Depicting Fatness in Picturebooks: Fat Temporality in Malin Kivelä's and Linda Bondestam's *Den ofantliga Rosabel* and Anete Melece's *Kiosks*

ÅSA WARNQVIST
Swedish Institute for Children's Books, Sweden
Linnæus University, Växjö, Sweden

MIA ÖSTERLUND
Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Abstract

In this article, we analyze how fat bodies are written into two contemporary picturebooks, Finland-Swedish Malin Kivelä's and Linda Bondestam's *Den ofantliga Rosabel* (The Immense Rosabel, 2017), and Latvian Anete Melece's *Kiosks* (The Kiosk, 2019). They are representative of two prominent tendencies in contemporary picturebooks: the displacement of fat children's bodies and, depicted in their place, fat adult or animal bodies. We explore the depiction of fatness in relation to this lack of representation and show what narrative strategies enclose this absence. In contrast to earlier studies, we explore how fat-positive depictions are shaped. We use a theoretical approach new to picturebook studies, on how time and timelines put in relation to representations of fat produce meaning. Via the queer-theoretical concept *fat temporality* we discuss how manifestations of fatness in the two picturebooks express temporality. In *Kiosks* the fat temporality manifests a way of being in the world other than a normatively organized life span, and in *Den ofantliga Rosabel* queer paraphernalia simultaneously create a queer temporality and a queer utopia. The analyses conclude that both stories resist the predefined way of thinking about fat and time and that neither narrative centers on changing the person or the fat body. Instead, it is the protagonists' changed circumstances that lead to closure. However, the strategy of using anthropomorphization and fat adult characters in picturebooks aimed at children shows that fat is a complex issue, addressed in various and contradicting ways. The displacement strategies raise the broader question of how body norms and sizes are inscribed, and referred to, in contemporary picturebooks in general.

Keywords: *picturebooks, fat studies, fat temporality, Linda Bondestam, Malin Kivelä, Anete Melece*

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What do a cheeky, chubby pony in a stable and a dumpy, daydreaming salesperson in a kiosk have in common? In the vast landscape of contemporary European picturebooks, this pony and this salesperson are significant signposts for how fat characters are written into visual narratives. In this article, we turn to these two representations in order to exemplify how bodily norms are developed and how fat bodies are depicted in contemporary picturebooks. The two books – Finland-Swedish Malin Kivelä's and Linda Bondestam's *Den ofantliga Rosabel* (The Immense Rosabel, 2017, henceforth *Rosabel*), and Latvian Anete Melece's *Kiosks* (The Kiosk, 2019), the latter based on an animated short film with the same title that was released in 2013 – are representative of two prominent tendencies in contemporary picturebooks: missing fat child bodies and, depicted in their place, fat adult or animal bodies. The two picturebooks have been chosen from a broader corpus of books depicting fat characters within our ongoing research project "Body Politics and the Fat Child".[1] Our study differs from earlier research on fat in children's literature in that the material includes non-Anglo-American and non-Anglo-Saxon books. We also use a theoretical approach new to picturebook studies, on how time and timelines put in relation to representations of fat produce meaning.

Given the actual numbers of real-life fat children (World Health Organization, 2018),[2] one would expect an abundance of fat child bodies in children's literature to manifest diversity, but the fact is that fat child characters are vastly underrepresented in Western children's literature. This particularly applies to fat-positive depictions and depictions of fat protagonists and is connected to the medicalization and stigmatization of fat in general and fat children in particular. Fat studies scholar Katariina Kyrölä argues that this thin normativity reflects an internalized fear of fat characterizing Western society (2010; 2021). In accordance with previous research, we have concluded that fat children admittedly exist in children's literature, but as a rule they are subsidiary characters depicted in a negative and stereotypical way, usually used to ridicule, offer comic relief or caution within a health discourse where fatness is connected to different kinds of moral failures (see e.g. Webb, 2009; Flynn, 2013, p. 28; Averill, 2016; Warnqvist, 2017; Herrmann, 2018; Amato, 2019, p. 6).[3]

Fat studies scholar Anja Herrmann calls the general absence of fat bodies in picturebooks "missing bodies" (2018), an immense absence displaying a fundamental taboo

[1] The selection so far comprises of mostly contemporary Nordic picturebooks and picturebooks translated to Swedish collected via review work and our work with the Book Tasting at the Swedish Institute for Children's books, the August Prize jury, the Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Prize jury, and different working groups at the Swedish Arts Council. Through these different assignments we have read thousands of picturebooks during the 21st century.

[2] According to WHO's report *Taking Action on Childhood Obesity* (2018) there is an obesity "epidemic." "Childhood obesity is one of the most serious global public health challenges of the 21st century, affecting every country in the world," WHO concludes. According to the report, the "number of school-age children and adolescents with obesity has risen more than 10-fold, from 11 million to 124 million (2016 estimates)." WHO also estimates that an additional "216 million were classified as overweight but not obese in 2016," this including more than 38 million overweight or obese children under the age of five in 2017 (2018, p. 1). The idea of an "obesity pandemic" has, however, been challenged in lack of clear evidence supporting the claim of a general increase in weight or life-changing illnesses and mortality rates as a result of it (see e.g. Raisborough, 2016, p. 51).

[3] Two well-known examples of fat stereotypes are the depictions of Augustus Gloop in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) by Roald Dahl and Harry Potter's cousin Dudley in J. K. Rowling's bestselling book series (1997–2007) (see Webb, 2009; Warnqvist, 2017).

around fatness.[4] Our ongoing research on particularly Nordic picturebooks shows that fat children's bodies are constantly and consistently displaced. When fat characters occur, they are generally anthropomorphized animals or adults (Österlund, 2019; Warnqvist & Österlund, 2021). In this article, this tendency provides the frame of our analysis. We explore how manifestations of fatness are expressed in the above-mentioned picturebooks in relation to the lack of representation of fat children and show what narrative strategies enclose this absence. In contrast to earlier studies, however, we focus on fat-positive picturebooks with fat protagonists. In doing so, we go beyond the general stereotypes and explore how fat-positive depictions are shaped.

