

*The Hindu Celticism of James Cousins (1873-1956)**

Jerry Nolan

Abstract: *The very existence of James Cousins as a significant Irish Cultural Revival voice is barely acknowledged in the field of Irish Studies. Alan Denson's pioneering and admittedly congested bio-bibliographical survey published in 1967 has made very little difference in the many commentaries on the Irish Revival in which Cousins was imaginatively formed and from which he emerged as a great teacher in India. Very recently, the young American scholar Joseph Lennon has devoted a very welcome long chapter on Cousins in his book Irish Orientalism wherein Cousins is seriously discussed in the light of issues arising out of the implications of Edward Said's seminal post-colonial work Orientalism. The essay which follows will attempt to track the passage of Cousins from Ireland to India where finally the veteran Celticist was admitted to Hindu worship on January 14 1935 in the temple of Travancore in South India. The cross-cultural significance of the spiritual formation of Cousins as Hindu Celt will be discussed in the light of certain key texts which he wrote along the way – plays, poems, theosophical writings, autobiographical musings and educational philosophising. This considerable legacy of writings, which Tagore felt deserved the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934, awaits discovery by a new generation of Irish cultural commentators.*

In 1897, at the age of 24, having been born into a Belfast working class family, James Cousins, already a published poet and active member of the Gaelic League, moved from Belfast to Dublin in search of more Irish culture. His first job in Dublin was a clerkship in a coal and shipping company. Quickly growing enthusiasm for the Gaelic League as the most culturally progressive organisation led him to meet Douglas Hyde, W.B. Yeats, AE, Edward Martyn and other prominent writers at a time when the project of the Irish Literary Theatre was about to happen with the first productions being planned for Dublin's Antient Concert Rooms of Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* and Martyn's *The Heather Field* on May 8 and 9, 1899. Many years later, Cousins would describe these beginnings of the Irish Dramatic Movement as "pathetically puny" but he was prepared to credit it with at least having a lively influence on the sluggish intellectual

life of Dublin at the time (1950, 57) Cousins himself was continuing to write poetry and plays on Irish subjects. His most successful play in Dublin and Belfast was *The Racing Lug* in 1902 which was a short tragedy, similar to but actually predating J.M.Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and somewhat removed from his deeper longings for Celticism. Cousins later described the play as "the tragedy of the life of the fisher-folk of Belfast Lough in plain prose" (1941, 14-15). Cousins and AE became close friends as they shared the same passion for promoting the Celtic way historically backwards and forwards, in the confident hope that it would be through the recovery of the symbolical power of the Celtic mythos that Ireland would best develop and embody the body of profound cosmic and psychological truths at the heart of the Irish Being. Then Cousins introduced AE to Frank and Willie Fay who decided to produce AE's only play *Deirdre* with Cousins playing a minor role in the production. In 1906, Cousins himself wrote a long poem about the marriage of Lir and Niav who came to represent for him an ideal way of unifying states of Celtic and cosmic awareness. In the four hundred line poem about Lir and Niav, Cousins drew on Standish O'Grady's historical material in *The Story of Ireland* on the mythological couple from whose union was born Manannan, the Irish god of the seas (1940, 36-54). When Cousins wrote "Etain the Beloved" (1940, 74-111) he drew on the research of H. d'Arbois de Jubainville into the Irish bardic tales, one of which was the myth of Etain, the wife of the god Mider which was essentially a story of shifting incarnations in the realms of gods and of earthlings about which Cousins wrote: "Here was matter to my taste, the circle of the cosmic life completed in a single story, and with a nearness to the details of nature and of human psychology" (1950, 210). As in the case of AE, the wisdom of Western Celticism and the wisdom of Oriental Theosophy began to be welded together in his extensive writings.

