Sonia Jackson

College Scholars Senior Project

“The Story of the Monkey and the Turtle”

An Illustrated Retelling of a Folktale from the Philippines

Mentor: Professor Marcia Goldenstein

March 24, 2008

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I. Project Goals and Origin

Project Goals

The purpose of this project is to exercise what I have learned throughout my education, but also the project needs to be a portfolio piece, a product to be used in the promotion of my skills as an illustrator, writer, and even as a designer. From this experience I hope to learn the actual process of putting together an illustrated book, and so I need to go through the steps of production.

Project Origin

I had decided years ago to write and illustrate a children's book for this project. Storytelling and fiction in general play nearly as important a part in my career goals as being able to produce artistic renderings to fit various needs for various audiences. A children's book allows me to both exercise creative writing and illustration. Although I did not realize it before, the process would also allow me to develop and display other skills in design and layout. Since I seek a career in illustration and writing, most likely for children's books, this project is very useful in starting me on that career path.

In order to know about the world of children's book publishing, I sought the advice of Dr. Jinx Watson in Information Sciences, at the University of Tennessee, in Knoxville. Her advice led me to choose a folktale for my project. I learned that generally, children's book publishers do not allow new illustrators or writers to both illustrate and write their own books. After success is proven in one of these areas, then a publisher might trust an illustrator to write his or her own text, or a writer to produce his or her own accompanying illustrations. Variants of this idea have come to my attention over the past few years, such as the notion that publishers like to choose illustrators for authors. I have also heard that authors and illustrators usually do not work together and rarely even meet. My understanding of the situation is that publishers like to maintain control of the product in which they are investing, which from a business perspective makes sense. From my conversation with Dr. Jinx Watson, I learned that my best option to fulfill my educational goals of exercising skill and knowledge both in illustration and writing, and to have a product worth showing to publishers, was to choose an existing story such as a folktale or fairytale. By choosing an existing story, I would have less to create, and I could focus most of my creative energy on the imagery of the book.

My choice of folktale originated from a personal connection. The folktale I chose, usually titled, "The Turtle and the Monkey" or "The Monkey and the Turtle," tells of how a monkey and turtle loose their friendship because of greed over a banana tree. This folktale has been passed down in my family. My grandmother, Dr. Natividad Corrales Taboada told the folktale to my mother, Maria Jackson, who told it to her children. My oldest brother, Frederick made a short picture book for a high school assignment based on this same folktale.

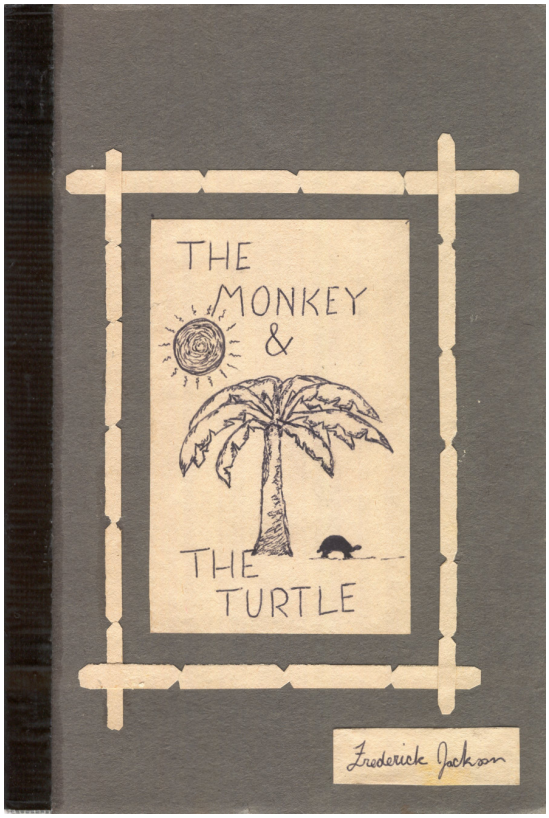

Fig. 1. Front Cover of The Monkey and the Turtle by Frederick Jackson. Handmade illustrated book.

