

'Christian Humanism' in W.B. Yeats '*The Countess Cathleen*'

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Abstract

Augustine attempts to identify the Christian Humanism in the play *The Countess Cathleen* which was the first play of W. B. Yeats. He shows the play as built around the theme of Christian Humanism, speaking about the way people deal with existential questions and religious quests.

Keywords: Christianity, Humanism, Bible, Christ, Religious quest

William Butler Yeats is one of the prominent poet-dramatists of the twentieth century. Most critics explored the depth of his poetry and gave him honour as a great poet of the modern era, but it took some time to arouse serious interest among the critics in the plays of Yeats. The dramatic achievements of Yeats came to the forefront ranking him as a great poet-dramatist especially after the publication of his philosophical work entitled *A Vision*. The recent renewed interest in Yeats reconfirming his significance as a dramatist. An in-depth study of the plays of W.B. Yeats reveals that some of his major plays expound his leaning towards Christian Humanism. Renaissance Humanism refers to the intellectual, cultural, literary and scientific movement that spread over Europe from fourteenth century. Humanism exalted the human achievements by their wisdom, knowledge and skill and made human concerns of utmost importance. Humans who found themselves suspended between faith and reason, the secular and the spiritual could not tear themselves off from the necessities of everyday existence. Hence they were forced to concentrate on their activities that would sustain themselves in this world of here and now instead of waiting for a world to come as was taught to them in the orthodox religious faith. This translation is the context within which the translation of Renaissance Humanism into Christian Humanism as is expounded in the play *The Countess Cathleen*. Yeats' love for and use of Irish tradition, Irish mythology and folk-lore present in his writings conceal his deeply spiritual outlook on life. The study focuses on Yeats's Christian Humanism in the play *The Countess Cathleen*.

Evolution of Humanism

Humanism is an intellectual, cultural, literary and scientific movement which gestated in Europe in the fourteenth century and was strongly influenced by the study of ancient Greek and Latin literature and philosophy. It was a movement which

emphasized the personal worth of the individual and the central importance of human values. The philosophy that wo/man is a rational being became popular during the Renaissance due to an interest in the study of classical culture and a group of subjects known collectively as the 'studia humanitatis' or the humanities. Humanism became fundamental to the Renaissance culture that began in Italy in the fourteenth century, spread to Northern Europe, and flourished until the late sixteenth century. It included the study of grammar, speech, poetry, ethics and history in their original classical texts (Latin). The traditional approach to humanism concentrated on Logic, Natural Science and Metaphysics which prepared the students to become doctors, lawyers and theologians.

The new humanism placed the emphasis on a broader education which encompassed more professions and physical and moral developments. It gave importance to the individual's responsibilities of citizenship including the participation in the political process in the community. The history of humanism began with Dante and Petrarch of which the former was merely the precursor and the latter the exponent who popularized it. Gradually Italy became the hub for the new humanist's education and attracted the scholars from far and wide by the end of the fifteenth century. The roots of humanism are based in the past and the humanism of the countries of Northern Europe was influenced by their past too. The difference in Italian and Northern humanism is the difference in their histories. The Italian humanists identified strongly with Rome where as the Northern Europeans viewed the history of the Middle Ages with more sympathy. The Northern humanists kept up stronger ties with Christianity than did Italy, insisting on activation of finer values like unselfishness, service and compassion.

As humanism found its own time to reach Northern Europe, the arrival and acceptance coincided with the Reformation Movement. Sometimes the Northern humanism is also identified with Christian humanism. The Christian humanism sought to use the scholarly techniques of humanism in order to apply them to the study of The Holy Bible. The humanists read biblical texts in original Greek and Hebrew and found out the differences among the sources. It led to more queries about the policies and practices of the Catholic Church. The central focus of Renaissance Humanism was human beings. Humans were praised for their achievements attributed to human ingenuity and human effort than divine grace. They considered themselves as the lord and master barring any divine interference. Humans were regarded optimistically in terms of what they could do in the Arts, Sciences and even morally. Human concerns were given much attention and importance leading people to spend more time on work that would benefit people in their daily lives.

By the mid-fifteenth century, many of the upper classes had received humanist education. Some of the officials of the Church were humanists such as Cardinal Bessarion, a convert from Greek Orthodoxy to the Latin Church. There were five Humanist Popes in the fifteenth century among whom Pius II was a prolific author.

