

An Unpublished Essay by Mary Berenson, 'Botticelli and his Critics' (1894–95)

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An unpublished essay entitled 'Botticelli and his Critics' (see Appendix), written in 1894–95 by Mary Costelloe (1864–1945) (the future Mary Berenson), addresses 'the immense popularity among cultivated Anglo-Saxons of the fifteenth century artist, Sandro Botticelli. How is it to be explained, and what does it indicate?'.¹ This unfinished text might well be the first extended analysis of the Botticelli craze written while the phenomenon was still raging on both sides of the Atlantic.² Together with two nearly forgotten publications by Costelloe from 1894, a highly critical review of the first Botticelli monograph by Hermann Ulmann and a perceptive article on 'The New and the Old Art Criticism', this previously unknown essay helps us understand not only the scholar's innovative writings about Botticelli, but also her early collaborations with Bernard Berenson.³ Working closely with her intellectual and romantic partner, whom she married in 1900, Costelloe set up an argument based on binary oppositions, a typical approach in the period: secularism/Christianity in the Renaissance, religion/science in modern times, and linearism/naturalism

¹ Florence, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Biblioteca Berenson, Bernard and Mary Berenson Papers, 22E.4. All unpublished material cited in this article is found among the Berenson Papers, and all transcriptions were very kindly provided by Michael Gorman, as part of his project to publish all the unpublished writings of Bernard before 1900. I located Mary's essay and Bernard's 'Scheme', discussed below, thanks to the assistance of Ilaria Della Monica, archivist at I Tatti. Gorman brought to my attention each of the other unpublished items cited below. Transcriptions for many of the same letters were provided by Tiffany Johnston and Francesco Ventrella; the latter also shared the manuscript of his essay, 'Befriending Botticelli: Psychology and Connoisseurship at the Fin de Siècle', in *Botticelli Past and Present*, ed. by Ana Debenedetti and Caroline Elam (London: UCL Press, 2019), pp. 116–47 <<https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787354593>>. I am extremely grateful to all three scholars and for their fundamental assistance in my research and their invaluable comments on this article.

² For an introduction to this topic, see *Botticelli Re-Imagined*, ed. by Mark Evans and Stefan Weppelmann, exhibition catalogue (London: V&A Publishing, 2016).

³ On these collaborations, see Tiffany L. Johnston, 'The Correggiosity of Correggio: On the Origin of Berensonian Connoisseurship', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 19 (2016), 385–425; and Ventrella, esp. pp. 128–33, both with further bibliography.

in Botticelli. Building on this last point, the unpublished essay presents the idiosyncratic view that in Botticelli's figures, the 'indeterminate' appearance (which others often describe as 'dreamy') results from the tension between the artist's attention to outline and linear flow, on the one hand, and an accurate and unidealized representation of the world, on the other. This reputed indeterminacy, for Berenson and Costelloe, appealed to the artist's contemporaries because fifteenth-century viewers questioned their own identity, vacillating between Christian values and the 'Renaissance', here understood as the embrace of secularism. In their own day, according to the late nineteenth-century scholars, the indeterminacy in Botticelli's works attracted great interest because of the indecision of modern viewers: should they choose science and modernity, or religion and spiritism? The latter, moreover, was of great interest to both Costelloe and her former teacher, William James. For Berenson and Costelloe, the spiritual crisis in the late nineteenth century, comparable to one in the late fifteenth century, led viewers in both periods to appreciate Botticelli's dreamy figures. The authors argued, however, that the artist's indeterminacy can only be understood by an analysis of his autograph works and stylistic artistic development, not his religious beliefs.

In 1894 Mary Whitall Costelloe — as she proudly signed herself — had just published a polemical essay entitled 'The New and the Old Art Criticism'.⁴ The second half offers a lucid tour de force of Botticelli connoisseurship, noteworthy for its early date. Here, Costelloe embraced the view that

probably there is no painter who of late years has had more nonsense talked and written about him than poor Botticelli, and for this the authors of our National Gallery catalogue are in a great measure responsible. Botticelli is a distinctly Anglo-Saxon fad. (p. 830)

Costelloe devotes several lines to a then popular tondo in the National Gallery, one she correctly identifies as a workshop painting, in part because of its 'mechanical outline'.⁵ At one point she refers to 'the misnaming of

⁴ Mary Whitall Costelloe, 'The New and the Old Art Criticism', *Nineteenth Century*, May 1894, pp. 828–37. As documented by Tiffany L. Johnston, 'Mary Berenson and the Concept of Connoisseurship' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University Bloomington, 2001), pp. 547, 551 n. 79, the article was completed in December 1893, accepted for publication in February 1894, and published the following May.

