Rumours of the Infinite: An Irish Poet in Japan

by David Burleigh

James H. Cousins (1873–1956)[1] is best known nowadays for the role he played in the formation of the early Irish theatre. His name appears quite regularly in historical accounts,[2] and some of his own dramatic work survives. Yet, although he wrote prolifically in both verse and prose, Cousins thought of himself as primarily a poet.[3] Eventually he moved well beyond the range of simply Irish literary vision. In a late poem addressed 'To Ireland,' he acknowledges the beginning of his spiritual odyssey there:

> I loved your paths for on them dawned
> The vision of the Hidden Way

But the trajectory of Cousins' life had by that time already carried him much further:

> You were to me the door of life,
> But life grew larger than its door.[4]

From India, which became his base after leaving Ireland, the poet also visited America, Europe and Japan for extended periods. It is his little known, but nonetheless well-documented, visit to Japan that this essay will examine.

James H. Cousins was born in Belfast on 22 July 1873, the first

child of four in a Methodist family. Though his formal education ended early, his considerable gift for self-education enabled him to secure a teaching post. He also served for a time as secretary to the Mayor of Belfast, and published his first volume of poems[5] there, at the age of twenty-one. The conventional mould of his early verses, shaped according to a Wesleyan upbringing and the Unionist sympathies of those around him, was broken when he joined the Gaelic League. It was then that he began to learn about Celtic mythology, and to incorporate this into his religious outlook. When he moved to Dublin and met AE (George Russell), his personal philosophy expanded to take in Theosophical beliefs. Unlike W. B. Yeats and AE, whose interest had preceded his, Cousins formally espoused the tenets of the Theosophical Society. He also became a vegetarian. The beliefs that he thus acquired had a profound effect on everything that he subsequently wrote, and did.

Probably the most significant contribution Cousins made to the Irish Literary Revival was to introduce the actor-brothers, Willie and Frank Fay, to AE, who had a play ready to perform. This led to the formation of a drama group, out of which the Abbey Theatre later grew. Cousins wrote several plays himself, and was successful for a time. But when Yeats, who became the dominating force, complained of 'too much Cousins,'[6] the budding playwright was 'snuff(ed) out.'[7] Some of Cousins' plays, dealing as they mostly did with Celtic legends, were composed in verse. At the same time Cousins continued to publish collections of his poetry, while supporting himself with clerical and teaching jobs.

When, in 1903, Cousins married Margaret E. Gillespie (1878–1954), a young woman from Roscommon, his new wife joined him in vegetarianism. She later became a member of the Theosophical Society as well. Their successful and long-lasting marriage also united them in a strong

belief in the equality of the sexes. Margaret Cousins had formal training as a music teacher, and occasionally gave piano lessons. She was also something of an activist, and was imprisoned twice in the fight for women's suffrage.[8] A contemporary diarist remarks that, at the Cousins' house, 'you (were) always sure to find some interesting people.'[9] Among the guests was the youthful James Joyce, to whom the couple were helpful,[10] though Joyce was derisory about the poet's verse.[11] When James Cousins became bankrupt from unwise investment at the age of forty,[12] he and his wife moved for a while to England. Then when Mrs Annie Besant, president of the Theosophical Society, invited them to join her at its international headquarters near Madras, they accepted. They sailed for India in 1915, and were never to live in Ireland again.

When he took up residence at Adyar, where the Theosophical Society's headquarters is located on the outskirts of Madras, James Cousins' first job was to edit a newspaper. The library at Adyar, a green and spacious compound bordering a river and a beach, has now perhaps the largest collection of books relating to Cousin and his wife. The poet was soon, however, appointed as a teacher at a college run by the Society at Madanapalle, a town further inland in the hills of Tamil Nadu. Later on, he became principal of the college there. Having already written texbooks while he was in Ireland, it was natural that he should extend his writing to educational, as well as philosophico-religious, matters. From this time on most of his books, which included collections of poetry, works of literary criticism and volumes about art and other topics, were published in Madras. The patient and prolific Cousins whom Joyce had once excoriated, seems to have retained a capacity for stimulating a response in others through his own dogmatic obstinacy. His praise of Aurobindo Ghose in *New Ways in English Literature* (1917)[13] did not prevent the Indian poet and philo-

sopher from disagreeing with him in a review. The disagreement then provoked Aurobindo into writing a volume of his own.[14]

Cousins seems, nonetheless, to have been much liked and respected as a teacher, and his widening range of international acquaintances came to include the Japanese poet and expounder of oriental art, Yoné Noguchi (1875–1947). Noguchi, who was a professor at Keiogijuku University in Tokyo, arranged for Cousins to be invited to teach there as a visiting professor for a year. This was, like Cousins' departure for India, a significant step, for it made him the first, and so far the only, Irish poet to experience Japan directly. Fortunately he has left us a detailed account of the year that he spent here, written up afterwards from diaries. His book, *The New Japan : Impressions and Reflections*, records a visit made in 1919–20, and was published in India in 1923.[15]

