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“Caroline” and the Mountain: Popular Children’s Picture Books that Shape the Perception of the Mountain

Christophe Meunier

“How beautiful this landscape is! The mountains shine in the sun, and the icy peaks sparkle like diamonds. Caroline thinks that it would be very nice to live here all year long. But, alas! The snow only falls in winter!” (Probst, 1959: 12-13)

- 1 Having reached the summit of the resort where she and her friends have decided to spend their winter holidays, Caroline, the young heroine that author Pierre Probst created in 1953, is standing in the snow, facing the sun and admiring the mountain range of the Alps.
- 2 *Caroline aux sports d’hiver* is the seventh volume of the series published by Hachette. Its title implies a particular approach to the mountains, which at the time (the end of the 1950s) were becoming more and more popular, namely by offering areas for play and leisure (for sports) temporarily (during the winter) and addressing a targeted public (city-dwellers). This book, and some others, has conveyed mountain representations and practices to generations of children. I intend to examine these representations and practices in greater detail, in particular by studying two parts from the “Caroline et ses amis” series: *Caroline aux sports d’hiver* (1959) and *Caroline fait du cheval* (1989). To what extent do these two books constitute “cultural geographic products”? And what are the images and spatial practices of the Alps that they suggest, considering that it is the setting for both stories?
- 3 For a start, I will show that this type of sketched literature is a cultural, geographical product whose seriality increases transmission and performativity (Austin, 1970). Subsequently, I will analyse the iconotextual process that allows the building of the

mountain and participates in what I call spatiogenesis. Finally, I will deduce the spatialities that the two books convey.

Fig. 1. P. Probst, *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (1959), cover – P. Probst, *Caroline fait du cheval* (1989), cover

The "Caroline" series as a cultural, geographical product

- 4 As the products of an environment (and whose aim is to comprehend this environment), children's books fulfil the function of a real "cultural object", if we stick to Paul Claval's definition of "culture" that is either "a mediation between men and nature" (Claval, 2003: 8) or "an ensemble of tools and artefacts which enable men to act upon the external world" (Claval, 2003: 15). Here, I am choosing the word "environment" in the sense given by Jacques Lévy: "the ensemble of the conditions both biological and social which can have an influence on the behaviour of a human group who, in turn, can have an influence on these conditions" (Lévy, 2013: 618). I would like to show to what extent the various episodes with Caroline constitute artefacts that, on the one hand, are produced by an environment and help to comprehend it and, on the other hand, permit acting upon this environment.

The children's book as an object of cultural geography

- 5 In an article published in 2010, psychologist Emmanuel Diet defines a "cultural object" as a "psychic or material object that may produce, attract or contain of meaning" and possibly mediate the culture that produced it (Diet, 2010). *Caroline aux sports d'hiver*, which first appeared in 1959, was not the first book in the series to take place in the mountains; however, in this part, the mountain occupies a very particular place because it identifies a certain number of specific spatial practices. In the previous

volume, *Les vacances de Caroline*, published a year earlier, the mountain had been nothing more than the setting for a holiday vacation camp; in fact, it only appears in the background of the strips. The second book I will refer to in my study is *Caroline fait du cheval*, published in 1989. This was the 22nd adventure of Pierre Probst's young heroine. The action is set during the summer, when Caroline is once again involved in tourist activity in the Alps.

- 6 It is interesting to point out that Probst produced both works during two periods when mountain tourism was becoming popular: By the end of the 1950s, tourism – particularly winter tourism in the mountains – was developing and attracting more and more people. The fifth week of paid vacation and the development of winter resorts contributed to materialising a certain paradigm: summer by the sea, winter in the mountains. The second book dates to the end of the 1980s and corresponds to the surge in massive summer tourism in the mountains (Bourdeau, 2009).
- 7 “A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design” (Bader, 1979) wrote the American literary critic Barbara Bader in 1979. The interdependence of the text and pictures makes it an iconotext (Nerlich, 1985). Probst is above all an iconic narrator; the presence of the text reassures the reader in her attempt to understand the pictures. Each double-page presents Caroline and her eight little friends (three dogs, two cats, one baby bear, one leopard and one lion cub) on different levels and in different situations. Some literary specialists see in these double-pages a kind of “iconic cacophony” (Boulaire, 2010) that Probst himself enjoys. All of the author's characters move around in landscapes that constitute not merely a simple setting but rather the story's real protagonists. They are the “artialised” representation (Roger, 1995) of “the relational weaving” between the environment and its inhabitants (Berque, 1999: 261). So it is for these two boards whose schematised composition we present and on which we will comment further below. In the first one, which comes from
- 8 *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (fig. 2), the resort's regular customers are represented on the same line following the slope. They seem to be integrated with the valley and the village. In the second one, from *Caroline fait du cheval* (fig. 3), the background opens up onto high mountain pastures that could be seen as wilderness, but because of a visible path we can deduce that shepherds frequently use this part of the mountain.

