Fiction in Translation
October 2020
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Happy Stories Mostly

by Normal Erikson Pasaribu

Translated by Tiffany Tsao

Original Title: Cerita-Cerita Bahagia, Hampir Seluruhnya and Hanya Kamu Yang Tahu Beberapa Lama Aku Harus Menunggu (the English edition will include selected stories from these two collections)

Original Publisher: Gramedia Pustaka Utama

Expected Language: Indonesian

Expected Length: 35,000 words

Published in the UK by Tilted Axis, all other rights available

About the Book

Witty and tender, playful and poignant, experimental and charged, Happy Stories, Mostly is a short-story collection that queers the norm. A blend of science fiction, absurdism, and alternative-historical realism, the collection casts queer, working-class, and ethnic Batak characters in situations and plots conventionally filled by straight, middle-class, ethnic-majority individuals. The stories do so in an almost matter-of-course way, and form a subtle, yet powerful counter to the “majority as default setting” of most Indonesian fiction, and when you think about it, a lot of fiction elsewhere.

In one story, a character is introduced to their new afterlife workplace—a department of Heaven devoted to archiving unanswered prayers. In another, a character takes up secret residence in the house of an old childhood friend with whom he shares a deeply traumatic past. In another, set in a futuristic Indonesia filled with flying cars and android servants, a karaoke-bar employee talks about her little brother, whom she’s never seen again. One heartbreaking tale follows a working-class woman on vacation to Vietnam—her desperate attempt to make peace with the suicide of her only son. In the longest piece of the collection—a masterful speculative examination of historical narrative—a young man befriends a nerdy university classmate obsessed with verifying the actual existence of a mythical 111-foot-high man.

Throughout the collection, queerness is a fact of life from which these tragic and tragicomic tales spring. By taking queerness as a priori rather than endpoint, the stories are freer to explore in rich, imaginative detail the struggles and tragedies faced by their queer characters. Not infrequently, the stories of the queer characters are told from the perspective of another characters. This technique allows the marginal to take center stage, making the queer characters the object of narration and fascination, and showing us the extent to which these queer characters influence the narrators’ lives.

The cumulative effect of all the stories is similar to that of David Mitchell’s Cloud Atlas, even though the stories aren’t nested. There are distinctive unifying elements running through Norman’s short fiction which bind them together in a coherent whole: a deep concern with metafictionality; the dark absurdity of life; the paradoxically cruel solace provided by Batak
Christianity, the Church, and God; the external forces that conspire to keep people from those whom they yearn for most; the miraculous yet depressing ability to survive such loneliness—in the words of one of the stories’ narrators, “I work in the dark. Like mushrooms. I don't need light to thrive.”

**Praise for the Author**

“A new and magical voice emerging in literature, yet one almost preternaturally wise, profoundly celebratory of the history and possibility of poetry.”
— Christos Tsiolkas, author of *The Slap* and *Damascus*

“Pasaribu tells a truth plain and human, stripped to reveal its strangeness, its absurdity, its pain…a quiet but rigid resistance against that world’s desire to maim the queer spirit.”
— *Singapore Review of Books*

“The book’s formal diversity, epigraphs, mixing of genres, signal to a medley of traditions that cannot easily be explained as a singular poetry from the ‘margins’. By referencing Indonesian writers like Wiji Thukul alongside Herta Müller and Richard Siken, Sergius Seeks Bacchus emerges not from the sidelines but from within the continuous and intertextual script of transnationalism.”
— *The Poetry Review*

“Literally and metaphorically driven underground by unorthodox desires, Pasaribu’s primary stance is seeking; his is a restless questing as his cast of characters search for a shared history that is textually present but remains elusively out of reach.”
— *Mascara Literary Review*

**About the Author**

Norman Erikson Pasaribu is an acclaimed Indonesian author whose work spans fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. His work has been shortlisted twice for the national Khatulistiwa Literary Award in the categories of prose (2014) and poetry (2016), and his debut poetry collection *Sergius Mencari Bacchus* placed first in the 2015 Jakarta Arts Council Poetry Competition. In 2017, the Southeast Asia Literary Council awarded him their Young Writer prize. His work has been translated into English, Vietnamese, Bengali, French, and Dutch.

