"I'm too big but I love to play"

Stories about James Tiptree, Jr.

"You will in the future have compensations for defeat."
"I know... You are going to tell me that in a hundred years the readers of the whole world will have my books standing on their shelves to take them down with reverence and delight. I have had it said to me before."
"But wrongly said, Milord, wrongly said... In a hundred years your works will be read much less than today. They will collect dust on the shelves."
"I do not much mind," said Lord Byron.
"But one book," said Pipistrello, "will be rewritten and reread, and will each year in a new edition be set upon the shelf."
"What book is that?" Lord Byron asked.
"The Life of Lord Byron," said Pipistrello.


In the next chapter I demonstrate that the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award is a site where the battle of the sexes in science fiction continues. However, unlike many of the earlier battle of the sexes texts it is a site in which feminism is celebrated and the battle of the sexes is reworked and transformed. The Tiptree Award takes its name and its inspiration from the work and lives of James Tiptree, Jr. In this chapter I sketch out some of the stories that surround Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr. In order to begin thinking about how these stories have become part of a feminist sf mythos and so how these stories have helped make the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award possible.

For almost ten years James Tiptree, Jr. published science fiction stories which had a tremendous impact on the field, earning prizes and critical acclaim. No-one had met the writer but many had received letters from 'Tip' and curiosity about 'Tip' was enormous. During that period Raccoona Sheldon (from here on Raccoona) also published science fiction stories, though not nearly as prolifically as Tiptree. In 1976 it was revealed that James Tiptree, Jr. and Raccoona 'were' Alice Sheldon. So James Tiptree, Jr., and also Raccoona, were written into creation by Alice Sheldon: perhaps together they form a literary hermaphrodite.
Any discussion of Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr./Raccoona finds itself dealing with the problem of pronouns. Do I simply use the name Alice Sheldon to refer to writing under Tiptree’s name as well as writing under the name of Raccoona as well as writing under the name Alice Sheldon? Is Tiptree’s writing ‘his’ writing, ‘her’ writing or ‘their’ writing? This problem crops up frequently in writing about Tiptree et al. Jeffrey Smith begins his article “The Short Happy Life of James Tiptree, Jr.”:

How does one attempt a biography of someone who is more persons than person? When was James Tiptree, Jr. born? Was it 1915, when his alter-ego Alice Sheldon (then Bradley) came into the world? Was it at that childhood date when she discovered science fiction? Was it in 1967, when she began writing sf under the Tiptree name? Or not until March of 1968, when Analog published “Birth of a Salesman”? (Smith 1978: 8).

In writing about this “someone who is more persons than person” it is very difficult to decide just how to refer to ‘them’. Of course no-one is a unified subject: “[h]uman beings are characterised both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity” (Davies & Harre 1990: 46). At least for most people, there are no more than one or two names to refer to this “continuous personal identity” and “discontinuous personal diversity.” For the subject of this chapter, however, there are far more than one or two names and whatever shorthand I choose will give the stories I tell a certain emphasis.

Le Guin in her introduction to Tiptree’s Star Songs of an Old Primate (1978) names her/him Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Sheldon Jr. Amanda Boulter uses this naming in the title of her 1995 article, “Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Sheldon Jr.: Textual Personas in the Short Fiction of Alice Sheldon”. In this article, Boulter uses the pronoun ‘she’ to refer to Alice and Raccoona Sheldon, and the pronoun ‘he’, to refer to James Tiptree, Jr. This allows Boulter to set out the difficulties of a straight forward mapping of the ‘pen-name’ of James Tiptree Jr. on to the body of Alice Sheldon. Boulter closely examines Tiptree and Raccoona’s short fiction and the way these texts have been read by a variety of critics in terms of the human body that was presumed to have produced them. She argues that frequently the preceived feminism of Tiptree’s writing rests in the knowledge that he is really a woman.
I also follow this practice of referring to Tiptree as ‘he’. However the focus of this chapter is not the published science fiction stories of James and Raccoona. I am examining a cluster of texts that have built up around, and constructed the person(s) who was born Alice Hastings Bradley in 1915 and died Alice Sheldon in 1987. I examine a set of stories for which a series of names form a peg. To do this, I expand the title of Boulter’s paper, adding a few more names so that her/his name becomes: “Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr.”

I can not remember where or when I first came across the story of James Tiptree, Jr. Perhaps it was in Joanna Russ’ How to Suppress Women’s Writing, where, after discussing the changing reception of Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights depending on the perceived sex of the author, she gives a more recent example:

> It would be nice to think that the exaltation of male authorship via the derogation of female authorship is dying out. In 1975, however, Robert Silverberg...introduced the collected works of a new, unknown and pseudonymous fellow writer as follows...“there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree’s writing...”

> In 1977 it was revealed that James Tiptree, Jr. was the pen name of a sixty-one-year-old retired biologist named Alice Sheldon - who had found a pseudonym on a jar of marmalade while shopping in the supermarket (Russ [1984] 1988: 43-44).

Here are the bare bones of the fable of the woman, Alice Sheldon, writing sf as a man, James Tiptree, Jr., who ‘proved’ there was no essential difference between the way men and women write, but only in the way that what they write is actually read.

Part of the fable, of course, was what a joke the revelation of Tiptree’s ‘true’ sex was on the science fiction boys, particularly poor old Robert Silverberg and his oft-quoted observation about Tiptree’s Hemingwayesque ineluctable masculinity. This is in part what was behind the choice of Tiptree’s name for the first science fiction prize to be named for a woman. There is more to the fable because Alice Sheldon had done many of the masculine things ascribed to her when she was him. Sheldon worked for the CIA, in her forties she had gone back to university to earn a PhD. in psychology, she had spent her childhood in Africa and Asia, and so she had an
easy familiarity with such ‘masculine’ matters as guns, airplanes, the interior workings of automobile engines, and the military/espionage world” (Silverberg 1993: 5).

In reading these stories by and about Tiptree I found that I was not able to make a simple distinction between the stories of the life of the writer and the writer’s published stories. The more I read the more I needed to read. As I read many interviews with Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr. - they were never with Raccoona - I became increasingly fascinated by her/his stories of her/his life, of lives really, by the series of names and disguises which did not begin with James Tiptree, Jr. In this chapter I explore each of these lives in turn. Thus I devote a section each to Alice Hastings Bradley, to Alice Davey, to Alice Sheldon, to James Tiptree, Jr. and to Raccoona Sheldon. In the final section, The Revelation, I examine the impact of the discovery that James Tiptree, Jr. ‘is’ Alice Sheldon.