The intersection between fat studies and queer studies lays the ground for our approach to how fat is depicted in the chosen picturebooks.[5] Via the queer-theoretical concept *fat temporality* – here understood as a competing timeline which questions normative time through the presence of fat bodies – we explore how manifestations of fatness in picturebooks express temporality. In order to uncover how a fat temporality is utilized, we discuss antropomorphism and adulthood as two strategies used to depict fat bodies and thereby fill the space of the missing fat children in picturebooks. We are interested in what means – such as book format, narrative devices, and different aesthetical choices – and effects the creation of fat characters demands. Moreover, we ask what fat bodies in picturebooks stand for, and what temporal implications there are.[6]

The relationship between fatness and the social construction of time is a fruitful and pivotal intersection addressed from multiple angles, for example feminist and gender studies, critical race studies, disability studies, cultural studies, and queer studies. In children's literature research, fat temporality is not yet in broad use and our approach is therefore mainly informed by studies of the concept in other fields. However, some studies exist within the field, such as Michele Byers's study on fat futurity in the young adult novel, which stresses that the concept reveals how novels "carve out spaces in which fat bodies and their futures can be complexly imagined" (2021). In addition, Margaret Hass discusses tropes that govern fat teenagers' time (2018). As the concept of fat temporality is not used in earlier picturebook studies, our analysis paves the way for a completely new approach to this subject.

Based on our extensive reading of contemporary European, mostly Nordic, picturebooks, we can confirm that there is a fear of touch or even disgust surrounding the depiction of fat child bodies (see Herrmann, 2017, p. 16). Moreover, there is a range of strategies to avoid depicting fat children, primarily via different levels of displacement or smoothening strategies such as an overall aesthetic of roundness and use of perspective and proportion (Warnqvist & Österlund, 2021). On the surface, some of these strategies can be said to utilize different possibilities of visually depicting fat in picturebooks, but notably those depictions are highly dependent on thin normativity and linear timelines which limit the contribution to a disruption of normative conceptualization of bodies. Moreover, the term *fat* is almost never mentioned in these books.

[4] Herrmann draws on Casper & Moore, 2009, in her discussion of fat child bodies in picturebooks.

[5] See "What's Queer about Fat Studies Now?" (2021) by Allison Taylor for a critical exploration of how queer studies inform fat studies.

[6] Temporality is also a key concept in picturebook analysis with a specific terminology to describe how time is visualized (see Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, p. 139 ff.), but this is not how we use the term in this context.

Within fat studies, the term *fat* is used in order to avoid common euphemisms that make excuses for fat bodies (Wann, 1998; LeBesco, 2004; Wann, 2009; Parsons, 2016). Although the word "fet"/"fat" is actually used in *Rosabel*, the epithet in the title of this book is a typical example of such euphemisms. In this case, the word "ofantlig"/"immense" underlines both the size of the fat pony and her greatness in a transferred sense; she is a prototype girl power figure, therefore also metaphorically large.[7] In *Kiosks*, the body size of the protagonist is not commented on in the text – a typical strategy with the aim to manifest an inclusive and body-positivist approach (see Melece, 7 May 2019), but at the same time a displacement strategy. Apart from our tongue-in-cheek opening line in this text, we use the word *fat* to describe the protagonists in the two books under investigation.

Fat Temporality and Picturebook Narratives

Societal movements and activism such as body positivism have gained momentum during the last decades. An intersectional and material view on representation – in other words an approach building on aspects such as race, ability, class, and sexuality, as well as focusing on lived experiences of bodies – has also highlighted body size as an overarching category of structural oppression. Already in the 1960's, the Fat Acceptance Movement and Health at Every Size campaigned against the stigmatizing of fat bodies. Building on feminist and queer theory, the transdisciplinary field of fat studies challenges normalization, knowledge production, and the circulation of stereotypical body images. Fat studies enable us to think critically about fat and fat bodies while also making visible seemingly neutral structures and discourses that strive to normalization (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009; Rinaldi et al, 2021).

A key to understanding the complexities in depictions of fat and fat bodies is to study how fat and time interrelate and how fat existence and fat interventions cultivate temporal economies other than linear, capitalist, and colonial (Tidgwell et al, 2018). Elizabeth Freeman has coined the concept *chrononormativity* to explain how normative conceptions of time favor certain courses of time before others (2010). Studies of temporality emphasize that time is multiple and the term *radical polytemporality* acknowledges this idea of multiple courses of time competing (for instance courses of time connected to the home sphere, the nation, the political sphere and so on). Fat temporality is one of these competing courses of time which draws on the relationship between fat and the social construction of time. Often, but not always, fat temporality occurs in contexts where fat bodies are found, since fat bodies are considered to slow down normative time and break its chronology (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2005; Freeman, 2010; Helgesson, 2014).

Within fat studies, fat temporality is often connected to queer time.[8] Temporality is a central concept within queer studies to uncover the structural oppression where normative

[7] It is noteworthy that Malin Kivelä sought to reclaim and problematize the word "fat" also in the book's title. However, the intended title, *Rosabel – the fat pony*, was changed only by request of the Swedish publishing house in order not to offend readers (Kivelä, 24 August 2021).

[8] The concept of queer time has been theorized by, for example, Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2005; Freeman, 2010). See also, for example, Helgesson, 2014, p. 557. *Fat time* and fat temporality are used synonymously (see Tidgwell et al, 2018), but for the purpose of clarity we only use the term fat temporality in our analysis here. See

courses of time dictate a certain order of human living which forecloses certain bodies. The influence comes from Walter Benjamin's critique of linear time (1969). Queer studies have embraced this idea of time as a movement not necessarily forward moving, but containing wrinkles and folds, an image embraced by fat studies scholars since it reflects how the fat body with its folds of fat are conceived as a material expression of non-linear and non-normative time. Definitions of fat temporality often assume such physically anchored wordings (Tigdwell et al, 2018; Rinaldi et al, 2021).

