

***Ti-Koyo and His Shark.***  
**Human-Animal Brotherhood from Clement Richer to Italo Calvino and Folco Quilici**

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**Abstract**



*Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* [*Ti-Coyo and His Shark*] is a 1962 film by Italian film director and screenwriter Folco Quilici. Based on a novel by the Martinican writer Clement Richer entitled *Ti-Coyo et son requin* (*Ti-Coyo and his [White] Shark*, 1941) but adapted for cinema by Italo Calvino (who wrote an actual short story on the subject, "Fratello pescecane" [Brother Shark]), Quilici's film features the fraternal relationship between a boy and his beloved pet shark. This article investigates both the making of *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* and the significance of the human-animal relationship it presents. It thus first explores Richer's novel in order to reveal how Calvino's and Quilici's versions have altered the original narrative as well as its postcolonial and post-pastoral meaning. It then examines how these transformations have affected the portrayal of the friendship between the human protagonist and the shark. The aim of this article is twofold. On the one hand, it argues that these three different versions of same story offer a perfect example of how contrasting representations of a similar environment might deeply affect both the cultural and the material relationships between human and non-human animals. On the other hand, it underlines how all of them also present a representation of an uncanny human-animal friendship capable of reminding us that we can actually love nature and its creatures for what they are.

*Keywords:* animal studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, literary animal studies.

**Resumen**

*Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* [*Ti-Coyo y su tiburón*] es una película de 1962 del director de cine y guionista italiano Folco Quilici. Basada en una novela del escritor martiniqués Clement Richer originalmente titulada *Ti-Coyo et son requin* (*Ti-Coyo y su [Blanco] Tiburón*, 1941) y adaptada para el cine por Italo Calvino (quien también escribió un cuento sobre el tema, "Fratello pescecane" ["Hermano tiburón"]), la película de Quilici cuenta la relación fraternal entre un niño y su amado tiburón. En este artículo se analiza tanto la realización cinematográfica de *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* como la importancia de la relación humano-animal que presenta. El artículo comienza examinando la novela de Richer con el fin de revelar cómo las versiones de Quilici y Calvino han cambiado tanto la narrativa original, como su significado poscolonial y post-pastoral. Después, se examina cómo estos cambios han afectado a la imagen de la amistad entre el protagonista humano y el tiburón. El objetivo de este artículo es doble. Por un lado, mostrar que estas tres versiones diferentes del mismo cuento ofrecen un ejemplo perfecto de cómo representaciones contrastantes de un ambiente similar pueden afectar profundamente a las relaciones culturales y materiales entre los animales no-humanos y los animales humanos. Por otra parte, subrayar cómo todas las versiones presentan también una representación de una inquietante amistad entre humanos y animales capaz de recordarnos que en realidad podemos amar a la naturaleza y a sus criaturas por lo que son.

*Palabras clave:* estudios de los animales, ecocrítica postcolonial, estudios literarios de los animales.

Sharks have a special place in the imagination of modern Western cultures: more than any other non-human animal, they seem to “inspire terror out of all proportion to their actual threat” (Crawford 7). Besides the four truly dangerous sharks—great whites, tiger sharks, bull sharks, and oceanic whitetips—there are in fact more than 500 species that do not represent any serious threat to humans. Rather, the opposite is true: some twenty percent of the world’s shark population is facing extinction due to human activity (115).<sup>1</sup>

As marine biologist Rick Aidan Martin has noticed, “more than any other event, the film *Jaws* revolutionized the public's conception of sharks” (1). Sharks had been depicted as malevolent forces even before Spielberg’s 1975 film, but *Jaws* was so successful in transforming all sharks into human-eating beasts that we cannot but fear and possibly desire to kill them with mindless violence.<sup>2</sup> As Dean Crawford has pointed out, it is no exaggeration to say that *Jaws* “launched a thousand ships [...] all of them gunning for great white sharks” (75). While such an eradicating enterprise is no longer as popular as it was in the immediate wake of the film, unfortunately it has been recently replaced by a massive and potentially even more dangerous hunt for their fins, primarily for culinary purposes (128).

*Jaws* gave also birth to what Crawford has called a more symbolic “shark-ploitation” (83), that is to say a lavish series of popular works, mainly films, in which sharks are depicted as mindless and emotionless monsters for human entertainment. For instance, the number of horror films produced after 1975 devoted to sharks exceeds by far that of more common predators,<sup>3</sup> and even television events supposedly developed to raise awareness and respect for sharks, such as the “Shark Week” run every summer by the Discovery Channel since 1988, testifies instead to this ominous popularity.

In such a charged material and cultural landscape, it is quite understandable that the sight of a shark fin emerging from the water almost automatically triggers the desire to kill, either out of fear or to profit monetarily. Cultural works capable of offering a different representation of sharks would thus be an invaluable tool not only for changing the common (mis)perception of shark species and possibly avoiding their eradication, but also for bringing Western audiences to a less

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough collection of data on sharks, current shark research, the shark fishery, and shark conservation, see also the website of the Florida Museum of Natural History (<https://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/Sharks/sharks.htm>).

