"Eleanor Cameron:
Wonderful Flights Through Space and Time"

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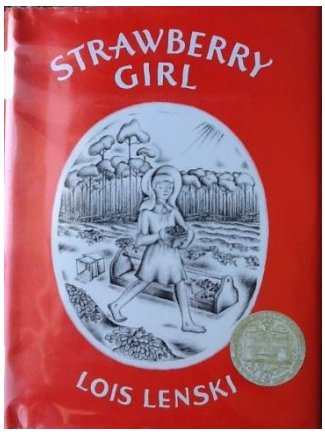
Lois Lenski Children's Literature Lecture
Illinois State University
March 25, 2019

## Introduction

I want to start tonight by getting some awkwardness out of the way.

While they weren't quite contemporaries, Lois Lenski and Eleanor Cameron did cross paths once, and it didn't go well. As a critic, Eleanor had a habit of framing her arguments by refuting a quote from other writers. She'd take that quote and then basically beat up on it for a few pages. In her essay "The Dearest Freshness Deep Down Things," which was published in *The Horn Book* in October 1964, Eleanor picked a Lois Lenski quote to beat up on.

The year before Lenski had written an article called "Creating Books" in which she detailed the process of creating her regional novels, including the 1945




Newbery winner *Strawberry Girl*. Eleanor read Lenski's point to be that realism was preferable to fantasy, that invented stories had limited plots, and that their authors were in danger of setting themselves apart from their audience. Eleanor responded by expounding on the limitless of imagination, the importance of the author bringing a personal vision to their work, and the power of place, humor, evocative language, imagery, and memorable characters.

She covered a lot of ground in her essays

To wrap up that section Eleanor wrote: "Miss Lenski says in her defense of realism that real life needs no apologies. But real life is not art. Art is not realistic in the sense that it simply reflects life. It does not reflect, it creates. It selects, it makes patterns. It puts together certain patterns. It puts together certain people, certain events in such a way as to afford illumination."

Lenski didn't take kindly to being used for a straw woman, and wrote a letter to the *Horn Book* to express her displeasure in, she felt, being misrepresented and misinterpreted.

Now at this point Eleanor had only been a critic for two years. She'd published just three essays. Her career as a novelist was more established, but she

hadn't won any of the awards or accolades she'd eventually get. You might say she had very little "cred." It took audacity to take on someone of Lenski's stature and accomplishment, so you'd think being challenged on it would inspire a degree of contrition.

But that wasn't Eleanor. With her chance to respond to Lenski's concerns, she didn't apologize. She didn't concede any points. Instead she wrote:

> "I regret that I have distressed Miss Lenski. But I think that, in the world of children's books as in any field of art, we should be able to disagree without any undue stress."

One of my main goals in this talk is to give you a good sense of Eleanor's philosophies and personality, and that response does a lot of that work for me. She was an opinionated, demanding, intense, slightly vain person who took authority on herself. She relished debate, and didn't concede victory in an argument easily, if at all. She didn't suffer fools or egomaniacs.

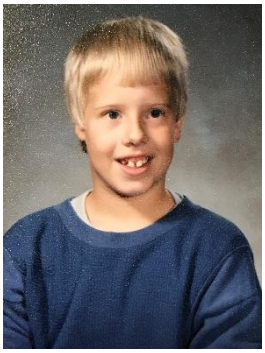
And lest this make Eleanor sound too much like someone you'd avoid at a party, many of the people who knew her also used words like generous, empathetic, warm, charming, engaging, and funny.

## My Journey

I want to thank the ISU children's literature department and Milner Library for honoring me with the invitation to speak about Eleanor tonight. When I looked at list of names of people who've given the Lenski lecture in the past, I felt intimidated and outclassed. I felt a little bit like I'd snuck in somewhere I don't quite belong.

But I also felt like I've come full circle. I could do an whole separate talk just on path that I took to writing Eleanor's biography and becoming an "expert" on her life and work, but in the interest of time I'll give you the Reader's Digest condensed version.

My journey to telling Eleanor's story is kind of like a fairy tale. It's comprised of three magical experiences, each one building on the last.



The first magical experience came when I was 9 years old and I discovered a book called *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet* at the Bloomington Public Library, just three miles south of here. It was the title that grabbed me – how could it not? I took it home, started reading it at bedtime, and didn't stop until I'd finished all 214 pages. That was the first time I had found myself so engrossed in a book that I couldn't stop reading.

Though I'd vividly remember the story of two boys building their own rocket and taking an overnight trip to a hidden planet, I almost instantly forgot the name of the book and its author.

