sé ach ag iarraidh a chuid kicks a fháil, ar dhóigh amháin nó ar dhóigh eile.”(135) Nonsense becomes meaningful in its meaninglessness, and, indeed, “The mad, fantastic world of nonsense no longer seems to many any more deranged or absurd than contemporary life.”(Tigges, ed. 53)

“Contemporary psychology regards the conscious and unconscious processes underlying creativity in all domains as an essential combinative activity - the bringing together of previously separate areas of knowledge and experience. The scientist’s purpose is to achieve synthesis; the artist aims at a juxtaposition of the familiar and the eternal; the humorist’s game is to contrive a collision. And as their motivations differ, so do the emotional responses

³⁵ Tysger Boelens has written; "Whoever wishes to define nonsense literature in one sentence runs the risk of not so much demarcating nonsense as increasing it, by one sentence." (Tigges, ed. 299) Despite the warning, Lisa Ede would define nonsense as "a self-reflexive verbal construction which functions through the manipulation of a series of internal and external tensions. The basic dichotomies involve illusion and reality and order and disorder, with such further contrasting pairs as fantasy and logic, imagination and reason, the child and the adult, the individual and society, words and their linguistic relations (language as designation and language as expression), denotation and connotation, and form and content." (Tigges, ed. 57)

evoked by each type of creativity: discovery satisfies the exploratory drive; art induces emotional catharsis; humour arouses malice and provides a harmless outlet for it.”(Koestler ‘Humour and Wit’ 744) In Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí Mac Annaidh attempts to combine the cathartic role of the artist with the harmless, nonsensical malice of the jester, enacting the role of Nietzsche’s ‘Cosmic Dancer’;

“Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back - not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other - is the talent of the master. The Cosmic Dancer, declares Nietzsche, does not rest heavily in a single spot, but gaily, lightly turns and leaps from one position to another. It is possible to speak from only one point at a time, but that does not invalidate the insights of the rest.”(Campbell 229)

Any negative experience suffered is balanced by a desire, a need, to communicate. A problem shared is a problem halved. For the creative mind, that need is all the more acute, and for those fully aware of their mortal condition, communication is an attempt to defeat the loneliness and isolation that comes from that knowledge. Mac Annaidh’s desire for communication is expressed without reservation; “Déanaimis teagmháil. Cumarsáid . . . please.”(48) and with the urgency that the previously discussed threat of non-existence entails. A constant plea is “Amharc sna súile agam. Déanaimis caidreamh.”(9) At a very basic level “eye contact is an important element of interpersonal interaction. The establishment of eye contact is usually a preparatory step when initiating interaction. During a conversation continued use of this behaviour may indicate attention, interest and involvement, and its selective use can, therefore, have reinforcing consequences.”(Hargie et al. 1996) More poetically the eyes are seen as the mirror of the soul, windows to the heart, the relevance of which will become clear later. Mac Annaidh’s desire to communicate is reflected in his characters, most forcefully in the character of Fánaí, the angst-ridden teenager who is unable to find anyone to whom he can communicate the depth of his suffering;

“B’iomaí uair a chloig a chaith sé ag éisteacht is ag labhairt leis an ghasúr eile, ach bíodh go raibh tuiscint eatarthu bhí sí teoranta go maith. San oíche nuair a bhíodh na gasúir eile ag iarraidh a ghabháil a luí bhíodh an bheirt seo ina suí ar an leaba ag cabaireacht le chéile. Is minic nach raibh aon ábhar tromchúiseach leis an chaint seo, mar ní raibh Gilly ach ag iarraidh an chumarsáid a choinneáil ag gabháil ar aghaidh.”(136)

The act of reading is a form of interpersonal communication in which the eyes, of necessity, play an important part (leaving aside the use of braille), linking the reader to the author through the text; “Es la lectura, pues, un silencioso coloquio del lector con el autor de lo leído.”(Entralgo 130) [Reading is, then, the reader’s silent conversation with the author of what they’re reading.] The reader is necessary in the author’s attempt to make the act of communication complete;

“ . . . el lector es colaborador indispensable del autor, y no tanto porque la novela se hace en la lectura, sino porque aquel le añade algo suyo. Cada lector lee su novela, su drama y presta al personaje, a los personajes, un poquito de su alma, la proyecta en las figuras ficticias y, dentro de su unidad fundamental, [el personaje] será distinto . . . según quien lo leyere y en qué estado de ánimo.”(Stevens and Gullón 14)

[The reader is the author’s indispensable collaborator, not so much because the novel is created through the act of reading, but because they add something of their own. Each reader reads their own novel, their own drama, and lends to the characters a little

of their soul, projecting it into the figures of fiction, and, within the fundamental boundaries, [the character] will change depending on who's doing the reading and in what frame of mind.]

In writing, the author reaches out to establish a relationship with the reader, and vice-versa, while each also seeks to deepen their relationship with themselves; “Tá tusa ar oileán chomh maith ach tá mé ag tógáil droichid ar mhaithe leatsa. Tá muidne mar an gcéanna droim ar ais. Beirt ag amharc amach, beirt ag amharc isteach.”(18) It is through the author's desire for communication, and the consummation of that desire through the connection with a reader, that the fictitious characters find their fulfilment; “El alma de un personaje de drama, de novela o de *nivola* no tiene más interior que el que le da . . . el lector.”(Niebla 167) [The soul of a character in a play, novel, or *nivola*, only has an inner life insofar as the reader gives it one.] The paradox is such that the communication must needs be incomplete, however, as the text, if successful, must be

“a work that will effervesce with the contradictions, the mystery and the incompleteness of human experience. The reading experience, to be authentic, must remain, like the experience of life, tentative, uncertain and incomplete; for only by experiencing the daunting mystery of death can our lives be truly complete.”(Longhurst xlvii)

It is interesting to highlight the important role that dialogue, speech, and conversation play in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, elements in Mac Annaidh's storytelling that parallel his emphasis on communication. As Louis de Paor points out, prose depends more than other literary forms on the spirit of the spoken word;

“Dá mhéid a bhíonn friotal na filíochta ag brath ar an 'mbainne' mothálach a chuireann úsáid choitianta i bhfocail, braitheann meanma an phróis i bhfad níos mó ná sin ar an mbéal beo, ar an dath a thagann ar fhocail nuair a bhíonn siad gafa tríd an aigne phoiblí. Pé stíl a roghnaíonn an scríbhneoir, braitheann friotal inste an phróis a bheag nó a mhór ar an bhfuinneamh a thagann i bhfocail ó phlé leanúnach a bheith acu le beatha pobail. Is é an fuinneamh sin a chuireann tathag san insint ó thaobh chomhrá agus mhachnamh na bpearsan go speisialta.”(de Paor 12)

Mac Annaidh's dialogue flows with the sparkle of bilingual interaction, particularly in the scenes from the Gaeltacht narrative; “Bunaithe ar chaint bhriotach an fhoghlaiméora Ghaeilge, ar Ghaorla na gColáistí Samhraidh cuireann sé béarlagair oirúnach, argot dá chuid féin i mbéala na ndéagóirí.”(de Paor 14) These scenes are almost nothing else but dialogue, still we experience a colourful world of cut and thrust through our reading experience;

“Caidreamh. Dílseacht. Grá, b'fhéidir. Tá sé in am domhsa a bheith ag imeacht liom. Bhí sé in am dósan a bheith ag imeacht leis. An réamhcheol thart. Cailíní trasna, buachaillí trasna, coiscéim ar deis, coiscéim ar clé. Ar ais arís. Luascadh. Déan i gceart é. Ghortaigh cailín amháin a lámh in eachtra luasctha. Cad é an bharúil a bhí ag bunadh na háite de, agus é ina sheasamh ar bhalla chlós na scoile ag iarraidh na damhsaí nach raibh ar eolas aige féin a theagasc tríd an Ghaeilge do na páistí gan ceol ar bith le cluinstitín, as leabhar, nuair nár thuig na daltaí ach cúpla focal anseo is ansiúd? Lookit thon Séamas eegit up on the wall. Watch you don't fall with all that drink you have insida you. Faigh cailín, a Mhícheáil. Ionsaí na hInse. I don't care if it's the Hucklebuck, I'm not dancing with her. She's cat. She's yucky. Anois, a Mhícheáil, má thagamse anuas chugat . . . You wouldn't be able to get back up on the wall again. Caoimhín wasn't dancin' yet. Bhí sé leoga, agus tá na damhsaí uilig ar eolas aige cibé ar bith. Big lick, that's what you are, Caoimhín. Bí ciúin anois, a Mhícheáil. Tá an

damhsa sin ar eolas agaibhse uilig anois, nach bhfuil? Tost. Déanfaidh sibhse ag an chéilí anocht é. Anois déanaimis Tonnaí Thoraí uair amháin eile. But it's too complicated, Séamas. Cosúil leat féin, a Mhícheáil. Hey, Caoimhín, tell us what he's sayin'."(108)

For Miguel de Unamuno, dialogue was at the heart of his characterisation, at the heart of his characters' fictionality. As Víctor says of the *nivola* in *Niebla*; "Mis personajes se irán haciendo según obren y hablen, sobre todo según hablen . . ." (119) [My characters will come to be through what they do and say, but above all through what they say.] Olson has remarked that "it is quite literally true that literary characters have no reality other than that of the textual record of their acting and speaking - especially of their speaking." (79) A direct consequence of this emphasis on dialogue in the works of Unamuno is the lack of a fictionally created descriptive environment;

