

“Ahead By A Century”: The Representation of Minorities in

ANNE

WITH AN E

Rosan Schoeman

S1043364

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Signed

Name of student: Roo (Rosan) Schoeman

Student number: S1043364

Abstract

The plot of Lucy Maud Montgomery's classic early twentieth-century children's book series *Anne of Green Gables* underwent several significant changes in its Netflix adaptation titled *Anne with an E*, directed by Moira Walley-Beckett. Montgomery's books are about orphan Anne's journey towards hope, home, and community, but lack representation of several minorities that are marginalised and erased in history. In contrast to the books, *Anne with an E* includes subplots focusing on gay culture, Black culture, and the experiences of Indigenous children sent to residential schools in this time period. I argue for the importance of representing minorities in (historical) adaptations, to provide a mirror for minority identities as well as provoke change and emancipation in contemporary society. After an investigation of the representation of these minorities, I conclude that the series provides a more accurate and diverse view of pre-WWI Canada than Montgomery's original books.

Keywords: Anne with an E, Anne of Green Gables, L.M. Montgomery, Representation, Minority Studies, Black Representation, Indigenous Representation, Queer Representation, Historical Accuracy, Fidelity, Othering.

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Introduction

“You are ahead by a century,” goes the intro song of *Anne with an E* performed by the Tragically Hip.¹ Adapted just over a century after the release of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s classic eight-volume book series *Anne of Green Gables*, the story of *Anne with an E* shows a modern and inclusive view of late nineteenth-century Prince Edward Island, as if the story is somehow set simultaneously in the late-nineteenth as well as the twenty-first century. This interplay between centuries has a curious effect: contemporary sensibilities overlay those of the past. *Anne with an E* is a coming-of-age period drama about an orphan named Anne who is adopted by Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert, siblings who both never married and need help around their farm, Green Gables. Anne gets into all kinds of trouble, but learns valuable lessons along the way. The series emphasises the joy of girlhood and the strength of a young, determined mind. In addition to this, the series shows late nineteenth-century Prince Edward Island and its reaction to cultural changes, specifically that of a Black man moving into town as well as their treatment of the Native Mi’kmaq people. There is also Queer representation through characters who struggle with their identity as well as those who have fully embraced it. *Anne with an E* has an 8.7/10 score on IMDB, and a 53% average ‘tomatometer’ with a 91% audience score over the seasons on Rotten Tomatoes.^{2 3} As Netflix originals go, that is a considerably good reception, which makes it all the more unfortunate that it was cancelled after its third season. The perspectives of Black, Queer, and Indigenous people are lacking in Montgomery’s original books, which means that director Moira Walley-Beckett made a conscious decision to step away from the original plot in order to diversify the series.⁴

While quite a lot of research has been conducted on Montgomery’s original books, the recent Netflix adaptation has been the subject of only a select amount of scholarship. The research that has been done about *Anne with an E* often focuses on the representation of girlhood from a feminist perspective, and on the presentation of the rural utopia that is

¹ The Tragically Hip, “Ahead By A Century,” track 3 on *Trouble At The Henhouse*, MCA Music Entertainment Ltd., 1996, <https://open.spotify.com/track/2SVEOxPGB8Z8WikO4DppNA?si=ba71783a48b146bf>.

² “Anne with an E,” IMDb (IMDb.com, May 12, 2017), <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5421602/>.

³ “Anne with an E,” Rotten Tomatoes (Rotten Tomatoes, March 19, 2017), <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/anne>.

⁴ Alison Elizabeth Hnatow, “Anne-girls: Investigating Contemporary Girlhood Through Anne with an E” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2020), 30.

Avonlea.⁵ This is likely because the Netflix series is quite recent (it aired between 2017 and 2019), so there has not been much time for critical reflection. The series has been lauded especially for its depiction of early feminism and its representation of the power of the young mind.⁶ *Anne with an E* and its representation of minorities has been the subject of research for a PhD dissertation (Hnatow, 2020), but not with much regard to historical accuracy – rather to the effect of the diverse surroundings on Anne and her maturation. It is important that more is researched about historical accuracy in the series, because representation is increasingly important in contemporary film and television in times of Black Lives Matter, Pride, and the Indigenous People’s Movement. While the representation in *Anne with an E* seems accurate and comprehensive from an outside perspective, it is important to check facts and investigate this case further in order to provide an answer to my research question: “In what ways does *Anne with an E* expand on the original plotlines of Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, and to what extent do the changes made in the adaptation provide a more accurate representation of life on late nineteenth-century Prince Edward Island?”

After analysing the additions, I expect to draw the following conclusions: The inclusion of Black, Queer, and Indigenous subplots makes *Anne with an E* a more accurate representation of the diversity of life in late nineteenth-century Canada than L.M. Montgomery’s original books. However, some aspects are still idealised, as modern ideals and values are projected onto the characters of the series. Sometimes, fidelity to a source text must be sacrificed in order to move away from heteronormative, Eurocentric norms, and *Anne with an E* proves that the inclusion of minorities into a series enriches the narrative. The representation of minorities is important both to members of these groups as well as the general audience, as the former can gain self-acceptance by seeing themselves represented on the big screen, and the latter can gain knowledge and acceptance of minorities they are not familiar with. While all three additions to the plot are significant, the inclusion of the plot surrounding residential schools is the most critical, because the show accurately depicts a situation that is mostly erased from history.

In order to analyse representation in *Anne with an E*, I will first define ‘representation’ and discuss Stuart Hall’s theory of representation as well as Edward Said’s idea of representation. Stoddard et al.’s concept of ‘the burden of historical representation,’ together

⁵ See “From *Anne of Green Gables* to *Anne with an E*: the Avatars of a Canadian Heroine” by Cécile Fouache (2019), or “Two “Matriarchal Utopias”: A Comparative Study of *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery and its Netflix Adaptation” by Kornelia Niewitowska (2020).

⁶ See “*Anne with a Me*: Adapting to New Adaptations of *Anne*” by Jessica Carniel.

with Leavitt et al.'s theories about underrepresentation of minorities, will provide a solid basis onto which to build my argument. Leavitt et al. and Monk-Turner's ideas about media as surrogate representation and the dangers of stereotypes in the media can be used to define the effect of *Anne with an E*'s representation on a modern audience. The concept of othering is represented in the series, but *Anne with an E* is not participating in othering itself. The concept of queerbaiting needs to be addressed in order to analyse Queer representation in the series. Finally, it is significant to look at the idea of fidelity to a source text, and why adaptations are sometimes better off stepping away from their source. Here, Thomas Leitch's 'Twelve Fallacies in Adaptation Theory' comes into play.

The remainder of this thesis will be comprised of four chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter has its own focus. In Chapter 1, I will contextualise theories about representation in connection to my topic of research. Chapter 2 is the first analysis chapter, in which the representation of Black people in *Anne with an E* is analysed. Here, I look at the treatment of Black characters by the Avonlea townspeople, and consider the idealisation of this reception. Chapter 3 is about the representation of Queer people in the series, and looks into several characters' queerness or possible queer coding as well as queer experiences from L.M. Montgomery's own life. Chapter 4 is focused on the perspective of the Indigenous Mi'kmaq people who inhabit Prince Edward Island, looking in particular at the experiences of Ka'kwet, who is sent to a residential school. This subplot is one of the most graphic and gruesome of the series, and provides a representation of residential schools that is otherwise often eschewed in film and television. In the conclusion I will synthesise my findings and decide whether or not the additions make for a more historically accurate view than Montgomery's books. I will also consider further research that can and should be done into the series and its representation.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

In order to investigate representation in *Anne with an E*, it is important to establish the meaning of the word representation. In the field of Representation Studies, Stuart Hall's theories stand central. According to Hall, representation is "an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture," involving signs that represent things.⁷ Signs are words, sounds, or images which carry meaning, and they represent the concepts and conceptual relations between them, which we in turn translate into meaning.⁸ Meaning, then, is constructed *by* the system of representation. In thinking about culture, there are codes that fix the relationships between concepts and signs.