<sup>2</sup> Aidan Martin was a marine biologist who devoted his life to sharks and the Director of the *ReefQuest Centre for Shark Research*. In this piece for the Centre’s website, entitled “JAWS Reconsidered,” he stresses however that the film also “ignited the imaginations and inspired the careers of a whole new generation of shark biologists,” including his own, and that “a whole constellation of dedicated shark research programs were begun or renewed” probably to counterbalance the negative representation of the shark in *Jaws* (Website).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Wikipedia page devoted to natural horror films, since 1975 sharks have been featured as protagonists in 58 horror films. Primates come second in this list (47 films, including those on the so-called Bigfoot) and dinosaurs third (circa 40). [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_natural\\_horror\\_films](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_natural_horror_films)]

exploitative or sensationalist understanding of the ocean as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Yet, these works are incredibly rare.

This essay explores one example of a potentially transformative depiction of sharks, as presented by *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* [Ti-Coyo and His Shark], a 1962 film by Italian film director and screenwriter Folco Quilici based on a novel by the Martinican writer Clement Richer originally entitled *Ti-Coyo et son requin* (“Ti-Coyo and his [White] Shark,” 1941). Adapted for cinema by Italo Calvino (who wrote an actual short story on the subject, “Fratello pescecane” [Brother Shark]), Quilici’s film features the fraternal relationship between a boy and his beloved pet shark. My goal is to investigate both the making of *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* and the significance of the human-animal relationship it presents. I will thus first explore Richer’s novel in order to reveal how Calvino’s and Quilici’s versions have altered the original narrative as well as its postcolonial and post-pastoral meaning. I will then examine how these transformations—from novel to script to film—have affected the portrayal of the friendship between the human protagonist and the shark.

My aim here is twofold. On the one hand, I will argue that these three different versions of the same story offer a perfect example of how contrasting representations of a similar environment might deeply affect both the cultural and the material relationships between human and non-human animals. Narratives such as Richer’s version of the story, which acknowledges our complex socio-political relationships with other humans as well as with the environment, tend in fact to reflect such complexity in their treatment of non-human animals. On the other hand, I will underline how all three versions offer a positive portrayal of an otherwise uncanny human-animal friendship. As such they manage to remind us that we can not only engage and eventually appreciate non-human creatures which greatly differ from us, but also love them for what they are and for the transformative power they might potentially have on our lives. In fact, the ethical value of literary and cinematic animals does not exclusively lie in their ability to trigger identification, as suggested for example by Martha Nussbaum and her followers (Copeland 94). Rather, the case of *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* displays how even literary animals which do not provoke an immediate sympathetic identification help deconstruct our often reductive assumptions about certain non-human creatures through narratives that establish mutually transformative connections between these creatures, humans, and their common habitat.

Clement Richer was born in 1914 in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique (Brooks 1), and throughout his writing career published several books

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<sup>4</sup> As Patricia Yaeger has noted, “the premises of the oceanic turn in literary studies is this: we have grown myopic about the role that seas and oceans play in creating ordinary histories and cultures” (524). This myopia is even more accentuated when we focus on sharks. If in recent years we have in fact seen few compelling studies devoted to the relationships between human cultures and identities, the ocean, and an increasing range of sea animals—from cetaceous (Steinwand, Bryld and Lykke, etc.) to jellyfish (Alaimo)—sharks have still been largely left out of the picture, despite their fundamental role within, for instance, Pacific Island cultures.

of fiction, almost all of which are now nearly forgotten.<sup>5</sup> However, he experienced his share of international fame when his second novel *Ti-Coyo et Son Requin* was first published in Paris in 1941, and then again in 1951 in its English translation which “surprised and delighted American readers” (Cook 36).

*Ti-Coyo et Son Requin* is the story of the successful relationship between a boy and a shark, and it has been described as “a work of fantasy [...], humorous and lighthearted” (Jack 109). Yet, the subtitle of the 1951 American version, “an immoral fable,” better describes the tangle of contradictory elements that characterize this work, which is part children’s literature, part postcolonial and ecocritical pastoral. As a fable, it playfully portrays how the young and resourceful Ti-Coyo finds, raises, and welcomes a shark into his family. As a postcolonial post-pastoral (Gifford 146; Huggan and Tiffin 83), *Ti-Coyo and His Shark* not only introduces racial allusions, beginning with Ti-Coyo’s problematic mixed-race status,<sup>6</sup> but it is also worth noting that the island where the story unfolds has nothing of the pastoral idea of a tourist snapshot (Huggan and Tiffin 111). Rather, Ti-Coyo’s Martinique is a place where nature and society coexist often in uncanny, enchanting, and violent ways.