"One of the most striking characteristics of Unamuno's work is the absence of description of the setting - there is scarcely an indication of time or place. The narrative is given in its bare bones, isolated from the temporal and spatial circumstances in which we would expect it to be embedded. Persons are presented without the material world which surrounds them. They have only their personalities, their emotions, their passions, their loves and hates. Unamuno rejected the typically nineteenth-century approach to novel writing in which external circumstances, whether material or social, were made to play a leading role in the lives of the characters. By and large the nineteenth century writer had still adhered to an objective concept of reality, that is to say to the belief that there was a knowable reality which was common to all individuals." (Longhurst, xi)

This bares a remarkable similarity to Louis de Paor's comments on Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí;

"Is beag cur síos ar chuma fhisiciúil na ndéagóirí, idir chorp agus fheisteachas, ná ar shuíomh an scéil. Ainmnítear bailte áirithe ach is beag de chuntas nithiúil a thugtar orthu. Tá an cur síos ar an ospidéal neamhléir agus ní thugtar ach tuairisc anghinearálta ar an obráid a dheineann an Dochtúir Mac Gréine ar an othar neamhchoitianta atá aige. Ag ceann de bhuaicphointí an scéil, agus Gilly amach ar mharcáocht aeráochta in éineacht le Fánaí de Paor is beag eolas a thugtar ar a dturas, ar dhéanamh na ngluaisteán, cuirim i gcás, ná ar aon chuid eile de na mionsonraí fhisiciúla a bhaineann leis an eachtra." (de Paor 14)

The importance of dialogue, the importance of the communicating *logos*, in the lives of the characters of the Cuaifeach makes Mac Annaidh's pleas for personal dialogue with the reader all the more immediate, his attempts to communicate something of the death experience all the more powerful.

Communication is one of the central truths of what it means to be human, and in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí intertextuality plays a large part in the communication between Mac Annaidh and the reader. 'Intertextual Overkill' is a common concern in self-conscious literature, and Flann O'Brien's narrator in At-Swim-Two-Birds believed that it was an important part of the modern novelistic art;

"The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet. The modern novel should be largely a work of reference." (O'Brien 25)

This novel is no different, the references culled from a variety of eclectic texts, often texts that have formed part of Mac Annaidh's formal education through secondary school and university. Writers such as Máirtín Ó Direáin, Seán Ó Ríordáin, W.B. Yeats, Myles na gCopaleen, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Art Mac Cumhaidh, Dante, Wilfred Owen, Séamas Ó Grianna, Seosamh Mac Grianna, Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta, Pádraic Pearse, Máire Mhac an tSaoi, and many more find their work quoted and paraphrased throughout the text³⁶, and an exhaustive sourcing of all the intertextual references in the Cuaifeach would be an almost impossible task, maybe even a pointless one; each reader brings their own literary/textual background to bear on the text as they read it, maybe even finding resonances that were totally unintended. That is one of the joys of reading a work as complex as this; "Intertextuality links a narrative not so much to the real world as to the world of other stories in which the reader lives. The theory of intertextuality suggests an interactive double paradox; the writer 'reads' and the reader 'writes' . . ." (Hopper 20)

Where the intertextuality engages the reader most fully as communication is when the reference carries certain thematic weight beyond simply acting as an intertextual tag, a game of literary 'Where's Wally?'. For example, Mac Annaidh takes Ó Direáin's revival of the word 'dán' to mean 'yoke' in the spiritual sense of 'burden'³⁷ from the poem 'Cranna Foirtil' and with it adds another angle to the presentation of death as a burden on humanity; "Marbh a bhí sé. Fuar. Bhí a dhán ina luí go trom ar Shiamais." (22) A particularly startling example is the linking of Oscar Wilde, "Oscar Mac Speranza" (225), with Dante's "Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate." (147) (See footnote, page 65 of this thesis) In all cases the experience of death acts as an extra-textual reference point between Mac Annaidh and the reader, giving the text a unity of purpose, which many might claim an intertextual work like At-Swim-Two-Birds lacked.

So where does that leave us? Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is a prolonged meditation on death. On one level it presents death to us as something commonplace, omnipresent, something which permeates every level of our existence, something which has the power to qualify our every thought and action. On another level it presents us with a number of strategic responses to the death experience: *Carpe Diem*, Humour, and Interpersonal Communication. In the next chapter I hope to show the ways in which Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is an attempt, however much doomed to inevitable failure, to defeat death and attain immortality.

³⁶ The patriarchal bias of the intertextuality reflects the patriarchal bias of modern Irish language literature and fits comfortably within the overall patriarchal bias of Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí.

³⁷ There may be the suggestion that poetry ("dán") itself may be a burden for those who don't like it but are nevertheless forced to study it for examination purposes.

Chapter Three.

“Only birth can conquer death - the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new. Within the soul, within the body social, there must be - if we are to experience long survival - a continuous “recurrence of birth” (palingesia) to nullify the unremitting recurrences of death. . . . When our day is come for the victory of death, death closes in; there is nothing we can do, except be crucified - and resurrected; dismembered totally, and then reborn.”(Campbell 16)

“By immortality is meant, in general, endless life. It is said absolutely of a being who cannot die (gods, God) and then of a being who survives in a changed form after death. This survival can be thought of as personal or impersonal (supra-personal), as bodiless or in some way bodily, as a lower or a higher plane of existence.”

(Encyclopaedia of Theology)

In the face of death, bodily immortality is an appealing alternative, and has always held a fascination. For centuries alchemists sought the elixir of life. Across the world in the present day a cryonics industry has grown up purporting to offer a chance of life after death, in hope that in the centuries to come we will have at our disposal the medical know-how to repair damaged tissue right down to cellular level. Experiments are being carried out with communities in hot-house conditions involving specially regimented diets and exercise schedules in an attempt to prolong life. Scientists have isolated a gene in worms and that may allow us to double our life-span.³⁸ To eternally look young and beautiful is the aspiration, if not the obsession, of millions of people, and the generator of millions of dollars for a worldwide cosmetics industry, including cosmetic surgery. Already research is being carried out by British Telecom into ways of recording and reduplicating the entire brain’s electrical impulse patterns with a single computer chip implant, with the ultimate aim of recreating an immortal mind.³⁹ As Josipovici writes;

“On the one hand part of us wants to keep at bay the recognition of time passing, since that would entail a recognition of our own eventual death; on the other hand part of us desperately wants to wake up from a situation in which time is not even acknowledged. This is because in pursuing his linear existence man is in flight from death, but he is also in flight from his own body; the body calls out for recognition, but recognition of the body would entail the acceptance of the world in which that body has a place and thus of the fact that it will one day cease to occupy that place. And none of us, Freud knew, is willing to give up the myth of his own immortality without a struggle.”(125)

The desire for immortality is as fundamental as the fear of death, but in a modern and spiritually bereft world the merest thought that maybe religion’s promise of some sort of a spiritual afterlife is not guaranteed leaves us grasping for straws;

“Whenever we are invaded by doubt, and our faith in the immortality of the soul becomes clouded over, the longing to perpetuate our name and fame, to grasp even the shadow of immortality, grows more ardent and painfully intense. Hence the tremendous struggle to distinguish oneself, to survive somehow in the memory of others and of posterity. And this struggle is a thousand times more terrifying than the struggle for life. And this struggle gives its tone, colour, and character to our society,

³⁸ Concar, David. ‘Death of Old Age.’ *New Scientist*. 22 June 1996.

³⁹ Source: *Future Fantastic*. BBC Television, 1996. Presented by Gillian Anderson.

where the medieval faith in the immortal soul is fading. Every man seeks to affirm himself, even if only in appearance.”(Unamuno, trans. Kerrigan 59)

This is where the final piece of the jigsaw puzzle that is Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is to be found. Not only is Séamas Mac Annaidh’s debut work a humorously macabre meditation on death, but, in fact, a lunge for immortality, an attempt at eternal self-perpetuation, an attempt to conquer death.

Where is the evidence for this? The very first words of the novel are “Biseach an Bháis”. This was the appearance of improvement in a patient’s health right before death. Mac Annaidh reappropriates this phrase, making it a statement of mission, of intent to cure himself of death. The central narrative structure, as we have seen, is the Epic of Gilgamesh; the quest of Gilgamesh, King of Uruk in Mesopotamia, for the ultimate prize of immortality. The second most important narrative of the novel is also based on one of the fundamental myths concerning the quest for immortality, the myth of Frankenstein;

“... ar an tríú lá de mhí Dheireadh Fómhair anuraidh maraíodh gasúr díolta nuachtán anseo sa chathair. Ba ar an lá sin a leagadh thusa chomh maith, agus bhí androchbhail ar do chorp d’ainneoin nár gortaíodh do chloigeann. Maraíodh gasúr eile i dtaisme amuigh faoin tuath an lá céanna. Bhí sé gaolta leat. Le fírinne níor maraíodh ach a inchinn agus mar a dúirt mé, leagadh thú ag gluaisrothar i Sráid Gardnar Íochtarach agus bhí an bheirt agaibh agam taobh le chéile istigh san ospidéal anseo agus ní dhearna mé ach d’inchinn a aistriú isteach i gcorp an ghasúir. Is léir anois go bhfuil dea-thoradh ar an obair, agus go mbeidh tú beo céad go leith bliain ar fad, más maith leat sin a thabhairt air. Sin é, go bunúsach. Ní bhacfaidh mé leis an taobh theicniúil.”(51-2)⁴⁰

Ireland’s mythical link to the theme of immortality, Tír na nÓg, is ushered in by the brief appearance of Oisín;

