



Man Tiger

Eka Kurniawan , Labodalih Sembiring (Translator) , Benedict Anderson (Introduction)

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A wry, affecting tale set in a small town on the Indonesian coast, *Man Tiger* tells the story of two interlinked and tormented families and of Margio, a young man ordinary in all particulars except that he conceals within himself a supernatural female white tiger. The inequities and betrayals of family life coalesce around and torment this magical being. An explosive act of violence follows, and its mysterious cause is unraveled as events progress toward a heartbreaking revelation.

Lyrical and bawdy, experimental and political, this extraordinary novel announces the arrival of a powerful new voice on the global literary stage.

Man Tiger Details

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Author : Eka Kurniawan , Labodali Sembiring (Translator) , Benedict Anderson (Introduction)

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From Reader Review Man Tiger for online ebook

Missy J says

The most moving novel that I read in 2016. I haven't written a review for this because I'm still literally speechless. All I can say is that Kurniawan wrote a novel for the many, many voiceless women in third world countries. Is it inevitable that oppressed people often oppress those that are weaker (women, children, disabled, elderly, animals...)?

This short novel is divided into five parts. In Part One we hear that a murder happened in a small unnamed Javanese village. Margio, a young man killed his neighbour, the middle-aged Anwar Sadat, but nobody knows why. In Part Two, we learn about "the tiger." The villagers believe that some people inherit a tiger spirit from the ancestors and that the tiger will guide its owner as a wife and protector. Part Three looks into the past of some characters, while Part Four leads to the climatic event. Finally in Part Five, all the pieces fall into place and we learn why the murder happened.

I loved the imagery of this book. I was lucky to have read this in the original Indonesian text and Kurniawan really brought forth what Javanese village life is like. The old man at the fish pond. The motorbike wobbling through the rice fields. The serabi pancake sellers in the morning. The kite flyers and dove gamblers in the fields. And the young men and their dogs returning to the village after hunting pigs. The author's narrative voice flows very smooth like water.

Kurniawan depicts how superstition is part of the villagers' life and that it is often the only way for them to explain the unexplainable. Or maybe they can guess and already know what really happened, but telling the legend of the tiger is a kinder and less offensive way to explain things.

But more interesting than the tiger, I thought was this book's presentation of gender relations. Village girls are married off at a young age because their parents want it and because everybody else in the village is doing it. The girls are too young to understand what they are getting themselves into. Some will come across the horrors of domestic violence. How entitled man can feel towards woman. How woman quietly accepts her "fate," yet still harbors a deep, vengeful resentment against man which could explode, who knows? Is it any wonder that one of the few Malay/Indonesian word that crossed over into the English language is "amok"? Kurniawan presents the ugly and it is very uncomfortable. In a society where people are too polite and indirect to talk about the ugly, I'm glad Kurniawan penned this novel.

Painting by Raden Saleh.

Sidharth Vardhan says

Even if you leave alone magical realism, there is a hint of Marquez in this author's prose. If that doesn't sell the book, I don't know what will. Just look at this:

"After two days in the hospital, Komar asked to be taken home and said firmly to Mameh, "Don't call for any more doctors. I'm healthy enough to wait for my grave to be dug."

"The city government was said to have given him a plot of land in the heroes' cemetery as a reward for his service, something he described as an invitation to die quickly. "

The references to classics and mythological tales celebrate storytelling traditions. In fact, the story itself is a retelling of an ancient myth.

The story itself, told in a non-linear manner and from a shifting point of view, though is very simple - that of two dysfunctional families. The tiger seemed to me no more than symbol of repressed anger of a kid over domestic violence (child becomes tiger the way Bruce becomes hulk) and mistreatment of his mother and about how hard and violent instincts of a community which has found peace after long period of violent disturbances and wars; find new ways to show up (animal hunting games, fighting games for youth, domestic violence). The post-war atmosphere shows up as a theme in many other ways (the retired major, rusted samurai swords, the army needing local criminals to have their fun with etc.)