At first Yeats encouraged Cousins as a writer, but then quickly went on to dislike and disparage him. Cousins in old age, still kindly remembered Yeats as "the world's greatest singer in English" (1950, 162). Probably the Yeatsian problem with Cousins, apart from the record of their differences over Cousins's farce about Irish life *Sold*, which Arthur Griffiths had published in *United Irishman* 27 December 1902 and which Yeats subsequently dismissed as "vulgar rubbish", was the uncomfortable fact that (for Yeats), in spite of their shared interest in theosophy, Cousins and his wife Margaret saw theosophy not as forms of esoteric posturing for a self-appointed elite, but as the springboard for espousing a broad range of radical causes in Dublin between 1903 and 1913 – causes such as pacificism, the suffragette movement, the cooperative movement, vegetarianism and anti-vivisectionism which led to the couple being branded in Dublin as little more than "faddists". In standard accounts of the Irish Revival over many years, Cousins has featured almost entirely in trivialising anecdotes such as the news that the couple gave house room to James Joyce in his bungalow in Dromard Terrace, Sandymount just before Joyce moved, apparently unhappy with the vegetarian diet in the bungalow, for better or worse into Gogarty's Martello Tower; and then again there is the tale of how Cousins left the sole editorship of *Irish Citizen*, in whose columns there was much campaigning for his wife's

crusade for women's emancipation, to his close friend and co-editor Francis Sheehy-Skeffington shortly before the departure of the couple via Liverpool for India in 1913. Alan Denson's sprawling documentary work on Cousins and his wife, first privately published in 1967, has, in fact, been remarkably unsuccessful in much influencing Irish Revival scholars who mainly continue to view Cousins as a comic pigmy when set beside the likes of Yeats who contemptuously snuffed him out as a dramatist, and of Joyce whose lines from the 1912 broadside "Gas from a Burner", based on a very transitory acquaintanceship with Cousins and his early poetry, are still being quoted, with a wink and a nod: "I printed the table-book of Cousins/Though (asking your pardon) as for the verse/' Twould give you a heartburn in your arse.' Cousins Studies have fared better outside of Ireland. Rabindranth Tagore admired Cousins's writings in India to the extent of nominating him for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934. (Lennon 353).

More recently the work of Cousins has been acknowledged in the scholarly writings of D.K.Chatterjee, Gauri Viswanathan and above all, in the very recently published book about "Irish Orientalism" by Joseph Lennon who devotes a long chapter to Cousins, entitled "James, Seamus and Jayaram Cousins" (Lennon 324-370). What characterises Lennon's important and most welcome essay are his readings of Cousins in the context of the politically charged theoretical fields of anticolonial and postcolonial narratives whose agenda was set out by Edward Said. Lennon's thesis addresses the role of Cousins in the perspective of the links between Ireland and India as two cultures in need of revival on the Western and Oriental fringes of the British Empire but it does not address the relevance to *the development Ireland* of Cousins's work. That placing of the work of Cousins back at the very heart of the discussion of the Irish Revival requires, most of all, that attention must be paid to the nature of his *spiritual* passage from Ireland to India during a period when one of the sturdiest of roots of the Irish Cultural Revival was a form of Theosophy which reached out towards Hinduism as one of the most creative alternatives to the history of warring sectarian religions in Ireland over many centuries. Those Theosophical roots failed to grow in Ireland: there are many reasons for the cultural failure which began to happen when the majority of the nation after 1921 settled for the complacent compromises of Irish Celticists who saw no problem in sending Christian missionaries to convert the Orient, a practice of foreign religious proselytism which Cousins denounced as "a denationalising one" (1925, 67).