“A Ghaiscigh óig, is léir nach ar lorg na Gaoithe atá tú má tá deireadh leis an tseilg.’ Agus dúirt Oisín leis:
‘Ar ndóigh tá Tír na nÓg ann, más ag iarraidh a bheith buan atá tú, ach is cosúil nach mbeidh dúil agat i síoga de mhná Éireannacha.’”(68)

At one stage Gilly even claims; “Is saghas Oisín mé ar dhóigh.”(109) Images of resurrection and rebirth abound: Dr. Mac Gréine tells Gilly; “Tá tú beo. Rugadh thú den dara huair.”(50), following Fánaí’s death Gilly echoes the words of the angels in the garden following the resurrection of Jesus; “Cad chuige a bhfuil sibhse ag cuardach anseo? Níl sé anseo níos mó.”(148), and during the Gaeltacht narrative we find the following allusion to Jesus’ resurrection; “Tá oíche amháin le cur isteach agat sa teach liom go fóill . . . ‘I’m going to destroy you, Séamas, for good.’ ‘Aye, surely, agus atógfaidh tú mé taobh istigh de thrí lá.”(197) During the séance, itself a form of resurrection, the boys are visited by a “resurrectionist”; “Is mise Peadar Ó hEarcáin, ‘resurrectionist’ nó réabóir reilige, mar a déarfá. Chuala mé sibh ag trácht ar bheith ag goid corp. Sin spórt daoibh, geallaim sin daoibh. Dá bhfeicfeá mise agus na mic léinn as na coláistí leighis i mBaile Átha Cliath.”(118)

So it is clear that the quest for immortality, a desire to conquer death, is an issue in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. An examination of the roles of fame, heroism and autobiography in the

⁴⁰ In Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein the scientific details were also evaded in the phrase, ‘I assembled my materials’.

novel, coupled with a comparative analysis of the role of the *nivola* in Unamuno's fiction will show us how the work is Mac Annaidh's personal attempt to immortalise self.

Diotima says in Plato's Symposium that "The love of fame and the desire to win a glory that shall never die have the strongest effects upon people." (90) Sandars writes that

"Gilgamesh's search was not for any eternal renewal of nature, such as the goddess Ishtar might have given, nor for the mere escape from old age into a life of ease and idleness, such as Utnapishtim had been granted; but much more an earthly immortality with its opportunity for heroic action, and for glory on earth like that of the gods in heaven." (43)

Fame, the perpetuation of a person's name in the collective memory of a people, has long been seen as a form of immortality. In Petrarch's (1304-1377) *Trionfi* Death is defeated by Fame (Bergin 148).

Throughout *Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí* we are reminded of the importance of fame in the face of death as a gateway to immortality;

"Níl aon bhuanseasmhacht ann a thuilleadh. Mar sin ní mór dúinn a bheith ionraic dílis caithréimeach lenár linn sa dóigh is go mbeidh ár n-ainmneacha i mbéal an phobail ón tír seo go bánta an Oileáin Úir. Rachaidh mé go dtí an choill chéadrais agus cuirfidh mé an fathach seo faoi smacht agus beidh ainm Ghiolgamais le cluinstitín ar fud an domhain."

'Fiú má tá an choill chéadrais sa Liobáin?'

'Rachaidh mé go himeall na cruinne, agus níos faide más gá. Beidh ainm Ghiolgamais buan.'" (91)

This is linked into the idea of the Punk mentality, of *Carpe Diem*, by stating that it is better to be famous and die young like Cú Chulainn or Sid Vicious than to simply fade away into old age. These people have achieved the immortality of memory in the minds of millions;

"'Tá mé ag déanamh,' arsa Fánaí le Gilly an oíche dar gcionn sa tsuanlios, 'gur punk nó rocker de shaghas éigin ba ea Cú Chulainn.'

'Cé a chuir an nóisean sin i do chloigeann?'

'An máistir Gaeilge sin atá againn, Séamas a' Chaca.'

'Eisean? Ó, ná bac leis. Cnapán gliogaire. Cú Chulainn mar phunk!'

'Ar ndóigh níor dhúirt sé directly ach tá's agat the bit where Cú Chulainn says gur fearr i bhfad saol gairid a bheith ag duine agus é a bheith cáiliúil, ná a bheith ar mairstín go dtí go mbeadh sé ina sheandúine gan chumas.'

'Is cuimhin liom that bit, ach ní fheicimse an connection...'

'Faigheann na ceoltóirí is fearr bás go hóg.'

'An duine sin Hendrix a raibh Aodán ag trácht air an lá faoi dheireadh, *per esemplio*?'

'Si... ach tá seisean too long dead domhsa. féach ar Shid Vicious anois. Bhí seisean go hiontach. Ba mhaith liomsa a bheith cosúil leis. Níor mhaith liomsa a bheith aosta - cuireann sé eagla orm.'

'Agus níl tú ach trí bliana déag d'aois. Tá eagla ormsa roimh an oíge ach ní thuigfeá sin.'

'Tá mé ag tarraingt ar na ceithre bliana déag anois. look at it this way, ar mhaith leat a bheith cosúil le Séamas a'Chaca, dhá bhliain is fiche agus post buan aige? Go bhfóire Dia orainn. Faigh bás go hóg. Sin an rud is fearr a dhéanamh. Tá an saol thart nuair atá tú thar bliain is fiche.'" (109)

Mac Annaidh revels in incongruity by introducing Pádraic Pearse into the equation by association with Sid Vicious, who is in the process of offering Pearse drugs; “Féach sin, tá Sid ag tairiscint toitín dope dó”. Not only is Mac Annaidh deliberately confusing lines of history, but also introducing a cheeky element to challenge Pádraic Pearse’s nationalistic beatification, the source of his fame. These three are famous, and this is something to which Mac Annaidh aspires.

Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is the vehicle by which Mac Annaidh will gain fame, and, therefore, it follows, immortality;

“. . . is mise an scríbhneoir is bisiúla atá againn i gCúige Uladh sa lá atá inniu ann. Léitear mo shaothar go forleathan. Ní thuigtear é. Táthar ag dúil le leabhar eile uaim gan mhoill agus gheofar é. Bhuaigh mé comórtais san Oireachtas le cúpla bliain anuas agus ní bheidh deireadh le mo racht - em ríocht.”(194)

This example brings us back to the idea of direct, spontaneous emotional release, “racht”, while also highlighting the role of author as creator-god; “Ní bheidh deireadh le mo . . . ríocht.” We also find;

“Go ‘way. Shoo, shoo, yis are ruinin’ me concentration. Tá mórshaothar Gaeilge bhur linne anseo idir lámha agam . . .”(172)

Needless to say, Mac Annaidh couches the claim in self-mockery, but the place of fame in the novel is consolidated by the importance of heroism in the text, heroism being a way in which fame will be achieved. The adjectives ‘cróga’ and ‘caithréimeach’ are ubiquitous, the phrase ‘Giolgamaís cróga’ appearing most often, saturating the text with an heroic awareness, but also an awareness of the unheroic life, as portrayed in the life of the old Patrick Ó hUltánaigh before his rebirth as Gilly;

“Níl scéalta le hinsint agam. Ní luaitear m’eachtraí áit ar bith, i gcomhluadar ar bith. Toisc nach raibh mé páirteach in eachtraí ar bith. Ní dhearna mé éacht riamh. An rud is fearúla dá ndearna mé riamh ná cloch a chaitheamh leis na buidéal bhainne a bhí taobh amuigh de dhoras . . . Ní chuimhin liom cér leis iad, ach nár phreab mo chroí! Cumhacht. Díoltas? Easpa misnigh.”(24)

The foil to Patrick’s lack of heroism is the pure and symbolic heroism of Sally Holme’s brother, Seoirse, who went off to war, never to return;

“Ba ghnách linn teacht le chéile in úllord a bhí ag a muintir toisc go raibh sé ciúin príobháideach . . . Bhí deartháir aici a raibh meas mór aici, agus agamsa, air. Bhí sé cróga agus d’imigh sé chun beart a chur i gcrích. Bhí sise ag dréim go ndéanfainn féin éacht den tsaghas chéanna, rud nach ndearna mé, agus rinne mé iarracht neamhaird a thabhairt ar an deartháir. Ghoill sé sin uirthi, ar ndóigh, agus scar muid le chéile agus gineadh fuath as an ghrá sin. Ní raibh aon teangmháil eadrainn go ceann i bhfad, ach anois le déanaí chuaigh mé i dteangmháil léi, beart a bhí cróga ann féin, agus tá rudaí eile déanta agam ó shin a mbeas sise sásta leo nuair a gheobhas sí amach ina dtaobh. Tá mé chomh maith leis-sean anois. Glacfaidh sí liomsa arís agus beidh réiteach sásúil ar an scéal.”(107)

Patrick/Gilly’s bravery stems from having come face to face with death, in the same way that Seoirse did; “In ainneoin an cheoil chuala sí é agus smaoinigh sí uair amháin eile ar an deartháir chróga aici, Seoirse. Fear a bhí ann nach raibh eagla air roimh an bhás nó roimh an

mharú ach oiread.”(248) In the words of Shaler; “Heroism is first and foremost a reflex of the terror of death.”(qtd. in Becker 11) We have already seen the extent to which Mac Annaidh has faced up to the presence of death in his life and in the text; by association, therefore, effecting an act of heroism. Heroism in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí takes yet another form as Gilly and his friends become heroically transformed by playing in a punk band;

