

1991

## The Eloquent Eye: Roberto Longhi and the Historical Criticism of Art

David Tabbat

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia>

---

### Recommended Citation

Tabbat, David (1991) "The Eloquent Eye: Roberto Longhi and the Historical Criticism of Art," *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought*: Vol. 5 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia/vol5/iss1/14>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought* by an authorized editor of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact [mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu](mailto:mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu), [hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu](mailto:hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu).

# The Eloquent Eye: Roberto Longhi and the Historical Criticism of Art

David Tabbat

Bernard Berenson once observed that Vasari's greatest strength as a writer was that sure instinct for narrative and characterization which made him a worthy heir of Boccaccio. Lest his readers misconstrue this appreciation of Vasari's "novelistic tendency" as a denigration of his work when judged by purely art-historical criteria, Berenson added that the author of the *Lives* "is still the unrivaled critic of Italian art," in part because "he always describes a picture or a statue with the vividness of a man who saw the thing while he wrote about it."<sup>1</sup>

To a remarkable degree, these same observations may aptly introduce the work of Roberto Longhi (1890-1970),<sup>2</sup> who is often regarded by the Italians themselves (whether specialists or interested laymen) as the most important connoisseur, critic, and art historian their country has produced in our century.<sup>3</sup> Like Vasari, Longhi had the storyteller's sense of incident and character; like him, too, Longhi had an extraordinary capacity to perceive a work of art keenly and to convey his perceptions in words.

Throughout the whole of his long career, Longhi never published anything which was not intended, on the face of it, as a meticulously scholarly contribution to connoisseurship and art-historical understanding. And yet, in reading his works, one may at times be assailed by doubts as to whether Longhi the dazzling stylist is really the loyal ally of Longhi the scrupulous connoisseur, or whether he is not—perhaps—subversively pursuing some independent end. However many traits Longhi may have in common with Vasari, there is a point at which any analogy ends abruptly; as a writer, Longhi has none of his predecessor's naive spontaneity. On the contrary, he has, as we shall see, all the modern literary artist's self-awareness, self-consciousness even, complete with a fully articulated theoretical justification for his own writing.

In any discussion of the "novelistic tendency" in Longhi, the *locus classicus* must be his essay entitled "Fatti di Masolino e di Masaccio."<sup>4</sup> Published in 1940, this seminal study represents a milestone in the history of connoisseurship, clarifying convincingly for the first time the division of hands in the *Madonna and Child with St. Anne* now in the Uffizi, and also (with astonishing results) in the Brancacci Chapel fresco of the *Tribute Money*. It offers much food for critical thought on such varied topics as Masolino's later career and Fra Angelico's relationship to the most advanced artistic tendencies of the early Renaissance. But the most startling thing about it may be the form in which parts of it are cast, a form practically unprecedented in a serious scholarly article. Rather than setting forth long stretches of formal exposition in order to explore how Masolino and Masaccio might have set about trying to reconcile their wildly divergent visions and methods, and how this interaction was reflected in the actual progress of work on the chapel, at crucial points in his argument Longhi sets in the mouths of the two painters passages of dialogue.<sup>5</sup> Thus we can read (and most entertainingly, too) how Masaccio went about browbeating his hapless and flustered elder associate with new-fangled, radical ideas about Brunelleschian perspective (and about much else besides). It is obvious that Longhi cannot have transcribed the very words spoken in the church of the Carmine back in the 1420s; but the point is that, looking at the frescoes in the light of Longhi's text, one comes to the conclusion that the

1. **Masaccio and Masolino: *Virgin and Child with St. Anne*.** Florence, Uffizi. Longhi's unequivocal identification of each artist's share in this panel was an important contribution to the connoisseurship of early Quattrocento painting.





process by which they were brought into being must indeed have been very close to the one which he reconstructs in his delicious dialogues; dialogues one willingly accepts as "history" because they are perfectly mirrored in the mute "dialogue" between the two artists on the walls. As Longhi himself observes, demurely and a little maliciously, in commenting on his own essay, "a little imagination isn't a bad thing in an historian."<sup>6</sup>

Although Longhi's works contain innumerable other instances of his remarkable—positively "novelistic"—capacity to bring a historical setting to life,<sup>7</sup> his apparently paradoxical ability to give his literary imagination free play while adhering scrupulously to the matter and manner of his subject is nowhere more in evidence than in his close readings of individual works of art. Here is his characterization of the Virgin in the Louvre's wonderful *Annunciation* by Carlo Braccesco, a late-fifteenth-century Lombard master whose *oeuvre* Longhi was the first to reconstruct:

Chi sarà intanto questa Signora della Loggia? La "pucelle" dello stile cavalleresco, suggerita dai miniatori francesi del Duecento ma trovata soltanto da Simone? O non più che un ricordo di essa, già divenuta castellana un po' greve di riviera ligure e magari della Costa Azzurra? Ancora alquanto "bas bleu" ma, ormai, non senza sospetto di "bas de laine." Quello aperto sul leggio tutto d'oro, non c'è dubbio, è il "livre d'heures," ma, più in basso, nello scaffaletto dove ridono le legature di prezzo, è forse anche il *Roman de la Rose* e il taccuino orlato di platino delle spese segrete.

. . . E il segreto di quello sguardo accorto e smarrito, di quell'ombra sorniona accocciata agli angoli della bocca, di quell'aria di castellana saputa, di parrocchiana del primo banco che non si lascerebbe, per nulla al mondo, sorprendere alla sprovvista, me lo vorrete spiegare?

Perché arriva ronzando, sul suo piatto dorato in prospettiva, questo calabrone violetto, la tunica smartellinata dal vento, la tracolla di nastro che brandisce, i piedi impigliati nelle ultime trinelle di nube, il serto ridotto a tre sole roselline stiacciate e all'"aigrette" che struscia sul cielo caldo? Ah! una distrazione finalmente nella filza di questi pomeriggi così brevi. . . .<sup>8</sup>

First of all, who is this Lady of the Loggia? The "damsel" of the chivalric style, suggested by the French miniaturists of the thirteenth century but only found by Simone [Martini]? Or nothing more than a memory of her, already become a chatelaine, a trifle coarse, of the Ligurian Riviera or perhaps the Côte d'Azur? Still rather a bluestocking, but not, by now, without a hint that her

**2. Masaccio: *The Tribute Money*** (detail). Florence, Brancacci Chapel. Longhi was the first to recognize that the head of Christ in Masaccio's most celebrated fresco had in fact been painted by Masolino.





stockings are of good bourgeois wool. The book open on the golden lectern is, no doubt about it, the "Book of Hours"; but a bit lower down, on the shelf where the costly bindings make so fine a show, there are perhaps also the *Roman de la Rose* and the platinum-edged notebook for secret expenditures.

. . . And the secret of that shrewd and dreamy gaze, of that mischievous shadow at the corners of the mouth, of that air of the smug chatelaine, of the front-pew parishioner who would never, for anything in the world, allow herself to be caught unawares—can you explain it to me?