Alice Hastings Bradley b. 1915

And suddenly mother realized that Africa was only another fairy tale to Alice, whose whole world was all half fairy.

(Bradley 1927: 68).

Stories in which Alice Hastings Bradley appears are told by more than one storyteller. However she is usually a minor character, the little girl in Africa who ‘became’ Tiptree. After cautioning that “the links between a writer’s work and her life are never simple”, Sarah Lefanu writes:

She spent much of her childhood exploring Africa with her parents, in the days when exploring meant walking 2,700 miles to the Mountains of the Moon in search of the black gorillas. Her parents were impressive: her mother wrote more than thirty-five books (Lefanu 1988: 116).

Adam J. Frisch offers no such explicit caution:

The daughter of naturalist Herbert Bradley and mystery writer Mary Hastings, Tiptree as a child often accompanied her parents on wildlife expeditions to Africa and Indonesia, trips that may have sparked her later interest in the study of behavioural psychology (Frisch 1982: 48).
The first story of little Alice that I read which offered more detail appears in Donna Haraway's 1 Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science (1989) and allows Haraway to make a direct link between colonial presences in Africa in the 1920s, and science fiction of the 1970s and 1980s which "interrogate[s] the conditions of communication and reproduction of self and other in alien and home worlds" (Haraway 1989: 377). The link of course is a flesh and blood one as well as a textual one - it is Tiptree and Raccoona and Alice.

However Alice had been a literary persona long before she became Tiptree and Raccoona and long before Haraway's influential text. In the 1920s her mother, Mary Wilhemina Hastings Bradley, told stories of her daughter in travel books she wrote about expeditions to parts of Africa and Asia in the 1920s. Two of these were written for children and are ostensibly all about her daughter, namely, Alice in Jungleland (1927), and Alice in Elephantland (1929). Alice also features in three of Mary Hastings Bradley's other travel books, On The Gorilla Trail (1922), Caravans and Cannibals (1926) and Trailing the Tiger (1929). 2

In the Contemporary Authors entry on Alice Sheldon (in parentheses Raccoona Sheldon; James Tiptree, Jr.), Mary Wilhemina is described as a writer, explorer, linguist, and her husband, Herbert Edwin, as an attorney, explorer, big-game collector, and naturalist. In the 1942-43 edition of Who's Who in America Mary is an author and big game hunter, and Herbert a lawyer, traveller, big game hunter and explorer. In 1921 with their little daughter, Alice, the Bradleys were part of Carl Akeley's first expedition "to find gorillas for a group for the American Museum of Natural History of New York" (Bradley 1922: 1).

Mary Bradley relates her stories of this expedition in On the Gorilla Trail (1922) and Alice in Jungleland (1927). Both are illustrated with photographs.

---

1 I would like to thank Sylvia Keho for pointing out Haraway's Tiptree Story to me.
2 Thanks to Gordon Van Gelder and Julie Phillips for their help in getting me copies of some of Mary Hastings Bradley's travel books.
“Alice at a Kikuyu Dance” from Mary Hastings Bradley’s *Alice in Jungle-land*, 1927, p. 103.
from the trip and in addition the front dust cover of *Alice in Jungleland* proudly proclaims that it has "drawings by Alice herself!" *Alice in Elephantland* (1929) is also illustrated by Alice Hastings Bradley. The difference between the mother and the child's accounts of Alice in foreign climes could not be more marked: the determined cheerfulness of the mother's account where dangers of disease and cannibal are introduced to add colour to these fabulous adventures versus the melancholy alienation evinced by the grown child.

As I read Mary Bradley's travel books I found myself placing her stories alongside the later ones of her daughter. Here is Mary's story of a costume party amongst the white passengers on the boat bound for Africa. Mary dresses her Alice as a doll:

> It gave Alice's Mummy a very queer feeling to see her little girl being carried off like a toy in a box, and she was glad when the cover was taken off and she could see Alice again. They stood the box up on end and there Alice stood, just like a doll. Every one had been afraid that she would never stand still, but she surprised them all by keeping perfectly quiet, just like a real doll in a box - in fact she felt so strange and shy that she didn't want to come out of the box at all.
> One little baby was so sure that Alice was a real doll that she tried to pull her out to play with and that made Alice laugh and come out (Bradley 1927: 12).

The photograph reproduced opposite shows the child Alice at a ceremonial dance of the Kikuyu. She looks like a doll dressed in her small white delicate dress with her blonde hair in ringlets.

Tiptree tells a similar story about hiding:

> Once I ran away; I got into a good patch of elephant grass, where I made a secret house by crushing the grass down. Mother led a search for me and hauled me back out. You know, being hauled out of my James Tiptree retreat, when everyone found out who I was and I had to go back to being Alice Sheldon, was a similar feeling (Platt 1963: 260).

Later in *Alice in Jungleland*, Bradley observes that the exotica of Africa, gorillas, lions, volcanoes, were now "so much a part of her life...that she did not think there was anything strange about them" (Bradley 1927: 130). The shift in Alice's view of what is normal caused problems for her when she returned 'home':

> A long time after, when she came back to America and went to school with other girls and boys there was a geography lesson about mountains and volcanoes. The teacher asked them what a crater was.
> "Up went Alice's hand. This was something she did know about."
> "My mummy spent the night in the crater of an active volcano," she said.
> A small boy turned and looked at her. Looked and looked and his round face grew rounder and rounder with disbelief.
> "She did not!" he said, indignantly.
For, of course, no one's Mummy ever spent a night in a crater. A volcano was something in a book to study about. It didn't happen, not in real life. Of course not. At least not in your real life (Bradley 1927: 130-131).

In the article about Alice Sheldon for Contemporary Writers, she writes about this period of her life in the third person:

And finally, she was exposed to dozens of cultures and sub-cultures whose values, taboos, imperatives, religions, languages, and mores conflicted with each other as well as with her parents. And the writer, child as she was, had continuously to learn this passing kaleidoscope of Do and Don't lest she give offence, or even bring herself or the party into danger. But most seriously, this heavy jumble descended on her head before her own personality or cultural identity was formed. The result was a profound alienation from any nominal peers, and an enduring cultural relativism (Gearhart and Ross 1983: 444).