Let us first examine the relationship between the boy and the shark. Ti-Coyo rescues the baby shark in order to terrorize the divers who gather coins thrown from tourist ships docked in Saint-Pierre’s harbor, with the intent to monopolize the coin-diving enterprise himself. His endeavor is successful as the shark Manidou devours several coin-divers and other local fishermen, helping the boy both to become one of the most prosperous inhabitants of the island and scandalously to marry the daughter of a white, outraged landlord. Yet, in spite of the violence embedded in Ti-Coyo’s initial reasons for raising the shark, the relationship between the boy and the animal is increasingly described in terms of brotherhood and mutual, almost exclusive, understanding. For instance, when the fishermen decide to capture and kill the shark, the boy claims that Manidou “was his very life; his best and only friend,” and he would therefore never allow anyone to harm it (Richer, *Ti-Coyo and his Shark* 64-65). So, when the shark is indeed captured, Ti-Coyo puts his life at risk to free the animal from its wire caged. Nonetheless, what is most surprising here is not the boy’s feelings toward the shark, but rather that Richer acknowledges the animal’s affection as well. While Ti-Coyo lies in bed, severely injured from saving the shark, Manidou does not leave

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<sup>5</sup> The current state of Richer criticism is apparent from the almost complete lack of monographic studies of his work. The most compelling and informative studies are still an article by Mercer Cook published in *The French Review* in 1953 and a Master’s thesis by Elizabeth Brooks defended at Howard University in the same year, from which I acquired most of Richer’s biographical information. I want to thank Joellen ElBashir, Chief Librarian and Curator at Howard University, for kindly providing me with a copy of Brooks’s work.

<sup>6</sup> On Ti-Coyo’s *métissage* and his figure within Francophone Caribbean literary tradition of *récit d’enfance*, see the brief analysis of the novel in Hardwick 29-30. For a general analysis of “class-color hierarchy” specifically in Martinican writing, see instead Haigh 5ff, although in this volume Clement Richer is surprisingly not mentioned.

the big open tank built near the boy's house, instead remaining there for five whole days without eating. The shark's mysterious behavior is understood only by Ti-Coyo, who, once informed of Manidou's conduct, realizes that "the shark is dying from not seeing me anymore [...] just as I wanted to die when I thought his end had come" (81). Consequently, he decides to leave his bed and, as Richer writes,

the most extraordinary thing happened! Scarcely Ti-Coyo opened his mouth when the shark twisted about as though it had been stung by the sharp point of a harpoon, leaped over the rim of the tank, and fell on the paving stones, where it lay on its side, breathing with difficulty. [...] Ti-Coyo had no thought of running away. He had tottered across the few steps that lay between him and the shark, dropped to his knees, and was now passing his burning hands over the rough back and smooth white belly of the monster. [...] And all this while the monster's eyes—narrow of a strange, unusual green—were fixed on the boy and followed each of his movements. (83)

Although the shark is still described as a potential human-eater, the overall scene suggests love and affection. If the contrast between the powerful size of the shark and its devotion to the boy cannot but recall Yu-Fu Tuan's foundational text on the making of pets, here Clement does not describe a relation of inequality, but rather the encounter between "two sovereign individuals" (Tuan 163).<sup>7</sup> By venturing out of his element in order to meet the boy in his human territory, the shark in fact reveals his own will and agency. Ti-Coyo grasps perfectly the importance of Manidou's behavior and, despite the fever, dives into the tank, not only to save his friend from dying but also to reciprocate the risk: as the shark has left the comfort of his habitat for the boy, so the boy is willing to embrace the watery world of the shark in spite of his illness. In this exchange, both the human and animal cross their own supposed habitat boundaries so that their emotional encounter happens in a state of limitrophy. Here, not only are both lives at stake but the human also acknowledges that the animal is actually looking at him; for readers as well the shark is no longer a passive object of observation or exploitation.<sup>8</sup>

Gaze and agency credited to the shark come as no surprise within the post-pastoral context of Richer's novel. What Elizabeth Brooks has called Richer's "method of personification" (20) is actually the literary method of attributing agency to the material world, often even beyond animated beings. For instance, *Ti-Coyo and His Shark* describes both Nature's felicitous thoughts at Ti-Coyo's wedding, and how Mount Pelée's eruption and destruction of a nearby city was the intentional result of the volcano's capricious feelings (175-176; 178-180). This non-human agency is at times used to humorous effect, but it also displays Richer's deep interest in the natural, non-human world as a subject in itself. As he wrote in a letter to Elizabeth Brooks, Richard was actually more interested in stories

<sup>7</sup> On the ambiguous interplay of dominance and affection in "the making of pets" see also the more recent volume edited by Paul, Podberscek, and Serpell cited in the bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> On physical limitrophy between human and non-human creatures at sea and the animal gaze, see respectively the two contributions by Stacy Alaimo and Jacques Derrida cited in the bibliography.

depicting animals and elements rather than human feelings: he explicitly states that he loved sharks more than the idiocy of humanity (Appendix 1: iv<sup>9</sup>). Yet, this almost hyperbolic love for nature led Richer to hide neither its violent, disturbing manifestations, nor its ties with human communities. Rather, from Manidou's attacks to Mount Pelée's historical eruption in 1902, Richer animatedly describes the predatory or destructive (or indeed "immoral") aspects of the natural world, as well as the relationships between these aspects and social power. For instance, both episodes trigger the reversal of the usual hierarchy and the rise of a social mixed-race pariah, *Ti-Coyo*, first above the community of black fishermen and later the white settler. In this way, Richer builds a postcolonial narrative that "refuse[s] to depict the natural world in terms that erase the relationship between landscape and power" (DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley 4), and thus offers an image of his island that is at the same time enchanting and dangerous, "a totality and an otherness that nevertheless cannot be possessed" (8). The result is a cruel, amusing fable in which humans, animals, and the whole environment interact in ways which remind us that the supposed Caribbean paradise belongs to a political, material sphere where human and non-human agencies may clash and collaborate sometimes in unexpected, uncanny and transformative ways.