II. Process: Research

I began with researching the story, in order to see what had already been done. I feared the book might exist in too many forms, and my that version would have less validity. The story is a popular Filipino folktale. The Philippine national hero, José Rizal created cartoons that have been recently published in book form. Clarion Books published a children's book by Paul Galdone titled The Turtle and the Monkey. These versions were the only two I found in an illustrated book form. I found eight other versions of the folktale besides the two versions I had within my family, that of my mother's and my brother's high school assignment. Altogether I gathered ten versions of

the folktale. Also while interning at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts during the summer of 2007, on one of my few visits to the local bookstore, I discovered a children's book about a similar Indonesian tale, titled Mangoes and Bananas. After reading the eleven stories I had gathered, I selected what I felt were the important motifs or other elements the versions had in common. In analyzing the different versions, I gave emphasis to the telling of the story I felt closest to, in which I transcribed a telling of the story from my mother.

The major plot elements from my mother's version include:

1. The phrase "best of friends"
2. The finding of the tree
3. The monkey climbs the tree and eats the fruit without sharing with the turtle.
4. The monkey and turtle split the tree into two parts. The monkey takes the top part, and the turtle takes the bottom.
5. The monkey climbs the tree again and eats the fruit without sharing with the turtle a second time.
6. The turtle punishes the monkey by placing thorns around the tree.
7. The turtle hides but is found by the monkey.
8. The monkey threatens the turtle.
9. The turtle asks not to be thrown into the water.
10. The monkey throws the turtle into the water.
11. The turtle resurfaces and taunts the monkey.

Significant common tendencies between the other versions of the story include the establishment of gender: in some versions the turtle is female, the greed of the monkey, and the ability of the turtle to outsmart the monkey. Some versions of the story grow increasingly violent, sometimes even resulting in the death of the monkey. Since my intended audience is children, I took into account these versions simply for the sake of research, for the sake of knowing what already existed, but I chose not to be influenced by these versions when writing my own. One aspect I did glean from a previous version of the story other than my mother's. In the version of the folktale by M. Mariano, from Asian-Pacific Folktales and Legends, when the monkey throws the turtle into the pond, the turtle resurfaces having caught a fish. "The monkey was about to go back to his home when he heard a gurgling sound coming from the water. He was amazed to see the turtle showing at the surface, a large fish struggling in the grip of his claws," (Mariano 65-66). In my retelling of the folktale, I use this as inspiration for the reconciliation between the battling friends.

The other research for this project was born of my need for structure when establishing my own unique version of the folktale. Artistically, I tend towards realism, so I pursued realism in creating my characters. I searched for two species that could theoretically have lived on the same island in the Philippines, arriving at the long-tailed macaque as my model for the monkey, and the Philippine pond turtle as my model for the turtle. While finding imagery for the monkey was fairly easy, I had selected a very rare species to serve as a model for my turtle. I eventually found pictures of a neotype of the Philippine pond turtle in the scientific journal, Copeia. By seeking existing animals, I had a foundation on which to build my characters visually. I also took inspiration for the

names of my characters from the names of the species they are visually based on. The decision to incorporate certain aspects of realism in my characters creates a unique authenticity for my version of the story.

III. Process: Writing My Own Version of the Folktale

Writing the text of my version of the story about the monkey and the turtle posed two major challenges. The first was the need to make my story unique. With several versions already recorded, and one children's book already published in the United States, I needed to reveal my own personal interpretation in my retelling of the folktale. In answering this challenge I arrived at the second challenge: the need to create a reconciliation between the monkey and the turtle. All the other versions of the folktale about the monkey and the turtle lack this reconciliation. The turtle wins the battle by tricking the monkey. Remaining as this, the plot is insufficient for an audience of children. I sought an ending to the story that reflected my moral beliefs and that would also translate well to children.

