



Paprika

Yasutaka Tsutsui, Andrew Driver (Translator)

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Paprika - exotic, piquant, to be used sparingly. The eponymous heroine of Tsutsui's novel is the alter ego of brilliant and beautiful psychotherapist Atsuko Chiba, one of the leading brains in the Institute for Psychiatric Research. An expert in the use of 'psychotherapy devices' that trap a patient's dreams and display them on a monitor, Atsuko is able to manipulate those dreams, even enter them, as an aid to psychoanalysis. When treating private patients, Atsuko transforms herself into the guise of Paprika - a captivating girl of unknown age - to mask her true identity. As Paprika delves ever deeper into her realm of fantasy, the borderline between dream and reality becomes increasingly blurred. All the more so when a colleague at the Institute develops a new device that allows the dreams of several individuals to be combined simultaneously. With this, they enter dangerous territory - far from curing their patients, they could drive them insane. Rich in humorous dialogue and ridiculous situations, replete with the folly of human desires, yet with an underlying sense of menace that 'all is not what it seems', Paprika could be described as the very pinnacle of Tsutsui's art.

Paprika Details

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From Reader Review Paprika for online ebook

Sara G says

TLDR; conceptually interesting, but those concepts are not realized until the second half. Also, major trigger warning.

Paprika, a novel by prolific Japanese sci-fi author Yasutaka Tsutsui, is about the invention of a device to access others' dreams. The protagonists and villains are doctors who work on psychological disorders at a cutting-edge clinic. Using the new device, they can watch a patient's dreams and help diagnose and cure the patient's neuroses. Of course, someone quickly realizes the power that one could wield with such a tool, as well as the fun sexual uses it could be put to, and thus conflict is introduced.

The book begins when workers at the clinic who had access to the device begin to suddenly go mad. The cause of the madness seems like it is intended to be a mystery, but the writing quickly ruins any suspense. Within a few pages a certain doctor Osanai is behaving so shadily that the reader instantly knows he is responsible for the attacks. The protagonists, meanwhile, wonder about it for another 100 pages or so while the reader has ceased to care. All potential points of interest are dismissed in this fashion. Why is this other fellow acting so villainous? No use wondering for long, because soon someone remembers his entire backstory in one quick paragraph, tidily handing him a motive. When a powerful, new version of the device, the DC Mini, goes missing and the characters urgently need to find it, they muse about where it is but don't actively search for it. No need; when the time is right one of them just finds it in a pocket where they had placed it and forgotten it.

It's a shame that a book about the amazing ability to enter another person's dreams spends over half of its text with mysteries that never have a chance to be mysterious and boring anxieties about who is offending whom in the Japanese workplace. The second half finally indulges in the possibilities the technology offers. Part 2 opens with the history of a strange European sex cult and then launches into a long series of chases through nightmares, with all of the fantasy and physics-defiance that the reader had long been waiting for. The writing is still shoddy, but there is enough distracting action to make it delightful nonetheless.

There is one aspect to the book that I know some would describe as being independent of its literary merits, but which has a significant impact on whether or not I am able to enjoy a book. I know that I am not the only one in this. This aspect is rape. Rape here, rape there, rape everywhere. The rape in this book is unique in that the violence is not the horrifying aspect; rather, it is written such that the main female character, Dr. Atsuko/Paprika, more often than not semi-consents to the rape, as paradoxical as that sounds. In one instance, she even insists that she needs to be raped to save her life. Discussing this with others, we could not decide if literally asking for rape even qualified as rape anymore, but that's how it is described within the novel. The book devolves into hentai on more occasions than the narrative requires and if I wasn't reading it for review I would have stopped at the first disgusting ecchi-fanboy moment. And that's not even getting into the other questionable decisions the author made in regards to how he portrays Dr. Atsuko, such as the fact that despite being a Nobel-nominated scientist, all people care about is her vagina and how she looks.

Despite my reservations about this novel, I know there are several people out there who would enjoy it, like people who read Palhaunik for his edginess. The chase scenes are fun, the science is fantastic, but the book is horribly, horribly flawed.

