

BA Illustration: Research in Practice (ADAD5004)

Name: Brooks Hardman

Lecturer: Delyth Lloyd-Evans

Word Count: 2,565

Title: Analysing adaptations of existing fantasy stories

Keywords: Stories, Adaptation, Representation

Narration is a constant in all human cultures with causal communication systems. The phenomena of storytelling seems to have been present since the cognitive revolution, according to Hungarian professor and psychologist János László in his book *The Science of Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Psychology* (2008). His linguistic and scientific expertise supports the claim that narration plays a vital role in communication and culture. He quotes Roland Barthes:

Narration is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. ... Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, trans historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

(Barthes, 1977:79)

My first keyword is stories, due to the fascinating phenomena of narration and storytelling throughout human history. One form of storytelling especially present in modern media is my second keyword adaptation, defined as retellings of existing stories. As a consumer of stories and their adaptations, I chose representation as my third keyword because I also had interest in newer animations and illustrations that feature positive (or sometimes ambiguous) portrayals of the queer community, people of colour, and people with disabilities. I will be examining these keywords through the lens of Arthurian Legend in the UK and parts of France, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in Europe, and the tale of Cinderella across Europe and Asia. The purpose of this essay is to explore the above keywords, with the intention to form a proposal question.

Stories

The Cambridge Dictionary (2019) defines the word 'story' as a description or account of a connected series of events, either real or imagined. Stories are often how children first learn about the world. They tend to contain a lesson or moral, with the intention to safely impart wisdom unto the child before they learn that wisdom through firsthand experience. For example, a story about a person who gets lost in the woods and meets a tragic end intends to protect the child reader by deterring them from entering the woods alone. It is through stories that people of any age can experience an event or phenomena that they otherwise could or should not.

With the importance and significance of narration in human life acknowledged, one can move on to how narration is communicated. Visual and auditory mediums encompass the vast majority of communicative and artistic expression. In the visual field of illustration, the presence of story is near-vital. Illustrator Kadir Nelson communicates that “facial expressions, posture, hand positioning, composition, lighting, palette— all of these are very deliberate choices that help tell a story” (Brazell and Davies, 2014, p. 31). To explain is to tell a story and give detail, with the intention of clarification. Therefore, illustration itself is inherently visual narration.

Ancient Britain is famously known for its tales of the legendary King Arthur of Camelot, and his Knights of the Round Table. The exact details as to the historical origins of this figure are widely debated. Welsh stories of a 6th century CE warrior king who defeated the Saxons existed in the works of Gildas, a Romano-british monk in the 6th century, and Bedes, a monk and historian of the 7th century CE (Mark, 2017). Britannica states in their summary of Arthurian legend that “the legend was popular in Wales before the 11th century, was brought into literature by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and was adapted by other mediaeval writers...” (Britannica, 2007). Welsh cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth is indeed noted by most sources as the first of many to write of King Arthur in his pseudo-historical book *Historia regum Britanniae*, or History of the Kings of Britain, between 1135-1139 CE (Kuiper, 2011). He is even referred to as the father of Arthurian Legend by many, including modern day writer for the World History Encyclopedia, J.J. Mark (2017). Mark provides context for the preface of the book:

This passage introduces the reader to Geoffrey's problem which is solved when a friend of his loans him 'a certain most ancient book' which is exactly what he was

hoping for. He then claims that his work is just a translation from this ancient text into Latin. While some scholars claim that it is possible he had access to an actual 'most ancient book,' there is no doubt that Geoffrey made up most of his 'history' in an attempt to give Britain a proud and noble past.