By the time I got to college at Augustana, and took a class in children's literature – which Dr. Nancy Huse, who gave this lecture herself in 1995 – *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet* seemed like a dream. I became determined to track it down, but I had limited avenues to do that. This was 1997, so


the Internet was still in its infancy, and no one I described the book to had any hint of recognition. I even went back to the Bloomington Public Library on the longshot chance that the book was still in the same place on the shelf. It wasn't.

Then one day on a whim I picked up a guide to children's literature that was sitting in a free box outside the English department office. I took it to my dorm, where I was working front desk duty, and began flipping through. Suddenly there it was: *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet* by Eleanor Cameron. I knew instantly that was the book I'd been looking for. Not only that, there were four sequels. I couldn't believe it. That was the second magical moment.

The final magical moment occurred about 16 years later, in the fall of 2013. I was teaching middle school reading in Roseville, Minnesota. My work was with

seventh and eighth grade reluctant readers, so I liked to start the year by sharing with my classes the books that had been important to me in my life. *Wonderful Flight* always figured prominently. When I finished talking about the book, one boy raised his hand and asked, "Have you read that author's other books?" The answer was no, and I told him so. "Why not?" he asked.

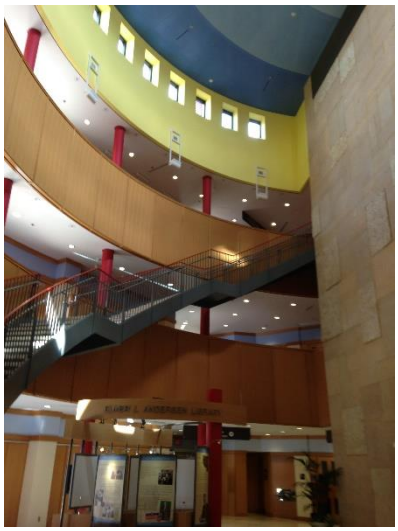
It felt like an accusation. I can't quite explain why I never pursued learning more about Eleanor, beyond reading the second Mushroom Planet book, except that life had taken me other directions. But his question – "Why not?" – renewed my curiosity. I decided to seek out her books and try to find out more about her.

Once I started searching, I was shocked at the dearth of information. Here was this author who'd published 18 novels and 2 books of criticism, won a National Book Award, and yet her Wikipedia page was shorter than your average NFL player's. I took it on myself to start gathering as much as I could about Eleanor. At the very least I thought I might update that Wikipedia page.

One day not long after, I was at a coffee shop doing some internet searches on Eleanor's first novel. A few pages in on the Google results was something called The Eleanor Cameron Papers. I followed the link and discovered that Eleanor had donated fifteen boxes of manuscripts and letters to a children's literature archive called the Kerlan Collection. The thing that made this magical or serendipity or kismet, or whatever you'd like to call it, is that the Kerlan was located at the University of Minnesota's Anderson Library, which was 10 minutes from my house. I still can't quite believe it.

I made an appointment with the Andersen library to come take a look at a few of those boxes. On my very first visit I came across a manuscript for an unpublished sixth Mushroom Planet. I knew at that moment there was no way I wouldn't be coming back to go through every single one of those boxes. And I also knew that I would need to do something with what I was finding in those boxes.

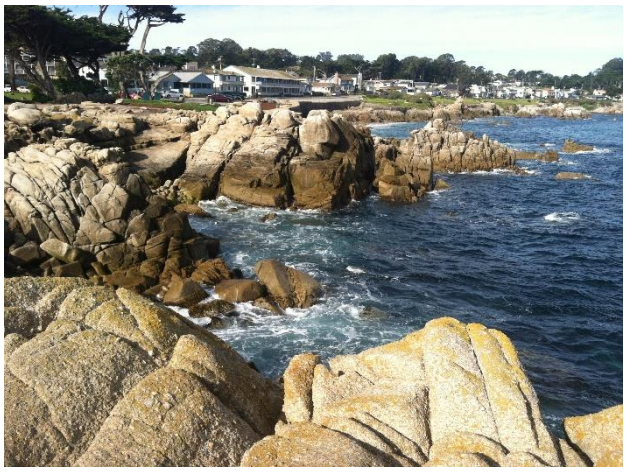
I've always loved to write. I'd written stories and essays since I was in fourth grade, but like Eleanor I had very little in the way of "cred" to take on a project of this magnitude. I graduated with a BA in English, and the last time I'd been paid to write anything was for the *Augustana Observer* in college. But, also like Eleanor, I pushed that aside and just worked. I made 36 trips to the Kerlan in total, walking up and down those steps every time.



The process of researching was honestly thrilling. I felt like a combination of a journalist, archeologist, and detective, like Lois Lane, Indiana Jones, and Encyclopedia Brown all mixed into one. Once I took the scary step of contacting people for interviews, the project took on a whole new dimension. Eleanor really came to life once I began talking to people – friends, family, contemporaries – who'd actually known her. And that included Ursula Le Guin and Gregory Maguire, two authors I approached with great trepidation. What I learned is that if you have a weirdly specific reason for contacting a famous person, you're more likely to get a

response. And, as odd as it seems, you start to feel like a peer instead of a fan, even if in you're really just still a fan.