In the first ever interview with James Tiptree, Jr., conducted by Jeffrey Smith, and published in the June 1971 issue of the fanzine Phantasmicon, Tiptree is asked a series of questions about his writing, and about his 'real' life which, as his mother observed almost fifty years earlier, is not everybody else's 'real' life. Tiptree is happy to talk about his writing and about sf generally but is less forthcoming about this hidden life of his. He responds as follows to Smith's slightly exasperated "how about telling us what you are willing to let us know about you?":

Well I..trailed around places like colonial India & Africa as a kid (and by the way, I knew in my bones that they weren't going to stay "colonial" any more than I was going to stay a kid, but nobody ever asked me) (qtd. in Smith 1971: 7).

The choice of word "trailed around places" echoes the titles of two of Bradley's travel books about colonial India and Africa, On the Gorilla Trail and Trailing the Tiger. The choice of word points up Alice's lack of agency in Mary Bradley's accounts of this period of trailing about colonial Africa and Asia. The child that Tiptree refers to in this fragment of interview, little Alice, was not asked but was told and then was told of.

As a little white girl, Alice was coming up against the boundaries of race and sex in a setting which is other and exotic in Mary Hastings Bradley's discourse:

[India] was an uneasy place in which to travel with a little girl of nine. Alice was a woman to these folk and we were told, by English residents, not to let her go alone from her room to the dining-room, even in big hotels. The Indian servants of the place are not always reliable, and there are the bearers of white travellers loitering about and servants delivering packages.
There had been no race problem in the heart of Africa, where Alice's native boy had been a dependable guardian, but here we could not let her go out alone with her Indian bearer. There are faithful and trusty Indian servants, of course, but a hasty traveller has no way of discriminating, and our warnings were earnest (Bradley 1929b: 14).

In Africa and India there was no possibility of Alice passing or even of hiding, as she was able to later via the CIA and science fiction. In every one of the photographs of Alice in Africa she is pre-eminently visible: the only white child, the only head of blonde ringlets, the little doll. Constantly looked at; never alone.

Donna Haraway's version of Alice in "Jungleland" is very different from that of Mary Bradley:

I have tried to fill Primate Visions with potent verbal and visual images - the corpse of a gorilla shot in 1921 in the "heart of Africa" and transfixed into a lesson in civic virtue in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City; a little white girl brought into the Belgian Congo in the 1920s to hunt gorilla with a camera, who metamorphosed in the 1970s into a writer of science fiction considered for years as a model of masculine prose (Haraway 1989: 2).

These first two "potent...images" from Donna Haraway's Primate Visions both feature Mary's daughter, little Alice. Alice Hastings Bradley was a member of the Carl Akeley's expedition in which that gorilla was made into a corpse in 1921 and of course the second image is Haraway's briefly sketched version of the Tiptree Story. It is a potent "verbal image" in a list of many such "verbal and visual images" which dominate Haraway's construction of her visions of the interaction between primates: monkeys, apes, humans. In her story the "little white girl", Alice Hastings Bradley, is unnamed, as is the "writer of science fiction" she "metamorphosized" into.

Haraway's telling of the story, beginning with the little Alice in the Belgian Congo, brings into conversation two literary personas, "the little white girl," and the masculine "writer of science fiction". Haraway reads Sheldon/Tiptree in terms of her other names "Bradley" and "Hastings" and the colonial heritage associated with those names. Haraway discusses briefly the 1921 Akeley gorilla hunting expedition, in her chapter titled, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-36." She describes a photograph which is reproduced on the next page, of Akeley, the Bradleys, two anonymous Africans
and the dead gorilla which when mounted and stuffed for the Museum is renamed
“the giant of Karimbisi”:

The photograph in the American Museum film archive of Carl Akeley, Herbert Bradley, and Mary Hastings Bradley holding up the gorilla head and corpse to be recorded by the camera is an unforgettable image. The face of the dead giant evokes Bosch’s concept of pain, and the lower jaw hangs slack, held up by Akeley’s hand. The body looks bloated and utterly heavy. Mary Bradley gazes smilingly at the faces of the male hunters, her own eyes averted from the camera. Akeley and Herbert Bradley look directly at the camera in an unshuttered acceptance of their act. Two Africans, a young boy and a young man, perch in a tree above the scene, one looking at the camera, one at the hunting party (Haraway 1989: 34).

In the final chapter of Primate Visions Haraway returns to this view of the Bradleys and brings the young Alice into focus:

Tucked in the margins and endnotes of “Teddy Bear Patriarchy” was a little white girl in Brightest Africa in the early 1920s. Little Alice Hastings Bradley was brought there by Carl Akeley, the father of the game, on his scientific hunt for gorilla, in the hope that her golden-haired presence would transform the ethic of hunting into the ethic of conservation and survival, as “man” and his surrogates, sucked into decadence, stood at the brink of extinction. Duplicitous, the little girl turned into James Tiptree, Jr., and Raccoona Shelden, a man and a mother, the female author who could not be read as a woman and who wrote science fiction stories that interrogated the conditions of communication and reproduction of self and to her in alien and home worlds. But Tiptree’s gender, species and genre transfigurations were only beginning to germinate in the child placed in the world still authored by the father of the game and the law of the father (Haraway 1989: 378).

Haraway reads the location of the little golden-haired Alice through the later writing career of Raccoona/James. Haraway’s “little white girl” became Tiptree/Raccoona, man and woman who re-invents herself and transfigures “gender, species and genre” and seizes the agency which was denied her as a child trailing through Africa, pretending to be a doll silent in a box.

Alice Davey b. 1934

The brief existence as Mrs. Alice Davey, wife to William Davey, “poet and polo-player”, took place during Alice’s first career as a painter. In the account Tiptree gives of his complex ‘me’ in “Everything but the Name is Me” he talks about this first career as a painter, to which the marriage and family are made into background noise, relegated to the dependent clauses:

3 This article first appeared in Khattri as “Everything but the Signature is me”.

I’m too big but I love to play 207
Alice Hastings Bradley/Davey. Date unknown.
If you'd asked me any time from age 3 to 26, I'd have told you "I'm a painter." (Note, not "artist" - painter. Transubstantiation there.) And I was. I worked daily, whether I was supposed to be listening to lectures on Chateaubriand, whether my then-husband was shooting at me (he was a beautiful alcoholic poet) whether the sheriff was carrying our furniture out, whether Father was having a heart-attack, whatever (Tiptree 1979: 32).