In the lengthy autobiography that Cousins coauthored with his wife, he speaks of 'the piece of good *karma* that had come to me through the collusion of Sarojini Naidu and Yone Naguchi (sic), two poets who had shuffled a third into a Guest Professorship of Modern English Poetry in the first modernised university in Japan, the Keiogijuku of Tokyo.'[16] There was a slight delay in his departure, owing to the disruptions in world transport that followed World War I. Cousins travelled first to Calcutta, and boarded a steamer there which left for the Far East on 30 April 1919. He had to make the journey alone, while his wife remained in India. The ship sailed first to Singapore, then made two stops off the coast of China, at Hong Kong and Shanghai, before arriving in Kobe on 28 May. According to his own account, Cousins had reached Japan 'just in time to be too late for the cherry blossoms.'[17]

Cousins later noted that he had prepared some lecture notes in India, and brought these with him,[18] but he also brought a certain quantity of

intellectual baggage deriving from his Theosophical beliefs. Thus when he describes himself at the outset of his account as 'an observer of human beings from as unprejudiced a point of view as a human being can attain'[19] he is expressing a Theosophical ideal.[20] Almost immediately, he becomes indignant at a rickshaw driver offering him a girl, thereby giving expression to another aspect of his character, an ingrained puritanism. He becomes more friendly on being greeted by curious children at the station, where he boards a train for Tokyo. Yoné Noguchi meets him on arrival there, and takes him to the small house he is to occupy in the grounds of Keio University. It is a traditional Japanese construction, and he admires the *shoji*, as he had admired Mount Fuji from the train, for a quality of 'purity.'[21] At his first meal he is offered Western food, his hosts being unaware that he is vegetarian. He observes to the reader: 'I felt myself, when I declined the flesh-foods, to be the only true Buddhist at the table.'[22]

While staying in Japan, Cousins frequently compares what he encounters to what he has experienced before in India. This is unusual, and perhaps inevitable, since India was not only where he was permanently domiciled, but also where his book was published. Occasionally his comments can be quite interesting, as when he compares Japanese tatami to the flooring of an Indian household. He finds the position of women in Japan better than he had expected: 'Japan has her own limitations on the movements of her women, like every other country; but, compared with Japan, India, as far as its women are concerned, is a vast prison'.[23] The possibility of independence is made real for him by a visit from a lady journalist. The disappointment is that she has come to ask him, not about his own work, but about that of his senior and contemporary, Yeats. News of the political turmoil in Ireland has already made an impression in Japan, for Cousins is asked quite early on to lecture on

'Irish political History'.[24]

Cousins is also made aware of the independent attitude of the Japanese people, whose country, unlike India, had not been colonized. But when he begins to teach, he finds the students' clothing 'dismal and formal,'[25] unlike the more colourful costumes worn by Indians. Unlike Indians again, they cannot grasp abstractions, and he is frustrated sometimes by their linguistic limitations. Nonetheless, he is quite happy to attend a Tanka Society Meeting in the university, and learn something of Japanese poetic practice. He has absorbed enough to describe this poetic form in general terms to the reader, and also that of haiku. But what he most delights in, among his various discoveries, is the 'sheer artifice'[26] of Noh. Adding to his pleasure in the first performance that he attends, is a chance meeting with the widow of Lafcadio Hearn, an author whom he calls 'one of the chief divinities in the literary pantheon of my youth.'[27] He is invited by Mrs Hearn to visit her at home, and they take tea together, thinking of their absent spouses, for the day on which they meet is Mrs Cousins' birthday.

The poet, though approaching fifty and already fixed in his way of thinking, seems a friendly and outgoing man, open constantly to new acquaintance. The English potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979) strikes him as a likeable and sympathetic person. And Cousins is easily persuaded by The Young Party, a group composed mainly of students, to join them on a trip to Kamakura. The photographic record reproduced from this excursion shows the poet seated with his companions before the Great Buddha. As in most of the portraits in the book, Cousins appears white-haired and moustachioed, dressed in a light suit with a floppy black bowtie. This was his habitual costume, and perhaps one of the reasons why he later complains of the cold in winter in Japan. He is struck, as he moves about the country, by

its uniformity: 'My impression was that Japan was Japan wherever you went.'[28] The contrast of ugliness and beauty sometimes troubles him, as do the intellectual differences: 'Everything mental seemed to be immediate, small, clear. There was no feeling of "long views," of large conceptions, of the wavy edge that is characteristic of the horizon of mystical vision.'[29] Given his desire for equal treatment of the sexes, it is unsurprising that he disapproves of *onnagata*, or males impersonating females on the stage. His comment on this appears after a visit to Kabuki.