(Mark, 2017)

Regardless of how truthful Geoffrey's 'translation' was, his book was the first to flesh out in depth the characters and narrative that would come to influence the whole of Arthurian legend. After Geoffrey follows many French, German, and English poets, most notably 12th century Chrétien de Troyes' five Arthurian romances, the various poets of the 13th century Vulgate Cycle, and Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* completed in 1470 (Britannica, 2018). One of many artists inspired, pre-Raphaelite British painter Sir Edward Burne-Jones created *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (1881-1896), depicting Arthur on his deathbed surrounded by women courtiers (fig. 1). The legend of King Arthur is a collaborative effort by writers, poets, and artists spanning nearly fifteen-hundred years. Beyond literature and art, Arthurian mythology has inspired works of every creative medium, such as film, graphic novels, music, fashion, and more. It holds a cultural impact far greater than that of the average folktale.



Fig. 1: Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (1881-1898).

Adaptation

The word adaptation in the UK Cambridge Dictionary (2022) is the process of change in order to suit different conditions. The American Cambridge Dictionary defines the word as a product or characteristic of something with the intention to adjust to different conditions or uses (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). These definitions are quite similar, however UK English speaks of a process or phenomena, while US English talks of a thing, or characteristic of a thing. This distinction itself could be considered a form of adaptation, if

one is familiar with the historical origins of the United States of America, and from where their most commonly-spoken language originates.

Adaptation is a word utilised in a vast variety of academic fields. From zoology to literature, almost all seem to relate in some way to organic life. One could then make the generalisation that adaptation is inherently linked to the living and the evolving. Expert historian and philosopher Yuval Noah Harari wrote about the evolution of humankind in relation to storytelling in his 2017 book *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*:

Humans think they make history, but history actually revolves around the web of stories. The basic abilities of individual humans have not changed much since the Stone Age. But the web of stories has grown from strength to strength, thereby pushing history from the Stone Age to the Silicon Age.

(Harari, 2017, pg 155)

Harari focuses more on stories as agreed-upon beliefs in society, rather than those of an artistic nature, but nevertheless his insight remains invaluable when establishing the impact of stories and their cultural adaptations in human history. Focusing on the phenomena of adaptation in different forms of media, such as film, literature, and art, adaptation often refers to the transference of a story from one medium to another. However it also applies to the retelling or reworking of a story, regardless of medium. Adaptation within illustration can be referenced by the growing use of digital art software, and the near necessity of social media promotion. It's almost a certainty that one will come across illustrations composed of both traditional and digital design in modern stores or advertisements. Writer for the

resource archive Illustration History Yuanyuan Zhou (2021) educates on the impact social media platforms have had on illustration:

The use of websites and social media raise the efficiency for illustrators in various aspects of their work. First, social media promotes the spreading of knowledge and information. It makes knowledge more accessible and affordable for artists who constantly seek professional skill improvements. Second, social media also makes the cost related to online self-promotion, marketing, and establishing small and micro-businesses greatly reduced for startups.

(Zhou, 2021)

Some of the most well-known adaptations have their origins in millennia old stories, such as the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, first preserved in literature by the Roman writers Publius Ovidius Naso (modernly referred to as Ovid) in 29 BCE, and then by Publius Vergilius Maro (modernly referred to as Virgil) in 8 CE (Kline, 2001). Over time many details of the legend have been lost or intentionally changed, but the core story remains the same: Eurydice, wife of Orpheus, dies and her soul descends to the underworld ruled by the god Hades.

Overcome with grief, Orpheus undertakes the poetically impossible journey to the underworld as a living soul in an attempt to save her. Once in the underworld, Hades tells the two lovers that they may go, but Orpheus must walk in front and never turn around to look at Eurydice, or she will be wrenched back to the underworld. The two make it almost all the way out, but Orpheus turns around to see his wife too early and thus loses her (Greenberg, 2021).

Orpheus & Eurydice is a tale that has been adapted and retold countless times across wildly varying mediums. Far beyond its origins as spoken or written word, the love story has

expanded to the more modern mediums of sculpture, comic books, musicals, film, and video games. The late French sculptor Auguste Rodin created the stunning work *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1887-1893), sculpted from pure marble. It depicts Eurydice still partially stuck in the mass of stone, a nod to her circumstances in the most climactic part of the myth. Far from capturing just one moment, Neil Gaiman's long running comic book series *The Sandman* which started in 1989 includes its own take on the story of Orpheus & Eurydice, depicting Orpheus as the son of the Greek muse Calliope and the main protagonist, whose many names include the one Oneiros.