As a queer-theoretical concept fat temporality is deliberately fluid and includes a spectrum of possibilities. The difference between queer temporality and fat temporality is that queer temporality signifies how norm-breaking temporality regulates bodies and vice versa, whereas fat temporality signifies how norm-breaking temporality regulates specifically fat bodies and vice versa. However, many fat studies scholars are vague in their definition of the term. They often draw on a critique of the idea of varying future prospects in relation to social constructions of time for certain bodies depending on their size or function, an idea in which slim bodies are favored and considered more viable. The linear orders of time asserted by health, normativity, and respectability discourses are then contradicted by fat temporality, which manifests alternative ways of being in that it disrupts normative hierarchies and bodily regimes. In fiction, fat temporality allows fat bodies to talk back to normative discourses and to question fat stigma and body shame (Tigdwell et al, 2018).[9]

As mentioned, a few studies on particularly young adult fiction use the concept of fat temporality within children's literature research, but the concept is new to picturebook studies and therefore we suggest our own definition.[10] By fat temporality we refer to a competing timeline which questions normative time through the presence of fat bodies. At the core of the definition is, in other words, the fat bodies' possibility to express fat temporality. The fat temporality is manifested both in fat, static bodies and in fat bodies in movement contradicting normative expectations on what a fat body can do from a social point of view (Tidgwell et al, 2018).

Following Tidgwell et al (2018), we also see timing and tempos in the narratives – in other words when something happens and at what pace – as crucial in the depiction of fat bodies in picturebooks. We also consider how sensorial experiences (touch, smell, and other sensory impressions), pleasures (something that feels enjoyable and rewarding), and timelines in new combinations together manifest an alternative way of being which disrupts normative bodily regimes. In our analysis this is connected to what the fat protagonists do, where they do it and how. In our material, for example, Rosabel confronts and overcomes thin normativity – manifested by the slim horses – by breaking out of limiting fences and expressing joy running outside of them, while Olga's situatedness inside the kiosk is characterized by the pleasure of sitting still and daydreaming, and at the same time oscillates between stasis and movement.

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also the concept *fattening of time* for the manifestations of a non-normative time (see Tidgwell et al, 2018, p. 122).

[9] See bell hooks, 1989/2015 for the concept of "talking back."

[10] Earlier fat studies within children's literature research have mainly focused on young adult fiction (see e.g. Quick, 2008; Younger, 2009; Webb, 2009; Flynn, 2013; Wedwick & Latham, 2013; Parsons, 2016; Amato, 2019, Byers, 2021; Hass, 2018). There are only a few fat studies of picturebooks (see e.g. Herrmann, 2018).

From the 1970's onwards, fat studies include a stronger direction towards visuality, manifested in a subfield called visual fat studies (Herrmann, 2017; Herrmann, 2018). A similar approach is mandatory for the study of picturebooks, where visual and verbal narration merge (see e.g. Doonan, 1993; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Not only do fat characters in picturebooks manifest bodily norms, but these norms are also embedded in, or comprise, fat temporality. In picturebooks, fat can be present on multiple levels and in both verbal and visual narration, even if, as pointed out above, euphemisms and smoothening strategies are common. As the analysis below will show, the visual manifestations in particular can expose and explore fatness in manifold and material ways. Moreover, the picturebook format and narrative conventions are utilized in the depiction of fat figures and fat temporality, for example via carvings, as will be discussed below (see also Warnqvist & Österlund, 2021).

Nicole Ann Amato, who examines the representation of fat female bodies, states that fat bodies in graphic novels have yet to be systematically studied and that graphic novels have the potential to disrupt thin normalization since the nature of visual narration is suited for complexity (Amato, 2019, p. 4). This can certainly be claimed for picturebooks as well, where there is not yet a systematic analysis of how the fat trope is present.

The study of fat in a feminist or queer-theoretical context has undergone several shifts since Susie Orbach declared that "Fat is a feminist issue" in her catchy phrase from 1978; an axiom within feminist studies, yet feminist scholars advocate clearly different views on fat, from early studies where fatness is considered a coping mechanism for gender inequality, and an unconscious desire to hide from heteronormative sexuality, to an overarching societal structure of fat haunting or overall internalized fear of fat (Hartley, 2010; Kyrölä, 2010; Saguy, 2012; Erdman Farell, 2021). What we discuss here, fat temporality, is a queer-theoretical way of interpreting fat, where fatness is reclaimed via temporality, gurlesque aesthetics,[11] and other means of opposition to normalized timelines, creating a fat-friendly temporality.

Rosabel and *Kiosks*

In both *Rosabel* and *Kiosks*, the fat is the very precondition for the plot and its development. In *Rosabel*, the core narrative is a story of bullying where the fat is the cause of alienation. The fat pony Rosabel is teased by the other horses and overlooked by the rider of her dreams, causing her to dream of an existence where instead of being bullied, she is chosen and important. The solution to her problem follows a classic storyline in children's literature (see e.g. Reimer, 2008): the protagonist goes out into the world (or, possibly, experiences the events as a dream), gets a taste of life outside of her own limited sphere, makes new discoveries and has new experiences while also finding a friend who does not judge her because of her appearance or body shape. Returning home, she has reconciled with both her body and her situation.

[11] As a queer concept the gurlesque, coined by Lara Glenum and Arielle Greenberg in 2010, refers to reimagination of girly and feminist traits, as well as with disruptive moments: "The concept of the *gurlesque* is an aesthetic mixing of feminism, femininity, cuteness and disgust (grotesque and cruel) and a gurlesque aesthetics combines feminism and queer theory with depictions of sweetness and disgust on both a narrative level and in the queer ideas on doing gender that the novels encapsulate" (Malmio & Österlund, 2016, p. 14).

The plot of *Kiosks* follows a similar pattern, although here the protagonist relocates to a new place after her adventure rather than returning, a consequence of the fact that in *Kiosks* it is the very location that is the issue. The narrative is driven forward by events that can be described as carnevalesque or comical, also common strategies in children's literature, as well as in depictions of fat characters (see e.g. Shieff, 2001; Stukator, 2001). The salesperson Olga is unable to leave her location due to her fatness. She is stuck in the kiosk and this spatial limitation makes her sad. It is not until the kiosk is turned upside down that Olga discovers she can simply pick it up and walk away with it, as if it were a big coat. A dog running around her feet causes her to fall into the river, kiosk and all, and she is swept away by the current, the kiosk now functioning as a boat. Olga ends up at sea and after a few days she reaches the island of her dreams. Still inside the kiosk, she relocates to the beach and starts selling ice cream.