My wife Wendy and I even took a trip to California, where Eleanor spent the majority of her life. We visited Berkley, walked the streets she lived on as a child



and teenager, and saw the location of the music store where her mother and step-father worked. We went to the Monterey Peninsula, visiting Pacific Grove, where the earthbound parts of the Mushroom Planet books are largely set. We found the house in Pebble Beach where she lived and worked for the last 25 years of her life.

When I was done I had the manuscript of Eleanor's biography, which I titled, *Eleanor Cameron: Dimensions of Amazement*.

In the interest of time and moving on to the real substance of this talk, I won't detail the arduous process of finding a publisher, but suffice to say it was the exact inverse of the joy I felt in the research and writing process.

## Eleanor as a Reader of Fantasy

My overarching goal of this talk is to provide an good introduction to Eleanor's life and work, but honestly there's just too much there to cover in 50 minutes. So I'm going to fast forward past some of the parts. Eleanor was many different writers in her lifetime: A Virginia Woolf-obsessed adult novelist, a fantasy writer, an essayist, a poet, a children's literature critic and an author of realistic semi-autobiographical fiction.

Though she had an eclectic career, the truth is that the books of hers that made the most impact both in their time and over time were fantasies. And fantasy was also one of her major topics as a writer of criticism. So it just makes sense to me to use fantasy as a focusing lens to take a trip through her life and work.

To give you an idea of structure, I'm going to attempt to weave together her story for you in three parts: Eleanor as a reader of fantasy, Eleanor as a writer of space fantasy, and Eleanor as a writer of time fantasy. Within those last two parts I'll attempt to weave in her views as a critic as well.

Eleanor's childhood and adolescence were best characterized by motion. She was born in 1912 in Winnipeg to parents who had both immigrated to North America from Great Britain. Her parents didn't know each other when they married and that would prove to be a problem. When Eleanor was three, the family moved to South Charleston, Ohio. When she was five they moved again, this time across the

country to Berkeley, California. Within Berkley she'd move at least three times before the age of 10. When she was 10, her parents divorced. Most of the family's moves had been a result of her father's wanderlust and unhappiness, and so living on her own with her mother was the first time Eleanor truly felt a sense of home. But even this didn't last long, as her mother remarried and the family moved again within Berkeley. And then when she was 16, they left Berkeley for Los Angeles. This was a move that Eleanor hated and mourned.

One constant for Eleanor among all the tumult was a love of books. Stories provided a sense of comfort and connection she was missing in her everyday life, and she felt them deeply

> "I remember so clearly from childhood the intensity of my relationships with the animals and humans in the stories I loved best. I suffered and rejoiced with them as if they were alive."

The books and stories that she cited as meaning the most to her in childhood were largely works of fantasy: Fairy tales, talking animal stories, myths, and legends all captured her imagination.

Eleanor adored Arthurian legend, which she likely read in James Baldwin's *Stories of the King*, she wrote:

"'Here lies Arthur, once King and King to be.' His death meant the passing of goodness and courage and idealism, the breaking up of the ring, the scattering of the great knights: all of that gone, perhaps forever. I remember now the almost unutterable poignancy I felt - sadness mixed with longing - yet a sense of exaltation, of having touched something fine and powerful and strength-giving. For me, as a child, Arthur's story was equal to the adult experience of Greek or Shakespearean tragedy." – "The Unforgettable Glimpse" – *The Green and Burning Tree*

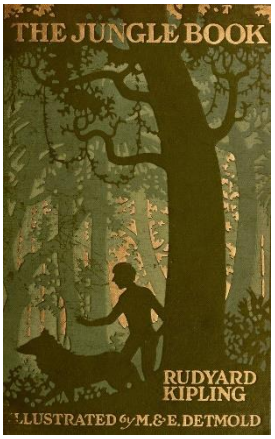
Hans Christian Anderson was another favorite. Of "The Little Match Girl," Eleanor said that reading the story made one of the most lasting impressions of her childhood, and she even attributed it to the awakening of her sense of empathy. And that empathy was not only important to the person Eleanor grew up to be, it would serve as one of her foundational beliefs about children's literature: She felt that stories were the best way for children to learn to care about and care for people different than themselves.

Through most of her life Eleanor held an abiding love of the ocean, which is most evident in the fat that most of her own books have oceanside settings. She

credited this to Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," saying that "my love of the sea, my desire to be near it, to be able to look out over it" came from the first lines of the story:

"Far out in the ocean, where the water is as blue as the prettiest cornflower, and as clear as crystal, it is very, very deep; so deep, indeed, that no cable could fathom it: many church steeples, piled one upon another, would not reach from the ground beneath to the surface of the water above. There dwell the Sea King and his subjects."

