

An analysis of "dr. susan calvin" in "i, robot", by isaac asimov essay sample

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A hero is defined as a person noted for special achievements in a field. Dr. Susan Calvin, the main character of the novel I, Robot, is made the hero because of her special achievements in the field of robotics. Dr. Calvin is a robopsychologist who uses many different methods of problems solving to solve the problems that other scientists and mathematicians were incapable of doing. Through these many adventures in the field of robotics, Dr. Susan Calvin displays her many character traits to the reader. Dr. Calvin has an excellent combination of many different attributes. In I, Robot, by Isaac Asimov, Dr. Susan Calvin, the main character, reveals much about herself to the reader, and makes the book what it is.

Many times during the novel, Dr. Calvin displays amazing intelligence in tough situations. When analyzing the mind reading robot named Herbie, Dr. Susan Calvin displays great amounts of intelligence. Since Herbie is a mind-reader, Dr. Calvin knows that in order to understand what happens in his synthetic brain, she must analyze it vigorously, and by her intelligence she figures out that in order to stop him from hurting others by what he says to them, she has to out-smart the robot, which is not easy. Since one of the Three Laws of Robotics are that a robot must not hurt a human, she figures out Herbie's weakness and says to him, "' You can't tell them,' droned the psychologist slowly, ' because that would hurt and you mustn't hurt,'" confuses Herbie to the point that he shorts out and " dies," in a sense

(Asimov 133). During her many adventures in the workplace, Dr. Calvin displays her intelligence in assorted situations.

In Beacham's Encyclopedia on Popular Fiction, it states that, " Most of the robot tales are exercises in problem solving," in which the problems are solved by Dr. Calvin showing that overall she has great intelligence, no matter what situation, and that she can handle it no matter how hard the problem is (Beacham 2064). Many times in the novel, Dr. Calvin shows her intelligence by reminding her colleagues that robots are infallible, and when problems come up that a robot has not been producing the correct information, Dr. Calvin no sooner proves that it is human error and is not the faults of the robots. Not only does Dr. Calvin show intelligence in the workplace, but she also shows the immense amount of common sense she possesses.

At one point during the novel in a situation regarding whether Stephen Byerley, a political figure, is a humanoid robot or not, she states to one of her colleagues, " So far you are presenting circumstantial evidence, with which you can accuse but not prove," which shows that she knows certain circumstances do not always give the exact answer to a question (Asimov 220). Also when trying to discover the truth about Mr. Stephen Byerley, Calvin says, "' People say ' It's as plain as the nose on your face.' But how much of the nose on your face can you see, unless someone holds a mirror up to you,'" which shows that she knows some things may look obvious, but in order to understand it exactly, one must analyze it and study it, in order to

make sure that there are not any underlying factors in the situation (Asimov 244).

At one time Dr. Calvin shows her love for another person, which is very rare. Dr. Susan Calvin changes her lifestyle somewhat in order to get the one she loves to notice her. Dr. Calvin discovers her intense love for another person, a colleague named Milton Ashe, in a conversation with the mind-reading robot named Herbie and in order to get Ashe to notice her, she starts to wear lipstick. Dr. Calvin is able to get into a friendly relationship with Milton Ashe, and, " Her eyes fixed themselves upon Ashe in an oddly intent manner," which displays her love for Ashe in that there usually is nothing else besides robotics that could make her as happy as she was at that moment (Asimov 113-114). Dr. Calvin's personality changes so much due to her love for Milton Ashe that it is able to be seen by other colleagues. Dr. Lanning, a colleague, asks Dr. Bogert, "' Say, Bogie [Dr. Bogert], have you been noticing anything queer about the lady lately,'" which shows that even other people are starting to notice a change in her, even though they never figure out that she has feelings for Milton Ashe (Asimov 120).

Dr. Bogert says to Dr. Lanning, in response, "' She's using lipstick, if that's what you mean,'" which shows that Dr. Bogert has been noticing that she's been wearing makeup, which Dr. Calvin is using in order to gain the attention of Ashe. Dr. Calvin becomes embarrassed about her love when talking to Herbie. She figures that since Herbie can read minds, he must know that she loves Milton Ashe, and starts to feel embarrassed about it. When Herbie answers her that he does know about it, Dr. Calvin starts to redden, which

shows that she has feelings for another person, because the normal individual does show that he or she is embarrassed when somebody knows that he or she is in love.