What is he coming here for, buzzing on his gilded plate in perspective—this violet hornet, his tunic buffeted by the wind, his shoulder-ribbon waving, his feet entangled in the last snippets of cloud, his garland reduced to just three flat little rosebuds and his plume brushing the hot sky? Ah!—finally a distraction in this string of wearisome afternoons. . . .<sup>9</sup>

That a first-class wit is at work here scarcely needs to be emphasized. But does not a passage like the above, so far from being gratuitous in its ironic playfulness, perfectly define the half-courtly, half-bourgeois, and entirely worldly spirit of the picture itself?

This same painting had already called forth from Longhi in 1920—many years before he solved the problem of its attribution—the following gorgeous evocation of its stylistic qualities:

Apparizione d'oro e di avana, azzurro e grigio. Le carni lievemente aduste; quasi un sospetto di meticcio. Sui visi più chiari le ombre ardesia. Le babbucce di Sant'Alberto come olive nere. Toni caldi e toni freddi (che cosa importa?) da non distinguersi. Ori, ori: non però appiattiti sulla luce, anzi che smagliano nella luce, bruciati dalla penna nera dell'ombra. Sentimento degli ori. Coltivazione degli ori. Civiltà degli ori lombardi (Monza, Treviglio, Lodi). Intelligenza della forma da screditare più d'un fiorentino, però, non fiorentina; confidenziale, accostante, non insolente e saputa. La città nel pomeriggio torpido: una Pavia immaginaria, di ricordo? E l'angelo che sembra smartellinato da uno scultore della Certosa. Viola come nel Bergognone. Gli azzurri, invece, di lago, intatti, come in Fouquet e Charonton. Del resto, anche la Madonna, "fermière". Elezione della spalliera di rose come in un antico "lai" provenzale; i garofani che tremano nell'afa entro il vaso, ahì, "rinascimento." Ironico, però, anche nel frammento di girale troppo bello, impeccabile. Tutto scritto e tutto dipinto; largo e minuto. Un miniatore di genio. Un gran pittore di minimi. Il più alto colloquio tra nord e sud, tra Van Eyck e Piero. L'apice della pittura lombarda del Quattrocento.<sup>10</sup>

**3. Carlo Braccresco: *Annunciation with Saints*.** Paris, Louvre. *The Lombard-Ligurian master Braccresco was forgotten until Longhi reconstructed the corpus of his work.*





ECOLE du NORD de l'ITALIE vers 1500 .  
L'Annonciation



Apparition of gold and yellow-brown, azure and grey. The flesh-tones slightly dusky; almost a suspicion of mixed blood. On the brighter faces, slate-grey shadows. Saint Albert's Oriental slippers like black olives. Warm tones and cool tones (what does it matter?) that cannot be told apart. Gold, gold: but it isn't flattened out by the light; instead it dazzles in the light, burnt by the black feather of shadow. Feeling for gold. Cultivation of gold. Culture of Lombard gold (Monza, Treviglio, Lodi). Astute handling of form, such as would put many a Florentine to shame; yet not Florentine: confidential, intimate, not insolent and smug. The city in the torpid afternoon: an imaginary Pavia, a memory? And the angel who seems hammered out by some sculptor of the Charterhouse [of Pavia]. Violet as in Bergognone. The azures, on the other hand, are like a lake, pristine, as in Fouquet and Charonton. As for the rest, even the Madonna, "rustic." The choice of the rose-trellis, as in an old Provençal "lay": the carnations which tremble in the sultry heat within the vase which is—alas!—"Renaissance." Ironically so, however, as is the too-beautiful, impeccable fragment of acanthus-leaf decoration. Everything written and everything painted; large and minute. A miniaturist of genius. A great painter of small things. The most elevated dialogue between North and South, between van Eyck and Piero [della Francesca]. The pinnacle of fifteenth-century Lombard painting.

The above passage may serve well as one example of Longhi's verbal transcriptions of works of art. The particular insistence in this instance upon the recording of color, as well as the somewhat stenographic, hermetic quality, may perhaps reflect the fact of the page's originally having been written as a promemoria for Longhi's own use; in any event, Longhi did eventually publish it, convinced that it did successfully illuminate the painting's aesthetic impact. It is worth calling attention to the numerous references to the work's "correspondences" with other artistic styles, an instance of a recurrent Longhian technique which here serves in a first attempt to "place" the work, as well as providing a shorthand summary of formal traits.

In the example quoted below, different in approach but equally characteristic, Longhi is concerned exclusively with the meticulous and methodical description of an individual painting in and of itself, in this case Antonello da Messina's *Virgin Annunciate* in the Museum in Palermo:

È il gesto architettonico della Vergine che compie il miracolo stirando con la sinistra il manto ad includersi in una piramide assoluta,

**4. Antonello da Messina: *Virgin Annunciate*.** Palermo, Museo Nazionale. Longhi devoted considerable attention to the Sicilian artist's role as a mediator between styles current in different geographical areas.





la quale rotea sopra un perno cristallino, motore immobile, fino ad assestare di fronte a noi l'asse ideale che, scavato nell'piega sulla fronte, sfila per lo spigolo facciale, discende oltre l'angolo chiuso del pannello fino all'prominenza dell'inginocchiatoio. Ma la mano destra s'avanza inclinata a tentare cautamente il limite possibile del volume; trovandolo s'arresta, mentre, contrapposto, il libro alza sull'aria il fendente affilato del suo foglio candido. Nella cavità interiore sulla colonna del collo si depone lentamente l'ovoide incluso del viso su cui virano come sopra un pianeta larghi diagrammi d'ombre regolari.<sup>11</sup>

It is the architectonic gesture of the Virgin which accomplishes the miracle as she pulls at her mantle with her left hand so as to enclose herself in an absolute pyramid which turns, an unmoved mover, on a crystalline pivot, until it establishes before us the ideal axis which, etched in the fold on the forehead, runs down the protruding part of the face, descends past the closed edge of the drapery as far as the jutting corner of the prie-Dieu. But the right hand advances at an angle to test cautiously the possible boundary of the pictorial space; having found it, it halts, while, counterbalancing it, the book slices the air with the sharp blade of its bright page. In the hollow within the column of the neck, there slowly settles the enclosed ovoid of the face, over which there turn, as over a planet, broad diagrams of regular shadows.

Even if we may wonder a bit at the "crystalline pivot" and the "slowly settling" head, the formal function of the right hand's gesture is magnificently observed and communicated, the construction of the painting is painstakingly described, and the tone is measured and precise, admirably reflecting the poised geometry of Antonello's forms.

The rhetorical elaboration of passages such as these inevitably raises a question as to their fundamental nature. Are we in the presence of formal analyses such as might have been written by any art historian, save that they happen to be the work of one gifted with unusual eloquence? Or does that very eloquence imply that the text itself aspires to the status of art, thus taking on a quasi-independent existence which tends in some way to vitiate its credibility as critical commentary on the painting under discussion? To put the problem differently: Is the aesthetic pleasure we feel upon reading such a passage due to a heightened perception of the works of art themselves, or is it instead a response to Longhi's verbal creation? (Or, if it partake of both elements at once, what does that imply about the relationship between the work of art and Longhi's description of it?)