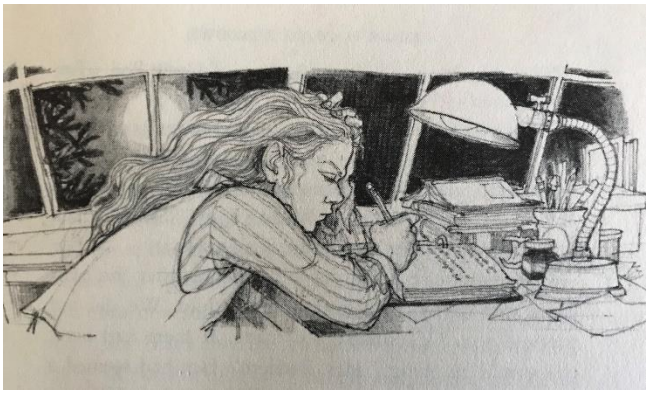
The natural world delighted Eleanor, especially forests and wild animals. That all started with her love of books about anthropomorphized animals: Beatrix Potter's animal stories, *The Wind in the Willows*, and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books*.




She wrote in her final book of essays in 1993: "After all these years, when I repeat the names in *The Jungle Books*, something eerie still happens - I get the feathery thrill around the back of my neck...and the whole world of Kipling's jungle rises in my mind. The years fall away, and there's no distance at all between the time I was ten and now."

## Space Fantasy

Eleanor knew from the age of 11 that she wanted to be a writer. Using a desk



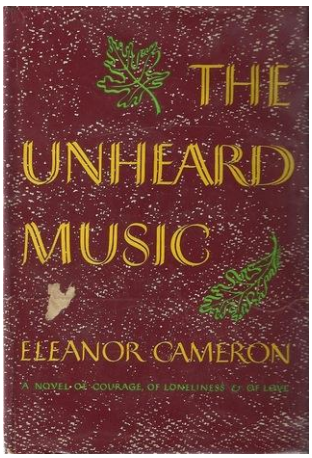
her father made for her – one of the few acts of kindness he ever showed to her, she said many times – young Eleanor created poems and short stories that she sent to the *Berkley Daily Gazette*'s Sunnyside Club children's page. Many of them were printed, something that thrilled Eleanor and gave her a taste of seeing her work published. She'd chase that feeling for the next 25 years.

After high school she attended art school, but only, as she put it so she could illustrate the books she was sure she'd one day publish. She next spent a year or so at UCLA, but never finished. Since she was 17 she'd been working at the Los Angeles central library, and she'd be a librarian for the next three decades.

When she was 22 she married Ian Cameron, an immigrant from Scotland who worked in a printing shop.

She never stopped writing nor did she stop trying to get published, but as the years piled up along with the rejection letters, she began to have grave doubts about whether or not she could make it happen. But she told Ian that they would not be having any children until she'd given her writing career every best effort. And she held to that. When he went off to the Army in 1942 Eleanor quit work for a few months and completed a novel. She considered this her last best effort to become a writer. Son David was born in 1944.

Eleanor kept sending short stories to magazines, and it was a submission to *Atlantic Monthly* in the late 1940s that changed her luck. The editor didn't want her story, but wondered if Eleanor had a novel. This led, in 1950, to Eleanor's first published work, a Virginia Woolf-inspired character study called *The Unheard Music*.




There's no hint of fantasy here, but tellingly the novel Eleanor tried to sell to the publisher first was a children's animal fable called *Griselda's Great Ambition* or *Griselda the Hen Who Wanted to Sing.* This was basically a thinly-veiled allegory about Eleanor's own desire to succeed as a writer.

*The Unheard Music* got good reviews, but didn't sell particularly well. Little, Brown rejected its follow-up. Eleanor feared that her good fortune and her publishing career were both at an end. She was at this low point when David, now 7 years old, asked her to write a story for him.

He had tired of reading Hugh Lofting' s *Doctor Doolittle in the Moon* over and over again, and there were no other books like it.

David set out the parameters for his mother:

-The story would feature David himself as the main character, along with his best friend Chuck

-They would travel to a kid-sized planet

-There would be no girls in the story except David's mother

-The characters couldn't just stand around and think

This request didn't light Eleanor's imagination on fire right away, but her mind had been on children's books more and more. This was due to a combination of reading her childhood favorites to David, as well as a change in jobs. Eleanor had left the Los Angeles public library for a position within the Los Angeles public schools. Here she advised teachers on books to use in their classrooms.

It wasn't long after her conversation with David that Eleanor had a vision of a small bald man in a gardening coat, and her mind began working out how he might fit into David's story.

