

Introduction

The setting is the dining room of Pierson College at Yale University during the academic year 1956–1957, where the Fellows of Pierson College had lunch together every other Wednesday or so. These Fellows consisted of some of the most famous professors at Yale (if not also in academia at large) from a variety of academic disciplines.

As a freshman “bursary” student, that is, a work-scholarship student, assigned to clearing the tables in the Pierson College dining room, it was possible to listen in on the conversation of the Fellows. In fact, there was a temptation to linger while clearing the tables, taking in as much of their conversation as possible. Their erudition obviously made a strong impression, but the biggest impression of all was made by the civility of discourse during specific discussions in which there was strong disagreement of opinion. As a result of this experience, it became an assumption, if not a belief, that such civility of discourse characterized the behavior of famous scholars whenever they engaged in intellectual debate with their colleagues.

Years later, as an independent scholar who still believed that civility of discourse and debate was a hallmark of the academic world, I had no hesitation to attempt to publish some information and hypotheses that contradicted what was being taught as a paradigm in art history classrooms, and what was written in art history textbooks, monographs, encyclopedias, and so on. The Guido Riccio debate among scholars, thus, formally began in 1977 with a small article in which the traditional attribution to the famous artist Simone Martini for the large equestrian portrait of the mercenary soldier Guido Riccio da Fogliano was contested (Moran, 1977). This large wall painting located in the Palazzo Pubblico museum in Siena, Italy, not only is famous among art historians, but is also a major tourist attraction that is reproduced extensively in Siena and Italy on the covers of guidebooks, posters for tourist agencies, posters for tennis tournaments, plates, ashtrays, lampshades, bathroom tile decoration, and even wine bottle labels.