Into the 21st century, sung-through musical *Hadestown* by Anaïs Mitchell first premiered as community theatre in 2006 Vermont, United States. The play grew in popularity and went through numerous adaptations over the years, performing in New York, Canada, and London. It landed on Broadway in New York in 2019. The musical follows both the love stories of Orpheus and Eurydice as well as the paralleled relationship between Hades and Persephone, set in a New Orleans-inspired world to the tune of American folk and jazz music. The 2020 rogue-like video game *Hades* from Supergiant Games follows Zagreus, son of the game's namesake, as he makes his way through hell. Like many reimagined characters from Greek and Roman mythology in the game, Eurydice and Orpheus's character designs (fig. 3) pop with vibrant colours and strong detail.

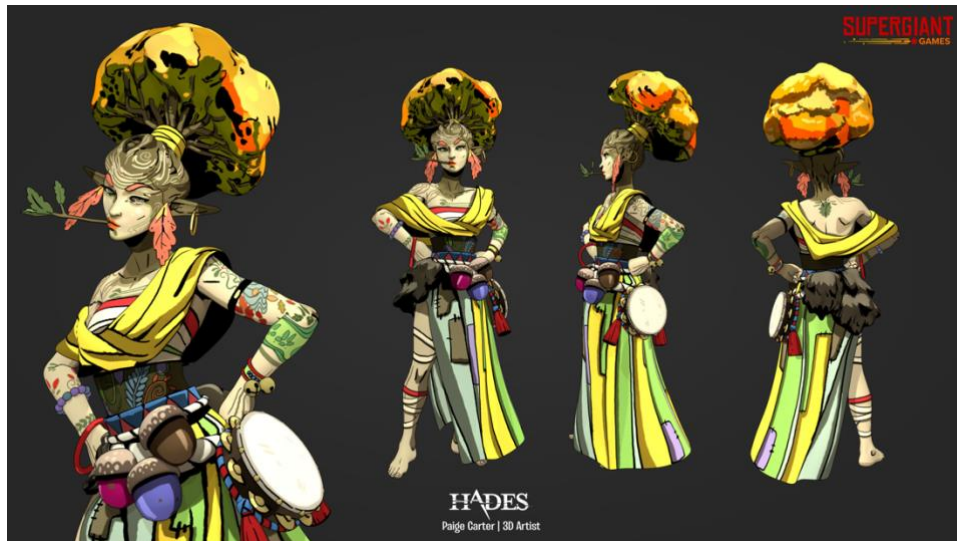


Fig. 2: Jen Zee and Paige Carter, Eurydice character design (2021).

Representation

The word representation has many definitions and applications. Jaños László (2008) dedicates Chapter Five: 'On Representation' in his book to the psychological and scientific analysis of representation in reality, dipping into the theory of semiotics. Although a real and valid use of the word, it differs from the Cambridge Dictionary's definition, "a person or organisation that speaks, acts, or is present officially for someone else; the way that someone or something is shown or described" (2019). Representation in creative media often refers to the quality and quantity of depictions or portrayals of marginalised groups of people. A 2015 Chapman University published a research article about a study they conducted in America that produced evidence of racial discrimination and depiction:

The current study content analyzes the 345 most viewed U.S. television shows within 12 separate television seasons spanning the years 1987 to 2009.... Content analysis results reveal severe under-representation of Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans, and a tendency to depict ethnic minorities stereotypically (e.g., over-representation of hyper-sexualized Latino characters).

