



Autobiography through Anecdotes in Joe Pieri's *Isle Of The Displaced*

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Abstract

Associated with such life writing genres as (auto)biographies and memoirs, anecdotes are described as stories which 'illustrate particular ideas, concepts, and views of the way a life is lived, making considerable editorial commentary on the nature of a particular ideological moment and the effect of that moment on individual lives'. (*Encyclopedia of Life Writing*) Anecdotes thus focus on, and highlight episodes of a person's life by transforming them into tales and stories using fictional narrative techniques and suspenseful plot twists.

Having emigrated from Italy to Scotland at the beginning of the twentieth century and established his fish and chip shop in Glasgow, Joe Pieri was then interned and turned into an 'enemy alien' on the day Italy declared war on Britain in 1940. In *Isle of the Displaced*, his book about this traumatic event, Pieri turns the most marking aspects of his journey to, and life in 'Camp S' in Canada into a series of witty and comic anecdotes. This paper focuses on the definitions and history of anecdotal theory in order to analyse Pieri's fictionalisation strategies and the way these stories function as a psychological dam in times of crisis, in addition to re-inscribing these important events in British and Italian histories. The main contention of this article is that the appeal of fiction increases during life's most difficult times mainly thanks to the imaginative and tragic-comic powers of literariness.

Keywords: anecdotes, fictionalisation techniques, Italo-Glaswegian identity, World War Two

سيرة ذاتية من خلال الحكايات في جزيرة المشردين جو بيرى

مرتبطة بأنواع كتابة الحياة مثل السير الذاتية (التلقائية) والمذكرات ، يتم وصف الحكايات على أنها قصص توضح أفكارًا ومفاهيم ووجهات نظر معينة حول طريقة عيش ، مما يؤدي إلى تعليق تحريري كبير على طبيعة لحظة إيدولوجية معينة وتأثير تلك اللحظة على حياة الأفراد. ' (موسوعة كتابة الحياة) تركز الحكايات على حلقات من حياة الشخص وتسلط الضوء عليها من خلال تحويلها إلى حكايات وقصص باستخدام تقنيات السرد الخيالي وتقلبات الحكمة. بعد أن هاجر من إيطاليا إلى اسكتلندا في بداية القرن العشرين وأسس متجر أسماك وبطاطس مقلية في غلاسكو ، تم اعتقال جو بيرى بعد ذلك وتحول إلى 'أجنبي معاد' في اليوم الذي أعلنت فيه إيطاليا الحرب على بريطانيا في عام 1940. في جزيرة المشردين ، وهو كتابه عن هذا الحدث الصادم ، يحول بيرى الجوانب الأكثر تميزًا في رحلته والحياة في 'المعسكر S' في كندا إلى سلسلة من الحكايات البارعة والكوميديّة. تركز هذه المقالة على تعريفات وتاريخ النظرية القصصية من أجل تحليل استراتيجيات التخيل لدى بيرى والطريقة التي تعمل بها هذه القصص كسد نفسي في أوقات الأزمات ، بالإضافة إلى إعادة كتابة هذه الأحداث المهمة في التاريخ البريطاني والإيطالي. يتمثل الجدل الرئيسي في هذه المقالة في أن جاذبية الرواية تزداد خلال أصعب أوقات الحياة ويرجع الفضل في ذلك بشكل أساسي إلى القوى الخيالية والمأساوية الكوميديّة للأدب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحكايات ، تقنيات التخيل ، الهوية الإيطالية الغلاسكوية، الحرب العالمية الثانية.