The great moment of truth occurred for Cousins during January 1937 when he was in his early sixties. He had already been established as the Principal of Theosophical Colleges in Madras for the previous twenty years or so, when he received the all important invitation and acknowledgement, late in 1935, from the 25-year old Maharajah of Travancore to become the government's art adviser in Trivandrum, the capital. The young Maharajah and his mother Her Highness Setu Parvati Bayi were so impressed by Cousins's writings about the appreciation and patronage of Indian art and culture that they decided to confer on him the title "Kulapati" (the Sanskrit word for "teacher of multitudes"). Then on the 14th January 1937 Cousins was admitted to Hindu worship at

the Sri Padmanabha Swami Temple near Trivandrum, and given the name of “Jayaran” or “victory for the light”, shortly after which he became one of the Maharajah’s party in an educational visit to Java and Bali. The gift of a Hindu temple entrance became an important symbol for the man who had been brought up as a Wesleyan Methodist in Belfast. Later in *We Two Together*, Cousins claimed that his public declaration for Hinduism implied “no denial of the spiritual truth that was to be found in all religions, or any repudiation of their ceremonial and discipline.” On one level his interpretation of the conversion might be seen as diplomatic: “conversion did not mean a turning away from one religion to another: it had for me the meaning of turning from the externals of any religion towards its internal and eternal verity.” But Cousins had expressed, some twelve years before in *Heathen Essays*, a very focused view of “religious conversion” when he asserted that it was absurd:

...to assert that the Truth of the Universe can be hammered into one set of dogmas whose particular mental formulation carries exclusive authority. Yet from such roots of falsehood is drawn the heady draught of religious exclusiveness and superiority which all along the ages has poisoned the blood-stream of humanity, and brought about the tragic paradox of the religions frustrating the true expression of the universal religious aspiration of mankind.’ (1925, v-vi).

Later in the same book, Cousins asserted that in the light of his encounters with devotees of the great faiths of the world “There is no more separateness than there is between the branches that spring from the same root” (1925, 91-2). The love of All India which his conversion splendidly crowned had grown out of his positive early view of India as a nation who rejected as a model of society the divorce between the arts and religion and philosophy that had so afflicted an European culture given over to analysis, separation and specialisation. (1918, 162) What had been of crucial importance for Cousins at the beginnings of the Irish Revival, as it had been for his friend AE, was the discovery of the ancestral self in Celtic mythology. After about eight years in India, Cousins coupled Yeats and AE, but he could have been writing about himself: “They found the spiritual truths that Asia had given to the world reflected in the old myths and legends of Ireland, and out of their illumination and enthusiastic response arose the Irish Literary and Dramatic Revival whose influence at its highest was purely spiritual.” (1922, 8) Retrospectively, Cousins understood that the Irish Revival was partly a national protest against a colonial cultural repression which formed one of the major obstacles in the way of the Irish realising the ancestral self in new cultural forms; but in his own particular case, he came to realise that the Revival had opened windows onto the powers and processes of all peoples across the world, a notion memorably expressed by AE:

I have come to believe my dreams, however fantastic, mirrored some reality in divine consciousness, brooding in the future, divising religions, philosophies,

arts, sciences and civilisations, and breathing forth the mood by which acceptance is made possible.

Cousins used these very words from AE's last prose work "The Avatars" as the key quotation on the title page of his own most sustained analysis of the nature of education for the young and the old, the admirably idealistic *A Study in Synthesis*.

In his collection of lectures *The Wisdom of the West*, published before he left Ireland, Cousins was already thinking about the need to piece together an *universal* mythology which would be characterised by its appeal on a number of levels: a story for the man-in-the-street, a parable for the teacher, a revelation of eternal mysteries for the mystic. He began researching Irish mythological tales as versions of Oriental myths. He set about tracing many parallels between the gods and heroes of Roman, Greek and Celtic mythologies, and grew determined to hold all in precarious balance as manifestations of human consciousness in search of many symbols for one spiritual reality. Thus the many mythologies of the world began to be seen as the manifestations of the indestructible Ego which, being passed from generation to generation, is enriched by the experiences of particular individuals, and might one day gather all into one simple conscious expression of the Divine Word (1912, 18). The great ambition of *The Wisdom of the West* was to link indissolubly the myths of Ireland with the myths of the Orient. Already inspired by his reading the works of Madame Blavatsky and his conversations with Annie Besant, Cousins studied *Vedanta*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, consciously preparing himself to become one of most striking examples of an Irish expatriate in the Orient.

