

SAI
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LOSES
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Ten
interpretations
of an ancient
Chinese story

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Ten
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of an ancient
Chinese story

Confucius Institute
and
School of Languages
at
Rhodes University

Edited by
Robert Berold

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INTRODUCTION

Marius Vermaak
Director, Confucius Institute at Rhodes University

Last year students from the School of Languages at Rhodes University engaged with Chinese language (and culture) by translating a classical poem into German, Latin, French, Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. This year the challenge was not a translation but a creative transformation of an ancient Chinese story into a re-imagined context.

Students and lecturers were invited to engage creatively with the well known story *Sai Weng Loses His Horse* (塞翁失马 *sai weng shi ma*). They could transpose it into another time, or another setting, or even write a counter story. The only constraint was that certain structural features should be maintained: the ups and downs and ambiguities of good and bad fortune which befall the main character. We deliberately left the meaning of the story open to interpretation or misreading. Interesting things happen when people misunderstand and err.

A famous modern version of *sai weng shi ma* happened during one of the first visits of US president Richard Nixon to China in the 1970s. Premier Zhou Enlai responded to a question about the significance of the French Revolution with an inscrutable: “Too early to tell”. Zhou’s response is often cited as evidence of the sage Chinese ability to think long-term – in contrast to westerners’ impatience. We are stopped in our tracks by the Chinese perspective, echoing as it does Sai Weng’s deadpan reactions and his long view of the rhythms and meanings of life.

In fact this iconic anecdote derives from a misunderstanding. It has recently come to light that Zhou was referring not to the 1789 storming of the Bastille but to the 1968 student riots in Paris. According to Nixon’s interpreter, it was “a misunderstanding that was too delicious to invite correction”.¹

This little book presents some fascinating engagements with the ancient story, and some creative misinterpretations too. We have *sai*

¹ The *Financial Times* of 10 June 2011 reported that, at a seminar in Washington to mark the publication of Henry Kissinger’s *On China*, retired foreign service officer Chas Freeman sought to correct the long-standing error. “I distinctly remember the exchange. There was a misunderstanding that was too delicious to invite correction,” he said.

weng shi ma set on the wild Lesotho/Eastern Cape border, in East Cape townships, in Nazi Germany, in the neverlands of fable, in a science fiction future run by machines. It is gratifying to see that so many of the stories speak to young people in contemporary South Africa.

The 2011 Story Project has turned out to be a worthy successor of the 2010 Poetry Project, and for this I thank Robert Berold, Ma Yue, my colleagues from the School of Languages, the judges and translators, and the authors for their enthusiasm and effort.

Have our authors grasped the Chinese point of view? Do they share it? I leave these questions for the reader.

How good are the stories? Perhaps it's too early to tell.

Sai Weng Loses His Horse

There once was an old man who lived with his only son at the border of the state. They liked horses and often let them graze freely. One day a servant reported to the old man, “A horse is missing! It ran into the neighbouring state.”

His friends felt sorry for him, but the old man was not bothered at all by the loss. In fact, he said: “Who knows! The loss may bring us good fortune!”

A few months later, a strange thing happened. Not only did the missing horse return home safely, it also brought back with it a fine horse from the neighbouring state.

When his friends heard the news, they congratulated the old man on his good luck. But the old man said, “Who knows! This may bring us ill fortune!”

One day, when the old man’s son was riding the fine new horse, he fell off it, broke his leg very badly and became crippled. Many friends came to comfort the old man, but the old man was not disturbed by the accident in the least. “Who knows! This may bring us good fortune after all!” he said.

A year later, the neighbouring state sent troops across the border. All young and strong men were drafted to join the fight, and most of them got killed. The old man’s son however was not drafted because he was crippled – and so his life was spared.

This is one of the many forms of the famous ancient tale *Sai Weng Loses His Horse*, which dates from the second century BCE.

The challenge was to write a short story in a language taught at Rhodes University that responds to and engages with the Chinese story.

The guidelines given to the writers were: Your story should be between 500 and 1500 words. It should follow the original story in the following respects – it should have a single central character,

who experiences three events which may be good or bad fortune. If you want to, you can add a fourth event which might or might not contradict the ambiguity of the other three. Otherwise the story can be set in any time or place, and be written in any style.

The writers were also asked to write a short essay explaining how their story relates to the Sai Weng story, and provide a summary of their story in English. The stories judged to be the best were translated in full into English and Chinese by experienced translators.

Lin Yutang, the great populariser of Chinese culture to the west in the 20th century, wrote about the Sai Weng story in his book *The Importance of Living* (1937):

[In Taoism] there are no such things as luck and adversity. The great Taoist teaching is the emphasis on being over doing, character over achievement and calm over action. But inner calm is possible only when man is not disturbed by the vicissitudes of fortune.

Evidently this kind of philosophy enables a man to stand a few hard knocks in life in the belief that there are no such things as hard knocks without advantages. Like medals, they always have a reverse side. [...] The desire for success is killed by the shrewd hunch that the desire for success means very much the same thing as the fear of failure. The greater success a man has made, the more he fears a climb down. The illusive rewards of fame are pitched against the tremendous advantages of obscurity. From the Taoist point of view, an educated man is one who believes he has not succeeded when he has, but is not so sure he has failed when he fails, while the mark of the half-educated man is his assumptions that his outward successes and failures are absolute and real.

Le Coq Vaniteux

Jounelle Gibson and Maya Sapieka

Il était une fois un coq vaniteux, Corbin, dont la beauté du plumage, aux yeux de ses voisins, le faisait passer pour une créature féerique. Tous les matins il se promenait dans la ferme et autour du village tout entier. Cependant l'orgueil s'empara de lui et l'amena à se vanter de son apparence magnifique vis-à-vis d'autres animaux. Corbin se sentit supérieur, en comparaison avec le chien, par exemple, dont la laideur paraissait indémontrable. Corbin adorait bien son travail et sa responsabilité de réveiller chaque matin les habitants du village, comme s'il les tirait tous, pensait-on, du royaume des morts.

Quant à Charles le chien, il se prenait lui aussi pour le plus important de tous vu le rôle qu'il assumait pour la communauté tout entière. Aussi pensa-t-il qu'il était non seulement le meilleur ami du fermier et le protecteur incontournable de la ferme mais aussi le bon berger sans lequel les moutons se fourvoieraient. Charles n'hésita point de multiplier les efforts pour que d'autres animaux le reconnussent, suite à sa ruse et sa force, comme le meilleur et le plus utile d'entre tous.

Voilà qu'un jour, de mauvaise humeur, Charles vit Corbin marchant et se pavanant parmi une foule d'animaux.

- Tout le monde, regardez-moi, leur dit-il, je suis très beau!

- Ferme ta gueule, lui dit Charles, tu es vraiment vaniteux!

- Pauvre chien, dit Corbin, tu n'es que trop jaloux, tu ferais mieux, comme tout le monde, de maîtriser ta mauvaise langue.

Ce fut le comble pour Charles qui supporta mal ce grief. Il courut vers Corbin et lui arracha une touffe considérable de merveilleuses plumes de sa queue. Ainsi Corbin perdit-il l'atout majeur de sa belle parure.

Il sentit qu'il n'était plus aussi spécial qu'on le reconnaissait. La tristesse s'empara de ce coq quand toute sa confiance personnelle se vida de son imagination à cause d'une apparence qui ne fut pas la sienne. Que d'autres animaux du village se méfièrent de lui due à cette perte inopinée de sa beauté, cela fut possible dans un monde où la victime les avait habitués à contempler ses attraits physiques.

- Je ne serai plus capable de chanter à l'avenir à cause de mon embarras, se lamenta-t-il.

- Eh quoi, pensa-t-il, n'ai-je pas un fils talentueux à qui passer la main?

Cependant Milou, le fils du Corbin, était si timide qu'il resta dans l'ombre de son père pour la moitié sa vie. Bien que Corbin fût triste de la fin de son rôle, il ne manqua pourtant pas de guider avec le plus de zèle possible son fils dans ce métier qui lui était peu habituel.

Le lendemain matin, le jeune Milou se mit à chanter. Le chant du nouvel initié le fit passer, aux yeux des pensionnaires de la ferme, pour le phœnix dont la mélodie sans fausse note ne pouvait provenir que d'un autre monde. De son côté, Charles remarqua attentivement la majestueuse silhouette du fils de Corbin. Le jaloux attarda son regard méchant sur le plumage de la queue du jeune chanteur talentueux. Sans être charmé par l'harmonie des notes et de la forme attrayante de l'inconnu, Charles, dans sa bêtise le confondit sans doute à son père.

- Que le plumage de Corbin a poussé si vite, s'exclama-t-il en colère.

Il se sentit humilié, se rendant compte qu'il ne sut pas torpiller le rôle de Corbin.

Ainsi, frappé de sa folie habituelle, Charles tordit le cou du fils de Corbin, l'étrangla sans coup férir.

- Mon Dieu, cria Corbin, qu'as-tu fait ? C'est mon pauvre fils, mon fils unique!

- Je pensais que c'était toi, lui répondit Charles. Qu'est-ce que je viens de faire?

- Il n'y a rien que l'on puisse faire, médicaments ou médecins, c'est trop tard! tu es un chien méprisable.

À cause de la vanité et de la honte de Corbin, son fils en paya le prix. Corbin comprit enfin qu'il était égoïste en se préoccupant plus de son apparence que de sa famille. Il fut tourmenté dans son âme et finit par découvrir qu'au-delà de la beauté et de l'apparence, la vie était pleine de possibilités.

Voyant que Corbin était très bouleversé et accablé de chagrin, Charles se sentit coupable et honteux, et après un peu de réflexion, il déclara :

- Je me rends compte de mes actions, et je les regrette entièrement.

- Cela ne va rien changer, rétorqua Corbin.

- Oui je sais, mais on peut commencer à vivre comme des égaux, répondit Charles. Je reconnais à présent l'importance de chaque animal sur la ferme.

- Oui je suis d'accord, lui confia Charles.

Corbin décida de commencer une nouvelle vie où il ne se comporterait pas comme par le passé. Chaque matin il chantait fièrement pour son fils et pour lui-même. Les autres animaux éprouvèrent son bonheur, et ils devinrent tous des amis. En même temps, Charles apprit à partager la responsabilité de la vie et ne mit plus en cause l'égalité de tous les pensionnaires de la ferme.

Quelques jours plus tard, Corbin tourna les yeux et vit que ses plumes de queue commençaient à pousser, de nouveau...

The Vain Rooster

Jounelle Gibson and Maya Sapieka
translated by Denis Hirson

Once upon a time, there was a vain rooster named Roger. His plumage was emerald, green and black – so beautiful that, to his neighbours, he appeared to come out of a fairytale. Every morning he went strutting around the farm. Filled with pride, he showed off his appearance, more magnificent by far than that of the other animals, particularly the dog, whose personality was so ugly compared to the rooster's beauty. Roger adored his work: he was responsible for waking up the inhabitants of the farm every morning – it was as if the day could not begin without him.

As for the dog, whose name was Don, he took himself to be the most important of all, given what he did for the entire farm. He thought he was not only the farmer's best friend and the indispensable protector of the farm, but also a fine sheepdog without whom the sheep would escape. Don always doubled his efforts so that the other animals would recognize him as the best and most useful of them all, thanks to his strength and determination.

One day, when he was in a bad mood, Don saw Roger preening himself as he passed among a crowd of animals.

- Look at me, everybody, Roger said to them, See how beautiful I am!
- Shut your trap, replied Don, you are really vain!
- Poor dog, said Roger, you're just jealous of me.

This was the last straw for Don, who could not bear such an insult. He rushed towards Roger and tore out a considerable sheaf of his tail feathers.

Thus Roger lost the best part of his beautiful plumage. He felt he was no longer as special as he had been held to be. Sadness took hold of him and he lost all confidence, since in his mind's eye he no longer looked like himself. Other animals in the farm might possibly now start avoiding him due to his unexpected loss. After all, had he not accustomed them to contemplating his beauty?

I will no longer be capable of singing in the future, so embarrassed will I feel, he lamented.

On the other hand, he thought, do I not have a talented son who

can take my place?

Roger's son was, however, so timid and lived in his father's shadow. While Roger was sad that he could no longer play his role, he was relieved that his son was available and ready to take his place.

Next morning, the young rooster began singing. In the eyes of the other residents of the farm, the song of the new initiate made of him a phoenix whose faultless melody could only come from another world. Don, for his part, paid careful attention to the majestic silhouette of Roger's son. Jealously and with evil intent, he noted the tail plumage of the talented young singer. By no means charmed by the harmony of the notes or the attractive appearance of the stranger, Don idiotically confused him with his father.

How quickly Roger's plumage has grown back, he exclaimed in anger!

Feeling humiliated, he realised that he had not been able to deprive Roger of his role.

Once again, struck with madness, Don twisted the neck of Roger's son, and so severely damaged his vocal cords that he could never sing again.

- My God, cried Roger, what have you done? That's my poor son, my only son!

- I thought it was you, replied Don. What have I just brought about?

- There is nothing to be done, neither doctor nor doctoring, it's too late! You are an abominable dog!

Roger's son had paid the price for his father's vanity and shame. Roger finally understood how selfish he had been to pay more attention to his appearance than to his family. In his tormented soul, he discovered that beyond the beauty of appearance, life was filled with possibility.

Seeing that Roger was shaken and overcome with sadness, Don felt guiltily shameful, and after some reflection declared:

- I realize what I have done, I am filled with regret.

- That is not going to change anything, shot back Roger.

- Yes, I know, yet we can begin to live as equals, replied Don. I now recognize the importance of each animal on the farm.

- Yes, I agree, confided Roger.

Roger decided to begin a life in which he would not behave as before. Each morning he sang proudly for his son and for himself. The other animals felt his happiness, and all became friends. At the same time

Don learned to share his responsibilities, no longer believing that all the farm's residents were less than equal.

A few days later, Roger turned around and saw that his tail feathers had begun to grow once more...