Silvia says

No soporto este libro, empezó muy bien, todo el tema del estudio de los sueños y la manipulación de los mismos para curar enfermedades mentales me parecía una idea muy original pero los derroteros que empieza a tomar no me gustan. No me está gustando la forma en la que tratan todos los personajes masculinos a la protagonista, parece que todos y cada uno de los hombres que aparecen en el libro se sienten atraídos por ella, menospreciando su intelecto y valorando por encima de todo su físico y esta frase ha acabado exasperándome "todas las científicas eran así, infériles a un nivel intelectual. No era una cuestión de misoginia, se decía Osanai, sino simplemente de reconocer su disposición natural" así que... hasta luego Yasutaka.

Carmen says

Paprika's cheeks were flushed with the thrill of the chase, as if she felt entertained by this quest for truth. To be sure, the challenge to unravel the mystery of dreams always came as a pleasure to her.

I am very conflicted and torn on how to rate and review this book.

Atsuko Chiba (age 29) and her colleague - the obese and infantile Kosaku Tokita - are psychiatric geniuses who are to be awarded the Nobel Prize. This is because Kosaku has invented a DC Mini - a small patch which can be attached to one's head - which allows you to enter another person's dream. It is hoped to be used as a form of psychotherapy, in fact Dr. Atsuko Chiba has been 'moonlighting' as a dream therapist (illegally) for 8 years - taking the name and youthful appearance of 18-year-old "Paprika" and curing people by entering their dreams. Rich, older men usually. This is all done with full knowledge and consent.

But now the powerful, dream-altering DC Minis have fallen into evil hands. The line between reality and dreams is quickly blurring. People's dreams are becoming reality, reality is becoming a dream. People are dying and going insane. Can Atsuko and her friends stop this before it's too late?

...

THE GOOD

- The imagination of the author is simply stunning. Glorious. Dreams and reality blending together, having to fight the villains in dreams, using "dream powers," and being afraid to fall asleep are all amazing concepts that are executed with grace in this novel.
- The psychology - while not correct - is, of course, fun, futuristic and appropriately sci-fi. If you have a psychology background, you will really get a kick out of this.
- Vivid, clear writing that I really enjoyed. I heard a lot of people complaining about the writing in the book, but I for one loved it. It just really worked for me. I was enchanted by Tsutsui's writing style.

THE BAD

If you have a hard time with Japanese names - are unfamiliar with manga or anime - it might be helpful for you to grab a piece of paper and write down names and traits of people mentioned until you get into the

swing of things. Since it's Japanese, you need to remember each character's last name, first name, and possible nickname - much like in Russian literature, all three will be used by different people depending on their rank and/or relationship with the person addressed. I'm fine with Japanese, so this was okay, but I strongly advise using my advice if you are unfamiliar with Japanese names.

THE UGLY

Oh, boy. Where should I start? We have four major problems in this novel.

1.) MISOGYNY

This is not a book where the misogyny is nuanced and can be debated. I mean, the book is woman-hating. Y punto. End of discussion.

This comes out most clearly during the rape scenes (there are four of them, to my recollection). Atsuko is always the target in these situations. Tsustui's attitude toward rape is very bizarre and disturbing. Here are some of the book's concepts about rape:

- Instead of fighting off your rapist, you should be passive, submissive, and try to relax and enjoy it.*

(*This also ties into a hatred of homosexuality, using a line of reasoning like: if a man is under threat of rape from another man, he should fight to the death to stop this from happening, because this is an abominable, shameful, horrifying situation where death is preferable. But if you're a woman? It's in your nature to submit to a man's dominance anyway, so even if a man is being violent and forceful with you, this is actually the natural way of things, so don't fight it.)

Yes, he was an enemy, and if she were a man she would have fought him until her dying breath. But she was a woman. She had no intention of aping a man's senseless insistence on fighting to the death.

- If your rapist is attractive, this makes rape more bearable. If your rapist is "raping you out of love," this makes the rape more bearable.

Of course, it did help that Osanai was so absurdly handsome, a fine gigolo indeed. And he'd professed his love for her, notwithstanding the means he'd chosen to express it.