Very soon after his departure from Ireland, Cousins was analysing the reasons for the short life of the Revival:

It was mainly a renaissance of feeling, a new "romantic movement" in literature and the arts. It reached its maximum achievement with extraordinary rapidity, and as rapidly fell to its decline. Its primary impulse was spiritual; but it reduced itself ultimately to the level of a material and self-centred realism, and found its sequel in a hysterical internecine strife in which the expression of the highest idealism are made the shibboleths of physical destruction. (1925, 6-7)

Quite unlike AE, who decided to remain within Ireland until a few years before his death and who wrote tirelessly to heal Ireland's cultural disharmony in books like *The Interpreters* and *The Avatars*, Cousins as a prolific writer in distant India largely disengaged from the fast-growing party political debates about the direction of Ireland's cultural nationalism, although he never failed to acknowledge AE's heroic efforts to spell out to Ireland the ideal of "the National Being". Cousins himself felt utterly at home in India. What made India so attractive to Cousins was its great cultural fusion about which he so eloquently wrote in *The Cultural Unity of India* when he was eager to

point out that all four major world religions had originated in Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. (1922, 122-133) The genius of India, according to Cousins, was the continent's ability to make so many interconnections and interchanges that strength, not weakness, stemmed from its variety of religious symbols. Cousins's project was never aimed at compiling a comparative study of Indian religions but at locating those areas of activity which brought together people of different religious persuasions. In Ireland, Cousins must have remembered admiring the co-operative initiatives of AE and recalled the common ground shared by the people involved in the arts and crafts movement. What most impressed Cousins about India was the consensus that the nation needed to work hard to narrow the gaps at local level between life, art and religion. Cousins wrote his book *Samadarsana* as a forceful argument for the desirability of a national revival where the impulse towards cultural synthesis should not be infected with the Western disease of eclecticism and fragmentation, but be taken as a signal for the cultivation and harmonisation of the many different human activities which arise from a sure belief in the beneficence of all the gods. Only in the English poet Shelley did Cousins find inspiring examples in the West of such a degree of unswerving idealism, and he published a book on that subject in Madras in 1933: *The Work Promethean: Interpretations and Applications of Shelley's Poetry*.

When Cousins published *A Study in Synthesis*, his ambition was to construct a convincing explanation of "samadarsana" as applied to the manifold fields of religions, philosophies, the arts, sciences, arts and crafts. The dedication was to the memory of his Theosophical patron, Annie Besant (1847-1933): "The individual synthesis of Intuition and Action, Thought and Feeling, Masculine and Feminine, Youth and Age, East and West, Past and Future." The most impassioned section in the book was Chapter 8 "The Educational Synthesis" (1934, 354-479). Cousins had greatly admired Tagore's Bengali school at Santiniketan which he had visited shortly after the school had been turned into an university in the early 1920s : Tagore became a close friend who invited his friend to teach at Santiniketan and recommended Cousins for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934 (Lennon, 353) The long years spent by Cousins as a teacher well prepared him to argue for the way of synthesis in the education of each child in a world threatened by the compartmentalisation and fragmentation of human activities. Cousins drew up a Charter for the Liberation of Youth through Education and suggested the setting forth the ideal model of an University based on the world synthesis of human experience which he imagined might inspire fellow idealists in universities throughout the world who too often felt themselves controlled by political factions whose propaganda pretended that their partial truths amounted to the whole truth to which everybody else, in the name of so called democracy, should surrender and conform. Cousins sent a copy of *A Study in Synthesis* to his old friend AE back in Ireland. By then, AE had completed his last prose work *The Avatars* in which he had imagined the ideal of a *local* community in Ireland of friends devoted to the arts and precariously surviving within a technologically powerful and hostile state. On the other side of the globe, Cousins's successful work for

