

Uncle Rabbit and the wax doll

*Edited by Jonathan D Amith
Illustrations by Inocencio Jiménez
Narration by Silvestre Pantaleón*

The story

This book offers one of the most widespread tales in the Old and New World: Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby, told here in an ancient Nahuatl (Aztec) language version, with its unique twists and interpretations.

The story is beautifully rendered in his native tongue by Silvestre Pantaleón, and the digital recording will be made available to those who buy this book (downloadable MP3 or as a CD).

The illustrations were drawn on amate (bark paper), in exquisite detail over the course of 18 months by Inocencio Jiménez, a self-taught artist from the same village as don Silvestre: San Agustín Oapan, state of Guerrero, Mexico. There are a total of 15 drawings. Seven (six of which are shown below) measure 8 x 12 inches; eight larger illustrations measure 16 x 24. These fifteen amates tell the story of the trickster Uncle Rabbit as he makes fools out of his eternal adversaries: don Crocodile and Uncle Koyohweh, the coyote.

The story begins with Uncle Rabbit staring longingly across a river to a garden in which his favorite foods grow. He talks don Crocodile into taking him across by promising the reptile that he could eat up Rabbit once they got to the other side. But Uncle Rabbit escapes, and while don Crocodile plots his revenge Rabbit goes about eating the leaves off the plants in the garden. The farmer finally has enough and builds a wax doll, which Uncle Rabbit challenges to a fight. First a left, then a right, then one kick and another. But all his limbs get stuck in the wax.

Uncle Rabbit decides to trick his old enemy, Uncle Koyohweh, promising him the chicken that the gardener said he'd bring the next day for whoever was found with the doll. So Uncle Koyohweh takes Rabbit's place.

The next day the gardener comes along. But there are no chickens, just a couple of rods with which to beat up the intruder. While Uncle Koyohweh gets his beating, Uncle Rabbit runs away.

In the meantime don Crocodile has been hatching a plot. He plays dead to get Uncle Rabbit to come close. But, thinks Rabbit aloud, "If he were really dead he'd be covered by fire ants." Don Crocodile calls over his friends, the ants, and tells them to swarm over his body. Although they follow his instructions don Crocodile soon realizes that he's been tricked when he hears Uncle Rabbit laughing in the distance.

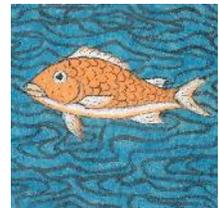
One final try: don Crocodile will hide behind the entranceway to the rabbit hole. But when Uncle Rabbit comes home he notices something is amiss. Well, again he thinks out loud. "My house always answers me when I get home. How are you my little house?" Well, don Crocodile knew what to do, "Ooooooh, ooooooh, jeeeh!" he answered.

And off when Rabbit. Someone must have been inside, for, Everyone knows that houses don't talk!

The book

The bilingual (Nahuatl and English) publication of *Uncle Rabbit and the wax doll* will comprise not only the 15 amates in exquisite detail. The text itself will be interspersed with images extracted from the drawings and at the end of the book will be an illustrated bilingual glossary of terms: Nahuatl-English. The drawing to the right, for example, will accompany the entry for *michin* / fish.

If they wish, readers will be able to listed to the beautiful Nahuatl rendition of this story told by don Silvestre Pantaleón. A CD could be included with the book, or a downloadable mp3 could be made freely available.



Potential audience

Uncle Rabbit and the wax doll has an enormous potential audience. Children will love the story and the unique, extremely detailed illustrations. They will be able to look through the drawings and find and count images of particular items, with the Nahuatl words for these objects given in the glossary.

Adults will also love this book as an art book, embellished with the reproduction of 15 amates (bark paintings) of unusual quality. Children and parents of Hispanic or indigenous heritage will want this book as it relates to their own cultural heritage. Schools and public libraries will acquire this book in an effort to increase representation of stories that are imbued with intercultural meaning.

Additional possibilities

At present I have a producer interested in an animated video using the same story and illustrations. Two possible sources for funding have been approached and the response was positive. In the event that an animated video is produced, this could be put on a DVD and sold with the book (or as an option with the book). This video is only a possibility at this time, but it is mentioned in the event that it would add to the appeal of the book



Example text:

There was once a rabbit who would spend his days looking longingly across a river.

Se:, o:kichi:w se: o:n Kone:joh. Pero ontlawelita ne: sentlapal.