Things fell into place quickly from there. Eleanor began to write a novel in

which David and Chuck are recruited by the small, bald-headed Mr. Bass to build a rocket and travel to a tiny hidden planet and help the people there. She sent it to her editor at Little, Brown, and they accepted it immediately. Upon its release in 1954 was an instant hit.

The book used many elements of science fiction rockets, high-tech gadgetry, aliens. Mr. Bass is presented mostly as a scientist, an inventor and astronomer. The book's main conflict – a sickness overtaking the people of the Mushroom Planet – is solved through science. As such, the book is largely regarded as a pioneering work of science fiction for children. As David had pointed out, outside of *Mrs. Pickerell Goes to Mars,* the Space Cat series, *Doctor Doolittle In the Moon*, and Robert Heinlein's juvenile novels, there wasn't much out there for young space nuts. *Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet* is often regarded as a gateway book for many science fiction fans and authors.

The irony of that is Eleanor herself didn't consider the book science fiction. She didn't read science fiction and she didn't belief the genre had much literary merit.

She regarded her book instead as a "space fantasy." She argued that structure and elements of the story of her story fantasy-based: Two unlikely heroes are deemed special and sent on a journey, aided by a mysterious wizard. Magic plays a large part in the story, from the construction of the rocket to the way certain circumstances fall into place to Mr. Bass's sudden disappearance at the end of the

book. She also pointed out that David and Chuck's rocket flight was "an impossibility in an Einsteinian universe" making it a fantasy element.

She later wrote:

> "Fantasy was my love. Science fiction extrapolated from the facts of science, and it was not for me. What I was doing was playing with the fancies my conception called up, wanting only to tell a story…"

There would be four Mushroom Planet sequels. The first three followed the first book in quick succession between 1956 and 1960. *Stowaway to the Mushroom Planet* manages to keep that same "space fantasy" balance as its predecessor, but the next two books find the scales tipping back and forth. The third book, *Mr. Bass's Planetoid*, is the most grounded in science of the series. It has lessons on meteors and meteorites and is full of pseudoscientific gadgets and processes. The fourth book, *A Mystery for Mr. Bass*, goes the other way, concerning itself with ancient civilizations, lost cities, spore people, and magical powers such as second sight and teleportation.

This toggling back and forth between science and magic was a manifestation of Eleanor's own complicated belief systems, namely that she mixed the two together as she saw fit. She believed in facts, research, evidence, and logic, but she also had a penchant for the inexplicable. She admitted her conflicting feelings:

"I am torn," she wrote, "having been for the greater part of my life enthralled

by the ancient vision of the earth hanging from heaven by a golden chain as by the knowledge that it has spun for perhaps four or five billion years around a little star that sits somewhere near the edge of an enormous whirling plate of light in the vast reaches of space…One vision to me is as breathtaking and majestical as the other. I cannot choose. I need both…"

In his 2005 study of Eleanor's work, author and professor Brian Attebery wrote on this exact same topic, ultimately determining that, at least in her books, Eleanor fell on the side of science. "Cameron's imagination" he wrote, "was stimulated less profoundly by unicorns than by black holes and fungi."

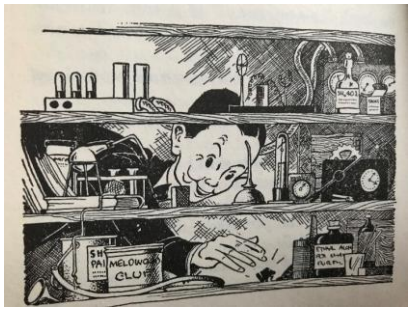
As evidence he points out that matters of science – inquiry, research, exploration – "generate the most evocative prose" in her books.

Attebery's points are persuasive, but I think his conclusion is off. I believe when it came to her own fiction and that of others, Eleanor's sympathy was always with the side of fantasy and magic. Attebery points out that the Mushroom Planet books "cloak their magical devices with the appearance of scientific inventions" but this to me actually shows that Eleanor was merely using the language of science to write about magic.

Of particular note to our topic is the fact that the antagonists in the three middle Mushroom Planet books are scientists. In *Stowaway to the Mushroom Planet* the titular stowaway is an egotistical and overzealous astronomer named

Horatio Q. Peabody. He believes that for the sake of the scientific discovery the existence of the Mushroom Planet must be revealed to all. But to Chuck and David this will lead to the exploitation and ruination of the Mushroom Planet and its people and culture.