The concepts and signs that make up representation are not as important in this analysis, since I must focus on the cultural significance of representation instead of its internal workings. Shehla Burney simply defines representation as the means by which society represents itself.⁹ In accordance with Edward Said's postcolonial theory of Orientalism, she makes a distinction between representation and re-presentation, with re-presentation functioning as a mode of empowerment stemming from the desire to break stereotypes.¹⁰ Re-presentation is a way to deconstruct the stereotypical narratives in which the Other is objectified and marginalised. The representation/re-presentation distinction is important to take note of in the analysis of *Anne with an E*'s presentation of minorities, as representation might be stereotypically charged.

Stereotypes are often present in representation, and it is important to avoid them as much as possible in cultural reproduction. In order to succeed in this, Stoddard et al. developed the concept of 'the burden of historical representation,' based on the existing concept of 'the burden of representation.' Shohatt and Stam explain that there is a 'burden of representation' in film representations of historically marginalised groups: there is a great burden in terms of stereotypes pervaded or roles played in cultural reproduction.¹¹ Stoddard et al. built on this

⁷ Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* 2 (1997): 1.

⁸ Hall, "The Work of Representation," 4.

⁹ Shehla Burney, "Chapter Three: 'Re-Doing the Narratives of Empire': Representation and Re-Presentation," *Counterpoints* 417 (2012): 61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981700>.

¹⁰ Burney, "Re-Doing the Narratives of Empire," 62.

¹¹ Jeremy Stoddard, Alan Marcus, and David Hicks, "The Burden of Historical Representation: The Case of/for Indigenous Film," *The History Teacher* 48, no. 1 (2014): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43264376>.

concept and furthered it into the ‘burden of historical representation,’ which can be used as a model “for examining how well films represent the pasts and perspectives of historically marginalised groups.”¹² They found that this concept is useful especially because film is often used as a medium through which to teach the history of marginalised groups. The burden of historical representation could be met “through developing complex characters and rich personal stories that challenge traditional historical and film narratives, which have generally focused on Eurocentric history and appealed to white audiences.”¹³ This is comparable to Said’s idea of re-presentation, as it indicates representation without stereotyping. Stoddard et al. do acknowledge that using the burden of historical representation does not imply that films can be completely historically accurate, or even need to be so in order to be an effective medium through which to engage with the past. They argue that the perspectives of films and media must be considered, and that the stories that are being told need to be contextualised.¹⁴ Stoddard et al. analyse multiple films that are made by or made for Indigenous audiences, and conclude that the use of largely Western genre conventions can broaden the intended audience of a film, but also takes away some power of the messages in the film.¹⁵ *Anne with an E* is not a Western, which already puts it on the right path towards meeting the burden of historical representation.

Leavitt et al. claim that mass media offers a variety of characterisations associated with different groups, which in turn are associated with different ways in which to be a person in society. These representations often reify stereotypes of groups, with Leavitt et al. mentioning African Americans as athletes and women as sexualised beings as examples. These representations vary in quality (accuracy and valence) as well as quantity (number and breadth).¹⁶ They argue that for ‘unmarked’ social groups, like white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class individuals, the media provides accurate and varied representations. Yet, for social groups that deviate from the aforementioned unmarked norm, like persons of colour or the LGBTQ+ community, the media often provides a narrow and predominantly negative view.¹⁷ Leavitt et al. quote a study by Fryberg and Townsend (2008) which concludes that when a certain group is underrepresented in the media, “members of that group are deprived

¹² Stoddard et al., “The Burden of Historical Representation,” 15.

¹³ Stoddard et al., “The Burden of Historical Representation,” 15.

¹⁴ Stoddard et al., “The Burden of Historical Representation,” 16.

¹⁵ Stoddard et al., “The Burden of Historical Representation,” 23.

¹⁶ Peter A. Leavitt et al., “‘Frozen In Time’: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding,” *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 1 (2015): 40.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12095>.

¹⁷ Leavitt et al., “Frozen In Time,” 40.

of messages or strategies for how to be a person.”¹⁸ Both the quality and the quantity of representations are limited for minority groups, which conveys the message that members of these minorities do not belong. Minority representation in television can thus validate the existence of these groups, but both quality and quantity need to be taken into account.

Leavitt et al. assert that mass media is a potent channel through which social and cultural representations are created and maintained. Mass media provide a surrogate representation for real-world exposure, meaning that interpersonal contact between social groups is generated where real contact is limited or non-existent: popular media is often the only exposure some groups have to other groups. Leavitt et al. argue that this is useful, but becomes problematic when the media conveys harmful or inaccurate representations, or when it fails to provide representation at all.¹⁹ Monk-Turner et al. contribute to this discussion that television is a cultural artifact that have the potential to impact how minority groups are perceived by wider society.²⁰ The fact that minorities are generally negatively stereotyped is problematic in that it shapes how viewers consider minority groups. It is thus important for media to be inclusive and representative without turning to common, often harmful stereotypes.²¹ In other words, the media must refrain from ‘othering.’ Black, Indigenous, and Queer communities are all the ‘Other’ to the norm of white, cisgender, heterosexual people. Michael Schwalbe describes othering as “the defining into existence of a group of people who are identifiable, from the standpoint of a group with the capacity to dominate, as inferior.”²² The dominance of white, cishet people over ‘others’ is obvious throughout history, as minorities have always faced oppression from this group. T. Richard Snyder states that it is only natural to consider ourselves as ‘us’ and others as ‘the other,’ but that we engage in othering once a group “differentiates itself at the expense of or with the denial of the full humanity of people who are different.”²³ In *Anne with an E*, some characters are actively othering or being othered, but the series itself is not presenting white, heterosexual people as superior over minorities.

¹⁸ Leavitt et al., “Frozen In Time,” 40.

¹⁹ Leavitt et al., “Frozen In Time,” 42.

²⁰ Elizabeth Monk-Turner, Mary Heiserman, Crystle Johnson, Vanity Cotton, and Manny Jackson, “The Portrayal of Racial Minorities on Prime Time Television: A Replication of the Mastro and Greenberg Study a Decade Later,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 32, no. 2 (2010): 102. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23416158>.

²¹ Monk-Turner et al., “The Portrayal of Racial Minorities,” 103.

²² Michael Schwalbe, “The Elements of Inequality,” *Contemporary Sociology* 29, no. 6 (2000): 777. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2654084>.

²³ T. Richard Snyder and George Yancy, “The Roots of Othering,” in *A Future without Walls: Confronting Our Divisions*, 52. 1517 Media, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17vf40b.8>.

Moreover, in order to provide representation and validation, it is important to avoid ‘queerbaiting’ in contemporary television. This is a “fan-conceived term that describes a tactic whereby media producers suggest homoerotic subtext between characters [...] that is never intended to be actualised on screen.”²⁴ Queerbaiting is aligned with the invalidation of queer identities, and can be harmful to members of the LGBTQ+ community. Cultural industries tend to exploit the queer community in order to reach a wider audience, without living up to the promise of actual minority representations. Queerbaiting is especially harmful when there is a complete lack of actualised queer relationships on screen, and the distinction between queerbaiting and homoerotic potential should be taken into account. Those with queer identities tend to look for representation of their identities (because it is scarce), and might read more into platonic relationships than intended.²⁵ In this situation, the audience is ‘queering’ heterosexual characters.

