



## “Real Men Mark their Territory!” Spatial Constructions of Masculinity in Joe Pieri’s Autobiographical Narratives

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### ABSTRACT

The history of Scots-Italian “male” encounters has an air of violence and brutality, one epitomized from ancient times by relentless “Picts” defending their lands from Roman invasions and by fearless mercenaries of the middle Ages protecting Italian cities. Such a peculiar waltz of animosity and loyalty created a deeply ingrained bond between the two cultures, until the first waves of rather “harmless” Italians started coming to Scotland, particularly to Glasgow, since the nineteenth century. These immigrants have irreversibly influenced the spatial and social infrastructure of the city, mainly through their connection with the catering business and the consequent establishment of ice-cream cafés and fish and chip shops. Now, they have to defend and “mark” their territory again.

This essay is concerned with the autobiographical stories and memoirs of Joe Pieri, a Glasgow Italian fish and chip café owner, whose main events take place in the 1920s and 1930s. The main argument of this essay is that spatial narration in Pieri’s accounts influences the construction of his and other masculinities. By examining four of his autobiographical works, I consider how these narratives spatially construct a wide variety of masculinities through their various defence and adaptation strategies in the poverty- and delinquency-stricken Glasgow of the period.

*Keywords:* Autobiographical studies, Spatial theory, Italo-Glaswegian immigrants, masculinity.

### بناء التركيبات المكانية للرجولة في روايات السيرة الذاتية لجو بييري

عرفت المواجهات بين الاسكتلنديين والإيطاليين حالة من العنف والوحشية منذ القديم. وقد تجسّدت منذ العصور القديمة في شجاعة شعوب "البيكت" الذين دافعوا عن أراضيهم ضد الغزوات الرومانية وكذلك المرتزقة الذين قاموا بحماية المدن الإيطالية خلال العصور الوسطى. خلقت هذه المواجهة الغربية بين العداة والولاء رابطاً عميقاً بين الثقافتين، إلى حين وصول أول الإيطاليين "غير المؤذنين" إلى اسكتلندا، وبشكل خاص إلى غلاسكو منذ بداية القرن التاسع عشر. لقد أثر هؤلاء المهاجرون بشكل جذري في البنية التحتية والاجتماعية للمدينة، لا سيما من خلال استثمارهم في قطاع المطاعم وما تفرّج عنها من صناعات السمك المبطن والبطاطا المقلّبة والمتلّجات وقد كان عليهم الدّفاع عن مجالهم وتحويله مرة أخرى. تتناول هذه المقالة قصص السيرة الذاتية من خلال مذكّرات جو بييري الذي يحمل جنسية مزدوجة (غلاسكو - إيطاليا) مالك متجر الرفاقات، التي جرت أحداثها في العشرينات والثلاثينيات من القرن الماضي. الفكرة الرئيسية في هذا المقال هي أن الرواية المكانية وتمثّل الفضاء/المجال في قصص بييري تؤثر بشكل مباشر على بناء الجانب الذكوري لديه وكذلك لدى المحيطين به. من خلال دراسة أربعة من كتاباته عن السيرة الذاتية، يركّز التحليل على كيفية بناء مجموعة بشرية لوجودها المكاني والمتعلّق بالذكورة من خلال استراتيجيات الدّفاع الذاتي والتكيّف مع الفقر والجنوح في غلاسكو خلال هذه الفترة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دراسات السيرة الذاتية، النظرية المكانية، المهاجرون، غلاسكو-إيطاليا، الذكورة.

Glasgow has been a city of constant mutability and metamorphoses, evolving from a cathedral town in the sixth century to an industrial and commercial centre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, consequently attracting a considerable flow of immigrants, either from other regions of Scotland or from such European countries as Italy. Hoping to find better prospects than those offered by their poor and backward villages, Italian immigrants of the late nineteenth century started out as itinerant peddlars, craftsmen and entertainers, grinding their organs or pushing ice-cream carts through the streets of Glasgow. A 1933 census shows that most of the Italians who settled in Glasgow came from two different regions of Italy: Lucca in central Italy and Frosinone south of Rome (Colpi 77). Despite the distinctiveness of their culture and customs, the Italians of Tuscany (Lucca region), more particularly from the villages of Barga and Bacchionero, soon fitted in well within their new environment which was at odds with their sunny peninsula, and a palpable, indivisible bond started developing between Glasgow's places and their Italian residents, whether permanent or temporary. From the outset, this bond with the places and spaces they live and work in seems crucial, as it conditions the Italo-Glaswegian sense of identity in terms of their belonging to and integration into the city of Glasgow.

The first stages of this integration saw an important spatial and occupational transition which also affected their cultural identity as they moved out of the streets and settled into shops, thus turning from Italian street vendors into Italo-Glaswegian ice-cream and fish and chip café owners. In *Who Belongs to Glasgow?* Mary Edward focuses on this significant link between the Italo-Glaswegian community and the spaces they came to invest and inhabit: "Italian cafés and chip shops are not only ...

relics of a lifestyle that is passing, but remain, so far, a monument to the period that witnessed the evolution of the Glasgow Italian” (90). Places and sites of memory such as these remains, “relics” and “monuments,” whether purposefully built or inadvertently left (over), are invaluable testimonies to old communities’ past histories, while an individual’s physical and sensory memories of such places can tell a much more intimate story. Joe Pieri’s autobiographical works reflect such centrality of geographical locations to the narration of his past and the construction of his and other subjectivities. In fact, his textual “tourings” organize and move the plot of Pieri’s stories whose ritualistic visits in that sense resemble constant attempts at capturing, perhaps re-possessing those locations as an integral part of his masculine and cultural subjectivity.