(Tukachinsky, R., Mastro, D. & Yarchi, M. 2015, p. 2)

American artist Evan Turk produced a series of reportage drawings from the Seattle Gay Pride Parade in 2011 (fig. 5), reflecting that there's "often a lack of illustration that speaks about gay experiences in personal and understandable ways" (Brazell and Davies, 2014, p.103). Marginalised groups like the queer community, people of colour, and disabled persons have historically been underrepresented in mainstream western art. Because illustrations reach from picture books to advertisements and beyond, it's important for there to be representation and visibility of minority groups in commonplace and public art.



Fig. 3: Evan Turk, *Seattle Gay Pride Parade Reportage* (2011).

Cinderella is a well-known character of public domain in the western world (Zimmerman, 2019). The oldest recorded versions of the tale date back to 6th century BCE Greece and 9th century CE China, though their credentials depend on what we define as a Cinderella story (Dictionary.com, 2018). The tale was massively popularised as *Aschenputtel* by the Brothers Grimm in 1819, which depicted gruesome body mutilation and abuse (Akbar, 2021). As a folktale with multiple cultural origins, it is not difficult to find a Cinderella outside of the standard white European framework so commonly produced in media and art. Author Rafe Martin and illustrator David Shannon's *The Rough-Face Girl* (2011) depicts an Algonquin Indian (Native American) Cinderella who suffers from burn scars, providing representation both for First Nations people and burn victims.

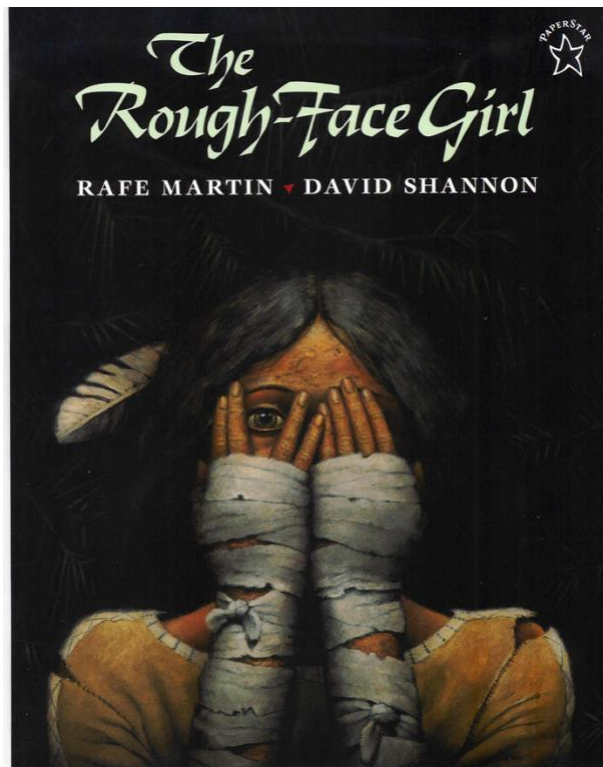


Fig. 4: Rafe Martin and David Shannon, *The Rough-Face Girl* (2011).

However, positive portrayals of physically disabled characters in mainstream art are usually severely lacking. Writer Margaret Kingsbury discusses the phenomena of negative portrayals of disability in fairytales:

Disability becomes a metaphor instead of a lived reality in fairytales. And this metaphor is so prevalent in narratives that it's become practically impossible to find any current stories where a disabled person can find a happily ever after without their disability becoming eradicated.

(Kingsbury, 2020)

One contradiction to the above statement is Marissa Meyer's sci-fi adaptation *Cinder* (2012). It features a young physically disabled version of Cinderella, an amputee who relies on a prosthetic hand and foot for movement (Emanuel, 2021). While the character does

face in-universe discrimination for physical conditions outside of her control, it is questionable if this is a positive representation of disabled people due to the high sci-fi setting. Often when there is a character with a prosthetic in media, they're outfitted with a superpowered robotic sci-fi arm, unrealistic to real life. *Cinder* unfortunately falls in this category.