Finally, since I am analysing a contemporary adaptation of a historical book series, changes made to the narrative can influence the faithfulness to the source text. Fidelity to a source has long been used as a criterion in the analysis of adaptations, but has been shown to undermine the idea of an adaptation. Thomas Leitch, describing twelve fallacies in adaptation theory, comes to the conclusion that fidelity is a hopelessly fallacious measure in analysing adaptations, because the source text will always be superior in being itself.²⁶ While an adaptation needs to have a relation to its source text, it is unavoidably influenced by circumstances like previous adaptations and contemporary society’s norms and ideals. Adaptations of historical fiction re-present history while representing a dialogue between the past and the present reality.²⁷ Stepping away from the source text in order to meet the burden of representation will therefore not undermine the nature of *Anne with an E* as an adaptation.

²⁴ Joseph Brennan, “Queerbaiting: The ‘Playful’ Possibilities of Homoeroticism,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2018): 189. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1367877916631050>.

²⁵ Brennan, “Queerbaiting,” 195.

²⁶ Thomas M. Leitch, “Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory,” *Criticism* 45, no. 2 (2003): 161. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2004.0001>.

²⁷ Ariane Hudelet, “Austen and Sterne: Beyond Heritage,” in *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*, ed. Deborah Cartmell (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 259.

Chapter 2: Black Representation in *Anne with an E*

Whiteness is central to *Anne of Green Gables*, with no mention of Black people anywhere in Montgomery's eight-book series. So too does whiteness seem to be central to *Anne with an E*, with no persons of colour present or even mentioned in the first season. Elizabeth Hnatow, quoting David, explains that Moira Walley-Beckett always planned on diversifying the narrative of *Anne of Green Gables* in a historically accurate and inclusive method.²⁸ However, it seems to be difficult to write Black experiences into a predominantly white narrative, as proved by the roundabout way in which Bash is introduced to the plot. A specific explanation seems to be necessary for why a Black character is introduced to the series. The addition of Black characters allows the series to show the experiences of Black people in Canada in that time period, highlighting both struggles and good experiences of this often erased community.

The people of Avonlea have a hard time accepting strangers in their midst, as already evidenced by the arrival of Anne herself, and they have never had a Black person in their town. Hnatow notes that Anne's struggles because of her hair colour can, in a slight way, be compared to the discrimination that Black people face. However, Anne's red hair does not negate her whiteness, and Anne is always quickly forgiven when she gets into trouble.²⁹ The extent to which Anne is disadvantaged because of her ginger hair does not come close to the discrimination faced by those with a darker skin tone, but in the first season she is heavily othered because of her past. She is an orphan, and comes from a different island. This is already enough for the Avonlea inhabitants to show prejudice and discrimination towards Anne, and for her to be seen as inferior. However, because she is white, this prejudice is quickly overcome and the othering stops. While at first, Anne is the one being othered for being an orphan, othering is shown in full effect once Bash comes into the picture.

The first appearance of a Black character in *Anne with an E* is in Season 2 episode 1. Gilbert, Anne's classmate, goes to work on a steamship to follow up on his father's dying wish, where he meets Bash – who has been working in the engine room for nearly ten years by that time. Most of the workers on the ship are Black, and Gilbert is seen as a privileged

²⁸ Hnatow, "Anne-girls," 30.

²⁹ Hnatow, "Anne-girls," 29.

white boy who has the option to go back to a safe life at any point in time. Bash tells him: “I been trimmer for 10 years. More. This is all I have. I can't move up, this is it for me. And there ain't nothin' for me on dry land. You're a white boy... You got options. You're a tourist, Blythe.”³⁰ Despite their differences, Gilbert and Bash soon become friends, and when the steamship arrives in Trinidad, Bash shows Gilbert the delicacies that can only be found there. White people around the town discriminate against Bash, and this is the first time Gilbert experiences discrimination in such fashion. This shows how oblivious people from predominantly white communities can be towards discrimination.

In Season 2 episode 4, Gilbert and Bash come across a woman in labour who is being thrown out of the public house she lived in. Gilbert wants to help her, but the woman is deathly afraid of Gilbert and assumes he wants to take advantage of her because he is white. The child turns out to be a boy, and Gilbert tries to reassure her that he can help. With the promise from Bash that Gilbert can be trusted, she allows him to aid her. This is a crucial moment for Gilbert, because this incident helps him decide he wants to go back to school to pursue medicine, which in turn is crucial for Bash: in Season 2 episode 5, Gilbert moves back to Avonlea and takes Bash with him to co-own his farm.

In Season 2 episode 6, Marilla goes to Gilbert's farm to welcome him home, and Bash opens the door. Marilla is shocked to see a Black person, but quickly recovers, remembers her manners, and invites Bash and Gilbert to Christmas dinner. Because Bash is vouched for by Gilbert, Marilla is able to overlook her prejudice. Matthew, on the other hand, has a particularly hard time with his presence and says nothing at all. Later that episode, Bash comes around to the Avonlea Christmas Pantomime, where he helps Gilbert backstage. Town-gossip Rachel Lynde assumes that Gilbert hired Bash as a help, because in her eyes, Black people only exist as servants. Rachel comes around and apologises to Bash a few episodes later, when she sees how he is treated by a train conductor. Here, it is shown how Rachel can overcome her upbringing and prejudice, because she realises the faults of her judgement and the profound effect of her behaviour on Bash. Matthew also quickly warms to his new neighbour, especially when Bash marries and has a child: Matthew grows extremely fond of little Delphine.

³⁰ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 1, “Youth is the Season of Hope,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired July 6 2018, on Netflix, 17:19-17:38, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

The way in which the reception of Bash is portrayed in the series shows that children often overlook matters such as race, evidenced by Gilbert's surprise at how people treat Bash and Anne's immediate acceptance of Bash. The older inhabitants have a harder time finding the place in their hearts, and some of the eldest men in the community refuse to accept Bash and his family at all. This should show children who watch the show a good ideal to strive after, since they see how it is up to them to make a change, and that kindness and acceptance go a long way.

Whitfield explains that Black migration is "one of the hallmarks of Atlantic Canadian history."³¹ The migration of Black people to Canada, whether forced or voluntary, formed a connection between the Atlantic region (comprised of the Canadian provinces located on the Atlantic coast, excluding Quebec), Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. In 1815, the migration flow had grown so big that the Nova Scotia Assembly tried (unsuccessfully) to block further Black immigration into the region, arguing that Black people were "unfitted by nature to this climate, or an association with the rest of His Majesty's colonists."³² The stereotype drawn upon in this statement is perpetuated in *Anne with an E*, where Trinidadian Bash wears several coats to get through the harsh Avonlea winter. However, Bash shows resilience, and he even meets his future wife because of his tendency to get cold. It is important to note that it is Bash himself who comments on his dislike of the cold, and that it is not used as a stereotype or as argument against his moving into Avonlea at any point in the series. This is representation, as a common stereotype now serves as empowerment.

Cecil Foster explains that the Black community has a long history of exclusion from Canadian society, while being among the earliest settlers in Canada apart from the Aboriginals.³³ Hnatow asserts that the Black community on Prince Edward Island, and specifically the part of Charlottetown called 'the Bog,' is a historically erased community.³⁴ Mary, who serves as a love interest for Bash, is from the Bog, which provides for various scenes set in different parts of the neighbourhood. The Bog was a real neighbourhood in 1800s Canada, and MacEachern argues that the Bog is important to the history and culture of

³¹ Harvey Amani Whitfield, "The African Diaspora in Atlantic Canada: History, Historians, and Historiography," *Acadiensis* 46, no. 1 (2017): 213. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44784961>.

³² Whitfield, "The African Diaspora," 215.

³³ Cecil Foster, "Oldest Loyalists: Blacks and the Social Evolution of Liberal Citizenship and Multiculturalism in Canada," *The CLR James Journal* 20, no. 1/2 (2014): 258. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26752072>.

³⁴ Hnatow, "Anne-girls," 29.