⁵ 'New and the Old Art Criticism', pp. 831–32. The tondo is *The Virgin and Child with Saint John and an Angel* (NG275). The name of Giuliano da Sangallo is painted on the verso, which led Costelloe to conclude that the architect and draftsman had produced it. In his own review of Ulmann's Botticelli monograph, Maurice Hewlett cites and rightly disagrees with this proposed attribution in *Academy*, 25 August 1894, pp. 137–38 (p. 137).

the circular “Madonna” on the screen’ (p. 831), probably indicating that Costelloe had used the text for a public lecture illustrated with lantern slides. We know that in December 1893 Costelloe spoke in London to the Woman’s Development Society about European picture galleries.⁶ In her essay, and most likely in that lecture, she contrasted uninformed views of Botticelli with the results of connoisseurship, which she described in her 1894 review of Hermann Ulmann’s *Sandro Botticelli* as ‘a new science still begging for admission among recognised sciences’. She then proceeds to offer an early and useful definition of the approach then being developed by Berenson: ‘Connoisseurship is the identification of resemblances between works of art so close as to indicate identical authorship, the finding of likenesses between artist and artist, so great that they point to the existence of a personal connection.’⁷ This new science allowed Costelloe to distinguish Botticelli’s works from those of his students. By misidentifying such workshop productions as paintings by the master, she wrote in her essay on methodology, the National Gallery does a disservice to its visitors. The London museum

encourages us in our bad national habit of jumping at the obvious literary meaning of a work of art instead of waiting until we have mastered the actual forms in which the artist has incarnated his ideas [...]. For a peg to hang poetry on — particularly poetry of the depressed, nihilistic kind [...] such pictures probably do even better than the real Botticellis. (‘New and the Old Art Criticism’, p. 832)

Workshop paintings, Berenson and Costelloe stated on several occasions, often have a greater impact than autograph works on those interested in poetic musings about art because students exaggerate qualities found in works created by the master. As Costelloe explains in her unpublished essay,

The fact that Botticelli’s [facial] type happens to be close to a type common among Anglo-Saxons, and that this was accentuated by his followers, has made it all the easier for us to understand the message of those hauntingly familiar faces, has made it all the easier to read our own states of soul into the works of Botticelli and his school.

⁶ On the lecture, without reference to the related article or slides, see Johnston, ‘Mary Berenson’, p. 552. Maria Alambritis kindly informed me that the tondo seems to have been exhibited on a screen in the museum, and perhaps Mary alluded to this installation in her talk.

⁷ M.C. [Mary Costelloe], review of Hermann Ulmann, *Sandro Botticelli*, in ‘The Editor’s Room’, *Studio*, 3 (1894), pp. xxxi–xxxiii (p. xxxii); the sentence continues, ‘which connection the relative ages of the artists and other considerations must determine’.

Costelloe's published comments about the depressing and nihilistic poetry of her day complement those in her newly found essay. Here, in writing about the Pre-Raphaelite artists and writers, she observes that

the predominant characteristic of this group is a dissatisfaction with the present that leads them to take refuge in dreams of other ages, — of the early Renaissance (from which the name pre-Raphaelite arose), or the middle ages, as in William Morris.

Part of the reason that these dissatisfied poets misunderstood Botticelli was because they confused workshop paintings with those by the master himself. Moreover, their flawed approach was compounded by 'the writings of the two most influential modern English critics [...] Mr. Ruskin's fervent and indiscriminating worship of gothic and the Giottesque, and Mr. Pater's glowing interpretations of Renaissance art' ('Botticelli and his Critics'). The catalogues of museums, such as those of the Louvre and National Gallery, should serve to educate readers, but instead, these publications only add to a profound misunderstanding of Botticelli.

Many of Costelloe's unpublished comments on the Pre-Raphaelites build on those found in a recently discovered essay by Berenson, with the title (added in Costelloe's hand): 'The Critic and Art: Pre-Raphaelites'.⁸ As often seems to have been the case in their collaborations, Costelloe took up and developed some of Berenson's ideas, giving them order, clarity, and literary form; in this case, she also applied Berenson's broad-based comments about art and poetry to the Pre-Raphaelite artist par excellence, Sandro Botticelli.