Maybe Calvino's Caribbean birthplace (Cuba) was the reason why Quilici asked him to adapt Richer's novel into a film script. Or perhaps it was the similarities between the fabulous atmospheres of Calvino's early works that convinced the film director to pursue the writer's collaboration.<sup>10</sup> In any case, Calvino accepted Quilici's invitation and likely read the only available Italian translation of Richer's novel, published by Longanesi in 1957 with its original title (Caputi 48; Ballardini 43). The outcome was a script entitled "Fratello pescecane" (Brother Shark), which was only partially published as a short-story in the cultural magazine *ABC* in 1962, but with a different designation, "Tikò e il pescecane," and with some minor discrepancies.<sup>11</sup>

As Mario Barenghi has pointed out, the version published in *ABC* claims to be directly inspired by *Ti-Coyo e il suo pescecane*, but Calvino actually seems to treat Richer's novel only as a general suggestion for his own account (Calvino 1267), keeping the central theme of the friendship between a boy and a shark but ignoring the postcolonial complexity of the original story. For instance, he changes

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<sup>9</sup> Specifically, Richer writes that he only loves "que les ouvrages où il est question de la nature, des éléments, et des animaux, et je déteste ceux qui parlent des hommes, de leurs sentiments raffinés." He also states that he prefers sharks over humans, because they are less idiotic ("J'aime mieux les requins. Ils sont moins idiots;" Brooks Appendix 1: iv).

<sup>10</sup> Quilici states that Calvino's script "s'innesta nella tradizione fiabesca e fantastica di Calvino, come un Barone rampante del mare (così fra noi si diceva, scherzando, durante i mesi dell'inverno 1959-1960 quando si stendeva il *treatment* del film" (Richer, *Ti-Coyo e il suo pescecane*, 1990 169)

<sup>11</sup> This 1962 version is the one in Calvino's "Meridiani" and is just the first third of the whole script (587-602; 1267). The entire story, in three parts ("L'infanzia;" "La giovinezza;" "L'amore"), was published as such only in 2000 by Caputi 177-216. However, in the "Meridiani," the editor added some notes on the characters written by Calvino on the original typescript (602-602; 1268) that are not present in Caputi's book.

the location from Martinique to a generic Pacific island in the Sulu archipelago, where, according to the script, “the idyllic atmosphere of primitive life seems to have been preserved” (Caputi 179). In his afterward to a new edition of Richer’s *Ti-Coyo* published by Einaudi in 1990, Quilici maintains that this shift in the story’s setting was his own idea, because in Polynesia “kids *truly* play with sharks” (Richer, *Ti-Coyo e il suo pescecane* 169<sup>12</sup>), and Calvino simply agreed. However, such geographical nonchalance is already displayed on the inside back cover of the Longanesi edition, where Saint-Pierre is mistaken as an island in itself. Strangely, such a mistake is replicated even in the Einaudi edition more than thirty years later, and might suggest a lack of postcolonial awareness that, as we will see, seems to characterize Quilici’s work as well.

A second interesting alteration lies instead in the name of the protagonist, which is changed to “Titokumi detto Tikò” [known as Tikò], thus losing the original connection with Ti-Coyo’s father, the humpbacked sorcerer Cocoyo (Ti-Coyo was the abbreviation of “Petit Cocoyo”). Actually, Calvino’s protagonist completely loses his original parents as they were presented in Richer’s novel and therefore also his mixed ethnic and racial origin, acquiring instead a generic status of “indigenous boy,” seemingly orphaned but with eleven older siblings, all fishermen. A similar destiny awaits Ti-Coyo’s lover Diana, who in Calvino’s account is neither white nor lives permanently on the island, but is rather the daughter of a Chinese businessman who runs a modern fishing business.

Such changes in location and genealogy also affect the relationship between Tikò and the shark. Rather than initially inspired by greed as in Richer’s novel, here their friendship is framed by the solitude of the boy, who is not allowed to fish yet, and a fabulous speech by the bar owner Cocoyo. Disappointed by his brothers’ lack of trust in him, Tikò encounters Cocoyo on the shore. The bar owner tells him that as a child his own brothers did not allow him to go fishing with them either. He thus learned how to talk with fish and can now teach the boy as well. Obviously, the possibility of talking to fish intrigues Tikò, but he should not be too surprised, because—as Cocoyo continues: “A long time ago, humans and fish were friends... And talked to each other. Humans spoke and the fish replied... But humans have forgotten the language they used to speak with the fish” (Caputi 180).<sup>13</sup>

Thus when the boy finds the shark, he rescues it not out of self-interest, as in Richer’s novel: he actually considers diving for the coins thrown by tourists degrading (182). Rather, Tikò expresses respect for non-human animals even before meeting the shark, saving the lives of several fishes captured for fun by other boys (184). Moreover, he is fascinated by their beauty, in spite of the harsh admonishment of his oldest brother that “fishes are neither beautiful nor ugly:

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<sup>12</sup> The emphasis is in the original. All the translations from Italian to English are mine, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>13</sup> “Devi sapere che tanto tempo fa, gli uomini e i pesci erano amici... E si parlavano... Gli uomini parlavano e i pesci rispondevano... Ma gli uomini hanno dimenticato la lingua con cui parlavano ai pesci.”

they are fish that we can catch or fish that can catch us” (186). Given such premises, Calvino does not waste too much energy explaining how the unusual friendship between the boy and the shark develops either, simply maintaining that “Tikò feeds [the shark] and in this way the friendship between the boy and the shark is born” (186). From the very beginning Tikò thus addresses the shark as “another one of my brothers” and the animal not only seems to understand him, but one day Manidu actually winks back at the boy, establishing a signal of mutual recognition that will play an important role later in the story. Yet, this first stage of their relationship does not last long and the end of Tikò’s childhood (as well as of the first part of Calvino’s account) is marked by the shark’s mysterious disappearance, apparently forever (190).