A second-generation Italian from Bacchionero, Pieri wrote about and fictionalised his life and personal experiences as a Scots-Italian immigrant during the 1920s and 30s. He had worked with his father in various hired fish and chip cafés around Glasgow’s districts and suburbs until he became the permanent owner of the Savoy café. His life stories thus generically evolve into a variety of autobiographical shapes which “historicise (his) personal” immigrant story and “personalise (Glasgow’s) socio-economic history” (Buss 595–596) in the form of memoirs and bildungsroman.

In *Tales of the Savoy: Stories from a Glasgow Cafe* and *The Big Men: Personal Memories of Glasgow’s Police*, Pieri selectively tells the life stories of Glaswegian and Italo-Glaswegian people and the spaces they inhabit—like the Savoy café and police beats—through third-person anecdotes and first-person testimonies. In his later work *The Scots-Italians: Recollections of an Immigrant*, there is a transition in the prologue to first-person narration but Pieri’s self is relegated to the background, only occasionally used in parts of his account. The latter in fact turns into another, more historical memoir in which he narrates and analyses (mainly through statistics and newspaper articles) the encounters between Italian and Scottish cultures from ancient to modern times as well as the particular success (or failure) stories of members of the Italian community in Scotland. It also includes important testimonies on the war and the internment of Italians as “enemy aliens”: “There is no fantasy here, just plain uncontested historical facts” (*Scots* 28). In *River of Memory: Memoirs of a Scots-Italian*, the narrative focus shifts to a more conventional autobiographical mode as Pieri’s own life story is told in a chronological, first-person account. All four narratives, however, share the same link of autobiography to geography and masculine gender. The main argument of this paper is that spatial narration in Pieri’s accounts influences the gendered and cultural constructions of his and other men’s identities. By examining Pieri’s

works, I will first consider the different ways of telling the self and their role in constructing geographical locationality. Then I will demonstrate how such masculinities influence one another and (re)create their spaces by deploying various defence and adaptation strategies.

### SPATIAL STRATEGIES OF TELLING THE SELF AND ITS “OTHERS”

Although *Tales of the Savoy* and *Big Men*, Pieri’s two earlier autobiographical works, mostly rely on third-person narration and are “lightly fictionalised” (*Tales* viii) “recollections” of the author and of “beat men” (Preface to *Big Men*), they can both be classified as memoirs. Pieri’s third book, *The Scots-Italians*, which is introduced by an autobiographical prologue, also relies mostly on third-person narration and may equally be classified as memoir. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Life Writing*, memoirs “personalise history and historicise the personal. Although memoirs are about individuals, they are also about ‘an event, an era, an institution, a class identity’ ... [and reflect a] preoccupation with the physicality of a materially located place in history and culture” (Buss 595). So Pieri’s narratives not only tell his personal life and identity as a Glasgow Italian man but also reflect its socio-economic, cultural and historical surroundings: the sharply contrasting districts of 1920s and 30s Glasgow, the Savoy café and, most importantly, their “richly variegated spectrum” of Glaswegian and Italo-Glaswegian masculine inhabitants (*Tales* 5).

In order to accommodate such an assortment of masculinities, Pieri focuses on particular moments and events rather than provide a chronological auto/biographical account. Such “episodic” structure is shaped by a variety of anecdotes and testimonies. Anecdotes (Greek for “things unpublished”) are defined in the dictionary as a “short account of an incident or event—especially a biographical one—of an interesting or amusing nature.” As to testimonies as a life writing genre, they are defined as a form of “recording personal experience of historical events,” a combination of “the idea of recording a historical truth with testifying to its veracity as if a witness in court” (Vice 438). In that regard, there is a “close connection between the act of testifying and the memoir form” (Buss 596) in their true-to-life autobiographical mode and the link they establish between the individual and his times and circumstances. In *Big Men*, testimonies rely exclusively on first-person narration and are structurally and visually separated from the rest of the narrative by indentation and the use of a different font. Policemen’s official reports and unofficial tales are also systematically introduced by reporting verbs such as “recounts” and “tells,” (*Big* 11,14) and most importantly by verbs related to memory

like “reminisces” and “recalls” (*Big* 16,24). In *The Scots-Italians*, testimonies take a different dimension as they are related to war and forced internment. In *Autobiography*, Linda Anderson reflects on the link between testimony and autobiography and defines the former as: “autobiography as a form of witnessing which ‘matters to others’” (130). Felman and Laub explain that “Testimonies are not monologues ... For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*” (70–71). So what Pieri witnesses and records matters not only to himself but also relates to the community of Scots-Italians in terms of their experience as immigrants, business owners, and as victims of internment and xenophobia. It also matters to the Scottish community as a reflection or mirror-image of their own racist and unjust behaviour towards Italian immigrants during that period.

However, Pieri’s autobiographical works are not purely factual as he resorts to many “prose fiction devices” in order to transform his and others’ life moments into such real, but funny and/or “interesting” narratives. In *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing*, Gunnthorun Gudmundsdóttir explains that “fiction is not a negative term in autobiography, it does not diminish autobiography’s truth-value, or [its] referential aspects” (273). So when Pieri changes real people’s names like his family name to Petri and uses such dramatic and metafictional remarks and expressions as: “Woe betide anyone who crossed his path,” “As has been stated many a time in these stories,” (*Tales* 74,168) he does so without destroying the factual aspect of his narrative. Pieri also relies profusely on second-person narration: “The older and honest brother Joe believed in the principle that if you were trying to be a fly man you had to be a reasonably honest fly man, and not an obvious rascal,” (*Big* 43) “unfortunately as a taxi driver he left a lot to be desired, for you never could be sure that he would take you to the destination requested” (*Tales* 46). He also uses free indirect speech: “The constable, in recounting the story, said that he had never been so relieved in all his life!” (*Big* 95) “The flow of cash into the register on these occasions did not escape his notice ... It must be planked someplace, he reasoned” (*Tales* 128). Letters are also engrafted in *Big Men* and *The Scots-Italians*, reproduced as they are to support the truthfulness of testimonies and enrich them with yet another layer of narration. Through such techniques, different levels and types of narration are created so Pieri’s transitions from one autobiographical mode to the other allow for a multiplicity of perspectives as well as narrative fluidity and dramatic immediacy.