Response to the Sai Weng story

In the original story, in the first paragraph, Sai Weng loses his horse, however the missing horse later returns with another horse. Following this, Sai Weng's son injures himself by the falling off the new horse but fortunately this means that his son will not have to fight in the war. Our story follows this pattern. The dog dislikes the rooster for his vanity and so attempts to punish him by destroying his beauty. The rooster, Corbin (Roger in English version), loses his confidence and is no longer able to crow. Although this may be seen as a bad thing, it allows Corbin's son to finally prove himself to his father by taking his place. However, this good luck is followed by bad luck when Charles the dog (Don in English version) loses his temper again and attacks Corbin's son so that he can never sing again. Charles's actions have brought much sorrow but together he and Corbin manage to realise their own mistakes. Another similarity is just as the original story has a central character that brings in other characters such as Sai Weng who brings his son and the horse into the story, our story follows Corbin with Charles as a secondary character and his son as a third. The underlying moral of the story of Sai Weng is ultimately that one should accept their lot for what it is and our story follows the same set of morals whereby the characters must learn to live as equals, accept their positions on the farm and live with humility. The story of Sai Weng deals primarily with the idea of luck. "There are no such things as hard knocks without advantages". On the other hand one cannot count on luck alone, as drawbacks are sure to follow. The story of Corbin shows that even though things are not going well, it does not mean one will not recover but at the same time, one cannot be too sure of oneself, as one never know what will happen. The story is influenced by traditional Chinese stories from the Confucian Sanzi Jing (Three Character Classics) basing its morals on the idea that physical beauty does not define anybody and that jealousy gets you nowhere. This story also expresses morality and therefore shows that luck and morality are intertwined. Both stories have lessons for the reader. In the story of Sai Weng, the central character already accepts his lot, in ours Corbin has to learn to accept his.

虚荣的公鸡

茹奈尔·吉布森 玛雅·斯皮尔卡

很久以前，有一只虚荣的公鸡，名叫高宾。他的羽毛是如此美丽，他的邻居觉得他好像就是来自于一个童话中的人物。每天早晨，他都会趾高气扬地在农场和整个村子里游荡。他总是豪情满怀地展示他的外表，看上去远比其他动物更加华丽堂皇。高宾觉得他比狗要优越。狗这么难看，真应该从人们的视线中消失。高宾为他自己的工作感到自豪：他负责每天早上把村里的居民叫起床 - 好像是把他们从死神那里召回一样。

至于那只狗，查尔斯，从他为整个社区所作的贡献来说，他也认为自己是重要的。他觉得他不仅是农场主最好的朋友，为农场提供了不可缺少的保护，而且他还是一只优秀的牧羊犬，没有他的话，羊群早就逃跑了。查尔斯以他的实力和老谋深算的方式毫不犹豫地加倍努力，以便得到其他动物的认可，从而可以把他当作所有人中最好的和最有用的。

有一天，查尔斯心情恰巧不好，他看到高宾自负夸耀地从一大群动物旁边经过。

- 大家看呐，他们对他说，我是多么的帅气啊！

- 闭上你的鸟嘴，查尔斯回答道，你真是太虚荣了！

- 可怜的狗，高宾说，你这是嫉妒吧，你最好跟其他人一样默不做声罢。

这可是动了查尔斯最后的底线了，他是无法忍受这样侮辱的。他冲向高宾，把他尾羽上的相当一把毛撕毁了。高宾因此失去了他美丽羽毛的最好部分。

高宾觉得他不再像过去那样特别了。一阵悲伤的感情袭来，他失去了所有信心。从精气神上，他再也不像过去的他了。村里的其他动物有可能会因为他意外损失而现在开始回避他。毕竟，过去不是他自己让他们习惯了关注他的美丽吗？

- 我将再也不能够歌唱了，我觉得我是多么狼狈啊，他感叹道。

- 嗯，他想到，我不是有一个很有才华的儿子可以顶替我的位置吗？

不过高宾的儿子米卢非常胆小，他的前半生一直生活在他父亲的阴影下。高宾很伤心自己再也无法发挥他的作用了，因此他不遗余力地训练他的儿子，以至于他几近掌握了这门技艺。

第二天早晨，年轻的米卢开始唱歌了。在其他农场的居民看来，这个新手的歌让他成为一只凤凰，他那完美无缺的旋律只可能是来自另外一个世界。查尔斯，从他的角度出发，仔细观察着高宾儿子雄伟的身影，心中充满了嫉妒和邪恶意图，他注意到了有才华的年轻歌手的尾部羽毛。查尔斯绝不会被和谐的音符或者这位陌生人的引人外表迷住，他白痴一样地把他和他的父亲混淆了。

- 高宾的羽毛长得也太快了吧，他愤怒地惊呼。

他感到了羞辱，他意识到他没有能够剥夺高宾的角色。

他一贯的疯劲又上来了，查尔斯扭断了高宾儿子的脖子，一劳永逸地把他掐死了。

- 我的上帝，高宾哭喊着，你做了什么？这是我可怜的儿子，我唯一的儿子啊！

- 查尔斯回答说，我还以为是你呢。我刚才干了什么吗？

- 没救了，医生和抢救都没用了，为时已晚！你这个可恶的狗。

高宾的儿子为了他的父亲的虚荣和耻辱而付出了代价。高宾终于明白了，对于自己的外表比对他的家人更关心是多么自私的行为啊。在他受折磨的灵魂深处，他发现了，除了美丽的外观，生活充满了可能性。

看到高宾颓丧和悲伤的样子，查尔斯感到了内疚和羞耻，反省之后宣布道：

- 我意识到了我所做的一切，我深感遗憾。

- 这改变不了任何东西，高宾反驳道。

- 是的，我知道，但我们从今可以开始平等地生活了，查尔斯回答。我现在认识到农场上每个动物的重要性。

- 是的，我同意，高宾坦诚接受。

高宾决定在生活中开始不再像以前那样的表现。每天早晨，他自豪地为他的儿子和自己歌唱。其他动物感觉到了他的幸福，都跟他成了朋友。查尔斯同时学会了分享他的职责，不再认为农场所有的居民均是不平等的。

几天后，高宾回首张望，只见他的尾羽再次开始生长……

Pule Stays Put

Silke Heiss

Pule was drafted into the army to fight in a civil war. His friends went into exile, or objected conscientiously, or signed up, but Pule took on a false name and went into hiding, saying, ‘This isn’t too bad. I’ll stay put.’

The government changed hands in a peaceful revolution, and conscription was abolished. Pule emerged unmasked under his true name, looked about and said, ‘Things don’t look too good.’ There was ongoing civil unrest and criminal violence committed by people who did not like each other’s faces, and who wanted each other’s things. Pule had nothing, but he was attacked. He was unconscious for eleven days.

When Pule came to, he saw a sweet and desirable woman standing at his bedside, whom he did not recognise.

‘She’s not too bad,’ he thought, ‘I’ll stay put.’

‘Your friend brought me to see you,’ she told him. ‘I watched and breathed in unison with you in your long sleep. I helped to calm you when the doctors did your brain scan – you heard my voice. I like your face and am to be your wife,’ she declared.

‘That doesn’t sound too good,’ thought Pule. But the woman had looked after him in his sleep of nightmares. So he married her, and they frolicked and danced and made love.

After the wedding, his wife asked, ‘Will you move with me to the Beautiful City where the mountains’ ankles stand in the sea?’

‘I’m not sure,’ Pule said. He had prospects where he was.

‘But I must go,’ insisted his wife, ‘Please come?’

So Pule said, ‘All right then. It can’t be too bad. I’m committed: I’ll stay put with you.’

And off they went.

Pule did a little bit of this and a little bit of that – teaching and mentoring; and his wife did a hundred and one things besides – teaching, research, editing, and art. Things weren’t too good – the Beautiful City was not a city of prospects. Pule and his wife lived many years in beauty and poverty in their cottage overlooking the sea, and they saw thousands of pink sunrises and hundreds of silver

moonrises, ate rice and vegetables and sometimes meat, and Pule built a reputation for himself as an excellent, if unmoneyed, teacher. When the wife scolded Pule, whom need made grumpy, he said, 'Things aren't too bad, because we love each other, after all.'

One day the wife said, 'It is time for me to leave the sea. I must go to the forest. There is a man there, whose wife I am to be.'

Pule and the wife embraced each other and wept. Then Pule said, 'You go to that man. It doesn't look too good, but I'll stay put.'

The wife was happy and went. Pule felt lost and alone and free.

'This isn't too bad, after all,' he said, and had a dalliance, or maybe two.

Soon a friend from the country called and said, 'Will you leave the Beautiful City? There are prospects for teachers here.'

'It doesn't look good, because I'm the wrong age and race and gender,' Pule mused, and added, 'I'm coming.'

Pule went, found a little cottage where fresh milk was delivered daily, signed on for all kinds of paying work, and before long a lovely lonely woman who liked his face invited him into her bed.

He said, 'Things don't look too bad at all. Here I will stay put.'

Response to the Sai Weng story

My story's central character is Pule, who experiences (1a) the misfortune of conscription; (1b) the fortune of release from conscription; (2a) the misfortune of being attacked; (2b) the fortune of finding a wife; (3a) the misfortune moving to a place he does not want to be; (3b) the fortune of creating a reputation; (4a) the misfortune of his wife leaving him; (4b) the fortune of finding a new woman and new work elsewhere.

As in the Chinese story, in my story, the main character, Pule, is not in control of his fate, which starts with conscription, and ends via a marriage tied and broken with a sense – like the story of Sai Weng – of the character 'having got away' without suffering the worst, with life being neither too good nor too bad.

Running through my story is Pule's philosophy of 'staying put', no matter whether things are good or bad. As the story unfolds, 'staying put' is shown not to be a literal truth, but Pule's practice of staying true to his choices. I am critical of the phlegmatism (fear of negative emotions) in the story of Sai Weng, and so my story incorporates 'Greek'/ western – more dramatic – aspects, in that Pule's emotions form a part of his troubles – but he manages these with his humorous 'it's not too bad – it's not too good' refrain. Pule is not arrested by his emotions, and is thus able to negotiate unexpected events beyond his control. He neither submits himself as a conscript, nor does he make a show of protest, he simply hides. He is the victim of random violence and accepts that this results unexpectedly in his marriage. He does not share his wife's wish to move to another place, but nor does he resist it. Though poor, he builds a reputation. When his wife leaves him, he grieves, but does not stop her. When he has the opportunity to pursue better prospects, he does so without overly high expectations.

Pule takes the path of least resistance throughout, whether it goes up or down, looking neither back nor forward, but only at where he is at present. He is not unemotional – he is neither as old nor as phlegmatic as Sai Weng, and his story is contemporary, and western, with human emotions presenting as much of a challenge in ups and downs as external realities. But Pule's pendulum between 'it's not too bad' and 'it's not too good' while 'staying put' shows a detachment from the real limits of his self, without compromising human feeling. In this way

he exemplifies not so much a parody of, as perhaps a more spirited approach than the story of Sai Weng offers to, life, in which unpleasant emotions accompanying unwanted events are accepted along with all that is not within our control. Pule has a sense of humour, while Sai Weng's wisdom is a tad dry.

普乐沉得住气

西尔克·海斯

普乐被军队征召入伍打内战。他的朋友们要么纷纷逃亡，要么较真地反抗，再要么就应征入伍了。普乐则取了一个假名字，躲藏了起来，说：“这样倒不坏。我会沉得住气。”

政府以和平方式进行了改换，征兵制度被废除了。普乐又以真实姓名冒了出来，他环顾四周，说：“事情看起来不太好。”相互看着对方的脸不顺眼的，而且相互看着对方的财物眼红的人们不断地制造内乱和刑事暴力犯罪。普乐虽然身无分文，但他仍受到攻击。他一下子11天昏迷不醒。

当普乐醒来的时候，他看到了一个他不曾认识的女人站在他的床边，是那样的甜美和理想。

“她看上去不错嘛，”他思忖道，“我要沉得住气。”

“你的朋友把我带来见你，”她告诉他。“在你昏迷不醒的时间里我一直守望着你，跟你同呼吸，共命运。医生在给你做大脑扫描的时候是我帮助安抚你，——你听到了我的声音。我喜欢你的容貌，我要做你的妻子，”她宣布道。

“这听起来可不太好吧，”普乐思忖道。但是那个女人在他梦魇般的日子里是那样地在照顾他，于是，他娶了她，他们一起嬉闹，跳舞，而且做了爱。

婚礼之后，他的妻子问道，“你愿意跟我一起搬到美丽城去吗？那里的山脚都泡在海水里。”

“这很难说，”普乐说道。他本来有他自己的打算。

“但我必须去，”他的妻子坚持道，“你来嘛。”

于是，普乐说，“那好吧。那不会太糟糕吧。我答应过，我会跟你在一起的。”然后他们就一起去了。

普乐零零星星地做点这，做点那——既教书又辅导。而他的妻子除了教学、研究、做编辑和搞艺术之外，还做成了一大堆的事情。事情不太好吧——美丽城并没有什么前景。普乐

和他的妻子在俯瞰大海的茅屋中生活了很多年，饱尝了美丽和贫穷。他们看到了成千上万次粉红色的日出和成百上千次皓月的升起。他们吃着米饭、蔬菜，偶尔有点肉。普乐为自己树立起了声誉——一个穷得叮当响的优秀教师。当妻子把普乐骂急了的时候，他就说，“事情没有那么糟糕，因为我们彼此相爱，这就成了。”

有一天，妻子说道，“我该离开大海了。我必须要到森林去。有一个人在那里，我要成为他的妻子。”

普乐和妻子相拥抱头大哭不止。普乐说，“你要去找那个男人。这样看起来不太好，但是我会沉得住气。”

妻子高兴地去了。普乐觉得很茫然，孤独，但是自由了。

“这其实也不是那么糟糕吧，”他说道，因为他有了一个情妇，也或许是两个。

不久，从乡下来的一个朋友探访他，说，“离开这个美丽城吧，教师在我们那里有前途。”