The clearest answer for how the two enemies could hope to be friends again was forgiveness. In my story, the turtle offers forgiveness to the monkey, and as a token of this act of forgiveness, the turtle offers a fish to the monkey. Then the turtle displays yet more wisdom by suggesting that they establish an agreement of teamwork: the turtle would catch fish for the monkey, and the monkey would retrieve fruit for the turtle. This major plot change influences the moral of the folktale. In most versions the apparent moral is either proclaiming the winner as the smartest, or the moral is simply that greed can destroy strong friendships. In my telling of the folktale, the moral is more positive:

forgiveness can restore friendships torn apart by greed. Besides adding my own ending to the plot, and therefore incorporating my own moral into the story's meaning, I made a third significant change by naming the characters based on the species I modeled them after. The monkey is named "Macque," which resembles the species name "macaque" after which he is modeled. The turtle is named "Leya" resembling the word "Leyte" in one of the names of the species after which she is modeled. Leyte is an island in the Philippines. With these changes, my text stands apart from the versions of the story that precede it.

IV. Process: Illustrating My Version of the Folktale

The greatest obstacle in the entire process of this project was choosing a medium for the illustrations. I feel most comfortable in two-dimensional media such as drawing, watercolor, and acrylic paint, but none of these media seemed to inherently compliment the story or the culture from which it originates. I tried researching Philippine folk art, yet only arrived at dance as a significant folk art form. As I know only very little about Philippine folk dance, and since I needed a folk art that could be reproduced in a two-dimensional format, I simply took from this research the concept that my illustrations should have a visible element of movement. For the purposes of illustration, this movement can translate is different ways, but most obviously in mark making and composition.

I wanted a medium that incorporated a carving motion. I began carving a small printing block when the notion of scratchboard came to me. Scratchboard is either a paper or board that has a layer of white with a second layer of black ink on the surface.

The image is created by scratching through the top layer of black ink, revealing the white underneath. This medium was perfect for several reasons. I have previous experience with the medium, and scratchboard would have the carving motions and mark making that I sought as a way of incorporating aspects of movement into the illustrations. Third, scratchboard looks like wood engraving and has an older, more traditional illustrative appearance. This appealed to me for the purposes of this project, since folktales are passed down through generations, existing as a result of the transference of tradition.

Having selected a medium that complimented the folktale, the next step was to organize what parts of the story I intended to illustrate. For information about the construction of children's books, I referred to Illustrating Children's Books: Creating Pictures for Publication, by Martin Salisbury. I also met with Jack Williams at Graphic Arts, the printing service at the University of Tennessee that prints such publications as The Phoenix, the literary arts magazine. I showed Jack Williams the practice illustrations I had already completed in scratchboard and asked him for advice regarding preparing files for printing and other general printing questions. He suggested creating a practice book on a small scale. This is referred to as a "dummy" in Illustrating Children's Books: Creating Pictures for Publication. "To make up your 32-page dummy, fold eight pieces of paper together and sew or staple them in the middle. The first dummy may just be a small, rough construct, which allows you to jot in thumbnail drawings and page numbers," (Salisbury 88). Taking his advice, I made two small books. They mostly differed in that one had a more traditional layout, in which the text rarely mixed with the images. I made a third, more detailed and conceptually developed book based on the

more traditional design. With this I had a thorough plan as to what exactly to illustrate. I made an initial list of approximately twenty illustrations.

Fig. 2. Example Practice Illustration from Dummy (Miniature practice book).

Once I had a list to work from, the labor of illustrating consisted of setting aside time on a daily basis for rendering the illustrations on scratchboard. I chose to work on the boards for the more important illustrations, allowing the use of paper scratchboard for less important illustrations. The important illustrations depicted characters, actions, and detailed scenery. The less important illustrations included the covers' bamboo border, bamboo textboxes, a bamboo textbox above a simple scene of ripples on water, and two

spot illustrations of a banana bunch and a banana peel. The boards allowed finer control and therefore finer detail when carving into the surface of the ink. The firm backing of the illustrations on the board also slightly improved the quality of the images when scanning them into the computer. The size of the illustrations was compatible with the intended size of the printed book, which would be eight inches wide by ten inches high.