Longhi himself noted, as early as 1920, that he had on oc-

casione been accused "of frequently substituting for the figurative artwork a literary artwork whose relationship to the object which brings it about is often accidental."<sup>12</sup> He answered the charge as follows:

Poiché si tratta di stabilire esattamente le qualità formali di opere figurative, noi pensiamo che . . . sia possibile ed utile stabilire e rendere la particolare orditura formale dell'opera con parole conte ad acconce, con una specie di trasferimento verbale che potrà avere valore letterario, ma *sempre e solo . . . in quanto mantenga un rapporto costante con l'opera che tende a rappresentare*. Ci pare che sia possibile creare certe equivalenze verbali di certe visioni; equivalenze che procedano quasi geneticamente, a seconda cioè del modo con che l'opera venne gradualmente creata ed espressa. Non sappiamo se ciò sia tradurre . . . ma da quando un fatto personale è inevitabile per chiunque impenda fare storia, crediamo che questo nostro modo possa ancora aver luogo in *un buon metodo di critica storica delle arti figurative*; e ce ne pare riprova il fatto che quelle nostre "trascritture di opere d'arte" non avrebberò più alcuna efficacia una volta astratte dal *rapporto essenziale e continuo che mantengono e vogliono mantenere con l'opera*. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Since it is a matter of establishing exactly the formal qualities of figurative works, we think that . . . it is possible and useful to establish and represent, with clear and appropriate words, the particular formal structure of the work with a sort of verbal transposition which may have literary value, but *always and only . . . to the extent that it maintains a constant relationship with the work it aims to represent*.

It seems to us that it is possible to create certain verbal equivalents of certain visions; equivalents which proceed almost genetically, that is according to the manner in which the work was gradually created and expressed. We do not know whether this is translation . . . but since a personal factor is inevitable for anyone who undertakes to practice history, we believe that this approach of ours can have a place in *a good method of historical criticism of the figurative arts*; and we think this is proved by the fact that our "transcriptions of works of art" would no longer make any effect if they were removed from the essential and continuous relationship which they *maintain and are meant to maintain with the work*. . . .

Now it is perfectly true that Longhi's "verbal equivalents," so far from being self-referential, only make sense insofar as they depend upon the work of figurative art under discussion. Longhi is also undoubtedly justified in arguing that *all* historical writing, no matter how it may be cast, inevitably partakes of the subjective experience and outlook of the writer, so that there is no good reason why Longhi's work should be singled out for attack merely



---

because its subjective nature is more readily apparent than is generally the case. At the same time, however, this very element of subjectivity is precisely what leads one to doubt whether a text by Longhi (or by anyone, for that matter) can constitute a genuine "verbal equivalent" of a figurative work.

Other writers before Longhi have postulated the idea that the critical text may constitute an "equivalent" for the work of visual art, aiming to reproduce the latter's aesthetic impact rather than merely describing or explaining such impact at a suitable critical remove. Here, for example, is the English critic William Hazlitt (1778-1830) on the subject:

the critic, in place of analysis and an inquiry into the causes, undertakes to formulate a verbal equivalent for the aesthetic effects of the work under consideration.<sup>14</sup>

Addressing himself (at least ostensibly) to this very text, Mario Praz, in a lecture entitled "Time Unveils Truth,"<sup>15</sup> has argued cogently that, save perhaps in the case of texts created more or less contemporaneously with the works they aim to represent, "verbal equivalents" will always reveal themselves, with the passage of time, as artifacts of their own period, and thus as something other than true equivalents. He compares them in this regard to skillfully executed fakes, suggesting that, in both cases, changes in taste will bring to light "period" stylistic traits and preoccupations which went unnoticed at the time that the text or fake was created, simply because they were at that moment practically universal.<sup>16</sup>

Praz's point is well taken, although it is also true that *all* historical and critical works tend to date, from whatever angle they are written; the problem is scarcely unique to those involving the attempt to create a verbal equivalent for a work created in another medium. Furthermore, there probably exists a fundamental difference in *kind* between visual and verbal experience, such as to limit significantly the degree to which two works created in such differing media as words and paint can evoke identical sensations or convey identical messages.<sup>17</sup>

Although, for the reasons adduced above, Longhi's descriptions cannot be true "verbal equivalents," we may nonetheless conclude—even if we sometimes feel disinclined to accept his disavowal of any autonomous artistic ambitions<sup>18</sup>—that these texts constitute a legitimate form of critical commentary, an eloquent vehicle for the transmission of Longhi's close observation of visu-

al art. Even if they seem at times to forget their station and head for the empyrean—What of it? As Lytton Strachey once said:

That the question has ever been not only asked but seriously debated, whether History was an art, is certainly one of the curiosities of human ineptitude. What else can it possibly be?<sup>19</sup>

And that Roberto Longhi was an artist there can be no doubt. His quick imagination, his sense of the metaphor, his mastery of prose rhythm, his verve, above all that instantly recognizable tone of voice—lyrical, ironic, hortatory—make of him, to put it as simply as possible, a great writer.<sup>20</sup>

Was he also, judged by more conventional standards, a great art historian? To put the question in epistemological terms: What do his writings communicate which is knowable in a form other than the specific verbalization he gave to it?<sup>21</sup>

Longhi arrived early at his conception of the nature of the art-historical discipline, from which he was never, in the essentials, to deviate. He defines it in the *Breve ma veridica storia della pittura italiana*, written in 1914:

Porre la relazione fra . . . due opere è anche porre il concetto della Storia dell'Arte, come almeno l'intendo io, e cioè null'altro che la storia dello svolgimento degli stili figurative. . . .<sup>22</sup>

To set forth the relationship between two works is also to set forth the concept of Art History, at least as I understand it, and that is nothing else than the history of the development of figurative styles. . . .

This conception, concerned as it is primarily with tracing the development of visual style, risks excluding, as extrinsic to the work of art considered *qua* art, whole areas which have been most fruitfully cultivated by other art historians. And in fact we shall search in vain through all of Longhi's works for any real illuminations regarding iconography, for instance, or the relationships between economic life and the visual arts; at bottom, such matters simply did not interest him.<sup>23</sup> What *did* interest him was the interplay between tradition, influences, and the individual artistic personality. Throughout his career, he strove to demonstrate how even the most innovative visual language is always to be understood as an outcome of previous artistic idioms, without which it would be inconceivable; and to show how a new style may in turn contribute to what will come after.<sup>24</sup>



Longhi viewed the analysis of stylistic development not as an occasion for the formulation of neat abstractions, but rather as a methodology for use in the study of concrete historical cases. He writes of his

studi storici singoli, condotti sempre con quel "puro" metodo figurativo, sempre cioè per via di un rilievo esatto di tutti gli elementi formali che, esaminati con acutezza nei rapporti tra opera e opera, si dispongono inevitabilmente in serie di sviluppo storico . . .<sup>25</sup>

single historical studies, always carried out using that "pure" figurative method, that is to say, always by means of a precise stress upon all the formal elements which, observantly examined in the relationships between one work and another, inevitably dispose themselves in a series of historical development. . . .