Apart from the overall adventure pattern the two stories may seem different at first glance, but they have a lot of things in common, not least the fact that both Rosabel and Olga deal with the situation by dreaming, a central aspect to the analyses to follow: Rosabel dreams of being the star among the horses and of being chosen; Olga reads travel magazines and dreams of faraway lands.

The Picturebook Format and Spatial Modes

Fat bodies in picturebooks mark an intersection of discourses, surrounded by stigmatizing structural norms. As is often the case with complex phenomena, the figuration of fat bodies is situated in the midst of competing discourses (Flynn, 2013; Raisborough, 2016). In both *Rosabel* and *Kiosks* parts of the narratives include episodes or elements which can be regarded as stereotypical depictions of fat protagonists – for instance, Rosabel comfort eats carrots after a "rotten day"[12] – but when looking at how time is conceptualized in the books, other patterns emerge. Temporality and the discussion of fatness are addressed in quite different ways in the two books, but in both cases it is linked to spatial position, an aspect which unfolds already on the covers of the picturebooks.

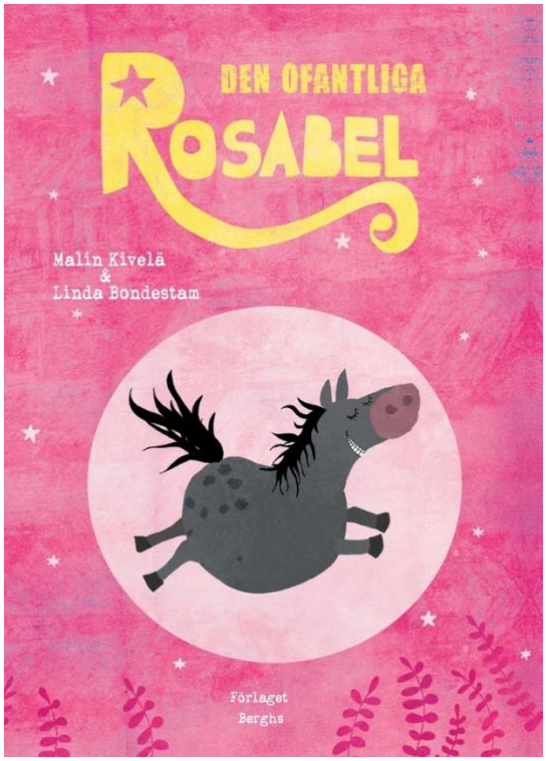
Both picturebooks have a carving on the book's cover, enabling the reader to see part of the image on the front pastedown and title page respectively. In both cases, these images center the main character of the book, thus underlining fatness as a material entrance to a fat temporality. However, the covers depict the fat bodies in quite different ways, connected to the shape of the carvings, round in one case and square in the other. In their multimodal analysis/visual grammar of images, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen point out that angular versus curved shapes carry opposite meanings: round shapes are often attached to something positive, such as nature or infinity, while square shapes indicate order, entrapment or oppression (2006, p. 54 ff.).[13] These meanings permeate the covers of the two books.

Rosabel is shown in full figure through the round-shaped hole of the carving on the book's pink cover, jumping and smiling contentedly in free space. The round shape of the

[12] Original quotation: "rutten dag." Quotations from the picturebooks lack page numbers throughout, since neither picturebook includes page numbers.

[13] Picturebook studies also provide thorough discussions of materiality and spatiality connected to our discussion of round and rectangular form (see e.g. Doonan 1993; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, Painter et al, 2013, Painter, 2018).

carving as well as the stars enclosing Rosabel function as a spotlight, amplifying the impression that Rosabel is confident and in effect the star of this book. The cover image and title of the book both emphasize motion, free space, and the expansion of possibilities (see *Picture 1*).



Picture 1. The round shape of the carving in the cover amplifies mobility and that Rosabel is the star of the book. From *Den ofantliga Rosabel* © Förlaget/Linda Bondestam, 2017.

The carving on the equally pink cover of *Kiosks* is square and mimics the kiosk window, hence the choice of the rectangular shape. It shows Olga sitting in her armchair while eating a cookie and reading a travel magazine with a dreamy expression on her face. Unlike the round shape surrounding Rosabel, Olga is not seen in full figure. The square carving shows only parts of her body, leaving the top of her head, large parts of her arms, and her body from the waist down hidden from view behind the cover. This narrative device inverts the concept of "headless fatties," a visual representation of fat bodies without heads coined by Charlotte Cooper (2007). The headless fatties emphasize the fat person as an anonymous representation which causes anonymization and depersonalization.[14] In Olga's case, it is not her head but most of her fat body that is hidden by the frame, emphasizing that she is not a representation but a person. However, the square carving also gives the impression that Olga is cramped in the kiosk. Turning the page, the front pastedown reveals Olga in the kiosk's equally cramped interior. In this small space Olga is surrounded by packed shelves and a floor covered with boxes of crisps, bottles, and different kinds of sweets. This multitude of goods manifests a capitalist assemblage where consumerist and self-control discourses intersect: it presupposes a control of eating which, as we will show later on, is questioned in the narrative as part of the norm-breaking discourse. The only space available for Olga is the one she seems to imagine, dreaming herself away to far-off places. At the same time as the cover of *Kiosks* highlights Olga as a person and

[14] Our larger material show that the "headless fatties" device is often used as part of a visual child perspective in Nordic and European picturebooks, focalizing from the child's view, but since the picturebooks studied here lack child protagonists this convention is not present.

not merely a representation of a fat figure, it thus also emphasizes immobility, cramped space, and limitations (see *Picture 2*).

Picture 2. The square carving and the image of the front pastedown emphasizes immobility, cramped space, and limitations. From *Kiosks* © Liels un mazs/Anete Melece, 2019.