- Women who haven't had sex in a long time will enjoy being raped, because they will be horny and any sexual advances (even unwanted, violent ones) will be welcomed in the end as a means of sexual release.

It had been some years since she'd had sex with a man. Having intercourse inside a patient's dream didn't count. She was of course preoccupied with her research and treatment, but even then, she'd occasionally noticed an unnatural flow in her libido and a sense of unfulfilled desire. Though not of her own choosing, this would be the perfect chance to satisfy that desire.

Did I mention that this is AFTER he's beaten her into unconsciousness and while he is still punching her in the face repeatedly? Yeah.

- After a rape attempt which is unconsummated (the rapist is unable to get an erection), a woman will be very turned-on but still unsatisfied, so she will call her lover or her crush in order to schedule a sexual rendezvous so that she can expel the sexual tension created by being almost-raped.

Atsuko was troubled by the thought that she couldn't satisfy her passion now that it was ignited. She could of course regulate her bodily functions with her mind, but all she wanted now was an outlet for her lust, as if a valve had been unblocked inside her.

Her face is swollen and bleeding from the attack and she was just sexually assaulted in her own home by a colleague. I mean, I fail to understand how Tsutsui could possibly think that now she is horny and in need of some sex from a man she actually likes.

Throughout this whole entire book, Tsutsui's bizarre ideas about rape and female sexuality kept stunning me even when I'd thought I couldn't be shocked anymore. o.O

That was Rape Scene #1. There are three more to get through, which seems excessive to this reader. I won't go into more detail - but you get the basic picture. It's disgusting freakazoid stuff. Not just rape, which is bad enough. And not even sensationalized rape (rape for excitement/titillation) which is even worse than "regular rape" in novels. This is on an even darker level - a "it's your feminine nature to submit," "why don't you just lie back and enjoy it," "after all, he's handsome and is in love with you" way of thinking that is frankly beyond horrifying. I know Tsutsui is male, but most men I know aren't this stupid (or fucked-up in the head), so I can't justify any of his ideas here. I know that Japan struggles with sexism, but this is beyond the pale.

Leaving aside the multiple rape (attempts) and the problems they create, let's focus on just plain woman-hating with no rape factor. Things like:

She could therefore put on a brave face, drawing on her feminine ability to become impervious to evil as necessity demanded.

and

Now, if ever, was the time to deploy a woman's disregard of logic.

These kind of "facts" about "feminine nature" are just casually sprinkled throughout the text like so many chocolate chips.

How about Paprika/Atsuko herself? She is the very embodiment of a "manic pixie dream girl." Always laughing and good-natured (even when being raped), every single man (EVERY SINGLE ONE) in the book falls in love with her. Even the gay men. (More on that in the "gay-hate" section.) Most "fall in love" with her after spending an hour or two with her. She is absolutely-super-fucking-gorgeous and this is discussed CONSTANTLY. Every man, gay or straight, wants to fuck her and thinks they are in love with her.

Here's what happens at a press conference early in the book:

Some social affairs correspondents who were attending for the first time let out involuntary gasps of astonishment at her ravishing beauty, which even exceeded its reputation.

We also see that Atsuko has no real backstory or "depth" beyond being a super-model-gorgeous genius. She has a personality (bubbly, cute, intelligent, fast-thinking, sexy) but no real history or flaws.

She is very attracted to older (around age 60) men who are rich and powerful. That's fine. However, she is a psychiatrist who has sex with her patients. She claims this is 'therapy' and 'cures them much faster.' There's a reason most of the clients she takes on are rich and powerful men in their sixties. And she's not just using

them for sex! She develops romantic and loving feelings for all of them. By the way, they are all married with children. Just FYI. Her treatment of patients is VERY unethical and immoral.

Another aspect of this is that - because all men 'love' her and want to (or have) had sex with her - these men become a loyal army for her. Because they are all in love with her - would die for her, would kill for her, are protective of her - she has a huge male "base" to draw from in forming an "army" to defeat evil in this book. It's very reminiscent of Laurell K. Hamilton's Anita Blake series.

Let's move on to Problem #2.