Further expeditions take the poet to Karuizawa, and Oiwake, where he worships at a Shinto shrine. His travelling companions on this trip to the mountains of central Honshu are a French couple by the name of Richard.[30] The poet experiences an earthquake, and observes a volcano that is mildly active. His mountain walks are carefully described, and there is a further visit to Nikko, where he glimpses the Crown Prince (later Emperor Shōwa). He also meets the famous American anthropologist Dr Frederick Starr (1858—1933), of Chicago University. But in a Nikko 'temple' (sic), he says: 'I missed the sense of the deeper life that one gets in Indian sacred edifices.'[31] Back in Tokyo, he is kept awake by the birth, and two months later death, of a baby boy next door. He observes the intensity of suppressed feeling when he meets the father. These episodes of joy and tragedy have chapters to themselves. There are, however, other observations about noises in the night. Cousins discovers the call of the customary blind masseur, the clappers that accompany warnings about fire, and overhears a men's choral group at practice. Tragedy occurs again, with the death of Noguchi's little daughter.

India is never far away from Cousins' consciousness and memory. Part of the reason he feels 'humbled and nervous'[32] when delivering a set of public lectures at Keio University derives from the fact that the Indian

poet Rabindranath Tagore, his friend and hero, had mounted the same dais a few years earlier. The seven lectures that Cousins gives on Modern Poetry, followed by a reading of his own poetic compositions, receive extensive coverage in *The Japan Advertiser*.[33] But the poet has another focus of artistic interest, and that is painting. In general, he finds only a 'stagnant perfection' in Japanese painting, and dislikes the imitations of Western art.[34] He goes to see the painter Yokoyama Taikwan[35] in Ueno, on the other side of Tokyo, and when he cannot find the address, it is an Indian who turns up by chance to help him. The painter takes the poet to a geisha party, where Cousins only pretends to drink the *saké* he is offered, calling it 'a fiery degradation of the innocent snowy rice.'[36] Characteristically, he posits India as 'the source of ideas' in his reflections, and he consequently thinks that what Japan needs is a 'return to India.'[37] He gains a strongly favourable impression from another painter, Tami Koumé, whose work, though little known, is sufficiently approved to be reproduced in the pages of the book.[38]

The other art that has been missing from Cousins' daily life is music. It is undoubtedly because his wife is a musician that he misses her particularly after hearing a musical recital. Ever sociable, he makes friends with some Americans, and is welcomed at the American Embassy, and also that of Mexico. The British Embassy, however, snubs him, probably because of his Indian associations. He reports not long after this: 'My attitude to the life around me was no longer spectacular either in appreciation or criticism. Japan began to matter to me.'[39] At the same time he acknowledges didacticism as his 'besetting sin,' and begins to preach 'religious unity.'[40] It is the sentiments of the people who request his help that generate Cousins' enthusiasm for a new journal, *The Asian Review*. At the inaugural gathering, he discovers: 'In the heart of the new Japan

secretly lived the flame of the old, the eternally ancient that is ever the veritably modern.'[41] Shortly afterwards he meets a Mr Yanagi,[42] whose unusual interest in Blake he finds most sympathetic. 'Now once again,' he expounds, 'the protest of the human soul was being voiced against the fallacy of limiting the illimitable Personality to the expression of one Person. The ancient paradox was seen again, that only in a multitude of idols was there safety from idolatry.'[43]

Cousins' response to Japan is conditioned, perhaps more than most observers, by the preconceptions he has brought with him. What he finds must always be measured for value and significance in terms of his Theosophical beliefs. He does, however, represent the ordinary events of life fairly well. He tells us of his appreciation of the music performed by the Wagner Society at Keio, and of his first hot spring bath, on an outing to Atami. (There is a fine picture of Mt Fuji seen behind a waterfall). Before this he has also visited Kyoto, to stay with a couple by the name of Eichheim, an American violinist and his wife. Christmas finds him in bed with flu, but afterwards he travels to Yokosuka, and to Kamakura once again. New Year he spends in Tokyo, where he is invited to take part in a tea ceremony, conducted by a 'Miss Arrow-head' (sic). He is by now aware of the honesty of ordinary Japanese, from an incident involving a mislaid purse, and of their hidden passion, from what he hears of love suicides. But he is also intrigued when : 'One day I saw a Buddhist funeral and a Shinto one crossing each other's path.'[44] It is his syncretic creed to which his mind regularly returns, so that it is not surprising to find him giving some lectures on religion. These are not so well received as his talks on poetry, though they are followed by an attempt to set up a local branch of the Theosophical Society.[45]

When Cousins is unexpectedly recalled to India in a telegram from

Mrs Besant, the head of the Theosophical Society, it is with some regret that he begins to make preparations for a new departure. Although his students have sometimes disappointed him, he is delighted, just before he leaves, by a visit from two young women who have learnt some of his poems, which one of them recites. He departs Tokyo on 21 March, to journey westward. It is typical of him that he finds the time and energy to visit 'Horiyuji,' not far from Nara. He describes the temple complex, which dates from the early seventh century, as 'the holy place of the double marriage of Indian and Japanese art and religion.'[47] His guide and companion on this occasion is an Indian visitor, fluent in Japanese, who has come here to study pottery. Cousins departs Japan at last on 28 March 1920, in his own words, 'just in time to be too soon for the cherry blossoms.'[48]