普乐若有所思地说，“这事看起来不太好吧，我的年龄，种族和性别都不太合适。”他又补充说，“我来吧。”

普乐去了，找了一间小茅屋住下，每天都有鲜牛奶送上来。他受聘于各种有报酬的工作。没过多久，一个喜欢他的容貌的可爱而且寂寞的女人就把他勾引到她的床上了。

普乐说道：“事情看来一点也不差啊。我会沉得住气。”

Die Kostbarste Perle

Rebecca Domingo

In der Zeit der gelben Sterne wohnten in Dresden ein jüdischer Juwelierhändler und seine Frau. Als es dazu kam, dass das Geschäft wegen des Zeichens im Ladenfenster unterging und man sich ihr Haus und ganzes Vermögen (ungerechterweise) aneignete, sagten viele über sie: „Ihr Leben geht zugrunde; was bleibt, ist bloß ein Scherbenhaufen.“ Aber der Mann sagte zu seiner Frau: „Wir leben noch. Der Herr wird uns einen neuen Weg zeigen.“

Ein treuer Freund bot ihnen Schutz in seinem Kellerraum, und dort verbrachten sie einige Monate. Obwohl man der Meinung hätte sein können, sie hätten Glück gehabt, überhaupt ein Versteck gefunden zu haben, sagte der Mann zu seiner Frau: „Zwar leben wir noch, aber wie lange hält der, der uns verbirgt, noch aus?“

Mittlerweile wurde es dem treuen Freund und seiner Familie immer gefährlicher, und eines Tages geschah das Unvorstellbare... Man bedrohte die Familie des Freundes, und er verriet sie. Nachdem er in der Nacht dem Mann und seiner Frau heimlich geholfen hatte, aus seinem Keller zu fliehen, sagte er leise zu sich, ihre fliehenden Gestalten beobachtend: „Ihr Leben ist jetzt zu Ende; was bleibt, ist bloß ein Scherbenhaufen.“ In ebendiesem Moment sagte der Mann zu seiner Frau: „Wir leben noch. Der Herr wird uns einen neuen Weg zeigen.“

Es gelang ihnen, mit knapper Not zu entkommen und zwar auf einem Güterzug Richtung Zürich, verborgen zwischen enteigneten Kulturschätzen. Sie schafften es, sich dort eine dürftige Unterkunft zu besorgen, und langsam aber sicher schlugen sie jenen neuen Weg ein. Eines Tages vernahmen sie mit großem Entsetzen die Nachricht, dass Dresden von den Alliierten zerbombt worden war. Hätten sie noch dort versteckt gelebt, so wären sie ohne Zweifel jetzt tot.

The Most Precious Pearl

Rebecca Domingo
translated by Silke Heiss

In the time of the yellow stars there lived in Dresden a Jewish jeweller and his wife. When it happened – due to the sign in the window – that the business went under, and their house and all their belongings were unjustly appropriated, many said: “Their life is ruined; what remains is but a heap of shards.” But the man said to his wife: “We are still alive. The Lord will show us a new way.”

A loyal friend offered them protection in his cellar, and there they stayed for some months. Although one could have thought they had been lucky to have found a hideout at all, the man said to his wife: “We may still be alive, but how long will he who’s concealing us hold out?”

Things became ever more dangerous for the loyal friend and his family, and one day the unimaginable occurred... his family was threatened and the friend betrayed them. He secretly helped the man and his wife out of his cellar that night, and, watching their fleeing forms, said quietly to himself: “Their life is finished now; what remains is but a heap of shards.” In that same moment, the man said to his wife: “We’re still alive. The Lord will show us a new way.”

They made a narrow escape, on a goods train headed for Zurich, concealed between plundered treasures. They managed to secure humble accommodation, and slowly but surely they paved their new way. One day they were horrified to receive news of the Allied bombing of Dresden. Had they still been in hiding there, they would doubtlessly now be dead.

Response to the Sai Weng story

My story corresponds to the original in the following ways:

- it has a central character who is portrayed in conjunction with a family member
- it narrates three events
- in each event, an opinion is conveyed, proclaiming imminent disaster, great luck/ fortune, and impending doom respectively; the central character, grounded in his belief system, responds in each case with the opposite opinion,
- in the end, “fate” (in our case, history) proves the central character to have been the wiser of the lot.

It could be said that there are elements of cultural translation at play in this version, in that it incorporates various historical themes of particular significance to the culture of our discipline, German Studies, and weaves them on a loom originally constructed in and by a vastly different culture. I transported the setting to WWII Germany, specifically Dresden, which is well-known for having been one of the cities almost completely destroyed by Allied bombs. My central character is a Jewish-German jeweller, which, taking into account the setting, affords associations such as closure of business, appropriation of home and goods, upheaval, uncertainty, concealment in cellars, betrayal, the “neutrality” of Switzerland. There is also mention of Nazi-plundered cultural artefacts, an issue which is to this very day a pertinent and largely unresolved one. Furthermore, the Taoist metaphysical schema at the heart of the attitude expressed by the original Chinese central character is transported to that of Judaism, in which a faithful follower is able to stoically withstand the greatest trials without losing hope and faith in God (cf. Job). I’ve titled the story “The Most Precious Pearl” with reference to the New Testament parable about the inestimable value of faith. While such a reference to Christian scripture does, to a certain extent, disconnect the reader from the story’s Jewish foundation, I don’t think this is a serious issue, as the importance of unwavering, childlike faith in a God who provides is common to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

最珍贵的箴言

丽贝卡·多明戈

在纳粹统治时代，有一个犹太珠宝商和他的妻子住在德累斯顿。当这一不幸时代到来时 - 由于在窗口的黄色标志 - 他们的生意破产了。他们的房子和所有财物被（不公正地）征用了，许多人说：“他们的生活毁了，剩下的只是一堆瓦砾了。”可是珠宝商对妻子说：“我们还活着。上帝会向我们展示新的生活道路。”

忠诚的朋友在他的地窖里为他们提供了保护，他们在那里呆了几个月。虽然人们会想他们已经很幸运地找到了一个藏身之地，可是珠宝商却对妻子说：“我们可能还能活着，但是藏匿我们的人到底还能够坚持多久？”

形势变得对忠诚的朋友和家人比以往任何时候都更加危险了。有一天难以想象的事终于发生了... ..由于自身家庭的安危受到威胁，朋友只能放弃他们了。趁着夜色，他暗中帮助珠宝商和他的妻子从地窖出逃。看着他们逃亡的背影，他的朋友暗暗地对自己说：“他们的生活现在完结了，只会剩下一堆瓦砾了。”而此时此刻，珠宝商对妻子说：“我们还活着。上帝会向我们展示新的生活道路。”

他们九死一生，爬上一列开往苏黎世的货物列车，藏身于被掠走的宝藏之间。他们设法搞到了一处狭小的栖身之处，慢慢地但却是稳步地奠定了新的生活道路。有一天，他们听到了惊人的坏消息，盟军轰炸了德累斯顿。要是他们仍然藏匿在那里的话，他们现在是必死无疑了。

Ukonakala Kwenye Kukulunga Kwenye

Tsepiso Nzayo

“Ndifuna ukuba ngumdlali wodumo.” La ngamazwi kaThamsanqa Mhlontlo, uzwathi lomfana oneminyaka elishumi elinesibhozo, onothando olungummangaliso lwebhola ekhatywayo. Akonelanga nje ukuyithanda, unaso nesiphiwo sokuyidlala. Xa eyibambile ibhola uba ngathi ngumbane ukuya kunozinti, yaye ophambi kwakhe akamazele nto. Unesantya, yaye unesakhono sokuyibamba angayiphunculi. Ngubani owayenokuma phambi kwakhe lo mfana? Wayengumbane, ngenene wayelilandele igama awayelinikwe ngabahlobo bakhe nababembiza ngalo, uThunder. YayinguThamsanqa “Thunder” Mhlontlo. Kwakududuma akuyibamba ibhola.

UThamsanqa lo wazalelwe kwifama yaseGqume kude kufuphi nesixeko saseRhini. Kulapho uthando lwakhe lwebhola ekhatywayo lwaqala lwaze lwakhula khona. Nanjengaye nawuphi na umntwana oyindodana osakhulayo, ebessithi xa ebuya esikolweni aye kudlala nabanye abantwana ebaleni. Ibhola zazisenziwa ngeengxowa ezibomvu zee-orenji bazihlohle amaphepha. Kwasekukhuleni kwakhe ke uThamsanqa wayeyinkwenkwe enamendu, la mendu ke ayemsebenzela kulo mdlalo.

Wayeneziphiwo ke uThamsanqa nanjengoko wayekrelekrele kakhulu ezincwadini, ezinika ingqwalasela. Loo nto ke yaye yamenza ukuba abe ngomnye wabafundi abathandwayo yaye abaqwalaselwayo ngootishala. Ebengumfundi ongonqeniyo ukuyimisa iklasi ebuza imibuzo, ukuzama ukunceda nabo bangahle bathi kanti bebengekayichani into leyo ifundiswayo.

Ukufikelela kumabanga aphezulu kwaba ngamatshe kulo mfana, nanjengoko waye waliphumelela emagqabini ibanga lethoba. Ngenxa yokuba kule fama wayehlala kuyo isikolo esifundisa amabanga aphakamileyosasingenazonkeizixhobo ezifunekayo kwafuneka ukuba aye kuhlala nezizalwane zakhe eRhini. Injongo yayikukumlungiselela ukuba akwazi ukufumana uncedo oluza kumbangela ukuba afikelele eDyunivesithi. Azange ibe ziindaba ezimnandi ezi kulo mfana wakwaMhlontlo. Wayecinga iqela lakhe lebhola alishiya ngasemva kuba kwakulungiselelwa imidlalo yobuntshatsheli. Wayengomnye wabadlali ekuthenjelwe kubo yaye naye wayengafuni ukubadanisa abahlobo

kunye nabalandeli. Nanjengomntwana owayenembeko, wathobela ilizwi labazali, wahamba waya eRhini. Wazixolisa ngokuzixelela ukuba kuhlwa kusisa kwaye umzingisi akanashwa. Wamkelwa ngobubele ke ngumakazi wakhe eRhini, owayengafekethisi konke konke, kodwa emthanda lo mfana kadadewabo kuba ke unkabi wayezolile yaye eneliso elibukhali.

Ekufikeni eRhini akuzange kuphosiswe maseko, waya kubhaliswa kwisikolo samabanga aphakamileyo iNombulelo. Wathi ke akufumana ithuba wakhe wazinika ixesha lokuqwalasela amabala okudlala apha kwesi sikolo sitsha. Akazange agxeke nto. Kwiveki yesibini engenile esikolweni, kwaba ngathi amaphupha akhe aza kuzaliseka nangaphezulu kokuba ebecinga. “Amakhwenkwe anomdla wokudlala ibhola ekhatywayo kuyacelwa ukuba ashiyeke ukuphuma kwesikolo,” watsho umyalezo owadluliswa kutitshala ngomnye wabafundi. Wawufunda ke utitshala umyalezo, engaqondi ukuba loo myalezo wawungumculo omyoli ezindlebeni zikaThamsanqa. Akazange alibazise ke umfana wazixelela ukuba nali ithuba lakhe. Saphuma isikolo adibana amakhwenkwe notishala oza kuwaqeqesha. Kwaxoxwa nje kancinci, waze waqukumbela utitshala ngelithi, “Ngomso nize niphathe impahla zenu zokuzilolonga.”

Ziqengqelekile ke iinyanga kungekho gxeke ezifundweni nasemidlalweni kaThamsanqa.

“Ngeeholide zenyanga yeSilimela kuza kubakho ukhuphiswano lokukhetha abafundi abaza kumela iphondo. Kufunwa abadlali abangaphantsi kweminyaka elishumi elinesithoba,” wabaxelela utishala. Wavuya akuva ezi ndaba uThamsanqa. “Yho! Ndiza kuqinisekisa ukuba ndiyakhethwa, kunini ndifuna ukudlalela iphondo lam,” wazithethela watsho unkabi, uncumo iloluya lukabhlankethe.

Lafika ixesha lokuvalwa kwezikolo. Kwathi kuba eyintanga yokuya esuthwini uThamsanqa wenza njalo. Kwathi xa kuphela iveki yesibini esesuthwini kwafika iindaba ezingazange zimphathe kakuhle. “Thamsanqa ndithi mandikuxelela ukuba ukhuphiswano luza kuba kule veki izayo. Inyanga itshintshiwe kuba kulungiselelwa iNdebe yeHlabathi,” watsho utishala wakhe, washiyeka lo mfana ematshekile, ilizwe lifile kuye.

Ekubuyeni kwakhe esuthwini uThamsanqa waqhuba nezifundo zakhe kwakunye nokudlala ibhola ekhatywayo, yaye efuna ukuzilolonga nangaphezulu. Kwiveki yesibini zivuliwe izikolo kwaye kwafika umpoposho wokuba kuza kubakho ukhuphiswano lwezikolo zikazwelonke eKapa. Wavuya unkabi kuba eqonda ukuba akasoze aliphose elo ithuba, nangona lalingelothuba elilungileyo emva kweemviwo zokulungiselela ezokugqibela. Waye wazimisela ngakumbi ekudlaleni kuba wayebona ukuba kungenzeka ibe leli thuba kwakukudala elilindele eli.

Kunyani siwe ke xa kuthiwa ukonakala kwenye kukulunga kwenye nanjengoko loo nto yabangela ukuba angaziniki ingqwalasela ngokupheleleyo iincwadi zakhe. Ekufikeni kwexesha leemviwo, kwaye kwabhalwa nanjengoko bekucwangcisiwe. Ekupheleni kweemviwo kwaye kwalungiselelwa ukuvalwa kwezikolo, kodwa ke oku kwakungazi kuhamba nje kodwa kuThamsanqa. Kwakufanele ezifumene iindaba ezimnandi zokuba igama lakhe lalikhokuhlu lwabo babetyunjelwe ukuya kudlala eKapa. Kangangendlela awayechulumance ngayo, wayengasawuvali umlomo. Sele enombono wakhe unkabi, engumdlali ophambili kumaqela awaziwayo ebhola ekhatywayo.