After the large scale printing by the newly invented press, Italian Humanism spread northward to France, Germany, Holland and England.

Sir John Hale, a historian of the Renaissance warns us against a direct linkage between Renaissance Humanism and the modern uses of the term:

Renaissance Humanism must be kept free from any hint of either 'humanitarianism' or 'humanism' in its modern sense of rational non-religious approach to life. The word 'Humanism' will mislead if it is seen in opposition to a Christianity, its students in the main wished to supplement, not contradict through their patient excavation of the sources of ancient God-inspired wisdom This is one of the meaningful first attempts in defining Christian Humanism which should inculcate humanitarian values.¹

In England Christian Humanism became very influential as it found a home in the court of King Henry VIII, from where it came to play an important role for the establishment of the Church of England. It does not mean that Christian Humanism could not find advocates in the Catholic tradition. Erasmus remained a Catholic throughout and many of the leading thinkers of the Counter Reformation also were immersed in Catholic Christian humanist thinking. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Christian Humanism became one of the leading intellectual thoughts of Europe. The development of the idea of God-given human rights beyond the authority of any government, initiated by John Locke, an English philosopher, which got enshrined in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, was one of the many direct outgrowths of Christian humanist thinking. Biblical criticism and the development of liberal theology in the late nineteenth century also represent Christian humanist spirit. Christian Humanism sought the need to apply Christian principles to every walk of life.

In the modern sense Christian Humanism is the recognition of God present in humanity; God's image and likeness in human as it is the core of Christian faith that man is created in the image and likeness of God. It consolidates human dignity. It relives the Gospel values. A re-presentation of God's love for humanity and human response to that through the love of God for one's own sake and love of neighbour for God's sake is seen in modern Christian humanist thinking. Christianity emphasizes the spiritual and the human aspects of Christ's ministry. While some parables of Jesus Christ speak directly about the spiritual strength of man, there are other parables which reveal the humanitarian spirit of compassion, fraternity and the idea of service to mankind especially to the suffering, dejected, poverty ridden and downtrodden of the society which is the crux of Christian Humanism. Such kind of theology was developed in the late nineteenth century. The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most beautiful parables told by Jesus Christ in The Bible and contains

1 John Hale, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Italian Renaissance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981, p.171.

the quintessence of the Christian humanist principle.² The parable is the narration of unselfish love. Accordingly he answers rightly how Jesus Christ narrates in his teaching to the disciples and the people. The context of this parable was a question asked to Jesus by a lawyer who wanted to test Him: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit the eternal life?"³ The answer of Jesus was in the form of another question: "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" (Luke 10:26). Jesus was well aware of the lawyer's thorough knowledge of the Law and Prophets in the Jewish tradition. Accordingly he answers rightly that the scripture says: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with your entire mind and your neighbour as yourself".⁴ But still wanting to justify himself and to test Jesus Christ more, the lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbour?" At this point Jesus narrates the parable of the Good Samaritan. After finishing the story, Jesus Christ asked the lawyer: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"⁵ The lawyer answered rightly "the one who showed him mercy". The conversation between the two comes to an end with a command by Jesus "Go and do likewise".⁶ This command is the core of Christian Humanism today which manifests love for one's neighbour.

This Christian Humanism which is 'inclusive' affirms the dignity and responsibility of human beings. It heralds justice that transcends the material and partial well being. Christian Humanism lies at the core of the Christian message. The aforesaid parable demonstrates Christian humanist principle in action. Jesus emphasizes in his teaching that charitable works such as feeding the hungry and caring for the needy are more important than mere acknowledgement of him as Lord.⁷ If the parable of the Good Samaritan is cited as an example of the humanist principle in Christian teaching, the play, *The Countess Cathleen* is undoubtedly the manifestation of the Christian Humanism. A close study of these two in juxtaposition unfolds the truth that W.B. Yeats was a Christian humanist to the core and highlighted the spirit of Christian compassion through his works at a time when the European nations surrendered the Christian values deflecting spiritual sterility through their lifestyle. This underlines the fact that the literary career of Yeats undoubtedly had a Christian influence.