2.) HATRED OF HOMOSEXUALS.

I hate the term homophobia. ("Oh, I'm scared of gay people!") So I rarely use it. I'm not talking about being "frightened" of gay people here, I'm talking about being a homosexuality-hating fucking piece of shit. Okay?

Gay men get the brunt of the attack here. Two gay men are the villains of the piece, cackling and bent on world domination. Homosexual love is shown as a deviant, freaky, disgusting occurrence that is shameful and horrible. BTW, in case you're wondering - the gay men still want to rape Paprika/Atsuko. So. You know, how that happens and stuff. Also, the idea is that there is a secret, Christian-based gay cult where gay men... I don't know... pray and have sex with each other and fantasize about having sex with Jesus, or something?! Very weird.

Lesbians do not escape the hatred either. In the one scene where Atsuko/Paprika is hit on by a woman, she is "repulsed and disgusted." Being lesbian is described as "unnatural." So...

This hatred of homosexuality is frequent and very explicit. Again, like the misogyny - not subtle or debatable. IN YOUR FACE and explicit. Very disturbing - read at your own risk.

3.) Much less harped on, there is still another hatred presented here and that is a hatred of fat people. Kosaku is morbidly obese and (despite being a genius) is portrayed as infantile, a huge child, someone who is completely weak-willed, whiny, and has zero self-control. I found this highly offensive.

4.) There are a few digs at "the Chinese" in this book, but compared to the absolute avalanche of woman-gay- and fat-hate this could almost go unnoticed. It's like a full-time job keeping up with all the bigotry in this novel.

...

The movie is much better in that it tones down this woman-hating/homosexuality-hating rhetoric. The film is enjoyable if a bit confusing. This book will DEFINITELY help you understand the film better, in case you watched it and are a bit lost.

...

Tl;dr - *sighs* *puts head in hands* I don't think I can give this the one-star that it obviously deserves because Tsutsui's world and concepts (as far as sci-fi goes) are amazing and innovative. Such imagination! Such vivid colors! Dream detectives! Mystery! Horror!

However, typing all this out and going over word-for-word what a female-hating, gay-hating piece of shit this book is - I don't know. I hate this. I hate when a good writer has horrific worldviews that bleed into their fiction. Well, this isn't bleeding; this is gushing all over the place. 2 Stars, with a strong caveat to anyone considering reading this. Read at your own risk - This is NOT a drill. The misogyny and hatred of

homosexuals is *real* and *constant*.

Cay says

Paprika has been on my to-be-read list ever since I found out about it, about a year ago. I have seen Paprika, the anime movie a few years back and when I learned that it's based on a novel by Yasutaka Tsutsui, I was curious what the book would be like. Apart from a few vague tidbits, I don't remember much of the film, but I do remember that it was one hell of a weird anime. So when I picked this book up, I knew I was in for a unique ride.

As the book starts off we're immediately introduced to Atsuko Chiba and Kosaku Tokita, two directors of the Institute of Psychiatric Research who have been shortlisted for Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Tokita is a morosely overweight, child-like genius, the inventor of psychotherapy devices. Using these PT devices psychotherapists, like Doctor Atsuko Chiba, can enter and analyse their patient's dreams. It's a revolutionary new method to treat mental diseases.

Only not everyone is happy about how the PT devices are being used; the Institute is torn with internal conflicts. Despite the technology being legal now, people still have safety concerns. They don't understand how it really works, but they feel the potential danger in it. Especially if it falls into the wrong hands. And now there is a rumour going around about a doctor getting infected by a patient's schizophrenia. Except it's not a rumour. Someone in the Institute is using PT devices to influence dreams with schizophrenic images, causing the victim to become schizophrenic.

Atsuko, Tokita and Shima, the President of the Institute of Psychiatric Research, firmly state that schizophrenia is not catching at a press conference. They want to save the reputation of their research institution at all costs, and decide to solve matters by themselves.

Atsuko is not only a lead researcher and the best psychotherapist in the Institute, but also a strikingly beautiful young woman. And for that the object of both envy and admiration. Many men at the Institute are in love with her, or at least lust after her, but she's also surrounded by considerable number of enemies.