A good example of this approach is the first major article of Longhi's maturity, "Piero dei Franceschi e lo sviluppo della pittura veneziana,"<sup>26</sup> where we find him arguing on purely stylistic grounds that the art of Piero della Francesca, although it may have found no worthy continuation in the artist's native Central Italy, nonetheless constitutes the *sine qua non* for the work of Antonello da Messina and Giovanni Bellini. While the essay contains immensely perceptive and stimulating analyses of the styles of the three artists, Longhi's performance here is perhaps less than fully convincing because of his (inevitable, given the available documentation) inability to demonstrate irrefutably by what route Piero's influence actually passed into the Veneto.

But in this essay Longhi was laying the groundwork for a method which was later to bear magnificent fruit in—to cite but a single instance—his series of studies of the sources of Caravaggio's style. Rather than throwing up his hands before the mystery of this painter's shattering originality, Longhi set patiently to work in order to demonstrate, in numerous articles and other publications over the years,<sup>27</sup> how Caravaggio might have found much of what he needed for the formation of his own style in the then-recent example of such "luminists" and "forerunners of naturalism" as Lotto, Moretto, Moroni, and Savoldo, all of whom were active in the part of Lombardy (around Brescia and Bergamo) where the artist was born and raised. He further established "the tortuous procedure whereby the works of Antonio

**5. Caravaggio: *Basket of Fruit*.** Milan, Ambrosiana. *Through his ongoing exploration of the sources of Caravaggio's style, Longhi demonstrated the existence of a coherent historical context for the work of this revolutionary painter.*





Campi [another Lombard painter of the generation before Caravaggio's] might have been useful to Caravaggio."<sup>28</sup> And he was especially pleased when, after he had hypothesized a relationship between Caravaggio and the Lombard Mannerist painter Peterzano—a connection which most observers, on the strength of the visual evidence, might judge at least implausible—documentary evidence subsequently turned up showing that Peterzano had in fact been Caravaggio's first teacher.<sup>29</sup>

(Although Longhi always insisted on the primacy of the visual evidence,<sup>30</sup> practically everything he wrote bears witness to his mastery of the documents—at least the published ones, for, as may be imagined, he was no researcher in the archives—and, for that matter, of the art-historical literature. And on those rare occasions when the written documents *are* his primary concern, as in the splendid essay<sup>31</sup> devoted largely to Correggio's *fortuna critica*, he handles them with grace and skill.)

More than any other art-historical method one can think of, one based (at least in theory and intention) solely upon the analysis of stylistic factors requires an extraordinary verbal virtuosity on the part of its practitioner if insights are to be communicated with the necessary subtlety and completeness; and this, no doubt, is one of the reasons why Longhi developed such a highly "literary" style.

More than any other method, too, a purely formal one will tend, in its relentless concentration upon the work of art's stylistic aspects (which is to say, ultimately, its aesthetic qualities), to approach the condition of art criticism. Longhi recognized as much when, in the passage about "verbal equivalents" quoted earlier, he defined his field of activity as "historical criticism of the figurative arts."<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere in the same article, Longhi is even more explicit regarding this point:

Nel far critica figurativa abbiamo sempre inteso di fare storia, ed abbiamo anzi fin dagli inizi del nostro lavoro esplicitamente dichiarato di esserci accorti che "la critica coincideva con la storia."<sup>33</sup>

In practicing figurative criticism we have always understood ourselves to be practicing history; and ever since beginning work, we have in fact explicitly declared our realization that "criticism coincides with history."

Criticism, of course, ultimately implies the expression of subjective aesthetic opinions; and Longhi never shrank from formulating a value judgment.<sup>34</sup> In his "Viatico per cinque secoli di pittura

veneziana,"<sup>35</sup> for example, he retraces the history of Venetian painting from the Gothic period down to the time of Tiepolo (or, as he would have preferred to say, of Pietro Longhi and Rosalba); and at every step of the way, he takes sides passionately "for" or "against" certain artists and the tendencies they represent. One need not accept all his (often unorthodox) verdicts in order to find them stimulating; what is significant is that here the frontier between historiography and overtly subjective criticism has been very nearly erased.

Longhi's capacity for interest in, and passionate advocacy of, artists generally neglected or at best considered minor had consequences which must in any event be considered contributions to purely historical (in the sense of factual) knowledge. Along with his studies of such major figures as Piero della Francesca or Masaccio, he devoted much attention to such varied artists as Lelio Orsi,<sup>36</sup> Amico Aspertini,<sup>37</sup> Orazio Borgianni,<sup>38</sup> Gaspare Traversi,<sup>39</sup> Carlo Braccesco,<sup>40</sup> and countless others.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the service rendered in simply drawing attention to these figures, Longhi clarifies the corpus of their works and elucidates their styles; he also (to a greater extent, perhaps, than his theoretical premises would seem to admit) addresses questions of biographical detail (especially where it serves his interest in stylistic development<sup>42</sup>). It is, in any case, difficult to envisage a more concrete, if potentially narrow, contribution to scholarship than a correct attribution: if acceptable and accepted, it becomes a *fact*. In this sense Longhi, with his constant activity as a connoisseur, undoubtedly made a major contribution to the knowledge of the history of Italian art. And his findings as a connoisseur are generally set forth and argued in such a way that even the smallest-scaled and least speculative of his articles can take on wider implications, providing surprising insights into the history of style and a given artist's place in it. If today artists as different as Caravaggio and Lorenzo Lotto are generally appreciated, this is largely due to Longhi's sympathetic understanding and elucidation of their art.<sup>43</sup>

His capacity for radical re-evaluation often extended to the work of entire schools or geographical areas. He helped create an interest in the Renaissance painting of such Lombard centers as Brescia and Bergamo as something more than an earthbound and provincial imitation of Venetian models;<sup>44</sup> he delineated the importance of Bologna as an independent artistic center in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries;<sup>45</sup> he was among the first to



explore seriously certain aspects of the artistic history of such relatively out-of-the-way areas, art-historically speaking, as Sicily, the Marches, and Piedmont.<sup>46</sup> It is entirely characteristic that one of his very few full-dress monographs should have been devoted to the painters of a school which, while not precisely unknown, had been regarded as of secondary importance: that of Ferrara.<sup>47</sup>