As Elina Druker has pointed out in her discussion of Tove Jansson's groundbreaking work with carvings and perforations in *Hur gick det sen?* (*The Book about Moomin, Mymble and Little My*, 1952), the holes in the pages also disrupt a linear narrative and render temporality open and manifold (Druker, 2008, p. 81). Through their use of carvings, Bondestam and Melece allude to this possibility of temporal disruption. Thus, these fat protagonists are already from the beginning located within a temporality in flux.

As the descriptions show, the carvings on the covers display quite different depictions of how the two protagonists occupy space as well as two very different spatial modes or positions. In both cases, however, the narrative questions and contradicts this first impression. The body-positivist cover of *Rosabel* turns out to be a reflection of the protagonist's fantasies for coping with a reality of bullying, connecting the story to the structural norms linked to fatness, while the stereotypical depiction of the fat body's immobility on the cover of *Kiosks* is contradicted by the themes of travel and relocation that dominate the narrative. In both cases, the contradictions are connected to how temporality is expressed in the narratives.

Fat Temporality in *Kiosks*: Slow Tempo and a Non-linear Time

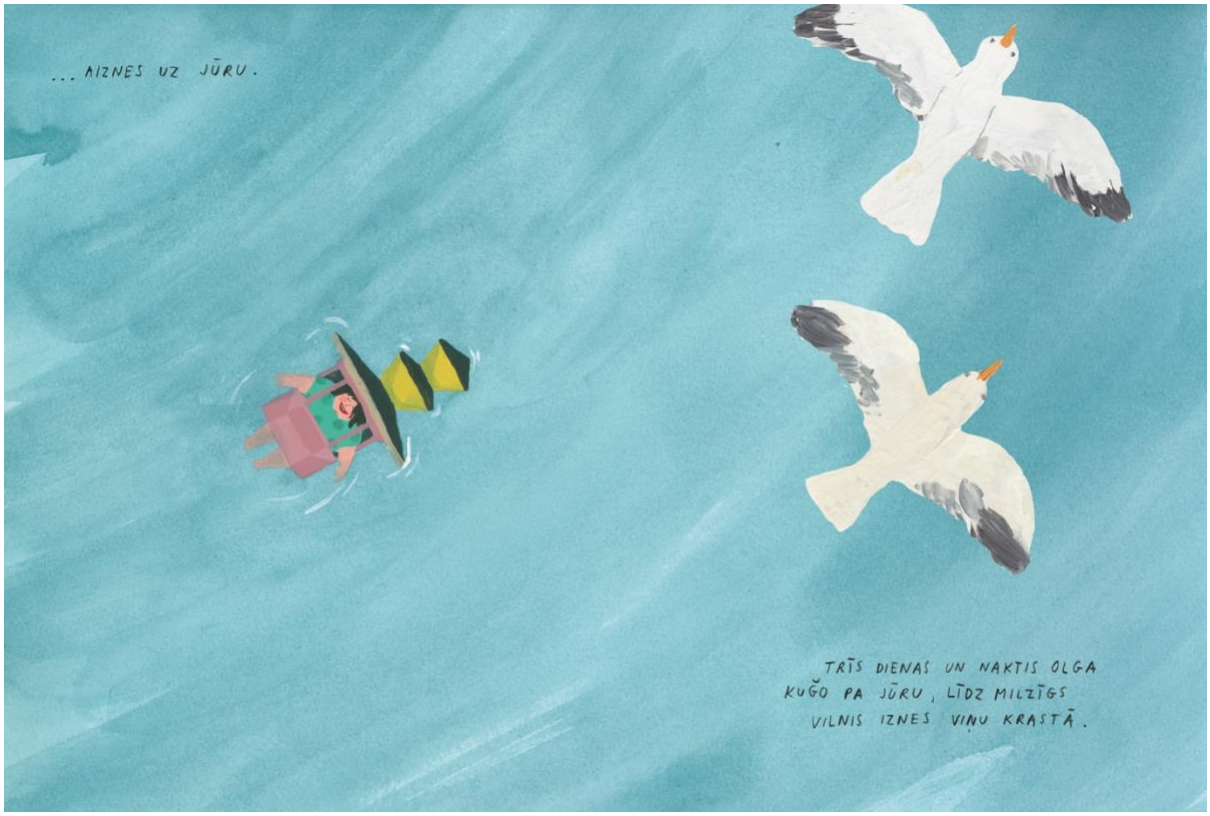
Normative time signifies a view on time which favors normality and a certain chronological life span, connected to concepts such as maturation, reproduction, and progress (see, e.g.,

McFarland et al, 2018). This is embedded in what Elizabeth Freeman defines as chrononormativity: "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (2010, p. 3). According to Catherine Jefferey, fat undermines chrononormativity, in other words fat bodies interrupt expected and normalized temporality and create a failure or a collapse of normative timelines (2019). Fat bodies can disrupt and make visible the chrononormative order merely by existing. They are considered to be altering or slowing down time by, for example, sitting still or lying down.

The stories of Rosabel and Olga both resist the predefined way of thinking about time and especially Olga's body manifests the chrononormative interruption. The fat temporality in *Kiosks* manifests itself both by a slow tempo and a non-linear time. Temporality is primarily built by the busy tempo of the city, with a steady flow of cars, exposing the parallel lifelines of the kiosk customers and passers-by (see *Picture 3*). Every day seems like the other, repetitive, but the slow time of Olga's fat and immobility marks a different pace than the outside world. Olga slows down time, first by sitting still in her kiosk fantasizing about a different location and second by surrendering to circumstances when falling into the river and letting the sea take her wherever it wants (see *Picture 4*). The sea voyage goes on for three days and three nights, until a wave casts her ashore on the island. Olga's pleasant journey can be seen in the light of Anja Herrmann's discussions of the visual analogies between marine mammals and fat women (2017).[15]

Picture 3. In *Kiosks*, the slow time of Olga's fat and immobility marks a different pace than the busy tempo of the city. From *Kiosks* © Liels un mazs/Anete Melece, 2019.