The photo which appears opposite was taken during this period. In Tiptree's story of the marriage, related to Charles Platt in an interview, the view of the economics of marriage where the woman is bought and then renamed for the master is made explicit:

I was made into a debutante, and I thought that meant I was on the slave block, so I married the first boy that asked me, three days later. I'd seen him for seven hours. He'd been seated on my left at the party, he was certified as a poet and a gentleman by the president of Princeton, so I ran off and married him in Waukegan. Broke my mother's heart, because she'd given me the most expensive debutante party ever seen, in the middle of the depression, and had intended a grand tour to follow, culminating in my presentation at the English court, to the King, with three feathers on my head. Anyway, I married this beautiful but absolute idiot - what they hadn't mentioned in the documentation was that he was maintaining half the whores in Trenton and was an alcoholic (Platt 1983: 262).

The following account comes from Mark Siegel's appreciation of Tiptree. The text consists of his commentary as well as excerpts from private conversations and correspondence between them:

"He was beautiful, he was charming, he was a poet... He was like an angel possessed by demons. It was an extraordinary thing..."

"Mother quite rightly perceived that this was no father for her grandchildren, but unknowingly removed the possibility of grandchildren forever by having the head of gynecology at the University of San Francisco Hospital perform a legal abortion on me - just a D&C, but he muffed it, and he wouldn't admit he muffed it and discharged me from the hospital with a temperature of 104. We got in the car and started out through the Mojave Desert, which was only a one-track road at the time, you know, with signs saying "Last Water". Bill had brought cases of whiskey and one canteen of water, and halfway through the desert to Santa Fe, with me getting hotter and sicker, the day about 120, the car broke down. He said, "This is the end!": emptied the water, drank a quart of whiskey, and passed out in the back seat. Well, I drove the car the rest of the way to Santa Fe, found a sign that said "Doctor", and passed out on his steps (qtd. in Siegel 1988/89: 7).

Elsewhere Tiptree refers to not being able to have children because of a bad case of septicemia but does not mention the botched abortion. The marriage took place in 1934. By 1938 they were divorced.

---

4 I would like to thank Franklin Berkowitz for providing me with this photograph.
Alice B. Sheldon b. 1945

"I'll never let myself outlive him," she said quietly, nodding toward the living room where Ting was watching TV. "His eyesight's going. He has to sit right on top of that set now to see anything." She told me, as she'd told other friends, that if things got too bad for him, she'd kill them both. "Unless of course I die first," she laughed, taking another hit off her cigarette and hacking loudly. The scar on her chest from her recent open-heart surgery pulsed with anger.

(qtd. in Siegel 1988/89: 6)

Alice B. Sheldon's story begins in 1945 and ends in 1987 when Alice killed her husband and then herself. Charles Platt writes that

In 1945, she joined the Air Staff Post-Hostilities Project, devised by its commander, Colonel Huntington D. Sheldon, who had been Deputy Chief of Air Intelligence in the European Theatre...

Alice Hastings Bradley married Huntington D. Sheldon in a French mayor's office, very shortly after she had begun working in his project. They remain married to this day, a very strikingly close and devoted couple (Platt 1983: 263).

Every story I have read about this second marriage repeats this description of their relationship. Hartwell wrote that they "were an extremely close couple" (Hartwell 1987: 63). Jeff Smith wrote in his obituary for Alice Sheldon that

She and her husband (it was hard at first to think of this quiet but forceful white-bearded man as "Ting", but that soon passed) were extremely devoted. They watched each other constantly, and while you talked with one the other would lean forward and drink in the scene with pleasure and admiration. All told me once that the worst night in her life was the one when Ting's small fishing boat had been swept out to sea by a storm; the emotion in her voice, years later, was overpowering (Smith 1987: 16).

After their time in the armed forces and a brief stint running their own business, they both went to work for the CIA:

Ting...joined...at supergrade level; I was at mere technical level, helping to start up their photo-intelligence capability, which was then evaluating captured German air photography of the U.S.S.R. (Platt 1983: 263).

In the interview with Platt the next important moment is Sheldon's attempt to escape from everything and everyone. In the early 1950s

I wrote a two-line letter of resignation, and ran away from everybody. I used the techniques the CIA had taught me, and in half a day I had a false name, a false bank account, a false security card, and had rented an apartment and moved in. I was somebody else.

I wanted to think. So I thought, then I got back in touch with my husband and we thought together, and decided we could really work things out (Platt 1983: 264).

Alice went back to university to get a PhD in experimental psychology:
I dragged out the predoctoral fellowship, long after I finished my PhD. exams, so that I could do four years of solid research, and I'll tell you, there is no greater thrill I've ever had than to stand bare-faced in front of Nature and say, 'I think this is the way your creations work; tell me, am I right?' And Nature grumblingly and reluctantly makes you do - as I did - thirteen different paradigms of the god damned experiment before you get the thing without any uncontrollable variables, and then finally says, in answer to your question, a clear-cut 'Yes.' That is the most thrilling moment I ever had in my whole life (Platt 1983: 265).

She continued to work teaching experimental psychology and statistics at George Washington University, Washington D.C. until she retired because of ill health in 1968.

*James Tiptree, Jr. b. 1967*

It was a lovely life being nobody. But then of course the "nobody" became terribly obtrusive, so that in many ways I was glad to get rid of him because I was evoking too much curiosity

(qtd. in Gearhart and Ross 1983: 445)

This is the story with which the science fiction community is most familiar. The man with the "inevitable masculinity" who turned out to be a woman. Sheldon created Tiptree with his own signature, bank account and post office box, and when mail came, "to avoid lying, she gave 'Tiptree' her own life history" (Platt 1983: 267). James Tiptree was not just a pseudonym - there have been other pseudonyms in science fiction - Alice Sheldon, with her CIA acquired knowledge, was able to create a whole new persona and keep Tiptree's 'real' identity hidden from even publishers and even Tiptree's agent.

James Tiptree, Jr. was born in 1967:

I simply saw the name on some jam pots, Ting was with me; I said 'James Tiptree' and he says - 'Junior!' It was done so quickly, without conscious thought; but I suppose I couldn't have avoided having the thought - although I don't remember it - that the editor would take my stories more seriously (Platt 1983: 266).

James Tiptree, Jr. entered the world of science fiction with ease, writing four stories that were sent out and duly accepted. Smith recalls that they did not make an instant impact:

I remember reading Tiptree's first story, "Birth of a Salesman," in the March 1968 Analog and thinking it was funny (though I can't claim I predicted great things for its author). I had read a dozen or so Tiptree stories by 1970, when I wrote to him and asked him if he would participate in a postal interview for my fanzine, Phantasmicon. (This was based on no great perception on my part that Tiptree was about to blossom into the
writer he became, but because in those New Wave vs. Old Wave days Tiptree was being claimed by both camps - and there seemed to be a story in that.) (Smith 1987: 16).