'A thousand things may happen in reality which elude the subtlest imagination'
(Dostoyevski, *The Brothers Karamazov*)

Let me tell you an anecdote. When my grandmother passed away ten years ago, I remember how every member of my family was devastated. Everyone was roaming through the house like a soul in pain. Then, suddenly appeared my aunt, silently holding a tray of a special kind: it was filled with tiny white sleeping pills. 'Help yourself to the tray if you can't bear the pain.' Now when I think of that particular circumstance as part of my life story, my unwritten autobiography, I laugh at its tragic-comic quality and at the manner in which it highlights how one inevitably fictionalises one's life in times of crisis by telling and retelling it, in this case as an anecdote. A Glasgow-Italian fish-and-chip café owner in the twenties and thirties, Joe Pieri wrote his life story and that of his human and spatial entourage through autobiographical narratives, many of which are constituted as long anecdotes: *Tales of the Savoy* (1999), *Big Men* (2001) and *Isle of the Displaced* (1997). He was arrested and interned at the outbreak of World War Two along with other Italian civilians following Italy's declaration of war on Britain, and taken through an inhumane and cruel expedition to Canada without any contact or knowledge of his destination and fate. Pieri's *Isle of The Displaced* is particularly pertinent to this study because his use of

anecdotes serves two important purposes: narrating the circumstances of his own life and of the Scots-Italian community, while also documenting an important segment of both British and Italian history. In this article, I would like to argue that Pieri's anecdotes, thanks to their rootedness in orality and the efficiency of their literary compactness, could represent a pertinent alternative to conventional life writing genres, and more particularly, auto/biography.

Different definitions of the anecdote

The focus on the definition of the anecdote and the history of its evolution is crucial to the study of its form and various functions. There are many lines of thought and possibilities of research questions related to anecdotes: Are they oral or written? Is their historical probability an intrinsic aspect of their essence? What is their historical, literary or biographical value? Are they used for mere entertainment, as an adornment, or do they have more serious purposes (political, moral, social and the like)? Are they a minor, ignored genre or is anecdotal theory—to use Susan Gallop's title—a field in its own right?

Throughout my readings about the anecdote, I found many different definitions. The Greek etymology is 'ek-didomi' which means 'not given out'¹ as in the case of an unpublished story or one that is only told in private. 'Anekdotia' is, in the context of marriage, a 'young woman not yet married', and in the context of publication a 'story told for the first time', a definition which establishes the anecdote's link to confidentiality, serialisation and transmission. Anecdote (ἀνέκδοτῶν) is also defined as a brief narrative of a particular incident. It would be interesting to note at this point that Joe Pieri himself calls his anecdotes 'incidents'. Still, they differ from a short story in that they are unified in time and space, are uncomplicated, and deal with a single episode.

In English studies, the anecdote as a genre was first theorised by Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century under the appellation of 'apophthegm', then by Isaac D'Israeli's *Dissertation on Anecdotes* published in 1793, a century during which the anecdote (also called 'anas' as in *Johnsoniana*) witnessed a boom and became 'a compulsive mode of representation' in Simpson's terms. In addition, D'Israeli sees the anecdote in light of the subjective relationship between men and history, of the fact that it brings 'history to life' and materialises it through its little incidents. The reader is also given presence and existence by actively interpreting these incidents, allowing for the portrayal of the paradox of the ordinarily contingent, but exceptional event. The more recent 'theorists' are Joel Fineman in 'The History of the Anecdote: Fiction

and Fiction', David Simpson and Susan Gallop in *Anecdotal Theory*. On the other hand, French research, including Michel de Montaigne, French anecdote tellers/writers, historians and other specialists, is also very varied and up-to-date.

E. 'Nolue Emenanjo, in his study of Igbo anecdotes as an oral genre, chronicles the history of the anecdote through its earliest eighteenth century definitions. Samuel Johnson first defined the anecdote in 1755 as 'something yet unpublished', which was revised in 1773 following the French definition as 'a biographical incident, a minute passage of private life'. Johnson also considered that 'anecdotes provide moral instruction' through 'circumstances' of 'particular lives', the 'deeds' rather than the words of men. He also declared his love of anecdotes and saw them as the future of literature: 'I fancy mankind may come, in time, to write all aphoristically [...] grow weary of preparation, and connection, and illustration, and all those arts by which a big book is made' (Boswell's *Life of Johnson*). John Bacon's definition, on the other hand, was related to 'circumstances' or 'apophtegmes' which, he considers, make for 'meaningful conversation', and are similar to anecdotes (Silver, 252-53) as short, historical, and with a point or edge. In fact, he uses the adjectives 'pierced and severed'.² They are repeated, which is the very logic of the anecdote, from one person to another as 'a small bit of history imported into the conversation to give it reality' (Silver, 253). In 'Anecdotes and Conversations', David Simpson defines the anecdote as an explanation of something general 'by reference to the immediacy of a lived incident' (Simpson, 53). W.C. Snipes in *Writer and Audience* describes it as 'originally an unpublished item or (an) interesting or striking incident, usually of a personal or biographical nature'. Emenanjo quotes Edmund Fuller (a collector of anecdotes) and calls them 'stories with points', defining them himself as 'short, involving no more than a single incident, generally factual and authentic in content (or at least alleged to be so) [...] uncomplicated in plot line'.