Conclusion

Originally, I was drawn to the key words of stories, adaptation, and representation due to my love of many artworks of varying mediums, whose origins come from earlier sources. The works analysed by the keywords above were the Greek myth Orpheus & Eurydice, Arthurian Legend, and the tale of Cinderella. As a result of these analyses, I will continue with the chosen keywords, but perhaps analyse them solely through an Arthurian lens. My practice-based project will be a series of sequential art, illustrated both traditionally and digitally. They will be informed by Arthurian Legend and portraying marginalised groups. Artists that inspire my work and have been discussed in this essay are Jennie Nelson, Jen Zee, Paige Carter, Evan Turk, and Natasha Morley.

Proposed Question:

How can learning cultural stories of the past and their adaptations influence modern artistic storytelling, and positively affect the quality and content of the work of modern illustrators?

Bibliography

Brazell, D. and Davies, J. (2014). *Understanding illustration*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

[Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Britannica (2018). *Arthurian legend*. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arthurian-legend>. [Accessed 18 Apr. 2023].

Britannica (2007). *Arthurian legend summary* / *Britannica*. [online] www.britannica.com.

Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Arthurian-legend> [Accessed 11 Apr.

2023].

Cambridge Dictionary (2019). *REPRESENTATION* / *meaning in the Cambridge English*

Dictionary. [online] Cambridge.org. Available at:

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/representation>. [Accessed 11 Apr.

2023].

Cambridge Dictionary (2019). *STORY* / *meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary*. [online]

Cambridge.org. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/story>.

[Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Cambridge Dictionary (2022). *adaptation*. [online] Dictionary.Cambridge.org. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/adaptation>. [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Dictionary.com (2018). *Where Did 'Cinderella Story' Come From?* [online] Everything After Z by Dictionary.com. Available at: <https://www.dictionary.com/e/cinderella-story/>. [Accessed 18 Apr. 2023].

Emanuel, L. (2021) '*Cinder Characters: Cinder/Princess Selene*'. Review of Cinder by Marissa Meyer. LitCharts LLC. Available at: <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/cinder/characters/cinder-princess-selene>. [Accessed 20 April 2023].

Greenberg, M. and PhD (2021). *Orpheus and Eurydice: A Complete Guide* (2021). [online] Mythologysource.com. Available at: <https://mythologysource.com/orpheus-and-eurydice/>. [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Hadestown by Annais Mitchell (2019) Directed by Racheal Chavkin [Walter Kerr Theatre, New York, 17 March 2019]

Harari, Y.N. (2017). *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. New York, NY, USA: HarperCollins Publishers.

Kilne, A.S. (2001). Virgil (70 BC–19 BC) - *The Georgics: Book IV*. [online] www.poetryintranslation.com. Available at: <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilGeorgicsIV.php> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Kingsbury, M. (2020). *Thoughts About Fairytales and Disability*. [online] BOOK RIOT. Available at: <https://bookriot.com/fairytales-and-disability/>. [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Kuiper, K. (2011). *Historia regum Britanniae | work by Geoffrey of Monmouth*. [online] Encyclopedia Britannica. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Historia-regum-Britanniae> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Lászó, J. (2008). *The Science of Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Psychology*. [online] Taylor & Francis Group. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/trinity/reader.action?docID=348444>. [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Mark, J.J. (2017). *The Literary Development of the Arthurian Legend*. [online] World History Encyclopedia. Available at: <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1069/the-literary-development-of-the-arthurian-legend/>. [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Martin, R. and Shannon, D. (2011). *The Rough-Face Girl*. New York: Puffin. [Accessed 21 April 2023]

Merriam-Webster (2018). *Definition of ILLUSTRATE*. [online] Merriam-webster.com. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/illustrate>. [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

TheHistoryofArt.org (n.d.). *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* by Edward Burne-Jones. [online] www.thehistoryofart.org. Available at: <https://www.thehistoryofart.org/edward-burne-jones/last-sleep-of-arthur-in-avalon/>. [Accessed 21 Apr. 2023].

Tukachinsky, R., Mastro, D. and Yarchi, M. (2015). *Documenting Portrayals of Race/Ethnicity on Primetime Television over a 20-Year Span and Their Association with National-Level Racial/Ethnic Attitudes*. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(1), pp.17–38. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12094>. [Accessed 15 Apr. 2023].

