



J. F. Kennedy Theatre.

Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture. By Lawrence W. Chisolm. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963. xiv + 297 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$7.50.)

Daijin Sensei, Teacher of Great Men, was the meritorious title the Japanese bestowed on Ernest Fenollosa, the first professor of philosophy at the University of Tokyo. But it is not as the exponent of Spenserian ideas that Fenollosa is best remembered; rather it is as a teacher of Japanese art to the Japanese and as a major figure in promoting the appreciation of Asian art in the United States. Fenollosa's enthusiasm for Asian aesthetics has continued in his influence upon Arthur Dow in art education, Ezra Pound in literature, and Georgia O'Keefe and Max Weber in art.

Lawrence Chisolm, Assistant Professor of History and American Studies at Yale, in his highly articulate and stimulating intellectual biography of Fenollosa, has helped to restore a full portrait of a man whose wide range of interests has, until now, led specialists from numerous disciplines to examine his work and importance too narrowly. Brought to Japan in 1878 to teach philosophy, at age 25, Fenollosa soon became interested in collecting Japanese art. At this time, when Japan was in the process of modernizing herself, there was little interest in or support for Japanese art

among the Japanese. From collecting, Fenollosa moved into archaeology, art criticism, art education and then administration. Influenced by Emersonian ideals of individualism, self-reliance and cultural independence, Fenollosa, in the spring of 1882, attacked the Japanese for their western art craze and urged them to look to their own great artists and artistic traditions. From this speech, given before a club of aristocrats, including the Minister of Education, came a national art revival which led to the formation of numerous art clubs, new ideas in art education and Fenollosa's appointment as an Imperial Commissioner of Art (1886). In this capacity, Fenollosa toured the world, returning to Japan to help establish and manage the Fine Arts Academy.

After twelve years in Japan, Fenollosa returned to the United States to become curator of the Japanese collection at the Boston Museum. The collection was one which Fenollosa had himself gathered together and persuaded Charles Weld, a Boston philanthropist, to purchase for the museum. From the time of his return until his death (in 1908), Fenollosa devoted his efforts to quickening American interest in Asian art. As Chisolm points out, the time was propitious. As an "Apostle" and "Prophet" for Eastern art, he found a wide and ready audience, not only in Boston, but at the Pratt Institute in New York, in the lectures he delivered around

the country, and especially at the Chautauqua meetings at Winona Lake, Indiana, which became Fenollosa's summer home after 1900. His lectures reflected his wide interests: "A Comparison of European and Asiatic Art," "Japanese and Chinese Poetry," "Problems of Art Education," "The Meaning of the Orient for the United States," and "The Foundation of Criticism and Education in Art." Beside his far-ranging lecture schedule, Fenollosa continued to write extensively on art and cultural relations. Articles on the No drama, Chinese and Japanese painting and color prints joined catalogs for exhibitions of leading Asian artists as well as philosophical writings on the meeting of East and West. His most enduring monument was his *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* which appeared, after his death, in two volumes edited by his wife.

Epochs represents probably the fullest expression of Fenollosa's aesthetic. Chisolm's chapter, "The Individualist," gives a penetrating analysis of this aesthetic. Through art, Fenollosa felt, man could be renewed, achieve freedom, change and find individuality. Great art could only be produced when there was a break from formalism. In examining the Chinese and Japanese tradition, he found that the great epochs of art occurred when Confucianism was in decline, and Buddhism and Taoism in the ascendancy. A convert to Buddhism, Fenollosa found in non-

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Confucian religions the individualism, freedom and beauty which were necessary to his system. Noting that great Western art had been produced under similar conditions, Fenollosa was able to conclude that a universal scheme of art existed; that great art was the product of unique individuals operating in a climate of intellectual freedom. Upon this basis, Fenollosa could look to a future merging of the East and West which would offer new opportunities for individual growth and artistic expression. Chisolm argues that in holding this view of life, Fenollosa can be placed in the stream of American modernism which includes Walt Whitman, William James and Ezra Pound. It is, Chisolm continues, a pattern of "existential modernism" which "includes in each instance a series of unique relationships discovered and ordered by a single trained sensibility." (p. 246)