In light of all the aforementioned definitions, an anecdote is a 'brief' or 'short' narrative or story or account of 'an incident', 'a single event' and has such characteristics as 'amusing', 'interesting', 'striking' and even 'obscure' (*Oxford English Dictionary/Dictionary.com*). Some dictionaries add that it is 'about a real person or event' (*Oxford American Dictionary*), 'about something someone has done' (*Cambridge Dictionary*). On the other hand, anecdotal evidence is said about information that is not based on facts or proper studies, which creates a tension, a paradox in its very definition.

There are also different types of anecdotes: literary, historical, autobiographical, etc. as they are often associated with other fields of study such as history, as in Joel Fine-man's discussion of Steven Greenblatt's New Historicism and its use of anecdotes, or philosophy, as Hegel's fondness for anecdotes is highlighted by John McCumber, or

memoirs such as Procopius' unpublished memoirs of Justinian and Theodora or the *Anecdota* published in the sixth century about the Roman Empire. Anecdotes can even be found in novels as an interval plot such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. The definition of the anecdote also differs from one culture to another: Igbo anecdotes are fictional, while English and French ones are rooted in the real and may function as folk tales which reflect their culture of origin with its values and idiosyncrasies. In relation to its oral aspect, Simpson explains the 'dialogic' aspect a good anecdote brings to a story (linking it to conversation), he also expands on what Silver calls in 'The Anecdote in Polite Conversation' 'human reality', (Nabokov qtd. in Silver, 243) which is created through conversation, as opposed to external or 'objective' reality which is impossible to grasp or put into words.

Historical circumstances

The most important historical events which documented Pieri's works include mass Italian immigration before World War One to escape dire conditions in 'mountain regions' (147). This was followed by the rise of Mussolini and fascism in 1922 and 1926, an extremist right-wing political party whose 'membership became a passport to work', (Gillman 148) while the persecution and murder of political opponents and Race Acts (1937) pushed more and more Italians to seek refuge in Britain. A strong anti-Italian feeling started to develop in the United Kingdom following Italy's declaration of war in April 1940. Mussolini's announcement and Churchill's answer to 'collar the lot!' led hundreds of Italians to be arrested on the same night: 'To the bewilderment of some of the police handling the affair, those arrested naturally included a large number of restaurant proprietors, café owners, chefs and waiters who formed the core of the Italian community in Britain' (Gillman, 154).

The main policy which had started these mass arrests and deportations was called 'Regulation 18B', an emergency legislation planned in case of war and made by a secret committee set up by the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1935, which was intended to arrest and intern 'disaffected (i.e. disloyal) persons of British nationality' as well as 'those of hostile origin or associations [...] in the interests of public safety or the Defence of the Realm'. This legislation led to the arrest, then internment or deportation, first of members of 'Il Fascio', then of 'Italians between 16 and 60' who had spent less than ten years in Britain — this was later indiscriminately extended to twenty years (Gillman 151). These forced detentions and displacements constitute part of what is considered by the 'Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the

Crime of Genocide' as war crimes intended to 'get rid' of a particular ethnic group, in this case Italians:

Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part... ('Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide' 2020)

Interestingly enough, the history book itself also uses anecdotes such as Ernani Landucci's, an Italian waiter who had a British-born daughter and who burst into tears when he was arrested as an 'enemy agent' as he explained that he only 'enrolled' in the Manchester branch of 'Il Fascio' to be able to own a piece of land in his native country, '[t]he account survives because the policeman involved was Robert Mark [...] who, in his autobiography, described the incident as one of the most formative of his career' (Gillman 154-5). This and other 'incidents' are going to climax into one of the most tragic consequence of this mass internment: the sinking of the *Arandora Star*.