Fig. 2. Layout of pages 16-17 in *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (1959)

Christophe Meunier, 2016

Fig. 3. Layout of pages 16-17 in *Caroline fait du cheval* (1989)

Christophe Meunier, 2016

- 9 Both works examined here are practically bursting with spatial representations – the “social and/or individual creations of a relevant plan of reality” (Guérin, Gumuchian, 1985; Bailly, 1995). They are involved in a self-centred and aesthetic transcription of

space. It is this special aspect that interests cultural geography, for which children's books have become an object of study. As we can see, both of the books carry the influence of their century and the perception of their contemporaries by conveying representations of the mountain. Even more, they contribute to constructing the concept of a mountain.

A "mountain builder"

- 10 Throughout the stories, by means of the iconotextual narrative that he proposes, Probst is involved, in his own way, in a sort of "intellectual orogeny", in the sense developed by Bernard Debarbieux and Gilles Rudaz (Debarbieux, Rudaz, 2010). The "Caroline" series is, therefore, one of numerous "mountain builders" that construct the concept of the mountain by means of narratives about the mountain. What is fundamental in both books is that they are part of a series that succeeds in earning the loyalty of many young readers over nearly half a century and 44 volumes. "The main character, crosses various spaces: domestic, local and global ones. She travels from her house in the city to another one in the country, passing by the sea and the mountain. She goes to the moon and discovers Paris, Europe, America, the North Pole, Canada, Egypt, Russia, Scotland and many other places. In their structure, Caroline's stories seem to ignore barriers to movement in order to allow and facilitate narrative progress and the discovery of new countries. So Caroline goes from one space to another, from one story to another, without any major trouble. The series works like a "passing machine" (Fresnault-Deruelle, 2011: 27). Every pause in these new spaces is an opportunity for the heroine and the reader to make new discoveries. Home, sea, mountain, country and city make up spaces to live in and are chosen by the author because they can sum up all the spaces on Earth. Their presence inside the narrative can be symbolic enough to signify a way of life, and thus Caroline's series constitutes a sort of "trans-spatial guide" (Lussault, 2013: 1025).
- 11 If the seriality allows these works to be considered "mountain builders", the fact that they are all "long-sellers" is another element bolstering this effect. Indeed, the most recent statistics obtained from the publishers indicate that both parts have been sold in very equal proportions at about 2,500 issues per year since 2010. More than one-third of these sales are in supermarkets (Auchan, Carrefour etc.) and a quarter of them in specialised stores (Fnac, Cultura etc.). The share for book stores specialising in children's literature is weak (between 12 and 16 percent). Caroline has become a popular heroine for the masses and, in this way, readers can consider her spatial practice in a setting like the mountains as something that is reproducible. This is what I call the author's (conscious or unconscious) 'spatial intentionality', which means transmitting a spatial ideology and/or practice via the narrative (Meunier, 2016).
- 12 The frequent republication of these two works calls into question the temporality of the spatialities linked to the mountain.
- 13 *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* has been republished eight times. The books of the three first publications (1972, 1975 and 1978) were the same size (32 cm) and had the same number of pages (15). Since 1984, Hachette Jeunesse has offered Pierre Probst the chance to produce a new, shorter version (13 boards) and in a smaller size (27 cm). The goal was to produce a cheaper series, printed abroad for the first time (in Italy) and intended for sale in hypermarkets. Probst updated the 13 boards. After the author's

death in 2007, Hachette offered a new republication in the same size (2010). The most recent republication was in 2013, in an even smaller size (22 cm). The series became "Les petits albums Hachette". The price is very cheap (€3.50), which makes it possible for most people to purchase it, and it is sold mainly in hypermarkets. *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* and *Caroline fait du cheval* are among the 16 titles that the publisher selected.