Atsuko is a contradiction of terms. Clever, beautiful and independent, yet needing the help and love of men. She's only attracted to intelligent men in high position, and can and does "love" more than one man at a time.

"You may be beautiful, but you're no woman. The only men you can love are freaks and mental patients who let you do what you like"

While I can't entirely agree with it, there's some truth in these words. But even if she did some ethically questionable things (and the way she handled the "rape" situation was just wrong on many levels...), I still admired how ambitious and driven she was.

Paprika, the dream detective is only an urban legend for the vast majority of people. A very young and very pretty girl who treats through dream therapy. But she's real. And in dreams - vividly real.

We're in the Radio Club, a discrete bar in Roppongi: a gentleman is waiting in one of the dark booths while soft music is playing in the background. It's all very film noir. Then the door opens: Paprika has arrived.

Paprika uses uncommon therapy methods; she combines dream therapy with sex therapy. Her clients are elite men, who doesn't want the world to know about their not so good mental health. Paprika enters these men's dream in search of the root of their mental problems. And those dreams were doubtlessly my favorite parts of the story.

In dreams nothing and nobody is as it seems. Everything has a hidden meaning, everyone is wearing a mask. It's a land of surreal ~~japanese~~ nightmares images. And it's the job of the dream detective to find out what's

hidden behind those images. And she was amazing at it. Her dream interpretations were fantastic, and the crime fan in me enjoyed trying to figure out what meant what. It was fun times.

"Interesting people have interesting dreams. Dull people only have dull ones."

Having watched the anime, I was very interested in reading the novel it was based on. And I wasn't disappointed. Paprika is an interesting book, with interesting characters who're having interesting dreams. There's a lot of Jungian, Freudian and Sezession (a fictional homosexual "cult") mumbo jumbo in the book, that is not everyone's cup of tea, but it certainly gives the story a unique flavor. Nothing is black or white in the book's surreal world, that and the unpredictiveness of the plot makes this book a fascinating read. A few "lost in translation" moments notwithstanding, I really enjoyed Paprika and would recommend it to lovers of fast-paced science fiction, and to fans of Inception (the movie was inspired by this book), anime/Japanese literature and Philip K. Dick.

Jeremy Hurd-McKenney says

If you like your heroines to be smart, beautiful, Nobel-prize winning doctors, you might at first glance think this book is for you, but you would be wrong. Things start off innocently enough--a well-respected doctor moonlights as Paprika, a "dream detective" navigating her way through her clients' dreams as a way to find and isolate the source of their waking anxiety. Things start to get a little weird when Chiba's alter ego shows up at her client meetings disguised as a teenage girl, and everything quickly goes south. Naturally, every recommended treatment is for Paprika to have sex with the client, either in their dreams, in real life, or both if you have the right electronic equipment. Even if you don't want to have a go, Paprika will take all the guilt away--"please rape me," she begs one hesitant client. One trip into Paprika's magical dream vagina is all you need to cure you of your mental problems.

There is also some sort of mystery subplot here about a pair of mincing gay guys stealing electronic equipment and using the collective human subconscious as a playground for sex games and for bringing mythological demons to life, but the terrible translation makes it difficult to follow that particular storyline. Additionally, the inevitable weird sex stuff is told using exacntly clinical terms--"he's having a nocturnal emission" observes one character--which to me made it even squickier than if it had been described using more crass language. Overall, Paprika was a spice that I could have lived without.

Ger says

Kosaku Tokita es un brillante científico, responsable de crear los "dispositivos de psicoterapia" que permiten ver (o incluso entrar a) los sueños de los pacientes. La protagonista de este libro, Atsuko Chiba, es la otra pata de este singular equipo y está encargada de tratar a pacientes depresivos o esquizofrénicos usando los dispositivos de Tokita. Cuando entra en este rol de "detective de sueños" toma una personalidad más juvenil y desdenfadada a la que llama Paprika. El eje de la historia es el robo de uno de estos dispositivos por parte del vicepresidente del instituto donde ellos trabajan, quien lo utiliza con fines oscuros.