The first cheque to arrive came from John W. Campbell, one of the most famous science fiction editors whose name is synonymous with the so-called golden age of science fiction. Selling your first story to Campbell is a heady entry into science fiction. It is also an entry into a particularly boy’s own version of science fiction. By 1974 P. Schuyler Miller, well-known for his review column in *Analog*, was acclaiming Tiptree as “one of the finest talents to appear in the field in some time” (Miller 1974: 152) and many concurred. Silverberg’s well known introduction to *Warm Worlds and Otherwise* (1975), “Who is Tiptree, What is He?”, is overflowing with his enthusiastic assessment of Tiptree’s writing. Tiptree won three Nebulas and two Hugos for his work, all before the revelation of his ‘true’ identity.

Tiptree wrote many articles and letters to *Phantasmicon* (later named *Khatru*) as well as to other fanzines. He was one of the participants in the 1975 *Khatru* Symposium on women and science fiction. His voluminous correspondence and his contributions to fanzines mark Tiptree clearly as one of the many pros who did not disdain the fan world.

Though they had never met Tiptree in person, many in the field felt that they knew Tip (or “Uncle Tip” as he called himself) well through his many letters. Le Guin writes of her friendship with Tiptree:

> He always types with a blue typewriter ribbon, and the only question I have asked him which he has always evaded is, “Where do you get so many blue typewriter ribbons?” When he himself is blue, he has told me so, and I’ve tried to cheer him up, and when I have been blue I’ve been turned right round into the sunlight simply by getting one of Tiptree’s preposterous, magnificent letters. The only thing better than Tiptree’s letters is his stories (Le Guin 1978: viii).

In these letters as well as in his articles and the interview with *Phantasmicon* Tiptree let slip various details about his background and current situation. In the “Galaxy Stars” department of *Galaxy* there is the following report:

> James Tiptree, Jr., one of our more peripatetic writers, is just back from a fishing sojourn amid the primeval rocky lochs of Northern Scotland. Saw no Loch Ness monsters, he reports: also no fish (*Galaxy* January 1969: 194).
In the June 1971 issue of Phantasmicon Tiptree was interviewed by Jeff Smith. Smith opened by asking,

Your friends and associates are unaware that you are a science fiction writer, so you don’t want sf people finding out who your friends and associates are. But how about telling us what you are willing to let us know about you? (Smith 1971: 7).

Tiptree responds:

Well I was born in the Chicago area a long time back, traile... around places like colonial India & Africa as a kid....I’m one of those for whom the birth and horrendous growth of Nazism was the central generation event.

... At any event, by the time I had finished the decade’s worth of instruction in How Things Are provided by this event - you know, joining organisations, getting in the Army, milling around in the early forms of American left-wing sentiment, worrying about Is It Going to Happen Here - an occupation I haven’t given up - getting out of the Army, doing a little stint in government, trying a dab of business, etc. etc. So ensued a period of more milling (I’m a slow type) including some dabblings in academia. And now the story grows even vaguer for the time being, Jeff, since I’m against lying on principle (Smith 1971: 7).

Jeff Smith then asks the obvious:

Why don’t you want your friends to know about your “second career”? Don’t you think that perhaps someday somebody will stumble across one of your stories? Will you then deny being the same James Tiptree, Jr. or what? (Smith 1971: 10).

The answer is “or what”:

I could give you a set of plausible reasons, like the people I have to do with include many specimens of prehistoric man, to them the news that I write ugh, science fiction would shatter any credibility that I have left. (Sometimes I think that sf is the last really dirty word.)

Or that I’m unwilling to tarnish my enjoyment of this long-established secret escape route by having to defend it to hostile ears. (Coward!) Probably the real reason is partly inertia; it started like this, I don’t yet really believe it, let it be til [sic] it ripens. That too.

.... Well, the last remaining part of my secretiveness is probably nothing more than childish glee. At last I have what every child wants, a real secret life. Not an official secret, not a q clearance polygraph-enforced bite-the-capsule-when-they-get-you-secret, nobody else’s damn secret but MINE. Something THEY don’t know. Screw Big Brother. A beautiful secret REAL world, with real people, fine friends, doers of great deeds & speakers of the magic word, Frodo’s people if you wish, and they write to me and accept my offerings, and I’m damned if I feel like opening the door between that magic reality and the universal shitstorm known as the real (sob) world (Smith 1971: 11-12).

These bits and pieces of information fuelled speculation about Tiptree:

A squad of fans once actually stalked out my McLean, Virginia, post-office box when the big science-fiction convention was in D.C. - luckily I was in Canada at the time (Sheldon 1988: 51).

There was a great deal of speculation about Tiptree:

James Tiptree calls himself “an amateur - I don’t write to eat.” Exactly what Mr. Tiptree does to eat remains unknown, however he tells us: “I do not, repeat it, work for the CIA,
the FBI, NSA, the Treasury, the nars or the Metropolitan Park Police." Well, sf people are a noisy bunch, and we won't give up, but meanwhile there is more than enough to consider in Mr. Tiptree's fiction. It includes perhaps thirty stories published during the last five years, a consistently high quality and inventive body of work which has earned him a reputation as one of the major new voices in science fiction (The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction December 1972 : 4).

In almost every review and every editorial comment or introduction to a Tiptree story or collection of stories there is some speculation about the secretive Tiptree. In his sf review of Warm Worlds and Otherwise for the New York Times Book Review, Gerald Jonas writes that

Tiptree is the current mystery man of science fiction. He keeps to himself, does not show up at S.F. conventions to receive the awards that he wins, and is rumoured to work for a government agency in Washington. No one knows whether the name he signs to his stories is his real name or a pseudonym (Jonas 1975: 31-32).

In 1972 Silverberg wrote:

[t]he first of James Tiptree's science-fiction stories to see print appeared early in 1968 - a long time back, by the reckoning of some, but just an eyelash ago to those of us who have Cosmic Perspective. It attracted no particular attention, nor did his next two or three; but by 1970 he was finding his way into anthologies and getting nominated for awards, and now it is apparent that a major new short story writer is in our midst: deft, original, vigorous. What he can do in the longer forms is still something of a mystery as of this writing, but the odds favor him. Tiptree the man likewise remains something of a mystery at present. He lives south of Mason-Dixon, thought not very far, seems to travel a good deal, and describes himself as "a Midwesterner who batted around jungly parts of the globe when young and worse jungles with desks when old." Perhaps he's the Secret Master of the CIA; perhaps he's Ho Chi Minh in a clever plastic disguise. One thing is sure: he's a writer (Silverberg 1972: 21).