“Bhí gach duine anois ag amharc ar Ghilly cróga a bhí ag marcaíocht tríd an speictream ar an ghiotár, ag díbirt an chotaidh díobh, agus chuir sé faoi gheasa iad le gach aon chasadh dá chorp uilechumhachtach foirfe naofa folamh. Bhí Liam uasal, cinnte. Bhí Aodán ina amadán ceart. Bhí Anna suaimhneach cumhachtach agus ba ghrá leo iad uilig. Bhí iontas ar na gasúir ab óige go dtiocfadh le hathrú teacht ar na daoine seo a raibh aithne acu orthu ón scoil sa dóigh is go raibh siad anois ina laochra giotáir.”(206)

Mac Annaidh has also been a ‘laoch giotáir’ with his group The Fermanagh Blackbirds, but in the context of the novel he places himself on another pedestal, firstly through the act of authorship, then again by presenting the text, as we shall see, as autobiography, thereby inviting heroic transformation;

“One of the key concepts for understanding man’s urge to heroism is the idea of “narcissism”. As Erich Fromm has so well reminded us, this idea is one of Freud’s great and lasting contributions. Freud discovered that each of us repeats the tragedy of the mythical Greek Narcissus: we are hopelessly absorbed with ourselves . . . It is one of the meaner aspects of narcissism that we feel that practically everyone is expendable except ourselves. We should feel prepared, as Emerson once put it, to recreate the whole world out of ourselves [my emphasis] even if no one else existed. . . . Freud’s explanation for this was that the unconscious does not know death or time: in man’s physiochemical, inner organic recesses he feels immortal.”(Becker 2)

Séamas Mac Annaidh in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, I will argue, attempts to recreate the whole world out of himself.

We have seen in the previous two chapters how, through the experience of death, meaninglessness in modern life, and the loneliness of the modern world, communication becomes ever more difficult;

“The loneliness . . . is closely linked to two other aspects of current distress, isolation and the inability to communicate. Mass communication is essential to our world, but increasingly, people as individuals seem unable either to talk to or to listen to each other.” (Ruitenbeek 56)

At the same time, “Desire to communicate and establish contact and so escape the burden of isolation seems to grow as ability to communicate diminishes.” (Ruitenbeek 57)

But how can a person seek to communicate when even their own identity is a source of doubt? As Becker writes;

“Man’s very insides - his self - are foreign to him. He doesn’t know who he is, why he was born, what he is doing on the planet, what he is supposed to do, what he can expect. His own existence is incomprehensible to him, a miracle just like the rest of creation, closer to him, right near his pounding heart, but for that reason all the more strange. Each thing is a problem, and man can shut out nothing.”(51)

Ruitenbeek (24) identifies the needs for ‘Individuation’, a sense of self, “which requires opportunity for the person to maintain himself as an independent being”, and ‘Identification’, a sense of belonging, “which requires communication and stability”. We have seen the part that communication, the quest for identification, plays for Séamas Mac Annaidh in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, but more important by far, I would feel, is his quest for a sense of self, a sense of identity;

“... identity involves the individual as he exists in his society. Man must know who he is: he must be able to sense himself as both author and object of his actions. For the only true fulfillment of his human needs is his development as a fully individuated personality, which recognizes itself as the center of its own being. Such a personality has achieved identity.” (Ruitenbeek 11)

It is wholly appropriate, therefore, that autobiography should be one of the most important focuses of the novel, allowing Mac Annaidh to present himself to us, to introduce himself to us in person, explicitly mediated through the text. This is the fulcrum around which all discussion of fame, heroism and desired immortality turns.

For Unamuno, a novel is, or should be, a reflection of the innermost being of the writer;

“For Unamuno, then, a novel is in some real sense the writer’s life, because, as a writer, the writer’s life is his mental life; his work is himself or at least a part of himself. On one occasion Unamuno asks rhetorically: ‘No son acaso autobiografías todas las novelas que se eternizan y duran eternizando y haciendo durar a sus autores y a sus antagonistas?’ (OC, X, 860). [Could it be that all novels that remain eternal, perpetuating their authors and antagonists, are autobiographies?] And a few lines later on he actually answers the question himself: ‘Sí, toda novela, toda obra de ficción, todo poema, cuando es vivo es autobiográfico. Todo ser de ficción, todo personaje poético que crea un autor se hace parte del autor mismo.’ (OC, X, 861). [Yes, each novel, each work of fiction, each poem, when alive it is autobiography. Every being of fiction, every poetic personality that an author creates becomes part of the author themselves.]” (Longhurst xi)

The work of fiction acts for Unamuno, then, as a mirror in which the author reflects themselves, thereby gaining in self-awareness. In Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí the image of the mirror is a recurring motif, confirming for us Mac Annaidh’s awareness that this is indeed one of the functions of his debut novel. The chiasmic structure of the mirror-image in the Cuaifeach works on a number of levels, from being a merely physical reflection; “Chonaic sé a scáth i bhfuinneog thaispeántais garáiste. Sé troithe in airde beagnach a bhí sé, cromtha beagán, tanaí, fadchéimneach, a ghiall neamhbhearrtha.”(126), to being a means by which we can confirm our own reality;

“Chuala Patrick an t-iomlán agus bhí sé buartha go maith. Níor mhothaigh sé riamh go raibh aon seachrán air. Ní raibh seachrán ar bith san fhírinne. Dúradh leis gur tharla taisme bhóthair agus gur gortaíodh an cloigeann. Bhí a rian sin air . . . Mhothaigh sé lena mhéara na línte ar a bhlaosc gan gruaigne ar bith orthu. Cha raibh siad frithir anois, agus bhí sé den bharúil nach raibh siad le feiceáil anois le chomh tiubh is a bhí an ghruaigne ag fás. Dá mbeadh scáthán aige bheadh sé cinnte, ach dhiúltaigh an Dochtúir nuair a d’iarr sé ceann air.”(42)

This clarifies Mac Annaidh’s use of the mirror metaphor in relation to the text. As we have seen in the shower scene, the mirror enables Gilly to see himself as ‘other’, to carry on a

dialogue with himself, to confirm for himself that, although the reflection looks considerably different in physical terms, he is still Patrick Ó hUltánaigh. By reflecting himself through the text Mac Annaidh is carrying on the same internal dialogue, confirming his reality. As in the conversation between Patrick and his reflection (48-49) the conventions of language itself become inadequate, requiring new approaches and distortions that act as constructs to better represent Mac Annaidh's reality.

There are certain obvious ways in which Cuairfeach Mo Londubh Buí can be seen as autobiography, a textual reflection of the life of the author. The day-in-the-life narrative (28/7/82), is, as we have seen, a thinly-veiled autobiographical fiction, including details from various periods of his life to that point;

“Bhí féasóg ar Shéamas nuair a bhí sé ar scoil. Rasputin a thugtaí air. Shuíodh sé ar chnocán ar chúl na scoile ag seanchas is ag gríosú na ngasúr chun foirfeachta. Chuir sé eagar go dílis ar iris na scoile ach ní raibh aon sásamh ann. Níl aon bhuanseasmhacht ann a thuilleadh. Buaileadh é i dtosach nuair a tháinig sé chun na scoile ag gasúr thuaithe a mheas gur Brit a bhí ann toisc go raibh blas ar a chuid Béarla nach raibh le cluinstitín i mBéarla an chontae. Buaileadh é le linn na nDaoine Síochánta mar mheas gasúr eile gur phoblachtach mallaithe a bhí ann toisc gur labhair sé Gaeilge lena chuid cairde is deisceabal.” (174)

The Gaeltacht narrative, (the tale of a Summer spent as a *ceannaire* at an island-based Irish College, and Séamas' interaction with the students), might also merit inclusion here as an apparently autobiographical strand (See introduction). Perhaps more immediately autobiographical are Mac Annaidh's feelings of isolation in his home town of Enniskillen as a young man at the time of writing the novel, separated from his place and people by education;

“De réir a chéile tháinig cruth ceart aitheanta ar a chuid smaointe agus ba léir dó an cás ina raibh sé. Bhí sé bliain is fiche d'aois, bhí céim ollscoile aige agus bhí sé gan obair, bhí sé ina choimhthíoch i measc a mhuintire féin toisc go raibh oideachas air, toisc go raibh sé imithe ón bhaile ar feadh trí bliana. Anois bhí sé tagtha ar ais. D'imigh sé arís agus chaith sé mí ar oileán sa Ghaeltacht agus ansin tháinig sé ar ais den dara huair chuig an fhírinne ar an oileán lom sceirdiúil seo agus ní imeoidh sé arís.”(220)

“Sin mar a bhí sé anois, míshuaimhneach ina bhaile dúchais, gan aithne aige ar oiread is duine amháin amuigh ar an tsráid sin roimhe. Bhí a chuid cairde scaipthe sna ceithre hairde, cuid acu ní thiochfaidís ar ais. Choíche.”(127)

It could be argued that Mac Annaidh's sense of place, “Buachaill ón Éirne mé”(185), compensates for his increasing detachment by allowing much of Enniskillen's historical and geographical colour to become part of the fabric of the text, in much the same way as the town is an integral part of the fabric of his life and identity. It also brings us back to the idea of fame and collective memory, the idea that the historical figures around Enniskillen have achieved some sort of immortality through community remembrance and a sense of history;

“Buanseasmhacht? Ní raibh an Caisleán ag clann Mhig Uidhir an t-am sin. Sa chaisleán chéanna bhíodh Eochaidh Ó nEodhasa mar Ollamh ag Cú Chonnacht a d'éag i 1589, ag Aodh a d'éag i 1600 agus ag Cú Chonnacht eile go himeacht na nIarlaí sa bhliain 1607. Bhí sé mar Ollamh ag Aodh Rua Ó Dónaill chomh maith agus scríobh sé faoin 'dá Aodh do imthigh uaim'. Bhí an tOllamh ar aon chéim shóisialta le heaspag. Fuair sé bás sa bhliain 1612 in aois a thrí bliana is dhá scór. Bhí sé muinteartha le

Giolla Bríde (Bonaventura) Ó hEodhasa, Proinsiasach agus scríbhneoir a fuair bás i 1613.

