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# James Cousins and Sherard Vines at Keio University: 1919–20; 1923–28

## Part One

William Snell

### Introduction

Keio Gijuku University acquired the sobriquet “the Oxford of Japan” early in the last century, although it is difficult to attribute this to any one person or reason. However, the fact that so many distinguished scholars from that eminent British university have visited and lectured at Keio can in some way explain the title. Among them but largely forgotten now are such names as James H. Cousins (1873–1956), Irish writer, playwright, critic, poet and theosophist, who was Guest Professor of Modern English Poetry at Keio University from 1919–1920; and the lesser-known poet, writer and critic (notably of Georgian satirical verse, and later, in 1929, the first appointed G. F. Grant Professor of English at the University of Hull — formerly “The University College of Hull”) — Walter Sherard Vines, who taught at the Faculty of Letters for five years from 1923–1928.

This brief study intends to look at the former figure, while *Part Two* will examine Vines’ connection with Keio, and his writings both in and on Japan: in particular his travel book *Yofuku, or, Japan in Trousers* (1931), and the novel he published in 1928, *Humours Unreconciled: A Tale of Modern Japan*, a scathing satire on the expatriate community of Tokyo in the 1920s.

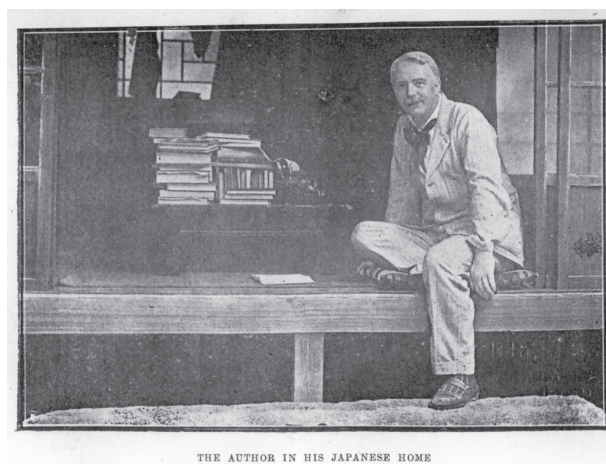


Fig. 1 (*The New Japan*: photograph facing p. 48)

Born in Ulster, Ireland, in 1873, James Henry Sproull Cousins, poet and playwright, is now probably best remembered as a writer on Theosophy.<sup>1</sup> Just as Sherard Vines was a peripheral member of the Bloomsbury Group, so Cousins was, from our present-day perspective, a relatively minor participant in the Irish Literary Renaissance. And yet *The Nation* of London stated, "...Mr. Cousins can only be put below the two leaders of his movement (AE [George W. Russell] and W. B. Yeats)."<sup>2</sup> The Irish National Theatre also produced his plays in the first years of the twentieth century, and apart from being an actor, in his late youth Cousins taught and worked as an editor. Among his literary friendships in Ireland was one with James Joyce, who used Cousins' wife's name 'Greta' (Margaret E. Gillespie, whom he married

1 The Theosophical Society was a religious sect founded in 1875 by the Russian-born Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91) and the American Henry S. Olcott (1832–1907), the former succeeded by Annie Besant in 1907. See William A. Dumbleton, *James Cousins* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), p. 36.

2 Dumbleton, "Preface": n.p.

in 1903) for Gabriel Conroy's wife in his major story "The Dead."<sup>3</sup> However, the term 'friendship' should be understood with some skepticism, for no matter how close if ever the two writers became personally, Joyce seemingly had little room for Cousins' writings, as is evidenced by his rather cruel appraisal circa 1912, "Gas from a Burner":

I printed the table-book of Cousins  
Though (asking your pardon) as for the verse  
'Twould give you a heartburn in your arse.<sup>4</sup>

Joyce's appreciation of Cousin's poetry may have been jaundiced by the fact that although the Cousins were kind to him, offering accommodation when he was down at heel (i.e. broke), by that time they had become strict vegetarians and Joyce left the household after a few days complaining of stomach problems attributed to a "typhoid turnip."<sup>5</sup>

A prolific writer, Cousins authored several volumes of lyrical verse, some of which consists of narratives of Irish mythology, either under his own name or employing pseudonyms such as 'Seumus Ó'Couisin'. During his many years in India he published sixteen volumes of poetry, two plays, seventeen books of literary criticism and on art, eleven volumes on education, Theosophy, or cultural topics, and over twenty pamphlets on various subjects.<sup>6</sup> However, although Cousin's poetry has much to commend it, there are nevertheless some poems which are better consigned to oblivion: for example "Gladiolus, in an Oriental Garden" which William Dumbleton refers

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3 Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (London: O.U.P, 1982), p. 256n.