In the same year another well-known science fiction writer and editor, Harry Harrison wrote,

[i]t is with some pride that I say I printed this author's first story just a few years ago. He reluctantly admits that he spent most of World War II in a Pentagon sub-basement, and wonders what war it was he watched go by in Shanghai when he was ten years old. Other facts about him are hard to come by, other than the vital fact that he can write stories such as this one - that purports to be about the far future, but is about all science at the same time (Harrison [1972] 1976: 182).

In 1975 Silverberg summed up what was known about Tiptree:

James Tiptree, Jr., lives in Virginia, not far from the capital, and prefers to let public attention center on his stories, not on his private life - so not much is generally known about his profession, marital status, childhood and upbringing, and such. He is willing to admit that he is a man of middle years who had travelled widely; all the rest is conjecture, at this point (Silverberg 1975: 89).

It is inevitable - given their shared life histories (not to mention their shared body) - that Tiptree now gets read through those other lives and those other lives get read through Tiptree. However Tiptree with the same life story as Alice
Sheldon becomes someone different. The co-incidence of a supposed male body and the childhood in the wilds of Africa and the knowledge of guns and government workings, lead to different speculation than those about Alice Sheldon after the revelation.

_Raccoona Sheldon b. ?_

And what of the much-neglected Raccoona? There are no articles about the short fiction of Raccoona Sheldon. Certainly her output was much smaller than Tiptree’s. She, too had a separate life, with her own post office box and bank account in Wisconsin (Tiptree 1979: 34). For Jeffrey Smith it was easy to accept “Alli and Tiptree as the same person, but Raccoona has always been someone else to me”. Raccoona

first surfaced as a fanzine artist, as Tip sent me a page of sketches by an “old friend” for my use. (I told him he should try to get her to illustrate his magazine stories: “She draws like you write.”) The original scheme had been for Raccoona to establish herself as a writer, then for Tip to drown in Mexico and there’d only be one persona left. But Raccoona couldn’t live in McLean so a Wisconsin Post office box had to be set up and mail shuttled back and forth. And neither could Raccoona have just picked up Tip’s friendships. Raccoona was left out in the cold: since she couldn’t be Tiptree she couldn’t really be Alli either (Smith 1987: 16).

Raccoona initially had some difficulty getting published until Tiptree wrote covering letters recommending his friend’s work. Raccoona writes:

I don’t know too much about it, but I have a faint suspicion [sic] borne out of a smidgin of proof that mss. with a female name on them are read differently (The Witch and the Chameleon April 1975: 26).

This letter was published by the first feminist sf fanzine, _The Witch and the Chameleon_. Raccoona, like Tiptree, took part in fandom and more particularly she was a part of feminist sf fandom. In other letters she comments on feminist issues such as abortion (_The Witch and the Chameleon_ 1976: 14). Raccoona also appears with a poem in which she refers to many of the prominent women sf writers of the period and thus links herself and her writing to them and the feminist sf they embodied: Joanna (Russ), Ursula (Le Guin), Kate (Wilhelm), Vonda (McIntyre), Quinn (Chelsea Quinn Yarbro), Suzy (McKee Charnas) and
Kit (Reed), Carol (Emshwiller?) and Shirley (Jackson?) (The Witch and the Chameleon September 1975: 1).

In a letter in the final issue of The Witch and the Chameleon, Raccoona writes, "[o]f course my instinct is to stick together as much as we can. We know who profits from us excluding each other" (The Witch and the Chameleon Issues 5 & 6 1976: 30). Her pronouns, her 'we' and 'us' refer to women and to the women's liberation movement.

The feminism of Raccoona Sheldon was vastly different from that of James Tiptree, Jr., the author of a "profoundly feminist story told in entirely masculine manner" (Silverberg 1975: xvi), who along with the other men involved was asked to leave the Khatru Symposium by Joanna Russ:

I suggested asking Tiptree and Delany into this symposium and both have contributed a good deal, but it's true that they are time-hoggers and that they - and Jeff - keep drawing our attention away from what (to me) is what is truly interesting: what we think (Smith 1973: 96).

These are Raccoona's pronouns 'we' and 'our' referring to we women but they operate to exclude Tiptree. The revelation that Tiptree 'is' Alice Sheldon shifted the relationship of these pronouns to Tiptree.

The Revelation

James Tiptree, Jr. was revealed as Alice Sheldon in 1976:

Tiptree reported to few correspondents the death of his elderly mother. More than one of Tip's friends checked the Chicago obituaries and found Mary Hastings Bradley, novelist, travel writer, and explorer. The details matched up. Under "survivors" was listed Bradley's only child: her daughter (Phillips 1996: 18).

Jeff Smith reports his confusion on reading Mary Hastings Bradley's obituary:

The last line read, "She is survived by one daughter, Mrs Alice Hastings (Mrs Huntington) Sheldon."

This left me very confused. Sheldon was Raccoona's name, and it never occurred to me that Tip and Raccoona were the same person - I corresponded with Raccoona, too. But if Raccoona was Mary Hastings Bradley's daughter, then why was Tip handling the affairs? (Smith 1978: 10).

He wrote to Tiptree for clarification and Tiptree confessed to 'being' Alice Sheldon. In December 1976
she admitted the truth to a small group of people like me whom she felt she might have offended by allowing them to persist in their error. "Honour, or something, compels me to do something after which I fear I may have lost a deeply valued friend...It hasn't been a put-on or attempt to take advantage, it just grew and grew until 'Tip' became me (Silverberg 1993: 6).

In 1977 Tiptree was revealed as Sheldon more publicly in the science fiction news magazine *Locus*. It was not really a Great Revelation but a series of revelations, you never come out just once, but over and over again. As Pat Murphy remarks:


Even now there are readers who pick up and read a Tiptree book without knowing his 'true' sex.

Tiptree, however, will never simply 'be' Alice Sheldon:

with "Raccoona" selling too, things had gotten fairly confusing. I was writing stories and letters as the female me, but from a place I didn't live in and without my own real past - and at the same time writing and corresponding as a man who for a decade had made himself part of me too. Tip owned my past life and my years of science fiction friendships, and he lived in my home, but my husband was his "gringo friend". I'm sure you sense the chaos? (qtd. in Gearhart and Ross 1983: 445).