Another motif is people believing that things are coming out of them used to show people showing shock at themselves/ their own behavior (the way hulk refused to be identified with the other guy). While the tigress coming out of a man is an obvious example, the other example would be that of his sister:

Every morning her chest size seemed to have expanded overnight, a thought that sometimes made her wonder if a separate woman wasn't starting to emerge from the teenage girl. "

Other beautiful lines :

" It was almost dark when the sandy red soil finally covered him. The gravedigger slowly stepped on this soil, but didn't make it too compact, as a mandatory precaution lest the dead should be resurrected. "

"He also had a feeling that the baby was a girl because, as people said, that's how it is when a woman suddenly becomes exceptionally beautiful during pregnancy. "

Nicole~ says

A person kills only from an impulse that springs from his blood and sinews, from the vestiges of ancient struggles.

? Émile Zola, The Beast Within(Les Rougon-Macquart)

Eka Kurniawan may have been inspired by Emile Zola's powerful novel of the nature of man: who would devolve to primitive instincts harkening back to animal behaviors, to the history of the male for dominance, and conquest of the female to reduce her to sexual subjugation. In The Beast Within(Les Rougon-Macquart), Zola posited that the human proclivity for vengeance and the unleashing of violent urges that end in a crime, are primarily borne through heredity. Atavistic bloodthirsty instincts -primitive in its beastly origins- lay dormant, but could resurface to avenge immoral and malevolent wrongs. In the case of the 'Man Tiger,'

mental and physical brutality to women is on trial.

Set in an unknown Indonesian town, *Man Tiger* follows old folklore stories from Eka Kurniawan's youth, about tigers that live in villages and are guardians of their families. He weaves a very vivid tale of a small community socially structured by patriarchal dominance, depicting domestic violence at the heart of the matter which play out tragically and all too real.

This psychological thriller isn't that classic crime novel rife with the usual suspects since it begins with a bold line announcing the murder and the murderer from the start, and blends such violence with a typical day in the life of youth: *"On the evening Margio killed Anwar Sadat, Kyai Jahro was blissfully busy with his fishpond."* It evolves in the mesmerizing progressive style that Kurniawan masterfully showcased in *Beauty is A Wound*, of fluidly shifting time from the present backward, retracing the imprints of the crouching man-eater to its fatal pounce.

Featuring two families over two generations with its main character Margio unaware of, and possessed by, the sleeping beast within - a vengeful white tigress and supernatural creature inherited from his grandfather - Kurniawan unites the passion of coming-of-age, the desire to protect loved ones and the blinding rage of unplanned murder.

If a man couldn't control his beast, it could turn so violent that nothing could restrain it once enraged.

Margio, a child of domestic rape, grows up embittered toward his father for his frequent absences, and hating the same for the brutal sexual and physical abuse of his mother. *"Her husband's treatment felt like slow death, but she didn't know what to do. She never thought of leaving him... All she could do was keep to herself, and since sometimes Komar could be sweet and treat her well, hope didn't die entirely."* Margio's emotional restraint further unravels when he becomes romantically involved with the privileged daughter of the village's elite member, the controlling Anwar Sadat, a man with the secret that will ultimately tip Margio over the edge. In a well manipulated story arc, Margio's resentment toward Sadat parallels the rage for his father, inciting the 'tigress' to roar out of her dormancy.

Unlike the historical political map and complex magical realm of 'Beauty', *Man Tiger* is more contained in its plot structure, barely expressing Jakarta's history but realistically illuminating a hierarchical small town life still gripped in patriarchal hold. It is straightforward Asian noir, progressively paced in suspense, simple and exciting in its goth rendering and short enough to get through in a day.

Read June 2016

Teresa Proença says

«Eka Kurniawan poderá ser um próximo Prémio Nobel.»
— *Le Monde*

Como diz uma amiga minha: "Desde que vi um porco a andar de bicicleta, já acredito em tudo."