The New Japan was neither the first of Cousins' publications that resulted from, or had a bearing on, his sojourn in this country, nor was it by any means the last. *Sea-Change,*[49] a collection of poems that appeared in the year of his return, contained the first of his verses about Japan, and was dedicated to Noguchi. The next year, 1921, Cousins gathered his Keio lectures into a volume entitled *Modern English Poetry: Its Characteristics and Tendencies,*[50] which also came out with a dedication to Noguchi. On the basis of this publication, Cousins was awarded the degree of Doctor of Letters by Keio University (through the Ministry of Education), and thus became the first foreigner to be granted such an honour.[51] The following year, 1922, Cousins published three new books, all of them containing some mention of Japan. In a prose work entitled *The Cultural Unity of Asia,*[52] one chapter takes Japan for subject, though the opening and closing chapters deal, almost inevitably, with India. *Surya-Gita,*[53] Cousins' new poetry collection, in fact reprints two earlier collections, with a selection of new poems at the end. The title-sequence of the final section

is Indian in inspiration, while some of the other poems derive from the poet's visit to Japan, but the dedicatory verses are addressed 'To Kathleen-Ni-Houlihan.' The third book was a volume of essays on art and education, called *Work and Worship*,[54] the last three chapters of which are of some relevance to this examination. In Chapter VIII, Cousins speaks approvingly of 'a coordinated quality (in Japanese art) which becomes recognisable as the racial temperament. The Japanese touch in handicrafts is unmistakable....'[55] Chapter IX deals with the 'Passing-world' school of woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*), whose development he traces, and which he says display an 'innate genius for aesthetic chastity,'[56] despite the lewdness of their subjects. Having observed previously that 'Japanese sensibility has exhausted things felt, and looks for new sensation in the adoption of western methods,'[57] Cousins concludes with an essay on Tami Koumé, the contemporary painter he had met during his stay in Tokyo. Chapter X begins by remarking how Koumé describes himself as '*an artist*' rather than 'a Japanese artist,'[58] and Cousins then somewhat strenuously traces the painter's development, on a Theosophical model, towards greater spirituality in general expression. Koumé's paintings are praised for their 'strong calmness,' and the author says that the artist 'escapes the domination of emotion of the high-coloured kind just because of his racial heritage of reserve in feeling.'[59]

'Race tradition' is a concept that is central to Cousins' thought, and there are several mentions of it in *The New Japan*. Earlier in life the poet had learnt, from Mrs Besant, about 'a long process of racial and cultural evolution out of which Ireland was ultimately to emerge as the spiritual mentor of Europe, even as India had long ago been to Asia.'[60] This belief in a messianic destiny was perhaps necessary to the Irish nation in its effort to recover from colonial domination. Cousins' strongly held

convictions with regard to racial and sexual equality, and his efforts to achieve things, remain wholly admirable still. But his refusal to modify his notions about 'race tradition' even after World War II, means that some passages in his writings are less easily acceptable today. His spiritual identification is with the Celtic school of Yeats and AE, his contemporaries in Ireland, and he describes their genius as 'vagrant and lyrical.'[61] He locates his own work 'somewhere in the suburbs of the affection of (this) school, with a lack of the new cliché, and an assurance and determination to go its own way that became a son of Ulster.'[62] He seems unaware in this ascription that, as an Ulster Protetant, he is very likely not of Celtic stock or origin, but he was seldom troubled by doubts or contradictions of this kind. The poets whom Cousins most admired were Blake and Shelley, for the visionary quality informing what they wrote. In the lectures that he gave in Tokyo, he criticises Ezra Pound, and praises the 'Indo-Anglian poets,' as he calls them, like Radindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghose. It was the spiritual goal of poetry that he judged its most important attribute:

> I count no poet worthy of the craft
> Whose aim is not pitched higher than the highest.[63]

William Dumbleton, author of the only monograph so far published about Cousins' work, points out that, although Cousins wrote both plays and poetry, 'he valued the poetic genre over the dramatic.'[64] In several longer compositions, usually dramatizing Celtic myths, he attempted to combine them. It is from one such work that the lines above are taken, and it is in another one that those which follow come. Much of Cousins' lyrical poetic effort is, as Dumbleton quite reasonably suggests, directed towards:

The mystery of small familiar things
Made great with gleams from past the verge of sight
And strange with rumours of the infinite.[65]

The word 'verge,' as Dumbleton notes, is a recurring one in Cousins' work, and expresses the poet's yearning for absorption into a purely spiritual world. He considers himself privy to the spiritual immanence that transcends material reality. The temporal or finite world, in which we live, is represented by Biblical words like 'clay' or 'moth and rust.'

Cousins' poetic output was substantial, and only a small portion of it was written in or about Japan. Most of these compositions can be found in his *Collected Poems* (1940)[66] and, while not among his best work, they are illustrative of his technique. Cousins wrote in a variety of different forms, but usually has more success with longer lines and formal structures, than he does with free verse or shorter lines. 'Mill-Wheels,' the first poem ascribed to his sojourn in Japan, was composed at Kutsukake in 1919:

A miller stood beside his mill
Under a larch-clad, pine-topped hill,
And heard, or fancied he could hear,
From his two mill-wheels rumbling near,
Words with their creaky gurgling blent
That sounded like an argument.[67]

The ensuing stanzas work out the argument, spoken by voices of quite different character, with a moral at the end. It is competently done in rhyming couplets, and its didactic element recalls some of Cousins' poems in anthologies.[68] The next piece, a free verse composition called 'Moon-Worship' and meant to be 'Paraphrased from the Japanese,' is less successful.