The chaos did not end with the revelation of the 'truth' about Tiptree. Instead there was a furore within science fiction. There were some voluble criticism:

the more vulnerable males decided that 'Tiptree' had been much overrated. They sullenly retired to practice patronizing smiles (qtd. in Platt 1983: 267).

In a different interview Sheldon elaborates:

there were the male writers who had seemed to take my work quite seriously, but who now began discovering that it was really the enigma of Tip's identity which had lent a spurious interest, and began finding various more-or-less subtle ways of saying so. (Oh, how well we know and love that pretentiously amiable tone, beneath which hides the furtive nastiness!) I'd been warned against it, but it was still a shock coming from certain writers. The one thing I admire about that type of male hatred is its strategic agility. They soon get their ranks closed. Only here the timing was so damned funny, the perfect unison of their "reevaluation" of poor old Tip rather weakened the effect (qtd. in Gearhart & Ross 1983: 446).

Aldiss and Wingrove in their *Trillion Year Spree* have this to say about the revelation:

[that] there is little that is overtly feminist in Tiptree's writing, even as Raccoona Sheldon. and she never tried to write like a man. Her stories and novels are humanistic, while her deep concern for male-female (even human-alien) harmony ran counter to the developing segregate-the-sexes drive among feminist writers. What her work brought to the genre was a blend of lyricism and inventiveness, as if some lyric poet had rewritten a number of
clever SF standards and then passed them on to a psychoanalyst for final polish (Aldiss and Wingrove [1986] 1988: 462).

“Never tried to write like a man” is almost a direct quote from Alice Sheldon:

However, men have so pre-empted the area of human experience that when you write about universal motives, you are assumed to be writing like a man. And so when my identity was revealed, some people said it proved that a woman could write like a man. Now, in the first place, this assumes that I was trying to write like a man, which was the last thing I was trying to do. I was writing like myself, with the exception of deliberate male details here and there. Other critics talked about my “narrative drive” as being a male writing style, but narrative drive is simply intensity, and a desire not to bore. It has never been confined to men. Take one of the first women utterers that we know about: Cassandra. She was never accused of a lack of narrative drive. She was just a little before her time, which is often what women’s crimes consist of (qtd. in Platt 1983: 267)

Certainly Silverberg had believed that Tiptree “wrote like a man”. In “Who is Tiptree, What is he?” Silverberg compares Tiptree to Hemingway:

Tiptree’s stories don’t bore. They are lean, muscular, supple, relying heavily on dialog broken by bursts of stripped down exposition. Although there is no real stylistic influence discernible, I think his work is analogous to that of Hemingway, in that Hemingway preferred to be simple, direct, and straightforward, at least on the surface. Hemingway was a deeper and trickier writer than he pretended to be: so too with Tiptree, who conceals, behind the aw-shucks artlessness an astonishing skill for shaping scenes and misdirecting readers into unexpected abysses of experience. And there is, too, that prevailing masculinity about both of them (Silverberg 1975: xv).

This is not simply a comic misreading on Silverberg’s part. Some women sf writers also thought that Tiptree had a “prevailing masculinity” which resulted in the above mentioned request for Tiptree to leave the Khattru symposium on women in science fiction. Tiptree responded to the request as follows:

Joanna [Russ], your piece inviting me out of the talk is exactly how I feel. My own concept of what I at least was supposed to do was simply to learn and perhaps talk enough to get knocked down after which I felt acutely that I should fade away but didn’t know how to...Without, you know, sounding like gimme my wagon and I’ll go home mad. So I just bumbled on figuring that you could ignore me as well as I could. (After all, one possible use for a male participant is just to remind everybody of everything there is to be mad at. All the small exquisite vulenesses I mean) (Smith 1975: 96).

Alice Sheldon may have protested later that she was “not trying to write like a man” but it is hard to know how else to read these comments, or others made during the Khattru symposium. For example, Tiptree ‘confessed’ that the “motive for [flashing] is an obscure and yet apparently potent one, which seems to have missed me or be buried deep” (Smith 1975: 104). It is only when you know that Tiptree ‘is’ a woman that this, and other comments, become an ironic play.
Le Guin was a part of the *Khatru* symposium. She was also fooled by Tiptree:

"Recently I've been hearing from people who have friends who say, "I knew all along that Tiptree was a woman. I could tell it from the prose style," or "from the male characters," or "from the female characters," or "from the Vibrations." I don't know any of these people who knew all along; they didn't say much about it; never even happened to mention that they knew, for some reason, until all the rest of us knew. We (the rest of us) knew rather suddenly and utterly unexpectedly. I don't think I have ever been so completely and utterly surprised in my life - or so happily. All I can say is I'm glad I didn't know all along, because I would have missed that joyous shock of revelation, recognition - the beautiful Jill-in-the-box (Le Guin 1978: viii-ix).

Many others experienced that "joyous shock":

The feminist world was excited because, merely by having existed unchallenged for ten years, 'Tiptree' had shot the stuffing out of male stereotypes of women writers (qtd. in Platt 1983: 267).

Amanda Boulter argues that Alice Sheldon's "gender deception" has made her "a particularly exciting figure for feminist critics of science fiction." However, the history of Tiptree's career makes him a problematic figure for feminist science fiction, raising certain, perhaps, awkward, questions about the feminist implications of Sheldon's gender disguise (Boulter 1995: 6).

These questions are clearly delineated in the *Khatru* Symposium, where the Tiptree revelation complicates how the pronoun of the writer is read.

Tiptree insists that there is more than one kind of white man. He argues that "a huge wrought-iron sign" he saw in Los Gatos which read "THE GENTILE WHITE MAN IS THE KING OF THE EARTH" excludes him just as much as Delany or any of the women in the symposium (Smith 1975: 103). Tiptree argues that he is a "natural lynchee" who "exudes the same smell of subversion which those good ole boys can smell a mile away" (Smith 1975: 103). Luise White replies:

you'll forgive me for wondering why, if you're such a "natural lynchee" you're still alive, and over one million Vietnamese who had no power at all are dead. And if it is just an historical accident, perhaps you could refrain....from baiting minority groups of any sort: you say they're after you "the way they used to hunt gays". Used to? Next page you call Arthur Clarke "Jiggling-nuts": I assume that's queer-baiting, Jim. Perhaps me, Joanna, Chip and anyone else who can read find you "threatening" because if you did fear "the
abuse of power” you wouldn’t try to please one audience by putting down a minority group (Smith 1975: 122).5

Tiptree’s insistence that white men are not a unitary class is not well received. In 1975, in the Khattru symposium, it is not something that can be heard coming from a white man. It would be interesting to know how Luise White would have responded if Tiptree had already been revealed as Sheldon.