I planned to produce about five illustrations or more a week. The order of the illustrations completed was based on my artistic feelings. I engaged in the illustrations that I felt comfortable with or most eager to complete first. By following this order, I managed to avoid a situation where all the illustrations at the beginning of the story are evident of less experience than illustrations at the end of the story. Instead, illustrations I completed in a given week are mixed between illustrations completed a week or more later, after I had already grown accustomed to the medium. By February 14, 2008, the first three illustrations were basically completed, titled, "'Hey!' Turtle Perspective," "'Hey!' Monkey Perspective," and "Splitting the Tree." All the illustrations were fully completed in scratchboard by around March 18, 2008. The stage of rendering the illustrations in scratchboard lasted less than five weeks.

The second stage of developing the illustrations involved editing the scanned images using the computer program Adobe Photoshop CS3 10.0. Editing mostly consisted of adjusting the image so as to heighten its appearance, such as increasing the black of the image, because when scanned, the black of the scratchboard surface appeared more gray. This stage also included cleaning dust off of the image files, which was either on the scanner or the board itself when scanned. Using the program Quark Xpress 7.0, the images were inserted into a layout design that consisted of thirty-two

pages, not counting the interior and exterior covers. With all the images inserted into their proper place, I next placed bamboo textbox illustrations into the book, followed by the text of the story. The font used for the text of the story and information pages at the beginning and end of the book was American Garamond BT, which had a clean appearance and was comfortable to read. The font used for the title page, cover page, and titles on the "About the Story/About the Author and Illustrator" page, was Auriol. This font reminded me of Philippine text imagery. The third font, used only on the dedication page of the book, was Present. This font needed to be able to represent my own voice, since the dedication serves as note from me, as the author and illustrator, to my audience.

Using the same program, I created the front and back exterior cover and the interior covers. The final step was submitting the completed design in the correct form to Graphic Arts and approving the proof of the book so that it could be printed.

V. The Illustrations

The text, plot, and message of the story all leave lasting impressions, but the images likely hold the strongest impact for the reader. Special intent has been put into the illustrations themselves. Many illustrations are grouped in pairs, with corresponding compliments to provide symmetry to the overall book. The illustrations explore different perspectives and angles in order for the reader to have a fair overall view of the entire plot. The illustrations as a collection also display a range of visual concepts of which I am capable.

1. The Front Cover

The cover needs to allow room for the title, and it must compliment the rest of the story. The cover design incorporates design motifs used in the book: the bamboo borders that hold the text throughout the book, and the woven texture seen in the endpapers. Thirdly, the cover needs to depict the subject of the story and its title. The title being "The Story of the Monkey and the Turtle," portraits of the monkey and the turtle are depicted on the front cover. Instead of a mean monkey, the monkey in this version of the folktale is driven by instincts with which the reader can identify. His hunger and greed lead him to do bad things, though he inherently is not bad. For this reason, I give the monkey an impish, pathetic face. The turtle needs to appear wise and kind, since she outsmarts the monkey, and she brings about the reconciliation to their friendship. Depicting the turtle in portrait form is particularly difficult since she walks on all four legs, leading towards a landscape orientation. By cropping and taking an eye-level perspective, I am able to focus on her face.

2. The Endpapers

The Endpapers of the book are inspired by Philippine embroidery. Since the primary design motif in the book is the bamboo borders that serve as textboxes, I have chosen to depict bamboo in the endpapers. The endpapers also introduce the setting of the story.

3. Title Page Spot Illustration: Banana Bunch

The purpose of the banana bunch is to introduce the reader to the focus of the characters' attention. This is the object that starts the conflict. To complete the complication started on this title page, the final illustration of the story is spot illustration of a banana peel.

4. Introduction to the Island

The first actual story illustration depicts the setting, the small island on which the story takes place. The landscape scene allows room on the vertical page for a bamboo textbox to hold the opening text of the story.