Prince Edward Island of that time.³⁵ The portrayal of the Bog in *Anne with an E* shows it as it would have been in that time, inhabited by descendants of free slaves, immigrants, and poor people of both Black and white descent. The show also portrays the prejudice of Avonlea's inhabitants towards the Bog, with Gilbert referring to it as "sad and unlawful and full of poverty" – to which Bash adds: "and people who resemble me."³⁶ The inclusion of the Bog in *Anne with an E* highlights settler effect while also showing independent Black communities, and it adds to the series a decolonial and inclusionary narrative.

It is interesting to compare the portrayal of Black men with that of Black women in *Anne with an E*, as the only Black woman with a significant role in the series passes away due to sepsis only six episodes after her first appearance. Hnatow argues that Mary's death is used by the show to collect support for racial equality in Avonlea, and asks: "What does it mean that the show cannot really imagine Black women as successful and happy adult women?" then answering her own question by saying she believes it a failure of the series, "as well as a symptom of issues that permeate society and, therefore girlhood. *Anne of Green Gables* is a story of hope and home, the fact that one of the only Black women on the show have neither hope nor home is seriously concerning."³⁷ I believe this to be an exaggeration on Hnatow's part, since Mary truly finds a home in Bash and in Avonlea, and some of the other Black female characters (like Mary's friends, Jocelyn and Constance) being welcomed into a white community such as Avonlea sparks new hope for inclusion and emancipation. Instead of a trigger for sympathy, the death of Mary is a realistic representation of how little doctors could do about certain conditions in that time, as any person contracting sepsis would have met the same fate. Mary receives medical attention from a licensed doctor, and thus does not die due to a refusal to treat her. Still, the doctor has to come all the way from Charlottetown, and Anne reflects: "I think it's shameful that the only doctor that will see her is all the way in Charlottetown." Marilla responds to this with: "I agree. Illness doesn't discriminate."³⁸ In an attempt to portray the limited medical knowledge, Walley-Beckett could have followed the plotline of Montgomery's *Anne of the Island*, in which schoolmate Ruby Gillis passes away

³⁵ Hnatow, "Anne-girls," 30.

³⁶ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 8, "Struggling Against the Perception of Facts," directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired July 6 2018, on Netflix, 10:27-10:28, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

³⁷ Hnatow, "Anne-girls," 32.

³⁸ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 3, "What Can Stop the Determined Heart," directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired October 6 2019, on Netflix, 15:12-15:20, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

from tuberculosis, but it is understandable that she did not want to ‘kill off’ one of the children.

Additionally, Mary and Bash’ daughter Delphine has a bright future ahead of her. As she lay dying, Mary explains to Bash what she wishes for her daughter: a bright future, with school and college if that is what she wants. The set-up of the season implies that Delphine will have great, caring people around her during her childhood, but the cancellation of the show leaves the rest unanswered. It is obvious that Anne, Marilla, and Matthew have the best in mind for Delphine, and with the help of the increasingly supportive Avonlea community, Delphine should have guaranteed hope and home in Avonlea. In Season 3 episode 3, the Avonlea community throws an Easter party to grant Mary a final favour as her health deteriorates. This shows that Avonlea has come to care about Mary and her family, and they truly come together as a community to honour Mary. After her passing, Anne and her classmates, who run the town newspaper, write an obituary for Mary to be published in the Avonlea Gazette, and this further sparks sympathy from the residents who were previously hesitant to accept Mary in their midst. The tragedy of Mary’s death thus kindled respect and kindness towards Bash and his family, perhaps playing a vital role in the journey towards acceptance. This is an idealisation, but befits the values of the series. Some of the older, more conservative residents of Avonlea, notably the old, white, male village council, still show their distrust and even disgust of their new Black neighbours. One instance of this is when an unnamed member of the council says: “And what about the obituary for the coloured woman? I have relatives who fought in wars and did not receive the dignity of being memorialised in print.”³⁹ He is clearly arguing that he believes a coloured woman does not deserve the honour of having her obituary printed, because he is of opinion that Black people are undignified. He is actively othering here by proclaiming that his white relatives are superior to Mary.

Hazel, Bash’ mother, is another Black woman who receives some attention in the show. She is a personification of the mammy stereotype, but she has worked hard for a white family all her life, having to ignore the needs of her own child to prioritise those of her boss. Bash explains it from his perspective: “I watched my mother raise other people’s children. Didn’t understand why the only person in the world supposed to love me seemed like she

³⁹ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 7, “A Strong Effort for the Spirit of Good,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired November 3 2019, on Netflix, 14:54-15:09, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

didn't.”⁴⁰ While Hazel is getting paid for her work, Bash explains she never really left slavery: “My family never left that plantation. Not Granny, not Mom.”⁴¹ Hazel would be a good example of a Black woman who never truly found hope or a home, since she spent her life working in another person’s house, raising another person’s children, and having no hope of another way of life. In Season 3 episode 8, Hazel arrives in Avonlea to help Bash around the house and with Delphine. Hazel has an incredibly hard time adjusting to the openness with which Bash behaves around Gilbert and his friends: all her life, she has been under the control of a white person, and it is the only way of life she knows. She calls Gilbert ‘Sir’ or ‘Mr. Blythe,’ and cannot understand how Bash feels safe in this community. In my opinion, Hazel is the only Black female character who finds neither hope nor home, contrary to Hnatow’s suggestion.

While it is unlikely that a person of colour would have been welcomed – in such fashion – into a white rural community like Avonlea in the late nineteenth century, the addition of Black characters to *Anne with an E* makes the series more diverse and opens up discussion about racism and discrimination in that time, which is often eschewed in historical fiction. The representation of a poor community like the Bog shows a profoundly realistic view of the experiences of people of colour in that time, and according to Whitfield, Hnatow and other sources, *Anne with an E* presents the Bog accurately. There are some stereotypes present in the representation of Black people in the series, like Bash’ dislike of the cold, but they are shown from a positive rather than incriminating angle and could thus be labelled as empowering re-presentation instead. The discrimination faced by Black people in their home countries as well as abroad is realistic, as well as the fact that a lot of former enslaved families never got the opportunity to break away from the colonial narrative. White people are still the unmarked norm in *Anne with an E*’s Avonlea, but the series shows a promise of a diversifying

⁴⁰ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 2, “There is Something at Work in My Soul Which I Do Not Understand,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired September 29 2019, on Netflix, 32:20-32:30, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

⁴¹ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 2, “Signs are Small Measurable Things, but Interpretations are Illimitable,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired July 6 2018, on Netflix, 16:45-16:50, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

society. While at first, Bash and his family are othered by Avonlea, they are soon accepted as part of their community. The series idealises the acceptance that is shown, but also reflects the sense of hope and community that is so central to the stories of *Anne*. In this case, fidelity to the historical situation is replaced in favour of a hopeful narrative that can trigger acceptance and kindness from the audience.

Chapter 3: Queer Representation in *Anne with an E*

Anne with an E takes place in the small fictional rural community of Avonlea, and with its inclusion of queer characters depicts the often overlooked experiences of queer people in rural areas. The queer community is often linked to cities, with thriving queer ‘villages’ and a lively scene in urban communities. Due to this common assumption, Baker proposes that rural queers are often marginalised and erased.⁴² Baker quotes a study by Wilson, who states that the sense of being different from others, or that of being the only person who feels differently from others, is prevalent in people’s queer awakenings.⁴³ Wilson continues to assert that isolation plays a significant role for queers living in rural areas, and that access to media is important for self-acceptance. This is in line with Fryberg and Townsend’s assertion that underrepresentation in media deprives groups of strategies for how to be a person.⁴⁴ In the time period that *Anne with an E* depicts, there was no internet, and electricity was only just beginning to be used in urban areas. Avonlea did not even have a paper until the school children bring one into circulation, and newspapers and periodicals were about fashion and farming rather than about identity. When the Avonlea Gazette publishes an article with a feminist air to it in Season 3 episode 7, the town council takes away the school’s printing press in an act of censorship. This shows the limits as to what could and could not be written about. Queer characters in Avonlea thus had no access to queer influence via media, which is apparent in the journey to self-acceptance that they make: they travel to a bigger city and find a sense of home in the queer community of the city.