Costelloe knew from personal experience the impact that literary figures can have on the aesthetic awareness of this painter. In the first chapter of her unpublished 'Life of Bernard Berenson', written largely between 1931 and 1933, she recounted how, in 1884, when she and her brother Logan were both students at Harvard, they attended a lecture given by the poet and critic Edmund Gosse:

When he mentioned the sacred word 'Botticelli', I remember looking at my brother with eyes brimming with emotion and excitement and saying, 'Oh, Logan, we are at the very centre of things!'. We became pre-Raphaelites and hung photographs of Rossetti's pictures in our rooms.⁹

⁸ For this unpublished essay, see Ventrella, pp. 136–37.

⁹ For a reproduction and transcription of this unpublished chapter, see *Berenson and Harvard: Bernard and Mary as Students*, ed. by Jonathan K. Nelson, online exhibition catalogue, 2012 <<https://berenson.itatti.harvard.edu/berenson/exhibits/show/berenson>> [accessed 27 April 2019], entry MS.IV.2. For discussion, in the same catalogue, see Sanam Nader-Esfahani, 'Paths Intertwined: The 1884 Lowell Lecture and "The Sacred Word 'Botticelli'"', entry MS.III.6.

Unbeknown to Mary and Logan, Bernard was also at Gosse's lecture. This young Harvard student also linked Botticelli with his literary interests. In a short story, published in November 1886, Bernard described the type of relationship he would develop with Mary when they first met in 1888. The protagonist, Robert Christie, courted a certain Rosalyn Storer and 'knew no greater pleasure than to look with her at some drooping, poppy-saturated pre-Raphaelite sketch, or at a drawing of the divine Sandro Botticelli'.¹⁰ A few years later Berenson alluded to writings about Botticelli's *Primavera* in a letter to Costelloe; she included this missive of 1 December 1890 in her unpublished 'Life'. The painting, he thought, 'seemed so much greater than ever, and an everlasting rebuke to people who want to submit art to newspaperology [...] it suffers no interpreters, and certainly no translation, least of all in words'. A couple of weeks later, in another letter she cited in her 'Life', Berenson noted that Botticelli 'is getting his day now, at the very least [...] but at the same time I feel sure that about nine-tenths of the admiration he gets now is on false grounds'.

Berenson shared his research with Costelloe to help her with a publication on Botticelli. On 2 December 1893, when Costelloe was completing her article on 'The New and the Old Art Criticism', she explained to her mother that Berenson 'has been a year helping me collect materials for my Botticelli, which is I hope going to be a thorough and very thoughtful piece of work'.¹¹ Just one week later, however, Berenson wrote Costelloe a dramatic letter, immediately after learning about the publication of the first scholarly book on Botticelli, by Hermann Ulmann:

A huge book by a German on Botticelli has appeared. I have ordered it, and will give you my notes on it which you must concoct into a review to pay for it. I doubt whether it will prove so good that we shall be tempted to give up our scheme.¹²

Many of these notes survive in the Berenson Archive at Villa I Tatti, together with Costelloe's own annotations about connoisseurship and methodology in the volume by Ulmann. The marginalia clearly indicate Costelloe's contribution to her collaboration with Berenson. In the end, they published quite different reviews, signed respectively by 'M.C.' (in 1894) and 'Z' (in

¹⁰ Bernard Berenson, 'The Third Category', *Harvard Monthly*, November 1886, pp. 66–83 (p. 68); for a reproduction and transcription, see *Berenson and Harvard*, ed. by Nelson, entry [BB.IV.20](#).

¹¹ In a letter to her father, dated 27 November 1893, Costelloe wrote, 'I am going to devote this winter to preparing a work on Botticelli and his School, which I *hope* to make a very thoughtful piece of criticism.'

¹² Gorman established that the undated letter was written on 9 December 1893.

1895).¹³ The handwriting of the manuscript for the 1894 review, virtually identical to the published version, can be identified as Berenson's but this does not necessarily indicate that he was the sole author.¹⁴ A typescript of an early version, also at I Tatti, seems to reflect the interests and wording of Costelloe. The two evidently exchanged ideas, notes, and drafts before producing a final text that both could approve. Literary connoisseurs might attempt to identify the 'hand' most responsible for one text or another, but it seems best to refer to the 1894 review published by 'M.C.' as Costelloe's, as she herself did in a letter and diary entry of 25 February 1894.¹⁵ Most importantly, the surviving material strongly suggests that both this review and the unpublished essay on Botticelli reflect a vibrant intellectual exchange between the scholars.