- 14 *Caroline fait du cheval* (1989), for its part, was republished five times, initially in an intermediate size (27 cm), then in a smaller size in 2013. A final album, published in 1996, also takes place in the mountains. It is titled *Caroline dans les alpages* but because of its extreme rarity, I decided against including it in my corpus of long-sellers.

And the mountain emerges from the narrative

- 15 Probst succeeds in creating the mountain thanks to the iconic and spatial narratives linked to the book. The pictures' structure and the effects of the page turning allow the mountain to appear gradually and Caroline to go higher. This process, which I call spatiogenesis, is deeply rooted in the heroine's movements (Meunier, 2016). As soon as she moves, the adventure begins and the space is created. It is with the narrative that the space takes shape: It selects places, links them and organises them (Certeau, 1990).

Spatiogenesis of the mountain

- 16 Spatiogenesis is the literary and iconotextual process that leads to the construction of spaces (Meunier, 2016). It occurs in two steps inside the narrative: first, the "extraction" (the heroine leaves the closed initial area) and then the "trajectory" (the heroine travels, and the narrative organises the space). As we can see in figures 4 and 5, the starting point for both books is a closed area: In *Caroline aux sports d'hiver*, it is the inside of a sporting goods store; in *Caroline fait du cheval*, it is a courtyard on a farm.

Fig. 4. Spatiogenetic diagram of *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (1959)

Caroline aux sports d'hiver (1959)

Christophe Meunier, 2016

Fig. 5. Spatiogenetic diagram of *Caroline fait du cheval* (1989)

Caroline fait du cheval (1989)

Christophe Meunier, 2016

- 17 The trajectories are the same in both spatiogenetic diagrams, created from the two books' narratives. They form two loops; Caroline and her friends climb the mountain

before returning to their starting point: In *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (fig. 4), we start from an area that the heroine is familiar with (the city) and move to an unknown area (the snowy summits). A lot of anxiety and fear goes along with this spatial experience. This is the only book in the entire series in which Caroline cries. In *Caroline fait du cheval*, the experience takes place in a completely unknown space. The climb seems to be extremely rewarding. The challenge is to excel (fig. 5), to be the first to reach the top.

- 18 In most children's picture books, narratives in a loop are "touristic" (Meunier, 2016) and used to make the readers discover the different facets of a space. The loop is a way to appropriate a space: The main character discovers a space that he/she does not know and often follows the inhabitants in order to build his/her own way of dwelling.

The iconotext

- 19 As I showed earlier, spatiogenesis uses all the constituent parts of the iconotext. Thus, in *Caroline aux sports d'hiver*, the first double-page represents the inside of a sporting goods store. In the two versions (1959 and 1984), this is a room with an exit onto the street in the background. The room seems to be enormous but not big enough to contain the cacophony of Caroline's eight friends who gesture in all directions. The text underlines the excitement: "Les vendeurs n'oublieront pas de si tôt ces petits clients remuants, mais si charmants!" [The salespeople will not soon forget these fidgeting but charming little customers] (Probst, 1984: 6). It is very easy to guess the reason for the extraction from this initially closed area: the departure for winter sports, a kind of quest to accomplish.
- 20 In *Caroline fait du cheval*, the eight animals are standing around Caroline in the middle of a closed courtyard. Pouf, the white cat, points to the top of the mountain and says: "Je serai le premier tout là-haut!" [I will be the first one there] (Probst, 1989: 6). Therefore, the reason for the extraction from the initial place is the same task for all the friends – to reach the top – but a quest only for Pouf, who wants to be there first.

- 21 **Fig. 6. Spatial arrangement of *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (1984)**

Christophe Meunier, 2016

- 22 So, it is the departure from this closed area, the extraction, that throws the characters into the adventure: The narrative begins, and the mountain appears. In *Caroline aux sports d'hiver*, the three double-pages that follow suggest a slow climb towards the top

of the ski trails (fig. 2): starting station / resort / chairlift. Pages 12-13 are very significant; this is the first time the reader discovers the snowy summits in the background. The cables of the chairlift in which Caroline and her friends are sitting start in the lower-left corner of the board and disappear off the page at the top-right corner. Caroline's chair seems to go off the page, too, as the pole is partially detached. Caroline is looking at something at the top of the mountain where she is pointing with her finger. The next four boards present scenes in which the characters ski down the slopes and slalom through the pine trees / ski jump / night ski / sledding. The graphic processes are inverted: The characters and the design elements now follow some construction lines that start at the top of the left-hand page and run towards the bottom of the right-hand page. The next three pages are set inside the resort: ice skating / snowman competition / the woody warmth of a hotel café. As we can observe, the seven boards review several activities that every tourist can perform in the mountains during the winter.