The English edition of his poetry collection was published by Tilted Axis Press in 2019 as *Sergius Seeks Bacchus*. Norman’s poetry in English has appeared in various outlets, including *Asymptote, Modern Poetry in Translation*, and *Cordite Poetry Review*. English versions of his stories have been published by *Catapult* and *The White Review*, among others.

**About the Translator**

Tiffany Tsao is a literary translator and writer. Her translations of Norman Erikson Pasaribu’s poetry collection, *Sergius Seeks Bacchus*, was awarded a PEN Presents prize in 2017 and a PEN Translates grant in 2018. She has translated two Indonesian novels into English—*Paper Boats* by Dee Lestari (Amazon Crossing, 2017) and *The Birdwoman’s Palate* by Laksmi Pamuntjak (Amazon Crossing, 2018). She also writes novels. Her latest, *The Majesties*, was published in the US by Atria Books.
Hellfire

by Leesa Gazi

Translated by Shabnam Nadiya

Published in India by Eka Westland. All other rights available

About the book

For the sisters Lovely and Beauty, home is hell. Hellfire opens with Lovely’s solo expedition to Gausia Market to buy fabric. It’s her fortieth birthday which is possibly why her mother allowed her out by herself—for the first time in her life.

Lovely’s trip turns into a rebellious adventure during which she buys a knife, visits a park notorious for being sketchy, almost goes home with a strange man, and breaks the curfew imposed by her mother.

The story unfolds at a fast pace, spanning a day, allowing the reader access to the intimate lives of the family consisting of the two sisters, Lovely and Beauty, and their parents. The family is completely dominated by Farida Khanam, the mother. Trapped in a marriage with an impotent husband, Farida Khanam turns her daughters into virtual prisoners. They are routinely locked up with access to the outside world and other people only allowed at Farida Khanam’s discretion. The fragile ecosystem that exists in this dysfunctional household shatters once Lovely begins to glean a secret shared by her sister and her mother.

About the Author

Leesa Gazi is a writer, actor and co-founder of a London based theatre and arts company, Komola Collective. She was the script-writer and performer of ‘Six Seasons’ and ‘A Golden Age’ at the Southbank Centre.

She worked as a script interpreter for the 2012 Globe festival on ‘The Tempest. She was the cultural coordinator and a voice artist for Akram Khan’s ‘Desh’ & ‘Chotto Desh’. Leesa’s new play ‘Daughter of the Forest’ produced by Komola Collective completed its Spring-Summer tour
in 2016. Leesa has been working as a playwright, researcher and translator of the “Portrait of Baul” project by Enamul Hoque & Openvizor in partnership with British Library & Barbican. Leesa has translated Tahmima Anam’s debut novel ‘A Golden Age’ in 2008. Her first novel, ‘Rourob’, was published in 2010.

Leesa was the concept-developer, co-writer and performer of ‘Birangona: Women of War’ theatre production, nominated for The Offies 2014. Birangona means ‘Brave Woman’ and this was the honorific granted to the hundreds of thousands of survivors of the campaign of rape carried out by the Pakistani Army and their local collaborators in the Liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. The play interwove film footage by the individual Birangona women. The play completed its UK and Bangladesh tour in 2014.

Currently, Leesa is directing a feature doc film ‘Rising Silence’ that aspires to give a voice to the survivors of rape who refuse to be diminished.

**About the Translator**

Qabar

by KR Meera

Translated by Nisha Susan

Published in Malayalam by DC Books. All English language and other translations, except Indian languages, available

About the Book

As a temple is slated to rise in the site of Babri Masjid, voices rise from a qabar in a small town in Kerala. A judge presiding over the property dispute is hypnotised. Is the petitioner the jinn-summoning sorcerer he is reputed to be? Or is she having a mental breakdown from loneliness? Why else would the spectre of a long-forgotten ancestor and his handmaidens appear before her? How is she supposed to make a ruling when her self is profoundly divided? A hypnotic novella from KR Meera full of the dizzying knowledge that verdicts are not solutions.

About the Author

Author of more than a dozen books in Malayalam including novels, novellas, short story collections, essays and children's literature. Her novel Aaraachaar which won the Kendra and the Kerala Sahitya Akademy Awards was translated by J Devika as The Hangwoman and was shortlisted for the DSC literary prize. Her translated works include Yellow Is The Colour Of Longing, The Gospel Of Yudas, The Poison Of Love, The Unseeing Idol of Light and The Angel's Beauty Spots.