O livro inicia-se com um crime. Um homem é morto à dentada, no pescoço, que quase lhe separa a cabeça do tronco. A narrativa prossegue contando a história do assassino, e da sua família, e as motivações que o

levaram a perder a cabeça de forma tão violenta.

As páginas de descrição do crime provocaram-me incredulidade e uma ligeira repugnância; as da violência doméstica foram-me indiferentes (e não devia ser assim); as muitas a relatarem cenas de sexo desagradaram-me, pelo abuso sobre as mulheres e pela forma ridícula e demasiado extensa como são descritas; as restantes aborreceram-me.

Não gostei do modo saltitante como são narrados os acontecimentos; não gostei da escrita (por exemplo ele batia-lhe "*a torto e a direito*" e "*despejar beijos repletos de luxúria*" não me parecem frases muito literárias); não achei qualquer sentido - ou não percebi, ou está mal contado - ao tigre branco que vivia dentro de um homem e que passava para os descendentes.

Enfim... tempo e dinheiro desperdiçados. Que pensei não o serem porque Eka Kurniawan, além de ser um dos nomeados para o Man Booker Internacional Prize de 2016, é comparado a Gabriel García Márquez.

Warwick says

This dreamy, meandering novel is written around a murder in a quiet Indonesian village, a crime whose victim and perpetrator are both given away in the opening sentence. Darting backwards and forwards in great swirls of flashbacks and foreshadowings, the story fills in the connections between the two characters and their families, gradually building up a kind of pointillist image of the town and the various tensions that led to the killing.

The young man at the centre of the book is possessed by the spirit of a white tigress, and this flash of 'magic-realism' (a label I've always found rather irritating) has led some reviewers and blurbers to make hasty comparisons with García Márquez or even Rushdie. Actually this has nowhere near the same level of complexity or linguistic dexterity (at least in translation); but anyway, the magic realism angle seems to be a bit of a red herring, since the main value here is not in the fantasy elements but rather in the naturalistic portrait of Indonesian village life, a life of boar hunts with wild dogs, snakes in the allamanda trees, prayers in the surau, cockfights in the ruins of an abandoned railway station, and the quiet desperation of families running on routine domestic violence.

What the novel illustrates, through its very sensitive portrayal of the two central families, is the way that violence within a family can scale up to violence within a community. For those with a little knowledge of Indonesian history, there may be an implicit invitation to scale up again, and make a connection with violence within the country as a whole. (Though politics is not mentioned directly, the region's history is present in various fossilised elements within the story, like the rusted samurai sword left over from the Japanese occupation that's being dragged around by the protagonist in the opening chapter.)

The English translation from Labodali Sembiring is excellent and reads extremely naturally, despite the fact that the world it describes is often quite an alien one. But the underlying emotions are as familiar as ever, and Kurniawan has found some beautiful new ways to get at the same old bittersweet wisdom: 'All that remained was a precious lesson that love causes pain, and the conviction that it couldn't be otherwise.'

Skip says

Well written, but I think some of the Indonesian author's words and ideas did not translate well into English.

This is the story of a surprisingly violent murder in a small village, where a 20-year old boy-man tears open the throat of an older villager in the opening chapter. The rest of the book is spent providing the backstory of what motivated young Margio (the man tiger) to act as he did. I thought the book was well paced, but found the inconsistent timeline a bit hard to follow.

Mary says

In the opening line we are told that one man brutally kills another. We don't understand why until the very last page. In between, there's a haunting, rambling, poetic story being told from several directions, all of it as tense and sweltering as the coastal village that is the setting.