Zhou, Y. (2021). *How Recent Technology Impacts Audiences and Artists: A Study on Social Media and Big Data*. - *Illustration History*. [online] www.illustrationhistory.org. Available at: <https://www.illustrationhistory.org/essays/how-recent-technology-impacts-audiences-and-artists-a-study-on-social-media-and-big-data>. [Accessed 15 Apr. 2023].

Zimmerman, K. (2019). *A public domain for Cinderella* | *MIT Libraries News*. [online] libraries.mit.edu. Available at: <https://libraries.mit.edu/news/public-domain-cinderella/29015/>. [Accessed 18 Apr. 2023].

Akbar, A. (2021). The Brothers Grimm Present: Cinderella review – a turbo-charged fairytale. *The Guardian*. [online] 19 Nov. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/nov/19/the-brothers-grimm-present-cinderella-review-barn-cirencester> [Accessed 18 Apr. 2023].

BBC Wales writers (2019). Wales history: Why is the red dragon on the Welsh flag? *BBC News*. [online] 6 Jul. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-47389680> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2023].

Brandenburg, A. (2022). There is no such thing as ‘historical accuracy’ of fiction. [online] *Language at Play*. Available at: <https://languageatplay.de/2022/04/22/there-is-no-such-thing-as-historical-accuracy-of-fiction/> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2023].

Cinderella (1950). Directed by Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, and Clyde Geronimi [Film].

Boston: RKO Radio Pictures.

Grimm, J. and Grimm, W. (2006). Household Stories by the Brothers Grimm. [online] Project Gutenberg License. Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19068/19068-h/19068-h.htm#illus-135>. [Accessed 15 Apr. 2023].

Holmes, L. (2015). NPR Choice page. [online] Npr.org. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2015/03/13/392358854/a-girl-a-shoe-a-prince-the-endlessly-evolving-cinderella>. [Accessed 15 Apr. 2023].

Nennius, active 796 (2006). The Project Gutenberg eBook of the History of the Britons (Historia Brittonum). [online] <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1972/1972-h/1972-h.htm>. Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1972/pg1972-images.html>. [Accessed 21 Apr. 2023].

Organization for Transformative Works (2023). Merlin (TV) - Works | Archive of Our Own. [online] [Archiveofourown.org](https://archiveofourown.org). Available at: [https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Merlin%20\(TV\)/works](https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Merlin%20(TV)/works) [Accessed 21 Apr. 2023].

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu [Portrait of a Lady on Fire] (2019) Directed by Céline Sciamma
[Film]. France: Pyramide Films. [Accessed 19 Feb. 2023].

Sagers, I. (2021). Opinion: Media representation for ethnic minorities remains important.
[online] The Daily Universe. Available at: <https://universe.byu.edu/2021/10/11/opinion-media-representation-for-ethnic-minorities-remains-important/>. [Accessed 11 Apr. 2023].

Vredenburg, E. (2013). My Book of Favourite Fairy Tales - Illustrated by Jennie Harbour.
Read Books Ltd. Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/15145/pg15145-images.html>. [Accessed 15 Apr. 2023].

Figures:

1. Jones, E. C. B. (1881-98). The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon [Oil on canvas]. Available at:
https://arthive.com/edwardburnejones/works/356483~The_Last_Sleep_of_Arthur_in_Avalon (Accessed 15 April 2023).
2. Zee, J. and Carter, P. (2021). Eurydice Character Design. [Image]. Available at:
<https://www.artstation.com/artwork/aYJLYz> (Accessed 14 April 2023).
3. Turk, E. (2011). Seattle Gay Pride reportage [Illustration]. Available at:
<https://evanturk.squarespace.com/blog/tag/seattle> (Accessed 14 April 2023).
4. Martin, R. and Shannon, D. (2011). The rough-face girl. New York: Puffin.