Paradoxically, it is the breadth as well as the narrowness of Longhi's interests which makes the essence of his contribution so difficult to summarize. The narrowness because, of all insights, those into purely stylistic matters are among the most resistant to proof or easy reformulation. The breadth, because so many different works by so many different artists engaged his attention, and he resisted coordinating his observations about them—scattered in profusion through the fourteen thick volumes of mostly short articles which comprise his collected works<sup>48</sup>—into any kind of grand system, feeling that any schematic reading of art history involved oversimplification and hence falsification.<sup>49</sup>

The difficulty in defining Longhi's place in the development of the art-historical discipline is increased by the fact that his work is, by its very nature, somewhat unprecedented. If such earlier connoisseurs of Italian painting as Cavalcaselle or Morelli had been without serious "literary" pretensions,<sup>50</sup> such great stylists as Ruskin, Pater, even Fromentin, had in no sense of the word been genuine connoisseurs or art historians.<sup>51</sup> The co-existence (and even at times the absolute identity) in Longhi of the gifted imaginative writer and prose stylist with the conscientious connoisseur and art historian, committed to the meticulous annotation of his observations regarding pre-existing works of art, led him to postulate, as we have seen, theoretical premises of questionable validity for his methodology as a writer; premises whose dubious validity does not necessarily compromise the value of the keen insights set forth so brilliantly in his actual writings.

To all the other factors which contribute to the elusive and problematical character of Longhi's work, one must add, where the non-Italian reader is concerned, the practical challenge of dealing with his unusually complex prose.

For many reasons, then, Longhi's work presents uncommon difficulties. But for the reader willing to face them, the reward will more than repay the effort in terms of new insights into the nature and development of artistic styles, a heightened visual perception of individual works of art, challenging judgments, concrete historical data, and—after all, why not?—literary beauty.

## Notes

1. B. Berenson, "Vasari in the Light of Recent Publications," in BER, pp. 1-12. The personal relationship between Berenson and Longhi, incidentally, comprises one of the more colorful stories in the by-no-means peaceful annals of artistic historiography. The young Longhi, an enthusiastic admirer of Berenson's, proposed to translate the latter's *Italian Painters of the Renaissance* into Italian, and his offer was initially accepted. Later, assailed by growing doubts about Longhi's linguistic equipment and flamboyant prose style, and by what he took to be a certain tendency on Longhi's part to slant the translations to reflect his own aesthetic convictions, Berenson withdrew his authorization. The ensuing rupture was aggravated in following years by the two men's competition for hegemony as the supreme arbiter of attributions in the field of Italian painting; Longhi's attack on the elder connoisseur's entrenched position culminated in the publication in 1934 of Longhi's *Officina ferrarese*, which contained, along with much else calculated to offend Berenson, a caustic allusion to his celebrated "lists" (giving Berenson's attributions of most known Italian paintings) as "that new timetable of the Italian artistic railways which many people, out of mental cowardice, take as Gospel" (OF, p. 9). (E. K. Waterhouse, reviewing Longhi's book in *Burlington Magazine*, LXVIII, 1936, pp. 150-51, felt moved to write: "His two principal aims appear to be to establish as rigorous a chronology as possible, and to be as rude to Mr. Berenson as the large vocabulary of the Italian language allows.") The rift between the two critic-connoisseurs was not healed until 1956, when Longhi delivered a glowing eulogy on Berenson (published in BG, p. 259) upon the occasion of the latter's being awarded an honorary degree by the University of Florence. Cf. esp. F. Bellini, "Una passione giovanile di Roberto Longhi: Bernard Berenson," and G. Previtali, "Roberto Longhi, profilo biografico," both PRE, pp. 9-26 and pp. 141-70 respectively; also M. Secrest, *Being Bernard Berenson*, New York, 1979, pp. 285-386, and the entry for 1916 in the "Cronologia" in CON, p. LXXXV.

2. A brief biographical sketch is here in order. The son of a schoolteacher, Longhi was born in 1890 at Alba in Piedmont. In 1911 he took his degree in art history at the University of Turin, where he studied under Pietro Toesca; he wrote his thesis on Caravaggio, who was to remain a particular interest throughout his career. Following a period as a teacher of art history in the *licei* (high schools) of Rome, he was "taken up," around 1920, by the great collector Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, who gave him the opportunity to travel throughout Europe and helped launch him upon his career as a connoisseur. In 1924 he married the writer Lucia Lopresti, who was herself to have a distinguished career under the pen-name of "Anna Banti." Longhi was appointed in 1934 to the chair of art history at the University of Bologna, and in 1949 to an analogous post at the University of Florence. Throughout his career, he was involved with a series of art-historical and critical magazines; following publication of several articles (dealing with contemporary as well as earlier art) in periodicals such as *La Voce* and *L'Arte*, he briefly co-edited the magazines *Vita Artistica* (1927), *Pinacotheca* (1928-29), and *La Critica d'Arte* (starting 1938); in 1943 he founded *Proporzioni*, which appeared only four times, the last in 1963; in 1950 he founded the monthly *Paragone*, which was to remain one of his interests practically to the end of his career. Longhi died in Florence in 1970. See the chronological tables in PRE, pp. 258-63, and G. Previtali, "Roberto Longhi, profilo biografico," in PRE, pp. 141-70; for his work in magazines, "Le riviste di Roberto Longhi," in CON, pp. 1122-23.

3. It sometimes seems that one cannot open a book by an art historian currently active in Italy without encountering some reference to Longhi's brilliance as a connoisseur, the keenness of his insights into the history of artistic styles,



and the stimulus provided by his example. See for instance A. Conti, ed., *Sul restauro*, Turin, 1988, "Introduzione," pp. 80-81; and F. Zeri, *Dietro l'immagine*, Milan, 1987, pp. 146-50 and 167-70. And Longhi is surely the art historian whose name appears most frequently in Italian newspapers and general interest magazines.

4. R. Longhi, "Fatti di Masolino e di Masaccio," *La Critica d'Arte*, vol. XXV-XXVI (July-December 1940), pp. 145-91; reprinted in FM, pp. 3-65.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 15, pp. 18-19 in FM. Longhi builds up to his effect with the sure instinct of an accomplished literary artist; the pages of dramatic dialogue are preceded, a few pages earlier, by a passage of paraphrased conversation which sets the scene and predisposes the reader to absorb the shock when it comes.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

7. An important example is the evocation of life in Squarcione's studio contained in the "Lettera pittorica a Giuseppe Fiocco," *Vita Artistica*, 1926, pp. 127-36 (reprinted in SR, pp. 77-98, where the relevant passage appears on pp. 92-93). As is generally the case with Longhi, this exhilarating piece of rhetoric, far from being an end in itself, aims at the illumination of a stylistic problem; in this case, how it came to pass that such North Italian painters as Mantegna and Tura, under the impact of the new, classicizing Florentine art represented by Donatello, could not but produce (in Longhi's view) "a medieval interpretation of the Renaissance."

8. R. Longhi, *Carlo Braccesco*, Milan, 1942; reprinted in LV, pp. 267-85. The passage quoted is on p. 272.

9. This and all the following translations have been made by the author of the present essay. Longhi's extreme complexity and idiosyncrasy of language make him an exceptionally difficult writer to translate, even with regard to the literal meaning of his words, let alone his style. So the author can only say, along with the frontier saloon-keeper: "Please do not shoot the piano player. He is doing his best."