the arts in India encouraged him to feel at times optimistic about the likelihood of the growth of poly-cultural world awareness emerging as a driving force in the construction of national and international identities. For the full picture of Cousins striving to harmonise the world, one should not forget to acknowledge the activities of his beloved wife Margaret who was politically active in India from her founder membership of the Women's Indian Association in 1917 to her imprisonment in 1933 for addressing a public meeting in Madras in protest against emergency ordinances being incorporated into the ordinary penal code, and beyond. The Indian Prime Minister Pandit Nehru recognised the importance of the writings and direct action of Margaret Cousins for Indian freedom in 1953, the year before her death after a long and very painful illness. A comprehensive guide to the many activities in India of this truly remarkable Irish woman from County Roscommon can be found in Alan Denson's comprehensive bibliography of the couple. (1967, 23-6, 89-95, 116-126)

In 1940 Cousins published his *Collected Poems*. His republication of his early Irish poetry, including the short verse play "The Sleep of a King" (which had been produced in Dublin by the Fays in 1902) deftly touched on the theme of the relationship between the cosmic and the local in his Irish storytelling. Cousins wrote in the Introduction to *Collected Poems* a review of his early poetry in connection with the inclusion of "The Sleep of the King" in a sequence of other Irish poems: "its true spiritual location...in the middle of poems expressing, in terms of Irish legend, my vision of the Emergence of the Soul in the Universe in "The Going Forth of Dana"; the call of the spiritual life to the Soul in incarnation in "The Sleep of the King"; and the culmination of the Soul's experience in the union of its outer and inner aspects in "The Marriage of Lir and Niav". He went on to introduce a restored full version of an ancient bardic tale in "Etain the Beloved" as "the descent of Etain, the Celtic Psyche, from the inmost world of the spirit, through the midway realm of the Gods, to the wider world of Eire, and her recall to her true spiritual state. I could not resist the temptation to another imaginative pilgrimage around the inevitable cycle of life, particularly as the story, being psychological rather than cosmic, took me nearer to the intimacies of the individual spirit in its fall and rise from allegiance to allegiance." (1940, vii-ix) The closing lines of "Etain the Beloved" describe the reunion of Etain and Mider, which powerfully suggests a Celtic symbol for universal love as the desirable summit of all terrestrial strivings:

.....A hope
 Shoots a faint arrow instantly – no more.
 A blinding light falls from night's glimmering slope.
 Flame-like the twain meet on the rushy floor –
 And vanish.. King and clansmen blindly grope
 Into cool air. Across the sky two swans
 Fly slowly towards the day that palely dawns. (1940, 111)

At such a high altitude of symbolic representation, the Celtic myths seemed starved of a local habitation and a name. By contrast, Cousins in India was much more successful in *locating* his poems in oriental cultures which revered religious symbols and holy rituals and places. There was “A Tibetan Banner”, in which the poet depicted the story of the Tibetan Buddhist lama who brought on foot across the Himalayas a banner from Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, and stopped to worship at the Kalimpong Temple in the lower Himalayas.

The quiet lama took his stand,
And turned his prayer-wheel in his hand,
And from his wise and travelled scroll
Spelt out the secret of the soul,
And mapped the Ancient Middle Way
From darkness to the spirit’s day. (1940, 309-10)

Parts 2 and 3 of “A Tibetan Banner” were condensed versions of the Buddhist teaching written down in an ancient manuscript which was venerated at Kalimpong Temple.

Cease not to turn the praying drum
And chant *Om mani padme hum*;
For they who seek the spirit’s end
Have all creation for their friend. (1940, 315)

Part 4 of the poem vividly evokes the Divine presence in the form of a pilgrim at the Temple of Kalimpong.