Tsutsui nos sumerge de lleno en este mundo de psicoanálisis, máquinas futuristas y escenas oníricas. Me resultó interesante como introducía conceptos del psicoanálisis en la historia, particularmente porque es un tema que no me atrae para nada, así que es todo mérito del autor que me haya enganchado. Las escenas de los sueños son espectaculares y muy bien narradas, aunque el final me pareció un poco ambicioso.

Como puntos negativos, el autor muchas veces cae en la misoginia y la homofobia. Personajes femeninos que "se dejan violar" o justifican las violaciones por la belleza del perpetrador. También se habla negativamente de gays y lesbianas en varios pasajes del libro. Creo que este es el mayor error de Tsutsui.

No vi aun la versión animé de esta historia aunque pienso hacerlo en breve. Me gustaría que se filmara una versión live-action también, creo que lo amerita. Aunque Nolan ya se robó varias ideas de esta novela en Inception, je.

Yasmin says

I'm sure the translation wasn't the best it could have been, but I can easily look past the clumsy sentences and imagine that the original version was at least a little bit better. But the real problem here is not the language or the style or the pacing, it's what I perceived was the mindset of the author: that of a sexist and homophobic jerk.

I haven't read anything else by this author and I don't really know anything about who or how Tsutsui is, but the way he created these characters seemed to be just an extension of his way of thinking. Comments of disgust towards homosexuality were made by most characters and Paprika's own thoughts seemed, at times, to mirror those of a man (a really stupid man). (view spoiler)

Leaving all this aside, there *are* some things about this book that are not entirely bad: the overall plot and some of the dream sequences are pretty good. But the ending was crap, so I don't recommend this book at all, unless you're doing a research on misogyny and homophobia or you really don't have anything else to read or do with your life.

Issie says

It was a little hard for me to enjoy it completely because I made the mistake of watching the movie before reading the book, so my brain was betraying me into making Paprika an animation image several times.

Apart from that, it was a really intriguing book, and maybe the central idea of the plot is the best: what if we could enter other people's dreams?, and even more disturbing, what if the things we imagine in our dreams and nightmares could turn into reality?

The scene where all the monsters from everyone's nightmares attack reality just made me think of Ghosbusters movie, wonder if the author was thinking about that when writing it.

Is true there a lot of sex scenes, that can be analyzed as misogynist, but come on, they're supposed to be dreaming!!! Never heard of someone capable of controlling what's in their sexual dreams, I mean everybody has them, and usually, everybody hides them because they can result disturbing when analyzing on a conscious mind. I found it realistic whatsoever. Also lots of homosexual sex, so yeah, again I find it realistic.

Sam says

Trigger warning: rape, sexual violence, and pretty offensive portrayals of mental illness (coming from someone who has dealt with them)

I'm reviewing this book before finishing it because the only reason I am going to continue reading is because I need to for my thesis.

Let me say first that I was super excited to read this after seeing the movie (which is amazing, you should watch it) but ugh. At first I thought maybe it was the translation that accounted for the bad soap opera dialogue and totally made up psychoanalytic terms (and it might partially be), but the pacing is also awful. The novel was originally serialized, which explains why the reader is being constantly reminded of the plot, but absolutely no suspense is built up.

And those aren't even the real problems. This book is hands down the most sexist and homophobic thing I've read that isn't an internet comment section. All the characters are totally vapid and shallow, and the 'sexually liberated' protagonist is just a stand-in for the author's desires. Really? This 28 year old genius only falls for awkward yet upstanding middle-age men that fit the physical descriptions of the author? Huh. On top of that, the villains are gay (and only the villains). And I'm pretty sure we're meant to believe they are villains because they are gay and deviantly sexual. The book goes to great length to suggest that, while everyone has latent homosexual desire, sexual deviancy (which is anything that isn't straight) is really really wrong.

But then there is the rape scene. (view spoiler)

I wish I could be nice and fair but this book just makes me so angry.

Magrat Ajostiernos says

Sentimientos encontrados.