4 Quoted by Dumbleton, p. 21.

5 Ellmann, p. 168.

6 For a comprehensive list of Cousins' works see Dumbleton, pp. 136–38.

to as a “poetic lapse”, but which also perhaps validates Joyce’s estimation of his poetic worth and goes a long way toward explaining why Cousins is now forgotten for his poetry:

In my gardening sauntering solus  
 Came I on a gladiolus:  
 But before I bent my knee  
 Something strange occurred to me!

What had been a flower now glowed a  
 Crimson-lanterned peaked pagoda,  
 Sacred to the More-than-man  
 In the islands of Japan.<sup>7</sup>

In 1915, Cousins traveled to India with his wife to work for the Theosophical Society at its International Headquarters at Adyar, Madras, and they went on to spend most of the rest of their lives — over forty years — in the country. He was appointed principle of the Theosophical College at Madanapalle in 1918, but the following year came the proposal to teach at Keio Gijuku University, which can be linked to the recent death of the Canadian, Alfred William Playfair (1870–1917), professor at Keio from 1906, who died unexpectedly during a trip to Atami.<sup>8</sup>

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7 Quoted by Dumbleton, p. 108.

8 My thanks are due to Professor Naoko Nishizawa of the Fukuzawa Memorial Center for Modern Japanese Studies, Keio University, for helping to verify this.



A JAPANESE POET'S SMILE (RIGHT)—PAGE. 36

Fig. 2 (*The New Japan*: photograph facing p. 32)

### Cousins at Keio

I gathered that the invitation to me to join Keiogijuku was the first step in a plan that the University had conceived, of having, not a professional man only, but an actual worker in English literature, not only to put a finishing touch to the English undergraduates but also to give public lectures on literary topics.

(*The New Japan*, pp. 205–06)

As Cousins relates in both his book *The New Japan*<sup>9</sup> and his interleaved memoir jointly written with his wife, *We Two Together* (1950),<sup>10</sup> several figures

9 *The New Japan: Impressions and Reflections* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1923)

10 James H. Cousins with Margaret E. Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1950), p. 342.

played a role in getting him invited to Keio, principally Yone (Yonejiro) Noguchi (1875–1947), poet and professor of English Literature at Keio from 1905<sup>11</sup> via the poet philosopher and first Asian Nobel laureate Tagore,<sup>12</sup> with whom Cousins maintained an admiration and friendship for several years, and who introduced him to cultural circles in India. Another was Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949), poet, political leader, and later governor of the province that is now known as Uttar Pradesh. The two poets had “shuffled a third into a Guest Professorship of Modern English Poetry in the first modernised university in Japan.”

As will be seen in *Part Two* of this study, Noguchi was a key figure in other invitations to visit Keio. Having been instrumental in bringing the Irishman to Japan, Noguchi was duty-bound to act as a host. As a consequence, Cousins became a frequent visitor to Noguchi’s house in Nakano, “... his lovely home where I had my first flavourous touch with Japanese life and the menace to life in earthquakes.”<sup>13</sup> In *We Two Together*, he relates an amusing incident that occurred on one occasion:

On my visits to Nakano, the process of exchanging greetings and removing footwear in the somewhat dark entrance to Noguchi’s house did not give me the opportunity of recognising what appeared to be a relief of, perhaps Shakespeare. But one day I realised that it was the life-mask of Francis Thompson, and asked how on earth it came to be there.

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11 Father of the sculptor Isamu Noguchi.

12 Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), who visited Japan three times and lectured at Keio in 1916. See Krishna Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 255.

13 *We Two Together*, p. 355.

He told me that, when in England, in 1903, he had been given this copy of the mask by Francis Meynell in London with the strict unjunctions [sic.] that he was not to let it out of his possession or to allow it to be copied. I suggested the exchange of the mask for that of a leering stage-demon in the studio. Whereupon the family — Noguchi carrying the Thompson relief, Mrs. Noguchi, and the three children — with the maid at the end, and myself in front purifying its transit by waving fragrant incense sticks, made a procession that would have caused the serious Catholic poet almost to smile.