All the time he would be thinking, “If there were just someone to take me across because that garden over there is really enticing. Sweet potato vines are my favorite food. But there’s no one to take me across. No one at all!

Kitowa, “Te:h, ya'atsi:n kinekisia ne:chpano:liti:sia, ne: milá:, tlakwalka:n *huerta*. Mm. No: nia:sneki, no: milá: notlakwal o:n, kamoxihtli. A:man, te:h, xa:k a:'ino:n ne:chpano:liti:s. ¡Xakah!”

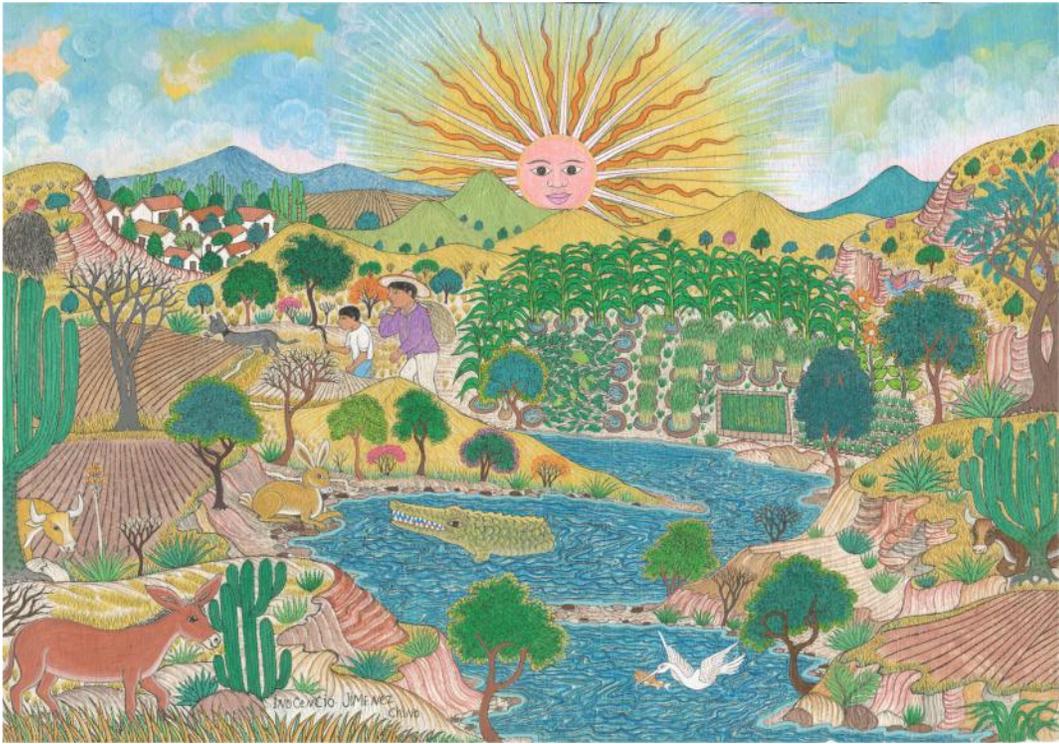
What unbearable suffering! Uncle Rabbit sat down and just stared across at the garden.

Milá: tlayo:wia, yo:nota:lih sa: ontlachi:xtok ne:yá a:na:lko, sentlapal.