Duine saoihiúil ba ea Éimhear Mac Mathúna. Saighdiúir agus easpag. Rugadh é sa bhliain 1600 agus bhí sé mar mhac léinn ag an Collegium Pastorale i Lobháin agus is ansin a chuir sé aithne ar Eoghan Rua Ó Néill. Bhí baint nach beag aige le héirí amach 1641.”(72)

“Tá fir na Comhairle Contae ag leagan síos bóthair san áit a raibh scoil ag an scríobhaí Síomóin Ó Maicín, lá den tsaol. Ghortaigh duine dá chuid daltaí a lámh le ceimiceán lá amháin. Tá a chuid lámhscríbhinní scaipthe ar fud na tíre, thar lear fiú. Tá mé féin den bharúil, áfach, nach bhfaca muid a dtrian go fóill, agus go bhfuil siad fós i bhfolach áit éigin ar an oileán seo. Tá tolláin faoin bhaile. Séaraigh, b’fhéidir, ach ní dóigh liom é, mar tá siad rómhór le bhheith ina séaraigh. Cá bhfuil ár saineolaí ar shéarachas anois? Mar chosaint in éadan ionsaithe? Bunkers ón ochtú céad déag. Tá ceann acu le feiceáil ag bun Shráid Wesley - oh yes, bhí seisean anseo chomh maith - ach ní thig leat fáil isteach ann. Níl an tolláin sin ach cúpla céad slat ón áit a raibh an scoil ag an Mhaicín. Dá dtiocfadh le duine fáil isteach ann, gheobhadh sé stair na háite san aghaidh chuige mar a bheadh an taoide as poll séideáin.

Ach cad chuige ar luaigh mé sin? Beidh lucht cosanta chultúr na hÉireann anuas sa mhullach orainn, ag rith chun na háite lena gcuid uirlisí, buamaí agus gunnaí san áireamh, chun an stair a réabadh amach as an talamh ar mhaithe le muintir uilig na hÉireann (a bhfuil Gaeilge acu). B’fhearr gan na lámhscríbhinní a bheith acu. Is trua gur inis mé díobh; b’fhearr i bhfad na lámhscríbhinní a fhágáil faoin talamh, áit a mbeidh siad slán óna leithéid. Nuair a cuireadh buama i Sráid Anna ag tús na seachtóidí scriosadh foirgnimh mhóra ar thaobh amháin mar a bhí beartaithe, ach ó tharla go raibh an t-áras sin tógtha ar cheann de na tolláin sin, chuaigh an séideáin trasna na sráide faoin talamh agus séideadh siopaí ar an taobh eile suas san aer.

Bhí clú ar leith ag baint leis an charrbhuaama chéanna toisc gur fágadh riochtán tailliúra ina shuí sa charr ag léamh nuachtáin sa dóigh is nár tugadh an carr faoi deara go dtí gur tugadh foláireamh.”(184)

We can see here, however, that a sense of place, a sense of history, can manifest itself in many forms, whether as a novel, or in expression of a violent republican nationalism. There is a certain paradox inferred in the previous passage; love of place leads these people to blow the place up. Could a parallel be drawn here in the way that Mac Annaidh, although a lover of the Irish language, often inflicts what some would see as a similar irreverence on it?

The name ‘Enniskillen’ and its original Irish ‘Inis Ceithleann’ become the source for a myriad of puns: ‘Enniskillings’(125), ‘Anois scilling’(209), ‘Inis Caillí’(7), ‘Inis Scáthlán’ (op. cit.), and throughout the Cuaifeach there is an awareness of, and an affinity with Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett, both past-pupils of Portora Royal in Enniskillen, both archetypal rebels, and both world-renowned literary figures; “Scríobh Wilde sa Fhraincis. Salomé. Sally Holme.” (182), “Anyway what’s happend th’Italian or is it that Beckett an’ Wilde are influencin’ you? Too much caidreamh with the leaids from the scoil ríoga, if you ask me.”(186)

A more direct way in which CuaifeachMo Londubh Buí might be seen as autobiography is in the omnipresence of the name Séamas. Mac Giolla Léith sees this as problematic in trying to identify the narrative voice;

“Ach cé leis an guth seo a bhriseann isteach chomh giorraisc sin ar shruth na reacaireachta uilefhiosaí agus a dhéanann iarracht labhairt go díreach linne léitheoirí? An é an t-údar daonna Séamas Mac Annaidh atá ag labhairt, an té a ndeir an nóta

beathaisnéise ar chúl an leabhair ina thaobh gur chéimí de chuid Nua-Ollscoil Uladh é a rugadh in Inis Ceithleann sa mbliain 1961? Nó an é an Séamas Caoimhín Mícheál Mac Anna B.A. é a chuirtear inár láthair sa tríú pearsa in altanna tosaigh an úrscéil agus a bhfuil a eachtraí mar mhúinteoir i gColáiste Samhraidh Gaeilge fite fuaite tríd an leabhar? Nó an é seo an phearsa a dtráchtar go tarcaisniúil air ar leathanach 70 .i. “Séamas Mac a’ Bhancaire,” “smoked salmon scríbhneoir” a chuireann “scéalta” (gan trácht ar chomhréir na Gaeilge) “as a riocht”?” (Mac Giolla Léith 7)

In the wider context of the novel as a whole I think it becomes clear that all of these characters are in one way or another Séamas Mac Annaidh, all deliberate projections of an alter-ego that takes many forms, including “fear fiáin sna sléibhte tuaisceartacha.”(68) In each case Mac Annaidh’s attitude to character-as-self is particularly self-effacing, as we saw previously;

“Oileán agus oileán eile. Seans eile. An chiaróg eile. Agus scéalta eile. Arna gcur as a riocht ag Séamas Mac a’ Bhancaire, smoked salmon scríbhneoir. Tá sé bródúil as an B.A. chéanna. Ach ní dhearna sé dada ar son na cúise. Scríobh sé an leabhar seo. Aidhe, agus tá níos mó dochair ná maitheasa istigh ann.”(71)

“Tháinig Gilly gan amhras, toisc nach raibh aon eagla air roimh an tseansagart, agus ós rud é go raibh rún aige rang Shéamais a’ Chaca a sheachaint ar aon chuma, rud a dhéanadh sé go minic mar nach raibh sé ag foghlaim mórán uaidh.”(156)

St. Patrick was the author of one of the most famous autobiographies in Irish history; “I am Patrick, a sinner, the most unlearned of men, the lowliest of all the faithful, utterly worthless in the eyes of many.”(Duffy 11)⁴¹ In Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí this self-effacement is reproduced as;

“Patrick - *peccator rusticissimus et minimus omnium carachtar et contemptibilissimus apud plurimos*. (Peacach agus culchy, not worth a ball of blue ó thaobh carachtair de; níl meas ag mórán daoine air.) *Qui dixit manet*.”(24)

This parallels and consolidates the disparagement suffered by the author’s character-as-self.

If we look at the novel as a whole it becomes clear that none of the characters, including Séamas in all his guises, can be said to possess a clear, distinct or well-defined identity. Mac Annaidh succeeds in blurring many of the characters’ identities, highlighting the arbitrariness of names as identifying labels. The names Gilly and Giolgamais are one and the same, and the source of no little confusion; “Nach mise Giolgamais Mac Gréine. As cathair Átha Cliath, de shliocht na nUltánach, uilechumhachtach, ilfhiosach.”(131) Séamas himself, as author, lays claim to the same omnipotence; “Is mise Séamas, nó Siamais mar a deirtear in áiteanna éagsúla sa tír bheag achrannach seo. Tá mé i gceannas ar an bhaile seo. Uilechumhachtach.”(240) But there is only ever room for one omnipotent. Note how the names Séamas and Siamais add to the turmoil. Giolgamais, Mesopotamian King of Uruk, at one point even claims to come from Enniskillen;

“*Phwatt iss yer nam*, tusa a bhfuil seanchraiceann á chaitheamh agat, tusa a bhfuil do leicne leonta agat, tusa a bhfuil d’aghaidh caite snoite agat, tusa atá cosúil le punk?”
‘Who? Me? Ó, Giolgamais is ainm domhsa. As Inis Cailí domh.’”(173)

⁴¹ It is curious, though coincidental, to note a link between the names Patrick and Gilly; “If the index to the Annals of Ulster is any indication, the form of the name [Patrick] almost exclusively in use before 1600 was Giolla Pádraig.”(Duffy 75)

This particular quotation is particularly appropriate for another reason. The use of the question “Phwat is yer nam?” is a direct reference to Myles na gCopaleen’s *An Béal Bocht*, and a scene in which the young ‘Jams O’Donnell’, a native Irish speaker without English, is being questioned by his teacher, Aimeirgean Ó Lúnasa;

“*Phwat is yer nam?*”

Níor thuigeas an caint seo ná aon chaint eile a chleachtaítear ar an gcoigrích, gan agam ach an Ghaeilge amháin mar ghléas labhartha agus mar dhíon ar dheacrachtaí an tsaoil. Níor fhéadas ach stanadh air, mé balbh ón bhfaitíos. Chonac ansin go raibh racht mór feirge ag teacht air agus ag méadú de réir a chéile go díreach mar bheadh néal fearthainne ann. D’fhéachas thart go scaollmhar ar na macaoimh eile. Chuala cogar ar mo chúl:

“T’ainm atá uaidh.”