Last but not least, anecdotes and testimonies share their final surprising twists which form an integral part of fictionalisation strategies. There is the anecdote about Jimmy, a soldier who deposited money in a bank

during the war only to discover afterwards that the whole city had been bombed. He continued to visit the “scenes of bygone battles ... and telling of how he had a lot of money invested in the Caserta area, if he could only remember where” (*Tales* 45). There is also the testimony of a policeman or “beat man” who, besides performing his usual duties, helps an old lady move her furniture and later a tourist to change his flat tyre. When his boss is sent letters of thanks, the latter exclaims: “Christ ... a couple of months ago you’re helping with a flitting and now you’re mechanics. Well, if you’re looking for a permanent job in a garage you’re going the right way about it” (*Big* 106–107). In *The Scots-Italians*, the story of Freddie Guido is full of irony as, on the occasion of World War Two, he had been called up by and had to fight for two conflicting armies due to his double Italian and British nationalities: “One year later he was back at the counter of the Alhambra restaurant, serving fish suppers to the Glasgow public, who were blissfully unaware that the Tally behind the counter had served in each of the two opposing armies in the recently finished war” (103).

Pieri’s later work, *River of Memory*, differs generically from his earlier ones as it is a chronological, first-person account of his life and focuses more closely on his subjectivity and its link to his family and external environment, with particular emphasis on his father’s biography. Gudmundsdóttir considers this relational strategy as the “mise-en-abîme” of a parent or parents’ biography within the narrator’s autobiography. Such an inclusion allows a more comprehensive view of Pieri’s past and origins and further experimentation with auto/biographical narration (183). *River of Memory* also marks an important thematic and structural transition to the autobiographical genre of bildungsroman whose definition was originally based on a novel by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as

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a story of a youth and of how ‘in joyful dawning he enters into life, searches for kindred souls, encounters friendship, and love, and how he engages in a struggle with the hard reality of life, and thus maturing as a result of the multiplicity of life experiences, he finds himself and becomes aware of his purpose in the world.’ (Burt 105)

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Despite the fact that Pieri’s personal story is based on such “searches,” “encounters” and “struggles,” it is painted in a less ideal “joyful” light. Its encounters are mainly masculine and the struggle to adjust to a new, unstable cultural and working environment makes it hard to realise, least of all to fulfil, one’s “purpose in the world.” The eighteenth-century definition of bildungsroman as “inner intellectual development ... a process involving dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment” (Burt 105) better fits Pieri’s narrative of what he calls his “formative

years” and the “conditioning of childhood” related to his Italian upbringing and Scottish environment (*Scots* 10). Pieri’s different realisations reflect the maturation resulting from contact with his environment: “I soon began to learn that I was somehow different from the other boys there,” “I came to realize what a culture shock it must have been for my mother,” (*River* 15) “the death of my big brother [brought] the realisation of my own mortality,” “It was during my time in Bacchionero that I began to mature mentally, and started out on the long road to understanding just what emigration meant in terms of psychological adjustment” (*River* 1, 14–15). So there is a common denominator with Pieri’s earlier memoirs in that, by “mirroring” the experience of this and other Italian immigrants (*Scots* 1), these narratives “focus on the times in which the life is lived and the significant others of the memoirist’s world ... who is not only witness and historian of events and persons, but an integrally involved participant in the story he narrates” (Buss 596). Another important feature of Pieri’s later works is the inclusion of his parents’ biographies in order to complement his own life story. As in his memoirs, second-person narration is used in these bildungsroman and bestows an immediacy on the narrative which reflects the dialectic relationship between the autobiographical voices of the child of the past and the adult of the present: “for that was the dream of every Italian immigrant: to have a business of your own, and to own a home of your own,” “There was a priest ... who put the fear of God in you every time you confessed to him” (*River* 5, 11). In addition, Pieri repeatedly effects a metabiographical analysis of his memory as a theme and a process and its role in the construction of his identity. First, phrases related to memorisation introduce the two works such as “I remember very little,” “at the age of five, my clear memories begin,” “I can clearly bring to mind” (*Scots* 3–5). In *River of Memory*, Pieri’s relation to and exercise of his memory in his recurrent mental and spatial “visits” to his past are even more intense:

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I seem to have acquired the ability to recall vividly and in detail happenings that took place three quarters of a century and more ago ... I have taken to probing deeper and deeper into my mind’s river of memory .... Long-forgotten and indistinct images appear, gradually take shape and become as real ... I have trudged up these paths many many times. (*River* 1–2)

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So when Pieri decides to retrace his life, he does it spatially rather than thematically: “I should write a book *around*<sup>1</sup> my stories” (my italics, *River*, here and *passim* 178). He introduces and expands on three important spatial acts/metaphors which refer to a particular type of mind-mapping or ‘mind-setting’: “motoring” through streets, “probing [his] mind’s