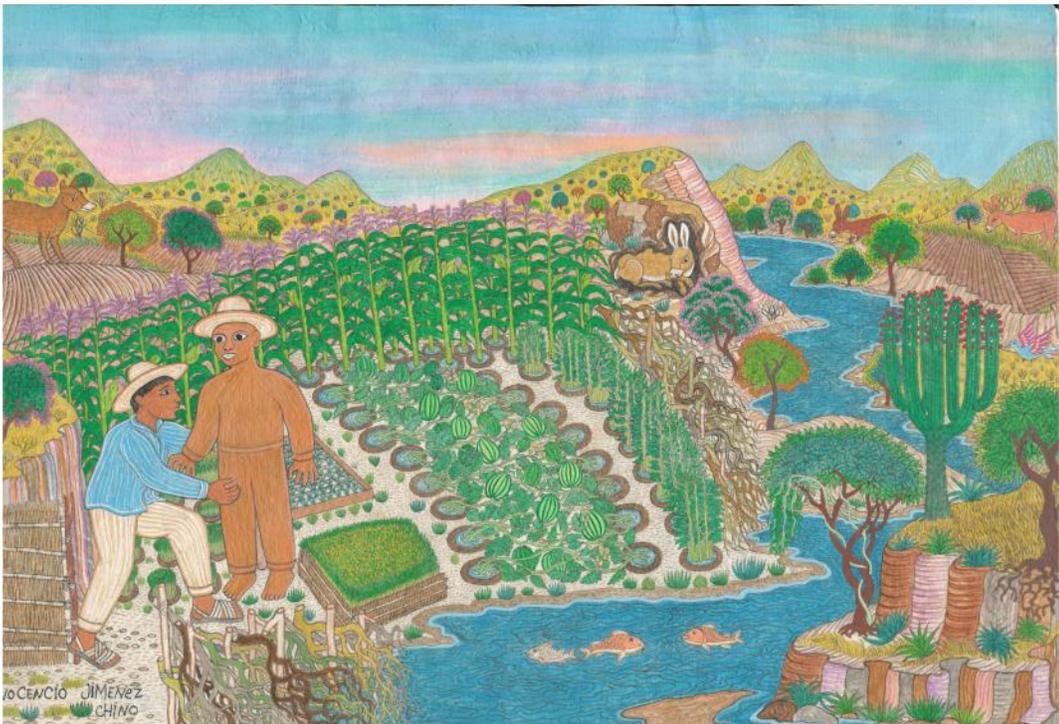
And then suddenly he just started shouting, “Ferryman!” That’s just what he said. “Ferryman! Anyone who takes me across the river will get to eat me once we get to the other side. There’s a flat bed of rocks there where I can be gobbled right up. I’m a really juicy morsel.”

Kihlia, yoún, “¡*Balsero!*” San tsatsi hko:n, “¡*Balsero!* ¡A:h, diki tla: niné:nekisiah a:kino:n ne:chpano:liti:s, ma:si niman ne:chkwa:s! Ta ne: o:nkah se: tepetlatl tampa, tampa ne:chkwa:s, *porque* no: milá: nichia:wak”.

There follows examples of six illustrations. The captions are descriptive of the illustrations and do not represent the story itself (see four paragraphs above) that will be presented in Nahuatl and English.



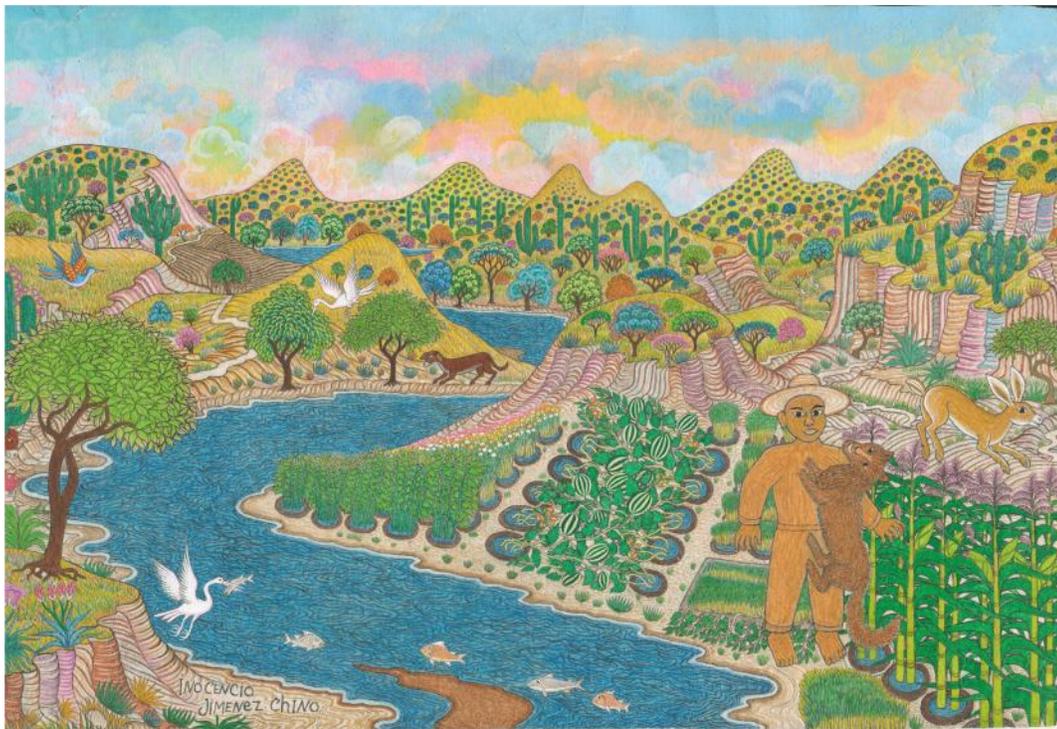
After having gazed for days at the enticing, mouth-watering garden across the river, Uncle Rabbit has called don Crocodile over to ask him for a ride to the other side.



