

# The New Criterion

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## The Botticelli mystique

by James Hankins

*On “Botticelli and the Search for the Divine” at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*

In his memoir *Unforgotten Years* (1938), the expatriate writer and aesthete Logan Pearsall Smith relates with exquisite irony how the name “Botticelli” first laid its enchantment upon a Boston audience:

While we were at Harvard, Edmund Gosse came to Boston [in 1884] to deliver the Lowell Lectures; my sister [later Mrs. Bernard Berenson] and many of the Harvard intellectuals went religiously to listen to the utterance of this English writer, whose name was familiar to us all. Of these lectures I have forgotten everything except one pregnant sentence, in which the name of Botticelli first echoed in our ears.

“Botticelli,” the lecturer said, in that cultivated “English accent” which was music to us, “Botticelli,” — and with what unction he slowly reiterated those syllables! — “Botticelli, that...

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