Then there is 'A Flower Offering,' taken 'From the Japanese of Empress Komio,' and ably recast in a double quatrain. 'Poet and Cicada,' composed at Nikko, is another dialogue:

Poet
What a funny song you sing
In the giant *sungi* tree:
Me me me me meeeeeee!
Always, on your lofty shelf,
Are you thinking of yourself?
(*Me me me me meeeeeee.*)[69]

Oddly, the same onomatopoeia occurs in the autobiography of Bernard Leach,[70] though unlike Leach Cousins uses it to point a moral. The cicada defends itself in several lightly delivered verses, to a Blakean conclusion:

Who then has the braver breath, –
You whose song is one long strife
With a shadow you call death?
I who nothing know but life?
Who is wiser, you or I?

But the poem ends flatly:

Poet
I shall think of a reply.

Several pages are then taken up with a free verse effusion called 'Processional Ode.' This was written in praise of Francis Thompson, when that poet's death-mask was moved, at Cousins' request, from the entrance of Noguchi's house into his study.

It is evident from the next poems, a sequence of four sonnets entitled 'Love in Exile,' that Cousins misses his wife, who had remained behind in India. As Dumbleton observes, in general 'the rigidity and containment of the sonnet form makes Cousins' lyric flights more tersely effective.'[71] It occasionally produces unnecessary contrivance, but there is genuine affection too:

> But when the wind of dawn through fern and tree
> Wakens the birds to their accustomed psalms,
> And her to exile from remembered bliss;
> Ah thought! be then no thought, but instantly
> Be very I, soul, body; be these palms
> Cool on her forehead, this good-morning kiss![72]

Two more free verse pieces complete this group. 'In Time of Rain,' written at Oiwake, tries to evoke the downpour in 'language rumourous of coming rain.' 'Love and Spring' was written in Tokyo just before the poet's final departure:

> What is this perfume soothing the harsh air,
> This living glow
> Stirring the melting snow
> That shuffles like a serpent to its lair?
> No cherries yet bloom for a woman's hair[73]

He looks forward in imagination to the cherry blossom season that he did not experience. He is probably remembering the plum blossoms that come out earlier, and which he would have seen, when he evokes the scented air. And he is doubtless recalling woodblock prints, or theatrical performances, when he thinks of women using the cherry blooms to decorate

their hair.

There are still other poems in Cousins' oeuvre that bear upon his connection with Japan. The free verse piece, 'A Planetary Conjunction,' though based on an idea that occurred to him before his arrival, was actually written up in Nikko.[74] 'Gladiolus,' subitled 'in an Oriental garden,' while clearly Japanese in subject, may have been written after his return to India. It records a vision evoked by the flower:

> What had been a flower now glowed a
> Crimson-lanterned peaked pagoda[75]

The rhymes are quite inventive, but the total effect is so bad as to be comical. Dumbleton cites this as an example of Cousins at his worst. 'The Fan,' another free verse composition, recalls Japan again:

> Yea, even as in Japan
> Poets in rhythmic syllables indite
> The joy in grief, the sadness in delight,
> The blossoms that proclaim the withering year,
> Upon an open fan[76]

This is because it was composed on the Eastern Sea, 'between Japan and China,' a decade later in 1929. At that time Cousins was going to America, from which he returned to India by way of Europe.

Svetoslav Roerich (b. 1904),[77] an artist once resident in India, and now living in America, has left us the best portrait of Cousins, at a gallery in southern India. This gallery, the Sri Chitra Art Gallery in Trivandrum, houses one of two collections of paintings that Cousins made[78] after he had been appointed Art Advisor to the Maharajah of Travancore (modern Kerala) in the early 1930's. Most of the paintings

are undistinguished, but interestingly some of them reveal the influence of Japonisme, which has come to India through Western art, by way of Europe. Other apparent influences come from Blake and the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as the paintings of AE, from whom Cousins took his views on art.[79] The portrait of Cousins shows him seated, on one side of a balcony, holding a book and spectacles. Behind him stretches a long valley, with mountains rising at the end of it, and above them cloud. The gallery in which this picture hangs was opened by the Maharajah in 1935, and it was not long after this that Cousins wrote another pair of sonnets for his wife. Entitled, 'For a Marriage Anniversary,' the first of these recalls a story about the tea master 'Rikiu,' which had been told to Cousins by Noguchi.[80] As a poem, however, it is awkward and contrived in execution, and much inferior to the second sonnet, which is simply about the couple growing old:

Had I but loved you in the way of men
Of sensual mind, and worshipped not your soul,
Well might I dread the lees in passion's bowl,
Their jaded palate wishing now was then.
But, love! your spirit's highlands glimpsed by dawn
Have still in dusk a distant virgin peak,
With hints of culminations yet to seek
Round crystal streams from cloud-hid fountains drawn.
Oh! freed from tyrannies of touch and sight,
Yet from their sweetness feathering love's wing,
Shall my heart quail from our dear earth to spring
When you take off upon your heavenward flight?
Nay, but in highest heaven where you shall bide,

My soul, ascending, shall be at your side.

