

# ContactZone

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

*James Tiptree, Jr. and Alice Sheldon*  
edited by Oriana Palusci and Umberto Rossi



(2023) Vol. N° 1 (July) – ISSN 2723-8881

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# ContactZone

n. 1 (Luglio) 2023

## ContactZone

An International Peer-Reviewed  
E-Journal

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### GRAPHIC LAYOUT

Nexus Advanced Technologies, Milano

[www.nexusat.it/digital-editing](http://www.nexusat.it/digital-editing)

*ContactZone* is an international double-blind peer-reviewed e-journal which publishes scholarly work on Science Fiction and the Fantastic connecting different languages, non-mimetic genres, and fields of study. It is the journal of the Italian Association for the Study of Science Fiction and the Fantastic. The areas of research range from literature to cinema, from media to comics and video games touching a wide spectrum of critical approaches, which includes literary criticism, ecocriticism, film studies, gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, linguistics, translation studies, critical race studies, queer studies. The journal welcomes papers from scholars, authors, teachers, and librarians supporting an innovative insight into texts written in English, but also in other languages, in order to promote a lively dialogue among critics and other specialists on an international level. *ContactZone* will focus on themes and topics dealing with the representation of imaginative and/or alternative worlds in the realms of science fiction and the fantastic.

*Director: Luca Sarti*

Authorisation n. 60 issued by the Court of Naples on 16/04/2019

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## Introduzione

# Ritratto di scrittrice di fantascienza come creatura anfibia

*Oriana Palusci e Umberto Rossi*

DOI: 10.26379/1894

Nel lavoro critico di periodizzazione della fantascienza si è spesso ragionato in termini di decenni. Gli anni Quaranta, l'età d'oro; gli anni Cinquanta, la fantascienza sociologica (o *social science fiction*); gli anni Sessanta, la New Wave e l'arrivo del postmodernismo. Gli anni Settanta, invece, sono stati il decennio della fantascienza al femminile, o femminista, che negli anni Ottanta viene sommersa dall'ondata cyberpunk. Una scansione comoda, ordinata, ma piuttosto fuorviante, perché i percorsi individuali non si conformano a questi incasellamenti – prova ne sia quello di Alice Bradley Davey Sheldon, alias James Tiptree Jr., alias Raccoona Sheldon, cui è dedicato questo numero speciale di *ContactZone*. Va detto che il ricorso a uno pseudonimo maschile, James Tiptree Jr., ha sicuramente agevolato la carriera della scrittrice americana in un ambito come la *science fiction* della fine degli anni '60 del Novecento. Così era stato per un'altra autrice dalle tematiche poco convenzionali come l'inglese Katharine Burdekin, che aveva adottato lo pseudonimo di Murray Constantine nel suo capolavoro *Swastika Night* (1937). L'aggiunta di Jr., come scrive Julie Phillips (2006) nella biografia di Tiptree, fu suggerita dal marito. A noi viene subito in mente l'altro Jr., cioè Kurt Vonnegut, che si stava affermando in quel periodo. Se junior viene aggiunto a un nome, significa che esiste un 'padre' che ha lo stesso nome, come nel caso dell'autore di *Slaughterhouse-5*. Nel nostro caso si può intravedere un intento parodico: Tiptree la scrittrice figlio di James della rinomata marmellata Tiptree?

# “Here we see our friends sprouting tentacles”: Some New Poems from the Juvenilia of James Tiptree, Jr. / Alice Sheldon née Bradley\*

*Timothy S. Miller*

DOI: 10.26379/1895

## Abstract

With the permission of the literary estate and the archival source secured, I present the complete texts of five previously unknown poems written while Alice Bradley was an undergraduate at Sarah Lawrence College in the 1930s and published only in the college’s student literary magazine. These new poems complement the previously unpublished verse from the 1940s and 50s that was posthumously collected in the chapbook *Neat Sheets: The Poetry of James Tiptree, Jr.*, and provide a fascinating window into Bradley/Sheldon/Tiptree’s early literary interests and ambitions. Based on the formal experimentation with orthography and references to humans with tentacles and mechanized angels, those interests clearly included both high modernist experimental poetry and some aesthetic features of the issues of pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales* that she was sneaking alongside her loftier literary reading. Other details of the poems will prove intriguing to readers of Tiptree’s science fiction: for instance, the playful byline “a. bradley” attached to one of the poems invents a new middle initial for Bradley, doubling the first letter of her name, and hints at the author’s notorious love of pseudonymity later in life. The poems are prefaced with an introduction and commentary approximately 3000 words in length that primarily serve to explain their provenance, document some of their apparent literary influences, and suggest their interest for perhaps tracing a longer trajectory than previously understood for Tiptree’s much later career as a science fiction author.

## Il continuum Sheldon-Tiptree-Raccoona

*Riccardo Gramantieri*

DOI: 10.26379/1896

### Abstract

Between 1968 and the end of 1976, Alice Sheldon not only wrote science fiction professionally using a male pseudonym (James Tiptree, Jr) and then a female one (Raccoona Sheldon), but she interpreted actual roles, giving them the semblance of reality, with their own addresses and bank accounts. Recurring to the tools of analytical psychology, the purpose of this article is to try to show that, for Tiptree/ Sheldon the opposite occurred: the male part of her personality, which can be called Animus, asserting itself on her ego, pushed Alice Sheldon to assume the pseudonym James Tiptree, Jr. At the same time, this proposed interpretation of the writer's life seeks to give a reason to Silverberg's famous misplaced phrase according to which Tiptree was definitely a Hemingway-type, a definition that would give a socio-cultural justification to the particular style of the writer whose multifaceted personality would be described as a continuum.