Art Education

Fenollosa's philosophy found perhaps its most concrete manifestation in the field of art education. Again sounding the Emersonian call for individual freedom, Fenollosa urged the reeducation of the child's eyes to see new arrangements and new orderings in the world around him. The key to the system was what Arthur Wesley Dow, who worked with Fenollosa in Boston, called "composition." By composition Dow meant that all of the parts of a painting must be the expression of an idea; they should all be related to forming a harmonious whole. Composition is related to the creative faculty, not to the imitative, in that it imposes order on all the processes and techniques which go into a painting. Dow, too, was greatly influenced by Japanese art and much of what he and Fenollosa learned went into Dow's very influential *Composition*, first published in 1899. Dow expounded his ideas to a growing audience first at Pratt Institute and later

at Teacher's College, Columbia University. His ideas were taken up by progressive schools, including John Dewey's at Chicago. For Chisolm, Georgia O'Keefe, in her art, exemplifies what Dow and Fenollosa were teaching; that the future union of East and West would depend upon "the relationships of individuals at particular times and places as on a philosophic harmony of components." (p. 243)

Like Fenollosa, Lawrence Chisolm has an eclectic mind. His interests touch upon literature, philosophy, psychology, aesthetic theory, history, education, modern design and politics. I suspect that Chisolm was drawn to Fenollosa because of many similarities in interests. In the biography this affinity, if it is such, is both a strength and weakness. Its strength is that Chisolm can swiftly delineate the multifaceted nature of his subject, while at the same time placing him in his cultural and intellectual milieu. The biographer is clearly in sympathy with the idea of fusing Eastern and Western culture, emerging with some kind of vital, positive whole.

Chisolm's sympathy for Fenollosa and his ideas, however, does present some problems for the reader. The book is constructed in a form which suggests a conversation between two highly literate people who are operating within a similar environment. Chisolm is clearly more interested in talking about ideas with Fenollosa than he is in critically examining those ideas, systematically presenting Fenollosa's life, or even really testing influences. A thin thread of chronology is maintained, but only serves to orient the reader who might otherwise become lost in the dialogue. Individuals, like Henry Adams, John La Farge, Edward Morse, Lafcadio Hearn, wander in and out from time to time and are described, but their presence is obviously external to what is being discussed. They serve largely as catalysts to bring about

some action; Morse's role in securing the Professorship for Fenollosa, or Adams detachment from the terms of the debate. Even Arthur Dow, who justifiably warrants considerable space, becomes largely a vehicle for the transmission of Fenollosa's ideas and terms of reference. Minor details, perhaps, of Fenollosa's career, such as how well he knew the Chinese or Japanese language, are left to the reader's intuition. The burden of proof for whether Fenollosa really understood No drama or not, largely rests on a quotation from a No master which appears in Fenollosa's own writings. On a critical level, when Chisolm discusses Fenollosa's ideas he is vague, no doubt because Fenollosa was vague, but instead of regarding this as a defect, the author, because of his own familiarity with the terms and ideas, seems willing to accept the premises of the argument on this level. The reader could only wish that phrases like "The direction of his [Fenollosa's] thinking shifted from rationalistic categories toward a vitalist gestalt," (p. 201) had been more fully explained.

Lawrence Chisolm has written a vital, impressionistic biography which should provoke extensive "conversations" among art historians and biographers; indeed, all those interested in the development of ideas and aesthetic theory. He has served Fenollosa well, becoming in no small sense another and later step in the unfolding of Fenollosa's hopeful dream of a new epoch which would be the result of fusing East and West. As if to emphasize this purpose, Chisolm ends his work with a musical "Coda." His concluding sentence is a testament of faith: "Fenollosa's radical artistic individualism, symbolized in the lotus, recaptures the revolutionary implications of an American individualism fit in many ways for a cosmopolitan world." (p. 247)

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