Since rural queer experiences are often overlooked and marginalised in media as well as research, the addition of queer characters in the rural town of Avonlea is important representation: the scarce research about rural queers does not mean they do not exist. The experiences of Cole MacKenzie in Season 2 of the series show the internalised homophobia that comes with growing up in a heteronormative, conservative community. The reaction of the other characters to the realisation that people can (and do) experience same-sex attraction also shows this internalised homophobia. The series shows a diverse spectrum of queer identities and hints at other possible queer characters, without overt queerbaiting. While there

⁴² Kelley Baker, “Out Back Home,” *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies* 11 (2016): 2.

⁴³ Baker, “Out Back Home,” 44.

⁴⁴ Leavitt et al., “Frozen In Time,” 40.

are hints towards queer characters in Montgomery's original books, *Anne with an E* adds more focus to queer experiences in both rural areas as well as urban areas, reflecting on the rising of queerness as an identity.

Moira Walley-Beckett made a conscious decision to add queer characters to the series, as the LGBTQ+ characters in *Anne with an E* are either straight or completely absent from Montgomery's original books. However, if read closely, the third and fourth part in the *Anne of Green Gables* book series do briefly mention the possibility of queer relationships in the form of so-called 'Boston Marriages,' which is a term used to describe two (often wealthy) older women choosing to live and spend their life together.⁴⁵ Hnatow claims that these Boston Marriages are frequent in Montgomery's books, but in reality there are only two such instances, and they are only very briefly mentioned: Miss Patty and Miss Maria in *Anne of the Island* and Aunt Kate and Aunt Chatty in *Anne of Windy Poplars*.⁴⁶

Cynthia Brouse explains Montgomery's own experience with queer desire in "The Maud Squad." In one of her diaries, Montgomery described the unwelcome attentions of a female fan, whom she named a pervert, but also mentions sharing a bed with her.⁴⁷ Hnatow similarly mentions a passage from Montgomery's journal, from when her cousin and close companion Frederica Campbell was on her deathbed: "Frede, my more than a sister," she wrote, which happens to be "the exact phrase of endearment that Victor Frankenstein uses for his adoptive sister, who becomes his wife."⁴⁸ Interestingly, the book *Frankenstein* also features in *Anne with an E* and forms the setup for a relationship between Diana and Jerry. This might be a clever hint at Montgomery's queerness, as the show's creators were in tune with Montgomery's journals, using several quotes from them in the series, but could also be coincidental.

While Montgomery might have had queer experiences herself, she did not include any developed queer characters in her books. It is thus evident that Walley-Beckett added queer subplots to the series to make it more diverse, and to show a realistic depiction of the queer

⁴⁵ Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Boston Marriage," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Boston%20marriage#:~:text=Definition%20of%20Boston%20marriage,loving%20relationship%20between%20two%20women>.

⁴⁶ Hnatow, "Anne-girls," 38.

⁴⁷ Cynthia Brouse, "The Maud Squad," in *The L.M. Montgomery Reader: Volume Two: A Critical Heritage*, ed. Benjamin Lefebvre (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 294.

⁴⁸ Hnatow, "Anne-girls," 45.

experience in a rural community in late nineteenth-century Canada. Online reviewers of Season 2 of *Anne with an E* have mixed opinions about the changes made by Beckett, with Gemma Marr drawing upon one review that says the addition of queer characters could have been good, had it not been “powder-coated with an incredibly unsubtle overlay of 2018 sensibilities.”⁴⁹ However, as the series is aimed at a contemporary, young audience, these 2018 sensibilities can be overlooked in favour of the re-presentation present, because the show moves beyond common stereotypes while providing valuable representation.

Anne with an E reimagines the stalwart Aunt Josephine Barry from the books as a queer woman in one such Boston Marriage, as she has lived a big part of her life with Gertrude, and was “married in my own way, and we had a full and wonderful life together.”⁵⁰ Aunt Josephine first appears in Season 1 episode 6, where she also alludes to the passing of her female companion. She is quite the advocate for queerness, both in sense of LGBTQ+ and of the traditional meaning of the word queer, with which Anne identifies. She hosts a party in Season 2 episode 7, where the queer community of Charlottetown comes together to celebrate the beauty in uniqueness. In this same episode, Aunt Josephine is sitting in the hallway during her party, quietly crying, when Cole stumbles upon her. She invites him to sit with her, and explains her emotions: “Gertrude loved my tears. She felt so openly. Hmm. Put me to shame. I was raised to keep everything buttoned up inside. But she had this extraordinary range of emotions. Life... had so many colours through her eyes. It painted my world forever. She was the first person with whom I didn't have to hide.”⁵¹ As homosexuality was a taboo in this time, she had to hide her identity for a long time. Through Gertrude she also found a community of likeminded individuals, and has taken it upon herself to support others – like Cole – in their journey towards self-acceptance.

Cole MacKenzie is *Anne with an E*'s original queer character who does not appear in Montgomery's books. In an interview with IndieWire in 2018, Walley-Beckett reflects on

⁴⁹ Gemma Marr, “Crafting a Heteronormative Haven: Representations of Sexuality on the Canadian Margin,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 54, no. 2-3 (2020): 256.

⁵⁰ *Anne with an E*, Season 1 episode 6, “Remorse is the Poison of Life,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired April 23 2017, on Netflix, 41:43-41:54, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

⁵¹ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 7, “Memory Has as Many Moods as the Temper,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired July 6 2018, on Netflix, 21:02-21:39, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

how her decision to include queer subplots allowed her “to provide a forum of acceptance and safe haven for Cole and other people in [their] community.”⁵² Cole first appears in Season 2 episode 2. He is different from the other boys at school, and prefers to draw in a quiet corner – and is bullied and othered for it by both the boys at school as well as their teacher, Mr. Philips. According to Hnatow, Cole is coded as Anne’s ‘gay best friend.’⁵³ The gay best friend is a common character trope in contemporary TV, and Khamis and Lambert describe gay best friends as “companions, confidants or even side-kicks, as go-to men for matters of fashion, grooming, and décor.”⁵⁴ Cole is indeed a confidant for Anne, and he shows his eye for fashion when he helps her style her hair in class in Season 2 episode 5. He gets punished for his ‘feminine’ behaviour by Mr. Philips and has to sit with the girls in class. Hnatow argues that Cole’s character arc goes beyond this common stereotype, as he has his own story in the plot where he deals with homophobia and discrimination.⁵⁵ Cole gets to explore his passion for art, eventually moving in with Aunt Josephine to pursue art in college. Especially after the first few episodes in which Cole features, he is often depicted independently of Anne and Diana, truly establishing his own identity. He is thus not simply included in the show to tick off the box of queer representation, but has his own narrative and characteristics.

In Season 2 episode 7, Cole accompanies Diana and Anne to Aunt Josephine’s party, where he finds out that there are more people like him in the world and that it is okay to be different in such a way. He shares a heart to heart with Aunt Josephine, and comes out to her at the end of the episode: “I think I’m like you and Gertrude,” he says, to which Aunt Josephine replies: “You have a life of such joy before you. Not without hardship. Not without bumps in the road. Be safe with those you trust. But when you do find people to trust, the bond will be that much greater. I’m quite touched... by you choosing me as one.”⁵⁶ Cole comes out to Anne in the next episode, after a disturbing intimate moment with Mr. Philips, where Mr. Philips tells Cole that he “disgusts him.”⁵⁷ Cole explains to Anne that he believes Mr. Philips is acting this way due to his own queer feelings and internalised homophobia, and then comes out to Anne, who reacts with immediate support and love. “It’s against the law, to

⁵² Marr, “Crafting a Heteronormative Haven,” 256.

⁵³ Hnatow, “Anne-girls,” 39.