The Play: *The Countess Cathleen*

The idea of writing a play based on the Christian virtue of self-sacrifice lurked in the mind of Yeats for long. Yeats has admitted in *Plays and Controversies* that he had the plan and even partially began working on *The Countess Cathleen* when he was

2 Cfr. Luke 10: 25-37.

3 Luke 10: 25

4 Luke 10: 27

5 Luke 10: 36

6 Luke 10: 37

7 Matthew 35: 34-40

only "little more than a boy". The first publication of the play was in 1892 which was performed for the first time after modifications in 1899, seven years later, in the Irish Literary Theatre. The performance did not bring the desired satisfaction which led him to revise the play further. In fact he continued the work of revision one after another till he got contented. Yeats writes: "Throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action".⁸

The plot is invented out of the mixture of Irish folk-lore and French tale. As Yeats began to dramatize the plot he had the pre-occupation of answering a burning moral question which lingered throughout in his mind, "May a soul sacrifice itself for a good cause?" In his Preface to the first edition of the play Yeats wrote: "The Christian Cycle being mainly concerned with contending moods and moral motives, needed I thought, a dramatic vehicle".⁹

It is admitted that apart from the Christian motive there was also a national motive in writing this play. The reason to say this is that almost all of Yeats's literary activities by that time were influenced by nationalistic zeal as he himself confesses: "There is no great literature without nationality, no great nationality without literature".¹⁰ If the moral motive governs the whole of *The Countess Cathleen*, the reproduction of the tradition, customs and beliefs of the Christian Ireland are the results of the national motive. The first performance really created an upsurge of anger since the public could not understand the philosophy of the theme. The people thought it was unpatriotic for an Irish woman to bargain away her soul. They believed a person selling the soul to the devil should not go to heaven as it was against the basic idea of established religion. The moral values of it were analyzed and protested by the critics, and masses joined by media and clergymen of the time to ban the performance of the play. The surprising end starkly eliminating all such objections was overlooked by them. The public demand of the damnation of the soul-bartering woman by the masses revealed that they really failed to understand the lines spoken by the angels at the end of the play:

The light beats down; the gates of the pearls are wide;
And she is passing to the floor of the peace,
And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
Has fallen on her face; the Light of Lights
Looks always on the motives, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.¹¹

8 W.B. Yeats, *Plays and Controversies*, London, Macmillan, 1927, p.291.

9 W.B. Yeats, *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*, London, Unwin, 1892, p.40.

10 George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer, (eds.), *The Letters to the New Island: The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats*, vol. VII, New York, Macmillan, 1989 (rpt.), p.104.

11 W.B. Yeats, *Collected Plays*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p. 50.

The Countess Cathleen, the eponymous heroine, a kind hearted and pious lady is an embodiment of self sacrificial love. The play opens with the fearsome description of a severe drought and famine in Ireland. Shemus Rua, a peasant, his wife Mary and son Teigue are talking about the dreadful condition due to famine. The animals, big and small, have nothing to eat. The situation has grown wretched and unbearable so much so that the spirit of "graves are walking" to rub salt into the wounds of the suffering people. Shemus who was out in search of food for his child Teigue returns empty handed finding nothing after he had tramped in the wood half-a-day where he had witnessed to his surprise all animals, like "badgers, rats and hedgehogs seem to have died of drought". He sat among beggars too, but there was no chance to beg as they 'haunted' him away with sticks and stones: "I had no chance to beg; For when the beggars saw me they cried out; They would not have another share their alms; And haunted me away with sticks and stones".¹²

Now in the house nothing is left and they are forced to live on some wild plants and weeds: "When the hen's gone; What can we do but live on sorrel and sock; And dandelion till our mouths are green".¹³

The people troubled with extreme hunger decided to barter their souls in exchange for gold to the two demons who appeared in the disguise of merchants. The Countess Cathleen being a kind hearted lady could not bear the plight of her people and plans to give away all that she has unhesitatingly in order to sustain the life of the poor people, but all her riches and possessions appear to be meager and too little to alleviate the great hunger of a vast majority. She declares to the steward: "Sell all I have; Go barter where you please; but come again; With herds of cattle and with ships of meal".¹⁴

The comment of the steward really qualifies her action for the poor: "God's blessings light upon your ladyship; You will have saved the land".

The concern and compassion of Cathleen towards the suffering people is revealed in these words:

From this day for ever
I'll have no joy or sorrow of my own
Come follow me for the earth burns my feet
Till I have changed my house to such a refuge
That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart,
May escape from beak and claw; all, all, shall come
Till the walls burst and the roof fall on us.
From this day out I have nothing of my own.¹⁵

12 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 23-34.