In his letter to Costelloe of December 1893, Berenson does not identify their 'scheme', but this evidently corresponds to an outline found among his papers, datable to the same year, entitled 'Scheme for a work on Botticelli'. The opening section, where Berenson asserts the 'necessity of, to some extent, establishing personality of imitators, the better to distinguish their works from masters', provided the point of departure for his fundamental article on 'Rudiments of Connoisseurship', published several years later.¹⁶ To understand Costelloe's 'Botticelli and his Critics', we can focus on the last of the four sections of the 'Scheme', dedicated to 'Botticelli's present popularity'. Berenson proposes three causes:

- (1) Revival of general interest in XVth century, and vague feeling of art being expression of it.
- (2) Revival of genuine art-feeling, and broad criticism, inclined to take a man's faults for granted, and insist on his qualities. Botticelli is highly appreciated by the few — that authoritative few — capable of appreciating his supreme genius as LINEALIST.

¹³ Z. [Bernard Berenson], review of Hermann Ulmann, *Sandro Botticelli, Revue critique d'histoire et de littérature*, 4 February 1895, pp. 88–95; and [Costelloe], review of Ulmann. For these reviews, see Ventrella, pp. 128–33.

¹⁴ Gorman discovered this important manuscript and identified the hand.

¹⁵ Mary Costelloe, diary entry, 25 February 1894, Berenson Papers: 'This morning we wrote, etc., and afterwards I finished a *Chronicle* review of Dr. Ulmann's *Botticelli*.' In a letter to her mother Hannah, of the same date, Costelloe wrote, 'I have just finished a review of Dr. Ulmann's *Botticelli* for the *Chronicle*.'

¹⁶ Bernard Berenson, 'Rudiments of Connoisseurship', in *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art*, 2nd ser. (London: Bell, 1902), pp. 111–48. I discussed this unpublished 'Scheme' briefly in a lecture given in December 2017, to be published as 'Swinburne, Berenson, and the Origins of the "Amico di Sandro"', in *Filippino Lippi: Beauty, Invention and Intelligence*, ed. by Paula and Geoff Nuttall (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). Ventrella, who studied the 'Scheme' independently, came to the same conclusion about its relationship to 'Rudiments', but offered a quite different reading of the text itself (p. 131); Berenson's notes are reproduced on p. 134, fig. 2.15.

(3) Chief cause. In our day also great PERPLEXITY.

The first point had already been made in 1877 by John Addington Symonds, an author greatly appreciated by Berenson and Costelloe. In *The Fine Arts* (1877), from Symonds's multivolume *Renaissance in Italy*, the poet and cultural historian added an extended footnote about Botticelli:

The prophecy of Mr. Ruskin, the tendencies of our best contemporary art in Mr. Burne Jones's painting, the specific note of our recent fashionable poetry, and, more than all, our delight in the delicately poised psychological problems of the middle Renaissance, have evoked a kind of hero-worship for this excellent artist and true poet.¹⁷

In 1890–91 Berenson was certainly reading another book by Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* (1890), which had a profound impact on his research on Correggio (Johnston, 'Correggiosity', p. 403). A couple of years later, Symonds's references to psychology and poetry in relation to Botticelli's fame must have struck a chord with Costelloe.

As for Botticelli riding the wave of general interest in the period, in 1896 the artist was discussed at length in Edward Armstrong's *Lorenzo de' Medici and Florence in the Fifteenth Century*. Armstrong suggested that Botticelli's 'present popularity may be accounted for by the application of the historical method to art criticism, by the fact that art has for the public acquired an educational, and not merely an epicurean value'.¹⁸ In her scathing review of this volume, Costelloe noted that Armstrong included several untenable attributions to Botticelli, then quoted the same line before concluding, 'Heaven save us from such "education" as unintelligent compilation affords!'.¹⁹

In his second point, Berenson expressed his admiration for Botticelli's 'supreme genius as LINEALIST'. Earlier in his 'Scheme', he referred to Botticelli's large number of imitators (what he calls 'ungenuine works'), and thus his

immense popularity, as result of the perplexity in human soul, originating in [the] artist, possibly as mere struggle and perplexity in artistic aim e.g. not decided whether to give up linealism or to take up with naturalism, or to combine them.

¹⁷ John Addington Symonds, *The Fine Arts* (London: Smith, Elder, 1906), p. 181 (text unchanged from the first edition of 1877).

¹⁸ Edward Armstrong, *Lorenzo de' Medici and Florence in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Putnam's Sons, 1896), pp. 423–24.