⁵⁴ Susie Khamis and Anthony Lambert, “Effeminacy and Expertise, Excess and Equality: Gay Best Friends as Consumers and Commodities in Contemporary Television,” in *Consumerism on TV: Popular Media from the 1950s to the Present* (2015), 110.

⁵⁵ Hnatow, “Anne-girls,” 39.

⁵⁶ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 7, 33:35-34:21.

⁵⁷ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 8, 07:10-07:12.

be like me,” Cole says, upon which Anne proclaims that “The law is wrong.”⁵⁸ Hnatow puts forward that Anne reacts supportively but realistically – she is certainly surprised at first – for an open-minded girl in her time period.⁵⁹ Anne’s reaction is ideal for a contemporary teen upon their friend coming out, and this is one of the scenes where contemporary norms overlay a historical situation.

Cole eventually runs away from his unsupportive home to move in with Aunt Josephine in Charlottetown. This brings about a complete change in his demeanour, going from sad and almost suicidal to happy and comfortable. He goes to art school with likeminded people and feels at home in the bigger city. With this, Cole confirms that he has found his community and what queer people often call a ‘found family:’ a family that is not related by blood but rather by connection and community. This is in line with the urban/queer theories mentioned before: Cole’s queer identity develops and flourishes once he moves to Charlottetown. Cole as a character moves beyond harmful stereotypes like that of the gay best friend and truly develops his own identity and character. This representation of a queer character could thus be coded as re-presentation, and the inclusion of his character in the show is empowering to a queer or questioning audience as well as eye-opening to the wider audience. The range of Cole’s experiences also proves how important it is for minorities, in this case members of the LGBTQ+ community, to have access to mirrors of themselves. As soon as Cole finds other members of his community, he feels validated, and for a queer audience, Cole’s character serves as such a mirror.

Hnatow draws upon the work of multiple scholars who have noted erotic tension between bosom friends Anne and Diana. There are instances where Anne seems to place herself on the queer continuum, for example when she finds out about Aunt Josephine’s relationship with Gertrude, where she states: “I think it’s wonderful ... there’s so much more possibility.”⁶⁰ Similarly, in Season 2 episode 5 Anne describes Diana’s lips as “the best most kissable cupid’s bow.”⁶¹ After learning about Aunt Josephine’s sexuality, Anne tells Marilla: “I think I learned some things about love, too. It doesn’t look the same for everyone. It can come in so many forms. And how can there be anything wrong with a life if it’s spent with a

⁵⁸ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 8, 21:55-22:00.

⁵⁹ Hnatow, “Anne-girls,” 41.

⁶⁰ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 7, 32:17-32:18.

⁶¹ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 5, “The Determining Acts of Her Life,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired July 6 2018, on Netflix, 01:16-01:22, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

person you love?”⁶² While Anne could potentially be coded as bi- or pansexual in the series, it is more interesting to look into Diana in this pairing.

In Season 2 episode 7, Aunt Josephine gives a speech dedicated to the late Gertrude, to which a woman in the audience replies: “To the most wonderful couple. My romantic ideal. Gertie and Jo.”⁶³ Diana asks Anne what the woman had meant, and Anne replies: “Oh, well, they were in love! Isn't it ever so sad to see what Aunt Josephine lost, but it's lovely to see what a life they had together?”⁶⁴ Diana immediately dissociates from the party. Later, when Anne, Cole, and Diana are in their room after the party, Diana voices her concerns about the situation. “My parents certainly don't know. That... must mean it's wrong,” “Two women could never have children. It doesn't make sense,” and “It's unnatural!”⁶⁵ Hnatow argues that this could be Diana's internal homophobia playing up, as she might be feeling such feelings herself. Eventually, Diana apologises to Aunt Josephine and says “At the time, I didn't know how much I – didn't know... I'm sorry. My thinking was narrow, I understand so much more now.”⁶⁶ Diana can also be queered through her behaviour, for when she and her friends are playing games of courtship, Diana always takes upon herself the role of the prince or gentleman courting one of the other girls.

The possibility of a queer Diana can be further explored through her relationship with Jerry (the Green Gables farmhand) in Season 3. Diana really enjoys kissing Jerry, but it is obvious that she just thinks the kissing is fun, but cannot imagine a romantic relationship with him. This could be because she does not feel romantic attraction to boys. In Montgomery's books, Diana eventually marries Fred Wright, but this character is absent from the series – though the show was cancelled prematurely for his appearance in any case. *Anne with an E* does however feature another original character named Winifred Rose, who serves as a love interest for Gilbert. Perhaps a far take, but Hnatow mirrors with Fred Wright: the similarity of their names are the perfect setup for a possible future relationship between Diana and Winifred had the show not been cancelled.⁶⁷ In the final episode of the series, there does seem to be a clear setup for the two to grow closer, as both Winifred and Diana are moving to Paris. However, at the very last moment, Diana decides to go to Queens college with her friends, so

⁶² *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 7, 39:54-40:14.

⁶³ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 7, 19:48-19:54.

⁶⁴ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 7, 26:53-27:15.

⁶⁵ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 7, 31:32-31:54.

⁶⁶ *Anne with an E*, Season 2 episode 10, “The Growing Good in the World,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired July 6 2018, on Netflix, 30:22-30:39, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

⁶⁷ Hnatow, “Anne-girls,” 46.

this possibility is nipped in the bud. Had there been a Season 4, Diana might have moved to Paris, where Hnatow's prediction could have become reality.

The renewed focus on queer characters in *Anne with an E* brings a richer variety of experiences to the story of Anne. Not only does Aunt Josephine represent the life of a woman who never married but opted to live her life with the woman she loved, but Cole represents the struggles faced by queer teenagers in a remote rural society, and shows the journey towards self-acceptance that rural queers often embark on by going to a larger city. As queers were marginalised but present in late nineteenth century Canada, the addition of these characters enriches the plot of the series and sheds light on marginalised and erased experiences. The possibility of a queer Anne and/or Diana is intriguing and compelling but runs the risk of falling into queerbaiting. As Brennan implies, queerbaiting is especially harmful in series or films that lack queer characters altogether, so the presence of Cole, Aunt Josephine, and the Charlottetown partygoers softens the effect of Anne and Diana's homoerotically charged friendship.⁶⁸ The possibility of a relationship between Diana and Winifred has potential, and Diana's struggles to accept Aunt Jo's sexuality can be interpreted as internalised homophobia. The editorial changes made to the plot might be a step away from the predominantly heterosexual original novels, but add greatly to the narrative and fit perfectly into the timeline, depicting a community that was ever present in society but avoided in media and literature.

⁶⁸ Brennan, "Queerbaiting," 195.

Chapter 4: Indigenous Representation in *Anne with an E*

One of *Anne with an E*'s most substantial additions to the original plotline is that of Indigenous characters and the harrowing experiences surrounding the colonial wish to educate and assimilate native children. Stoddard et al. define 'Indigenous' as "the group of people who first settles in an area or country."⁶⁹ While the Indigenous peoples settled in Canada long before it was colonised, they have faced the most exclusion, discrimination, and erasure out of all minorities in the country. Stoddard et al. put forward that Indigenous peoples are historically only included in Western film and television in the role of antagonist: people to fear and kill.⁷⁰ Even now, these representations continue, especially in the Western/frontier genre. Stoddard et al.'s concerns about the Western genre have no grip here, since *Anne with an E* is decidedly not in line with Western conventions. In *Anne with an E*, the Indigenous Mi'kmaq people are included in the narrative and play their own agentive roles. They are victims of discrimination and abuse from white settlers, but do not play the role of antagonist. Instead, their rich culture and language are featured alongside their relationship with the settlers, so re-presentation would be the term to use here. *Anne with an E* is not a series about Indigenous people, but their inclusion in the narrative is historically accurate, fits within the timeframe, and promotes inclusion and acceptance to its young audience.