At the beginning of scene III, the play beautifully presents the scene of temptation for Countess Cathleen. Aleel comes to Cathleen who was kneeling in front of the altar to tell her that she should leave her castle and fly out of the woods to live in the hills as he was told in a dream by an angelic being whom Cathleen calls 'an old god'. To quote Aleel:

And lady, he bids me call you from these woods
And you must bring but your old foster- mother
And some few serving-men and live in the hills,
Among the sounds of music and the light
Of waters, till the evil days are done,
For here some terrible death is waiting for you,
Some unimagined evil, some great darkness
That fable has not dreamt of, nor sun nor moon
Scattered.¹⁶

The call for her was to fly away from the situations of sufferings into a world full of sounds of music and enjoyment. An irony of situation is created here in the play. It was a temptation to which Countess Cathleen could easily yield. But she rejects this safe way out totally merely out of her deep love and selfless commitment for the welfare of the people. The temptation before Cathleen can be compared to the moments of temptation for Jesus Christ before his death and her self-sacrificial love to the perfect sacrifice of him. As Jesus was marching towards Jerusalem, he knew well in advance what was waiting for him, the death on the Cross. The disciples discouraged him from proceeding but he endeared the city out of his love for the whole humanity.

Scene V presents the bargaining of the soul between the merchants (demons disguised) and others like Shemus, Abel and a woman. The coming of a certain woman to offer her soul highlights the Christian notion of forgiveness and God's looking into the moral chemistry of human beings rather than judging on the acts alone. Throughout her youth she had been very pious, never missed church, paid her dues, but once in her unfortunate time she had stolen eggs and some food though later she confessed the mistakes in church. The act gained a thousand crowns for her soul. God's attitude towards sin and the circumstances which cause one to be a sinner is verbalized through the mouth of Cathleen: "A learned theologian has laid down; That starving men may take what's necessary; And yet be sinless".¹⁷

The moral principle with which the Countess would conduct herself through life is explained in this way: "And if it be a sin; while faith's unbroken; God cannot help; but pardon".¹⁸

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

This must have been the justification the Countess gives towards the end of the play for the extreme act of selling her soul for the good of the people. Eventually moved with utter compassion and pity for the plight of the poor people, the Countess drastically takes the last recourse to sell what she is left with, that is, her own soul, to calm down the pain and hunger of the multitude and release them from their great calamity. To quote the First Merchant in the play: "The gold is here; the souls even while you speak; Have slipped out of our bond; because your face; Has shed light on them and filled their hearts."¹⁹

The action of selling of the soul by all people in their utter necessity, and conspicuously the soul sold by a pious and good woman in the play can be put in contrast with the action of the Countess Cathleen. The ordinary people sell their souls to sustain themselves and the family as they had no other recourse. The pious and virtuous woman also does the same in the play. They think what they could do for themselves. Their preoccupation was themselves. In contrast to this, stands the Countess who thought not of herself but of others. Her action is modified and oriented towards the other which is the sum and substance of Jesus's teaching and a Christian humanist principle in action.

Yeats Espousal of Christian Humanism

The play *The Countess Cathleen*, presents an excellent paradigm of Christian Humanism where the protagonist does not hesitate even to sacrifice the soul in order to save the people of her kingdom. The parable of the Good Samaritan can be recalled here which is seen as the perfect example for Christian Humanism. The play undoubtedly becomes a dramatic extension of the Good Samaritan re-lived in the figure of the Countess. Thus it unfolds the fact that the play, *The Countess Cathleen* diffuses Christian Humanism at its core.

A close study of these two would lead to four-fold humanist principles. Firstly, the Samaritan acts in The Bible out of his compassion for the other.²⁰ He does not just see a victim, but recognizes the other as a human person whose dignity has been violated. He heard the cry of the wounded which prompted him to act. In the play, the Countess Cathleen does everything for her subjects out of the compassionate love for them. To the question asked by Porter, "Why do you do this lady", Cathleen answers: "I hear a cry from them/ And it is in my ears by night and day".²¹ Cathleen took her subjects as her neighbours and she acted as a good neighbour for them in mercy and compassion. Jesus Christ in the Gospel asks the question, "which of these was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" and the answer "the one who showed him mercy". The command of Jesus "Go and do like-wise" is fulfilled by the protagonist of the play. The Countess recognized and upheld the dignity of human beings, her subjects.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