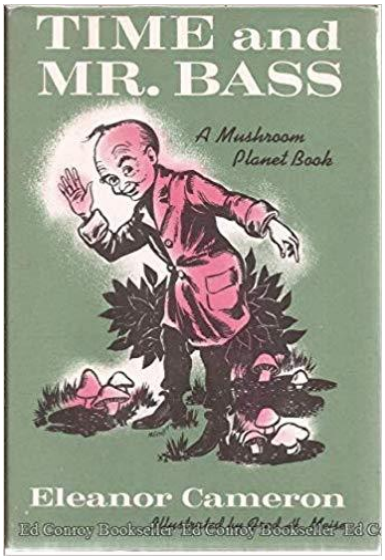
In *Mr. Bass's Planetoid* and *A Mystery for Mr. Bass*, we meet and follow another scientist, Prewytt Brumblidge - Eleanor had a way with naming her characters - whose invention, the Brumblitron, is supposed to turn salt water into fresh water. While this could be of great benefit to mankind, the machine has a downside: It's highly unstable and just might cause an atomic explosion.



Prewytt's sin is trying to bend the natural world to his will, and Eleanor herself was deeply wary of technology's potential for creating widespread violence and destruction. She wrote:

> "I have nothing against scientific rationalism ITSELF, nor against technology ITSELF, only a burning resentment of the wickedness men do to their descendants and to all of us and to the natural world in misusing science and technology out of callousness and greed and brutality."

Eleanor recognized that the third and fourth Mushroom Planet books didn't achieve the space fantasy hybrid that made the first two books so unique and effective, and she ultimately felt they were less successful because of that. But what's interesting is that the final published book in the series – *Time and Mr. Bass* – is basically a full-on fantasy book.




*Time and Mr. Bass* was released seven years after its predecessor and it shows evidence of Eleanor's growth as a writer but also her of her work as a critic that had begun in the early 1960s. The topic of Eleanor's first critical talk – titled "The Unforgettable Glimpse" - was fantasy. In writing that essay, Eleanor began the process of analyzing both the exemplars of the genre and the books that she'd admired as a child.

The results of that intensive study are evident in *Time and Mr. Bass*. It's the only book in the series where there's not a trip to the Mushroom Planet. Most of the action happens in Wales. This setting – the place where Susan Cooper's The Dark is Rising, Lloyd Alexander's Chronicles of Prydain were both set – was a conscious signal that Eleanor was playing around in what she would have labeled "high fantasy." Wales was also the place where some believe that Arthurian legend originated, and indeed Eleanor brings her beloved King Arthur into *Time and Mr. Bass*'s story, with the good vs. evil conflict arising from an incident that happened during Arthur's rule.

I believe that Eleanor's entry into writing criticism, that the process of immersing herself in the books she most admired, highly influenced *Time and Mr. Bass*. I believe she realized then that fantasy stories were the ones to which she felt most deeply connected. *Time and Mr. Bass*, with its interplay between past and present, is also a transitional book into the next types of fantasy Eleanor would write.

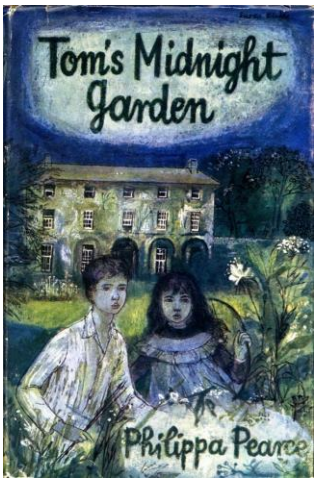
## Time Fantasy

During the 13 years she wrote the Mushroom Planet books, Eleanor published four additional novels. One was a fantasy about a sea creature, another was a fairy tale. The other two were her first attempts at writing realistically for children, and though there's no magic in 1964's *A Spell is Cast*, the book's construction and mood is that of a fairy tale.

1971's *A Room Made of Windows* was fictionalized autobiography about Eleanor's years in Berkeley. It was fully in the realm of realism, and it got Eleanor the most praise and recognition she'd had to date. One might think that this would encourage her to stay on that same track, but she couldn't resist the pull of fantasy.

In those few years since *Time and Mr. Bass*, Eleanor's stature as a critic had grown considerably. Her pioneering book of appreciative criticism, *The Green and Burning Tree*, had been published in 1968.

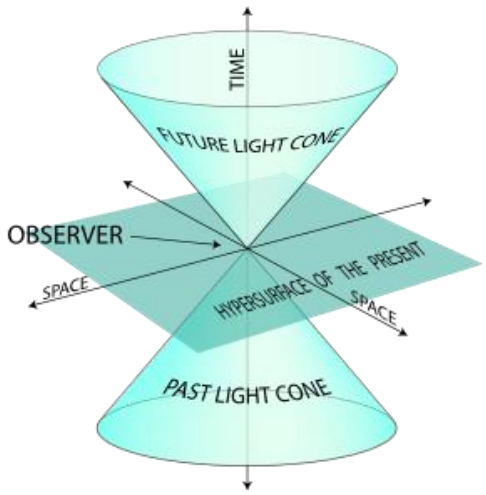
The title essay was a study of a subgenre Eleanor called time fantasy, exploring books in which modern children interact with a different time period in some manner. Though in most of the books this meant – like in E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* or Julia Sauer's *Fog Magic* – that the children physically traveled to the past,




Eleanor was far more interested in books where a character or characters from the past breaks through the barrier of time to communicate with the present, usually though the specialness of a specific place. Books like Lucy Boston's *Children of Green Knowe* and Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Elizabeth Marie Pope's *The Sherwood Ring*, and Penelope Lively's *The House in Norham Gardens*.