river of memory” and “trudg[ing] up paths” (*River* 6). The memorization process of this Italo-Glaswegian is thus based on and guided by mental trips and repetitive “excursions” to specific places and spaces belonging to his past. Any sensual interaction with these places seems to trigger memories and bring back familiar feelings and sensations: “the sight of an old street or building seems to reawaken in me the recollection of vague smells and odours ... which have now vanished from the environment, but which still linger in the memory” (*River* 6). The “Proustian Madeleine” is thus converted into a “Pierian Pockey Hat,” the ice-cream cones of his childhood in Glasgow, through the spatial act/metaphor of “driving” through one’s past, re-visiting old places and memories of old spaces. In “Spatial Stories,” Michel De Certeau draws a parallel between storytelling and moving through different spaces: “Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice,” as it describes a sequence of spaces “and links them together [into] sentences and itineraries ... They are spatial trajectories” (115). Indeed, a detailed geo-localisation of each life episode introduces every anecdote, as in *Tales of the Savoy* in which street names and venues are systematically, sometimes tenuously, indicated: “Maitland Street police station, headquarters of the Northern Division of the Glasgow Police, was situated a few hundred yards north of the Savoy, at the top end of Hope Street,” (*Tales* 78) “The Savoy, only a short distance away from St Aloysius on the road to the bus stop at Killermont street bus station” (*Tales* 116). In *Scots-Italians* and *River of Memory*, every personal move and transformation is marked by the location in which it took place: “I remember the Sundays in Crown Street ... In the playground at St Francis,” (*Scots* 4,6) “at the end of our lease in the Crown Street shop, father ... found one in Butterbiggins Road near Queen’s Park” (*River* 10). Even such historical events as the “General Strike of 1926” are personalised by being remembered spatially “I remember too ... took place during our time in Crown Street” and its effects on Pieri’s life and his father’s business are detailed (*River* 9). Accordingly, Pieri’s autobiographical narratives attempt to re-construct the moves and movements of his past, to find his “place” in history by driving around the streets of Glasgow or lingering on the sites of abandoned churches in his childhood village, then inscribing his memories through a narrative and textual “mapping” and “touring” of these spaces. But the most important of all places is the Savoy café which Pieri describes as “the foundation of future prosperity” (*Scots* 8). As much “a social institution” as it was a “retailing enterprise” (Colpi 82) in the 20s and 30s, the Savoy and its surroundings were “meeting points” (Colpi 83) which helped Pieri and other Glaswegians and Italo-Glaswegians to build their masculinity, either through friendly gatherings or hostile encounters.



## PIERI'S GENDERED AND SPATIAL SUBJECTIVITY

Pieri's different memories and anecdotes are constituted, often triggered by the names of streets, geographical locations and the moves from one country or district to another in which his and others' life events took place. His narration thus reflects a strong attachment to and fondness for place. In “Spatio-temporal and Spatio-sensual Assemblages of Youthful Masculinities,” Moody and Kenway explain this as the “practice of writing oneself into place, of inscribing one's subjectivity and imprinting one's body on the land ... a rich base for who he is and for what he wants to do ... Such feelings arise from local socioscap; the connections between time, blood and belonging” (49). Indeed, it is in his later works that Pieri provides a more detailed account of his origins and the land to which he belonged before the family emigrated to Glasgow. So his autobiographical subjectivity is constructed spatially by the narration and description of these areas and their gradual transformations. As the narration of the self follows the trajectory/itinerary of a life with its different spaces, Pieri's identity and life history, both as a Glasgow Italian immigrant and a man, are at once defined by, and deeply linked to his native land and to the city of Glasgow:

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Bacchionero, the name given to about 450 acres of land in the centre of which stood a group of farm buildings set round a tiny square graced by a small church. Bacchionero was my birthplace and the birthplace of my mother Maria, and of her mother before her ... the Carani family, about fifteen in all including my mother, generations of whom had worked the land ... over the years. (*River* 3)

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Pieri's double identity as an Italian immigrant<sup>2</sup> adds another dimension, that of his 'Italianness' mixed with his adopted Glaswegian environment and its own culturally-specific share of surrounding masculinities<sup>3</sup> such as school fellows, policemen, “chuckers-out” (*Savoy* 70) and boxers. All these various Glaswegian boys and men from all walks of life have participated in the construction of his dichotomous sense of self: “We are what we are because of two factors: genetic inheritance and environmental influence, and the latter in my formative years had gone to creating in me a sense of detachment from the society in which I was living ... to that extent I was Italian ... But Glasgow was my *home*; this was the *place* I had grown up in, where I had gone to *school*, and this was the *place* where I earned a living” (my italics, *River* 36). Despite the sense of detachment experienced by Pieri's Italian side as he casts an unfamiliar look at his surroundings, his description of Glasgow in purely spatial terms as “home,” “school”

and workplace is associated with a sense of growth and reflects a strong attachment to his “environment.” As Pieri drives through “the self-same roads” (*River* 78), he would remember Francesco and Ralph, his father and brother, respectively:

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The first hazy recollection I can bring to mind is that of the figure of my father bending down over me ... presenting me with a toy wooden locomotive. As they came back to me I would sometimes discuss these old memories with my brother Ralph ... When I told him of my vague recollection ... he recalled a Christmas in the early 1920s in our tenement flat in Surrey Street in the Gorbals. (*River* 1)

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This kind of metonymic recollection of specific toys from one’s infancy is pertinent in that it assists the autobiographical (written) reconstruction of one’s culture and identity in the same fashion as the sight of an old building or street. Pieri’s Italian culture of origin meant that he belonged to a typically patriarchal home or family “place” in which the “Law of the Father” is unquestioned and carried out through a conservative and strict Italian upbringing. The father’s authority and interference in his son’s life, creed and finances are never put into question or discredited: “father would not allow me to be out alone late at night ... That father should have assented without demur was a remarkable thing ... being out until 3am, an unheard-of occurrence as far as our family was concerned” (*River* 24), “my father would not hear of it ... In those days a father’s word was law” (*River* 32). In such “male-headed families” (Medaglia 111), when the father gets sick, Pieri has to abandon his schooling: “it was my duty to accompany my father ... schooling was not important; it was my duty to accompany my father. What was important was that the breadwinner should recover his health so as to take his proper *place* at the head of the family” (my italics *River* 13). Pieri’s masculine subjectivity is consequently co-dependent on his father’s biography from the very beginning of his narrative until, as he states, his own “clear memories begin” (*The Scots-Italians* 4). The resulting dichotomous identity causes a double vision to radiate from his narrative strategies and to influence his perception of masculinity. Considered in that sense as a “relational life” (Eakin 65), in addition to his patriarchal “place” with its strict paternal regulations, another spatial territory of Pieri’s childhood initiated and constructed his cultural and masculine identity: the school playground as a “space” of constant fighting. Pieri’s narrative as a schoolboy reflects an early feeling of displacement and alienation from other school fellows because of his ethnic and religious origins. Despite the “hegemonic masculinity” represented by his father at home, his becomes a “marginalised” one as soon as he leaves the house. In her article about the interwar representations