The conditions of transportation and accommodation aboard the *Arandora Star* were so dire and precarious that they ironically contrasted with the original, peacetime purpose of the ship: a 'sybaritic' cruise-ship which used only to transport about 400 first-class, wealthy passengers to holiday dreamlands and shiny locations. With the advent of the war in 1940, the *Arandora* was painted grey and modified to suit its new wartime purposes: 'armed both fore and aft [...] (with a) 4.7. inch cannon [...] and her 12-pound anti-aircraft gun', in addition to 'barbed wire barricades on the promenade deck' (Gillman 189). It was now intended to transport war internees and prisoners of war of different nationalities. It was on the dawn of 1 July, to the north-west of Ireland, that Gunther Prien, a German naval officer, mistook the *Arandora* for a 'foe' and fired his U-47's last torpedo. The second ironical aspect of this event is that Prien did not know at the time that the boat he had sunk was carrying 500 of his fellow citizens, about one third of whom had lost their lives as a result: 'within thirty minutes the *Arandora Star* sank to the bottom of the sea, taking about 720 souls with her' (Pieri ch. 6). However, the highest mortality rate was among the Italians: 'two thirds of some 700', (Gillman 196) the most objective reason being the number of middle-aged and

elderly people who were 'used to comfortable existences' (Gillman 198) as opposed to German seamen and military officers of other nationalities. In *Isle of the Displaced*, Pieri and other 'enemy aliens' had been loaded on the *Ettrick* and the conditions were similar to those on the *Arandora*:

To the prisoners of the *Ettrick* the peril of our situation was only too apparent. Imprisoned as we were in the hold behind the fences of barbed wire, in the event of an emergency we would be caught in a trap and perish without the slightest hope of escape. I decided to stay as long as possible on the deck area as I had no desire to go back into the cramped and badly-lit hold [...] The soldiers on the other side of the wire seemed to have a friendly enough aspect, so I attempted a conversation with them [...] One of the soldiers hailed from Glasgow, knew our shop well and he promised me that on his return to Scotland he would get in touch with my parents with news of my whereabouts. Years later I was to learn that the soldier had indeed kept his promise, much to the relief of my parents. The news of the sinking of the *Arandora Star* with heavy internee casualties had been released in the UK to the consternation of every Italian family who thought that their relatives might have been on board that ship. (ch. 6)

I refer to 'objective' because the public had been greatly misinformed about the incident when, three days after, the British Press ruthlessly trashed Italian internees as the headlines of the *Daily Herald* and the *London Star* conspicuously reflected their prejudiced views: "'Aliens Fight Each Other in Wild Panic", "Internees" Panic Lost Many Lives.' The *Daily Express* added insult to injury by describing the Italians in the following terms: 'the whole mob of them thought of their own skins first. The scramble for the boats was sickening' (Gillman 196-7). Fortunately, an official memorandum and personal accounts of survivors later contradicted the press, all documented by Gillman's book which itself intends to dispel myths about this and other incidents hidden by official media during World War Two.

Pieri's anecdotes or how to 'translate knowing into telling'³

Being an internee allowed Pieri to meet an infinite variety of people and undergo both strange and ordinary experiences during the transits of his traumatic journey as an 'enemy alien', until he reached his final destination in Camp 'S', a microcosmic version of the world's diplomatic and foreign relationships: 'It was as if we had been forgotten by the outside world [...] we were there because of an accident of birth and because

of circumstances completely outwith our control [...] imprisoned by the society in which we had lived most, if not all, of our lives [...] home [...] was the very country that had put them behind barbed wire' (ch. 11, 16). But it was not all about fear and suffering as his autobiographical book also narrates his extremely well-organised everyday life in Camp 'S' on Île Sainte Hélène, near Montreal. The most striking feature of Pieri's anecdotes is that they constitute narrative acts of resistance to trauma and suffering through storytelling and humour, even in the worst of situations. In that regard, Marlene Kadar reimposes the importance of 'personal experience' to the autobiographical mode and deconstructs its opposition to historical fact:

What is important to note is that autobiographical practices do reference verifiable historical information, but they also work with personal experience and the rich character of personal responses to that experience. Thus, that which expresses more than what happened, that which helps us to understand what the particular event means to the subject, can be read as autobiographical. What is important is what it felt like, not exactly what it was like (243).