That image of the green and burning tree comes from Celtic legend. It's meant to be a representation of two different periods of time coexisting. Eleanor believed in what she called the Globe of Time, the idea that time is not linear and horizontal, but spherical, with past, present, and future comingling. Though this sounds mystical and fantastical, it's an idea grounded in theoretical physics, namely Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity. An aspect of that general theory, based on ideas formulated by Einstein's teacher Hermann Minkowski, adds time as a fourth dimension along with the three

dimensions of space, length, breadth, and depth. The four dimensional model looks something like this.



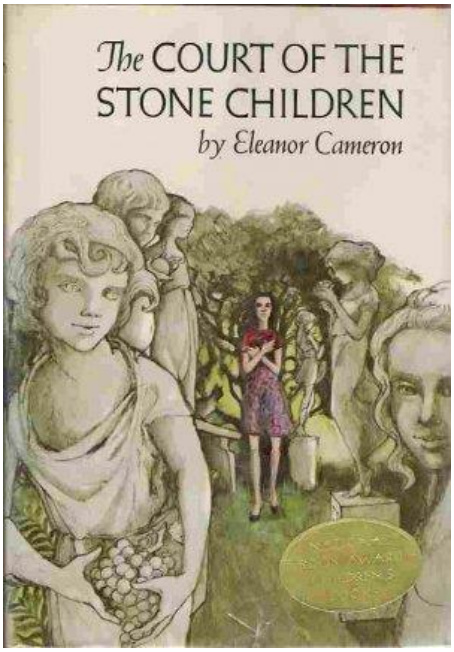

Now I don't pretend to have anything but a surface understanding of this. But the implications of this are that a person, object or place has not only physical dimensions, but dimensions in time as well. This view events in time as not a succession or sequence, but as existing all at once. The past, present, and future are all laid out simultaneously in that fourth dimension.

Eleanor read Einstein, and she also read H.G. Well's *The Time Machine*, which also expressed this idea

> "There is no difference between time and any of the three dimensions of space except that our consciousness moves along it."

These ideas would prove to be the basis of her follow-up to *A Room Made of Windows.* In 1973 she published *The Court of the Stone Children*. The working title of the book was *The Globe of Time*.

The novel follows Nina Harmsworth, whose family has just moved to San Francisco. The move has made her lonely and depressed, but she finds solace in a nearby French museum. As she explores the museum, Nina begins to interact with Dominique, a girl who claims to hail from France in the early 1800s. It seems she lived in the chateau whose interiors have been imported and reassembled in the museum. What's more, Dominique has foreseen Nina's arrival in a dream. She believes Nina can help investigate and resolve an injustice done against her father during Napoleon's rule.

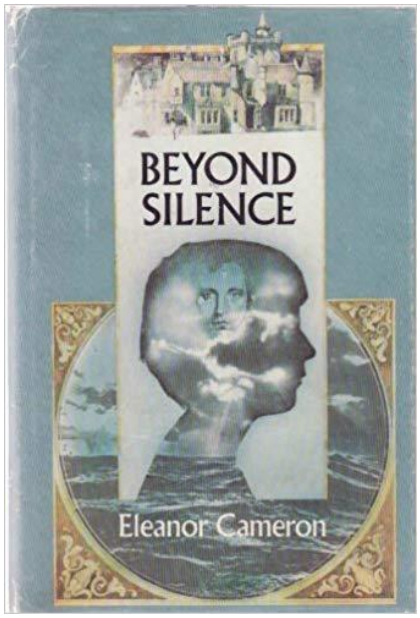



Eleanor used the novel to demonstrate that idea of objects (a journal, a painting), people (Dominique) and places (the transplanted chateau) having a simultaneous past, present, and future.

And though she utilized her understanding of Einstein and did her historical research, Eleanor didn't use her plot to try to teach theoretical physics or French history. She was instead much more interested in the emotional ramifications of her story, as through the novel's events, both Nina and Dominique are able to help each other come to terms with the traumas they've suffered.