5. The Bamboo Textboxes

The use of textboxes allows for a more traditional layout of text on one page and an illustration on the other page. The bamboo textboxes have two sources of inspiration. My parents have a wedding portrait hanging in their house with a frame modeled to look like bamboo. The other inspiration for the bamboo textboxes is the book my brother made based on this folktale for a high school assignment. As visible in Figure 1, my brother had only used cut paper strips with appropriate notches to imitate the appearance of bamboo. His design was simple, but it left an impression with me. To make mine unique, and to fit the already established standard of a certain realism to my illustrations, I looked at images of bamboo and rendered more realistic, more detailed bamboo borders. For variety, I made three versions of the bamboo textbox illustrations, not counting the border used on the outside covers.

6. Finding the Tree

This is the first scene in the book depicting the characters together with the source of their conflict. Realizing from my research that bananas do not actually grow on trees, I call the tree a "banana plant" throughout the narration of the story. The image is static, with the only real movement in the monkey's raised arms. It compares with the next illustration, as the composition is similar, with the tree or plant dissecting most of the page.

7. "Hey!" Turtle Perspective

In this illustration, the viewer takes an unusual position, from the perspective of the turtle looking upwards at the monkey in the banana plant. Here the turtle appears larger in the foreground, compared to the monkey farther away from the viewer. This illustration is meant to compliment the illustration titled "'Hey!' Monkey Perspective." This piece, like its complimentary illustration, has a more dramatic line of movement, meant to match the emotion of the dialogue and the problem encountered between the characters.

8. Splitting the Tree

This illustration has diagonal movement. The turtle's body faces the viewer, but her head is turned with her mouth hanging open in surprise at discovering the monkey's deceit. The monkey is turned away from the viewer and away from the turtle. This position is a sign of guilt, as if the monkey is hiding his face from those who know the truth. The truth of the remaining bananas on the banana plant is obvious for the viewer.

9. Grow

Perhaps the most planned illustration in the entire book, “Grow” depicts the stages in which the turtle nurtures the banana plant back to the point where it bears fruit again. This is the only illustration in the book consisting of multiple scenes on a single page. The illustration is divided into six stages. This design serves as a tribute to the work of José Rizal. When Rizal illustrated his own version of the folktale, he often drew six cartoon scenes to a page. By including this illustration, I am showing my knowledge of the history of this folktale. Hidden within my illustration is a hint at more Philippine history. Although perhaps not very obvious, while developing the illustration, I became aware that the rays of sunlight in the fourth square, reading left to right and top to bottom, remind me of the rays of sunlight seen on the Philippine flag.

10. Monkey Spying on Turtle

Originally sketched from the perspective of the monkey, the final illustration of this scene shows again the monkey at a distance, appearing comparatively smaller than the turtle in the foreground. As a result the monkey appears weaker, since he again is about to succumb to his greed. This illustration also allows for a unique view of the turtle, close enough to see her smile, while also having a wide view of the surrounding grass and trees and the monkey peering from behind a tree. This illustration is the compliment of another illustration, titled “Thorny Vines.”

11. “Hey!” Monkey Perspective

Although the perspective has shifted to the monkey, the dialogue of “Hey!” still comes from the turtle. This is the third time the monkey has tricked his friend. Here the viewer takes another interesting position above the action, looking down both on the monkey and the turtle.

12. Thorny Vines

This scene compliments the illustration titled, “Monkey Spying on Turtle.” The composition is very similar, with an extreme close up view of the banana plant. The plant occupies the left side of the illustration, whereas in “Monkey Spying on Turtle” the plant occupies the right side of the illustration. The use of the gradient in the background is meant to compete with the vertical movement of the banana plant.

13. “Yeeowch!”

This is the climax of the story and the most violent moment in my version of the story. The turtle has for the first time retaliated against the monkey after being tricked a third time. The depiction of pain is kept at a distance, with the monkey out of sight and the turtle hiding in the foreground. “Yeeowch!” is the only two-page spread illustration within the story, and is the widest landscape scene. Movement is from left to right, as the text of the monkey’s yell is read across the sky, and the viewer’s eye similarly follows the landscape leading to the turtle on the right page. This is the only illustration in the book that incorporates text as part of the image, rendered in the scratchboard. The other great difference between this illustration and all the others throughout the book is the use

of color, although I maintained a more subdued palette with darker tones. The color was added using Adobe Photoshop CS3 10.0. This illustration needed to stand out from the others due to its increased intensity of emotion. Color is unexpected since the entire book up to this point has been rendered in black and white. When turning the page, the reader is hopefully caught in surprise, and the eye is led immediately to the black text which stands in great contrast against the pale yellow sky. The dense tropical rainforest vegetation is emphasized by the use of dark greens.