of second-generation Italian children<sup>4</sup>, Wendy Ugolini focuses on the impact of racist and anti-Catholic attitudes on their self-image and life narratives: “Childhoods in the 1920s and 1930s [were] blighted by feelings of difference and repeated exposure to harassment. Growing up as part of a Catholic minority in Presbyterian Scotland ... fundamentally shaped the life stories of second-generation Italians and the construction of personal identity” (32). The consequent fracture or “dichotomy” within Pieri’s psyche mainly stemmed from the religious “polarization” and mutations of his ‘epic’ spaces, a polarization which is sustained by many critics<sup>5</sup>, not only because of its historical rootedness in Scotland, but also because of its alienating impact as “Catholics were beyond the boundaries ... even if they were British-born: they did not and could not belong” (qtd. in Ugolini, 32). From racist verbal attacks to violent physical fights, life in the cosmopolitan<sup>6</sup> Gorbals district for an Italo-Glaswegian boy was all but a bed of roses for he also had to confront gangs from other schools and areas. In “Street Gangs,” Andrew Davies explains that “[r]eligious divisions were certainly a prominent feature of life in the Gorbals, where gangs of schoolboys issued the traditional sectarian challenge ‘Wha’ are yese—Billy or a Dan [or an old Tin Can]?’ to Catholic, Protestant and Jewish boys alike” (Davies 255). Pieri experienced these challenges and their consequent bruises and injuries as inevitable, not only because of the area in which he lived, the Gorbals<sup>7</sup>, but also because of the need to assert his masculinity and belonging to the St Francis or St Mungo school group, be it chosen or imposed. His childhood thus strengthened his need to adapt to his environment and paved the way for a male consciousness of the necessity to appropriate one’s space. This appropriation started by confronting verbal and physical violence then by owning one’s business, that is by gradually building one’s “hegemonic” masculinity to protect one’s territory from other masculinities. Indeed, the allegiances of these schoolboys changed according to their surrounding space and the rooted tradition of gang territoriality and fighting commanded the behaviour of these little ‘males’ who had to learn to fight for survival by ‘marking’ the boundaries of their “place,” be it their identity, body or neighbourhood. These youngsters’ masculine strategies of attack and defence both take as a model and parallel those of adult Glasgow gangs. Indeed, there were “junior” gangs such as the “Wee Hive” who were recruited by “senior” street gangs when they were older (Davies 258–259). Hence Pieri’s narrative is not only representative of his own individual masculinity as a Glasgow Italian but also reflects other masculinities. Within the city itself however, it is the Savoy café, a fish and chip shop, which turns out to be the most important location as it plays a crucial role in Pieri’s life and narrative in terms of its strategic location and the

nature of its frequenters. First of all, it is Francesco's, Pieri's father, first working place "at the corner of Hope Street and Renfrew Street" (*River* 5). Second, the café was purchased at the first opportunity and owned by Pieri's family for fifty years or so which was an important step after life in a feudal Italian hamlet. Last but not least, Francesco and his sons succeeded in transforming a dangerous place into one of Glasgow's most successful and well-known businesses, "the foundation of future prosperity" (*Scots* 8) and the symbolic location at the heart of their identity. The Savoy is also spatially defined by its liminal location between the precarious Cowcaddens and the luxurious Sauchiehall Street:

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Set at the edge of the city centre it was flanked at the rear by pubs and drinking dens, and the street corner on which it stood served as bus terminal for the mining towns on the outskirts of Glasgow. Given the trading potential for their wares, the area was a stamping ground for the hordes of prostitutes who plied their trade the length of Hope Street, from the Central Station to the Cowcaddens, and at night the Savoy was a focal point for all this low-life ... In the Savoy the ebb and flow of all types of humanity could be observed. The place was frequented by a very broad cross-section of the population of the Cowcaddens and city centre ... [who] crossed our threshold in the course of a day's business. (*River* 19, 28)

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In fact, the "place" witnessed an incredible series of metamorphoses throughout the day: in the afternoon, day-shoppers from the vibrant Sauchiehall Street would stop by for a quick snack, then the nearby cinemas and theatres would bring their early evening share of decent customers. However, as the café was also surrounded by "drinking dens," bus terminals, the Central Station and overpopulated tenement flats, it would attract the worst specimens of nightly Glaswegian society. In the post-war years, Glasgow witnessed an enduring economic recession due to an export and shipbuilding-relying economy, a situation which was worsened by the 1926 General Strike in the coal industry, then by the Great Depression<sup>8</sup> (Maver 203–206). On the other hand, Maver nuances the image of recession by emphasizing the parallel "expansion of chain stores" in 1930s Glasgow which reflected the socio-economic gap in the city's living conditions (210). So while 'respectable' shoppers roamed the streets during the day, such night hawks as "drunks<sup>9</sup>," prostitutes and "toughs" abounded at the closing time of public houses and dance halls, preying on food and warmth (*River* 18–19). Prostitution or "The Great Social Evil" in Glasgow was deeply linked to such enduring social ills as unemployment, poor housing and health, in addition to the high rates of criminality mainly caused by the gangs in working-class areas<sup>10</sup> (Devine 386, Maver 234). Historically speaking, Glasgow gangs in the 1920s and