Pieri's perspective and reactions to the events he witnesses and narrates are reflected in his anecdotes. During their first traumatic night in the camp, Italian civilians had been mistaken for dangerous German prisoners of war and were ill-treated and beaten by the soldiers of the Canadian camp:

Even in such moments a sense of humour can show itself. Aldo Magris, headwaiter from Quaglino's famous London restaurant, sat massaging a painful spot on his ribs where a rifle butt had struck. In the area of the blow he discovered a long forgotten pocket, from which he surreptitiously extracted a packet of condoms. Glancing around carefully to be sure of escaping detection, he proceeded to blow one up, gave it a sharp tap, and the resulting balloon floated gently up into the warm night air. This was followed by two more, until Aldo was discovered and given a sore head as well. (Pieri ch. 8)

Another anecdote is about a dog named Bosco, the camp mascot, who defecated each time a piece of raw onion was placed on its nose. This odd habit was turned into a practical joke made at the expense of the captain of the camp during roll-call (Pieri, ch. 14). Other anecdotes belong to the tragic-comic mode such as the one about the internee whose leg was getting longer each day. Prisoners were joking about it but it ended up being amputated because, as it turned out to be a growing tumour, it had

been treated too late. However, Peter Pioli's circumstances as he was diagnosed with tuberculosis then submitted to a ruthless 'quarantine' in the 'bitter Canadian winter' has gloomier connotations and is referred to by Pieri as 'Kafkaesque' (Pieri, ch. 16).

Another anecdote I have chosen because of what I would like to call the poetry of sordidness, like Jaques Brel's song 'Au port d'Amsterdam'⁴ with its sailors who blow their noses in the stars and whose piss is likened to the singer's tears of despair at women's unfaithfulness:

Y a des marins qui boivent
 Et qui boivent et re-boivent
 Et qui re-boivent encore
 Ils boivent à la santé
 Des putains d'Amsterdam
 D'Hambourg ou d'ailleurs
 Enfin ils boivent aux dames

Qui leur donnent leurs jolis corps
 Qui leur donnent leurs vertus
 Pour une pièce en or
 Et quand ils ont bien bu
 Se plantent le nez au ciel
 Se mouchent dans les étoiles
 Et ils pissent comme je pleure
 Sur les femmes infidèles... (lyrics.com)

[There's mariners who drink
 and drink and drink again
 and drink again and again
 They drink to the health
 of Amsterdam's whores
 Hamburg's or elsewhere's
 Well, they drink to the ladies

Who give them their beautiful bodies
 Who give them their virtue
 for a golden coin
 And once they had enough to drink

Implant their nose in the sky
Blow it in the stars
And pee like I cry
Over unfaithful wives...] (my translation S. Z.)

The following anecdote describes a fit of epilepsy which causes a general state of surreal hysteria:

The minutes ticked by, the dust scuffed up by 400 pairs of feet hung low in the motionless air, and the humidity and heat seeming to become ever more oppressive. Suddenly there was a strangled shout from the middle of group 5 [...] A few seconds passed, and then, as though a giant scythe had been wielded amongst them, men began falling to the ground. Spreading out from Sangari's body like ripples in a pond, a mass fainting fit seized the camp, until a carpet of bodies lay on the ground. (Pieri ch. 16)

The similes of the 'giant scythe' and the 'ripples' as well as the metaphor of 'a carpet of bodies' are grippingly poignant and attract as much attention to the language used as to the story being told. Not only does Sangari's incident seem incredible in its contagiousness, but Pieri's poetic prowess also adds literariness and extraordinary beauty to an otherwise ordinary and squalid environment.