They feel that Presence infinite
Whose hand for searching hands has writ
Upon the universal scrool
The mutual language of the soul;
Who makes this temple, Night-and-Day,
A hospice on the pilgrim’s way;
Who for the foot-sore sends the showers,
And for sweet incense made the flowers;
Who stands with sanctifying grace
Midmost in life’s loud market-place,
And turns our world of sea and land,
A murmuring prayer-wheel in his hand. (1940, 318-319)

Another example of a significant lyric poem about enlightened leadership was “Enthronement” which described the first day of the ten days of the Hindu festival of

Dasara in Mysore in October 1939. Cousins depicted the late Maharajah at prayer and his people being festive.

And while the multitude applaud
The elephant's fastidious foot
And flower-salaam, the horse's nod,
He lifts his right hand to salute
With reverence the God
Incarcerated in the brute. (1940, 464)

In 1948 the India Society of London published a book of essays entitled *The Arts and Crafts of Travancore*, which included five essays by Dr. J. H. Cousins, Art Adviser to the Government of Travancore, Head of Fine Arts at the University of Travancore. The five essays by Cousins were remarkable for their combination of scholarship and enthusiasm: his subjects were: "The Craft of the Metal-Worker", "The Art and Symbolism of Travancore Wood-Carving", "Travancore Ivory Carving", "Dance-Drama and Shadow – Play", and "The Art of Procession". Such a celebration by Cousins of the harmonies of beauty to be discerned in the various forms of Indian arts and crafts showed how fully committed he was to the Indian Cultural Revival around the time of Indian political independence.

Nowadays the wisdom of James Cousins Hindu Celt no longer seems so eccentric in the context of more recent investigators into the meaning and value of myth. Like Joseph Campbell, one of the most popular twentieth-century authorities on mythologies, Cousins became convinced early on that, in spite of the daunting disparity of cultures, myths can become the stepping stones to an understanding of humanity's place in the Universe, as myths echo other myths in a seemingly endless process that ceaselessly crosses and re-crosses geographical, tribal and national frontiers. In a series of conversations with the journalist Bill Moyers given in 1987, shortly before his death, and published in the book entitled *The Power of Myth*, Campbell explained his view of how myths have an universal base in all cultures and are fundamental both to human self-knowledge and human solidarity. Then in 1993, sponsored by the Joseph Campbell Foundation, *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide* was published with Roy Will as the general editor: this work documented the many interconnections between world-wide mythological traditions of storytelling in the creation of a world mythography; there is included a chapter "The Celtic World (176-89) which would have certainly attracted the immediate attention of James Cousins who would probably conclude that such advocacy belonged to the lower slopes of the cultural enterprise. As in the case of Campbell, Cousins concluded that myths always needed to be interpreted symbolically for the good of humanity, because when national myths are insularly interpreted, even cherished national myths have a marked tendency to shut out the rest of the world and to develop a debilitating cross-cultural blindness. Again like Claude Levi-Strauss, the

great twentieth century cultural anthropologist who was a great investigator of myth making, Cousins concluded that the study of myth can help to synthesise binary oppositions in human experience such as youth and age, wet and dry seasons, the human and the animal, culture and nature, life and death. But what was most distinctive about Cousins approach to myth was the supreme emphasis on the educational importance of understanding the Arts in Education for the next generation as a pre-requisite in the interpretation and creation of cultures. In his Indian experience, Cousins reached a new pitch of creativity under the patronage of the Hindu Maharajas. That generous Hindu patronage transformed him into a World Advocate for the importance of the Arts in education. There was much respect expressed during his lifetime for the wisdom of his prolific writings, not from Ireland but from across the globe when he was invited to lecture in places from Tokyo to New York. In the context of his conversion to becoming a Hindu Celt, Cousins saw the Hindu Temple itself as a symbol of the harmony of the Cosmos: according to Cousins, the Hindu Temple ceremonials “carried out through the art of symbolical spectacle, anticipate the final withdrawal of the external universe into the being of Bramah” (1952, 185).