About the Translator

Nisha Susan grew up in India, Nigeria and Oman steeped in Malayalam genre fiction and pop culture. She currently lives in Bangalore and writes Cheap Thrills, a column on millennials, time
and obsessions. She is the co-founder of the high-spirited feminist platform, The Ladies Finger. Her award-winning non-fiction is focused on culture, gender and politics. Her fiction explores the intimacy and strangeness the internet has brought to India. She is a steadfast admirer of robustness and versatility of Malayalam contemporary literature.
Skyscraper

by Chen Xue

Translated by Jeremy Tiang

Published by Rye Field Publications, Taipei, 2015. All other rights available

About the book

We spy on the inhabitants of a New Taipei City skyscraper: the barista waiting for her past to catch up with her, the romantic novelist unable to leave her flat, the business man who keeps his wife and mistress in separate towers of this complex. When beautiful Mabel Chung is murdered, we see that this community might not be as functional as it believes. Who was the killer - the security guard who had a crush on her? The man she was having an affair with, or his pregnant wife? The brother who shared her abusive past? As the investigation continues, it becomes clear that everyone's secrets will have to be revealed, in order to get to the truth.

A story told in fragments and glimpses, this novel is both a well-observed depiction of atomized modern life, and a gripping thriller in which we see how apartment living requires us to place a great deal of trust in people we don't know all that well. Each chapter is narrated from a different person's point of view, while the skyscraper itself comes across as a character in its own right, pulsing with a personality that dwarfs the 3,000 humans who inhabit it.

About the Author

Chen Xue was born in 1970, and studied Chinese at National Central University. She is the author of eight novels and numerous short story and essay collections. In 2004, her novel The Child on the Bridge won the China Times Book Prize, and in 2009, her novel The Possessed was selected for the Taiwan Literature Prize.

About the Translator

Jeremy Tiang has translated more than ten books from Chinese, including novels by Su Weichen, Yeng Pway Ngon and Zhang Yueran, and been awarded a PEN/Heim Grant and an NEA Literary Translation Fellowship. He also writes and translates plays, and is the author of It Never Rains on National Day and State of Emergency, both published by Epigram Books.
Hospital: A Novel
by Sanya Rushdi
Translated by Arunava Sinha

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About the Book

Based in Melbourne, Australia, and on real life events, this is a story of a woman who has been diagnosed with a third episode of psychosis and, therefore, schizophrenia. The story is told in the first person, where the protagonist – who shares a name and family with the writer – finds herself questioning the diagnosis of her sanity or insanity, as determined and defined by a medical model which seems less than convincing to her. Having studied psychology herself, she wonders whether, even if the diagnosis is correct to some extent, the treatment should be different.

The events include home visits and interviews by the Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (CATT), admission to a community house, visits to the library, being arrested by the police, being admitted to the hospital – where the bulk of the novel is set – release from the hospital, and a return to the brink of another psychotic episode which may or may not actually materialize. The narrator believes she has talked herself out of it.

Through all of this, the story unfolds seemingly naturally, mostly in the form of conversations. The jagged voice and the chilling calmness serve to underline the pracity of the narrator and her negotiation with a social definition of sanity.
About the Author

Sanya Rushdi was born in Bangladesh, in 1977. She received her primary education in Dhaka, Bangladesh and then in Adelaide, Australia. She also spent a year in Sokoto, Nigeria. She is currently a resident of Melbourne, Australia. She studied the biological sciences and psychology at Monash University, the University of Sydney and Deakin University. ‘Hospital’ is her first novel.

About the Translator

Arunava Sinha translates classic, modern and contemporary Bengali fiction, non-fiction and poetry from India and Bangladesh into English. Sixty of his translations have been published so far in India, eight in the UK (by Tilted Axis, John Murray, Hesperus, Seagull Books), and five in the USA (by Archipelago Press, Amazon Crossing, Seagull Books). Eleven of his translations have won, or been longlisted / shortlisted for literary translation prizes in India, the UK and the US. He is an associate professor of practice in the Creative Writing department at Ashoka University, India, and the Books Editor of the online politics and culture magazine Scroll.in.