Except for the first story written by James Tiptree Jr., every thing we read in this class will have either won or been short-listed for the James Tiptree Jr. Award. In 1991 authors Pat Murphy and Karen Fowler at the Feminist Science Fiction Convention WisCon raised the idea of having an award for science fiction and fantasy that “explored and expanded gender—men’s and women’s roles.” The award was named for author James Tiptree Jr. whose fiction had so often explored and expanded gender and sexuality issues. The award was not conceived as a feminist award but in broader terms—to expand all the possible gender roles. Also from the beginning the people involved with the award had the attitude that it should be approached with both seriousness and humor. Much of the money was and continues to be raised through bake sales, cookbook sales, auctions with the comic flare of author Ellen Klages as announcer, t-shirt sales and so on. The prize is $1000, travel and expenses for the trip to the award ceremony, an original artwork, and chocolate. The official pin has the words “Bake Sales for World Domination” and SpaceBabe (compare to women on pulp covers) “who roams the galaxy, single-handedly fighting injustice, oppression, and outdated portrayals of gender roles in speculative fiction.” In “Strategies of Coding in Women’s Cultures” (Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture), Joan N. Radner and Susan S Lanser suggest that feminists can take ideas that may be seen as trivial and “code” them so they are both deliberately expressed to those in the know and concealed from outsiders.

Feminine codes of bake sales & chocolate were chosen quite deliberately to convert them into feminist messages by embracing techniques and procedures that are patriarchally designated as feminine and exaggerating them to expose the feminist power underneath. This juxtaposition of the familiar female, generally disregarded by the larger society, into something powerful and subversive, “a real solid effort to change the world and if you can’t change the world through chocolate chip cookies, how can you” is where the humor comes in. The award is designed to reward SF that redefines gender. The participants see themselves as rabble-rousers and want the code to be understood for what it really is (as explained by Elizabeth Matson in Foundation Spring 2002).

According to Debbie Notkin of the Award Motherboard, “While stability and predictable process are important to other awards, fluidity, flexibility, and unpredictability are the hallmarks of the Tiptree Award.” Pat Murphy says that judges are looking for work that is “thought-provoking, imaginative, and perhaps even infuriating. To change the way that our society thinks about women and men, we need to see people in different roles. The Tiptree Award is intended to reward those women and men who are bold enough to contemplate shifts and changes in gender roles. The Award is for those rare stories and books that challenge the norm, question our hidden assumptions, confront the expectations that we don’t even think about, and tweak the unconscious prejudices that influence our perceptions. The award is a subversive joke that takes you by surprise and makes you blink and turns the world into a different place, much stranger and more wonderful than you ever thought possible” (The James Tiptree Award Anthology I). Each year’s jury has been different volunteers, often previous...
winners (always at least one man) and each jury works through criteria for themselves, based on loose guidelines suggested by earlier years. Anyone can nominate a story or novel and the short list is not announced ahead of time, in order for the award to work in an expansionary rather than exclusionary way.

The Motherboard feels that "the main point of the award is not to provide answers—but rather to raise questions. When a work wins the Tiptree Award, readers then proceed to argue about whether the work was really about gender. These continuing arguments mean that people are reading the work, thinking about gender, and discussing it with others. And that's the point, after all. The Tiptree Award is eccentric, unpredictable, fluid, controversial, trying to struggle with hard questions while staying open-ended and open-minded" (The James Tiptree Award Anthology 2).

My hope is that this class will raise and grapple with the same kinds of questions (and have the same kind of attitude). So that all students will be involved in the discussions, each student will be responsible (in assigned groups) for putting questions on Blackboard by 6 pm the night before for discussion focus. All students can answer as many of the questions in writing as they wish for participation points, and we will use the questions in class discussion. Each student will also read and write on some fiction from the Tiptree list that is not part of the class reading. (See teacher for sign up as soon as you choose which story you want to write on—only one student per work. Annotated list is near end of packet.)

***Attendance is required and more than three unexcused absences will lower the grade. All work should be your own, exclusively for this class. See me or university requirements for questions about plagiarism. Tell me if you have a disability that may affect your work.

Syllabus: subject to minor change  W-winner
1 M 3/28  Syllabus, discussion about gender, assignment into groups
   Assign: Read pp. 1-20 (Gary Wolfe in Locus review) in packet; write two comments or questions to ask me or the class
2 W 3/30  Discussion of literary and science fiction terms
3 F 4/1  "The Women Men Don't See," Tiptree, 73 McB—questions Blackboard
   Assign: Gender pages in packet pp. 21-34, write paragraphs in response to two of the comments
4 M 4/4  More on Tiptree and gender issues
***Please read the jury annotations from the packet for each story before class.***
5 W 4/6  "Grownups," MacLeod, 92, Grp 1 questions on Blackboard
7 M 4/11  "Mountain Ways," LeGuin, W 96., Grp 3 questions on Blackboard
   **Deadline for choosing which story for out-of-class assignment
8 W 4/13  "Travels with the Snow Queen," Link, W 97, Grp 4 questions Blackboard
9 F 4/15  "Lovestory," Kelly 98, Grp 6 questions on Blackboard, Grp 5 questions on Blackboard
10 M 4/18  "Glassbottle Trick," Hopkinson, 2000, , Grp 6 questions on Blackboard
11 W 4/20  "Stories for Men," Kessel, W 02, Grp 7 questions on Blackboard
12 F 4/22  Summary/comparison discussion, Grp 8 questions on Blackboard
Assignments: 10%—participation—talking in class, posting questions and comments to the listserv, turning in brief paragraphs to the questions posted on the list, writing brief comments after class discussion, and volunteering for extra credit research as suggested by McBride.

30%—analysis of some aspect of short story from Tiptree list (4-6 pp.) OR 50%—analysis of some aspect of novel from Tiptree list (6-8 pp.)

In addition, each student should put a brief report to the class on Blackboard. Some potential questions to examine for the analysis: what aspect of gender does the fiction deal with, what makes this story worth reading or how does the story compare to other ones read in class, etc.

60% OR 40%—short analytical essays (3-5 pp.) on fiction read by class (questions at end of packet, due day of discussion—10% each or 20% for comparison essays or essays using critical works—see question page)