¹⁹ Mary Logan [Costelloe], 'Reviews of Recent Publications', *Studio*, 8 (1896), 181–84 (p. 183).

Costelloe picked up the same theme in her review of Ulmann's *Botticelli*. She noted that Botticelli and his teacher Filippo Lippi

are both great linealists sacrificing Nature as much to indulgence in line — line, not for its structural functions, but for its own sake — as the naturalists, their contemporaries, sacrificed line to merely correct anatomies. The quality of line not only connects Botticelli with Filippo but, being the one essential element of his artistic personality, furnishes the only test for the authenticity of works attributed to him.²⁰

Costelloe had already hinted at this test in her own work on Botticelli in her earlier article on 'The New and the Old Art Criticism'. Here she observes that 'with genuine Botticellis [...] his *line* is always beautiful and alive. I am aware that nothing is a better test of the cultivated eye than an appreciation of really fine line' (p. 832, emphasis in original). She returns to this test in the rough outline of her Botticelli project, which now appears as the last page of her unpublished essay; this includes an intriguing reference to 'Tests of genuineness'. For Berenson and Costelloe, Botticelli's use of line was not only the defining quality of his personality. Costelloe condemns Ulmann in her review for 'not having noted that this painter was a linealist who for a decade struggled to become a naturalist only to fall back, under the impulse of Leonardo, to linealism' (review of Ulmann, p. xxxiii). In her unpublished essay, Costelloe — using words extremely similar to Berenson's in his 'Scheme' — returns to this 'struggle': 'What was in [Botticelli] [...] a mere struggle and uncertainty in artistic aim — a wavering between two distinct schools of technique — was eagerly seized upon by his contemporaries as an expression of the perplexity in their own souls.'

Both Berenson and Costelloe repeatedly refer to 'perplexity', but this was rarely used as a critical term in late nineteenth-century writings about art or literature. It probably formed part of their private vocabulary, along with 'connosh', the verb they coined for practising connoisseurship.²¹ Perhaps their usages of 'perplexity' are sensitive to the Latin origin of the term, and thus to the idea of entwining or entangling.²² In a crossed-out paragraph on his 'Scheme', Berenson wrote, 'as in XVth century between Renaissance and Christianity, so now between so-called Idealism and Spiritism, and Science, and Modernity. Between English poets all

²⁰ [Costelloe], review of Ulmann, p. xxxii. For the importance of line for Berenson and Costelloe, see Ventrella, pp. 130–32.

²¹ Machtelt Brügggen Israëls, 'The Berensons "Connosh" and Collect Sieneese Painting', in *The Bernard and Mary Berenson Collection of European Paintings at I Tatti*, ed. by Carl Brandon Strehlke and Machtelt Brügggen Israëls (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2015), pp. 47–69 (pp. 47, 66 n. 1).

²² I thank Elizabeth Prettejohn for this suggestion.

despairing or hopeful but perplexed.’ In her own unpublished essay, Costelloe explained why,

in Italy, towards the end of the fifteenth century [...] a state of feeling was current which has a certain parallel in the perplexity, uncertainty and vagueness of our own day. Just as we hesitate between Religion, so-called Idealism and Spiritism on the one hand, and Science and Modernity on the other, so the Italian of Botticelli’s day was still hesitating between Christianity and the Renaissance.

The nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite painters felt a spiritual perplexity, comparable to that of Botticelli’s contemporaries, and this led all to appreciate the artist. True connoisseurs, she argued, knew that the real reason for the vagueness in the figures of Botticelli was his struggle between naturalism on the one hand, and the highly stylized linearism on the other.

Most probably, Costelloe intended her draft on ‘Botticelli and his Critics’ to be a chapter for a monographic study of the artist. A few other period sources refer to the progress of this hitherto unknown book. In a July 1894 diary entry, Julia Cartwright noted that Berenson had come for lunch, and he was ‘very keen that I should review his *Lotto* and Mrs Costelloe’s *Guide to Hampton Court*, which is to appear next week. She is also doing a monograph on Botticelli.’²³ Cartwright’s wording suggests that her lunch guest carefully distinguished between the projects of Berenson and Costelloe. The latter specifically mentioned a *book* dedicated to Botticelli, and not more articles, in two letters to her mother. On 22 March 1895 Costelloe writes, ‘I need now to get out a real book on Botticelli, which I am at work on’; and then on 8 September 1895, ‘I have also a chance to print a book on Botticelli.’ For reasons unknown, neither Costelloe nor Berenson ever wrote a book on Botticelli. It may be that they thought it would be difficult to publish such a volume after the appearance of Ulmann’s monograph in 1894. Perhaps they put off the project as they continued their work on distinguishing Botticelli’s autograph works from the ‘ungenuine’ ones. Already, in his review of Ulmann, Berenson notes that one work under consideration ‘may be by Filippino or rather of an intermediary artist, such as the author of the *Death of Lucretia* in the Pitti’, an artistic personality he baptized as the ‘Amico di Sandro’ in 1899.²⁴ Certainly, they did not produce any book-length study of a single artist during this period, but kept them-