10. *Carlo Braccesco*, in LV, p. 270. Longhi is here quoting from his own travel notebook of 1920. (It is entirely characteristic that, while drawing special attention to the rose-garden setting, Longhi should ignore the flower's traditional iconographic association with the Virgin.)

11. R. Longhi, "Piero dei Franceschi e la pittura veneziana" in *L'Arte*, XVII (1914) pp. 198-221 and 241-56; reprinted in SG, pp. 61-106, where the passage here cited appears on p. 87. Note that in the descriptions of both paintings, things are imagined as if in movement, as though the painting had but frozen an instant in a dynamic process. In the Antonello, the pyramid "rotates," the page "slices," the shadows "turn"; in the Braccesco, the carnations "tremble," the ribbons "flutter" (to say nothing of the dynamic thought processes of the Virgin herself, who becomes a sort of fictional character). All this is further evidence of Longhi's "narrative" tendency.

12. R. Longhi, review of *Luca Giordano* by E. Petraccone, in *L'Arte*, 1920, pp. 92-93; reprinted in SG, pp. 455-60, where the passage quoted occurs on p. 456.

13. *Idem.*

14. Quoted in M. Praz, *Mnemosyne*, Princeton, 1974, p. 36.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-54.

16. To what extent has what we may call "Praz's law" already become operative in the case of Longhi? In one sense, Longhi's most fundamental attitude—his emphasis upon the primacy of the stylistic components in a work of art, to the practical exclusion of all others—is in itself a "period" phenomenon, deeply rooted in the "aesthetic" current which was such an important feature of European intellectual and artistic life at the end of the last century. But what of the style of the texts themselves? There is no denying that, in their most elaborately wrought form, they can give off a certain scent of D'Annunzio and may

even remind us of the sinuously decorative qualities of Art Nouveau. At the same time, Longhi had learned very well the lesson of the most immediate model for his "verbal equivalents," the French critic and painter Eugène Fromentin (1820-76). Like Fromentin's, Longhi's texts do proceed, every step of the way, on the basis of direct observation of the work itself (however subjective and fanciful the language in which the observations are then expressed). For this reason, Longhi's "transcriptions," like Fromentin's own, do continue to describe and illuminate the pictures they discuss, to a much greater extent than do the apparently analogous productions of such writers as Pater or Ruskin, which by now would appear—whatever their literary merits—to have become utterly unglued from the objects which called them forth. (For Longhi's initial stylistic dependence upon Fromentin, see G. Previtali, *op. cit.*, p. 144, and R. Longhi, *Carlo Braccresco*, in *LV*, p. 270.) We must observe that Longhi's prose grows progressively less elaborate over the years, regardless of the subject he is discussing; the language of the early "Piero dei Franceschi . . ." might reasonably be described as Baroque, while the late *Caravaggio* is written in a style of Classical sobriety. This development, which is quite independent of the style of the works of art dealt with in Longhi's text, clearly suggests that the text is not a pure verbal equivalent of its subject.

17. Recent deconstructionist literary theory, with its insistence upon the ultimate impossibility of ascertaining definitively the "meaning" of any given text, would posit that there is no way of verifying the identity of two artifacts presented as being equivalents, since neither one can ever be fully known even in itself: the very act of interpreting them involves a process of subjective recodification on the part of the critic or reader.

The very fact of Longhi's texts being written in Italian may serve to make the English-language reader aware of the pitfalls inherent in the idea of "equivalency"; if one can see a painting for oneself, but cannot read Longhi's description of it in the original, then to what extent can the two things be true equivalents for each other? And if one reads a translation of Longhi's text, to what extent does that experience duplicate the experience of reading the original? As anyone who has ever attempted to translate Longhi (or any other writer, for that matter) can attest: "Less than fully." In short, a text and its translation are already significantly different, although both use the medium of words. How much more so must this difference exist when two works are created in different media!

18. One may very cautiously and tentatively suggest that, whatever theoretical superstructure Longhi may eventually have reared to justify his "verbal equivalents," the most important motivation may have been the unconfessable desire to "recreate" the work of art in such a way as to usurp the role of the artist who created it; to, so to speak, murder the artist and marry his picture. Certainly the need to identify the verbal creation completely with its figurative model, so that it actually becomes *the very same thing* as the work under discussion, would seem to be the only explanation for this astonishing assertion in the *Breve ma veridica storia . . .*, p. 128: "Quando sarete riusciti a dar senso ad ogni parola di questa resa letteraria di un'opera pittorica potrò credere che abbiate finalmente compreso che cosa precisamente sia l'incanto magico della sintesi prospettica di formacolare." To understand the literary rendering is to understand the painting, Longhi says; but we must add that this can only be really true if the literary rendering *is* the painting; otherwise it may be that one has only understood a literary test. This ambition of total fusion between text and subject does tend to confirm Longhi's assertion, cited in the main body of this study, that his verbal transcription's "literary merit" does indeed depend on an adherence to the figurative model; but it is perhaps a moot point whether it follows that Longhi's prose is at all times at the service of the work of art, or whether there is not at



certain moments an insidious inversion of values, with the work of art becoming merely a necessary precondition for Longhi's writing.

19. L. Strachey, "Gibbon," *Portraits in Miniature and Other Essays*, London, 1931; reprinted in *Biographical Essays*, New York, n.d., where the passage quoted appears on p. 142.

20. The Italian critic and connoisseur Federico Zeri, in M. Bona Castellotti, *Conversazioni con Federico Zeri*, Parma, 1988, p. 21, states his conviction that Longhi was one of the two greatest Italian writers of our century, independently of subject matter.

21. The most orthodox of Longhi's adherents would maintain that this very question implies a misapprehension of the nature and value of Longhi's work. C. Garboli, "Longhi lettore," in PRE, pp. 121-22: "... un discorso 'letterario' non è un fatto che *si aggiunga* alla professionalità longhiana e si possa isolare e scremare, studiandolo separatamente dalla totalità dell'opera di Longhi in quanto storico e critico d'arte. La letteratura longhiana non è un 'plusvalore' . . . ; essa è un elemento primario dell'attività di Longhi storico dell'arte." One of Longhi's best-known disciples, Mina Gregori, sets forth an analogous point of view in "Il metodo di Roberto Longhi," in PRE, pp. 126-40. It is perfectly true that Longhi's literary style constitutes a necessary precondition for the definition and communication of his insights into visual style. But to go beyond this recognition, arguing an absolute identity between the vehicle and the information it conveys, would seem to be a sort of mysticism which ultimately does Longhi a disservice. If the methodology is literally all, if the manner of reaching the conclusion is an end unto itself, then what becomes of the conclusion as such? Does it even exist?