Although Calvino informs us that eight or nine years have passed, Manidu actually reappears relatively soon in the story. Many things have changed on the island, including the transformation of almost all the fishermen into workers for the big fish company “Chang Fishing Export & Co.” (191). Even the shark has developed and now is a menacing adult. However, it has not forgotten Tikò, who immediately recognizes his old friend from its winking and tail-wagging “as a dog” (192). This is one of the most striking features of Calvino’s Manidu: probably playing on the Italian name of the animal (*pescecane*: fish-dog), the shark is increasingly treated by his human friend as something in between a hunting dog (“cane da battuta;” 198) and a puppy (“cagnolino;” 207). Although later in the story Tikò explicitly claims that he does not control anything, because domestication is against nature (214), throughout the story the shark actually becomes increasingly a kind of pet, enormous and potentially dangerous, but also controlled and tamed. Differently from the novel, where Ti-Coyo is constantly concerned about Manidou’s possible attacks on his family, in Calvino’s story the shark seems to have learned that it must obey his human master and harms neither Cocoyo (194), nor Diana, who can freely swim with the animal. Nonetheless, the shark’s partial domestication does not stop the fishermen who work for the fish industry for planning a trap, and Tikò has to rescue his friend, who then lovingly pushes his unconscious human master to the shore. Here, he is cared for by Diana and Cocoyo, while the shark waits, indeed as a good dog, in the water under Cocoyo’s bar (209-212).

While in Richer’s account Ti-Coyo’s sickness and consequent meeting with the waiting shark transform their relationship as well as readers’ recognition of the animal, here nothing truly alters either their friendship or our comprehension of the animal’s agency. Actually, Calvino uses Tikò’s sickness and rehabilitation only to establish a pause in the main narrative, while the history of the island proceeds and Tikò’s brothers surrender to the enticements of the fish industry. An important ideological feature of “Fratello pescecane” is thus revealed while Tikò lies in bed, as an exchange between the new owner of the fish industry (and Diana’s brother), Jeff, and Cocoyo. The former is sad because “progress” has

arrived on the island and (almost) everybody has embraced it, but he does not see happiness around him:

- I am not like my father. I do not know what to regret. What did we lose? Do you know, Cocoyo?
- Well... Some people say that once upon a time there was more harmony in the world...
- Animals have always torn each other to pieces....
- But there is one who is capable of being friends even with sharks. (213)<sup>14</sup>

Needless to say, the one who stands aside and refuses the almost inexorable progress is Tikò, who, as Cocoyo says, is made of the same stuff as volcanos and therefore gets along with sea monsters (213). It is in fact Tikò's difference that matters, and his friendship with the shark is relevant only for its allegorical meaning: as the 1962 introductory note of "Fratello pescecane" states, in the relationship with the animal Tikò actually "finds the reasons to remain faithful to his true nature of islander" (Calvino 1297). The shark is thus significant as long as it embodies a kind of nostalgia for a utopian harmony that only Tikò is capable of preserving for himself and, in a moment of danger, also for his community who eventually embraces the idea that animals do not make mistakes (215). When in fact a huge volcanic tsunami is about to hit the island, Manidu leads his human friend and the other islanders to a peaceful spot in the middle of the ocean, where all the animals have already gathered in order to survive the cataclysm. As in a beautiful utopia and in spite of Tikò's final departure, Calvino's story culminates with an image of salvation where animals do not actually eat each other and even "enemies are at peace" (215).

Such a utopian ending clearly does not preserve any of the "immoral" features of Richer's story. Actually, all of Calvino's changes to the original tale seem to emphasize the benign aspects of the friendship between the boy and the shark in order to obliterate the tensions embedded in their "brotherhood." Instead of the potentially transformative but socially disturbing interspecific relationship depicted by Clement Richer, only a generic contrast between a mythical, extra-historical innocence—embodied by Tikò and Manidou—and a present ruined by progress and modernity is accentuated here. Yet, Calvino's imagination cannot endure such dichotomy, and even the greedy desire for modernization expressed by the other islanders is eventually redeemed by the shark, whose rather anthropomorphic generosity allows the European writer to keep his dreams of paradisiacal harmony intact.