²³ *A Bright Remembrance: The Diaries of Julia Cartwright, 1851–1924*, ed. by Angela Emanuel (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p. 188. I thank Maria Alambritis for this reference.

²⁴ Z. [Berenson], ‘Review of Ulmann’, p. 93, in reference to portrait of the young man in the Louvre (no. 1663), my translation from the French; Bernard Berenson, ‘Amico di Sandro’, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 3rd ser., 21 (1899), 459–71; and 3rd ser., 22 (1899), 21–36.

selves busy creating lists of all Renaissance artists, inventing some new ones, and publishing previously unknown works. Nevertheless, the proposed outline for the Botticelli project included at the end of Costelloe's unpublished essay shows how carefully she had organized this work, and how she planned to incorporate her criticism of Ulmann.

The opening lines of Costelloe's review of Ulmann contrast the approach of a scholar with 'great and subtle powers of interpretation', such as Walter Pater, with that of 'a connoisseur possessed of the peculiar genius of the late Giovanni Morelli' (p. xxxi). This publication, together with her study of 'New Art Criticism', evinces Costelloe's own skill in connoisseurship. First as Berenson's finest student, and then as his colleague, she learned how to distinguish the ten per cent of masterly works attributed to Botticelli from the ninety per cent by his followers. In her unpublished essay, Costelloe makes the perceptive observation that the late nineteenth-century appreciation of Botticelli derives not only from a misidentification of his works; most importantly, it also derives from a tendency to 'read our own states of soul into the works of Botticelli and his school'. With these observations, Costelloe reveals herself to be a scholar who, like Berenson, followed in the traditions of both Pater and Morelli.

Appendix: 'Botticelli and his Critics'

Great advances have been made since the days when the student of history received no better equipment for reconstructing past ages than strings of dates and accounts of battles and treaties.²⁵ The so-called 'Philosophy of History' has weathered the reaction that set in against the facile theorizing of the last century, and has finally settled down to its legitimate work, the combination of accurate and full documentary evidence with thoughtful interpretations of the widest possible ranges of facts, including not only wars and constitutions, but those intellectual and emotional movements which are now the cause and now the effects of the political events.

One little section of this all-inclusive subject with which the future historian of these days must deal, will certainly be concerned with a remarkable phenomenon of our own times, the immense popularity among cultivated Anglo-Saxons of the fifteenth century artist, Sandro Botticelli. How is it to be explained, and what does it indicate?

The explanation at once takes us back, to go no farther, to the 'pre-Raphaelite' artists and poets in England (for purposes of culture

²⁵ The essay appears on twenty-six numbered sheets, neatly written in Costelloe's hand; the outline, here included at the end, is on an unnumbered page. Abbreviations have been expanded and deleted passages have been omitted. This transcription is based on one generously provided by Michael Gorman.

England and America are practically one), for it is among them that the cult of Botticelli arose, and by them that the fashion was set. The term pre-Raphaelite has come to apply more or less vaguely not only to the original 'P.R.B.', Rossetti, Holman Hunt, (the young) Millais, Stephens, Collinson and Wollner, but also to artists like Madox Browne, Burne-Jones and their satellites, and writers like Ruskin, Swinburne and William Morris. The predominant characteristic of this group is a dissatisfaction with the present that leads them to take refuge in dreams of other ages, — of the early Renaissance (from which the name pre-Raphaelite arose), or the middle ages, as in William Morris. In the writings of the two most influential modern English critics we trace the same spirit. Mr. Ruskin's fervent and indiscriminating worship of gothic and the Giottesque, and Mr. Pater's glowing interpretations of Renaissance art, are inspired by the same impulse to seek consolation for the ugliness and discord of modern life in distant and more sympathetic epochs. Even poetry such as that of Matthew Arnold does but strengthen the reactionary trend of culture among those who nourished their growing souls on such despairingly perplexed poems as 'Dover Beach' and such woe-begone artistic types as those of Burne-Jones and Rossetti.