Ngelixa uThamsanqa angasakwazi nokuwuvula umlomo, yimincili yokuya eKapa, abazali bona babecinga ngezifundo zakhe lo mfana, nabo benethemba neqikili lokuba akasoze abadanise nanjengoko wayesoloko enenkathalo. Umakazi kaThamsanqa wagqiba ekubeni aye kuzithatha iziphumo zomtshana wakhe, yaye enamabhongo okuba soze lo mfana abaphoxe.

“Thamsanqa yintoni le?” ubuzile umakazi esisifu ngumsindo, emva kokuba ezifumene iziphumo. “Uzele ukudlala ibhola ekhatywayo okanye uzele ukufunda apha eRhini khona ibiyibhola oyikhathalele ngantoni le?” waqokela ke umakazi, emxine ngemibuzo umtshana wakhe engamniki nethuba lokuphendula.

“Mamela apha ke, mna makazi wakho, ndithi akuyi apho. Wena into oza kuyenza kukuhlala apha ufunde iincwadi zakho ezi uzilibeleyo ngenxa yale bhola. Siyevana?” wambuza phofu engananze mpendulo umakazi.

“Ewe makazi,” waphendula uThamsanqa ngelizwi eliphantsi, kucaca mhlophe ukuba ubindeke kakhulu sesi sigqibo sikamakazi. Amaphupha akhe eminyaka atshabalala ityeli lesibini phambi

kwamehlo akhe. Akazange akukholelwe ke uThamsanqa oku, imigudu emininzi kangaka ayenzileyo ukuzama ukuphucula isakhono sakhe! Wayengakholelwa ukuba kuyaphela ngolo hlobo. Kodwa ke wayeza kuthini, umakazi wayethethile, kananjalo wayesazi ukuba kufanele isikolo sihambe phambili.

KuThamsanqa yayingase ingapheli iveki, okanye akhe ahambe eRhini okwethutyana. Oku kokuba angababoni oogxa bakhe xa kukhwelwa ibhasi eya ‘empumelelweni’. Kwafika kona okungaliyo, kwayinkungu nelanga esikolweni, abadlali bedibene ukuya kukhwela ibhasi eya eKapa. Kwathi xa lisiya kunina, yenjenjeya ibhasi ukunduluka, isingisa kwelaseKapa. Nabani wayenokuliva ifuthe labadlali ababenemincili, nanjengoko babecula amagwijo, bengasaziva ukungxamela phambili. Waba ke uyancama uThamsanqa, kodwa wabe enesingqala, angasathethi namntu, intliziyo ilihlwili, enemibono yaloo ndlela inde ebeza kukhe ayihambe okokuqala, esiya kudlala umdlalo awuthandayo.

Kwasa kona, iimini zingalindanga uThamsanqa nentliziyo yakhe ebuhlungu nje. Ngentsasa yangoMvulo wavuka njengesiqhelo unkabi, wenza imisebenzi yakhe yasekhaya, ezama ukulibala ngentlungu yakhe. Ithe xa iqinayo imini yangoMvulo wathi “makhe ndimamele unomathotholo, ndiyayithanda la nkqubo kasisi Tshidi, ka-‘Ezithandwa ndim’”. Kwathi kusenjalo lafika ixesha leendaba. Wakhe wacinga ngokutshintsha isikhululo kuba engenamdla kakhulu ezindabeni. Kodwa kwathi kusenjalo kwaphuma inqaku elamenza wangathi ujike wasisimo setyiwa. “Ingozi yebhasi ebilayishe abantwana besikolo ebebesingise eKapa kumdlalo webhola ekhatywayo, ibhukuqe yatsha, yaye akukaziwa nokuba bakhona na abasindileyo”. Yathi ndi le nyewe apha ekuhlaleni, yaye abazali sele beziziyunguma becinga abantwana babo. UThamsanqa wasuka akakwazi nokuthetha, akafuna nokutya, wasuka wabila kubanda, wangathi uza kuyoba. Kwathi kuqinisekiswa ukuba ngenene le bhasi yileyo ibisiya eKapa, wabe uThamsanqa sele engasakwazi nokuthetha ethe ndwanya nje ngathi usisidenge.

Wayesithi akucinga ngabahlobo bakhe angakwazi nokulala, kodwa athi akucinga ngokusinda kwakhe azive ebulela uYehova ngeenceba zakhe. Wavakala ewaphinda amazwi athi “Ukonakala kwenye kukulunga kwenye”.

Thamsanqa's Story

Tsepiso Nzayo

translated by the author and Pamela Maseko

"I want to be the best soccer player." These are the words of Thamsanqa Mhlontlo, a tall well-built 18 year old boy who wanted to be the best soccer player. He was not only passionate, he was so talented. He was fast and quick, his teammates nicknamed him Thunder.

Thamsanqa was born in Gqume farm on the outskirts of Grahamstown. That is where he started kicking a soccer ball. Like every teenage boy, he would come back from school and go play soccer with his friends. They would improvise by making a soccer ball from plastic and papers. Thamsanqa's speed gave him an advantage in this game.

Thamsanqa was also brilliant and he loved school. That is one of the reasons most teachers loved him. After passing Grade 11 at his school he had to go to a more advanced school because there were no resources in his school to take him to matric. He had to go to Grahamstown and stay with relatives. Thamsanqa was sad to leave. He was thinking about his team because they were preparing for the championships. He was one of the players they depended on. He also did not want to let down his friends and teammates. However, because he was an obedient boy, he did what his parents told him to do. He told himself another opportunity would present itself.

After arriving in Grahamstown he was enrolled at Nombulelo High school. On the second day of term a girl came with a notice for the teacher. "All boys interested in playing soccer are asked to remain behind after school," the teacher read. "This is my chance. It's now or never," Thamsanqa mumbled to himself. The bell rang and the boys met with the teacher who was going to be their coach. "Tomorrow please bring your training kit," he told them.

Months passed. Thamsanqa was doing well at school and he was also doing well in soccer. "During June holidays there will be trials for the Provincial under 19s," the teacher told them. Thamsanqa was excited to hear this. "I am sure they will select me, I have been waiting for this opportunity. Representing my province will be an honour," he mumbled to himself again. The time for the June holidays came, and

Thamsanqa went to initiation school. After the second week at “the mountain” his teammate came to tell him news that dampened his spirit. “I came here to tell you that the trials will be next week. They changed the month because of the preparations for the World Cup,” he told him. Thamsanqa was very disappointed. “There is always a way out. Another chance will come,” Thamsanqa comforted himself.

When he came back from initiation school, he continued with studying and playing soccer. On the second week of second term there was an announcement about the schools national soccer tournament that was going to be held in Cape Town. Thamsanqa was so excited, knowing that he was not going to miss this opportunity. They were going to leave after the September examinations. He worked hard during soccer practice to make sure that he made the list of players to be selected. His focus on soccer made him pay hardly any attention to his books. Her aunt had a talk with him, “I hope you are still studying very hard and this soccer of yours is not your only focus. We did not get the chance to go to school, and we do not want you to be like us. That is the reason you are here in Grahamstown, to study.”

Before the last day of term the team was revealed and Thamsanqa’s name was on the list! He was so excited. In his imagination he was already a star: he could stop dreaming about the fans cheering after he scored a goal. He even invented a signature dance to do after scoring. He appreciated the noise of the vuvuzela, thinking “One day the vuvuzelas will be blown for me”.

On the last day of term parents had to go and fetch their children’s examination results. and Thamsanqa’s Aunt went to fetch his. “Thamsanqa what is this?” she asked, fuming with anger. “Did you come here to play soccer or to study? What is this soccer of yours going to do for you?” she cornered him with questions, giving him no chance to answer.

“Listen here,” she said, “I, your aunt, am saying you are not going to Cape Town. You are going to stay here and study. Do you hear me?” she asked, showing no smile on her face. “Yes aunt” he answered, his voice expressing disappointment.

The weekend of the national schools championships came, and players gathered at the school premises, leaving on Saturday evening. On Monday afternoon Thamsanqa was listening to his favourite radio

show. He was about to tune into another radio station to avoid the news, which he loathed. The news presenter started reading: “There has been a horrifying bus accident. It is believed that the bus was travelling from Cape Town to the Eastern Cape. Most of the passengers were schoolchildren who were on their way back from the schools national soccer championships. There were no survivors.”

Thamsanqa could not believe what he had heard. And he was not the only one – other people also heard it. Parents were panicking. In the evening, it was confirmed that the bus was the one transporting Nombulelo schoolchildren and teachers.

Thamsanqa could not speak, his food could not stay down. It was a cold day but sweat was pouring down his face, he felt light-headed. “Even though I was sad because I did not go, the news about the accident was something else. Regardless of what happened I am so grateful that I am still alive”.

Response to the Sai Weng story

My story is about the attitude of a young man who understands what is accidental and what is essential. Thamsanqa Mhlontlo, a talented young man from the Qocwa clan in Gqume village. Mhlontlo has a very strong passion for soccer, and believes that given a chance he will go places and become a superstar. Just like in the Chinese story, he experiences challenges but they turn out to be positive.

First, he has to leave his soccer team, and go stay in Grahamstown to further his studies, while his team was preparing for playoffs to be promoted to an advanced league. He takes going to Grahamstown as an opportunity to good things that are yet to come.

In the second incident, he gets a chance of going to soccer trials to represent the province. He cannot go because the trials date is at the same time as when he has to go to initiation school.

The another opportunity presents itself. Even though it clashes with his examinations he goes to the trials, and he is selected. But then because he did not do well in his examinations, his aunt does not allow him to go with the team to Cape Town. He watches his excited peers preparing for their trip to Cape Town and he once again could not believe his tough luck. But then he gets the news that the bus has been involved in an accident and there were no survivors. He realises that his tough luck has turned out to be his fortune.

泰桑哥的故事

泽皮索·扎由

“我想成为最好的足球运动员，”这是泰桑哥·姆隆德罗常说的一句话。他是一个身材高大的18岁男童，他一直想成为最好的足球运动员。他不仅充满激情，他简直是太有才了。他动作敏捷快速，他的队友给他一个绰号，雷霆。

泰桑哥出生在格雷厄姆斯敦周边的秋姆农场。就在这儿他开始学会踢足球。像所有十几岁的男孩一样，一从学校回来，他就会跟他的朋友们一起去踢球。他们随时可以用塑料或者纸张做成一个足球。泰桑哥的速度使他在比赛中具有优势。

泰桑哥非常聪明，他很喜欢上学。这是大多数老师都喜欢他的原因之一。通过了学校11年级的考试以后，他得转到一所更高级的学校去了，因为现在他所在的学校没有能够让他参加高考的条件。他去了格雷厄姆，跟亲戚住在一起。泰桑哥很郁闷地离开了。他记挂着他的队友，因为他们正准备参加一场比赛。他们还指望着他挑大梁呢。他自己也不想辜负他的朋友和队友。然而，因为他是一个听话的好孩子，他按照父母的话去做了。他告诫自己，会有另外一个机会的。

来到格雷厄姆斯敦之后，他在诺布莱洛高中就读。开学第二天，一个女孩带来了老师的通知：“老师说，所有对踢足球感兴趣的男孩放学后留一下。”“我的机会来了。机不可失，时不再来，”泰桑哥对自己喃喃自语。下课铃响了，男孩们跟要当他们教练的老师见面了。“明天带上你们的训练装备带来，”他告诉他们。

几个月过去了。泰桑哥取得了良好的学业成绩，足球也踢得挺好。“六月假期期间省里将会选拔19岁以下的选手，”老师告诉他们。泰桑哥听了非常高兴。“我相信他们一定会选择我的，我一直在等待着这个机会。能代表省里比赛那可是一种荣誉，”他再次喃喃自语道。六月假期的时间来了，泰桑哥来到训练班。在“山”上呆了两周以后，他的队友带来的消息令他十分郁闷。“我来告诉你的选拔改在下

周了。因为世界杯的筹备工作，他们改变了选拔的月份，”他告诉了他。泰桑哥是非常失望。“总会有出路的。机会还会再来的，”泰桑哥安慰着自己。

从训练班回来，他在学校继续学习，继续踢足球。第二学期的第二周公布了有关要在开普敦举行全国学校足球锦标赛的消息。泰桑哥是太激动了，他知道他是不会放过这个机会。9月考试之后他们就要离开了。他训练非常认真，以确保他能够被列入选中的足球队员名单中。他太关注足球了，却很少看他的书。他不怎么学习了。她的姨妈找他谈话了，“我希望你还在很努力地学习，足球不应该是你唯一的重点。我们过去没有得到机会去上学，我们不希望你也像我们这样。这就是为什么你来格雷厄姆斯敦的，是学习的。”

学期的最后一天，球队的组成公布了。泰桑哥的名字在名单上！他兴奋极了。在他的想象中，他已经是一位明星了：他踢进一球后响起一阵球迷的欢呼声，这不是做梦了。他甚至设计了一个进球后的庆功舞姿。他赞赏呜呜祖拉的噪音，心想“总有一天呜呜祖拉将会为我吹响”。

学期的最后一天了，父母们到学校去领取自己孩子的考试成绩。泰桑哥的姑妈去取他的成绩单。“泰桑哥这是怎么回事？”她愤怒地问道。“你到这里是来踢足球的还是来学习的？你这足球能给你带来什么？”她一个问题接一个问题步步紧逼，让他都没有喘息的机会来应答。

“你给我听着，”她说，“我，你的姑妈，在这里说你不许到开普敦去。你给我留在这儿，学习。你听见了吗？”她问道，脸上没有一丝笑容。“听见啦，姑妈，”他回答说，声音里充满了失望。

全国学校足球锦标赛前的周末到来了，足球队员们聚集在学校里，周六晚上出发。下周一的下午，泰桑哥在听他喜爱的电台节目。他正要把电台从他讨厌的新闻节目调开，突然听到新闻主播开始说：“刚刚发生了一起可怕的巴士意外。据信这是一部由从开普敦开往东开普省的班次。乘客中大多是学童，他们正在参加完全国学校足球锦标赛返回途中。事故中没有幸存者。”

泰桑哥简直不敢相信他的耳朵。他不是唯一一个人 - 其他人也听说过了。家长们惊恐极了。到了晚上，消息被证实

了，运送诺布莱洛中学师生的巴士正是这一部。

泰桑哥说不出话来，肚子里的食物翻腾起来。这一天非常寒冷，可是汗水却不断从他的脸上流淌下来，他感到一阵头晕。“尽管因为我没去成而很到很伤心，有关事故的报道另当别论。不管曾发生了什么事，我还是很感激，我还活着”。

Stroopsoet en in die Sop

Ju-Ann Hockly

Om op 'n plaas groot te word, is vet pret. Ek en my boeties was alewig met kattedwaad doenig. Elke dag het'n nuwe avontuur gebring, soos die dag waarvan ek nou gaan vertel.