The magic-realism label barely applies here, I think. The story feels very real and very sad. A young man is brought to breaking point much the way people of colonized countries are brought there. The pent-up reaction is often vicious and misdirected. Kurniawan also spoke of the accepted brutality that is inflicted upon women in the name of culture and tradition. Marital rape mimics the rape of country; when you watch your mother beaten, when you watch your country taken, when people are not given a choice, they will snap. And so they should.

****A couple of days ago Man Tiger lost to The Vegetarian for the Man Booker International Prize. Having read both books, I can easily say that Man Tiger is the superior novel.**

Abduraafi Andrian says

Inilah mengapa aku terus membaca sastra Indonesia: indah. Penulis-penulis pribumi dihadapkan pada masa-masa ketika kaki harus terikat agar tetap berdiri. Tapi dengan ikatan erat kaki, tangan mereka tetap bebas. Bebas menuangkan tinta pada kertas. Bebas menuangkan pikiran dan pendapat melalui cerita. Dengan tulisan, mereka membangun bangsa sekaligus mempercantik keberagaman sastra Indonesia. Aku pikir Eka Kurniawan salah satu yang mengalaminya.

Selengkapnya: <http://bibliough.blogspot.com/2015/08...>

Ikra Amesta says

Suatu hari Margio membunuh Anwar Sadat tetangganya sampai lehernya nyaris putus. Tidak tanggung-tanggung, ia melakukannya dengan gigi sendiri dan saat ditanya anak itu hanya mengaku telah dirasuki harimau buas.

Pembunuhnya ditangkap, korbannya dikubur, satu desa tercengang, dan cerita selesai sampai di situ. Tidak ada proses investigasi ala detektif atau penelusuran lebih lanjut pasca kejadian, insiden itu jadi titik awal sekaligus akhir dari kisah **Lelaki Harimau**. Namun ini cerita yang sangat kaya, setiap karakternya jadi gerbang jalur labirin yang belit-membelit sampai ke klimaks itu, sifat-sifat manusia diiris dan dibedah dengan pisau psikologis yang tajam, semua lanskap terlukis oleh warna-warni kata realis sekaligus magis.

Ini adalah pengenalan pertama yang amat berkesan dengan Eka. Margio mengigit leher Anwar Sadat sampai mau putus, itu saja yang bisa saya sampaikan, selebihnya memang hanya Eka yang pantas menceritakan semuanya. Bayangkan saja kalau Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, William Faulkner, dan Virginia Woolf berembuk membuat satu novel berlatar Indonesia. *Yah*, sulit juga membayangkannya tapi percayalah, itu terjadi.

Phakin says

[illegible][illegible]

4,8 Stars

Kenapa baru kali ini ya baca bukunya Eka Kurniawan? Padahal beberapa karyanya ada beberapa yang udah dimiliki? Jawabannya... mungkin karena grogi mau baca karya yang banyak orang bilang bagus. Seakan perlu waktu untuk mempersiapkan diri. Kalau buku ini nggak ada yang mau beli cepat, mungkin masih belum dibaca juga. Dan ternyata setelah dibaca, ceritanya memang bagus banget. Meski padat narasi, asyik aja bacanya dan nggak ada rasa bosan. Sempat mual juga waktu baca bagian yang mengerikan itu. Tapi untungnya nggak terus-terusan dibahas. Aku juga merasa beruntung dapatnya kover yang ini. Karena ternyata ada edisi kover yang benar-benar menyeramkan!

Yang kurang buatku cuma masalah setting. Itu di Indonesia bagian mana ya tepatnya? Kadang rasanya kayak di pelosooooook banget, tapi waktu bapaknya Margio masih muda malah rasanya jauh lebih modern ketimbang masa kanak-kanak dan dewasa Margio. Aku juga sebenarnya berharap kisah harimau itu lebih dieksplor lagi biar semakin memuaskan rasa ingin tahu. Lain-lainnya udah pas.