Bhíog mo chroí le háthas ón bhfortacht seo agus bhíos buíoch don té a bhí do mo phromptáil. D’fhéachas go cneasta ar an máistir agus d’fhreagair é:

“Bónapart Micheálángló Pheadair Eoghain Shorcha Thomáis Mháire Sheáin Shéamais Dhiarmada”(24)

One of the sources from which Myles na gCopaleen drew this passage was Séamus Ó Grianna’s *Nuair a Bhí Mé Óg*, and the passage where young Séamus is being quizzed by the bishop;

“Shiúil mé suas go dtí an t-easpag.

‘What is your name?’ ar seisean.

‘James Greene,’ arsa mise. Bhí an méid sin agam ar chor ar bith, nó sin an t-ainm a bhí orm sa *roll book*.”(40)

Quite apart from their humorous import these passages are relevant to the whole question of identity. In a biblical context a name was a statement of mission. In the bilingual context of modern Ireland a name is often arbitrary, changing depending on which linguistic context you find yourself in. This is symptomatic of the identity crisis suffered by non-native speakers of Irish, and ultimately brings personal history and individuality into question. In the phone book Séamas Mac Annaidh’s number is listed under McCanny.

In *Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí* Mac Annaidh is explicitly aware of the reader’s confusion in relation to the naming process; “Cé anois atá i gceist, Séamas, Gilly, Fánaí, Giolgamais nó an Caisideach Bán?”(174), and by the end of the novel things seem to have descended into chaos, as one character blurs into the next; “Ba léir dó go raibh siad uilig cosúil leis ar dhóigh amháin nó ar dhóigh eile.”(226) The characters seem here to play just another part in the overall ‘Cuaifeach’ effect, and even seem to weaken the autobiographical impact of the text, but there is a way in which we can make sense of all the characters and their confused identities - if we accept that all of the characters, not only those with the name Séamas, are Mac Annaidh himself, that *Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí* is a sort of hyper-autobiography.

The idea that the author is implicitly present in his own text is not a new one; “Every author is present in his work in one rhetorical way or another: his ideas and his opinions on the ideas of others are what he is always trying to impose on the reader through the medium of literature.”(Foster 41) Or, as Booth would have it; “Though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear.”(20) It has also been offered that creative work *per se* is inevitably a form of autobiography; “The claim is sometimes made that the whole corpus of any imaginative writer, poet, novelist, playwright, makes up a kind of spiritual autobiography.”(Kilroy 75). Víctor Goti in *Niebla* puts it another way; “Todo lo

que digan mis personajes lo digo yo . . .”(119) [All that my characters say, I am saying]. For Mac Annaidh all of the characters are just different aspects of the same voice.

Mac Annaidh leaves signposts throughout the text to bring us to this conclusion, the idea of author as composite self, unity in multiplicity; “Bhí coinne ag Séamas Caoimhín Mícheál Mac Anna le seanchairde dá chuid i lár chearnóg Inis Caillí ar a trí.”(126), “Caithfidh go bhfuil míle i láthair má tá duine. Tá duine, mise.”(234), “Nach raibh muid uilig ar aon chruth leis an chruthaitheoir? Nach raibh muid uilig páirteach i gcorp amháin? Comhbhaill.”(82) This is an obvious reference to the biblical passage;

“Faoi mar atá mórán ball san aon chorp amháin againn agus gan an cúram céanna ar aon bhall díobh, is é an dála céanna againn féin é: dá líonmhaire atáimid is aon chorp amháin sinn i gCríost agus gach duine againn ina mbaill dá chéile.” (Rómh. 12:4-5) (An Sagart 1981)⁴²

This highlights once more the role of the author as a god-figure, as the Creator of his textual characters, but also the idea of ‘one body in Christ’, i.e. (textually speaking) one body of characters in Mac Annaidh. Just in case we do not get the point Mac Annaidh spells it out for us;

Séamas
Caoimhín
Mícheál
Me all (208)

Remember; “We should be prepared . . . to recreate the whole world out of ourselves as if no one else existed.”(op. cit. p126) Nowhere is this more obvious than in the following paragraph from the penultimate page of the Cuaifeach;

“Mhúscail sé de gheit. Bhí sé ina lá. D’éirigh Séamas amach as a leaba, d’oscail Caoimhín na cúirtíní, chuir Mícheál a chuid éadaí air, nigh Anna a haghaidh agus chuaigh siad ceathrar síos an staighre, agus nuair a d’ól siad an caife gliondrach ba é an t-aon bhéal amháin a shlog é.”(255)

Mac Annaidh’s personality, his community of characters as found in the text, is composite in much the same way as Frankenstein’s monster and Siamais Mac Gréine’s ‘Monster’ were composite, made up from different sources, “Ní neart go cur le chéile.”(209) As we have seen the Frankenstein myth has a direct and conscious parallel in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí;

“Nuair a cuireadh Déaglán Ó Maoldún bhí mála tiubh dubh plaisteach thart ar a chloigeann agus dúradh lena ghaolta go ndeachaigh roth an chairr thar a chloigeann agus go ndearnadh pancóg fhola de. Istigh i gcuisneoir Mhic Gréine, áfach, bhí aghaidh dhaonna ag fanacht le hAthbheochan.”(22)⁴³

So could it be that Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí as autobiography is Mac Annaidh’s quest for individuation, his attempt to objectify an identity, his attempt to distil his personality and

⁴² “For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”(RSV 1966)

⁴³ As well as the ‘monster’ being used as a metaphor for the composite personality in the novel, it is also a useful metaphor by extension for the composite, intertextual nature of the Cuaifeach, as was also the case in Mary Shelley’s original; “Like the monster it contains, the novel is assembled from dead fragments to make a living whole.” (Baldick 30)

present it to us, so maximising the potential for communication between the reader and writer? Is it more? Is Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí Mac Annaidh's personal Secondary ("literary", as opposed to "primary") Epic⁴⁴, with himself as hero, his own personally constructed initiation rite? The traditional initiation of the mythical hero runs as follows;

"In the first stage, there is an impression of chaos, a state of absence and lack, loss of direction, distress, loss of self, separation, solitude, impersonality, dispersal; in the second stage, after a feeling of rebirth, there is a gathering together, coherence, autonomy, gaiety, ecstasy; lastly, in the final stage, there is a metamorphosis, recognizable in the discovery of unity.

It would seem that between the closed space of the work and its author a relationship of reciprocity is established: the work can reach the metamorphosis of language which makes it a new reality only if its author has experienced the initiatory experience by means of which that author has made the passage from one condition to another, thus arriving at the self-generation which was the motive force of the undertaking. [my emphasis] Furthermore, writers cannot go through such an experience other than through constructing the work, an experience they undergo while the work is being created.

As a result, the true mythical character is no longer the character described by the work, but that work's author, in other words the individual who has in practice taken on the mythical condition of initiation."(Brunel 735)

This coincides closely with the autobiographical process in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí as I have described it, especially if we view the act of writing Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí as an act of birth. In the forthright words of Nancy Huston; "All novels say, "Look Ma, no navel.""(713) "Every novel," she continues "is a foundling. Every novel must be inculcated by its author in the short time allotted it to live, sharing with them the totality of human experience - joy and suffering, hope and despair, good and evil." In the context of immortality it is easy to see how a child, or in this case a novel, can act as an extension of the self;

". . . it is desire for immortal renown and a glorious reputation . . . that is the incentive of all actions, and the better a man is, the stronger the incentive; he is in love with immortality. Those whose creative instinct is physical have recourse to women, and show their love in this way, believing that by begetting children they can secure for themselves an immortal and blessed memory hereafter for ever."(Plato 90)

The book as 'child' reinforces Mac Annaidh's desire for complete independence, a world unto himself, and gives him another option in his quest to defeat death through self-projection.

It seems clear that Mac Annaidh was aware of the further metaphorical implications of the Frankenstein myth as regards the birth of a creative work; Frankenstein's relationship with his monster paralleling an author's relationship with their created text. For a male author there is added metaphorical significance;

⁴⁴ "Secondary: Belonging to the second order in a series related by successive derivation, causation, or dependence; derived from, based on, or dependent on something else which is primary." (OED)
"Primary: Of the first order in any series, sequence, or process, esp. of derivation or causation." (OED)
In a Secondary Epic (here the story of Gilly Mac Gréine and also, arguably, the novel as a whole with Séamas Mac Annaidh as hero) the epic narrative structure itself, with the hero at its centre, achieves self-conscious metaphorical significance by way of comparison with the older, archetypal, Primary epics, (for example, the Epic of Gilgamesh) almost all of which were the fruits of oral tradition.

“In effect, Frankenstein has tried to usurp the function of the female in the reproductive cycle and thus eliminate the necessity, at least for the purposes of the biological survival of mankind, female sexuality.”

These aspects are reflected in the text of Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí;

“‘Tá rud amháin eile,’ arsa an Dochtúir go cúramach. ‘Go hoifigiúil, is tusa mo mhac anois. Is tú Giolgamaís Mac Gréine anois.’ Thug an ráiteas seo an-fhaoiseamh dó mar Shiamais. Thuig an bhean rialta cé chomh mór is a bhí bua Mhic Gréine agus chonaic sí gan mhoill nach raibh ach bealach amháin chun cosc a chur leis.

‘Más tusa a athair, is mise a mháthair!’