The global world still cries out to be harmonised as it did when Cousin was alive. Superficially a harmonisation has come about not through religious enlightenment but through the victory of global capitalism and mass media communication and the movements of workers across national boundaries. Increasingly the language of transcultural debate focuses on diasporas, bordercrossings, self-location, the making of home away from home. The language of diaspora is no longer an exclusive feature of the emigrant Irish across the globe but is increasingly associated with migrant people, often from poor economically poor countries, who are driven to imagine their own distinctive cultural legacy as one sure way of asserting a confident self as a very necessary bulwark against being marginalised in the global economy. Contemporary nation states have become only too aware of the risk of being traversed and subverted by the demanding presence of diasporic exiles who are most often refugees. One of the most challenging recent statements about diaspora has been made by the American Anthropologist, James Clifford: “The diaspora discourse in history currently in the air is about recovering non-Western, or not – only – Western models of cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling with and against nation states, global technologies and markets” (Clifford 244-77). Would not Cousins have seen the new diasporas as a wonderful opportunity for cultural revival, once more in opposition to all those short-sighted politicians with nothing to wave but their obviously bogus “long term plans”?

In his use of the Celtic myth of Cuchulain, “the Irish type of the perfect hero”, Cousins sketched out the sheer scope of his view of myth. At first, there was ‘A Schoolboy Plays Cuchulain, evoking boyish enthusiasm for the story of a national hero: “Soon shall he fling the charging field/Back with his puissant pasteboard shield;/ And soon shall haughty Maeve bend down,”/A vassal to his tinsel crown’ (1940, 57-9) – the poem

first appeared in *St. Enda's School Magazine*, edited by P.H. Pearse (Christmas 1909). Next there was the revelation of the Hindu dimensions: Cuchulain as Atman, a form of the Divine Spark, the Will; Laeg, Cuchulain's charioteer, as Khrisna, a form of Intuition bearing Will into action; Lugaidh, Cuchulain's fellow-warrior, as Monas of Active Mind shaping external events. (1912, 55-6). Finally there was the juxtaposition in the late play *The Hound of Ullah* of Cuchulainn, hero of the Red Branch Knights story and the reemergence in the 'City of Dreams (Dublin in 1911) where Cuchulain as Dumb Dog, Laeg as Horsey and Lugaidh as Double shuffle join in with gossiping Dubliners who regard the trio as crazy. Cousins did not live to develop further his view of the Universe in life's ascending and descending grooves.

Apart from highlighting the life force of myth, Cousins also underlined the need for religious syncretism in a genuinely revived culture. In his play *The King's Wife* (1919), he prefaced the play by asserting that he was dramatising the three types of religious experience: the spiritual adventure and breadth of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, the simple Hindu devotion of Queen Mira and the inquisitorial fanaticism Mira's husband, King Kumbha. In the poetic play itself, the disguised Akbar assumes an Indian identity which integrates both the Muslim and Hindu traditions, an achievement which mirrors the sixteenth century emperor's great ambition to fashion a new syncretistic religion for all India; yet Akbar's wisdom cannot prevent the Rahput King from tragically misunderstanding his beautiful wife when he discovers the jewelled necklace which Akbar had presented her in token of his appreciation of her traditional singing in the garden which had led him to "the vision of the Feet of God" (1919, 28). Under the shadow of her husband's sentence of death, Mira flees as a beggar and later, in desperation, drown herself in a flooded river, an action which is described in the play a "great sorrow that has more sweetness in vina-strings or dances, or the food that rich men scatter at a festival." (1919, 94) In Indian history Mirabai was revered as a renowned poetess and saint of the fifteenth century. Cousins's version of Mira's death pointed to the fact that she represented the spirit of an Indian nation divided by two kings who represented mutually exclusive views of life and history. The strong suggestion in the play's conclusion was that Mira's martyrdom will eventually help to undermine the unjust King. There was a strong echo of Ireland in the image of Mira as a "queen with the walk of a beggar, the opposite of Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan, an old woman with the walk of a Queen" (Dumbleton 66).