²⁰ Luke 10: 33

²¹ *Collected Plays*, p. 43

Secondly, the Samaritan attends to the victim's right to life²² cleaning the wounds and caring for the victim attest that the sanctity of human life is to be valued. In the play the action of Cathleen is at par with that of the Good Samaritan. Selling all she had except the house and finally even her own soul for the worth of hundred thousand crowns to sustain the lives of the famine-struck are undoubtedly to attend to the victim's right to life. She says: "And I would have five hundred thousand crowns/That I may feed them till the dearth go by".²³ This corresponds to the words of the Samaritan in The Bible who takes out two dinarii, all what he has, and gives to the innkeeper for the sake of the wounded and tells: "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend".²⁴ Cathleen attends to the victims and safeguards their life through her self-sacrifice.

Thirdly, the Samaritan acts justly to lift the victim beyond his victimized state, that space of pain and suffering, to restore him to life.²⁵ The Countess challenged the evil structures which oppressed her subjects and gave up her life so that the victims may have the rightful status. Her action was to liberate people from injustice and exploitation. Cathleen says to the evil doers and the oppressors, the merchants: "The people starve, therefore the people go/ Thronging to you".²⁶ Fourthly, the Good Samaritan invites another, the innkeeper to do what he did for the victim.²⁷ The play also has a heart moving scene at the end when the peasants carry the unconscious body of Cathleen. As she regains half consciousness, she invites old Oona and entrusts her a task to do for the victims. It was not only a duty entrusted but an invitation to hold the responsibility of caring for those needy people and continue to do the same as she had done. She says: "Lay all the bags of money in a heap; And when I am gone; old Oona share them out; To every man and woman: judge; and give; According to their needs".²⁸

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the first two passers-by, the Priest and the Levite overlooked the wounded man and did not attend to him because they mused to themselves that what would happen to them if they dared to help him. On the other hand the Samaritan thought of the wounded man and asked himself, 'what would happen to the wounded if he did not attend to'. This 'thought of the other' is essential to Christian Humanism. Through the lens of Christian social teachings, humanism must include these things, (i) being conscious of the injustice, oppression and other's struggle; (ii) choosing to be compassionate and showing solidarity with them in their plight; and (iii) acting justly to liberate them so that they can re-create their lives. The

22 Luke 10: 34

23 *Collected Plays*, p. 4

24 Luke 10: 35

25 Luke 10: 34

26 *Collected Plays*, p. 43.

27 Luke 10: 35.

28 *Collected Plays*, p. 47.

Christian principle teaches that doing the afore-said is nothing less than what is our human responsibility as God's stewards. To make these acts purely Christian, one must show love and compassion which are self-sacrificial. The Countess's love for her people is rooted in mercy that manifests self-sacrifice: an indicator of Christian Humanism.

The terrible famine introduced in the play really served this purpose well. The struggle from pillar to post to sustain the life has exhausted all reason in the people having made them slaves of their emotions. Shemus and Teigue have lost all logical sense and relinquish their faith under the pangs of hunger. Here Yeats makes this point clear that it is never easy to suppress one's religious beliefs especially when it has been the leading driving force since childhood. It may be possible only when one undergoes a tremendous emotional strain. Here a question may arise if it has something to do with his personal religious faith that oscillates in him but never extinguished fully. The play gives another character Mary, the wife and the mother, who unceasingly fights the devilish temptations and is baffled at the blasphemy of her husband and son and her pent up feelings find an outlet in her passionate speech, "O God, why are you still?" and again: "Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly, You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang, Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God".²⁹

Among all these the most remarkable presentation is that of Cathleen. Her noble birth and religious bent have made her a fitting character for noble poetry. The heartfelt sorrow and deep anguish the Countess feels for her suffering people in her kingdom makes the design complete. The resolve to make a total surrender of her soul to save the life of the people not only makes her fully emotional but also moves the hearts of the two close followers of her deeply. Aleel, the poet in the play feels that his love has come to an end and Oona, the faithful old nurse sees the destruction of youth and beauty which she has nursed so well and nurtured so much. In the great sea of her sorrow, Oona sank herself and burst into lovely poetry: "Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace, That I would die and go to her I love."³⁰

The plot derives its splendour and strength neither from the action nor the conflict but from an elevation of human soul from natural to supernatural, human to divine and earthly to heavenly. The situation and the characters - the wretched peasants, the people and even the agents of the devil - all work together to hasten the spiritualization of Cathleen. Mary's inalienable and incessant faith provides the dramatic probability to the soul-sacrificing action of Cathleen where as Aleel and Oona enhance the depth, dignity and pity of the play. The most important of all is the atmosphere which is evil in structure and full of horrible images. The ominous and sinister atmosphere is heightened by thunder and lightning in the last scene as it is all the more necessary to create a scene of doom. All these serve as an integral part of the dramatic action.