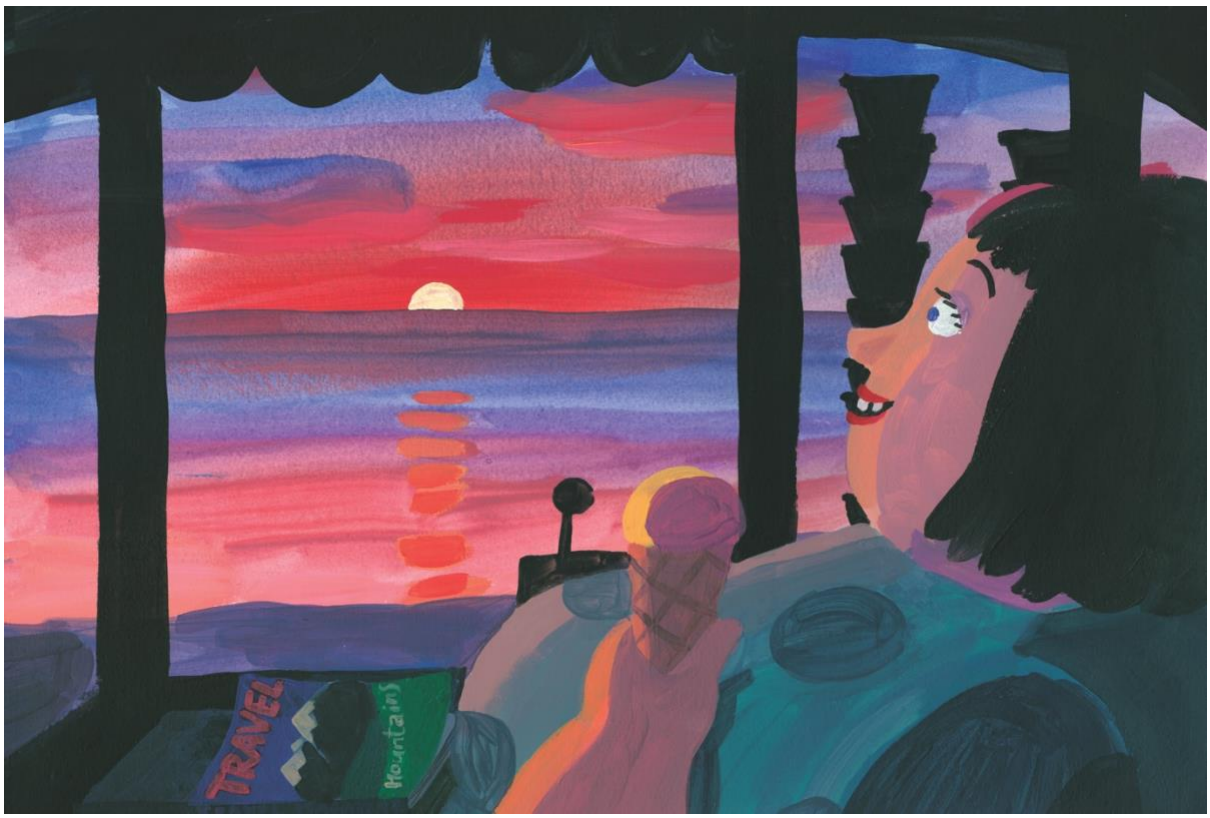
[15] Herrmann also points to the frequent visual strategy of mermaiding of fat bodies, in other words the association of the fat female body to both mermaids and mammals (2017).



Picture 4. Olga slows down time by surrendering to circumstances when falling into the river and letting the sea take her wherever it wants. From *Kiosks* © Liels un mazs/Anete Melece, 2019.

The emphasis on circular and non-linear time in *Kiosks* is underlined by the narrative pattern in the picturebook. It starts and ends with Olga relaxing in her kiosk watching a sunset (the first in a magazine and the second on the island) and having a snack (see *Picture 5*). Olga's eating of cookies, crisps, and ice cream in the beginning and end of the story emphasizes the circular composition and is easily read as comfort eating, a concept often associated with fat bodies, but also embedded in the discourses of fat as a feminist issue and thus enclosing a subversive potential (Saguy, 2012). The latter is manifested also in *Kiosks*, where the story destigmatizes and normalizes snacking and at the same time questions comfort eating as an appropriate term for Olga's relationship to food altogether. In the beginning of the story, it is made clear that Olga is sad because she can't leave the kiosk, but the text specifically states that she seeks her comfort in travel magazines and not the bag of crisps she is eating from. This is confirmed in the end of the story when Olga looks out on the sunset smiling while eating an ice cream. Olga eats crisps and ice cream not as part of the comfort-seeking act, but as a matter of fact. Eating and sweets are also related to an ethics of care expressed in the story through Olga's caretaking in relation to the kiosk customers. In both the beginning and the end of the narrative there is a spread containing a sequence of scenes of Olga exercising her ethics of care when taking care of her customers, first in the city and then on the island. Such actions of care no longer apply merely to traditional mothering but stand for a politics of empathy grounded in feminist ethics that stresses embodiment, situatedness, diversity, and the intrinsic sociality of subjectivity and care for others (Trites, 2018; Daly, 2019). Thus Olga's actions express what can be interpreted as a feminist ethics of care, and moreover becomes an important part of the circular composition, further emphasizing the fact that the issue in the story is not Olga's

fatness or that she is stuck in her kiosk working as a salesperson. Olga's relationship to snacks and the caregiving nature of her relationship with her customers show that neither of these aspects is the source of Olga's melancholy as they do not change during the course of the story. Neither Olga nor her customers comment on her fatness and Olga is content living and working in the kiosk. The heart of the matter is the place and Olga's need to relocate from the gray city streets surrounding her kiosk to the tropical beach with its colorful sunsets.



Picture 5. *Kiosks* starts and ends with Olga relaxing in her kiosk watching a sunset, emphasising a circular and non-linear time. From *Kiosks* © Liels un mazs/Anete Melece, 2019.

Another element in the story which underlines the circular composition and the fat temporality is the pattern on Olga's dress and nightgown. On the dress, big green dots against a turquoise-green bottom stress both Olga's connection to the sea and the greener environment she longs to, as well as connect the narrative to an overall aesthetics of roundness. Herrmann discusses the visual analogies of roundness, such as polka dots, as a sign of how fat females must perform fatness (2017). According to Katy Kelleher, the polka dot is a distinctly gendered pattern often appearing in queer culture, with a variety of cultural associations pointing to its different subversive powers. The dots themselves emphasize acceleration and disorientation, accentuating their inherent queer temporality, but as Kelleher concludes they can also be interpreted as symbols of energy and change, movement and infinity (2018), all aspects relevant to unpacking Melece's aesthetical choice of the dots on Olga's dress.