Ou meneer Erasmus wat langs ons gewoon het, het bye op sy dak aangehou. Die bye het die heerlikste goue heuning gemaak, maar ai! – meneer Erasmus was nie die vrygewigste man op aarde nie. Op 'n goeie dag besluit ons toe maar om onself te gaan help. Dis mos nie regtig steel nie, het ons vir mekaar oortuig. Ons sou meer as genoeg vir meneer Erasmus oorlos, en die bye sou mos aanhou heuning maak.

Ongelukkig het die bye nie so baie van ons plan gehou nie en hulle't vir my, wat die eerste paar heuningkoeke wou uitkry, links en regs begin takel. Daar was derduisende van die goed en voor ek nog die eerste koek kon uithaal, was my hele lyf vol steke. Ek het sommer van die dak afgetuimel en soos die wind gehardloop – al die pad huis toe. En byna al die pad het die omgekrapte swerm my gevolg en my goed laat verstaan wat hulle van die hele spulletjie dink.

By die huis gekom, het my ma my dadelik in 'n ysbad gegooi. Dit was nóg 'n marteling, maar my lyf het darem nie meer gevoel of dit aan die brand is nie.

Ek het my getroos deur in die bed te gaan lê en die lekker toebroodjies en gemmerbier wat my ma vir my gebring het, te geniet. Só raak ek toe aan die slaap en ek droom van ons dominee wat spesiaal net vir my kom preek oor hoe verkeerd dit is om iemand anders se goed te vat en hoe sonde nooit ongestraf sal bly nie.

Toe ek wakker word, het daar 'n wonderlike verrassing op my gewag. Die toebroodjies en gemmerbier langs my bed is vervang met 'n paar van die mooiste heuningkoeke wat ek al ooit gesien het! My boeties het blykbaar die geleentheid goed benut terwyl ek die bye se aandag afgelei het. Ek het dadelik begin smul, maar darem ook kort-kort my droom onthou...

Ons besluit toe om vir ons sonde te vergoed deur vir Ouma Marietjie van die heuning te vat. Sy was tog so lief daarvoor, maar die suinige ou meneer Erasmus het byna nooit vir haar daarvan gegee nie, al het sy ook hóé geskimp. Ons sou dus soos Robin Hood van ouds maak. Nou,

Ouma Marietjie se plasie was nogal vêr, en daarom het my oudste broer, wat al veertien was en goed kon bestuur op die plaaspaaie, aangebied om ons met Pa se bakkie te vat. Ongelukkig het sy bekwaamheid hom te hoogmoedig gemaak. Hy wou ons wys hoe vinnig hy kan ry en ons het dit natuurlik ook geniet en hom aangemoedig om voet in die hoek te sit. Ewe skielik, net so bykans halfpad terug huistoe, het dit gebeur. Die bakkie het 'n enorme slaggetref, my broer het beheer verloor en die bakkie het deur die lug getrek en op sy dak beland.

Wonder bo wonder het nie een van ons iets oorgekom nie, maar hoe sou ons nou dié situasie aan Pa verduidelik? Daar was net een uitweg: ons sou 'n storie moes opmaak. Ek het voorgestel dat ons vir pa vertel dat daar beeste in die pad was. Ons sou sê dat ons te vinnig op die beeste afgekom het om die bakkie te stop, en toe rol hy.

Tot ons almal se verligting het dit gelyk of Pa goed byt aan die storie en maar net alte bly was dat ons nie seergekry het nie. Maar die aand begin hy toe al die bure te bel om uit te vind wie se beeste dit was. Ná 'n deeglike ondersoek het hy vasgestel dat daar onmoontlik daardie dag enige beeste in die pad kon gewees het. Net oom Piet en oom Koos het 'n paar beeste besit en albei s'n was dié noodlottige dag by 'n veiling. Daar was g'n genade nie: die waarheid moes uit! En was Pa kwaad! Die skade aan die bakkie was al erg genoeg, maar kinders wat so roekeloos is en boonop nog vir hul ouers lieg, was net te veel vir sy senuwees. Hy het ons geroep sodat hy ons in sy studeerkamer kon "spreek". As straf sou ons vir die volgende week moes draad span.

Dié nag het die dominee só ernstig vir my gepreek dat hy kort-kort die sweet van sy voorkop moes afvee.

Dweepstert is ons die volgende oggend douvoordag al uit om ons werk te gaan doen.

So kort voor tienuur sien ons tot ons verbasing Ouma Marietjie se bakkie met die pad af kom. Sy het stilgehou en tot ons vreugde vir ons gewys dat sy een van haar beroemde heuningkoeke op die sitplek langs haar gehad het. Sy't dit spesiaal gebak om met ons te kom deel uit dankbaarheid vir die lieflike heuning wat ons die vorige dag vir haar gebring het.

Ons vertel haar toe die hele geskiedenis van die bye, die bakkie en die straf. Daarvoor het sy alte lekker gelag. Met 'n ondeunde vonkel in haar oë belowe sy toe dat sy tot ons redding sal kom. Ons is saam

met haar in haar bakkie huis toe, waar ons elkeen, Pa en Ma inkluis, 'n rojale stuk koek gekry het. Toe gaan “spreek” sy vir Pa 'n paar minute alleen in die studeerkamer. Tot ons vebasing was hy die vriendelikheid self toe hulle daar uitkom.

Eers jare later het Pa ons vertel dat sy in daardie gesprek vir hom herinner het aan al die kattedwaad wat hy self as 'n kind aangevang het. Dit was blykbaar net die ding wat nodig was om sy hart te versag. Ons moes nog altyd draad span, maar Pa het self ingepring om ons te help en só was die straf toe aansienlik ligter.

A Sweet And Sticky Adventure

Ju-Ann Hockly
translated by Marike Beyers

Growing up on a farm is real fun. My brothers and I were always up to some mischief or another. Each day brought a new adventure – like the one I’m going to tell you about.

Old Mr Erasmus, who lived next to us, kept bees in his ceiling. The bees made the sweetest golden honey, but oh – Mr Erasmus was not the most generous person around. One fine day we decided we would just have to help ourselves. It would not really be stealing, we told each other: we would leave more than enough for Mr Erasmus, and after all, the bees would continue to make more honey.

Unfortunately the bees didn’t think much of our plan. I was the first to try to remove a few honeycombs, and they started their attack on me, coming at me from all sides. There were millions of them, and before I could even get the first honeycomb out, my whole body was covered in stings. I tumbled from the roof in my haste to get away, and ran like the wind all the way home. The irritated swarm followed me almost the whole way and let me know very clearly what they thought of the whole business.

At home, my mother immediately plunged me into a bath of icy water. It was yet another torture, but at least my body no longer felt as if it was on fire.

I consoled myself by going to bed and enjoying the lovely sandwiches and ginger beer that my mother brought me. Soon I fell asleep and I dreamt that our dominee had come to preach a sermon specially to me about how wrong it was to take someone else’s things and how sin would never remain unpunished.

When I woke up, a wonderful surprise awaited me. The sandwiches and ginger beer next to my bed had been replaced by some of the most beautiful honeycombs I had ever seen. It seems that my brothers had made full use of the time that I spent distracting the bees’ attention. I immediately started to stuff myself, but I did think of my dream every now and again...

We decided to make amends for our sins by taking Ouma Marietjie some of the honey. She loved honey so much, but the miserly old

Mr Erasmus hardly ever gave her any, no matter how many hints she dropped. We would be like Robin Hood of old. Because Ouma Marietjie's farm was rather far, my eldest brother, who was already fourteen and could drive well on the farm roads, offered to take us in Pa's bakkie. Unfortunately his confidence had made him arrogant. He wanted to show us how fast he could drive and of course we egged him on to put his foot flat on the accelerator. About halfway home, it suddenly happened: the bakkie hit an enormous pothole, my brother lost control and the bakkie flew through the air, ending up on its roof.

Miraculously all of us emerged without a scratch, but how were we to explain the situation to Pa? There was only one thing to do: we would make up a story. I suggested that we tell Pa that there had been cattle on the road. We would say that we had come across them too fast to stop the bakkie, and then it rolled.

To our relief Pa seemed to accept our story, and was just glad that we did not get hurt. But then that evening he began to phone the neighbours to find out whose cattle they were. After a thorough investigation he established that there couldn't have been any cattle on the road on that day. Only Oom Piet and Oom Koos owned cattle, and both were at an auction with their cattle on the fateful day.

There was nowhere to hide: the truth had to come out! And was Pa furious! The damage to the bakkie was bad enough, but children who were not only reckless but even lied to their parents – that was just too much for him. He called us in to his study for a serious talking to. As punishment we had to work on the fences for the next week.

That night the dominee preached to me again, but with such urgency that he had to wipe the sweat from his forehead every now and then.

Tails between our legs, we left the house in the early hours of the next morning to do our work. Just before ten o'clock we saw to our surprise Ouma Marietjie's bakkie coming down the road. She stopped, and to our delight pointed to one of her famous honey cakes on the seat next to her. She had baked it specially to share with us her gratitude for the lovely honey that we had brought her the day before.

We told her the whole story of the bees, the bakkie and the punishment. She really had a good laugh, and then, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, she promised to come to our rescue. We went home with her in the bakkie, where all of us, including Ma and Pa,

had a hefty piece of cake. Then Ouma went into the study for a few minutes for a serious talking to with Pa. To our surprise he was all friendliness when they returned.

Years later Pa told us that she had reminded him of all the mischief he had got up to as a child. Apparently that was just the thing to soften his heart. We still had to do the fences, but Pa joined us, and so the punishment was that much lighter.

Response to the Sai Weng story

Since the original Chinese story takes the form of a proverb I felt that it would be good to write something that has the feel of a story that an adult would tell to their children. I wanted the reader to feel like he or she is sitting in on a family gathering listening to stories getting passed on from one generation to the next. This is why I decided to write a story from the perspective of an older man talking about some of the things that happened in his childhood and the lessons he learnt from them.

I took my inspiration from my father, who grew up on a farm. I feel that stories such as those I heard in childhood about my father's growing-up years deserve to be carried down through generations and should be shared with others too. I feel that this also leaves space for the reader to engage more with the text. The core events are, furthermore, thus based on real events. I have, however, adapted them quite a bit to fit into the framework of the original Chinese story. The names used have also been changed.

In the Chinese story there is a lot of ambiguity about what is good fortune and what is bad fortune, I have engaged with this by allowing the reader to identify with the feelings of the various characters. Although the reader does not hear from these characters directly he or she can still clearly see what good fortune and what bad fortune is for them. Different readers can thus also have empathy for the different characters. There is also a lot of overlap between good fortune and bad fortune.

To understand the ambiguity of good fortune versus bad fortune one needs to look at the characters individually as well as looking at them all together. The boy that gets stung by the bees has the bad fortune of pain, but the good fortune of getting some honey and honey cakes to eat. The brothers and the grandmother also have the good fortune of delicious honey. Unfortunately, this leads to the bad fortune of the car accident and the telling of lies, which furthermore leads to more punishment. For the father, the damaged car as well as the disappointment of knowing his children have lied to him is bad fortune, but he also has the good fortune of remembering his own young days. The punishment was the third event that was bad fortune on the surface, but that also added a deeper meaning to the story.

From the children's point of view, this could only be seen as negative, whereas parents will know that it has a positive side. The character in the story hears from the pastor that 'no sin ever goes unpunished' and comes out a better person at the end of the day.

我们甜蜜而纠结的冒险

菊安·赫克里

在农场上长大充满真正的乐趣。我和我的兄弟们总爱一些恶作剧和其他什么的。每一天都会搞点新的冒险 - 正像我这儿要讲给你们听的一样。

有一位老先生，伊拉斯谟，是我们的邻居。他在他家的天花板上养蜜蜂。蜜蜂酿出极其甜蜜的金色蜂蜜。不过 - 伊拉斯谟先生在附近可是算不上是最慷慨的人。一个晴朗的一天，我们作出决定，我们只能自己动手了。我们告诫对方：这不能真的算是偷，我们将给伊拉斯谟先生留下足够多的蜜，再说，蜜蜂还会继续酿出更多蜂蜜的。

不幸的是，蜜蜂对我们的计划不怎么感冒。我是第一个试图搬开一些蜂窝的，所以他们开始对我发起攻击，四面八方扑了过来。还没等我把第一个蜂窝挪开，数以百万计的蜜蜂把我的整个身体蜇了个遍。我从屋顶跌跌撞撞地脱身逃开，一溜烟跑回家去。恼怒的蜂群一窝蜂地几乎跟了我一路，让我很清楚地知道他们对我干这件事的想法。

回到家里，我母亲我立刻扔进装满冰冷水的浴盆中。这是又一次的酷刑，但至少我的身体不再觉得仿佛着火一样了。

我躺在床上，享受着我母亲给我带来的好吃的三明治和姜汁啤酒，以此从中得到安慰。不一会儿我睡着了，我梦见我们的牧师专门来给我讲道，说拿别人的东西是多么不应该，要是这种行为不受到惩罚是如何罪过云云。

当我醒来的时候，一个美妙的惊喜在等待着我。我的床旁边的三明治和姜汁啤酒已经被一些我见过的最漂亮的蜂巢所取代。看来，我的兄弟们趁我吸引了蜜蜂的注意力的时候充分利用了时间。我立刻开始往嘴里塞起来，但是我却不时地想到我的梦境... ..