(*We Two Together*, pp. 356–57)

However, in *The New Japan*, Cousins adds that “... So intimate did I become with the mask, and so amazing did the changes of the afternoon light change its expression, that it became a living thing to my imagination — nay, as something beyond the transparency of mortal flesh. For two years after I left Japan, my imagination was haunted by that face — a ghost that I could only lay to rest by a spell of my own making.”<sup>14</sup>

In Chapter One of *The New Japan*, “Between Two Civilizations,” Cousins describes his first impressions on being taken to Keio Gijuku University by Noguchi. His account will be very familiar to anyone who has visited Mita campus:

At a break in the row of shops we turned into a broad ascending pathway towards a large iron gate above which a flight of steps led to

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14 *The New Japan*, p. 109. Cousins would later write a poem “Installation Ode — for the placing of the death-Mask of Francis Thompson in the home of Yoné Noguchi in Japan” published in *Surya-Gita* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922).



a hill-top (probably a hundred feet above the street) crowned ... by a large brick building ... This was the library of Keiogijuku University, with which my life was to become identified for some time to come. The library stood on the right hand side of the hill-top. In the centre was a less ornate brick building towards which Noguchi led me, for here were the offices where I should meet the authorities and some of the staff.

(*The New Japan*, p. 18)

Among other of Cousins' early recollections of Keio and life in Tamachi contained in the beginning of Chapter Eleven, "Life in a University", he records his first encounter with Keio's Wagner Society:

Somewhere in the College compound a choir of male voices was rehearsing mid-European part songs. I sallied forth in search of it, and, like Christopher Columbus who had set out to discover Japan and collided with America, I found more than I had bargained for; to wit, not a mere group of male singers, but that first rehearsal of the Keiogijuku University Wagner Society for its twenty-ninth annual concert of European vocal and instrumental music...

(*The New Japan*, pp. 198–99)

He states that he promptly joined the society and attended a number of rehearsals, and praises the society for "mastering a piece of beautiful vocal music with as much enthusiasm as any choral society I have known in Ireland or England, and a finer æsthetical sensitiveness."<sup>15</sup>

This chapter is also revealing both of Cousin's relationship with Keio

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15 *The New Japan*, p. 199.

and his fellow professors, both Japanese and foreign.

Among the Japanese professors my circle of acquaintances remained small... Some of the professors looked as if they had come up from the depths of the ocean of learning and had not had time to remove the goggles of their diving-dress. Others when they laughed (which they did with an almost disconcerting frequency and heartiness) displayed an amount of glistening gold that would make the after-dinner utterances of the dullest speaker look brilliant.

(*The New Japan*, p. 21)

His initial conversations with faculty concerned Ireland, India and his voyage to Japan, and then reached the practical question of where he was going to reside. Having been invited and come “five thousand miles at their kind request,” Cousins assumed that universities which called professors from the ends of the earth had arrangements for their storage. However, as he notes, “Five thousand undergraduates (the number then on the register) and a hundred and fifty professors is a proposition that has to be left to its own devices.”<sup>16</sup> Asked if he would object to living on the university premises Cousins replied that he was willing to try, although he later recorded that he greeted the invitation with alacrity: “My living conditions were exactly to my desire to experience the life and ways of Japan. I was shown a disused tea-room of the president of the university<sup>17</sup> that I could have, with the warning that it was in entirely Japanese style”<sup>18</sup> and he goes on to describe the place

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16 *The New Japan*, pp. 21–22.

17 This would have been Dr. Eikichi Kamada, to whom Cousins wrote his Dedicatory Foreword in *The New Japan*.

18 *We Two Together*, p. 351; See also Fig. 1 above.

in fond detail:

The room was about 12 feet square: a wooden structure with paper windows (*shoji*); sliding doors (*amado*); a floor of woven cane matting (*tatami*) filled with cotton waste, clean and resilient, pleasant for all waking and sleeping activities; cupboards with pictured sliding doors; a *tokonoma* (recess) for a *kakemono* (hanging picture) and a piece of craftsmanship. The roof of my home was tiled with small wooden “tiles.” It was entered from the outside by a twisted row of stepping stones along a “garden” that grew here and there a shrub and tallish trees. There were three stone steps from ground to verandah. From the first of these I looked across uncountable house-roofs on one side of the city. On the foreground the watch-tower of a fire station clanged out the



(Fig. 3, *The New Japan*, p. 25)

news when the “flowers of Tokyo”<sup>19</sup> were in bloom; and the cook awoke me at any hour of the night to don my kimono and watch if any of the glittering petals were borne by the wind of destiny to our roof.

(*We Two Together*, pp. 351–52)

If Cousins had any reservations with regard to his Japanese colleagues, of his fellow foreign professors he was also very critical:

[They] were free and friendly with me, but it was difficult to get deeper in conversation with them than rates of salary and the possibility of a better job or an additional one. I found that it was quite understood that a man could teach in as many colleges and schools as he could fit into his waking hours; and I had a feeling of being put in a column headed ‘quixotic’ in certain mental catalogues when I put aside such offers in their direction on the ground that I meant to remain loyal to Keio.