1930s, believed to be encouraged by the war-related reduction of police forces (Maver 254), were either religiously or territorially divided: "it appears that conflicts in the East End of the city tended to be strongly sectarian in character, while those in the South Side tended to be rooted more in territorial rivalries." The latter gangs pledged allegiance to the district or neighbourhood in which they were born and raised and which they considered their territory, although not necessarily protecting the people who lived in their area<sup>11</sup> (Davies 254, 258, 262). Some gangs even named themselves after their territories like the "Bridgeton Billy Boys" or the "Calton Entry," and continually asserted their "ownership" of the streets through organized crime and displays of violence. In addition to a tradition of gang formation stretching back to the 1880s in Glasgow and other British cities (Davies 252, 254), the active membership of these gangs nourished three vital male needs in these young, poor and unemployed men: status, belonging and power through violence. No longer able to provide for themselves and their families, humiliated as failed breadwinners, "unemployment increasingly undermined [the] traditional, work-based masculine identities" of these men. Criminality and the violent seizure and dominion of such districts as the Gorbals thus helped reconstruct their sense of self-worth as ideal models of masculinity: "hard men" and "specialist criminals" (Davies 266–267, 252).

Glasgow's social and religious contrasts were reflected in Pieri's own subjectivity: "the dichotomy instilled in me" (*Scots* 10), the "Limbo-land of loyalties" (*Tales* 96), a "chameleon-like personality" (*Scots* 10), and influenced his spatial perspective of clean/bright/genteel Vs dirty/gloomy/low-life locations and their male customers. As "the other provides the map of the self" (qtd in Eakin, 69), it is his surrounding Glasgow Italian and Glaswegian masculine figures and their life stories which have shaped and influenced Pieri's concepts of masculinity which are in turn reflected in, and constructed by spatial diction, imagery and metaphors. Moody explains how "constructions of masculinity articulate strongly with local mateship and male connections and, for many, this is the traditional anchor of male identity" (Moody 50). Being located in exclusively masculine occupations and places, Pieri's subjectivity as a memoirist and first-person narrator is constructed through gendered and geographical relationality. In other words, his identity as a man is strongly attached to and constructed by spatial connections to other masculinities who could be divided into a dichotomy of strong defenders/guardians and devious aggressors. In all the anecdotes and testimonies, spaces and masculinities are closely linked and condition each other: each "beat" and "pitch," as well as the "police box," the back shop and the threshold of the café place literally and symbolically affect and reflect their occupier/owner's

identity. The latter in turn transforms the original and conventional function of their places by re-using and re-appropriating them.

In “Spatial Stories,” De Certeau defines place as “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence ... the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own ‘proper’ and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability” (117). Space, on the other hand, is “composed of intersections of mobiles elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it ... in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken ... modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts ... In short, *space is a practiced place*” (De Certeau 117). In other words, “place” is a stable system like language while “space” is an utterance putting the language system into practice and able to perform changes and transformations upon “places.” De Certeau adds that “there is no spatiality that is not organized by the determination of frontiers” (123) which exist through “distinctions resulting from encounters” (127) with “the other,” whether friendly or hostile. In the same manner, the Glaswegian café “place” is constantly appropriated by various models of Glaswegian and Italo-Glaswegian masculinities who either convert it to fit their needs or protect it to preserve its stability.

### MASCULINITIES AND SPATIAL STRATEGIES OF DEFENCE AND ADAPTATION

Before linking Glasgow’s masculinities to their spatial practices in Pieri’s autobiographical works, it would be important to note the centrality of Masculinity Studies to my analysis starting with R.C. Connell’s concepts of “Hegemonic masculinity,” the plurality of masculinities and their power relationships, all relevant to the variety of men who worked in and frequented the Savoy café. Connell’s theory, however, is limited to issues of power so the integration of social and cultural geography is essential, never all the while losing sight of their specificity to spatio-temporal circumstances of 1920s and 30s Glasgow: “it is only in the situated, empirically grounded analysis of actual men in actual places that we can grasp the shifting dynamics of power” (Hopkins & Noble 813), in addition to the importance of relationality and intersection with class and ethnicity:

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The ‘ethnographic moment’ in studies on men and masculinities has highlighted the multiplicity of masculinities, relations among masculinities, the importance of collectivity, social learning of and about masculinities and

femininities, complexities, contradictions and change. This attention to the ethnographic moment has both strengths, in the recognition of the local and of place, location and locationality ... the immediacy and potency of local and national space and place for gendered lives persists. (Hearn qtd. in Gorman-Murray 29, 37)

In spite of the specificity of place and the inevitability of power issues, it is the fluidity of masculine practices in Pieri's narratives which will be the focus of this final section. As waves of masculinities meet on the threshold or within the café as a “place,” theatrical shows of virility and territoriality are displayed as these men mark their territory through strategies of defence and adjustment. The choice of the verb “mark” is motivated by its double meaning: the first is the literal/spatial act of defining the boundaries of one's personal space in order to prevent “others” and outsiders from encroaching on it. The second meaning is metaphorical/spatial and is specifically pertinent to the study of autobiographical narratives and testimonies. This is the act of textually “marking” memorable occurrences/moments of the past as part of the process of constructing one's masculine subjectivity. In that regard, Massey contends that “the need for the security of boundaries, the requirements for such a defensive and counter positional definition of identity, is culturally masculine” (qtd. in Gorman-Murray 7). Such situations as described by Pieri's narratives are ironically reminiscent of the loyal Scottish mercenaries who used to valiantly defend Italian cities during the Middle Ages as in the twentieth century the Glaswegian policemen, boxers, runners and “chuckers-out” again constituted a community of strong guardians. The latter at once protected and moved about the various spaces of the Pieri shop while adopting various techniques of defence and appropriation. When it came to the Savoy, “the nature of the place changed” (*Tales* 71) as all this “low-life” turned the eating place into an arena, a space of violent fights and primitive battles, dangerous surroundings which required the Italo-Glaswegian men behind the counter to resort to tough survival strategies.

