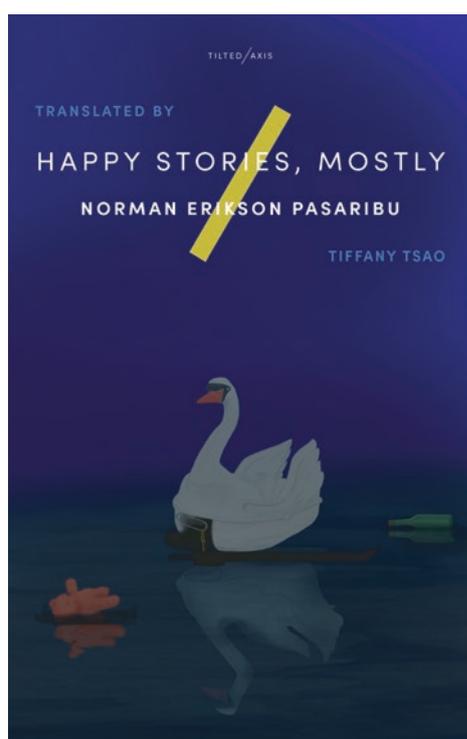




Reading Guide



Happy Stories, Mostly Norman Erikson Pasaribu

Translated by Tiffany Tsao

Tilted Axis Press

thebookerprizes.com

What the judges said

'The bittersweet stories of Norman Erikson Pasaribu's *Happy Stories, Mostly* – in a translation by Tiffany Tsao that shimmers and soars – range from the heart-wrenching to the absurd, creating a vibrant mosaic of contemporary Indonesia.'

About the book

Inspired by Simone Weil's concept of 'decreation', and drawing on Batak and Christian cultural elements, the stories put queer characters in situations and plots conventionally filled by hetero characters.

In one story, a new staff member is introduced to their new workplace—a department of Heaven devoted to archiving unanswered prayers. In another, a woman's attempt to vacation in Vietnam after her gay son commits suicide turns into a nightmarish failed escape. And in a speculative-historical third, a young man finds himself haunted by the tale of a giant living in colonial-era Sumatra.

A blend of science fiction, absurdism, and alternative-historical realism, *Happy Stories, Mostly* is a powerful puff of fresh air, aimed at destabilising the heteronormative world and exposing its underlying rot.

About the author

Norman Pasaribu was born in Jakarta in 1990. His debut poetry collection *Sergius Mencari Bacchus* (translated by Tiffany Tsao as *Sergius Seeks Bacchus*) won first prize in the 2015 Jakarta Arts Council Poetry Manuscript Competition, and was shortlisted in the 2016 Khatulistiwa Literary Award for Poetry.

About the translator

Tiffany Tsao was born in San Diego, US, in 1983. She translates Indonesian fiction and poetry into English. She has published three book-length translations to date. Her translation of Norman Erikson Pasaribu's *Sergius Seeks Bacchus* was awarded a PEN Translates grant and shortlisted for the 2021 NSW Premier's Translation Prize. She also writes fiction. Her third novel *The Majesties* was shortlisted for the Ned Kelly Award. She holds a Ph.D. in English from UC-Berkeley and currently lives in Australia.



The author says...

'Translations have opened doors to places where my writing can live terror-free. Where they will be loved, cherished. There is an American mother who wrote a long blog post about how the short story "So What's Your Name Sandra?"

helped her grieve for her son after his suicide. I want this mother to reclaim her life, wherever she is right now. Tiffany's translation has made this meaningful connection possible.'



The translator says...

'The original title of the book is *Cerita-Cerita Bahagia, Hampir Seluruhnya*, which can also be translated as "*Happy Stories, Almost All*". The "hampir" or "almost" is one letter away from "vampir"—"vampire". In Norman's own words

(untranslated by me): "We queer are always thrown to the hampir, to the almost, and there the idea of happiness turns into the vampir".'

Further reading

Norman Erikson Pasaribu *Sergius Seeks Bacchus*

Tiffany Tsao *The Majesties*

Nhã Thuyên *breathe, creatures of elsewhere*

Han Kang *The Vegetarian*

Isyana Artharini *I Am My Own Home*

Erni Aladjai *Kei*

Claudia Rankine *Citizen*

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