Olga's story also connects to the discussion within fat studies of who has a future, which is also underlying in the concept of temporality. "Today, fat bodies are often maligned of as having no future at all," Tidgwell et al concludes (2018). In *Kiosks*, the discussion of fatness and future is addressed through fat temporality. By staying in her kiosk, Olga refuses normative

embodied experiences and a normatively organized life span. Instead, the story manifests "other ways of being in the world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1) as successful, as emphasized by the different temporal aspects, political dimensions, and aesthetical choices analyzed above.

Rebellious Fat in the Queer Temporality of the Stable

In *Rosabel*, a linear narrative about bullying is layered with a dream or fantasy narrative. Time is mainly altered through Rosabel's fantasies, which appear as a possibility to disobey normative notions of time and body size. As a fat girl horse Rosabel occupies a common trope, the stable associated with horse books, but relocated to picturebook format. The fat horse is a clear-cut example of the displacement strategy, since the use of an anthropomorph allows for the depiction of a fat childlike figure.

Drawing on tropes from horse books, *Rosabel* depicts rivalry based on bodily appearance. The slim horses with fancy names referring to looks, like Iza Belle or Pinkyslim, tease Rosabel, who comes across as clumsy. Her fat body fails her in comparison to the thin normativity of the other horses when jumping obstacles. Rosabel is depicted as fat both in comments by others, by herself, and visually. "Heavy and fat! Heavy and fat! Agile as a dead jellyfish!"[16] the other horses neigh when bullying her. Not only the cover carving frames the depiction of fat; the back cover also underlines fatness, but in another way. Below the statement "For ponies that go their own way"[17] three thin horses fly effortlessly over obstacles, while Rosabel stands behind them, reduced in size on the page, metonymically referring to the obstacles that surround the fat body (see *Picture 6*). Kivelä's text is unusually explicit and comments on fat repeatedly: "I am fat,"[18] Rosabel states in a way that mimics the practice in fat studies, avoiding euphemisms. Nested in a strikingly normative setting, fat haunting is expressed throughout this picturebook, as when the mother figure of the story, Margaret, fails to accept Rosabel's fatness and clings to the common euphemism: "No not at all. You are only a bit chubby. And strong." Yet, her reply to Rosabel's complaint "But I'm not even pink!" points to a possibility of an alternative: "But you could be?"[19] The dialogue implies both a gurlesque aesthetics and a fat temporality, both in contrast to the highly normative setting.

In creating fat temporality, the picturebook draws on gurlesque aesthetics, defined as a playful liaison between conflicting girlhood tropes, resulting in combinations of pink practices and darker undertones (Glenum & Greenberg, 2010). Even the widespread Finnish phenomenon of tweenies riding hobby horses is represented, thus strengthening the connection to girlhood (Rask, 2018).[20] Moreover, the pony's name, Rosabel, contains the word "rosa," in Swedish both a girl name and the word for the color pink. It is also a telescope-word consisting

[16] Original quotation: "Tung och fet! Tung och fet! Smidig som en död manet!"
[17] Original quotation: "För ponnyer som går sina egna vägar."
[18] Original quotation: "Jag är fet."
[19] Original quotation: "Det är du inte alls. Du är bara lite mullig. Och stark. […]" / "Men jag är inte ens rosa!" / "Men du kan bli?"
[20] See Berry, 2019 for a description of how Finnish tweenies invented hobby horse dressage. Selma Vilhunen's documentary *Hobbyhorse Revolution* displays tweenies who discover their agency while crafting and riding hobby horses, nowadays a widespread phenomenon associated with girl power as it stands for a girlhood built on independence and playfulness. Hobby horse activities are aligned with the gurlesque in uniting a pink aestetics in combination with strength.

of pink (“rosa”), and rebel (“rebell”), while “bel” also refers to the French word “belle,” beautiful. Rosabel performs a rebellious, body-positive liberation from the original setting by disrupting both bodily and temporal expectations.

Picture 6. Rosabel’s failure to jump over obstacles metonymically refers to the obstacles that surround the fat body. From *Den ofantliga Rosabel* © Förlaget/Linda Bondestam, 2017.

Rich with girl power, the timeline of the book alters a gray and dusk stable reality through pink, rainbow-themed dreams. The latter blur and situate these parts of the story in the borderland between dreams and liberatory daydreams. The interplay of grayness and pink is similar to that of *Kiosks*. Initially, a dream of rainbows with Rosabel in a leading role expresses fat temporality by introducing an alternative timeline (see *Picture 7*): "It is her, / Rosabel, / the others follow. / She, Rosabel, / the rainbow waves. / A queen package, / a rocket of sparks / and a leap!"[21] Echoing the empowering attitude in Finland-Swedish modernist poet Edith Södergran's poem "Vierge moderne" (1916), Rosabel is called "Queen of everything," a saying also evoking a queer phrasing (see Urban Dictionary, 2011a; Witt-Brattström, 2011). In a dreamlike episode the Princess, a rider with pink hair, enters, but she always chooses other horses such as Raingirl or Pinkyslim, until one night when Rosabel is picked. The girl rides her standing on her back, alluding to prototype feminist girls like Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking, also standing on horsebacks. Thus, girl power imagery merges with a queer narrative strategy into an alternative fat temporality, a queer utopia, unsecuring what is real and what is dream in the story: the recurring references to rainbows, unicorns, and other queer paraphernalia simultaneously create a queer temporality and a queer utopia (Jones, 2013; Tang, 2019).

Picture 7. A dream of rainbows with Rosabel in a leading role expresses fat temporality by introducing an alternative timeline. From *Den ofantliga Rosabel* © Förlaget/Linda Bondestam, 2017.

[21] Original quotation: "Det är hon, / Rosabel, / de övriga följer. / Hon, Rosabel, / regnbågen böljar. / Ett drottningpaket, /en gnisterraket / och ett språng!"