Functions and purposes of Pieri's anecdotes

Pieri's anecdotes have specific formal features which serve various thematic and structural functions: they are short, use dialogue and are always based in real-life situations. The fact that the internment camp is an all-male environment is also to be taken into consideration for the anecdote of and about other male internees can be studied as a masculine storytelling strategy⁴ which gives Pieri's life story shape and density.

The first and most important aspect of these anecdotes is their brevity and the aim to 'illustrate rather than to explain' (Strachey VIII), two crucial features which are discussed by Craig Howes in 'Biobits': 'The eternal impulse to record lives briefly has therefore grown stronger over the centuries as the media available for producing them have multiplied [...] the fragment, anecdote, vignette, or trace have significant roles to play in expanding the range of what we consider to be life writing' (4). Interestingly bringing the discussion back to Sigmund Freud and Lytton Strachey, whose role in

establishing the 'economical' aspect of biography cannot be overlooked, Howett provides an additional, more contemporary dimension to Samuel Johnson's contention about anecdotes as the future of literature.

In addition, Pieri's anecdotes are formally dynamic in that they are at once told by Pieri as a witness and by the prisoners within his stories to each other. Even after the end of the war, the former prisoners would meet and 'swap humorous stories'. This aspect provides a double framework as well as a dialogic aspect to the anecdotes: 'the item of history [...] dramatizes the act of telling and requires an act of interpretation [...] its narration both comprises and refracts the narration it reports' (Fineman qtd in Silver 245-46). In other words, the anecdote at once performs the act of witnessing a particular incident or reality and constructs it through narrative, besides therapeutically raising morale by telling or writing down these brief life stories: 'These tales, sometimes embellished, raised morale amongst the men. In our situation such little acts of defiance could be considered victories against our captors' (Pieri ch. 8).

In 'L'anecdote entre littérature et histoire: Une introduction', [The Anecdote between Literature and History; An Introduction] Gaël Rideau refers to the 'effet de rupture' (10) [break effect] in relation to anecdotes; those pauses during narration which animate the narrative with their final twist and poeticise the sordidness of the everyday of an interment camp (ch. 16). Pieri's anecdotes thus at once interrupt and continue his/tory, they interrupt the narrative but also fill in the blanks of British, Canadian and Italian History as they tell history from below: 'it becomes a complement, or, more precisely, a supplement of History, in rectifying sense' (14)⁵ and criticise the untold history of Italian and other internees and the reality of British and Canadian histories (ch. 16). Pieri himself jokes about it: 'The first casualty in war is indeed truth!' as he writes about 'the unjust arrest of Italians who had suddenly become enemy aliens' (18). Fineman expresses it as: 'the opening of history that [...] is traced out by the anecdote [...] the seductive opening of anecdotal form' (Fineman, qtd. in Silver). Fineman also calls it the "'hole" in the "whole" of historical narrative', a notion also highlighted as 'gap' and 'bridge' (that is 'plugged up by a teleological narration') between the present and the past by Silver (246). The latter also uses the traumatic words of 'puncture' and 'wound' (Fineman qtd. in Silver, 246), even Jane Gallop uses a similar terminology of 'fissures' and prying open in relation to anecdotal theory, 'troubling (disturbing a story) to advance' as a narrative strategy. This is reminiscent of female saints' anecdotes of psychosomatic ecstasies as Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux is wounded by the 'shaft of fire' and she/her text is inflamed by devout passion in Vita Sackville-West's *The Eagle and the Dove*. There is inevitably a move towards the psychoanalytic and the notion of 'touch of the real' in relation to the impossibility of representing the

real in discourse: 'words can only gather up the traces that the real has left' (Silver 247) and Lacan resorts to anecdotes when theory, language and reality fail him.