Quilici's 1962 film, *Ti-koyo e il suo pescecane*, belongs to a tetralogy devoted to the Southern Seas (Ballardini 246; Caputi 45). The title of the first movie of this series, *Ultimo Paradiso* (Last Paradise; 1956), offers a clue to Quilici's intentions: to describe a detached, enchanted reality before it potentially disappears. The four

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<sup>14</sup> "Io non sono come mio padre. Io non so cosa rimpiangere. Che cosa si è perduto? Tu lo sai, Cocoyo? – Mah... C'è chi dice che un tempo al mondo c'era più armonia... – Gli animali si sono sempre sbranati tra di loro... – Ma c'è chi riesce ad essere amico anche dei pescecani."

films thus share a fascinating tangle of environmentalist, ethnographic, and entertaining attitudes, where documentary and fiction, representation and simulation, often overlap in order to describe a marvelous environment alien to the audience, as was customary in contemporary wildlife filmmaking (Bousé 13). Probably influenced by Jacques Cousteau's innovative underwater films, Quilici's earliest work displays a quasi-scientific approach toward the natural world mixed with a more adventurous side. For instance, *Sesto Continente* (1954) includes several scenes of underwater fishing, described as a sportsmanship practice that involves titanic fights between humans and dangerous animals, including sharks (Caputi 34-45; Quilici 5-17; on Cousteau, see Chris 41-42). In the tetralogy Quilici focuses less on documenting either the scientific enterprise or the targeted location and more on specific characters, according to his idea that real places must be described through characters (Caputi 42). This also means shifting toward a more ethnographic perspective, according to which not only must descriptions of nature always be deeply permeated by the presence of humans, but also all the natural elements acquire meaning only because they are parts of an environment with which humans interact (18).

*Ti-Koyo* aptly fits such description. As Quilici writes in his 1966 diary entitled *Giramare*, the location for *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* (the Tuamotu atolls in French Polynesia) was picked because, as noted above, on those islands he had actually seen children playing with small sharks (Quilici 112). He therefore knew that on those islands one could find "all the human material, and those landscapes, and that underwater nature, and those unexpected inspirations" (103) which would allow him to make a good cinematic product. The choice of the Polynesian islands helped Quilici not only transform Richer's fable into what he called a "magic film [...] hanging between the reality of images and the fantasy of the subject" (163), but also depict what he considered an almost completely isolated universe capable of eliminating any ties with the rest of the world (165). According to Quilici, it is such paradisiacal isolation that actually makes possible the friendship between a man and a shark and thus a perfect location for his film (165).

Given the anthropic quality of Quilici's interests, it is unsurprising that the first scene of the movie shows human activity taking place in a natural setting, namely, a group of Polynesian fishermen hunting a shark. Immediately afterward the dead fish is shown hanging from a tree, a proper fishing trophy toward which the camera zooms: quite surprisingly, *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* begins with a close-up image of a dead shark.

This camera work is obviously one of the features that belong neither to Richer's novel nor to Calvino's script, and is therefore unique to the film. As Lawrence Venuti and other adaptation scholars have pointed out, a film adaptation belongs to a larger intersemiotic recontextualization (Venuti 28-30), which includes both the material act of filming and the various issues that such activity

might involve. In *Ti-Koyo's* case, the material environment of the film location and its cultural practice, as well as the inevitable involvement of some non-human "actors," influenced the final product.

As for the former, the change of location (from Richer's Martinique) is for the film as crucial as it was for Calvino's script. Quilici actually decided to incorporate into his story specific elements of the local Polynesian culture, such as the practice of hanging sharks on trees or a scene where boys cruelly play with fish for the enjoyment of tourists: an element also present in Calvino's script but that was the director's direct suggestion. In the context of the film, this scene is clearly meant to display Ti-Koyo's disgust for such games and thus his love for animals. However, it is also a real practice of Polynesian children who, according to Quilici, recognize in this game the difficulty of their own life and the continuous fight with the Ocean, capable of "hardening the natural sweetness of the Polynesian people" (Quilici 128). Even beyond the idealization of Polynesian people exposed by this comment, Quilici seems in his work both to denounce how such cruel practice is triggered by tourism and to forget that he and his desire for filming possibly constituted a trigger as well, if we reasonably assume that he asked the children to reproduce such a game for the sake of his own camera. As Alexander Wilson writes about what he calls "social anthropology movies," Quilici's project appears thus to be marred by an attempt at realism that erases the presence of the observer or, in his case, of the filmmaker (148-149). As a consequence, *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* can also be quite "conservative—and mistaken—in [its] understanding of aboriginal cultures as static and unchanging and thus doomed in a modern industrial world" (149). We will return to this point shortly.

As for the latter, Quilici acknowledges the difficulties of working with human and non-human animals together. For instance, he recounts that Calvino's idea of the shark winking back at the boy led him to initially consider a mechanical fish (Ballardini 69-72). When it became obvious that the machine was not apt for the task, a member of the crew decided to take a living shark from the surrounding sea and splash its eyes with beer, wine, and finally fresh water to successfully make it wink. Quilici was allegedly not informed of the practice at the time of its occurrence, because probably he would have not allowed it. However, he commented afterward that he was not so sorry that a shark was tortured in order to obtain the "winking effect," because sharks do not actually elicit compassion (72). This ambivalence toward sharks persists throughout the whole making of the film, and it can be extended toward any animal used as an "actor." Some of these unwilling "actors" were in fact released back into the wild, but often they died as a consequence of the captivity and without much regret by the film crew (Quilici 135-140).