The concept of *queer utopia* has a strong connection to body normativity as it refers to the ambition to "craft queer spaces where heterosexist discourses cease to regulate bodies" (Jones, 2013, p. 2). Fat temporality in picturebooks is part of a manifestation of such queer utopias. In her dream Rosabel wears heart-shaped sunglasses, has rainbow-patterned hooves and mane, and a unicorn accompanies her. The visual narration references My Little Pony. Taken together these are queer-associated paraphernalia, and components of a queer utopian space soaked with fat temporality. Consequently, the back pastedown consists of a dreamlike Pride parade with horses of different shapes, the majority My Little Pony-associated fat ponies, and a unicorn.[22]

Picture 8. Rosabel experiences freedom from bodily norms and hierarchies when befriending a hedgehog-like creature outside the stable.
From *Den ofantliga Rosabel* © Förlaget/Linda Bondestam, 2017.

After the dreams, which establish a profound fat temporality, Rosabel finds a kindred soul outside of the stable. When befriending this hedgehog-like creature, Rosabel is literally liberated as the two escape the paddock (see *Picture 8*). The creature, with its catalyst

[22] Both My Little Pony and unicorns are strikingly complex. Unicorns, common fairy tale creatures, are present in children's literature classics such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Harry Potter*, as well as part of a queer vocabulary, then a swinging term referring to a single woman interested in meeting couples (Urban Dictionary, 2011b). The excessive use of allusions that are part of both children's culture and queer practices renders the narrative open and fluid. One context does not close out another, such as the Brony-fandoms surrounding My Little Pony. On the contrary, the openness contributes to making fat temporality manifest (see Hautakangas, 2015).

potential, carries queer traits and repeatedly avoids gendering. When Rosabel asks what the creature is and what name it carries, the reply is nonsensical, with an assemblage of letters: "≈qΩ□263ıhæf÷çøéœπ‹." The only thing that the creature confirms is their friendship, and thus freedom from bodily norms and hierarchies.

The back pastedown shows four more fat ponies confirming a queer utopian timeline. By embracing her fatness, Rosabel has liberated herself from narrow gender expectations and performed a fat temporality consisting of an existence outside of the fence as well as outside of normative body expectations accompanied by gendered expectations on both looks and behavior. The slim horses who formed a girlhood trope of mean girls (see Flanagan, 2009), are outruled by Rosabel's fat existence and, by extension, by her fat temporality.

Conclusion

Since the mid-2000s fat studies has emerged as a transdisciplinary field, in the last decade also within children's literature studies; yet this is still novel ground in picturebook studies. Moreover, the liaison between the queer theoretical concept fat temporality and picturebook analysis is an even less researched area. With our article, we suggest this new and fruitful direction as a means to address the many taboos surrounding the depiction of fat in picturebooks. Given both real life discourses on fat and prevailing stigmas surrounding fatness, considering the imperative for more diverse children's literature, we consider the merge of fat studies and picturebooks studies a productive way of updating research with more nuanced analyses of body size. Not only do fat studies observe how tropes regarding body size and weight intersect with categories such as gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality; the context of a late capitalist neoliberal gender regime has also been scrutinized as the body positivity movement has lifted fat empowerment and fat acceptance, often via queer theory.[23] Here much can be done also within picturebook studies.

As girlhood scholars have questioned the trope of the strong girl, fat studies scholars question empowering paradigms such as "riot not diet," and the reliance on a strong and independent ideal. Instead, they emphasize a radical self-acceptance and self-love, including acceptance of pain and failure (Herrmann, 2017, p. 17). While Olga in her kiosk manifests such radical self-acceptance, in Rosabel a prototype girl power figure and a queering of girlhood merges. Both picturebooks portray the ending as happy, as the experience of something new – friendship and a new location, respectively – has changed the protagonists' outlook on their existence. Thereby, the narratives do not center on changing the person or the fat body. Instead, it is their changed circumstances that lead to closure.

As we have shown, fat temporality is a key device in depicting fat in picturebooks. As mentioned initially, fat is frequently renegotiated, and often told via visual understatements such as merely a hint of chubbiness, but in the two picturebooks analyzed here, fat is addressed in various, complex, and possibly contradicting ways linked to the queering of time. However, both books are also examples of the manoeuvre to avoid the fear of touch in depicting fat children. The picturebook makers use classic children's books tropes and narrative patterns to

[23] See *The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies* (2021) where for example Hannele Harjunen discusses fatness and the consequences of neoliberalism and Cat Pausé and Sonya Renee Taylor provide an overview of fat studies scholarship.

tell these stories directed toward child readers, but the strategy of avoiding fat children and instead using anthropomorphization and fat adult characters erases fat child bodies and renders them "missing bodies" (Herrmann, 2018).

We are fully aware of the fact that these are merely two examples, and we therefore avoid further generalizing from such a small sample, although plenty more examples exist in our larger material (see also Österlund 2019; Warnqvist & Österlund, 2021). As fat is an understudied category in children's literature, there is room for studies that explore fat in relation to, for instance, gender, age, and different national contexts of the publications of the books. For example, our larger material suggests that fat male bodies as a rule are depicted in other ways than female bodies like the fat girl pony and the fat adult woman discussed here (see, e.g., Fjeldberg, 2020). As we have shown, the tendency to avoid depicting fat child bodies results in the appearance of other fat figures and serves as an arena for a complex handling of fat.

The displacement strategies thus raise the broader question of how body norms and body sizes are inscribed in, and referred to, in contemporary picturebooks. As for Olga and Rosabel, we can conclude that they have a future with their fat. Rosabel's queer possibilities allow her to stand above the fat-shaming rhetoric of the other horses, whereas Olga continues her work as a caring ice cream seller, but now in her preferred location. Elsewhere we have discussed a slight slant towards the inclusion of fat child bodies in Nordic picturebooks, although still surrounded by a fear of touch (Österlund, 2019; Warnqvist & Österlund, 2021). The future will tell if fat-positive picturebooks really dare to depict fat, be it the fat of children, adults, or horses.

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