Aku suka banget dengan cara Eka memperkenalkan karakternya berikut kisah hidupnya: lapis demi lapis dikupas hingga akhirnya mengerti sebab dan akibatnya. Dan dari sana aku mulai berangan-angan seandainya si akar masalah itu nggak terjadi mungkin nggak akan ada tragedi keluarga macam itu. Entah siapa yang lebih malang nasibnya.

? jamieson ? says

I've been to the tutorial for this book and now I'm an intellectual. time to write a proper review

“If a man couldn’t control his beast, it could turn so violent that nothing could restrain it once enraged.”

I read this for my English major world literatures unit, and it's the first piece of Indonesian literature I've ever read. I was incredibly excited to read it, because it was a first and also because I've heard good things about this book out and about. It's was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize in 2015.

I find literary books hard to rate often times, because there's a weird dichotomy between value and enjoyment. I didn't fly through this book, I didn't find it entertaining like I would find the usual books I read but I'm not sure if that's an excuse me to take away it's value or rate it low. It's a well written book and cultural examination.

Man Tiger is set in coastal Indonesia, following a boy called Margio who's got a white tiger inside of him. On the first page we found out he - or his inner white tiger - killed a man, and on the last page we find out why. We know he's done it, and the book follows the series of events and people that led him to that moment. It is an ownvoices book that heavily incorporates Indonesian - specifically Javan, culture, beliefs and a mixture of Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist religious beliefs.

A note and warning - there is graphic and explicit rape, domestic violence, infant death due to violence, parental violence toward a child and also general graphic violence. I found a lot of this book really hard to

stomach and found lots of it very uncomfortable. Violence is a core theme, symbolised through the white tiger and while the violence often comes as an exploration of toxic masculinity and Indonesia's often violent past, as well as Indonesian cultural expectations, it was still **really hard to read**

I genuinely disliked the representation of women in Man Tiger. The preface of this book argues that Man Tiger contains Kurniawan's most detailed female characters, so I really don't like to think what is in his other books. The women were objects to be exploited, tropey and objectified and I really didn't think they were well written.

The timeline is non-linear, and jumps around quite a bit which can be confusing, but which also lends to some great scenes and allows the story to unfold in a really unique way. I loved to get a glimpse of Javan life and Indonesian literatures through Man Tiger - the way that the religions coexisted and manifested in the society was fascinating and I also liked Kurniawan's attempt to depict the "true" Java and not "post card" Java. The postcard Indonesia is very prominent in Australia and it was nice to see an Indonesian writer tackling this perception of Indonesia.

Man Tiger is one of those books I'd recommend, and I think has good literary value and it very well written but I wouldn't reread. However, I've heard he's just released an Indonesian retelling of Animal Farm which I think I might check out!

Nancy Oakes says

4.5 rounded up. The short version follows; if you want the chatty cathy version, you can always [click here](#).

Man Tiger is just flat-out amazing, which is probably one reason it's been listed for the Man Booker International Prize for 2016. I was not at all disappointed -- au contraire -- I became the embodiment of the cliché about being glued to the story. Not only does this story move back and forth through time to get to the core of this tale, it also incorporates local folklore and mythology to help in doing so. It's a novel a person can read not just as the story of a crime, but also as a story about Indonesia as viewed through a number of different perspectives. The book is also an incredible example of storytelling -- I am not exaggerating when I say that this is a novel that I could not put down.

Intriguingly, Man Tiger begins with a vicious crime, about which the news spreads quickly throughout the small Indonesian coastal town where this book is set. It comes as a shock that Margio (20), has killed Anwar Sadat (the older victim). Margio was well known to everyone in this small Indonesian coastal town, and no one had pegged him as a particularly violent person. In fact, the only bad thing anyone could come up with about him was that he had been known to steal chickens. Even these, though, belonged to his father, and it was widely known that the theft was done "out of spite." But Margio had indeed murdered Sadat in a most vicious and brutal manner, by biting through his jugular. While it's true that "People attacked with their teeth, particularly when women fought each other," death by biting just didn't happen. Machetes, swords, yes -- but not teeth. The crime itself was not premeditated; Margio says that

"The idea came to him all of a sudden, as a burst of light in his brain."

and that

"He spoke of hosting something inside his body, something other guts and entrails. It poured out and steered

him, encouraging him to kill."