*The Court of the Stone Children* got glowing reviews – the *New York Times* called it "brilliant" – and it would end up winning the 1974 National Book Award in the children's category. Eleanor's next two books would be a different kind of time travel, with Eleanor calling on her own childhood experiences for *To the Green Mountains* (1975) and returning to her alter-ego Julia Redfern in *Julia and the Hand of God* (1977).

In 1980 Dutton published what would be Eleanor's last fantasy novel, another time fantasy. It has a lot in common with *The Court of the Stone Children*.




*Beyond Silence* finds high schooler Andrew Cames on a trip to a Scottish castle with his father. It's not a light-hearted vacation, though, as Andrew's older brother has just passed away. At the castle, Andrew begins to see visions of Deirdre, who lived in the castle in the early 1900s. As their encounters build in number and intensity, Andrew begins to understand both Deirdre's history and the message she's trying to convey.

More significantly, he begins the process of acknowledgement of his own pain and guilt over his brother's death. The story serves as a psychological profile of grief and PTSD, as well as a pointed commentary on war. Andrew's brother was a veteran of the Vietnam war, just as Dierdre's beloved is a soldier in the Boer War.

More than she did in *The Court of the Stone Children*, Eleanor brings science into the story. This comes most prominently in the form of yet another overzealous scientist. Phineas Brock is nicknamed "The Quark" because he's like "a busy little particle of matter." The Quark is a psychology professor at a local university, and right away he notices Andrew's odd behavior. He becomes gratingly obsessed with finding out what's going on, partly because he wants to make a case study of Andrew.

The Quark is annoying to Andrew, and his intentions are suspect. But he is also observant, logical, intelligent, and most of all he's right about what he's observing in Andrew's state of mind. He also serves as a mouthpiece for many of Eleanor's own beliefs, including precognition, the collective unconscious, and the Globe of Time.

So while on the surface it seems having yet another scientist antagonist is evidence of Eleanor's embracing of the fantastical, it's really another example of her complex hybrid view. In the end, Andrew comes to terms with his brother's death through what amounts to intense therapy, both real world and mystical.

In this way *Beyond Silence* is a continuation of that balancing act between science and magic that Eleanor first expressed in *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet*. Eleanor was fascinated by and devoted to science, but it never completed the picture for her. This is best stated by one of the book's three epigraphs, which is also voiced by a psychologist in the story itself.

It's a quote from astronomer James Jeans: "The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine."

If you're looking for a quick summary of Eleanor's views, you could do much worse than this one.

## Conclusion

Brian Attebery asserts that Eleanor never produced a defining work of fantasy, and – I hope he'll forgive me for once again respectfully disagreeing. It's true that she never created a transcendent allegorical work in the manner of her friend Ursula Le Guin – Eleanor felt especially that *A Wizard of Earthsea* was a masterpiece. Nor did she ever write a high fantasy based on mythology the way her friend Lloyd Alexander did.

But she used everything she knew and admired about to create her fantasy novels, and they were 100% the result of her own unique vision and worldview. All of her fantasies merged reality and magic in ways that stimulate the mind and reveal certainties of the heart.

> In her very first critical talk, "The Unforgettable Glimpse," Eleanor wrote "As we have seen, the great fantasists often express truths too subtle for the intellect alone; in tales of witches and goblins and princesses and animals and dolls there are judgments passed on reality, ideas presented which the child may not consciously remember, but which he absorbs along with the luminous tissue of the tale itself."

Though they trade goblins for alien spore wizards and witches for ghostly time travelers, I believe that this is exactly what books like *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet*, *Time and Mr. Bass*, *The Court of the Stone Children*, and

*Beyond Silence* achieve. Though good stories before anything else, these books present a multitude of Eleanor's judgments and ideas: messages about art, environmentalism, grief, war, jingoism, preservation, and conservation.

As her writing career wound down Eleanor wrote three more autobiographical Julia books and one more book of criticism. She did return to fantasy once more.

In the late 1980s she completed a first draft of a sixth Mushroom Planet book called *Jewels From the Moon*. This is the manuscript I found in my first day at the Kerlan collection. When she sent it to the publisher, the editor asked for rewrites that Eleanor didn't care to do. Friends with whom she shared the manuscript felt it lacked the qualities that made the earlier books special.

Having read it during my research, I have to agree. I think the main issue with the book was that Eleanor had already said what she had to say in the realm of fantasy.

In her final years she returned to where she started, working on a Virginia Woolf-indebted stream-of-consciousness novel. She never finished. She died in 1996 at the age of 84.

To wrap up, I'd like to point out, probably redundantly, that today I've only covered one tiny part of what made Eleanor's life and work so fascinating. Her work had a depth and breadth that has very few equals in children's literature. In terms

of just Cameron's own criticisms and novels, there so many other themes and strands to explore.

I hope to have piqued a curiosity that will set you on your own wonderful flights.