Fig. 7. Spatial arrangement of *Caroline fait du cheval* (1989)

Christophe Meunier, 2016

- 23 It is clear that the trajectories of the iconotextual narratives and the iconic speech build representations of the mountain. This "spatial intentionality" contained in the books not only contributes to a shared imagination but helps with its diffusion – even its (re)building. This is a process that we can associate with the very recent process of *storytelling*, which certain publicists are fond of using. For example, to target a population of 18- to 30-year-olds who seemed uninterested in skiing, the Sugarbush Resort in the U.S. state of Vermont developed advertising campaigns as invitations to follow the adventures of a fictional character and interact with it on a social network. This process appears to have been successful since the resort recorded a rise in subscriptions of more than 250 percent in a single year!

The inhabited mountain

- 24
- 25 What Pierre Probst proposes in his works could be considered "attachment in practice" (Werlen, 1996) on which the child could capitalise. Caroline and her friends arrive in an

unknown space and learn to become attached to it, to dwell in it. Learning these practices puts the heroine and the "experienced" inhabitants in relation to each other, as it were. We can draw a kind of "cultural circle" (Lazzarotti, 2006: 269) to link the visitors/tourists in one part and the inhabitants in another part with the inhabited space. (fig. 8).

Fig. 8. The "cultural circle", according to O. Lazzarotti

The inhabitants

- 26 As I wrote earlier, the mountain's customers are always present on the page throughout both parts: The ski instructor, the audience for the ski jumping competition or the bobsleigh competition, the owner of the chalet or the customers of the hotel, the owner of the "Les Airelles" inn, the young shepherds and Valentin the cheesemaker – all of them are mountain inhabitants, and we can consider them auxiliary agents. They help Caroline and her friends to complete their task or fulfil their quest. They facilitate the appropriation of the mountain by helping them to dwell in it.
- 27 The practice of being in the mountains is not innate; on the contrary, an initiation is required. Caroline appeals to these mountain inhabitants for help, and they are "mountain builders", too. For example, Caroline takes the advice of the clothes salesman (Probst, 1987: 6-7) or the ski instructor in the winter (Probst, 1987: 10-11), and she needs the farmer to plan her climb in the mountains in the summer. She visits Valentin's refuge, she stays on the ski trails and the marked paths, and she acts in space that has been territorialised by many generations of mountain dwellers.
- 28 In many of Probst's works, spaces are recognisable thanks to the representation of some well-known places that are often among the benchmark sites of the Probst family.

The identification of these sites is not always easy because the indications left by Probst are sometimes subliminal. Some who are passionate about the series do meticulous research in this regard and share their findings online. Both parts take place in Arlberg, near Innsbruck. The resort of Sankt-Anton-am-Arlberg, whose resort is recognisable in

- 29 *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (p. 8-9), is known as the oldest Alpine ski resort in Europe. It is serviced by the Alpenexpress, a train that we can find in the first publication (1959). In the background of pages 8-9 (1989), we can make out the Hoher Riffler mountain (3,160 m). On pages 16-17, it is possible to recognise the village and the church of Söll, near Innsbruck. In *Caroline fait du cheval*, the shepherds wear the traditional hat of Tyrol.
- 30 Probst thus anchors his narrative in real places. He wants to inscribe his characters in a reality constituted by "saillances" [salient features] (Thom, 1988), that is to say, identical places that succeed in crystallising both the culture of a territory and the territory itself. These places are used as references or benchmarks for the readers or the young readers' parents. Caroline, a young 8-year-old girl, always engages with new and real spaces, without any parents or adult guardians – only with her eight friends as companions. Moreover, in *Caroline déménage* (1987), the young reader will be able to understand that these companions are in fact stuffed animals.