It is a well-known fact that certain classes at given periods tend to express themselves, retrospectively, as it were, in their art. Instead of attaining a new utterance of their own, they turn with a passionate sympathy which is usually accorded only to contemporary poets and artists, to the productions of some past time which seem to embody their own temper and mood, if not their actual aspiration. Such has been the case among us for the last forty years, and in the explanation of this lies the secret of 'pre-Raphaelitism' and the cult of Botticelli. An earlier generation, which thought it knew precisely what it wanted, found an almost complete and satisfactory expression in Byron, but the aims of the next generation were too varied and uncertain to find expression in any one artist. We have had poets one or two of whom will probably rank among the greatest — certainly high above Byron — but none of them has been able to express his age completely. On no one subject have they given a clear and definite message. The groping indecision that, for example, characterizes their attitude toward religion, characterises the attitude of themselves and their readers to the whole of life. In Tennyson, the most puerile of them all, Church-of-Englandism is watered down into sentimental hopefulness and vague benevolence. Matthew Arnold, although the most sincere, casts many a regretful backward look at Christianity, while advocating the substitution of landscape-worship. William Morris substitutes theoretical pessimism and practical socialism for orthodox religion, while Ruskin sermonizes in the style of an eloquent revivalist upon the Morality of Art, and Pater advocates the cult of the 'coloured moment' — a sort of spasmodic, incomplete Hedonism. Swinburne, the most desperate, and most of the

minor poets, alternately coquette with neo-Catholicism and devil-worship, and Browning himself, the sanest and most hopeful of all, seems to be now on this side and now on that, of the Deist Christian pale. All the poets have in common an uncertainty as to what they actually desire, a longing for some definite and compelling ideal as the guide of life. The time has scarcely come for the joyous expression in poetry and art of the modern attitude toward life — the inspiration of faith in science and in human progress (Note: Signs however are not wanting, in contemporary French art at least, that science is beginning to flower into art: Eiffel Tower, frescoes of Besnard in *Farmacie* and *Hôtel de Ville*, Monet's studies of light, etc., etc.), and in the meantime it is not hard to understand that perplexity and groping can scarcely become widespread enough — and indeed are in themselves scarcely of the kind — to evoke popular expression in poetry. The vagueness always implied in mere yearning is against its expression in words. A musical age like our own finds its best utterance in music, while in periods of great achievement in the plastic arts, similar feelings find expression in painting and engraving.

In Italy, towards the end of the fifteenth century, as we know from many sources, a state of feeling was current which has a certain parallel in the perplexity, uncertainty and vagueness of our own day. Just as we hesitate between Religion, so-called Idealism and Spiritism on the one hand, and Science and Modernity on the other, so the Italian of Botticelli's day was still hesitating between Christianity and the Renaissance already dimly feeling within itself the tumult of those contending forces, which came to open war, when the Catholic Reaction triumphed over all that was most thoughtful and learned and progressive in Italian thought. Some such restlessness and presage of trouble we know existed, and we know that among the people who felt it most — among the self-conscious and literary Florentines — the works of Sandro Botticelli found immediate and overwhelming popularity. What was in him, as we shall see, possibly a mere struggle and uncertainty in artistic aim — a wavering between two distinct schools of technique painting — was eagerly seized upon by his contemporaries as an expression of the perplexity in their own souls, for in his types and expressions they found people who knew not how to make a choice, who felt pulled in different ways, and unconvinced of the superiority of any. Hence, it seems, many people wanted these types and expressions, caring little about the artistic qualities as such — indeed, if they could have the faces and figures a little more so, all the better. This explains, and is the only explanation, of the vast numbers of imitators of Botticelli who sprang up, whose works, emphasizing, often to the point of caricature, the typical expression of the master, while missing of course, the purely artistic qualities which distinguish a great artist from his imitators, nevertheless, just an account of their vehemence of expression, doubtless pleased the Florentine

public then, as they please the Anglo-Saxon public still, even more than the genuine works of Botticelli himself.