(*The New Japan*, p. 201)

Meanwhile, concerning his classes and students he states:

My own class-work went on regularly through the courses laid down for the various grades. It remained verbal and expository: there was no intuitive spring or discovery. Still, I felt that my students enjoyed their work and liked me; and even if our studies lacked originality or depth, my own inborn enthusiasm for literature, and my personal acquaintance with some of the poets whose works we studied, made classes different from what they might otherwise have been.

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19 See also *The New Japan*, pp. 244–45.

(*The New Japan*, p. 202)

This chapter is also revealing about his relationship with Yone Noguchi, to whose home, as mentioned above, Cousins became a frequent visitor:

I saw much of Noguchi during September and October. He had been invited to make a winter lecture-tour in America, and was preparing a series of lectures for the purpose. As he put each lecture into typescript he brought it to my room at leisure hours or after lunch in order that I might criticize his delivery of it. It was curious that, in spite of his ten years' life in America as companion to an American poet,<sup>20</sup> his long and intimate association with many eminent writers and speakers of English, and his constant study of English literature as a Professor of English in Keio University, he had never got beyond the mechanical limitations that the Japanese language has put upon the Japanese mouth. In Noguchi's case they created a few howlers, one of which I remember. Quoting a poem of his own he exclaimed:

“Oh! my berrubed,  
We shall fry in hebben.”

I explained that it was the other place they would fry in; but my jape went wide. He made a hundred patient attempts to get / into his mouth, likewise v. At the end of an hour, with close attention to every word, he could say:

“Oh! my beloved,

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20 Cousins is referring to Joaquin Miller, the Californian poet who encouraged Noguchi in his English poetry, and in 1895 invited Noguchi to live in a cabin on his estate in Oakland, now known as Joaquin Miller Park. See <<http://www.h.ehime-u.ac.jp/%7Eemarx/YN/Bio-short.htm>>



Fig 4. (*The New Japan*, p. 205)

We shall fly in heaven.”

But next day brought a relapse.

(*The New Japan*, pp. 203–04)<sup>21</sup>

Cousins describes the farewell dinner held for Noguchi in a Tokyo restaurant and his send-off at the station, attended by a “large crowd of friends, including many men and women of high distinction.”<sup>22</sup> This was the last time that Cousins saw Noguchi, as the former would be called back to Madana-

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21 We are left wondering what the mutual / poetical influence between Cousins and Noguchi was like. For example, Cousins’ poem “Love and Death” contains the lines: “‘Oh! touch not my beloved” he saith, / “Nor on his threshold stand.” / Death bent and kissed the face of Love ...” See Dumbleton, p. 122.

22 *The New Japan*, p.205.

palle before the poet's return to Japan,<sup>23</sup> due to political problems in India, which put the future of the Theosophical College in jeopardy. On a tragic note Cousins adds that a month later, following Noguchi's departure, "the melancholy news was brought to my room late in the evening that his little daughter had died — she who accepted me into her friendship with a cherry and a cake and a bow on the floor. I knew his fondness for the bright little creature and grieved for him." He reveals that Noguchi's wife "bound me not to tell him anything of the death in my letters for fear it would do him harm in his lecture-work."<sup>24</sup>

Cousins gave a series of weekly public lectures (seven in all) in "the great auditorium" at Mita, which were later published as *Modern English Poetry: Its Characteristics and Tendencies (The Keiogijuku Lectures in Literature, Autumn, 1919)*,<sup>25</sup> the first of which he gave the day after Noguchi's departure for America. As he recounts, "Professor Kawai, Dean of the Faculty of Literature, introduced me in a short speech in Japanese, in which he spoke of the innovation that was being made by the lectures."<sup>26</sup> Cousins continues: "Having regard to the fact that I was myself a poet, he said, he forestalled any risk of modest omission by publicly inviting me to devote one of the lecture-days to a recital of my own poetry, a fact which I mention as indicating the

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23 Incidentally, a trip to India in 1935 by Noguchi to promote Japanese imperial objectives in the Far East, which lead to his irrevocable falling out with Tagore, became the subject of Noguchi's last volume of poetry in English, *The Ganges Calls Me* (1938).

24 *The New Japan*, p. 205.

25 (1921) As for most of Cousins' writings, this was published in Madras by Ganesh & Co.