Dr. Calvin does not show an interest in anything other than robotics, in her entire life. Her interest for robotics started when she was a teenager. Dr. Calvin, "...appears in 'Robbie' as a teenager working on her first paper on robotics for school," which shows that she obviously had an interest in robotics from a young age and continuing into her adult years (Beacham 2063). She would sit and study robots for school until, "[she]...had enough for her Physics-1 paper on 'Practical Aspects of Robotics'," which was her first of many papers on this subject, which also displays a lasting interest in the field (Asimov 22). Susan Calvin's interest in robots was never lost, even when she was working with them in her adult years. A colleague said that, "Susan Calvin talked about [Gregory] Powell and [Michael] Donovan with unsmiling amusement, but warmth came into her voice when she mentioned robots," which makes it obvious to her colleague that only robots are interesting to her and keeps her happy (Asimov 109). Her entire life was surrounded by the history of robotics, which makes it clear she never did lose interest in the field, and that even in the later years of her life, she still loved working on the subject.

During her conversations with Herbie, the mind-reading robot, Dr. Calvin shows her lack of self-esteem. An often time she explains to Herbie that she looks very old, a lot older than she is. She explains her age by saying, "'Thirty eight as you count the years; a shriveled sixty as far as my emotional

outlook on life is concerned," which probably means that she is so cold and unemotional that she is old and shriveled, even though she is actually young (Asimov 117). Calvin continues to tell Herbie that she looks old, and because of that, nobody would ever want to get into a long-term relationship with her. Not only does Susan Calvin see herself as older than she really is, she thinks she is also very unattractive. She tells Herbie, "I am not what you would call-attractive," which she means that in a sense, she views herself as an ugly woman and one that nobody would want as a partner (Asimov 117). Calvin continuously tells Herbie that there is no way Milton Ashe might love her as much as she loves him because of her physical characteristics, and almost convinces herself that that is the truth.

Although they are not mentioned very often, Dr. Calvin and others describe her physical and mental characteristics. She has a few mental characteristics that are displayed in the novel. Calvin is described as being, "... unemotional, and a brilliant robopsychologist" which means that rarely does anybody ever see a change in her emotionally, and that she is also very smart (Beacham 2063). Her, "...dryness and cold intelligence," explains that although she is very smart, she has absolutely no emotions that are shown throughout the novel (Beacham 2063). Dr. Susan Calvin also has very few physical characteristics, but she is the one who describes herself to the reader. During her many talks with Herbie, she mentions her age, which is thirty eight, which shows that she is a fairly young woman in that part of the novel. Also during her conversations with Herbie, the mind-reading robot, Calvin mentions that she thinks of herself as unattractive and is also

described as being unattractive; " Susan Calvin, an unattractive...
robopsychologist," (Beacham 2063).

In *I, Robot*, by Isaac Asimov, Dr. Susan Calvin, the main character, reveals much about herself to the reader, and makes the book what it is. Although she may not be beautiful, friendly, or likeable, Dr. Susan Calvin's immense amount of knowledge easily covers up her undesirable attributes. Calvin shows that her intelligence and common sense can out-work a mathematician's calculator or a scientist's experiments. Her conversations with Herbie show a different side of her, but in the end, they probably have made her a stronger human being. From a young age, she develops a strong interest for robots and the field of robotics; such an interest that she only warms up as a person while working in the field and talking about it. Although Dr. Susan Calvin does not lead an army to victory, or die for her country, she definitely makes herself the hero of this book purely by using her knowledge. In few cases does this occur, in which a woman, especially, just using her intelligence and common sense, is able to outsmart her fellow male colleagues and even the most elaborate thinkers in the universe, the robots. Without Dr. Susan Calvin's great knowledge, common sense, concentration, strong interest, as well as the many situations that she has overcome that has made her a better person, the novel *I, Robot* would not have been as great a book.

Works Cited

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