为了弥补我们的罪过，我们决定要给玛莉茄奶奶送一些蜂蜜去。她对蜂蜜喜欢极了，尽管她一再暗示，但吝啬的伊

拉斯谟老先生却几乎从来都没有给过她一点蜜。我们就像是过去的罗宾汉。由于玛莉茄奶奶的农场离得相当远，我们年满十四岁而且能够在农场土路上驾驭车辆的大哥，自告奋勇要用老爸的小皮卡来载我们。不幸的是，他的自信心膨胀为傲慢。他想向我们显摆一下他的飙车技艺，我们当然也怂恿他把脚在加速器上踩到底。在回家的半路上，事故突然发生了：皮卡压上了一个巨大的坑洞，我大哥失去了控制，皮卡腾空而起，翻落下来弄了个底朝天。

我们几个都奇迹般地没有收到任何刮伤。可是我们该如何给老爸解释呢？只有一种选择：我们来编故事。我提议我们这样来告诉老爸，路上遇到了牛，我们遇到牛的时候车开得太快，皮卡停不住，然后它就翻了。

令人欣慰的是，老爸好像是相信了我们的故事，只是表示很高兴我们并没有受伤。然而那天晚上，他开始给邻居们打电话问是谁的牛挡在路上。经过彻底调查之后，他发现当天的道路上根本不可能有任何牛。只有皮特叔叔和库斯叔叔有牛，而出事那一天他们两个跟他们的牛都在拍卖会上。

这下谎话可无处藏身了：真相暴露出来了！老爸震怒了！把皮卡搞坏已经够糟糕的了。可孩子们不但鲁莽，而且还甚至谎话连篇地骗他们的父母——他感到这实在太过分了。他把我们唤到他的书房把我们严厉地训斥一顿。作为惩罚，我们下面整个一周都要去修围栏。

那天晚上牧师再次向我布道，但是由于紧急赶过来，他不时地擦拭着额头上的汗水。

第二天一大早我们就离开家去干活了，我们的尾巴紧紧夹在双腿之间。差不多快十点钟的时候，我们惊讶地看到玛莉茄的皮卡出现在路上。她停了下来，用手指着她旁边的座位上她的赫赫有名蜂蜜蛋糕，这让我们喜出望外。她是为了感谢我们前一天带给她的蜂蜜而专门烤制了蛋糕拿来跟大家分享。

我们把整个关于蜜蜂，皮卡和受处罚故事讲给她听，这让她好一顿大笑。然后她顽皮地眨了一下眼睛，答应她来救我们。我们坐上她的皮卡回到家，所有的人，包括老妈和老爸，每人吃了一大块蛋糕。然后奶奶到书房里跟老爸好认真地交谈了一阵。出乎我们的意料，当他们回来的时候，他满

脸堆笑。

许多年以后，老爸告诉我们，那天她提醒了他作为孩子的时候他所做的调皮捣蛋的事。显然，这件事让他的心肠软下来了。当然，我们仍然得去修围栏，但是老爸也加入了我们，所以这样处罚就轻得多了。

Tragédie et Bonheur

Matthew de Klerk

Il était une fois un pauvre homme appelé Gordon Yves. Il habitait dans une très petite ville située à une bonne distance de grandes villes. Cet homme avait une belle femme et un fils unique, Jacques, et il les adorait beaucoup. Ils vivaient tous ensemble dans une petite maison blanche avec un joli jardin où ils cultivaient des légumes, des fruits succulents et beaucoup d'autres plantes pour se nourrir et se maintenir en bonne santé.

Un matin, après des jours de pluie continuelle, alors que le ciel était encore nuageux, les habitants de la ville se mirent à chanter et à danser de joie sous la pluie, se réjouissant ainsi de la fin d'une sécheresse terrible qui n'avait que trop duré.

- Quel bonheur! crièrent-ils.

- Qui sait vraiment? leur dit Gordon, cela pourrait nous apporter le malheur!

Dès le lendemain, la pluie cessa. Il ne plut ni cette semaine-là, ni le mois suivant. Il en fut ainsi pendant des mois qui suivirent. Les plantes se desséchèrent et finirent par dépérir. La ville fut soudain frappée de pénurie des denrées alimentaires. Toutes les provisions que les gens de la ville avaient conservées pendant la saison finirent sans qu'on en trouvât des nouvelles. La famine gagna la ville, et il y eut au fil du temps de moins en moins de nourriture.

- Une famine si terrible, se lamentèrent-ils tous.

- Qui sait vraiment? Cela pourrait nous apporter le bonheur, leur déclara Gordon.

La situation devenait de plus en plus désespérée. Cependant, un jour, un camion du gouvernement fit son entrée dans la ville. Il apporta beaucoup de sacs de riz et suffisamment de nourriture pour nourrir tous les habitants de la ville.

- Nous avons presque perdu l'espoir! Dieu merci pour ce miracle, poussèrent-ils ces cris de joie.

- Qui sait vraiment, leur dit Gordon, cela pourrait nous apporter le malheur.

Une semaine plus tard, le camion revint chargé de beaucoup d'autres provisions. Cependant au moment où le camion s'approchait, alors

que le fils de Gordon Yves voulait traverser la route, le camion l'écrasa impitoyablement.

- C'est vraiment tragique! dirent les gens en pleurant à l'enterrement de ce pauvre garçon.

- Qui sait vraiment ? dit Gordon d'une voix sombre à une foule sceptique, cela pourrait nous apporter le bonheur.

Quelques jours plus tard, Gordon souffrit des maux de tête les plus douloureux de sa vie. Inquiet, il décida de consulter un médecin. Cependant, étant généraliste, le seul médecin de la ville fut incapable de le soigner, et Gordon Yves décida de voyager dans une autre ville. Dans cette ville très lointaine il y avait un médecin spécialiste en neurologie. Au bout d'une semaine, ce spécialiste examina soigneusement Gordon qui ne tarda pas à rentrer chez lui.

Aussitôt rentré, ces amis se rassemblèrent autour de lui pour entendre le résultat de son voyage.

- Le médecin a dit que j'ai une tumeur aiguë inopérable dans mon cortex cérébral, et il croit que je mourrais dans moins de six semaines, dit-il à la foule.

- Quelles terribles nouvelles! C'est trop tragique! crièrent les gens. Qu'est-ce que tu vas faire? demandèrent-ils.

- Rien. Qui sait vraiment? Cela pourrait amener le bonheur! leur dit-il.

Mais cinq semaines plus tard, ainsi que le médecin l'avait prédit, Gordon trouva la mort. Il en fut de même pour sa famille qui mourut elle aussi sept jours plus tard, à cause d'un incendie dans leur maison construite en bois.

- Un cruel caprice de sort! Une vraie tragédie! dirent avec étonnement les gens de la ville.

Pourtant, au Paradis, l'homme fut réuni avec sa famille, et ils échappèrent effectivement aux problèmes du monde matériel. Ils n'eurent plus ni la faim, ni la tristesse, ni même la mort. Ainsi se libérèrent-ils du monde de souffrances, qui jadis était le leur, pour vivre éternellement heureux et à jamais unis.

Synopsis in English

Matthew de Klerk

This story follows the original format of the original Chinese proverb-like story. A man lives in a distant village with his wife and son. They all live together on a smallholding, with enough land to live self-sufficiently. In the style of the original story, the man and his village suffer a fantastic stroke of good fortune, followed by terrible misfortune, which happens only to precede good luck, and so on. Each time, the old man is wary of the good luck, and unfaltering under the burden of bad luck. This story appears to follow the same predictable pattern at first glance. In the beginning of the tale, it rains. After a short period of celebration (during which the protagonist remains stoically wary), there is a terrible drought. The village is at its wit's end on how to survive, but the man stays hopeful that something better is on the way. His hope proves to be well-placed: a government truck comes to the starving village bearing food for all. This good omen is, however, shown to have a horrific side: the man's son is killed in the road by the very supply truck that saved them. Despite this tragedy, the man remains hopeful that there will be something positive on the way. However, the universe isn't as predictable as it may at first seem, and when the greatest of tragedies strike all at once and death pitches his tent right at our doorstep, we are forced to ask ourselves whether it's really as bad as it seems, or if there really is something more meaningful to terrible misfortune beyond the scope of mere earthly existence.

Response to the Sai Weng story

On reading the original ancient Chinese story, I wasn't very happy with its style. I found the story too predictable and boring, particularly since the formula never changed: in real life, happiness does not follow unhappiness. There is no predictable, universal formula which is always applicable. I also thought that the style was too simple. In the original story, each time the man suffers due to unhappiness, happiness follows. I found this so predictable and simple that it was unconvincing and (in my view) perhaps a little banal. After all, in reality life is not at all predictable, and is often cruel. So I decided to create a story showing the reality of the destiny of the universe, in other words that happiness is not always followed by unhappiness, and vice versa. I also found that the original story was a little simplistic: each time an unhappy or happy event occurred, this had no consequence beyond the moment of the event itself. So I decided to include a series of tragic events. I believe that this great wave of unhappiness will disrupt preconceived ideas and suppositions derived from the original story. So I decided to show that everything in life has a final consequence, even if we can never predict this. Thus, I wanted to show that the sufferings on earth are not as bad as was originally thought. I also decided to include other characters in my story: the man's wife and his son. This makes it more believable, and when their death in the story creates a tone of despair. I decided that these characters would not play a great role in the story, but that adding them would make it more believable. I think that my story and the events which occur in it are believable and tragic, but I think that my positive conclusion will be a welcome addition for the reader.

Kein solches Glück

Mathaabe Thabane

Die Familie-Erhnmann hatte ein großes Unternehmen und dies war sehr erfolgreich. Aber, wie so manches in ihrem Leben, dauerte es nicht lange, bevor es weg war. Die Nazis hatten es verbrannt und alle Juden mussten die Stadt verlassen oder in ein Konzentrationslager gebracht werden. Innerhalb eines Augenblicks hatten sie alles verloren. Gabriella Erhnmann, die Witwe und Mutter von drei Kindern, war trotzdem nicht besorgt. Sie blieb brav und sagte lediglich : „Alles wird in Ordnung sein, Gott wird uns versorgen.“

Wie vom Himmel geschickt, kam eine alte Frau, die ihr und ihren Kindern ein Versteck in ihrem Keller bot. Sie schwor, dass sie die Familie nicht verraten würde, und obwohl sie sehr skeptisch war, dachte Gabriella an ihre Kinder, nahm das Angebot an und sagte lediglich: „Alles wird in Ordnung sein, Gott wird uns schützen.“

Ein paar Wochen gingen vorbei und, wie man es hätte ahnen können, stürmten drei Soldaten in das Versteck hinein und verlangten, dass die Besitzerin des Hauses ihnen sagt, ob sie Juden versteckt. Unten im Keller gab es nur Stille und schnellen Herzschlag. Ohne zu zögern, sagte die Frau: „Ja, ich habe vier für Sie.“ Erstaunt und erschrocken flüsterte die Witwe zu ihren drei Kindern, dass sie nach draußen gehen sollten, als ob sie die Toilette aufsuchen wollten und dann ohne sich umzusehen zu rennen – so schnell zu rennen wie noch nie zuvor. Alle vier rannten ziellos vorwärts und Gabriella, in all ihrer Not, sagte dennoch: „Alles wird in Ordnung sein, Gott wird uns leiten.“

Bald war es dunkel und die Familie fand sich in der Nähe einer Eisenbahn. Es war allgemein bekannt, dass täglich um sieben Uhr ein Güterzug von Dresden in die Schweiz fuhr. Die Witwe und ihre Kinder hatten nichts. Absolut nichts. Ohne viel darüber nachzudenken, erklärte sie, wie sie sich in Säcken verstecken und mit dem Zug in die Freiheit fahren würden, denn dort würden sie nicht verurteilt werden. Sie schmuggelten sich zwischen Kartoffelsäcken und warteten bis der Zug abfuhr.

Tage vergingen und die Witwe Erhnmann fand für sich und ihre drei Kleinen eine Unterkunft durch eine Synagoge im Osten von Bad Schandau. Vom Betteln auf den Straßen der Schweiz hatten sie jetzt

ein Zuhause.

Als sie eines Morgens die Zeitung lies, stand groß-geschrieben: „Bombenterror in Dresden: Eine Stadt in Scherben!“ Viele würden sagen, es war reines Glück aber Gabriella wusste, dass es kein solches Glück gibt, dass einem Menschen ermöglicht, drei Mal den Tod zu entkommen. Alles Schlechtes, was im Leben passiert, hat zwei Seiten. Sie seufzte tief and sagte zuversichtlich: „Alles ist in Ordnung, der Herr hat uns bewahrt“.

Synopsis in English

Mathaabe Thabane

Mine is a bitter-sweet story of a young Jewish widow and mother of three who loses almost everything in her life and has to make tough decisions for her and her children in the face of a Nazi regime in Dresden, Germany. At the very beginning, the reader is made aware of two important facts, namely that she has lost her husband and that her family loses its business and could potentially be sent to a concentration camp. As the tale unfolds, we discover her character which is grounded in her faith and also see that she does not believe in luck – although the series of events may be viewed by some as pure luck. As they live in fear and through pain, betrayal, hunger and doubt, she and her children constantly flee death. In the end, she comes to the realisation that it was only through the power of her faith and grace that they are alive. Or was it luck?

