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ISSN: 1481-4374

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## Portrayal of Mathematicians in Fictional Works

[Daniel Dotson](#), [Ohio State University](#)

### Abstract

In his article "Portrayal of Mathematicians in Fictional Works," Daniel Dotson explores how people with mathematical abilities -- including mathematicians, mathematics teachers, mathematically-inclined youths, cryptographers, and more -- are portrayed in novels, films, television programs, and a play. A summary table of the characters gives a short description of each of them, the title of the work in which they appeared, and the format of the work. Characters were analyzed to see if they possessed any of ten personality traits: obsessive, having major mental health problems, withdrawn, brave, timid, socially inept, arrogant, uses math to escape reality, out of touch, and stubborn. Dotson describes in his paper each personality trait, lists the characters with that trait, and several characters are described with further details as to how that character manifested that personality trait during the course of the work in which they appeared. Male and female characters are compared to determine if one gender received a better portrayal (i.e., fewer negative personality traits) than another. In addition, characters possessing several personality traits are described in detail as well as the few characters not possessing any of the traits.

### Recommended Citation

Dotson, Daniel. "Portrayal of Mathematicians in Fictional Works." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.4 (2006): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1324>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

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Rudy Rucker's work is stuffed full of fictional mathematicians! His 2006 book "Mathematicians in love" features Bela Kis and Paul Bridge, postgrads at Berkeley and a higher world of mathematician cockroaches! My favourite is a much earlier work "White Light" whose hero, Feliz Raymond, stays in Hilbert's Hotel and visits Cantor's Continuum. If he was on the list he'd have got my vote. See [www.rudyrucker.com](http://www.rudyrucker.com) to find out more. Images of mathematics and mathematicians are often negative and stereotyped. These portrayals may work to construct our impressions of mathematics and influence students' identity with and future participation in the subject. This study examined young adult fiction as a context in which school mathematics is portrayed and constructed. This article is available to members of NCTM who subscribe to Journal for Research in Mathematics Education. Don't miss out—join now or upgrade your membership. You may also purchase this article now for online access. Log In/Create Account Purchase Article. Abstract: In his article "Portrayal of Mathematicians in Fictional Works," Daniel Dotson explores how people with mathematical abilities -- including mathematicians, mathematics teachers, mathematically-inclined youths, cryptographers, and more -- are portrayed in novels, films, television programs, and a play. A summary table of the characters gives a short description of each of them, the title of the work in which they appeared, and the format of the work. Characters were analyzed to see if they possessed any of ten personality traits: obsessive, having major mental health problems, withdrawn, brave, timid, socially inept, arrogant, uses math to escape reality, out of touch, and stubborn. Dotson describes in his paper each personality trait, lists the characters with that trait, and several characters are described with further details as to how that character manifested that personality trait during the course of the work in which they appeared. Male and female characters are compared to determine if one gender received a better portrayal (i.e., fewer negative personality traits) than another. In addition, characters possessing several personality traits are described in detail as well as the few characters not possessing any of the traits.