They had been married then for over thirty years.

From the Maharajah of Travancore Cousins garnered a further honorary title, 'Kulapati,' meaning 'teacher of multitudes.' This was awarded in recognition of his contributions to the arts and education. Perhaps more surprising was the poet's acceptance of the Hindu faith about this period as well. This action, described in detail in Cousins' autobiography,[81] the poet interpreted not as a rejection of Christianity, but as the embracing of a larger faith. It was nonetheless an extraordinary gesture for one of his background and upbringing, and indeed for anyone not born a Hindu, since it is not a proselytizing religion. Cousins was received as a 'white Brahmin,' and given the new name 'Jayaram,' meaning 'victory to the light.' His devout participation in Hindu ritual is in marked contrast to that of E. M. Forster, who was also the servant of a maharajah. Forster was able to enjoy the rituals only because they meant nothing to him whatsoever.[82]

Cousins published two more volumes of poetry after the appearance of his *Collected Poems.* The second of these, *Twenty-Four Sonnets* (1949), contains a poem called 'The First Mirror,' a brief parable meant to take place 'in a remote village of Japan.'[83] It retells a popular legend about a wife becoming jealous after seeing her own face reflected in a mirror, and thinking that it was another woman. The next one is about a contest between strength and wisdom, in the persons of Goku and the Buddha respectively. This story clearly has its origin in a Chinese classic, the 'Tripitaka' or 'Journey to the West,' though Cousins must have heard about it in Japan.[84] In the last book that Cousins published, the 'duography' coauthored with his wife, one chapter is given over to the period

he spent living in this country. It gives a summary of what Cousins had written previously in *The New Japan.* Some of the original text is quoted, and a few additional comments are interpolated. One of these is the perception Cousins claims to have had about Japan on leaving. Already on board ship, he worries: 'Out there, in the darkness, was a being; *dai Nippon* it called itself in moments of relapse from its true greatness to the borrowed braggadocio of wealth and power that was foreign to the real spirit of the Orient.'[85] But his concern about the future of Japan, in a passage that has been considerably altered,[86] is expressed with the benefit of hindsight, and this diminishes its import.

Altogether, Cousins' portrait of Japan is perfectly recognizable, and the enduring significance of his experience of the country is borne witness to by the recurring mentions of it in his later writings. The view that he presents is a partial and unusual one, filtered as it is through his preference for India and his Theosophical beliefs. His aesthetic credo – 'I admire the protestant spirit, and the claim that art should serve life, and not life art'[87] – is not one to which many writers would subscribe today. Cousins was perhaps more conditioned by his Protestant (with a capital 'P') background than he fully knew himself.[88] There can be no doubt that, even disregarding occasional artistic failures, Cousins' obstinately literal and strict adherence to his personal convictions places serious restrictions on his outlook as a poet. An early critic noted how curious it was that 'the interest in mysticism betrayed by his prose has not appreciably determined the character of his verse.'[89] Dumbleton shares this view, considering that Cousins 'does not qualify...as a true mystic.'[90]

In his penultimate poetry collection, Cousins still identifies himself as the junior member of a triumvirate of poets that included Yeats and AE.[91] The others, he notes, died outside Ireland (Yeats in France, AE in Eng-

land), and he wonders where he himself will end his life. In fact he died, two years after his wife, at Madanapalle in southern India, on 20 February 1956, and was cremated the following day.[92] After leaving Japan, he had continued to be known as 'Doctor Cousins,' in view of the doctorate that had been granted him by Keio University. Today in India, the country he most loved, there are still many people, some of them working in education and the government, who remember him as such.

Notes

1. A wealth of detailed information about the poet and his wife can be found in Alan Denson, *James H. Cousins and Margaret E. Cousins: A Bio-bibliographical Survey* (Kendal: Alan Denson, 1967).
2. There are many of these, but see especially vols. 1–3 of the five-volume history of the Irish theatre edited by Robert Hogan and Richard Burnham.
3. A discussion of his early work can be found in Terence Brown, *Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), pp. 64–8.
4. *Collected Poems* (1894–1940) of James H. Cousins (Adyar: Kalâkshetra, 1940), p. 359.
5. This was *Ben Madighan and Other Poems* (Belfast: Marcus Ward and Co., 1894).
6. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Alan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 379.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
8. She served these sentences in Dublin and London, though her longest imprisonment, for a year, came as a result of her participation in the Indian struggle for independence.
9. *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre: A Selection from His Unpublished Journal*, ed. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 40.
10. Joyce acknowledged this later on himself. See *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 391.
11. Cousins is one of the objects of ridicule in Joyce's satirical broadside, 'Gas from a Burner' (1912), meant to be spoken by a publisher:

    I published the table-book of Cousins

Though (asking your pardon) as for the verse
'Twould give you a heartburn in your arse.