The visitors

- 31 Together, Caroline and her friends form a single, complementary unit that appears to the readers as the main character of Caroline's adventures. Their way of dwelling in the new space in which they arrive is a problem at the beginning of each story, but in the end, they find a solution. The characters succeed in adopting their own practice of attachment. Therefore, the analysis of pages 16-17 of both books seems to us particularly significant in showing the difficulties that the heroes have to face in a new space.
- 32 Both boards play with the foreground and the background to show the opposition between an adopted practice and another one that is still in progress. In *Caroline aux sports d'hiver*, while Caroline and seven of her friends are going down the mountain and following the slope where the audience is standing, Bobi is flying in the air and getting lost in the mountains. In *Caroline fait du cheval*, while Caroline is leading a band of horsemen along the crest at the top of the mountain, Pouf is going in the opposite direction with his donkey, Fernand, and getting lost on the following pages.
- 33 Why are Bobi and Pouf getting lost? Bobi, without any experience, was not paying attention and did not follow the group. Pouf was too arrogant and wanted to clean the teeth of the donkey that he judged not to be honourable enough to him. The animal found some pine trees to get the toothpaste out of its mouth. Both inappropriate traits are punished. The loss of a member of the entity that is "Caroline" is a necessary step to show that territorialisation is difficult and risky. The event reinforces the idea that dwelling is not innate.
- 34 Finally, in *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (1959), Probst contrasts the winter in big grey cities (p.3) with winter in the sunny mountains (p.11). He writes:
"Les villes sont grises et maussades, le vent souffle dans les rues désertes et secoue les arbres dénudés." [Cities are grey and gloomy, the wind blows in empty streets and shakes the bare trees] (Probst, 1959: 3).

- 35 This extract contrasts with the extract I highlighted at the beginning of this article. On pages 11-12, Caroline is sunbathing, leaning against a shelter; on pages 29-30, she is returning home to a grey and rainy city. Unfortunately, this opposition disappears completely from the 1984 version. In fact, the mountain is seen as a place somewhere else that "de-territorialises". The mountain activities, in both winter and summer, lead to a precise way of getting dressed, enjoying and living. They are inscribed in landscapes that are highly "artialised" (Roger, 1995), that it to say referring to other mountains or every mountain in summer or in winter. All these elements contribute to giving the mountain a reassuring representation, the result of a long "mind making" (Bozonnet, 1977).
- 36 In conclusion, in Probst's books, the mountain in winter and in summer is a space of leisure, pleasure and consumption. It seems to constitute an adventure land for the uninitiated who must get to know its uses, practices and codes. Probst's works have not only constructed (and are still constructing) over many generations the concept of the mountain but also allowed and continue to allow the feeding of children's cultural and spatial capital (Bourdieu, 1979). I want to speak about the addition of intellectual qualifications given by the family environment, the meetings, the readings and the experiences gathered throughout life.
- 37 The books we studied can be considered places where communication between the author and the reader could provide information – spatial intentionalities – that, once gathered and incorporated, would constitute a spatial and cultural capital from which the child, then the adult, would be able to draw some solutions throughout his life to solve "spatial problems" – for example, linked to the attachment to some new spaces.
- 38 The mountain belongs to the unmissable experiences of about one-third of the books in series drawn for young people (Meunier, 2016). Authors and publishers draw a distinction between the activities that we can perform in the summer and those that we can do in the winter. The represented spaces are territories dedicated to consumption. The mountain is a land of adventure for all the characters we studied. All the twists and turns lived out by the characters are not unexpected; they are predictable because some characters fail to respect certain codes. Therefore, the mountain is not the same kind of space for exploration as it could be in romantic literature for young people. In contemporary children's literature, the mountain is a secure, appropriated space, a "symbolic space, vested with values and uses that define another way of travel", in which the traveller is nothing more than an observer (Urbain, 1991).

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ABSTRACTS

Caroline, whom author Pierre Probst created in 1953, is a very popular character in French children's literature. In the 44 picture books that comprise the series dedicated to her, she takes readers around different areas: domestic and distant, urban and rural, maritime and mountainous. Probst's picture books depict characters evolving in converted landscapes as they frequent inhabited territories. *Caroline aux sports d'hiver* (1959), the seventh part in the series, was published when winter mountain tourism started to become popular. And for its part, *Caroline fait du cheval* (1989), the 22nd book in the series, presented summer mountain tourism just as it was becoming popular. These two picture books, despite being situated in a particular temporality and spatiality, have been republished and translated many times over. This article seeks to show how the two works can be considered as geographical and cultural products and to study the iconotextual processes that make it possible to build mountain areas and to provide practical examples, which I shall call spatiality.

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Keywords: children's picture books, spatiogenesis, tourism, mountain, image

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