26 *The New Japan*, p. 206.

breadth and elasticity of the University's methods."<sup>27</sup>

Regarding his audience on that first occasion, Cousins observes that they "expected more from me than I felt capable of giving, for they referred to me as 'successor to Lafcadio Hearn' ... and comments on the favourable remarks made by both the Japanese press ("The Japan Advertiser' considered them sufficiently valuable to print them almost completely each week"<sup>28</sup> and notes that some of his poems were translated into Japanese. "My students purred with satisfaction at the 'fame' of their *sensei* (professor). He himself [Cousins] was simply gratified that his work was useful to students, pleasant to the public, and accounted successful by the University. At twenty-two the circumstances might have threatened the disease of cranial distention: at forty-six they were part of the day's work."<sup>29</sup> He says that he felt "humbled and nervous to be standing on the spot that had been made illustrious by the feet of Rabindranath Tagore when, four years previously, he had delivered a lecture in Keio University."<sup>30</sup>

On two occasions, during the "lecture-teas" Cousins held after each performance, he met the eighty-year-old Dr. Clay Macaulay [sic.]<sup>31</sup> who had, as he notes, been on familiar terms with "the Sage of Concord", Ralph Waldo

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27 *The New Japan*, pp. 206–07.

28 *The New Japan*, p. 208. Introducing a poetry reading given by Cousins, the *Japan Times & Mail* declared, "The exquisite lyric philosopher of the following stanzas...is not by any means the least distinguished star in a galaxy which includes the benign, effulgent AE, the scorching, scoriac James Jolce [sic.], the mildly twinkling Lady Gregory and the distant and melancholy Padraic Colum" (*Japan Times & Mail*: 21 June 1919). See:<<http://www.musashino-u.ac.jp/iasil-j/Bibliography.html>>

29 *The New Japan*, p. 208.

30 *The New Japan*, p. 207; See also footnote 11 above.

31 The Unitarian minister Clay MacCauley (1843–1925)



Emerson, and aided Yukichi Fukuzawa in establishing the university: “It was a great happiness to me to see the delight of the old gentleman in being made warmly welcome in the very rooms in which he had lived many years previously as an officer of the then young university.”<sup>32</sup> He goes on:

His description of the great earthquake that tilted the water in the fish-pond from one end to the other set me calculating how the big auditorium would behave if and when a similar shaking came, and where my plank-and-paper room, that stood under its great shadow, would find itself — and me.<sup>33</sup>

Cousins was asked to deliver a second series of lectures starting on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1920, but on March 5<sup>th</sup> he received a cable from “my College” recalling him to India. He recounts being entertained by his students at a farewell party, “not now as their sensei, but as a fellow writer...”<sup>34</sup> and an incident “out of an efflorescence of kindness that comes to me with the aroma of exquisite romance,” when two of his female students payed a call on him and informed him “with quite frankness in good English, [that they] were lovers of my poetry, and therefore lovers of its author.”

Happily they had brought no carved or lacquered symbol of their kindness to complicate the last terrors of packing. They had come simply to recite to me two short poems of my own which they had seen in the monthly journal of The Young Party. There was no ceremonial space

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32 *The New Japan*, p. 209; See also *We Two Together*, pp. 349–50.

33 The auditorium was destroyed during the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923.

34 Cf. *We Two Together*, p. 366.

on the tatami of my room, and we had to sit on corded boxes [“labeled for Colombo and Madras” — *We Two Together*, p. 366]. When we had exchanged views on poets and poetry, one of them, a bright creature of beautiful spirit, stood up and made her offering, in perfect expression, with a voice like a temple bell sounding out of the Fujiwara era a thousand years ago — when the influence of women was dominant in art and life, but failed, not because of the femininity of women, but because of the imperfect manliness of men. The realisation spontaneously given to me in the pure æsthetic tribute of that free-souled Japanese girl, that in her I had reached the true Japan, was indeed a great gift, not of farewell, but of a spiritual meeting of Japan and myself behind the veils of life.

(*The New Japan*, pp. 316–17)

## Conclusion

We left Japan in wind and rain and struggling sunlight at noon on the twenty-eighth of March 1920, just in time to be too soon for the cherry blossoms.

(*The New Japan*, p.326)

Henry Cousins received an honorary doctorate from Keio in 1923, but thereafter he and the university drifted apart. The theosophist died two years after his “beloved” wife in Madanapalle, Feb. 20 1956, and was cremated there the next day. His recollections of a brief period in Japan and at Keio Gijuku University are imbued with fondness and admiration, particularly in *The New Japan*; in **Part Two** the contrastive impressions which Japan and the country’s oldest private university made on Walter Sherard Vines will be examined.

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