22. R. Longhi, BV, p. 36.

23. Cf. Federico Zeri's harsh criticism of Longhi on this score in M. Bona Castellotti, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

24. Longhi wrote in 1941 that art history was "una storia di persone prime: quelle degli artisti . . . còlt[i] sempre in atto di servirsi di una tradizione per già affermarne un'altra (che, a sua volta, potrà o non potrà servire ai sopravvenienti) . . . [L]'arte cresce soprattutto sull'arte . . ." (AI, p. 3).

25. R. Longhi, review of *Luca Giordano*, by E. Petraccone, in *L'Arte*, 1920, pp. 92-93; reprinted in SG, p. 453. Longhi's view of art history as essentially the history of style obviously presupposes that stylistic traits are the defining characteristics, the very essence, of the individual work of art. This view had in fact been propounded by, among others, Adolf Hildebrand (*Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*, 1893) and Benedetto Croce (*La teoria dell'arte come pura visibilità*, 1911), both of whose work the young Longhi read with intense although never acritical enthusiasm. Art having been defined as essentially a matter of style, it becomes possible to theorize an art *history* which is, accordingly, a history of style; here again, Longhi has antecedents and (partial) analogies in the work of Wickhoff, Wölfflin, Berenson, and others. (For the youthful Longhi's reading and theoretical interests, see PRE, pp. 9-27, 145-51.) More recently, the theoretical implications of the notion that even representational art's relationship to other works of art is direct, its relationship to the rest of the world relatively oblique, have been brilliantly explored by E. H. Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* (London, 1960).

26. In *L'Arte*, XVII (1914), pp. 198-221, 241-56; reprinted in SG, pp. 61-106.

27. The most important is "Quesiti caravaggeschi: i precedenti," in *Pinacotheca*, vol. 5-6 (March-June 1929), pp. 258-320; reprinted in MP, pp. 97-143. See also the monograph *Caravaggio*, Rome, 1968, indispensable even though meant for a popular audience; the text, shorn of illustrations and of its slender critical apparatus, is reprinted in CON, pp. 801-75.

28. R. Longhi, "Quesiti caravaggeschi: i precedenti," in MP, p. 98.

29. *Idem.*

30. See for example the already cited review from 1920, of Petraccone's *Luca Giordano* in SG. On p. 458 Longhi writes: "... per questa storia delle forme la critica figurativa pura non ha intellettualmente bisogno sostanziale dei sussidi biografici e cronografici della critica storica; i quali potranno semmai servirle di facilitazione quasi amministrativa, nel corso del lavoro; potranno talora risparmiarle tempo, permettendole di giungere con più rapidità alla constatazione critica alla quale soltanto importava di giungere; ma non avranno di ciò il più piccolo merito, come non ha nell'opera d'un filosofo il calamaio e la penna con cui egli stese le proprie teorie..." Cf. Berenson, writing in 1901: "the history of art should be studied much more abstractly than it ever has been studied, and freed as much as possible from entangling irrelevancies of personal anecdote and parasitic growths of petty documentation. . . . I, for one, have been for many years cherishing the conviction that the world's art can be, nay, should be, studied as independently of all documents as is the world's fauna or the world's flora. . . . Then, and only then, and chiefly for the convenience of naming, might one turn to documents. . . ." (BER, p. vii). The affinities of such ideas with Wölfflin's famous hypothesis of a "Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen," a method of art history conducted so exclusively along stylistic lines as to be able to dispense with the artists' very names, will be readily apparent; see SG, p. 458. The references in the Berenson passage to the study of flora and fauna come close to making explicit the underlying assumption that the development of artistic style, and the taxonomy of the resulting species and subspecies, proceed according to rules similar to those postulated by Darwin as governing the world of living things. The scientific positivism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then, appears to have pervaded the outlook of even certain "formalist" practitioners of art history, who, whether consciously or not, aspired to validate their own intellectual methods by analogy with those of the natural scientist. (See also, in this context, the references to botanical methodology in H. Wölfflin, *Classic Art*, London, 1968, p. xi.) Despite the obvious parallels between Longhi's outlook and those of Wölfflin and (especially) Berenson, the Italian critic seems to have been pretty much immune to pseudo-scientific excesses, largely because, as we have seen, his theoretical apparatus made room for the historian's subjectivity, as a natural consequence of his acceptance of "le relazioni di fondamentale identità tra arte e storia" (SG, p. 16); to him, the practice of history was an art.

31. R. Longhi, "Correggio e la camera di San Paolo a Parma," in CC, pp. 29-60.

32. Vide note 13.

33. R. Longhi, review of *Luca Giordano* by E. Petraccone, SG, p. 456.

34. Cf. Berenson's conviction, cited by M. Gregori in PRE, p. 134, that "the sense of quality" is the most important requisite for a connoisseur.

35. In PV, pp. 3-39.

36. R. Longhi, "Precisioni nella gallerie italiane. La Galleria Borghese," in *Pinacotheca*, Rome, 1928, pp. 1-254; reprinted in SR, where the observations on Orsi appear on pp. 271-73.

37. "Momenti della pittura bolognese," *L'Archiginnasio*, XXX, 1935; reprinted in LV, pp. 189-205 (see esp. p. 196); see also OF, p. 62.

38. "Orazio Borgianni," *L'Arte*, XVII (1914), pp. 7-23; reprinted in SG, pp. 111-28.

39. "Di Gaspare Traversi," *Vita artistica*, 1927, pp. 145-67; reprinted with additions, SR, pp. 189-219.

40. *Carlo Braccesco*, Milan, 1942; reprinted in LV, pp. 267-87.

41. Longhi's unflagging attention to the infinitely varied particularity of the past, in all its disorderliness, sets him at the antipodes from a system-build-



ing historian like Wölfflin, who in 1898 was able to write, without a trace of irony: "It goes without saying that only masterpieces are mentioned." (Wölfflin, *Classic Art*, London, 1968, p. xii.)

42. ". . . [N]on aspettate da me copia di nomi, di date, di biografie più o meno aneddotiche . . ." the youthful Longhi had told his *liceo* students in 1914 (BV, p. 36), in a polemical defense of the theoretical independence of "la critica figurativa pura" from any need for "sussidi biografici e cronografici" (SG, p. 458); he nonetheless displays in his writings an alert interest in the relevance of biography and even anecdote to his stylistic studies. One good example is his consideration of the vexed question of the young Correggio's Roman journey, which he considered to be surely demonstrable on the basis of the artist's evolving manner (CC, pp. 61-78); another is his startling development of a chance remark of Titian's into an acute analysis of the differing basic assumptions of Venetian artists on the one hand, and their Brescian and Bergamasque contemporaries on the other (CON, pp. 922-45). In any case, theoretical *parti pris* aside, practically everything he ever wrote clearly reveals his delighted response to artists' personalities for their own sake.