Así como me encanta la locura que destila esta historia, toda la parte onírica y de "investigación" de sueños, así como la atmósfera de ciencia ficción... hay muchas cosas que me han superado. Especialmente la MISOGINIA y machismo que se respira en el ambiente, que básicamente me ha estropeado el libro.

Aunque me ha encantado la parte de la acción y he logrado disfrutar de la historia, de verdad que ese tipo de acontecimientos me han estropeado por completo la novela D:

En conclusión: Me quedo sin duda con la película de Satoshi Kon

Julian Arce says

Oh my... what to do when you review a book that it's both praised and hated? (and you're in the middle?)

The book is... well... weird to say the least. I approached it coming not only as anime "aficionado", with a

hobby of studying japanese culture, and a psychologist (with psychoanalitic orientation) so I guess I can contribute my two pennies worth.

Starting with the good - the book is a nice sci-fi take on the dangers of technology, of the battle of new innovations and deep seated traditions; as well as the dangers of when new technologies are not used, but abused. It also deals a lot with dreams, which a topic that is seldom developed, and that adds a nice touch.

The book is also remarkable in one other way. To explain this I would have to mention a bit on the "logic" of dreams. As anyone who has ever had a dream knows, things work different in dream-like states, and new groups of rules happen. For example, different objects may be meshed into a single object (condensation), or the emotions associated with an object might be attached to another (displacement)... etc etc. So, you can dream about a cat, who is also your mom, and feel a deep hatred towards that object... but you don't really hate the cat/mom, you really hate your infant child who keeps you up at night, but since its horrible to hate your child, in the dream you hate this cat/mom since your relationship with her is kinda of rocky.

The above text makes little or no sense, and the book from a point onwards becomes more and more dream-like, to a point when the reader is not sure if he is reading a dream, or what is happening in reality (or if the difference makes any sense). It's a brilliant deconstruction of reality and common sense, and speaks a lot of the author's understanding of dreams and basic psychoanalytic theory.

But then... the whole setting is so Freudian, everything has to do with childhood traumas, and sex and sexual pulsions are so abundant... Up to the point where it can be kind of unbearing to some readers. There are several ways we can understand the use or abuse of sex in the book. It can be written from a Freudian perspective simply to make an effect on readers - or it can be a subtle criticism to neo-freudians. Another interpretation comes from japanese culture - the early japanese psychoanalyst theorized that japanese people have incredible high levels of repression of all base desires (because its a very organized society where everyone is so polite) and so all the violent and sexual pulsions must find other outlets (yeah, think of all that "tentacle-hentai" or violence anime or movies, and you get the point), and in the book the author might try to contrast the difference between these very nice and well-behaved people (in public) with their more animalistic side on their dreams.

Finally there are the characters... especially Dr. Atsuko Chiba (aka Paprika). The book is very much a character driven story, so it depends heavily on her, the "dream detective". I expected her to kick-ass, I expected her to be brilliant, I expected her to overcome. I didn't mind when she gets kicked around, nor her "male" helpers, or her sexual life, or her faults - since all of those make her a better character. But in the end she, who is our heroine, takes a window seat in the story... she gets pushed aside so completely as to be nerve breaking. She might have been one of the greatest female characters written in japan in early 90's... and she ends as a footnote. That last scene on Radio Cafe got it all wrong, Paprika is not dead now... she had been dead a long time.

But... read ahead if you have finished the book.

(view spoiler)

I would rather believe that interpretation, and think of this as a good book. Of course, its for everyone to interpret.

Jill says

So I don't know. Was this book seriously homophobic and misogynist? Was the structure really that formulaic and simplistic? Was I imagining the totally ridiculous, hyperidealized (and ultrasexualized) characterization of the female protagonist? Or do I just not get Japanese literature?

I keep trying. And the prime argument is that I'm not reading the right authors -- and yes, I'm sure that's true (recommendations?) to an extent. But I'm starting to think that there is something irreparably lost in translation; words and concepts and depth that just can't be conveyed in English (or with a Western context, for that matter).