14. Monkey Finds Turtle

The monkey needs to appear angry and powerful in this scene. The potential for danger exists, and he dominates the illustration, while the turtle remains huddled in the foreground.

15. Ripples in Pond

This page combines a bamboo textbox with a spot illustration of the ripples and bubbles resulting from the monkey throwing the turtle into a nearby pond. Again I have chosen to keep impressions of violence at a distance in this illustration, focusing on the scenery instead of the characters or their actions.

16. Turtle and Fish

The turtle swims across the surface of the pond with text floating above and below her. This is the only time I allow text to simply float within the illustration, as textboxes seem unnecessary.

17. Friends Again

The reconciliation scene needs to show a change specifically in the appearance of the monkey. Instead of the image of his anger, the reader should end the story with a comforting visual memory of the monkey. He again has an impish, pathetic face, realizing his mistake while also smiling at the gifts of forgiveness and fish offered by the turtle. Here the turtle appears more confident, while the monkey is forced into a downward position. The lowering of the monkey represents his defeat and the willingness to serve his friend.

18. Banana Peel Spot Illustration

To complete the complication started on the title page, a banana peel is depicted. This lends humor and closure to the story, and like many other illustrations, functions for the sake of symmetry from a design perspective.

19. Self-Portrait in Scratchboard/ Back Cover

I had decided early in the planning stage of the illustrations that I wanted a self-portrait at the end of the book. Originally intended to fit on the "About the Story/About the Author and Illustrator" page, following the last page of the story, this illustration has moved to the back cover because of lack of space. Allowing the informative section to elaborate on the origin of the book, I have opted for the self-portrait to appear on the back page with a matching reversed bamboo boarder according to the front cover. Reversing the bamboo border turns it into an object, so that when the book is closed, the front and back of the border is created. The self-portrait serves two purposes. First, it shows my

capability for realism in a challenging medium. Since the illustrations for the story are mainly realistically inspired, yet somewhat more of a cartoon nature in order to add personality to the characters, this image shows the extent of realism I am capable of in scratchboard, otherwise not visibly present in the book. The second reason for the self-portrait is self-promotion. With this book as an intended portfolio piece, I feel an image of myself helps to promote me as the source of the product. The self-portrait adds an element of authentic identity to the book.

The illustrations together make up a collection of visual works that show my potential as an illustrator. They display my capabilities at organizing and designing an image-focused book while also serving as a portfolio of my skill with the scratchboard medium. By choosing a wide variety of illustrative techniques, I show a range of visual creativity. In doing this while also keeping to certain patterns and motifs of design, the book demonstrates that I am able to work in a varied manner, yet still maintaining the appropriate consistency between the illustrations.

VI. Conclusion

The project proves to others, as well as myself, that my education has led to something specific and significant. Layered experience from various areas of study and exercises in various forms of creativity have resulted in increased knowledge and skill evident in this book. As a finished work, the book represents what I am capable of, which is much more than it would have been had I not made certain educational and experiential decisions. This project proves that I can produce something truly significant.

As a product, the book is marketable. The amount of research, effort, labor, and knowledge and awareness that went into creating the book gives me confidence in my own abilities. I now have a physical object, a product worth marketing to publishers. This fulfills the other primary goal for this project: to be able to leave college with an undergraduate degree, increased knowledge and skill, and of course a product with which to start a career in illustration and writing.

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(Photography by Art Wolfe)

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Although not mentioned in the narrative of the development of this project, both Marcia Goldenstein in the School of Art and Eric Smith of the Department of Student Publications at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville gave advice for this project.