In her article 'The Devouring: Traces of Roma in the Holocaust: No Tattoo, Sterilized Body, Gypsy Girl', Kadar refers to the undocumented auto/biographies of Roma minorities as 'traces or fragments of autobiographical telling' and goes as far as to suggest that these be acknowledged as 'member-genres in the taxonomy of auto/biographical practices', '[t]he power of the fragment or trace is undeniable' (223, 225). Kadar's article interestingly combines the retrieval of 'lost histories' (224) with a refurbished focus on witnessing as part of trauma studies and a more inclusive life writing theory.

There is undeniably a morality behind Pieri's anecdotes. Indeed, the latter tend to mock and expose the cruelty of their captors and the harsh, inhuman conditions before and during their internment, 'the awful Warth Mills, the fear and danger on the *Ettrick*, the brutality of the first night on the island, and the crushing, soul-destroying uncertainty and boredom of life un the camp' (Pieri, chp. 23). But the most shocking was the betrayal of the British government which had let them down as good, honest hard-working citizens and imprisoned them physically and morally behind the barbed wires of war expediency. The consequences of this war alienation perdured well beyond internment as, once freed, Pieri recounts his difficulties in reintegrating British and Scottish society:

For the first time in three years I was not under some form of military constraint or other [...] I could feel anxiety and apprehension well up inside me [...] Sudden release from captivity can be almost as traumatic as the shock of arrest. The suddenness of my imprisonment had cut me off without warning from my family and friends [...] As a prisoner, the routine duties of having to earn a living and making a way for myself in life had stopped [...] Existence was merely a long round of killing time and waiting for an uncertain future [...] I had become effectively de-personalised. With my release, the tensely wound psychological spring which had enabled me to come to terms with my captivity [...] seemed to have suddenly unwound [...] I looked around [...] These were the people who for the last three years had looked upon me as a dangerous enemy. (chp. 22)

Pieri's criticism is sometimes disguised behind the entertaining and the comic, behind this tragic-comic constant. However, in the final chapters of the book, the autobiographical 'I' releases a bitterness which directs the reader's attention towards the ul-

terior motives of Pieri's anecdotes: rebellion and revision, particularly, to use Strachey's words, by 'illustrating' specimens of British injustices and Scots-Italian narrative acts of resilience.

Conclusion

At the end of his memoirs, Pieri tells of the fate of each of his real-life 'characters' after the end of the war, then he substantiates his anecdotes with photographs of the internees who had shared his fate in Camp S/43:

For many years after the war I kept in touch with many of the friends made on Ile Sainte Hélène. Pasquale Nardo, the little Sicilian [...] went North to Naples, where he built up a thriving fruit exporting business [...] Captain Bonorino [...] retired to his little village high on the hills overlooking Genoa [...] many an exquisite glass we drank whilst exchanging tales of Camp 43. It is a curious aspect of human psychology that very often the mind tends to ignore the negative aspects of past experiences and in reminiscing dwells only on the more pleasant ones. The stories swapped in any gathering of the old prisoners seemed to deal with the humorous aspects of life there. The antics of the sailor Baldino in front of the cinema screen, the exploits of Gerry Capaldi, the preening and vanity of Moramarco, the nostalgic songs sung in the compound in the warm summer evenings... (ch. 23)

As a type of life writing, and in spite of being 'fragments' or 'traces' of the truth, anecdotes constitute an integral part of Pieri's autobiographical narrative impulse as they enliven the narrative by providing a third dimension to the characters of his stories, as if in a conversation with the reader. These characteristics establish the anecdote as a life writing and literary genre which effects a successful move from the oral to the written form and whose brevity and efficiency continually contribute to its perennial nature.

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Notes

¹ Give out: emit, make public or announce, distribute, expressed easily or unrestrainedly

² Similarly to the effect of the real which will be discussed in the final part of this article.

³ Hayden 5.

⁴ I have discussed aspects of his masculine autobiographical strategies in 'Real Men Mark their Territory', an article published in the *European Journal of Life Writing*.

⁵ Brecht's song is described by Chris Tinker as a 'pastiche of a traditional sea shanty which bathes in the dirt, decay, seediness, poverty and crime of the Dutch city' as well as 'a wilfully romanticised populist vision of street life' (42-43)