In his cell, Margio makes a statement "calmly and without guilt" that it wasn't really him who had killed Anwar Sadat, but it was "a tiger inside my body."

The rest of the novel goes back into time to explore exactly why Margio did what he did. At least, that's the easy explanation of this story, which also explores people tied together (and in some cases, trapped) by tragedy and by the past.

This book is part crime story, part exploration of a country still haunted and angered by its past, and when all is said and done, it's an intense read. Highly, highly recommended.

Lark Benobi says

This small novel turned out to be one of the most moving reads of 2015 for me. It took a while for me to accept its rhythms and to realize that this book has been completely misunderstood by anyone who thinks the tiger living within Margio has anything to do with making this a book of fantasy--this novel instead feels like a glimpse of the real world, from the perspective of those living in a small village on an Indonesian coastline. It feels like a place where belief in the supernatural fits easily into the natural world. It's a place full of life, where for instance a garden grows so abundantly that the village feels in danger of being taken over at any moment by the jungle; where the spirits of the dead make their demands on the living; where animals both natural and supernatural inhabit the empty places just next to civilization.

It's also the story of how one young man comes to a breaking point when confronted with the suffering of his family and loved ones. It's a story grounded in a squalid reality, for all its supernatural overtones. The lives of the women in this novel in particular are lovingly drawn, breathtakingly humane, heartbreaking. The style is digressive and yet deeply affecting, as, one by one, the author dwells on what makes each individual unique and worthy of having his/her story told. The village itself is as much a character in this brief novel as any of the people inhabiting it and the lifelong relationships between characters unfold in a pace that is somehow both languid and breathless. In the end what feels digressive suddenly becomes central to understanding its extraordinary conclusion.

Tien says

I can no longer say that I speak Bahasa Indonesia fluently. I have an Aussie accent now though really, my Indonesian isn't that bad! In any case, there are always certain things which do not ever translate well and it's to my advantage that I can mix the two languages. I have, however, a keen interest in translated works especially from Bahasa Indonesia. This was the only basis I had as interest in *Man Tiger* and boy, I was blown away.

Man Tiger drew me in right from the very beginning and kept me in its grip all the way to the end. The mystery isn't a whodunit but rather 'whydunit'. I thought this was a rather a fresh proposal but since I already know who, it might rather be difficult to keep me interested but I was kept spellbound through to the end of the book. The story of the town and of Margio and his family fascinated me with their brokenness, their zest for life, and most of all, their passions.

There were a few things, translation-wise, which threw me off. I think sometimes, you just cannot translate certain things especially when it is a native food with no western world equivalent. It just didn't sound right. I was also surprised at the sexual content and thought that I probably would not like it if I was reading the book in its original language. For some reason, sexual scenes just sound rather vulgar in Indonesian. *A week later, I read an interview of the author, Eka Kurniawan, who stated this exact same thought!* Nevertheless, I'm looking to source this when I go overseas next month.

Overall, I found the novel to be reminiscent of Haruki Murakami's. The magical realism aspect of the novel was slightly similar to Murakami's works though the strange factor is not quite at the same level. The ending, I feel, could be Murakami too... It was so abrupt though I really could not imagine what else there is to be so really it was abrupt but perfect.

Man Tiger is a very passionate tale –Passion which drives us to live, to feel, to need, and even drive us crazy. I'm a huge fan of Murakami and I believe, Eka Kurniawan belongs on the same spot in my heart. If you're a fan of Murakami, I don't think you'd be disappointed with *Man Tiger*.

Thanks Verso Books (US) via NetGalley for eARC in exchange of honest review