D’amharc Patrick orthu beirt agus dubhiontas air. Bhí siad beirt ag iarraidh seilbh a ghlacadh air! D’amharc an Dochtúir go hardnósach ar an bhean.

‘A Shiúr is liomsa an ghin seo. Mise a rinne an t-éacht seo.’”(52)

Doctor Mac Gréine has created a child even though “Bhí a bhean marbh”(12) A child has been brought forth into the world by a man alone, without the aid of a woman, rendering the female reproduction system unnecessary. This the ultimate fantasy of the self-absorbed male, and in a sense Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is the product of Mac Annaidh’s own total self-absorption, his own textual Frankenstein’s monster.

Mac Annaidh’s self-conscious act of creation, self-reflection in Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí could be seen as a heightened form of a process that each of us undergoes on a daily basis; “We select, we construct, we compose our pasts and hence make fictional characters of ourselves as it seems we must to remain sane.” (Gass qtd. in Waugh 116) As Copleston has paraphrased Schopenhauer; “To find the key to reality I must look within myself. For in inner consciousness or inwardly directed perception lies ‘the single narrow door to the truth’.”(37) Is it inevitable that a writer, an artist will turn inwards to seek that ‘single narrow door to the truth’?;

“Outward events and circumstances are so engrossing that most people gladly dwell among them; but the artist turns away into the “abyss” of his own being to learn what is there and to become reconciled with his own latent powers. In this way he is able to surpass his ordinary self, to achieve a preternatural level of being and perception. . . . He does so by granting forms a life of their own [my emphasis], independent of their function or appearance in external nature.”(Ellmann and Feidelson 8)

As we have seen, the author is present in the text as a ‘psychic projection’ through the spontaneous creative act, as any one of the fictional Séamases, as an amalgam of all the fictional characters, and present in a less obvious way through the medium, the *logos* of the text. He also appears explicitly in the role of the author-god, occasionally breaking into the narrative of the text;

“Anyway, to get back to the story . . . and just in case you’re reading this, Mickey, though I very much doubt it, I’ll put a few more lines in English to give your dog-haired dictionary a rest . . . twill annoy the fascists too. Brucellosis an Bhéarlachais. Look into my eyes. All the same back to front.”(61)

“Is mise Séamas . . . Tá mé i gceannas ar an bhaile seo. Uilechumhachtach.”(640)

By assuming the role of the author-god Mac Annaidh assumes the role of the Supreme Individual, the Absolute Unjustified Self. As Nicholas writes of Unamuno;

“La novela entera constituye un vasto mundo de ficción cuyos habitantes son personajes literarios, su Dios es el autor, y su paraíso es un universo ideal soñado, hecho de pensamientos puros.”(Nicholas 15)

[The whole novel constitutes a vast fictional world whose inhabitants are literary characters, whose God is the author, and whose paradise is an ideal, oneiric universe, made up of pure thoughts.]

This parallels Mac Annaidh’s attempt to create in the hyper-autobiographical Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí a personal, unjustified, solipsist⁴⁵ retreat. We see this clearly in the metaphor of the island as it is used in the text. At a basic level the island acts as a metaphor for the two worlds of fiction and reality; “Oileán agus oileán eile”(71), “Ach tá scéal le hinsint agam, scéal le chur os bhur gcomhair, scéal gliondrach, scéal míofar, eachtra an dá oileán.”(135) At a deeper level the metaphor of the island draws on the significance of allusions to both Seán Ó Ríordáin and Máirtín Ó Direáin. In the work of both of these poets the image of the island figured prominently: for Ó Ríordáin, in perhaps his most famous and significant poem, “Oileán agus Oileán eile”, the island is physically a place of refuge, a place of retreat, a place of escape, while the ‘other island’ is an internal, spiritual space deep within the writer’s psyche, a solipsist haven wherein “the authentic essential self concealed behind his various personae” (Ó Tuama 1995: 17) is sought. For Ó Direáin the island was similarly a conceptual retreat drawn from his physical experience of island life:

“Réaltacht fhisiciúil an oileáin is túisce a spreag filíocht an Direánaigh ach réaltacht inmheánach an oileáin is deireanaí a chleacht sé agus is saibhre a bheathaigh sé.” (Mac Craith 1993: 29)

Mac Annaidh’s island, his “Í Braisil”(215), his ‘other’ life of the text, is loaded with these significances, and is first and foremost, like heroism, a reflex of the terror of death. As Sally says to Siamais Mac Gréine, which we can also apply to Mac Annaidh; “Níor mharaigh tú agus níor mhair tú, agus bhí an oiread sin eagla ort roimh an bhás, roimh do bhás féin, gur shantaigh is gur chruthaigh tú saol eile.”(248) Mac Annaidh recreates his personality, the essence of his self, as his own island, as the following pun suggests; “Inis domh. Inis mé.”(209) [“Tell me/Island for me. I am an island.] The island here becomes intimately, and paradoxically, associated with the act of communication. The island metaphor would suggest however that Mac Annaidh is, like Ó Ríordáin, seeking truth “ar a shlí in uaigneas”.(Mac Craith 51) It is interesting to note that Unamuno’s *nivola* was seen by Batchelor as “the novel of solitude.”(90) The island has, however, a number of almost contradictory connotations. It can be seen as a metaphor of the idyllic, edenic state before birth. This brings us back to the use of the Garden of Eden as a motif in Mac Annaidh’s text. That garden was an island in as much as it was an enclosed haven, a sanctuary⁴⁶, and we can link both into Mac Annaidh’s pursuit of the unjustified self;

“. . . the Garden of Eden was a favourite mandala in Christian iconography, . . . a symbol of totality and - from the psychological point of view - of the self.” (Jung v.14: 210)

But it can be a place of punishment, of detention, as in ‘Devil’s Island’, from which prisoners wanted nothing more than to escape. In William Golding’s Lord of the Flies it was a place

⁴⁵ “Solipsism is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the philosophy which would reduce all actuality experienced by the individual mind to phases, or phenomena, or self-manifestations, of the individual mind itself as the one and only actuality.”(Coffey 86)

⁴⁶ The word ‘paradise’ comes from the Persian ‘pardés’, meaning garden. Genesis used the Hebrew term for ‘garden’.

without rules where chaos took hold, not unlike the stylistic free-for-all that is the Cuaifeach. It can also be an image of isolation and emotional retreat;

“I am a rock, I am an island.
And a rock feels no pain.
And an island never cries.”

(Paul Simon, ‘I am a rock’)

Mac Annaidh’s island would seem to be an amalgam of these - an attempt to escape suffering and death through solipsist isolation in a textual sanctuary.⁴⁷ The character of Bishop George Berkeley is introduced as an aside during the séance; “Tháinig an t-Easpag Berkeley uair amháin . . .”(135) To exist, in the early works of Berkeley, was to be perceived or to perceive (*esse est percipi*). Berkeley’s absolute Idealism lends weight to Mac Annaidh’s solipsist aspiration. This also leads us back to the poetry of Máirtín Ó Direáin, where in his poem “Berkeley” Ó Direáin acknowledges the conceptual aspect of his own island; “. . . ó chuaigh na clocha glasa / Ag dul i gcruth brionglóide i m’aigne” (Ó Direáin 121). Again we find room for comparison with the works of Unamuno;

“The extraordinarily distinctive feature of the *novela*, and this cannot be stressed enough, is the supreme reality of the individual’s personality. The external world is thus almost entirely obliterated.” (Batchelor 42)

This novel is escapist in the most profound sense, an attempt to shed the shackles of mortality through a recreation of self in autobiography, in fame, and as a self-contained textual world;

“The sense of self is not intended to be a vague, emasculated awareness . . . but a furious exploration leading the individual into eternity.” (Batchelor 27)

By participating in the text as author-god, Mac Annaidh not only sets himself up as the Supreme Unjustified Self, but also participates in the ‘reality’ of the fictional characters, eventually coming face to face with his own creations;

“Ceathrar gasúr i dT-léinte agus jeans - fan - bhí cailín ina measc (a d’aithin sé ar an toirt) agus bhí siad ag pocléim thart ar na leaca roimhe. D’éirigh siad as go faiteach chomh luath is a thug siad faoi deara go raibh sé ag coimhead orthu, mar ní fhaca siad é go dtí gur oscail a shúile. Níor bhobáil sé féin súil bíodh gur mhol mothú éigin taobh istigh ann diúltú don íomhá seo os a chomhair. Bhí teagmháil de dhíth. Ní raibh gar ann.”(221-2)

By engaging the characters as author in his text he underlines their fictionality on the one hand, but on the other “he nevertheless reinforces the idea that they are, at the same time, autonomous characters, who speak not as the author dictates but in accord with their own impulses . . . The very fact of engaging in discussion with his characters implies . . . a recognition of existence which is independent from their author.” (Batchelor 62) In Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí the characters achieve this degree of ‘independence’⁴⁸; “Thuig sé go tobann nach raibh siad ceangailte le chéile a thuilleadh, go raibh siad neamhspleách. Lasadh meangadh leathan gáire ar aghaidh leathlofa an fhir ar leis iad is ba bheag nach raibh sé tinn ar an toirt.”(243)⁴⁹ Mac Annaidh as character even defies his own authorship in an

⁴⁷ I directly refute Ó Muirí’s comment on Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí; “Níl aon iarracht den éalúchas ag baint leis.”(1991; 89)

⁴⁸ As do the characters in At Swim Two Birds.