The first mention of the First Nations people who reside on Prince Edward Island is in Season 1 episode 4, where Anne is reading about the Saskatchewan province in Canada. Anne, who is fascinated by everything, wonders what her name would be if she were a "North American Native."⁷¹ If Walley-Beckett had left it at this, the representation of Indigenous peoples in the series would be comparable to that in the original books. In Montgomery's eight-book series, there is but one mention of the existence of the First Nations. It occurs in the fifth instalment titled *Anne's House of Dreams*, on the very first page of the book: "Through the other window was glimpsed a distant, white-capped, blue sea of the beautiful St. Lawrence Gulf, on which floats, like a jewel, Abegweit, whose softer, sweeter Indian name has long been forsaken for the more prosaic one of Prince Edward Island."⁷² This is the only

⁶⁹ Stoddard et al., "The Burden of Historical Representation," 10.

⁷⁰ Stoddard et al., "The Burden of Historical Representation," 12.

⁷¹ *Anne with an E*, Season 1 episode 4, "An Inward Treasure Born," directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired April 9 2017, on Netflix, 15:24-15:30, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

⁷² L. M. Montgomery, *Anne's House of Dreams* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 1.

acknowledgement of Indigenous people and their culture in the whole book series, and it is extremely fleeting. It is therefore a bold but respectable decision on Walley-Beckett's part to include an elaborate subplot focused on the Mi'kmaq people – though they do not physically appear until Season 3 episode 1. The boys of the Avonlea school are playing ice hockey while the girls watch, and the Mi'kmaq happen to make superior hockey sticks which they sell to the boys. This is where Anne meets Ka'kwet (played by Kaiwentiio Tarbell, who is from the Indigenous Mohawk nation) whose father (played by Brandon Oakes, also Mohawk) is head of their tribe. The casting of Indigenous actors for Indigenous roles shows recognition of their culture and worth. Anne and Ka'kwet are very alike, with bright eyes, long braided hair, and a similar look at the world, and Anne reflects: "It's funny how people are so quick to point out differences when there's so many ways we're all alike."⁷³ It is evident that Marilla does not share Anne's opinion of the Mi'kmaq, because when Anne comes home wearing her hair in Ka'kwet's fashion, she exclaims: "You look like a heathen!"⁷⁴ Marilla also immediately assumes the 'Indians' (sic) threatened Anne, establishing the prejudice with which the white residents of Avonlea perceive the Indigenous people. She does not consider the Mi'kmaq to be equal to the Avonlea inhabitants, and projects stereotypes upon them without giving them the benefit of the doubt. She is actively othering here, but it will become evident later in this analysis that even Marilla can overcome her prejudice.

The subplot deepens when a government official arrives in Avonlea with the news of a new residential school in Halifax, "specifically designed to address the matter of savages living in our midst."⁷⁵ The pamphlets promoting the new residential school are misleading and propagandic in nature, with the intent to persuade white residents of town to convince their Native neighbours to give it a chance. In this case, Rachel Lynde takes it upon herself to spread the word, since she feels it is her "Christian duty to make this known to our own local Indians."⁷⁶ Ka'kwet wants to go to school, because she wants to learn how to write and speak English, and convinces her parents to let her go. In Season 3 episode 4, Ka'kwet leaves for school by train, and her parents are not allowed to take her there. This is the first moment of doubt about the school, but it is too late to back out. Upon arrival, Ka'kwet is given a 'proper Christian name' (Hannah) and her long braided hair is cut off into a 'civilised bob.' When

⁷³ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 1, "A Secret Which I Desired to Divine," directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired September 19 2019, on Netflix, 12:53-13:12, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

⁷⁴ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 1, 13:38-13:41.

⁷⁵ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 3, 20:33-20:42.

⁷⁶ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 3, 20:55-20:59.

Anne happens to be near Halifax she wants to visit Ka'kwet at school, but is not allowed to see her. Ka'kwet has been mentally and physically abused at this point, being screamed at and whipped for speaking her native language. In Season 3 episode 8, she decides to escape and succeeds, but the school guards, armed with rifles, trace her back to her village.

In Season 3 episode 9, the narrative around Ka'kwet and the Mi'kmaq comes to a climax. Ka'kwet finally arrives back in her village after a harrowing journey, but it is evident that the school has brainwashed her: she lashes out at her brother and sister for not speaking English, and yells at them to “stop behaving like a stupid Indian!”⁷⁷ In a matter of moments, the men set out to hunt Ka'kwet storm the village and want to take all other children with them. These scenes are in line with the forcible transfer of Indigenous children taken away from their homes.

In the chaos that ensues, Ka'kwet's father is shot in the arm, Ka'kwet is taken away again, and presumably more of the Mi'kmaq children from the village are taken too. Ka'kwet's parents come to Green Gables to ask for help, and surprisingly Matthew is the one to rush to help. By this time, Matthew has warmed to Bash and his family greatly, and it is evident that he has been rethinking his prejudice of those he is not familiar with. Ka'kwet's mother, in a desperate plea for help, explains to Marilla in her native language how it feels to have her child stolen away from her, and Marilla understands exactly what she means despite her unfamiliarity with the language. This incident triggers a sense of kinship between Marilla and Ka'kwet's mother, ending her othering. Matthew and Anne set off to take Ka'kwet's parents to Halifax to ask for their child back, thinking that it is all a misunderstanding. Upon arrival they are threatened with rifles and told they cannot ‘release’ any children, whereupon Anne exclaims: “this is a school, not a prison!”⁷⁸ Ka'kwet's parents decide to camp nearby, but the authorities are called on them and the officers tell them that the government has decreed to “kill the Indian to save the child.”⁷⁹ This is exactly what the deputy minister of Indian Affairs argued in 1920, as quoted in MacDonald: “I want to get rid of the Indian problem ... Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politics.”⁸⁰ Ka'kwet's parents set up camp a short distance away

⁷⁷ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 9, “A Dense and Frightful Darkness,” directed by Moira Walley-Beckett, aired November 17 2019, on Netflix, 00:26-00:30, <https://www.netflix.com/browse?jbv=80136311>.

⁷⁸ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 9, 29:23-29:27.

⁷⁹ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 9, 34:37-34:39.

⁸⁰ David MacDonald, “First Nations, Residential Schools, and the Americanization of the Holocaust: Rewriting Indigenous History in the United States and Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 40, no. 4 (2007): 1001, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25166181>.

from the school where they will not be seen, and Ka'kwet is shown watching them leave from behind the school's window.

Unfortunately, due to the premature cancellation of the show, this is the last we see of Ka'kwet and her family. While the narratives of Cole and Bash get a fabricated ending in Season 3 episode 10, there is no more mention of the Mi'kmaq, despite them being left in such a precarious situation. Walley-Beckett had been setting up multiple situations that could come to life in a possible Season 4, and that could have included more about the Mi'kmaq, but it is a shortcoming of the final episode to include nearly all characters from the show but the Mi'kmaq. Hnatow argues that this 'ending' serves an important purpose, because the series shows the racist and colonial nature of Canada: "giving Ka'kwet a happy ending would be ignoring the hard truth – that there is still a continued fight for indigenous girls."⁸¹ The last residential school in Canada was closed in Saskatchewan in 1996, and even now there is separation established in Canada: the lack of an ending mirrors the ongoing discrimination and segregation in Canada. The main characters of the show, predominantly Anne and Matthew, have now seen the effect of colonisation and racial and cultural discrimination for the first time, and immediately see the injustice that lies at its core. At the end of Season 3 episode 9, Matthew proposes to Anne that they write a letter to one of the big newspapers on the mainland, in order to call attention to the lies surrounding residential schools, in hopes of inciting change in a possible fourth season.