The first masculine model is that of Pieri's father who was more than just the Savoy's manager. His acquisition of the café, both financial and symbolic, constitutes the first step towards adjustment to his tough surroundings and their entourage: “[it] was ours, it was not a hired shop belonging to others, and the work we were doing was for our own benefit and for nobody else's” (*River* 20). Anne Marie Fortier's amalgam through the double meaning of belonging(s) as both “possessions” and “*appartenance*” is pertinent in this case as such a transformation in the life of the Pieri family changed their conception of their improved surroundings. Indeed, a stronger sense of property/place led to an increased feeling of belonging to the Italian/Glaswegian community (42). In fact, the



feudal system from which the family had suffered and fled back in their Tuscan village in Italy had given birth to a traumatic fear of dependence on, and enforced displacement by the landlords, but the achieved “dream of every Italian immigrant: a business of your own” (*Scots-Italian* 3) provides the security of stable earnings and a tangible possession. So the ownership of the Savoy gradually improved the Pieris’ life both socially and economically, leading to an almost idyllic era of prosperity which continued well into the 1950s and 1960s. Hence the paternal image of a strong man feared and respected by his sons and by other male members of his environment is gradually constructed within Pieri’s psyche and autobiographical narrative: “[The Savoy] needed the use of a very strong arm to carry on business there. But my father ... was made of stern stuff and was well able to cope ... he was helped by ... his physical strength and courage ... he was as strong as a bull and more than capable of dealing with the toughs and drunks who came about the place; there was never a fight nor a disturbance created that my father could not handle” (*River* 19), “he was thickset” (*Tales* 7). The Savoy’s new Italo-Glaswegian owner is thus ‘naturally’ endowed with the necessary masculine qualities and “bull-like” aggressiveness to defend and ‘mark’ his territory. However, physical strength is not the father’s only defence mechanism as he has shown another powerful skill, that of a “chameleon-like” (*The Scots-Italian* 10) adaptation to his hostile environment. But instead of showing or camouflaging his true colours, he forcibly transforms the socio-economic appearance of the café place as well as the human infrastructure of the surrounding district/space by “weeding out the riff-raff” (*River* 19) and adapting the serving area to the contrasting respectability levels of his clients:

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After teatime The Savoy would change character quite radically. Off would come the tablecloths, revealing the plain marble tops of the table, away would come the pretty cruet sets, to be replaced by plain glass vinegar and sauce bottles and metal salt dishes, the menu cards were replaced by a menu board hung on the wall ... the good quality crockery and cutlery in use until then was put away and well worn chipped and cracked substitutes laid out in their place. The stage was now set for the culmination of the day’s trade. (*Tales* 6)

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Indeed, there is theatricality implied in the spatial adjustment of tables and their accessories from the most luxurious to the most rudimentary which are reminiscent of the “dressing” of a stage before the start of a play. “And so the place was cleaned up. The Savoy was transformed” (*River* 19–20) into a “place” with a system of rules known to all. No quarter was given, only fists, blows and other variants of physical violence would be

administered by the owner and the "Polis" to the belligerent customers till the Savoy was finally turned into a haven of tranquility. Later, an additional guardian was needed to reinforce the protection of the premises during night-time business and Pieri was recommended a "chucker-out" called "Big Steve." Poised at the entrance with "a basilisk stare," Steve had a "massive frame and rock-like face ... [and was] menacingly unmovable" (*River* 83). He would also repetitively cross the threshold of the café, in and out of the place, to manage the constant flow of "troglodytes" who threatened to trouble the peace and respectability of the Savoy. Pieri relishes in the narration of such violent episodes with references to mythological heroes and a detailed, surgical description of the physical punishment of troublemakers which reflects a fascination for this violence as a "powerful," "well directed," "simple but effective procedure," and its consequences of "howls of anguish" and "assortment of gasping gargling noises." Because it is legitimized by the protection of the café place and its customers, chucker-out brutality is "fully condoned" by this masculine community as it effects a spatial transformation on his workplace, restoring it from an arena to its original function as a quiet eating place: "with his coming tranquility reigned" (*River* 83–84).

Other models of "hegemonic" masculinity such as Glaswegian policemen are portrayed and play a complementary role in Pieri's life. Such models he fictionalizes, even romanticizes, in *Tales of the Savoy* and *The Big Men*: "That was the type of man who appeared on the beats of the Northern Division ... That was the type of man sent out to deal with petty criminals ... And deal with them they did" (*Big Men* 28). This dominant masculinity is reflected in a visual insistence on height, statuesque build and body hair as well as recklessness and loyalty which clearly and repetitively feature in Pieri's descriptions and anecdotes. Pieri describes these men as representatives of the "majesty of the Law ... made manifest by the appearance ... of the policemen of those days ... The great majority of the beat men far exceeded this height [5 feet 10 inches], and their tall brawny appearance was enhanced by the wearing of the regulation helmet ... which added another 10 inches to their already formidable image" (*Tales* 79). Pieri's portrayal reflects his admiration and deep fascination for these "Big" men, a denomination which precedes the names of such tall and charismatic heroes as "Big Hitler," "Big Alec and Big John ... massive men by any standard" whom he idealizes and mythifies as "an awesome sight as they strode ponderously and majestically side by side along the pavements of their beat, left thumb tucked into their belt and right arm swinging with authority in time to their measured step" (*Tales* 83–84). These impressive men theatrically walking the beats and streets, the "spaces" of Glasgow, seek to impose order and authority by administering their "summary

justice” in the form of precise and well-rounded beating techniques. Pieri goes as far as to glorify these different forms of violence because they are ennobled by the protection of the innocent and of private and public property. In *The Big Men*, Pieri ‘engrafts’<sup>12</sup> some of these policemen’s personal testimonies and anecdotes to his narrative. These testimonies also bestow an oral quality, a kind of third dimension through the use of the Scots English language which enlivens the narrative and positions it more firmly in the Glaswegian context so that masculine locationality is asserted both through Scottish slang and the specifics of place:

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Well, the fella that saved me was a ned from the Garscube Road. John Foy his name was, a real hard man he was ... If it wasn’t for him the bloke in the pub would have done for me. Ok, Foy was a ned, but there’s neds and neds, you get the evil neds ... and you get the others who’ve got a half-decent streak in them and wouldn’t harm people. (*Big Men* 85)

To show you how strong he was. One day at the Normal School, at the corner of New City Road and the Cowcaddens, the school gate fell on top of a wee girl ... (Big Hitler) rushed and lifted the gate off the girl without breaking sweat ... He was merciless with the neds and used to run them in black and blue ... He was a real brute of a man. (*Big Men* 88)

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The back shop of the Savoy was in fact “a favourite oasis for the police constables” (*Tales* 25). Two factors lie behind this spatial appropriation-cum-transformation: the strategic position of the Savoy near a police box “next to the Hope Street entrance ... [these boxes are] concrete structures resembling phone kiosks in shape, but much larger ... On the roof was a light bulb, heavily protected by wire mesh” (*Big Men* 15–16). This proximity allows them to keep alert as to potential calls from their headquarters thus affording them “an illicit half hour” break away from their duties during which they can warm themselves with a cup of tea or a fish supper. Such a regular presence almost turned the local ‘Tally’s’ “place” itself into a police station which serves a double function. First, “if any of the local public wanted a policeman for some reason, the ‘Tally’s’ was the place” (*Tales* 16). Second, the shop would constantly be protected and kept safe from the attacks of Neds and hooligans. The policemen could thus relax while still performing their duties and everyone was satisfied. The police box itself was diverted from its original function of contacting the police main station or locking up arrested criminals as it often served as a “strategically situated” territory-marking device through the “use of prisoners’ heads as battering rams to open [its heavy wooden doors], a practice well calculated to impress upon the victim the clear message as to who was in charge” (*Tales* 79).

It should be noted, however, that the waves of Pieri’s surrounding masculinities were not limited to violent defence strategies but included other adjustment strategies and even masculine bonding. In fact, the Savoy originally provided catering and democratised “shop-bought” food (*Tales* vii) for those who could not afford it before. In addition, its masculinities could also engage in intellectual conversations such as the ones between priests of different persuasions or between a Polish inventor and an Italian opera singer:

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The Savoy was close to Howdens, and since it counted many interesting characters from all walks of life among its clients Sauschek made his headquarters there, holding court for hours on end, discussing the events of the day and life in general with whomever of interest happened to be on hand ... the characters attracted to his table were colourful and verbose ... he and Willie Dickie used to hold endless conversations. The Pole had an amazing ear for music. (*Tales* 91–92)

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Chess was also played in Pieri’s café, a competitive yet friendly game which transformed the Savoy into a socializing space, a shared territory in which lasting male friendships could be formed and would carry on influencing and interfering with his life and narrative well into his older years.

## CONCLUSION

Memoirs have the “power to revise both history and literature, the two discourses from which [the genre] traditionally draws” (Buss 596) so Pieri’s purpose is to give prominence to neglected historical episodes and a voice to cultural minorities, in addition to creating a haven of food and shelter. Besides this access to historical, religious and social facts of the period, Pieri’s works also represent a form of minority literature which should be further analysed and have its rightful place in autobiographical studies. Indeed, by showing aspects of what is socially or generically excluded from mainstream culture i.e. what belongs to “low life,” Pieri’s narratives valorise both Glaswegian and Glasgow-Italian communities, their everyday and isolated experiences of war as well as other important gender and ethnic issues. His is a rich and varied combination of autobiographical features as Pieri’s immigrant success story, memoirs and Italo-Glaswegian bildungsroman both textually and spatially narrate the Savoy café, a place in which a melting pot of masculinities can meet, for better and for worse.

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## NOTES

- 1 “around” rather than “about my stories.”
- 2 I refer to the imagery of masculinity in fictionalised diary writing pertaining to the 1920s Italian diaspora of the United States in a forthcoming book.
- 3 There are pertinent discussions of the link between masculinity and ethnicity in relation to the Irish diaspora. See Karen Lysaght’s “MOBILIZING THE RHETORIC OF DEFENCE : Exploring working-class masculinities in the divided city” (in *Spaces Of Masculinities* by van Hoven and Hörschelmann) and Michael Richardson’s “Intergenerational Relations and Irish Masculinities: Reflections from the Tyneside Irish, in the North-East of England” (in *Masculinities and Place* by Gorman-Murray and Hopkins).
- 4 Although Ugolini focuses on second-generation Italians from Edinburgh, there are similar patterns in Glasgow which Pieri’s own life narrative confirms.
- 5 Andrew Davies, Linda Colley and Olindo Porchetta. The last two are quoted in Ugolini’s article.
- 6 The Gorbals housed a mixture of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities in the 1930s (Davies 255).
- 7 Avram Taylor explores the inter-ethnic relations and interconnection between reality and perceptions of the area in the interwar period as a “poverty-stricken underworld, characterized by [poverty and] brutal encounters between rival gangs.” (1)
- 8 Maver comments on the negative transformation of the image of Glasgow in the interwar period from “Second city of the Empire” to “Cancer of the Empire” (234).
- 9 In *Glasgow: 1830–1912*, Devine describes the dominant view of Glasgow since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a “city of drunks” through statistics of illegal “shebeens,” the number of arrests for drunken behaviour and the testimonies of city-dwellers or visitors (383–384).

- 10 It is interesting to note Devine's and Maver's disease imagery in relation to prostitution ("Social Evil") and gangs ("malignant symptom") because of their perceived sickening of the city's society. (Maver 254)
- 11 There were reported cases of public house raids in the Gorbals by the Beehive Boys, although it was part of their territory. See the William Rae case in Davies' article (262).
- 12 This is a concept which I use in my PhD thesis about metabiography and fiction. It is inspired by a gardening technique of fertilization.