The dissatisfaction with the present, then, which we have noted as a characteristic of the pre-Raphaelites and of most contemporary poets, tended to lead them, as we have seen, to seek the satisfaction of their ideals in a past age, rather than to create them anew. The fact that their choice included a revival of interest in the fifteenth century is no accident, for they were, in fact, almost forced to it, out of opposition to the current popularity of the sixteenth and seventeenth century artists, the enthusiasm for the late Bolognese, for Correggio, and for Raphael, Michelangelo and Titian. The same feelings that led them to take refuge in the fifteenth century (with the Gothic revival we are not at present concerned), also made it highly probable that, among the artists of that time, Botticelli and his followers, who expressed a state of feeling so nearly analogous to their own, should be the most sympathetic of all the real 'pre-Raphaelite' artists. The fact that Botticelli's type happens to be close to a type common among Anglo-Saxons, and that this was accentuated by his followers, has made it all the easier for us to understand the message of those hauntingly familiar faces, has made it all the easier to read our own states of soul into the works of Botticelli and his school. The indignation of the public at any such thing as a scientific discrimination of his genuine works from imitations or copies, prove how they have taken him passionately into their very lives, subjectivizing his art so that they can no more endure any objective treatment of him, than they could endure a scientific, physiological analysis of their most personal emotions.

Of this subjective criticism, based not at all upon scientific discriminations or sensitiveness to artistic quality, but upon a passionate sympathy with the *feeling*, the literary intention of the works, the best instance is Mr. Walter Pater's famous essay upon Sandro Botticelli in his 'Renaissance', the influence of which in itself goes a long way toward explaining Botticelli's popularity among younger people. This essay itself owes its origin in part, as we shall see, to Mr. Ruskin's equally passionate and unscientific, though less subtle criticism of the Florentine artist. These two great writers again echo in the volumes of verses of the more cultured and less read minor English poets, who can scarcely print a volume of short poems without some verses to Botticelli (or his imitators).

On the other hand, in the domain of objective, scientific criticism, what have we that may help the sincere appreciator to reserve his raptures for the pictures which are really genuine, which satisfy the trained eye as well as the enthusiastic spirit?

We may dismiss the anecdotage and careless attributions of Vasari's predecessors, Billi and the anonymous author of the Codex Magliabecchiano. With the exception of an amusing anecdote illustrating

Botticelli's aversion to marriage, they contain nothing that Vasari himself does not say a great deal better. Vasari, as usual, is chiefly concerned with the legends current about the artist, and gives as usual an incomplete and misleading list of his works. Over the gossip about the man, amusing as it is, we must not now linger, for it throws no light upon the artist. As usual in Vasari, Botticelli 'conducted his pictures with diligence to a successful issue', 'worked with love' over the details, was 'much praised', produced work 'so beautiful in colour, drawing, and composition, that all the artists to this day remain struck with wonder at it.' From Vasari Mr. Pater takes the date of his death, 1515, and writes of the melancholy of 'his dejected old age', but the document he hoped might come to light and fix a date for his death, has been found in the Florence archives where his decease is recorded in the year 1510. Vasari gives us no hint as to Botticelli's real quality, and only one paragraph of interpretative description — which, however, is in his best style and contains all that need be said about Botticelli's masterpiece, the fresco of St. Augustine in the Ognissanti at Florence. 'He shows in the head of the Saint all that profound cogitation and acute subtlety which characterises those (wise sensate seers) who devote themselves to the abstract consideration of high and difficult subjects.'

From Vasari down the writings of the late Senator Morelli, we have nothing new about Botticelli. Messrs. Crowe & Cavalcaselle, Dr. Burckhardt, Kugler, and the other less important historical or technical authorities, have all failed to appreciate Botticelli's special quality as an artist, and have consequently failed to guide us towards any discrimination of his genuine works from the imitations. Morelli's criticism is a purely technical one, and as such we welcome it gladly, scientific discrimination is clearly the first step toward a genuine appreciation of the artist. In Morelli the characteristic forms of Botticelli's hands and ears and draperies (details which once acquired are rarely altered in the Old Masters) as well as certain beauties of colour which distinguish him from his imitators, but although he calls him 'undoubtedly one of the most gifted and individual among the painters of Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century', he remains content with these external aids to connoisseurship and gives us none of the more intimate quality of the artist [*sic*]. Yet the fact that he dwells upon him at all and still more that Ulmann [text ends].

Botticelli and his Critics

I. Account for popularity

1. Result of indecision
and cf. Florence in B.'s time
2. Types
3. Following

II. Pater

III. The Genuine Works

1. Necessity and advantages
2. Tests of genuineness

IV. Dr. Ulmann's failure

V. Reconstruction of Botticelli

A. The Materials

Orbit: 1. Pupil of Fra Filippo Div[ision]. of Florentine School

2. Influenced by Naturalists
3. Influenced by Leonardo

Quality: Line - poetry