Paprika has some awesome plot points and imagery (and I definitely checked to see whether "The Cell" had aped them), and the overall story is entertaining (if very uneven). The whole premise -- psychoanalyzing dreams, technological progress, and the fear of what happens when both get out of hand -- is way dystopian and cool. But the execution was oh so flawed, with events and ideas popping out of nowhere, and a total lack of rationale behind many of them. The idol worship (and, you know, REPEATED RAPE) of Atsuko was antiquated and deeply disturbing; likewise the comments about women and homosexuals. And then, when shit like office politics and religion start popping up with no context or explanation, but huge plot consequences...I dunno. You lost me, Tsutsui.

Ernest Junius says

If there is any single reason I could finish this novel is because I have watched the movie; it brought me here. But what's going on? Is it error in translation? Because honestly the prose... It feels like fresh coming out from a really bad hack. It's not purple prose—it's something else, what colours are worse than purple? Shit colour? It's shit prose then. But in all fairness, aside from the prose (I'm trying to comment purely on the story here), the story falls like a cheap sci-fi telenovela shot by a director who can't stop thinking about jerking off.

Okay I'm going to stop here. Just watch the movie.

Tait says

It's always interesting reading a book after watching (and being a big fan of) its movie version, especially in this case where the book's translation was only finished after the movie came out. Perhaps the main difference in this story about dreams taking over reality through stolen psychotherapy devices is that, unlike in Satoshi Kon's anime, where the more surreal imagery leaps from the screen within the first ten minutes, Tsutsui takes more than half the book for the content of dreams to become manifest. In fact, a quarter of the book passes before the dream detective Paprika enters someone's dream at all. Despite the potential for this to seem really slow, and less interesting than the more frantically paced movie, Paprika the novel actually works best by holding off the potential for surrealism to manifest itself, because that allows the author to create a familiar and logical real world first, which is necessary in order to make the weirder elements read as believable. Another interesting twist is that many of the inter-character plot elements held till the end of the movie are given at the novel's beginning, making the story less about finding out how the characters

interact but seeing how these interactions change in the face of embodied subconscious impulses.

As someone who has spent a lot of time working with my own dreams in a narrative context, it was interesting seeing some of the ideas that Tsutsui uses for his dream detective's dream interpretation methods, such as having dream characters really represent other people from our memories, which I find a little too simplifying with how dreams actually seem to work, but was necessary for the novel's cohesion. One unique concept is that of "dreason," which opposed to the reason in dreams that allows us to control our subconscious imagery (the translator should have called this lucidity, but for some reason didn't), dreason is the awareness of where logic falls apart in dreams, which keeps us from accomplishing even the most simple task and eventually wakes us up through being startled by frustration, guilt, etc, an idea that I've come up against in my own dreamwork and have called thwartedness, though I think the term dreason captures the scope of it better, and Tsutsui does a good job of displaying this in action, letting dream scenes and characters morph into each other, startling the dreamers who aren't always quite aware when they are dreaming.

One of the deeper themes of the novel, and a necessary one in talking about dreams vs. reality, is unfortunately not introduced (either directly or indirectly) until near the end of the novel, and I would have liked to see be played out from the beginning, more as it is in the Kon's movie: that goodness and evil (or god and the devil in religious terms), are imaginal constructs that are not opposed to each other but are opposed to the banality of everyday life/ human waking existence, the idea being that such extreme aspects of psyche necessitate each other, and the wilder, surreal parts of life, whether desired or feared, are at odds with life as it is lived on a daily basis. Unfortunately this idea just seems tossed off or unfinished, as the setting of a cutting-edge psychiatric institute is not exactly everyday enough to see the range/ struggle between reality and the dreams. Similarly, there is no resolve: good triumphs over evil as if it was reality triumphing over the dreams, which is certainly a common ending, but it perhaps would have been more interesting, and more in line with some of the Jungian psychology that the book draws on, to have the characters find a balance, a place where both good and evil, dreams and the everyday, could coexist as equally real and important, since humans after all are the ones who created these ideas of psychic extremes in the first place and still must learn what to do with them through our imaginations.

Those critiques aside, this book is fantastic, mesmerizing, and full of so many novel ideas and writing techniques that it is a must read for anyone interested in dreams, science fiction, psychology, and plain human behavior.

Max Nemtsov says

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