There is, however, a third aspect of the material reality of producing the film that radically influenced the final outcome and made it very different from both Richer's and Calvino's versions. According to Ilaria Caputi, after having read

Richer's novel Quilici fell in love with the idea of the friendship between a boy and a shark, but he did not like the "violent and manipulating" behavior of the "original" Ti-Koyo (48). He therefore decided to ask Calvino to modify the plot. Yet, initially Quilici did not approve of the overall kind-hearted tone ("spirito bonario;" Caputi 48) of Calvino's script either, and actually intended to give the story a sad ending: the shark is killed by Diana and Ti-Koyo leaves his island alone and in despair (49). In Quilici's mind, the shark Manidu represented less a real animal than the idea of uncontaminated nature (49), and therefore such an ending would have been allegorical, signifying the ending of the friendship between humans and nature and therefore the destruction wrought upon the Polynesian lifestyle by tourism and economic progress. The producer of the film, Goffredo Lombardo, ruled against such a conclusion, claiming that it would not have been good for the American market, and Quilici was thus forced to create a spurious happy ending (50). In this conclusive version, Ti-Koyo leaves his island because he realizes that the old world he knew has disappeared forever, and he cannot adapt to the new one. Most importantly, though, not only does Diana unexpectedly join the boy in his departure, but the shark becomes a "witness" to their happy, although unofficial, marriage, also performing the function of keeping a good watch ("fare la guardia") over their still undiscovered but somehow promised new paradise.

Despite Quilici's regrets about the producer's intrusion, this happy ending actually fits better within the overall narrative of the film. As Caputi has pointed out, *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* is a "gentle fable" (50) that retains nothing of the raw and dark humor of Richer's story. Instead, Quilici builds a narrative that mixes together a unique friendship between a boy and a shark, a rather overly sentimental love story, and a melancholic farewell to what he believed was a culture at the edge of extinction, namely the Polynesian culture of the islands. These three elements are all gathered in the figure of Ti-Koyo, who in Quilici's movie is not the capriciously cunning boy of Richer's novel, but a consistent embodiment of purity. This is the reason why, in one of the last and most revealing scenes of the film, the director of the fishing business claims that he vainly tried to convince Ti-Koyo to join his business because he wanted to show everybody that the boy's purity and fidelity to nature can be overcome by the wealth brought by technological progress. For the Chinese businessman, Ti-Koyo behaves in fact as "a savage, a fish, a seagull." Namely, he is hardly human, and winning over him would almost mean taming nature. Yet, it is precisely Ti-Koyo's almost primitive ability to bring together human and non-human, sky and sea, that allows him to remind everybody of "something that unfortunately we are forgetting," as Diana passionately replies to his brother at the end of the scene.

Unfortunately, the invincible purity and connection to nature which make Ti-Koyo such a likable figure are also his cinematographic weaknesses. There is in fact a didactic, too expository aspect in his character as represented by Quilici, a feature that can also be extended to his whole interaction with the shark. Take for

instance the rather absurd “winking” between the two, an element allegedly introduced by Calvino in his script. This “winking” acquires a different reality in the film, mostly because in the movie the camera repeatedly zooms in on the shark’s eye and rests on it for few, long seconds. As Jonathan Burt reminds us, this cinematographic focus on the animal’s eye is neither unique nor original, and characterizes for example not only John Huston’s 1956 *Moby Dick*, but also a movie Quilici himself helped film after his experience on *Ti-Koyo*, that is to say *Orca – The Killer Whale* (Burt 64-71; Ballardini 75-76). Whether or not Quilici borrowed the idea from Huston, in the context of his 1962 film the repeated image of the shark’s eye is less a signifier of Manidu’s gaze and independent agency, and more a symbolic reminder of the animal’s affection for Ti-Koyo and their supposed mutual understanding. Moreover, as Stephen Rust has pointed out about wildlife filming in general, cinematic texts differ from literature because they “claim to represent the world as it actually existed at the time of filming” (227). *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* is presented both as a fictional, symbolic story *and* as a document of an existing reality. As observers of such reality, we are therefore not only asked to believe that a shark can and does wink (while we now know that that effect was cruelly elicited) but also, and most importantly, we become witness to a world that is proposed as “real” but is instead allegorical. The final outcome is thus infused with both a “deep ecological conscience” (Caputi 95) and an idealistic (if not simply conservative) binary ideology, according to which the noble savage Ti-Koyo is on the side of nature, as testified by his friendship with his well-behaved pet-shark Manidu, and Western progress and its destructively technological modernity are on the other.

Undoubtedly, an exploration of both the Italian reception of Richer’s novel (how it was explicitly classified as children’s literature, for example) and the function of *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* within Italy’s cultural landscape in the early 1960s would be essential for a better understanding of Ti-Koyo’s story. A lengthier analysis of Calvino’s and Quilici’s other collaborations—such as in the documentary devoted to the Italian region *Liguria* (1973)—would be useful as well. However, even within the limited space of this article, we have enough elements to draw some conclusions.