# Aliena dello spazio interno

*Laura Coci*

DOI: 10.26379/1897

## Abstract

The life and narrative of Alice Bradley Sheldon are marked by restlessness and awareness of being a stranger in her own time and, perhaps, even on Earth. Disguising herself thanks to a male identity, she investigates the themes of gender difference and the invisibility of women in Western society, of reproduction and of a possible alternative evolution, of science, pain and death.

And here, within the context of the short story or short novel, focuses on the analysis of the pain of women, that becomes more evident as their awareness of their social insignificance grows (“The Women Men Don’t See”, 1973); the pain of submissive animals and those who develop empathy towards them (“The Psychologist Who Wouldn’t Do Awful Things to Rats”, 1976); the pain of the entire human race in the absence of meaning, which extends to a suffering that reach out to other worlds, other (alien) creatures, the entire universe (“A Momentary Taste of Being”, 1975). And, furthermore, the deadly ambivalence of love and sexuality (*Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death*, 1973), motherhood that leads to death (“The Color of Neanderthal Eyes”, 1988), the genocide of the feminine (“The Screwfly Solution”, 1977), up to the war on women, even more ferocious against poor and black women (“Morality Meat”, 1985).

# Reforming Genre and Gender from Within: Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr.'s Short Stories (1973-1981)

*Federica di Nicola*

DOI: 10.26379/1898

## Abstract

This article analyzes a selection of Alice Sheldon's SF short stories which she wrote under the pseudonym of James Tiptree, Jr. and which revolve around gender equality and women's sociocultural role. Sheldon stood out within the SF literary context of her time thanks to the original handling of traditional SF tropes as tools used to account for the female experience and to effectively investigate human nature.

Through the close reading of the stories, this article highlights Alice Sheldon's innovativeness and tackles some of her most recurrent and feminist-coded thematic nuclei. It argues for the importance of Sheldon's SF and for its influence and relevance within an entire literary genre, whose potentiality she harnessed to make space for female presence and action.



# The Unravelling Narratives of James Tiptree, Jr.

*Farah Mendlesohn*

DOI: 10.26379/1899

## Abstract

James Tiptree Jr. was a short story writer whose stories were witty, unexpected and painful. Spread over 20 years there is a distinct development in those stories from the witty screwball style of *Birth of a Salesman* (1968) through the race side sport story *Faithful to the Terra in Our Fashion* (1969) and on to bitter stories such as “*And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill’s Side*”. This essay will consider the different narrative structures Tiptree Jr. used and consider them as commentaries and reworkings of earlier classic science fiction.

# Senza via d'uscita: guerra e tossicodipendenza in “Yanqui Doodle” di Alice Sheldon, alias James Tiptree, Jr.

*Umberto Rossi*

DOI: 10.26379/1900

## Abstract

Compared to other short stories written by Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr., “Yanqui Doodle” has not received so far much critical attention. And yet this is a remarkable example of science-fictional war narrative, dealing with such important issues as trauma, the depiction of atrocities, neo-colonial politics, the American Empire; moreover, there is a gendered subtext, based on what might be defined as the femalization of a male subject, which connects this story with Sheldon’s/ Tiptree’s more celebrated narratives. All in all the story of a drug-addicted American infantryman subjected to a brutal and almost sadistic detox program can be well read as a bitter and pessimistic commentary on the policies of the Reagan administration in the 1980s, thus articulating a sort of critical allegory of American imperialism which is still valid today.

# I percorsi dell'estinzione. Tiptree e la fine del mondo

*Nicoletta Vallorani*

DOI: 10.26379/1901

## **Abstract**

The topic of extinction recurs in contemporary fictions, both by women and by men, and yet it also appears frequently in many narratives that belong to the classic tradition of the genre, starting with Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, 1826. Tiptree also deals with it, choosing an angle that anticipates many of the contemporary inflections of the theme. The most relevant aspect lies in the writer's ability to exploit her experience in the field of experimental psychology, but problematizing it, in the narrative discourse, in an unprecedented way and calling into question aspects more related to the variability of the socializing processes of human communities. In this way, Tiptree anticipates theoretical speculations that are very close to the more recent reflections of Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Federica Timeto and others, triggering a fertile exploration that goes on today.

# The Science Fiction & Fantasy Research Collection at Texas A&M University: Preserving the Future Deep in the Heart of Texas

*Jeremy W. Brett*

DOI: 10.26379/1903

## Abstract

Texas and Texans are renowned (notoriously so, sometimes) for an obsession with **bigness**, usually but not exclusively our own. In genres so often set within the vast distances between stars and the epic sweep of fantasy wonderlands, with stories involving massive starships or enormous monsters, it fits our state mentality well to tie ourselves to the history and ongoing evolution of the science fiction and fantasy genres. Certainly, Texas has more than its fair share of speculative fiction luminaries (both those born here and those who have at one time or another made the state their home), including people like Michael Moorcock, Elizabeth Moon, Howard Waldrop, Bruce Sterling, Martha Wells, Rebecca Roanhorse, Joe R. Lansdale, Gene Wolfe, Ardath Mayhar, and so many others.....