Uncle Rabbit has been sneaking in at night for a dinner of sweet potato and squash leaves. Fed up with the destruction, the gardener fashions a wax doll to scare away the intruder doing all the damage.



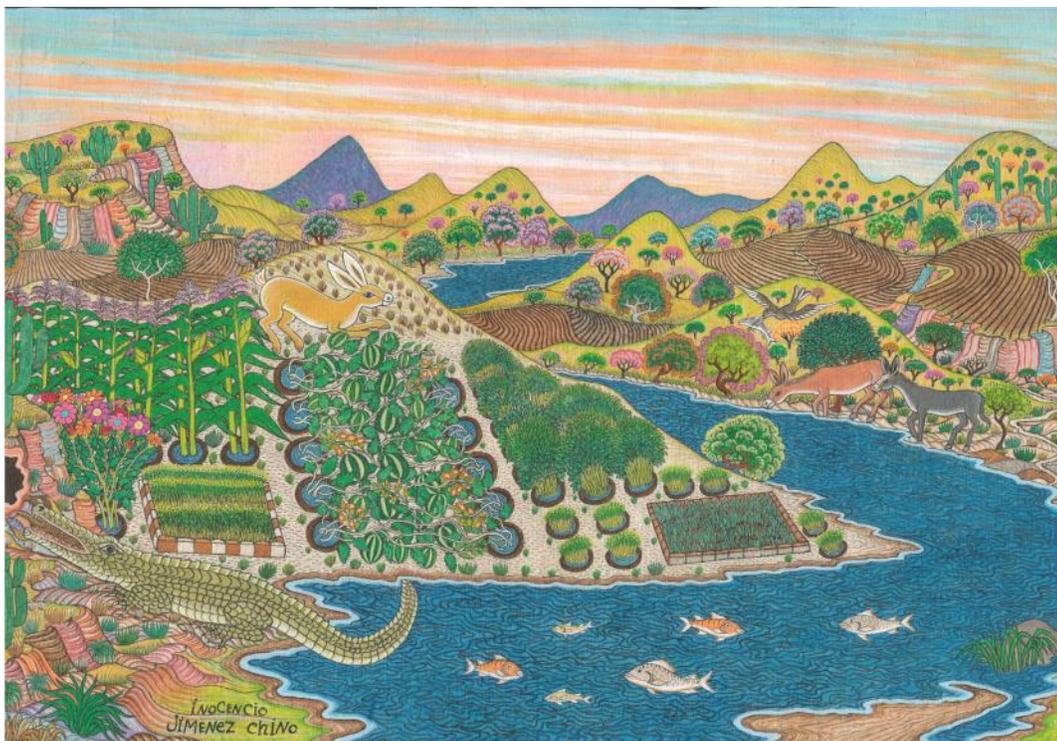
Finding the wax doll blocking his way, Uncle Rabbit chooses to fight. He hits the doll with a hard right hand and then a left. Both get stuck in the wax, making Uncle Rabbit get even madder. He'll teach this guy a lesson! But now, after two quick kicks, Uncle Rabbit is left helplessly hanging.



To get free, Uncle Rabbit calls out to Uncle Koyohweh, the Coyote. "Come take my place!" he cries out, for tomorrow the gardner has promised me two chickens! I'm a vegetarian, what will I do with them? You, however, would make short work of them and have a splendid meal.



Don Crocodile, however, has not been idle. Having been tricked by Uncle Rabbit to take him across the river he wants revenge. He wants to eat that rabbit. So he pretends to be dead to dupe Uncle Rabbit into getting close. “Mm,” said Uncle Rabbit out loud. “If don Crocodile were really dead, he would be covered by ants.” Hearing this don Crocodile calls to his friends the ants. “Come here and cover me up so he things I’m dead!”



The gimmick with the ants didn’t work out. Uncle Rabbit had tricked don Crocodile into getting him to cover himself with biting fire ants. So now don Crocodile decided to hide with wide-open mouth behind the entranceway to Uncle Rabbit’s house. He’d walk right through the door into the reptiles waiting mouth!