29 *Collected Plays*, p. 15.

30 *Collected Plays*, p. 50.

The background noises of thunder and the flashes of lightning are effectively and beautifully described by Aleel. These dramatic and realistic descriptions heighten the atmosphere through Irish mythological allusions.

There are several pointers to say that Maud Gonne³¹ was in the mind of Yeats when he wrote the play. The play was dedicated to her on its first publication in 1892. However, Yeats failed to persuade Maud Gonne to portray the Countess. The sacrifice of the Countess holds a similarity with that of Maud Gonne's who also surrendered whole heartedly her life of ease and luxury in order to participate in political activities for the freedom of Ireland. Thus the play acquires the status of being highly symbolical having moral as well as political significance. Yeats admitted in *The Countess Cathleen* and *Various Legends and Lyrics* that the play embodied a struggle between good and evil that it was an untiring effort to blend personal thoughts with the customs of Christian Ireland.

The action of selling the soul of the Countess to the devil is truly vindicated by the fact that each and every step adopted by her is for the well-being of those famine struck persons. Yeats in the play shows that her soul goes to heaven because the moral motive is the focal point of the dramatic action in the play. However, the representation of the fate and customs of Christian Ireland are incorporated due to the national motive. The sacrifice of the Countess by selling her soul was contrary to the belief of the majority of Christians in Ireland at the time of the production of the play. They unabatedly condemned the play as inaccurate and as a blatant piece of anti-nationalist propaganda. The fact is that they did not realize the basic Christian appeal and the unselfish motive of Cathleen as presented in the play which is obvious through the following statement of the Countess:

Ah, no, not that,
But I have come to a strange thought. I have heard
A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,
And I must go down, down - I know not where -
Pray for all men and women mad from famine;
Pray, you good neighbours.
Mary, Queen of Angels,
And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!³²

The play, *The Countess Cathleen* written in a period of spiritual sterility, highlights Christian Humanism. All the parables told by Jesus Christ demonstrate the commandment of love in action. The idea of 'Do for others' is the core principle of

31 Maud Gonne MacBride (Irish: Maud Nic Ghoinn Bean Mhic Giolla Bhríde, 21 December 1866 - 27 April 1953) was an English-born Irish revolutionary, feminist and actress, best remembered for her turbulent relationship with William Butler Yeats. Of Anglo-Irish stock and birth, she was won over to Irish nationalism by the plight of evicted people in the Land Wars. She was also active in Home Rule activities http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maud_Gonne

32 *Collected Plays*, p. 34

Christian Humanism. The selling of the soul by Countess Cathleen is truly reliving the Christian Humanism with the motive of 'doing good for others' at a time when Christian faith and values were at stake.

Conclusion

On the basis of the discussions made on the idea of Christian Humanism and the submarine flow of the related notions, we can explore further the relevance of Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* and open new vistas for more diverse projects of research and writing on the Christian influence of the playwright. The play appeared at an extremely opportune time, one marked by the wide dissemination of indifference of the entire world under the black waters of First World War, the lack of faith and the loss of Christian virtues. The world swallowed by the venomous serpent of doubt and disbelief and the breakdown of Christian values had been the powerful undercurrents in Yeats at the time of writing the play. He did not mince matters but expressed symbolically that humanity has lost the cardinal virtues of faith, hope and charity and refuses to come under the umbrella of religion and religious values. Realizing the pitiful contemporary situation, the play makes a vociferous demand to feel the need of the time to cause the rising of the Christian humanist principles like a phoenix from the ashes. Thus the first play *The Countess Cathleen* has been built around the theme of Christian Humanism, speaking to the way people deal with existential questions and religious quests. Yeats challenged the indifferent world in different ways by the implications of his work coated with the principles of Christian Humanism which lay the foundation for Humanism. An attempt to redefine the Christian Humanism and re-present it extensively in the world through his plays not only had a political and national motive but a moral and theological motive that Yeats inherited from his Christian upbringing.