Response to the Sai Weng story

In the Chinese tale, a picture is painted of an old man who loves his family and seeks to provide for them. Unfortunately, bad fortune is sometimes cast on him and his sons; yet, he remains positive through his loss and pain. Like the old man, the central character of my story is a strong person who is able to cope with her bad fortune and remains hopeful at every turn. Unlike the old man, there are no friends advising her against her decisions and actions or praising her for them; however, she has conflict within herself. We can therefore view her as her own friend and guide. In each instance, she thinks about the fate of her and her children and, at times, a part of her may be doubtful while another pushes for her to follow her instinct. While many things take place, as in the case of the old man's tale, three significant events occur. Namely, she loses her livelihood; she is betrayed by the woman who offered her hiding (who she initially thought was heaven-sent); and, she flees to Switzerland. In the end, every event and every decision that accompanied it is proven to have been worthwhile. Analogous to the end of the Chinese tale, her fortune, whether perceived as good or bad, has spared her family's life.

Sien jou by die peerboom...

Mia van der Merwe

Hulle ontmoet elke dag, in die koelte wat my takke en blare bied. Dikwels om te speel, partykeer om te lag, maar meestal net om kind te wees. Hulle klim al my takke uit, een vir een. Aan die laagstes word geswaai en in die skadu's gerondomtalie tot die dronkheid hulle saggies by my voete gaan laat Iê.

Sy vertel van al haar voorliefdes: van katjies tot katjiepierings. Met 'n stok in die hand word drome in die grond geïllustreer. Wat haar laat lag en wat haar laat huil, daarvan leer hy alles.

Moeiteloos deel ook hý sy wense, al sy vrese en sy afkere. En ook die vrae wat 'n frons tussen twee nuuskierige oë agterlaat.

Só word ek die plek van jonkwees, 'n skans teen die wêreld. Alles wat ek bied, word met 'n onbevange gretigheid aangegryp. En dié waardering sorg vir my hoogste genot. "Klim soveel as julle wil. Swaai aan my takke en draai in my koelte. Solank julle net nie van my pere eet nie." Dit is al wat ek vra.

"Dié boom se pere éét?!" roep haar oë in stomme verbasing uit.

"Hoe sou hulle smaak?" wonder sy nuuskierige oë.

Haar smEEK en mooipraat is alles vergeefs. 'n Saad is geplant en diep in sy rustelose binneste het iets ontkiem.

"Net een. Net om te proe."

Sy kyk op na my takke.

"Hy waarsku nie verniet nie," soebat sy weer.

Maar haar gestribbel word al flouer. Uiteindelik volg haar oë maar net hoe hy klim, al hoër, al soekend, maar dié keer nie na my koelte of die vastigheid van 'n tak nie. Behendig kies hy die rypste peer, met die vorm van 'n hart en 'n glans van goud.

Skraal vingers streel saggies oor die vlees. En voor sy vir oulaas kan keer, neem hy 'n hap uit die sappige vrug.

Sy staar, wagtend op die onheil. Hoekom die waarskuwing, waarom die nee? Sy bestudeer sy gesig, die hoeke van sy mond, die blou van sy oë. Maar hy glimlag dan! AI breër en breër. En met nuwe bewondering word ek aanskou, word ek opnuut waardeer.

"'n Anderwêreldse ervaring", sou hy dit later noem. Van kroon tot toon het ek gegloei. Gloeilampe vir pere en feeliggies vir blare. En 'n

bas met 'n warmte wat van diep binne af smeul.

Hap na hap, vrug na vrug, groei sy verwondering: “Ja, hóékom waarsku hy, wáárom sê hy nee?”

En soos ek gevrees het, kom hulle weer. Vol vreugde en opwinding, nes elke vorige keer. Bly is sy om teen my bas te kan lê, in my takke te kan wieg en uiteindelik in te sluimer. Maar slaap en rustig wees soek hý nie. Boomklim self is nie meer 'n avontuur nie. Dit het 'n doel gekry.

Opnuut probeer sy keer. Sy vertel stories en deel 'n geheim of twee. Alles om sy aandag weg te lei van die goudgeel ding wat so aanloklik daar hang. Sy probeer hom herinner aan die lekker van swaai en speel. Maar sy oë kyk anders. Die ander dag se ekstase was te soet, maar ook te kortstondig.

Sy tweede ervaring was alles 'n bietjie méér. 'n Vetter peer en 'n groter hap. 'n Gouer glans en 'n warmer gloed. Intenser as laas, maar net so tydelik.

So kom hulle en gaan hulle. Nog 'n dag onder my takke, nog 'n dag in my koelte. Nog 'n dag vir speel, 'n dag vol begeerte: haar begeerte na sáám speel en sáám rus. Maar ook die ánder, rustelose begeerte in hóm.

Sy probeer 'n laaste maal en bied selfs aan om saam te klim. Om saam in die hoogste mik te gaan sit. “Ons klim hom stadig uit, tot héél bo,” sê sy. Dit gaan nie oor wen nie. “Ek wil saam met jou na die uitsig kyk, na jóú uitsig kyk. Ek wil verstaan.”

Maar die nuuskierigheid in sy oë, die frons tussen die wenkbroue en die onrus wat diep binne hom roer, laat haar besef: hy sál weer klim, hy sál verder eet. Hy't 'n honger in hom, 'n honger wat knaag en smag na mý vrugte, en mý vrugte alleen.

Dié keer is hy haastig. Hy bestyg my onverskillig, bereik gou die hoogste tak, soek gierig na die rypste peer. Hy gryp ongeduldig na die vet vorm en vreet die ding met 'n paar gulsige happe op. Pitte, stronk en al. En dan is hy weer aan my voete, staan en staar hy om te sien hoe ek nóú lyk.

Ek begin soos al die ander kere te gloei, al sterker en sterker. Mooier as te vore, asemrowend. My pere lyk weer soos warm kole, my blare flikker soos kersvlamme in die wind en my bas het die gloed van 'n bosveldvuur.

Sy mond hang oop. Hy sukkel om te glo wat hy sien.

Ek brand.

En ek brand en ek brand, van bo tot onder. En ek sien hoe die vlamme in sy blou oë weerkaats. Die nuuskierigheid, die onrus, al die vrae is nou weg. En ek brand en ek brand, van my kroon tot onder by my wortels. En soos ek vergaan, waarsku ek 'n laaste maal: “Alles verdof maar met die tyd. Uitbrand lyk net meer opwindend.”

Synopsis in English

A boy and a girl meet under a pear tree every day. The story is told from the pear tree's perspective, and it sees how these two friends come to play in its shade, how they tell each other their life stories and how they enjoy the innocence of being children.

It appreciates that the boy and the girl enjoy all the simple things it has to offer, like swinging in its branches and lying against its trunk. The tree expresses its pleasure at witnessing their enjoyment and assures them that they are welcome to play to their hearts' content. It does, however, warn them not to eat any of its pears.

The girl had never even considered this, but the boy is very curious and has a deep desire to taste the fruit. Despite the girl's protestations, he tries one.

What he experiences when he eats the fruit is phenomenal. The entire tree starts to glow and he is filled with awe and wonder. He can't resist the temptation to try the fruit again.

The second time around, the experience is even more intense and more magnificent, and the girl's warnings become even more futile.

The third tasting is by far the best. The tree glows even more brightly and the heat grows so intense that the tree lights up and starts burning.

Just before burning out, the tree looks at the boy and warns him one last time: "Everything fades away with time. Burning out just looks more exciting."

Response to the Sai Weng story

The idea for my story came from personal experience. The boy eating the fruit was a good friend who got caught up in a lifestyle of drugs.

The way the boy could not enjoy the simple things the tree had to offer anymore, symbolises the effect of drugs. The fact that he needs to eat a pear each time to appreciate the tree symbolises how one becomes dependent on drugs to enjoy the simple things in life. The boy forgets to play and climb in the tree as he always did, which symbolises how innocence disappears during this process.

Of course, a reader may interpret the fruit as symbolic of any temptation in life, be it sex, alcohol or anything else we are warned against from a young age.

The story also has three incidents relating to the good and bad fortune of the Chinese tale. Although these incidents aren't necessarily good or bad luck, they are ambiguous. The boy sees these incidents as magnificent. Even though the girl has her doubts about these phenomenal experiences and tries to warn him, he keeps desiring a new one each time. Only after the third time does he realise the awful and destructive nature of these seemingly exciting experiences.

The last warning the tree utters is adapted from Kurt Cobain's suicide note, in which he adapts a famous phrase from a Neil Young song: "I would rather burn out than fade way". Although Cobain wrote this about his musical career, the statement also gives expression to a fundamental choice which many young people feel compelled to make.

Bright Nights at Boesmansnek

Jenna Collett

On the storm-worn saddle of the Drakensberg escarpment, near the border of Lesotho and South Africa, lies a place called Boesmansnek. It is home to a family who rear many handsome horses, of all breeds, and care for them only a little less than they do their own children.

It is early spring, and the Mother and Father must leave their land in the care of Grandmother and their youngest son, while they travel to surrounding farms to prospect foals. While they are away, Grandmother and child are left to oversee the horse-hands and horses. At every dawn and dusk they walk the fields, checking fences and clucking softly to the herds. On these walks, they converse furiously, enjoying the unfamiliarly-warm wind associated with the change of season. The previous year had seen many incidents of stock theft on the farm. Rustlers would steal across the Lesotho border and charge back at a gallop with the only the strongest of the family's horses, never to be followed or found again. The rustlers did not recognise the border any more than the mountains did, which never bowed for roads to be built on their backs.

Walking in the fields one evening, under a sky that holds the reddish hue of fortunate shepherds, the child says to his Grandmother: "We will be safe this evening Gran. The rustlers won't come to steal the horses. The moon is all alight tonight and they will be seen by the guards."

"But my child," replies the old woman in a voice like a pointed finger, "if the moon is all alight, we can see the rustlers, yes, but they can see the horses and – what's more – they can see us".

The high moon's light, so much like the sun at noon, means the rustlers can see their quarry as if it were day. That night, they sign to each other noiselessly, walking low and swift, their eyes wide and pupils small in the almost-day lightness of the full-blown moon. On nights like this, which parade as a different kind of day, all to be heard are the low seismic thunderings of hooves disappearing over the hills at dawn, the blood from the horses' newly cut ears separating in the wind and dotting the riders' wrapped faces.

"One rider," Grandmother once told the boy, "so famous is he for

cutting horses' ears on the steaming gallop, that the whites of his eyes are stained red with their blood."

Days pass and the pair walk in the fields once again. They stop for a drink at the spring and the child gasps between hand-cupped gulps.

"We will be safe tonight, Gran", he says. "The moon is half-crescented like a mouth that smiles, surely we can see enough of the rustlers to shoot, and they can see too little of the horses to steal?"

"Ah, but my child," replies the old woman with a voice like a studied hand writing, "of course we can see well enough to shoot at them, and they can see less of the horses to steal, but the shadows this half-light causes strikes fear into the guards, and both sides are as obscured as each other. To see and to be seen becomes one."

That night, as the moon is at the dusk of its phasing, the shadows fall tall, and the altered light means that the rustlers can wade through the air like darkness on water, rippling, dipping under and over the surface of the grass. Their at-once largeness and smallness frightens the guards: they believe them to be shape shifters, capable of filling your shoes and stealing your body. They say that when you take in a breath the rustlers let that same breath loose. On these nights, they can steal the very beat from your pulse, and the blood that pumps to your heart flows back out of theirs. Even when the guards see the rustlers on this trickster-night, they sit still beside one another, wondering why their own shadows don't dip with their shivers, and their rifles rest limp at their sides.

Days pass by as quick as thoughts, and in a mist that all but obscures the impoverished sliver of the new moon, the pair go out walking once again – but this time they avoid the outer fields that are crisscrossed by streams and rivers. The child shuffles through the white-washed air and declares: "We must be safe tonight Gran. How can they take the horses with sight like heads hooded?"

"But my child", the woman says with a voice like an envelope sealing, "we cannot see the horses either and, what is more, we cannot see the thieves."

On nights like this one, nobody watches. The guards sit and do not move, for now they are safe in the lee of a hill, but if they rise to chase after the whooping rustlers, who taunt them with their voices, they may fall and break their bones, or drown in the freezing river. Each

thief knows this land like his own father's breath. They know its rise and fall, its shallow hiding places. They know its ends, and they know its anger. The guards strike their pipes to remember what light is, and do not worry about the rustlers' eyes, perhaps looking but not seeing in this darkness.

Upon hearing this during their dawn walk the following morning, the child breaks their gait and cries: "But we cannot win, Grandmother; it is a wonder we have any horses left!"

"Child, I do not mean to lessen your heart. The moon has many phases, each one different from the next. On these walks, I have tried to show you that we don't see in black and white, but in the many phases between. To you, the full moonlight spells the danger of getting caught. For the rustler, it means he can see more horses to steal, and more guards to avoid. But you are both right. The light can be both the rustler's fortune, and his downfall."

"We see the moon as we do because of where we stand on the earth. But there are many places to stand, and so many moons to see. The earth locks the moon in its orbit, like the mind locks an image in memory. But the mind is more like a moon-reflecting pool than a cut glass mirror. The image on the mind is fluid, shape-shifting. It depends on what wind-tossed ripple, what side-winding water snake, or what desire-bloated frog, defines its patterns."

The child is quiet, his head full of the frogs' burp and the rustlers' thunder, which echo until they become a dull hum in him. He follows his Grandmother's gaze, her sure sparkling eyes look out towards the enduring mountains behind their fragile farmhouse. They both watch from the middle-distance as Mother and Father walk down the road and enter the first paddock, with three proud new foals in tow. Each one is clothed in brilliantly muted shades of grey and blue. The child's mind ripples.

Response to the Sai Weng story

Sai Weng Loses His Horse is an insightful fable about the possibility of perception. Each incident or situation that is experienced by the old man can be perceived in a different way. The first is demonstrated through the reactions of his friends, and can be viewed as a more conventional way of perceiving events. The second shows a more unorthodox or unusual way of perceiving, which is shown through the reactions of the old man. The old man's fluid postulations on "good fortune" and "bad fortune" are proved to be astute in this story, importantly showing that any situation can be viewed in a number of different ways. While reading the story, I was reminded of two separate incidents from my own memory, and these memories sparked my response and interaction with the original text.