We have for instance seen how the change of location from Martinique to Polynesia is crucial to the story and therefore to the human-animal relationship it depicts. Although Richer wrote his novel in Paris, Martinique was still his homeland, and we may assume that *Ti-Coyo et son requin* borrows at least a few elements from his childhood on the island. For both Calvino and Quilici the Polynesian archipelago is instead something foreign and exotic: regardless of the number of times they might have traveled to those islands, they remain white, European intellectuals depicting a reality to which they did not belong. This difference obviously marks their narratives and in particular their relationship with the respective postcolonial environments. It is no coincidence that Calvino

and Quilici erase from their versions the complex postcolonial components present in Richer's narrative, leaving only a negative but quite vague reference to Western tourism and technological progress as the forces opposing "a balanced relationship with nature" (Caputi 95). As a consequence and in spite of their own best intentions, the two Italian authors "orientalize" the story and its environment, creating a dichotomy between the supposed previous harmony and purity of the Polynesian paradise, as embodied by Ti-Koyo and his relationship with the shark, and the evil but inevitable force of history, represented by both the Chinese owner of the fishing business and the American tourists. In so doing they unwillingly replicate the tendency of a certain environmentalism to rely on the "old insular paradigm," that is to say the nostalgia for a prefabricated natural harmony which should (but somehow cannot) be restored (Garrard 21). In particular, Quilici's film risks being something similar to what Cynthia Chris—borrowing from Foucault and referring to wildlife films in general—calls "heterotopic spaces," that is to say places that "through their collection of normally unrelated objects, life forms, or representations expose visitors to worlds beyond their own reach" (xi). As she points out, the images presented by both wildlife films and their more ethnographic equivalents depict (human and non-human) animals and their habitats as both "real" and "absolutely different" from themselves, because they are constructed following specific conventions of representation (including "the economics of the film and television industries") which are instead accurately expunged from the final product (xii). As the scene of the Polynesian boys cruelly playing with fishes exemplifies, Quilici's *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* can be seen as such a space and therefore presents a painful and probably unforeseen paradox: it denounces Western technological progress as a force of destruction while employing it in order to depict the reality it wants to save. A similar paradox can be detected in the relationship with the shark. As Jonathan Burt has in fact noticed, even when it appears that animals in films point to a more natural or pastoral world, as in Quilici's case, "this is a role articulated by technology and therefore provided purely by modernity" (83). Unfortunately, this also meant treating some actual sharks quite cruelly in order to obtain a specific shot which was instead intended to display an intimate relationship with a fictional shark.

Yet, it is undeniable that the relationship between the boy and the shark is presented by both Calvino and Quilici in an overall positive light. For instance, although neither the script nor the film have those "post-human" features recently suggested by Serenella Iovino in her readings of Calvino's work, Ti-Koyo still seems to establish a kind of "symbiosis" with the shark. As Iovino pointed out, this symbiosis between different species advances an idea of human civilization as the product of the interaction between our history and the histories (and natures) of other creatures (128): an idea surely suggested by *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane*. Nonetheless, a symbiosis does not happen in a vacuum, but rather in a habitat, which in our case is constructed through words and images. This is the reason why

the binary habitat depicted by Calvino and Quilici risks impoverishing the relationship between the boy and the shark, which is not only paradigmatically given as the mark of an almost lost human purity but also belongs to a binary ecological ideology that is quite typical of the Western world (DeLoughrey and Handley 16). It is then not a coincidence that, as we have already pointed out, in both the script and the film Manidu behaves and is treated more as a dog than a shark, that is to say according to a master-animal relationship which is familiar to Western audiences. Instead, the postcolonial and post-pastoral world of Richer's novel neither dilutes the violent and paradoxical nature of the relationship between the two nor asks for a binary identification with the human protagonist, who is attractive but also quite disturbing and uncanny, as recognized by Quilici himself. Moreover, although he incorporates some historical elements into his narrative (such as the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902), Richer's "immoral fable" does not want to be "realistic" in the same way *Ti-Koyo e il suo pescecane* aspires to be. It is therefore free to describe the "impossible" relationship between a boy and a shark as part of the overall complicated and turbulent environment rather than as the disappearing symbol of its lost purity. As we have seen, this ideological difference also forges different encounters between the human and the non-human, and allows Richer to establish the crucial moment of the relationship between the boy and the shark in terms of transformative limitrophy, that is to say where both (human and non-human) natures and identities are at stake.

Finally, one last point. In an article published in 2007, Raglon and Scholtmeijer point out the critical differences between environmental and animal advocacy literatures. According to the two scholars, while environmental authors tend to depict ecosystems and avoid emotions, animal advocacy writers focus on individuals and imagination. As simplistic and problematic as this dichotomy may be (as the authors themselves acknowledge), it nonetheless helps us to credit Richer's novel, Calvino's script, and Quilici's movie with similar abilities to synthesize the two positions. As I have tried to show in this article, clearly Calvino and Quilici embellish both the shark and the island for their own ideological reasons, while Richer instead downplays neither the dangerous nature of the animal nor the overall violent environment in which the story takes place. Yet, in spite of their fundamental differences, these three works establish a direct correlation between individual (human and non-human) animals, their emotions, and the whole environment. Moreover, in all three versions we cannot but be sympathetic to the fantastic tale of the friendship between Ti-Coyo and Manidu. Their story ultimately reminds us that, just as a boy can love a shark, we, too, might "have the capacity to love even creatures who intellectually seem repellent to us" (Raglon and Scholtmeijer 137).

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