43. For Longhi's work on Caravaggio, see esp. the "Quesiti caravaggeschi" collected in MP, pp. 81-143; the monograph *Caravaggio*, Rome, 1968; and the article "Il Caravaggio e la sua cerchia a Milan," *Paragone Arte*, March 1951, pp. 3-16. For Lotto, see esp. pp. 115-18 of "Quesiti caravaggeschi: i precedenti" in MP; "Viatico per cinque secoli di pittura veneziana," pp. 15-16, and "Tiziano, Lorenzo Lotto e il 'San Marco Parato da Messa' nell' atrio della Basilica marciana," pp. 85-88, both in PV; and A. Banti- A. Boschetto, *Lorenzo Lotto*, Florence, n.d. [1953], a monograph written under Longhi's direct influence by his wife in collaboration with one of his close associates.

44. See for example "Cose bresciane del Cinquecento," SG, pp. 327-43; "Due dipinti inediti di Giovan Gerolamo Savoldo," SR, pp. 149-55; "Dal Moroni al Ceruti," CON, pp. 922-45; "Quesiti caravaggeschi: i precedenti," MP, pp. 97-143. Compare for example Longhi's reading of Moroni's style with the less sympathetic one in Berenson's *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*.

45. "Momenti della pittura bolognese," PV, pp. 189-226; "Mostra della pittura bolognese del Trecento," PV, pp. 155-87; OF, pp. 7-10, p. 62.

46. See for example "Frammento siciliano," FM, pp. 143-47; "Genio degli anonimi: giovanni di Piamonte?" FM, pp. 131-37; "Macrino d'Alba," FM, pp. 179-82.

47. *Officina ferrarese* (see bibliography). Longhi's other two full-length monographs are *Piero della Francesca*, Rome, 1927, reprinted several times, including Florence, 1963 as vol. III of the *Opere complete*; and the already cited *Caravaggio*, aimed primarily at the general reader.

48. Actually more than fourteen, because some of the fourteen "volumes" in the Florentine publisher Sansoni's edition of the *Opere complete* are themselves in several volumes, and because the *Breve ma veridica storia . . .* is not included among the numbered volumes. The most convenient and economical access to Longhi's work is provided by the reader *Da Cimabue a Morandi*, G. Contini, ed., Milan, 1973, published by Mondadori in the series "I Meridiani." It contains a generally well-chosen selection of his articles, along with full texts of the three monographs; all the works are presented without their original illustrations and notes.

49. See for example Longhi's rejection of the art-historical construct of Mannerism in favor of Vasari's non-programmatic term *maniera*, in CC, p. 82; also his opinion that Riegl "makes excessive use of the negative concept of 'anti-Classicism'" and his negative judgment on Wölfflin's "rigid scheme of Italian classicism," both in CC, p. 59. A good instance of Longhi's rejection of sweeping but ultimately undemonstrable generalizations about history is the essay "Arte

---

italiana e arte tedesca," *AI*, pp. 3-21. Written in 1941, at the height of the period during which the Fascist and Nazi governments were busy propagating nationalist mythologies, it expresses Longhi's dissent from notions of "national spirit" and of the *Zeitgeist*, reformulating the problems associated with such concepts exclusively in rational terms of local traditions. (Such essentially mystical ideas had, of course, been a notable feature of Wölfflin's 1915 *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, later translated into English as *Principles of Art History*; Longhi's disagreement with Wölfflin becomes explicit with his mention of the elder historian on page 13 of the article.) Despite the whiff of brimstone suggested by its having been delivered as a paper at a scholarly conference held in Florence in 1941 on the ideal Axis topic, "Romanità e Germanesimo," the essay remains an outstanding example of critical precision and wide-ranging erudition.

It should be noted that, in contradistinction to Longhi's lifelong rejection of overly neat *historic* schemata, he had at the outset a strong interest in the *aesthetic* categories posited by Hildebrand, Fiedler, Berenson, Wölfflin, and others. (Cf. note 25.) Their influence is apparent in the theoretical model elaborated in such early works as the *Breve ma veridica storia . . .* and the "Piero dei Franceschi . . .," both of 1914 (the year before Wölfflin published his own fully-developed system in the *Grundbegriffe*); although Longhi continues to rely on this model to some extent down through the monograph *Piero della Francesca* (1927), it rapidly yields thereafter to a more purely empirical method of description.

50. D. Levi has shown, in *Cavalcaselle*, Turin, 1988, that the great nineteenth-century connoisseur relied upon his collaborator Crowe to write up his findings for publication.

51. Berenson bridges only partially the traditional dichotomy between the connoisseur and the eloquently "literary" art critic. His cool and formal prose is certainly equal to any task of exposition; one has only to think of the brilliant discussions of "tactile values" and "functional line" in his *Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*. But even where he closely engages individual works, as in *A Siennese Painter of the Franciscan Legend*, he neither achieves nor aspires to feats of evocation or effects of sheer linguistic virtuosity comparable to Longhi's; as we have seen (Cf. note 1), he in fact rebelled when the youthful Longhi attempted to perform such feats for him.



## Selected Bibliography

- Berenson, Bernard, *The Sense of Quality: Study and Criticism of Italian Art*, New York, 1962. BER
- Longhi, Roberto, *Breve ma veridica storia della pittura italiana*, Florence, 1980. BV
- , *Caravaggio*, Rome, 1968.
- , *Da Cimabue a Morandi: saggi di storia della pittura italiana scelti e ordinati da Gianfranco Contini*, G. Contini, ed., 5th ed., Milan, 1987. CON
- Volumes in the series *Opere complete di Roberto Longhi*:
- , Vol. I, *Scritti giovanili*, Florence, 1956. SG
- , Vol. II, *Saggi e ricerche, 1925-1928*, Florence, 1967. SR
- , Vol. III, *Piero della Francesca*, 3rd ed., Florence, 1967.
- , Vol. IV, *'Me pinxit' e Quesiti caraveggeschi*, Florence, 1968. MP
- , Vol. V, *Officina ferrarese*, 1st definitive ed., Florence, 1956. OF
- , Vol. VI, *Lavori in Valpadana*, Florence, 1973.
- , Vol. VII, *'Giudizio sul Duecento' e ricerche sul Trecento nell'Italia Centrale, 1939-1970*, Florence, 1974. LV
- , Vol. VIII/1, *'Fatti di Masolino e di Masaccio' e altri studi sul Quattrocento, 1910-1967*, Florence, 1975. GD
- , Vol. VIII/2, *Cinquecento classico e Cinquecento manieristico, 1951-1970*, Florence, 1976. FM
- , Vol. IX, *'Arte italiana e arte tedesca' con altre congiunture fra Italia ed Europa, 1939-1969*, Florence, 1979. CC
- , Vol. X, *Ricerche sulla pittura veneta*, Florence, 1978. AI
- , Vol. XIII, *Critica d'arte e buongoverno*, Florence, 1985. PV
- Praz, Mario, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts*, Princeton, 1974. BG
- Previtali, Giovanni, ed., *L'arte di scrivere sull' arte: Roberto Longhi nella cultura del nostro tempo*, Rome, 1982. PRE