12. This obviously important fact is overlooked in most accounts of Cousins' life, including his own, but see Denson, *op. cit.*, p. 347. The 'Autobiographical Note' by one of Cousins' brothers, printed by Denson, pp. 11–13, also voices disagreement with the poet's portrayal of his childhood.
13. James H. Cousins, *New Ways in English Literature* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1917), pp. 32–41.
14. See Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2nd edn. 1985), Chapter I and Appendix I. What began as a review of Cousins' book of essays, grew into a series of articles, and then a book, though the whole manuscript was not published until 1953.
15. James H. Cousins, *The New Japan: Impressions and Reflections* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1923). 日本カズンズ is printed vertically on the spine and front cover. The title page additionally informs the reader that the book comes 'with seventy-four illustrations' and that its author is 'D. Lit., Keio University, Japan.' There is a 'Dedicatory Forward' addressed 'To Dr. Eikichi Kamada,' who in 1919 was President of Keio University, and by 1923 had become Minister of Education. I have not been able to find any copy of this book in libraries in Japan, though the Diet Library has a copy of one of Mrs Cousins' books.
16. James H. Cousins and Margaret E. Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1950), p. 342. Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949), a female Indian poet who wrote in English.
17. *The New Japan, op. cit.*, p. 1.
18. Though he did not actually use them. See *We Two Together, op. cit.*, p. 349.
19. *The New Japan, op. cit.*, p. 3.
20. The first of the Three Objects of the Theosophical Society is 'human kinship unprejudiced by natural distinction.'
21. *The New Japan, op. cit.*, p. 24.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 107. Helen Waddell (1889–1965), who was also Irish, gave a different interpretation when she wrote: 'It is the way of Japanese fairytales to end with a rather sorrowful indefiniteness – they get infinity so – like the line of the headlands on their cheapest little jars.' Quoted in D. Felicitas Corrigan, *Helen Waddell: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1986), p. 357.
30. Cousins helped Paul Richard translate a book of religious aphorisms. The Richards left Japan just before Cousins did, and also went to India. Mme Richard later became the driving force behind the Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry, and known simply as 'The Mother.'
31. *The New Japan, op. cit.*, p. 175.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
33. The references can be found in Denson, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–1.
34. *The New Japan, op. cit.*, pp. 215–8.
35. Yokoyama Taikan (1868–1958), a Japanese-style painter whose work is characteristically vague in outline, to create a deep poetic feeling. He helped found the Nihon Bijitsuin school of artists, and travelled widely.
36. *The New Japan, op. cit.*, p. 227.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 230–2.
38. A Pre-Raphaelite style portrait of a woman is reproduced between pp. 240–1 of *The New Japan,* but the artist is not listed in any of the standard reference works on Japanese painting.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
42. Probably Yanagi Soetsu (1889–1961), the art historian and leader of the folk-craft movement (*mingei undō*). He learned about the poetry of William Blake from Bernard Leach, and they were mutually acquainted with other artists.
43. *The New Japan, op. cit.*, p. 273.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
45. The announcement of this provoked a letter of protest from one Isaac Dooman in *The Japan Times and Mail,* a weekly paper. Cousins responded to the criticism, and the exchange continued for a month. Denson, *op. cit.*, p. 154, gives the references, with disparaging comments of his own about Cousins' adversary.
46. See *We Two Together, op., cit.*, p. 366. This incident is not mentioned in

The New Japan.

47. *The New Japan, op. cit.*, p. 318.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
49. James H. Cousins, *Sea-Change* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1920).
50. James H. Cousins, *Modern English Poetry: Its Characteristics and Tendencies* 'The Keiogijuku University, Tokyo, Public Lectures in Literature, Autumn 1919' (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1921).
51. A Japanese summary of his thesis appeared in *Mita Hyōron* 三田評論 in March 1923, pp. 61–2, and was followed by a translation of his 'Reminiscences of Keio' 「ケーオー追想記」 in the July issue, pp. 55–8.
52. James H. Cousins, *The Cultural Unity of Asia* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1922). Chapter IV is entitled: 'Japan. The Modern Island Synthesis of Continental Asian Culture,' pp. 64–92.
53. James H. Cousins, *Surya-Gita: Sun Songs* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922).
54. James H. Cousins, *Work and Worship: Essays on Culture and Creative Art* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922).
55. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
60. *We Two Together, op. cit.*, p. 75.
61. *New Ways in English Literature, op. cit.*, p. 41.
62. *Modern English Poetry, op. cit.*, p. 107.
63. These lines occur in a play, 'The King's Wife,' printed in *A Bardic Pilgrimage* (New York: Roerich Museum Press, 1934), p. 111.
64. William A. Dumbleton, *James Cousins* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), p. 52.
65. Quoted by Dumbleton, *ibid.*, p. 87. These lines come from 'Etain the Beloved' (1912), the long poem which is thought to have been the object of Joyce's satirical remarks. In an article introducing 'Mr Cousins as Poet and Critic' 「詩人竝に批評家としてカズンス氏」 E. E. Speight gives a summary of this work (in English) quoting the same lines, in *Mita Hyōron* 三田評論, July 1919, pp. 10–19.
66. Most of the uncollected poems can be found in *Sea-Change* (1920), but there are a couple more in *Surya Gita* (1922). Some are reprinted in the 'Second Selection' of Cousins' poetry, *A Bardic Pilgrimage, op. cit.*: 'A Golden Lily,'

p. 165; 'Fuel,' p. 168; 'Counsel,' p. 170; 'A Master Fiddler,' p. 174.