Cousins's yearning for a syncretism in the arts can be found expressed in a late Cousins poem which evokes a very special place in Travancore in South India – the poem is entitled "Windows". The place was the deserted but still magnificent Padmanabhapuram Palace, some thirty miles south from Trivandrum – even though the palace had been abandoned in 1750 as Travancore's capital, the building was still potent in the local Indian memory for its many former treasures of architecture, sculpture, wood-carving, mural paintings and ornamental windows awaiting rediscovery. Cousins was commissioned to write a guide book to the Palace; but he also wrote a memorable poem:

Grieve not for bright eyes closed
 On skill and vision grown
 So Godlike it imposed
 Godhood on wooden stone;
 And, under spirit stress,
 Through wielded brush and blade,
 To calling Loveliness
 Lovely rejoinder made...
 Grieve not for what they are,
 But what they might have been –
 Windows wherethrough a star
 Should scan the earthly scene;
 Mirrors that, though they break,
 Should, holding memory well,
 Visible beauty take
 To the invisible. (1940, 452-4)

During a period of residence in the vicinity of the foothills of the Himalayas, the Hindu Celt Cousins showed in a syncretist sonnet how as a poet he could still hold together in synthesis religious worship in Irish and Indian contexts across a gap of thirty years, as a vision of peace for an Ireland and India caught up in the history of internecine feuding:

Not now, as once through swift salt-savoured rain,
 He watches men and women slowly pass
 With “God and Mary to you” to early mass
 By fuchsia hedges in Kerry lane.
 Here, by the azure-eyed convulvulus
 He listens to loud ceremonial chants
 Surging around precipitous elephants
 When men in season grow God-amorous.
 By other paths on the same quest he goes;
 Not to the rainy peak that Patrick trod;
 But hearing in strange speech the name of God
 Along the selvage of Himalayan snows,
 Where, in the chaste colossal quietude,
 Fades from the heart and brain the human feud.

Ireland 1909, India 1939 (1940, 468)

The life work of James Cousins was concerned with the growth of the individual's deepening understanding of the universal cycles of birth and rebirth which are then

expressed as forms of artistic and religious revival in very different communities. Often the human impulse towards such revival involves a strong political dimension as part of the individual desire to render rebirth possible when the reformers are faced with the threat of misunderstanding and injustice, as was in the case of Ireland when the Revival began to take root and flower sporadically and briefly, towards the end of the nineteenth century – at a time when many Irish idealists searched for a national being different from the ways of English culture. The central conviction at the heart of Cousins's writing was that without some transcending spiritual impulse, a concentration on state-building in the aftermath of a republican revolution may well fail to ignite deeper levels of harmony, as happened during the post-revolutionary period when the impulse for Irish Revival faded and the constraints of the Irish Free State grew. Throughout his long life, Cousins crossed many borders and transcended many border-crossings. Even the outline of this pilgrim's progress conveys a message of hope for all travellers who seek to move in diverse ways across the world from the starting point of a love of one's own country – its myths and its places – before moving onto the challenging tasks of reforming societies so that a cultural richness of diverse yet complimentary traditions can become into being. As a teacher and writer in India for about forty years, James Cousins studied and promoted his project for cultural harmony in diversity, which he called SYNTHESIS, which is the most relevant English translation word for *samasdarsana*. Today he ranks as a great Hindu teacher who came out of Ireland but who remains waiting, now almost fifty years after his death, for a deserved recognition in the country of his birth, to add to a continuing good reception in his adopted country of India for the man who 'from golden stuff and silver thread/ Through Celtic vision wrought/Vedantic thought.' (1946, 37).

Note

- * An earlier version of this essay was presented as a paper "James Cousins Hindu Celt" at the IASIL Conference in Bath Spa, England in 2000.

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