

Mr. Piccolo's Peculiar Obsession

Joey Skee (September 17, 2010)



Tracing a “fool’s path” to power.

Those of you unfamiliar with the local machinations of Italian Americana in the provincial paese of



New York City may not have noticed the ongoing vituperations of a certain Arthur Piccolo. Since [the "Guido" colloquium](#) [2] in January 2010, the splenetic Mr. Piccolo has been emailing jeremiadic spam and [blogging vociferous missives](#) [3] concerning Queens College's John D. Calandra Italian American Institute. What can account for this person's singular fixation with the Calandra Institute?

When I mentioned to colleagues and acquaintances that I was writing this blog post, the vast majority asked a very simple question: "Who's Arthur Piccolo?" Indeed. I only became aware of Piccolo in recent years as I had the displeasure of receiving one of his fractious and desultory spam attacks.

A [simple Google search](#) [4] reveals very little. The "About Me" section of [Piccolo's blog](#) [3] exposes more about his inarticulate writing style than about the man himself. A quick search about the organization he claims to head, the "[Bowling Green Association](#) [5]," discloses even less.

Piccolo paints a disturbing self-portrait in an autobiographic note in the 2006 publication "[My Time at Tech and Other Memories from the Class of '66](#) [6]," written for the reunion of Brooklyn Tech High School graduates. Piccolo's excessive narrative (six pages, 27-32) is constructed around a series of plaguing issues concerning power and betrayal. The most telling from a psychological standpoint is the opening tale of being "conned by my own father and mother" to attend the boys' high school. "And the most valuable lesson I received from that experience [is] that trusting even ones [sic] own parents is a fool's path unless that truth is earned" (p. 27).

From that early incident ([the whisper of "Rosebud"](#) [7] hauntingly reverberates), a pattern of puerile contumacy emerges. His memoir continues with accounts of a "false accusation" of plagiarism, of being jailed for months in an Air Force brig for "insubordination" and "'administrative discipline,'" and of a series of failed political ventures, including a 2005 run for the mayoral primaries of New York City, in which the City Campaign Finance Board determined he was "'unqualified'" for matching funds, inclusion in the mayoral debate, or listing in the voter guide.

Particularly unsettling is his "most notable contribution" of writing an anonymous online feature for BlackAthlete.net "in the guise of [an often angry Black journalist](#) [8]." His paroxysmic exertions clearly know no bounds.

Italian-American colleagues familiar with Piccolo simply wondered why I would waste my time writing about someone they had long ago dismissed as a fatuous crank whose precipitant screeds were, at best, risible.

Yet some Italian-American politicians, businesspeople, and scholars in New York have begun to question why Piccolo is targeting the Calandra Institute at this time. A motive for his specious hectoring of the Institute and its dean, Anthony Tamburri, can be gleaned from Piccolo's pronouncement of "my epic efforts on behalf of Dr. [Joseph] Scelsa." His Homeric self-aggrandizement gives pause for it is a testament to a history that reveals what many believe is the master's manipulating hand in this petty yet sordid affair.

Those appreciative of the Calandra Institute and Dean Tamburri's numerous achievements have suggested that in fact it is Joseph Scelsa, the former Institute director, who has been instigating Piccolo's choleric rants. They note that the Italian American Museum under Scelsa's presidency is floundering, not merely curatorially, as a [recent Wall Street Journal article](#) [9] intimated, but more significantly, financially.

[Businessman Joseph Grano](#) [10] commented after his book presentation at the Institute on October 1, 2009, that he had pledged to raise \$10 million for the museum on the condition that Scelsa step aside as president and allow for a bona fide board of directors. This proposal was rejected. Grano is now using his business acumen for an alternative Italian-American museum.

It has been suggested that Scelsa is interested in denigrating Tamburri's affability and successes, and the Calandra Institute in general, so that he can return to the taxpayer trough by having the Institute's New York State funding diverted to the struggling museum.



Scelsa has wrapped the flag of “the Italian-American community” so tightly around his shoulders in the hopes of conflating the two. He is not the Italian-American community, nor does he represent the best Italian America has to offer. He is the epitome of Machiavellianism. It is curious that he is quick to discuss the “many cases of discrimination” he claims exist within the City University of New York in a [recent New York Times article](#) [11], but he is silent about the [law suits Italian Americans have brought against him \(and CUNY\) for harassment and other grievances](#) [12] while he was the Calandra Institute’s director. Those of us who had the tribulation of working during the Scelsa regime know him to be self-serving, mean-spirited, vindictive, and a truculent bully. That is his legacy, and for many, he will stand in perpetuity, to quote Charlotte Brontë, on a “pedestal of infamy” in an Italian American museum of the future.

Mr. Piccolo’s peculiar obsession is not with the Calandra Institute but with Joseph Scelsa, in the obsequious service to a fallacious power. One can only hope that Piccolo’s “most valuable lesson” in trust keeps him from not straying once again down a “fool’s path.”

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