⁴⁹ Consider this in relation to this E.M. Forster’s words; “The characters arrive when invoked, but full of the spirit of mutiny. For they have these numerous parallels with people like ourselves, they try to

attempt to assert independence; “Iontas na n-iontas, róluath a bhí sé, mar bhí an chearnóg go díreach faoi scáth an túir. Bhí sé róluath bíodh go raibh sé scríofa go raibh sé mall.”(126)

This underlines the consequence of engaging with the characters for Mac Annaidh himself. Mac Annaidh’s alter-ego has achieved complete fictionality. In the wider thematic context of the novel we are brought to a startling conclusion. If Mac Annaidh is now in some form a fictional character, then Mac Annaidh has achieved immortality; “Ars Longa Vita Brevis”(149). As Augusto Pérez proclaims in Niebla;

“Y luego pensó: “Pero ¡no, no! ¡Yo no puedo morirme; sólo se muere el que está vivo, el que existe, y yo, como no existo, no puedo morirme . . . soy inmortal! No hay inmortalidad como la de aquello que, cual yo, no ha nacido y no existe. Un ente de ficción es una idea, y una idea es siempre inmortal . . .”(176)

[So then I thought: “But no! No! I can’t die; only he who lives can die, he who exists, and as I don’t exist, I can’t die . . . I am immortal! There is no immortality like that of one, like me, who has not been born, and who does not exist. A being of fiction is an idea, and an idea is always immortal.]

As Stevens and Gullón have written of Unamuno in similar circumstances;

“Cuando Unamuno penetra en el ámbito ficticio creado por él, lo hace por creerlo no menos verdadero que el de la realidad y más duradero. Trata de convertirse en personaje de su novela, soñando con lograr así existencia más vigorosa y prolongada que la de los seres cotidianos.”(Stevens and Gullón 12)

[When Unamuno penetrates the sphere of fiction that is of his own creation, he does it in the belief that it is no less true than the sphere of his reality, and longer lasting at that. He tries to transform himself into a character of his own novel, in the dream of so achieving a more vigorous and prolonged existence than that of common beings.]

Can we accept, as Mac Giolla Léith proposes, that Mac Annaidh has succeeded in breaking down the barrier between fiction and reality; “Trasnaítear is atrasnaítear na teorainneacha idir domhan na réadúlachta agus domhan na samhlaíochta chomh minic sin go bhfoláítear nó go gcealaítear ar fad na teorainneacha sin.” (Mac Giolla Léith 9)? A similar claim has been made for the work of Unamuno;

“Niebla es un ejemplo de metaliteratura; es una obra autorreflexiva que llega a ser completamente consciente de su propia dimensión literaria. Así se borran los límites entre la vida y la ficción.”(Nicholas 28)

[Niebla is an example of metaliterature; it is a self-reflexive work that becomes completely conscious of its own literary dimension. In that way the limits between life and fiction are erased.]

I would rather share Foster’s view, that “the idea that [Unamuno] was destroying in his essays and in his own fictional works the limits between life and art is somewhat of a fantasy on the part of the overly enthusiastic critic.”(3) Or an overly enthusiastic author? Both Mac Annaidh and Unamuno seem to share in a certain degree of self-delusion, however temporary, that fictional projection of self achieves a kind of super-reality that transcends

live their own lives and are consequently often engaged in treason against the main scheme of the book. They ‘run away’, they ‘get out of hand’; they are creations inside a creation, and often inharmonious towards it; if they are given complete freedom they kick the book to pieces, and if they are kept too sternly in check they revenge themselves by dying, and destroy it by intestinal decay.”(72)

death. For us to accept that Mac Annaidh has achieved immortality by virtue of his textual self-recreation is to participate in a doomed suspension of disbelief. To suggest otherwise is nonetheless tempting. Fiction can only ever simulate the complexity of reality, never fully recreate it in its “irreducible plenitude”(Keep op.cit. 16), and Mac Annaidh’s solipsist ideal, his pursuit for the unjustified self was similarly doomed from the start;

“Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others only in himself, and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies.”(Shimon 1)

As Mac Annaidh asserts of the fictional world; “Bhí an saol ar fad ina bhréag.”(218) At the very least, one of Mac Annaidh’s main aims was that of personal communication, an aim which he shared with Samuel Beckett, who also pursued the unjustified self. Beckett’s work, fatally flawed, was;

“(a) an attempt at achieving solipsism, while
(b) knowing that this is impossible because
(c) he is trying to communicate his solipsism, otherwise he
would not be a playwright who presents his works.”(Shimon 11)

By the end of Cuifeach Mo Londubh Buí Mac Annaidh realises that his valiant quest for immortality has been in vain; “Níorbh ionann an saol úr seo agus biseach an bháis.”(147) Like Ó Ríordáin and Ó Direáin⁵⁰ before him, he must leave the island physically and metaphorically in the knowledge that what he seeks is not to be found there⁵¹;

“Tá deireadh leis an aistear anois. Tá turas mór an oileán déanta agam.”(233)

“Ní scríobhadh sé a thuilleadh; da mba rud é go raibh a shaol ina shaol, ní bheadh feidhm léi mar scríbhneoireacht. Ní raibh ann don scríbhneoireacht ar an oileán seo. .
.”(221)

Like Ó Ríordáin, Mac Annaidh ultimately opts for the tamer, ordinary reality of life, paraphrasing from ‘Oileán agus Oileán Eile’;

“Bhí barraíocht tábhachta leis an tsaol neamhréalach ar an oileán seo mí amháin gach aon samhradh. Ní raibh ciall leis a thuilleadh. B’fhearr i bhfad dó a bheith ag iascaireacht sa loch. Bhí an fhírinne rólom ar an oileán.”(200)

In the final analysis, Mac Annaidh resigns himself to the fact that writing and the creation of fiction are not successful evasion tactics, that death will claim its victims no matter what claims he cares to make, that like ‘Biseach an Bháis’ (see p127) the hope of a cure is illusory;

“Tá mé beo. Mairfidh mé tríd an bhás. Seo biseach an bháis. Is mé . . . is duine.’
Shíothlaigh sé, agus d’éalaigh a anam ón chéasadh.”(249)⁵²

⁵⁰ The island as an image declined in frequency as Ó Direáin’s poetic voice developed.

⁵¹ Similar dissatisfaction is to be found in Mac Annaidh’s quest for fame;

“ . . . An raibh tú riamh ag labhairt le duine de na ceoltóirí seo? An dtiocfadh leat a bheith cinnte go raibh siad sásta?
‘Níl mé saying go bhfuair siad uilig satisfaction, ach tá buanseasmhacht ag baint leo.’”(109)

⁵² Through Gilly’s death Mac Annaidh does, however, manage to partake vicariously in the death of a hero who dies young, like Cú Chulainn, Sid Vicious, and Pádraic Pearse.

On the final page we find “An Tús”, a signifier that the end of this quest signals the first day of the rest of his life, the end of evasion, the beginning of his acceptance of reality, suffering, and death. “With empty hands, his quest in vain, Gilgamesh finally returns to Uruk. The moral of his failure needs no underlining. Man is by nature mortal and he must learn to accept his fate and adjust his view of life accordingly.” (Brandon op. cit. 19) Mac Annaidh, like both Gilgamesh and Gilly, has been transformed into a tragic hero. Like Gilgamesh he has undertaken the noblest of quests, to rid humanity of its mortal shackles. Like Gilgamesh he has almost been successful, recovering in the process a sense of life in all its fullness. This, ironically, may be seen as a second birth;

“El segundo nacimiento, el verdadero, es nacer por el dolor a la conciencia de la muerte incesante, de que estamos siempre muriendo.”(166)

[The second birth, the true birth, is to be born through pain to the consciousness of unending death, the knowledge that we are always dying.]

Mac Annaidh’s quest for completion, his quest for self-discovery has led him full-circle. In trying to escape death he has come face to face with it again. In seeking unity through multiplicity he has been brought around again to the fullness of awareness, the fullness of individuation, the final unity of death as the moment of personal singularity. We remember the words of Heidegger;

"Death, honestly accepted and anticipated, can become an integrating factor in an authentic existence. . . Death is not merely a negative phenomenon. To anticipate death with resoluteness is to find a certain wholeness in it. It sets a boundary to my existence and so makes possible a unity of existence. Furthermore, as that possibility that is above all my own and that I must take upon myself, death sets me free from the 'they'."(op. cit. 44)

Afterword.

In this thesis I have examined Séamas Mac Annaidh's debut novel, Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí, showing how the text is arranged thematically around the concepts of death, immortality and self.

From the introduction it was clear that Mac Annaidh can be viewed in the general context of an internationalist trend in Irish language literature that has explored forms and styles with flair and imagination, and that we can easily place the Cuaifeach as leader of the avant-garde in the language. Chapter One's concentration on death was essential in order to then see how Mac Annaidh's use of humour, his desire for communication, and his love of spontaneous expression are all elements in his response to the challenge of the death experience. Chapter Three showed how this response went even further, as Mac Annaidh sought to recreate the quest of Gilgamesh for eternal life in the very act of writing Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí. Ultimately, as in the case of Gilgamesh, this quest was bound for inevitable failure, but the journey has made Mac Annaidh all the wiser and brought him face to face with the reality of his life imbued with the reality of his death.

I hope I have shown that Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is a powerful statement of Séamus Mac Annaidh's acknowledgement of death, his quest for individuation, his quest for immortality, and his pursuit of the unjustified self. In as much as this novel has been shown to be hyper-autobiographical I believe that I am justified in calling for this novel to be given its rightful place among the great works of literature in Irish in the twentieth century. A great work of art is judged by how closely it can approximate, in direct proportion, the uniqueness of its creator. It is my belief that Cuaifeach Mo Londubh Buí is a singularly unique work of art.

Anthony McCann
July, 1997.

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