The first memory was of a conversation I had during my stay at a horse farm near Boesmansnek in the Drakensberg mountains of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The night was clear as a bell, without a cloud in the sky and the full moon seemed dull under the millennia of stars overhead. The sky was so bright it cast our own shadows onto the grass. The farmer had been talking about how horse thieves from across the border had wreaked havoc with his stock. I asked if the horses would not be safer that night, as the thieves would surely be wary of coming out on a night which was almost as bright as day. The farmer laughed and said that these nights were the worst for stock theft, as the thieves could see in the dark – a much desired advantage for any criminal.

The second memory entailed a strangely similar incident which occurred a few years later. There had been a spate of burglaries on the smallholding in Grahamstown where my friends and I live. Burglars would come over the railway tracks – another kind of border – and break into our homes. One night we arrived home in a beautiful mist. It felt like a white screen that flickered as you approached, loosening as you walked, so you could see only a few feet ahead. I said to myself, "They won't come tonight; they can't see where they are going". But sure enough, the burglars came again, utilising the natural cover, and in the early hours of the morning we heard shotgun fire.

I wanted to tell an optimistic neo-fable about the infinite possibility of perception; however, these memories stuck to the page and refused to retreat. I had to find a way of incorporating them with what

I perceived to be the main message of Sai Weng Loses His Horse. Although my version possesses a more cynical tone than the original story, I hope it still demonstrates the idea that perception is fluid and omnipossible, and ultimately, that we must be open to this knowledge in order to constantly see things anew and combat stubborn or stagnant ways of seeing and being.

Alleen

Alisa J Lochner

Tik.

Tik

Tik

Tik.

Ek wonder hoe lank die masjien gaan vat.

Tik-Tik.

Sê nou dit was 'n slegte idee vir my om te kom?

Tik.

Dit het my vinger geprik... Sê nou die naald was nie skoon nie?

Tik.

Tik-Tik-Tik.

Daar verskyn 'n boodskappie op die skerm:

“...Dis goed dat jy gekom het...

...Jy is nie normaal nie...

...Neem hierdie pille...

...Kom volgende week terug...”

Ek kry 'n strokie met 'n nommer: e42h7m42 en my naam.

Ek kyk na die strokie. Die masjien ken my naam... my naam... dis snaaks. Hulle het gesê dit weet alles.

Tik-Tik.

“...Loop asseblief. Jou tyd is verstreke...”

Ek is verbaas oor sy kortaf opmerking. Ek gaan by die deur uit.

Buite die kantoor is daar 'n lang, nou gang. Dit is wit en koud. Daar is 'n telefoon teen die muur. Dit is een van die oues, dié wat met 'n draad aan die optel-en-praat-apparaat verbind is. Daar is ook nog knoppies om te druk. Deesdae is daar net een knoppie en geen draad-ding nie.

Die telefoon is abnormaal.

Daar is 'n klein robot agter my.

Piep.

“...Jy mag nie hier staan nie...”

Ek kyk na hom en sy rooi liggie. Daar is 'n gemene gesiggie op hom geverf.

Piep-Piep.

“...Jy mors tyd... Loop...”

Die robot begin my liggies te stoot.

Piep-Piep-Piep. Piep.

Dit piep al harder.

Ek loop weg.

Ek gee vir die masjien by die ingang my strokie.

Brrrrr.

Dit spoeg 'n sakkie pille uit. Daarop staan “een per dag.” Ek loop uit en kry die gevoel: “ek moes nie gekom het nie”, al het my werkgewer my gestuur en al het Die Dokter gesê dit is goed.

Ek voel naar.

By die huis sit ek op my enkelbank. “Nie normaal nie”. Dit is Die Dokter se opinie oor my toestand. Ek het iets anders verwag. Sal die pille regtig daarvoor help? Abnormaal... Ek sien nie meer mense nie, so ek sal nie weet wat normaal is nie. Ek sien mense buite op pad werk toe, maar ek sien hulle nie. Dit is net gesigte. Maar hulle lyk nie veel anders as ek nie... of doen hulle? Ek kyk in die badkamerspieël.

Die kraan drup.

Ek mors water. Dit is sleg.

Drup.

Ek probeer om die kraan toe te draai.

Drup.

Ek probeer weer.

Drup.

Die kraan is stukkend.

Drup.

Ek sit 'n koppie onder die kraan.

Drup.

Ek dink weer aan Die Dokter wat so getik het.

Is die kraan ook abnormaal? Dis stukkend.

Drup.

Daar val elke 3 sekondes 'n druppel. Daar is 24 uur in 'n dag. Dit is 1440 minute. Dit is 86400 sekondes. Dit beteken 28800 druppels per dag. Hoe groot is 'n druppel? Maak 3 druppels 'n milliliter? Dan is dit 9600 ml. – 9.6 liter per dag uit hierdie een kraan.

Ek mors baie water.

Drup.

Ek moet dit regmaak. Water is skaars.

Drup.

Ek loop weg, die kraan pla my te veel.

Drup.

Miskien is dit hoekom mense my ook vermy.

Drup.

Ek vergeet om my pil te drink.

Vandag is dag 6, wat voorheen Saterdag genoem is. Die naam is verander sodat die sisteem beter kan werk. Vandag is .6/05/11/2087. Alles word deesdae deur rekenaars beheer en hulle hou van syfers. Al die boeke is verbrand of begrawe. Blykbaar is boeke sleg. Die sisteem sê so. Drie liter water word gebruik om drie A4-velle papier te maak en 500 A4-velle is 6% van 'n boom, wat 5.4 kg CO2 in die atmosfeer vrystel. Alles is nou digitaal en werk met herwinde krag, dus beskadig ons nie die natuur meer so baie nie. Ek mis boeke. Ek onthou mense het altyd bymekaar gekom op dag 7. Almal het dieselfde boek by hulle gehad en daar is uit hierdie boek gelees... Boekklub? Ek wonder of hulle nog bestaan. Ek sal graag weer mense wil sien. Ek moet daarvoor uitvind.

Die kraan drup nog steeds.

Ek vergeet weer om my pil te drink.

Die Dokter het gesê ek is nie "normaal" nie.

Ek weet ek dink te veel.

Die sisteem het dit alreeds vir my gesê.

Daar word aan my deur geklop. Dit het nog nooit gebeur nie.

Ek hardloop badkamer toe en sluit die deur. Die klop word al hoe dringender. Ek klim in die storthokkie en maak die deur ook toe. Die kraan drup. Miskien is dit daai masjien met die kwaai gesiggie. Hy weet ek drink nie my pille nie! En dat ek water mors en dat ek te veel dink oor dinge. Ek wag. Dit klink of iemand my deur gaan afbreek. En toe... stilte. Ek bring die res van die dag in die storthokkie deur en luister na die kraan wat steeds drup.

Miskien is dit beter dat ek nie die boekklub soek nie. Die sisteem sal nie daarvan hou nie.

Ek drink weer nie my pil nie.

Die Dokter gaan kwaad wees.

Op pad werk toe vra ek vir iemand of die boekklub op dag 7 nog bestaan. Sy kyk my snaaks aan en loop net weg.

Miskien moet ek dit opsoek op die sisteem.

Ek kry net 'n error.

Ek dog die sisteem weet alles.

By die huis sit ek op my enkelbank.

Ek moet my pil drink.

Ek haal een uit die pakkie. Dit is ylik groot. Hoe moet ek dit gesluk kry? Ek probeer, maar ek verstik en die pil kom uit en rol met die wasbak se pyp af.

Ek het die pil gemors.

Ek voel sleg en gaan slaap.

Ek stap werk toe. Ek vat 'n ander pad. Ek loop verby 'n ou klipgebou. Dit is abnormaal dat dit nog bestaan. Deesdae word alles gesloop om plek te maak vir hoë geboue. Grond is skaars. Dit sê iets van 'n diens op Sondae om 9-uur. Watter soort diens? Miskien is dit die boekmense en miskien is dit hoekom dit nie op die sisteem is nie. Die gebou is te oud.

Ek is weer terug by Die Dokter.

Tik-tik.

Hy prik my weer. Dis seer.

Tik.

Weet hy wat ek dink?

Tik-tik-tik

Blykbaar is Die Dokter nooit verkeerd nie.

Tik-tik

Ek stem nie saam nie.

Tik

Dit is seker omdat ek abnormaal is.

Tik-tik

“...Jy het nie jou pille gedrink nie...

...Daar is nagevolge vir alles...

...Nou moet jy sterker pille kry...”

Ek sê vir hom ek wil nie die pille hê nie. Hulle is te groot om te sluk.

Dit ignoreer my en tik net weer 'n strokie soos die vorige keer.

Ek probeer met hom redeneer, maar al wat hy sê is:

“... Ek weet beter...

...Doen wat ek sê...”

Ek loop by die deur uit.

Ek kyk vir die telefoon in die smal, koue gang.
Die masjien met die kwaai gesiggie hou my dop.
Ek en die telefoon is dieselfde.

Ons is altwee gemaak om mee gepraat te word. Ek onthou dit, toe mense nog met mekaar gepraat het.

Die masjien piep vir my met sy rooi liggie.

Ek tel die apparaat met die draad op en hou dit teen my oor.

Die masjien se piepgeluid word al hoe dringender. Hy stoot aan my, nes laas.

Ek wens hy wil my net uitlos.

Piep-piep-piep-piep.

Die telefoon kraak maar die masjien piep so baie dat ek niks kan hoor nie.

Ek stoot hom weg. 'n Naald steek my in die been...

Huis toe.

Ek voel snaaks.

Kop pyn.

Kan nie dink nie.

Moet pille drink.

Slaap.

Op dag 7 word ek word wakker.

Boekklub.

My kop voel steeds swaar en dof. Die onmoontlike groot pille help nie daarvoor nie.

Ek voel vaak.

Die kraan drup stadiger.

Boekklub.

Ek staan op en gaan na die ou klipgebou.

Ek gaan binne.

Die boekklubleier praat.

Hy noem name, Mattheus... Markus...?

Ek hoor.

Ek kan nie luister nie.

Die klanke vibreer in my kop.

Ek kan nie dink nie.

Iemand begin met my praat. Ek weet nie wat om te sê nie. Ek is bang.

Ek vertel hom van Die Dokter en dat ek nie normaal is nie.

Hy sê dit is reg; volgens Die Dokter is niemand hier normaal nie.

Ek is verbaas. Hy glimlag vir my. Ek dink hy sien my.

Hy vra of ek die pille drink en verduidelik vir my dat die pille mense laat ophou dink, ophou anders wees. Dit maak mense soos masjiene. Dit is goed dat ek nog net een gedrink het.

My kop suis nog steeds en ek kan nie sin maak van wat hy sê nie.

Ek verskoon myself en gaan huis toe.

Die kraan drup.

Ek is moeg.

Maar ek voel goed.

Ek sal weer gaan, net sonder die kopseer.

Ek gaan nie terug Dokter toe nie.

....

Die kraan hou op om te drup.

Ek is nie al een wat abnormaal is nie.

Dit is goed om te hoor.

Ek is nie meer alleen nie.

Daar is hoop vir my.

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Synopsis in English

Alisa Lochner

The central figure of this story finds himself in a society run by computers. A database was created and it has an artificial intelligence that is so advanced that it has figured out how to take control of the people in order to best serve his main objective: To take nature into consideration whilst making the world an efficient, peaceful and ordered place. Doctors are replaced by analysis computers that can examine the entire body in an instant and then provide the accurate and necessary medication. The only problem is with what the system now considers as “normal”. Anyone that is not under the system’s influence is considered to have something wrong with them since they are not following the system’s plan, and therefore need “medication” to make them obey and listen to whatever the system tells them to do. People are not seen as valuable beings but only as a medium for the computer to achieve its objective. Through the systems analysis of humans it has seen that anything that can cause emotion destroys the world and makes the world less peaceful. Thus communication, books and religion are all shunned, and the system has everyone on medication to numb the ability to rebel and find real meaning in their lives. The main character has a craving for communication and belonging but through fortunate and unfortunate events manages to dodge the system and its medication and find a place where he feels he can find himself and the answers he is looking for.

Response to the Sai Weng story

In the original Chinese story there are three events and the views of the man about the events are contradictory to the views of the society in which he lives. At the end of the story, everything worked out well, even when he had bad fortune, it turns out to be good fortune. In my story there is a mixture of good and bad fortune but it ends well just as the Chinese short story. Added to this is the inspiration from Romans 8 v 28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Below are the three main events in my story, explained and shown how they are good or bad but eventually good.

According to society it is a good thing to visit "The Doctor" although the main character does not feel it is the right choice. Later we find out that he was right to feel this way, just as the old man in the story was right about it being good fortune when his son broke his leg.

Secondly, the main character seeks and craves human interaction and communication. Then someone/something knocks on his door. We are unsure if this would be seen as good or bad fortune by the society. The knock is ambiguous, perhaps it is the robot, or an excuse to not interact with another human being. We could assume the society does not encourage such interaction. We as readers would expect interaction to be a good thing, but he gets frightened and runs to his bathroom. His response may be seen as an event of bad fortune, as he isolates himself even more. But due to this event he does not drink his medication which in the end turns out to be a good thing.

Society thinks it will be bad for him to make contact with the "abnormal people" (he says he does not think the system wants him to go there and they do not exist on the systems directory) but he thinks it is a good idea and he turns out to be right. If he had listened to society, he would be on medication, unable to think and perhaps never come to terms with his emotions and have all his questions answered. He would have 'died' and become machine-like but now that he goes to the "book club" and he has found life and others like him. Because he had the misfortune of being injected, his feelings became numbed and this enabled him to make the contact with others. This is just like the son who now has life due to the misfortune of his broken leg.