67. *Collected Poems, op. cit.*, p. 219.
68. See, for example, 'High and Low' in *The Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, ed. Donagh MacDonagh and Lennox Robinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 160.
69. *Collected Poems, op. cit.*, p. 223. '*Sungi*' is obviously intended to be *sugi*, the Japanese cryptomeria for which Nikko is renowned.
70. See Bernard Leach, *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits and Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 51. Leach also left Japan in 1920, though he was later to return. There is no mention of Cousins in this book.
71. Dumbleton, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
72. *Collected Poems, op. cit.*, p. 233.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
74. For the genesis of this poem, see *We Two Together, op. cit.*, pp. 357–8.
75. *Collected Poems, op. cit.*, p. 274.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
77. Svetoslav Roerich is the second son of Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), a painter and philosopher of Russian origin whom Cousins met while travelling in the Himalayas. Nicholas Roerich's brightly coloured paintings mostly depict Himalayan landscapes, or deal with religious subjects. A collection of his work is on display at the Roerich Museum on Upper West Side in New York. A few portraits by Svetoslav can also be found in this museum.
78. The other one is in the palace at Mysore.
79. The noticeably symbolic paintings need to be seen against the historical background of Indian miniature painting, which 'was – like Hindu literature – consistently symbolic and suffused with poetic metaphor. One might relate this to the Hindu and Buddhist concept of maya: since all life is an illusion, art, which is an interpretation of life, is valid only as a vehicle for deeper, hidden meanings.... The artist's ultimate desire became to clarify man's relationship with God: it was recognized that the simplest manifestations of nature, everyday events, and basic drives and emotions, were all means to express noble ideas.' Roy C, Craven, *Indian Art: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 223. It is not difficult to see how attractive Cousins would have found all this.
80. *Collected Poems, op. cit.*, p. 445.
81. See *We Two Together, op. cit.*, Chapter LII, 'Religious Revolution' pp. 635–

49.

82. See, for example, Forster's description of the festival of Gokul Ashtami in *The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983; first published 1953), pp. 60–73.
83. James H. Cousins, *Twenty-Four Sonnets* (Adyar: Kalâkshetra, 1949), p. 11. Both Dumbleton and K. Sankara Menon, Cousins' executor, consider this book to be one of the poet's best.
84. This seems likely because of the name Goku, an abbreviation of Songoku 孫悟空, the Japanese version of the main character's name. The Chinese original has been translated by Arthur Waley as *Monkey* (1942).
85. *We Two Together, op. cit.*, p. 368.
86. Compare the original passage in *The New Japan, op. cit.*, p. 324.
87. *New Ways in English Literature, op. cit.*, p. xii.
88. 'It is probable, it seems to me, that occult rites...satisfied the cruder need of some Protestants for ritual discipline, a need satisfied for the less demanding by Freemasonry and for the more orthodox by High Church Anglicanism.... At any rate, the fact is the most famous leaders of Irish literary transcendentalism were protestant – W. B. Yeats, AE, John Eglinton (W. K. Magee), James Stephens, James and Margaret Cousins, Charles Johnston.' John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Revival: A Changeling Art* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), p. 59.
89. Ernest Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1968; first published 1916, revised 1922), p. 284.
90. Dumbleton, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
91. James H. Cousins, *Reflections Before Sunset* (Adyar: Kalâkshetra, 1946), 'Three Irish Poets,' pp. 35–7.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 37. A handwritten note on the copy of this book in the library of the University of Ulster says: 'He passed away at Madanapalle South India on the 20th feby. 1956, & "was cremated in the presence of thousands who came to pay their last tribute to his memory" on 21st feby.' This volume was donated by members of Cousins' family.

My enquiries into James Cousins' life and work have taken me to libraries and art galleries in Ireland, India, Japan and the United States. There is only space to thank a few of those who helped me with this project. My first debt is to the late John Hewitt, another Belfast poet, who drew my attention a number of years

ago to the chapter in Cousins' autobiography dealing with Japan. I should particularly like to express my gratitude to Sri Sankara Menon, Cousins' executor and now the head of Kalâkshetra, for sharing his recollections of the poet with me, and for the unexpected gift of some of Cousins' books. I would also like to thank my friend Osamu Note, a doctoral candidate in anthropology at the University of Chicago, for conveying his insight into the paintings on display at the Sri Chitra Art Gallery during our visit to Trivandrum.