This reading, shaped by the pronoun, has been for many feminist commentators, the lesson of Tiptree. In her comments on the second printing of the Khattru Symposium, Mog Decarnin writes that

she became a living illustration of all that sexism means. I remember a male writing, I think in a prozine, just very bluntly that if Tiptree had really been a man her stories would have been profound and compassionate, but since she was a woman those same stories were worthless and despicable (qtd. Gomoll 1993: 125).

At the same time that Tiptree was being critically acclaimed for stories like “The Women Men Don’t See”, Russ, McIntyre and Charnas amongst others, were being vociferously attacked and patronised for their feminism. Russ, herself felt sad at losing Tip, the male feminist:

oddly enough [I was] very tearful for a few days. I had been extremely fond of the man I imagined Tiptree to be and grievances at losing the one man who really seemed to understand (Boulter 1995: 8).

The shifting readings of Tiptree’s writings caused by the revelation of his ‘true’ sex has been glossed over by critics like Anne Cranny-Francis who in her ten page discussion of “The Women Men Don’t See” accepts unproblematically that Alice Sheldon is Tiptree and that this fact serves only to highlight “patriarchal masculinity” (Cranny-Francis 1990: 38). She writes:

[k]nowing that Silverberg’s “intractably masculine” writer Tiptree was actually the scientist and writer Alice Sheldon alerts contemporary readers to what is perhaps a more profoundly feminist story than even Silverberg suspected (Cranny-Francis 1990: 29).

5 Tiptree explains that Clarke wrote an unpleasantly patronizing reply to Joanna Russ in the SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America) Forum. She had tried carefully to explain to him why his “joke” about women-should-be-excluded-from-space-because-in-zero-g-their-breasts-bobble-distractively-to-the-men was not a joke and contained characteristically deep bias.

My “jiggling nuts” line was a regretfully abbreviated reference to the point someone else made more fully, that it would be as logical to exclude males because their genitals would wave about quite as distractingly to women (Smith 1975: 122).
In my reading Cranny-Francis maps the body of Alice Sheldon on to that of James Tiptree, Jr. Cranny-Francis omits from her account that it is only the knowledge that Sheldon is Tiptree which allows her to read the story as "more profoundly feminist" than Silverberg suspected. At the time the story was published this knowledge was not available and the story was not read in this way. Cranny-Francis makes the essentialist move of equating feminism with biology: because a story is by a woman it is more feminist than if it were by a man.

In versions like that of Cranny-Francis, James Tiptree, Jr. becomes a powerful feminist science fiction fable, the embodiment of "all that sexism means" and the mere mention of the name "James Tiptree, Jr." is code for a long history of women being marginalised in literature because of their gender.

Because the myth of Tiptree - who proved that women could write like men - has been so dominant, discussion of Sheldon's other 'persona', Raccoona, has been almost entirely absent. Boulter refers to Raccoona's claim that her first stories were not accepted until they were accompanied by a testimonial from Tiptree himself, which in turn provoked speculation that Raccoona might be his daughter, or alternatively his own pseudonym. Ironically, the dissolution of the female pseudonym into the male is repeated by contemporary feminist critics. Anne Cranny-Francis and Marleen Barr both discuss "The Screwy Solution" as by James Tiptree. Lillian Heldreth credits Raccoona, but only in the notes as a pseudonym of Tiptree (Boulter 1995: 14-15).

The writings of Raccoona and the whole Raccoona persona is frequently conflated with Alice Sheldon. For example, in the index of Russ' *To Write Like a Woman*, under the name Sheldon, Alice, a series of short stories are listed; those that appeared under the byline "Tiptree" have this noted in brackets, the ones published as Raccoona are not signalled in any way.

At the end of an entertaining, sensitive and very revealing interview conducted by Charles Platt and Shawna McCarthy, there is a biographical note:6

> With the exception of a short story in *The New Yorker*, ("The Lucky Ones," 1946) all of Alice Sheldon's fiction has been published under the name of James Tiptree, Jr., or

---

6 The interview is listed as being with James Tiptree, Jr. not Alice Sheldon. The interview for *Contemporary Writers* is listed as being with Alice Sheldon.
Raccoona Sheldon, the latter being used for five later stories when she felt she needed to write from an overtly female perspective (Platt 1983: 272).

The Raccoona pseudonym is not mentioned at any point during the interview.

The silence about the Raccoona pseudonym implies that this Raccoona is the real Alice Sheldon whereas Tiptree is her persona. Somehow it is presumed that Sheldon does not perform Raccoona because she is a woman and there is no need to perform your 'true' sex. However, Jeff Smith, in his description of his and his wife Ann's first meeting with Alice Sheldon, demonstrates that this was not the case:

While we were there, she was Tiptree often, the raconteur telling stories with little or no provocation, the speculator running with ideas to logical, illogical and evocative conclusions. Sometimes (particularly when she and her husband clattered around the kitchen fixing dinner) she was Raccoona, the rather dotty retired schoolteacher supposedly in Wisconsin. These were unconscious - whenever she thought about who she was, she was Alice Sheldon, the one who doesn't write science fiction (Smith 1978: 11).

Smith is perceiving sex here as a performance. Sheldon plays at being both Raccoona and Tiptree but also at being Alice Sheldon. They are all performances. The embodied nature of these performances is borne out in the three separate signatures of each name which is reproduced opposite.

The revelation that Tiptree was 'really' Sheldon can be read as a part of the battle of the sexes as it has been played out on the field of science fiction since the 1920s. The revelation both confirmed and confounded gender expectations about biological sex mapping neatly on to perceived sex. Tiptree's work was indeed profoundly feminist because 'he' was 'she' and at the same time 'she' had been able to fool everyone into believing 'she' was 'he'. The Tiptree revelation is thus used doubly to prove essentialist notions and to disprove them.

In the next chapter I examine the question of how all these stories operate in the construction of the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award. In discussions of the award to date the lives of "Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr." play very little part. The prize has been centred around the one story, of James Tiptree, Jr. who was 'really' Alice B. Sheldon. This feminist fairy tale has been the award's main inspiration, its starting point. Inevitably, however, five years after its announcement, the Award has moved away from its
inspiration. The term ‘Tiptree’ has now come to refer to this award and to the books that have been shortlisted for it, won it, or that people think are eligible for it. A Tiptree text is no longer only a text written by or about James Tiptree, Jr. The Tiptree Award has added yet another story to those of “Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr.”