Stoddard et al., arguing for historical representation of Indigenous groups in the media, assert that indigenous groups are too often viewed as something from the past.⁸² In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) published a report which called the residential school policy an act of cultural genocide against the country's native people.⁸³ The discussion around residential schools flared up in 2021, when the bodies of over 200 Indigenous children were found in an unmarked grave on the grounds of a former residential school in Kamloops. This renewed attention for the harrowing history of residential schools shows just how recent these proceedings were and what effects they have had on survivors and families. Stoddard et al. make the case that films made for or by indigenous groups can enhance students' grasp on the histories and cultures of marginalised

⁸¹ Hnatow, "Anne-girls," 34.

⁸² Stoddard et al., "The Burden of Historical Representation," 9.

⁸³ John Barber, "Canada's Indigenous Schools Policy Was 'Cultural Genocide', Says Report," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, June 2, 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/02/canada-indigenous-schools-cultural-genocide-report>.

groups that are often missing from the curriculum.⁸⁴ In the same manner, the inclusion of Indigenous narratives in popular television series like *Anne with an E* can enlighten both children and adults of the history absent from history books.

Rob Shields, in analysing settler affect in the original books, asserts that the absence of Aboriginal peoples in the books is part of a “structure of disavowal and repression of history.”⁸⁵ While Montgomery fills the landscape of Prince Edward Island with so much meaning and nostalgia, she colonised the landscape with her own Western values. Therefore, the mere presence of Indigenous people in *Anne with an E* makes for a more complete historical representation of Canada in the late nineteenth century. Not only are they included in the narrative, but Walley-Beckett decided to show the experience at residential schools, which is often eschewed in media representation because of its harsh realities. David MacDonald explains how Indigenous children were forced to live at the boarding schools for ten months a year, which is in line with Ka’kwet’s experience: she is not allowed to go home until the summer.⁸⁶ According to MacDonald, school days at residential schools would consist of half a day of studies and half a day of trades-related activities to prepare children for a “civilised existence in society.”⁸⁷ In *Anne with an E*, Ka’kwet and the other ‘students’ have to sing Christian hymns, but no other school activities are shown. Instead, the focus rests on the verbal and physical abuse the children face. Sexual abuse was common in residential schools, MacDonald states, but the series does not go as far as to show this.⁸⁸ *Anne with an E* is rated 12+ on Netflix; if rape or sexual abuse was graphically included it would have to be rated 16+, forgoing a large part of its audience.

The portrayal of the Mi’kmaq people thus provides a rich and unsettling subplot to the series, in which settler affect comes forward as the antagonist rather than the First Nations themselves. The Indigenous characters in *Anne with an E* are developed and significant characters in the show, and their rich cultures and skills are displayed. While not all the atrocities that Indigenous people faced at the hands of white settlers are portrayed in the series, it has great value to show the traumatic events that Indigenous people have had to go

⁸⁴ Stoddard et al., “The Burden of Historical Representation,” 33.

⁸⁵ Rob Shields, “Lifelong Sorrow: Settler Affect, State and Trauma at *Anne of Green Gables*,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (2018): 525.

⁸⁶ MacDonald, “First Nations,” 1001.

⁸⁷ MacDonald, “First Nations,” 1001.

⁸⁸ MacDonald, “First Nations,” 1001.

through. Stoddard et al.'s 'burden of historical representation' seems to be met in this case: the Mi'kmaq are complex and developed characters with personal stories, challenging existing film narratives from Eurocentric perspectives. In this way, people can learn about the history and culture of historically othered peoples indirectly: they choose to watch the story of Anne, but also learn about that concealed part of Canadian history.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the additions made to the narrative of Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* in Walley-Beckett's *Anne with an E* provide representation of minorities that are absent from the original books and demonstrate the diversity of people and culture present on late nineteenth-century Prince Edward Island. I analysed the representation of Black, Queer, and Indigenous characters in *Anne with an E*, and investigated how their portrayals compare to what is known about these communities in the late nineteenth century. Throughout this analysis, the concept of the burden of historical representation stood central, together with the theory of media functioning as a vessel to transfer knowledge and acceptance of minorities to the wider audience.

The first Season of *Anne with an E* stays quite close to its source text, but in Season 2, fidelity to *Anne of Green Gables* is left behind for a more inclusive and diverse narrative. The first step away from the original plot is the introduction of Bash. Bash moving to Avonlea with Gilbert might be an unlikely event, but it serves as a way to show how even the most reluctant people can grow to accept and love people they always considered as the Other. I argue that the rapid acceptance from some characters is idealised, but that it also shows how young minds in particular can overlook prejudice, and in doing this can trigger others to follow the same path of acceptance. While some aspects are thus idealised, the series clearly shows the struggles faced by Black people in post-abolition Canada, with the historically accurate depiction of the Bog showing that freedom from slavery does not mean freedom from society's bigotry.

The inclusion of several queer characters in *Anne with an E* portrays the struggles that queer people in rural areas often face, and shows how urban areas can be a place of community and acceptance. From Cole's journey to self-acceptance and Mr. Philips' internal homophobia to Aunt Josephine's Boston Marriage, the series shows a wide variety of queer experiences without relying on common stereotypes like the gay best friend. The series runs the risk of queerbaiting through the closeness of bosom friends Anne and Diana, but the presence of several other developed queer characters surmounts the common function of queerbaiting to attract a queer audience to a heterosexual series. Anne's immediate acceptance of Cole's identity is idealised, but is in line with contemporary norms and shows a modern audience how to support a friend who comes out.

The most consequential addition to the series is the one that gets introduced last: the Indigenous Mi'kmaq people. With Indigenous people being the most marginalised and erased community in the history of Canada, it is crucial for contemporary adaptations of historical source texts to include positive representation, or re-presentation, of the First Nations. *Anne with an E* shows the atrocities committed at residential schools from a first-hand perspective while demonstrating the rich Mi'kmaq culture. Instead of a Eurocentric, antagonistic perspective of the Mi'kmaq, the series shows that “there’s so many ways we’re all alike.”⁸⁹

From these three analyses, I conclude that the addition of Indigenous characters to *Anne with an E* is the most significant in its representation as well as the most historically accurate. Stoddard et al.’s burden of historical representation is completely met in this subplot, though some brutalities are not shown because the show is aimed at a younger audience. The inclusion of Black characters in the series makes it more diverse and depicts Black culture and society in a historically accurate fashion, and the acceptance of Black people in Avonlea is hopeful yet idealised. The representation of Queer people is varied and non-stereotypical, as all queer characters have their own independent character arcs, but queer representation is more present in contemporary television than the representation of Indigenous culture. Thus, the additions of Black, Queer, and especially that of Indigenous characters make *Anne with an E* more historically accurate than Montgomery’s books, because these communities were ever present but marginalised from history. Not only is there representation of these minorities in *Anne with an E*, but the series goes beyond common stereotypes by representing and re-presenting different aspects of their lives and cultures.

As Stoddard et al., acknowledge, contemporary films and series can never be completely historically accurate, because there is always an interplay between history and present.⁹⁰ However, this thesis has shown the importance of representation and especially re-presentation of minorities, which has profound effect on both members of marginalised minorities as well as the wider audience. Future adaptations of *Anne of Green Gables* and other historical source texts should learn from *Anne with an E* and include minorities in their narrative.

More research can and should be done on the effect of these inclusions on the audience, and a comparative study of several adaptations of *Anne* could show how a more inclusive

⁸⁹ *Anne with an E*, Season 3 episode 1, 13:01-13:12.

⁹⁰ Stoddard et al., “The Burden of Historical Representation,” 16.

adaptation reaches a wider audience. It is also important to investigate the reception of the representation of different minorities by members of those minorities. Do they agree that their culture (as it was in that time period) is shown accurately? Does the inclusion of their cultures and communities provide a mirror for them, which shows them that they do belong? A future study about this could be done through interviewing audience members who are part of these minorities, perhaps comparing the representation in *Anne with an E* with another contemporary television show.

Anne with an E is “Ahead By A Century” in the sense that it combines contemporary calls for representation and diversity with a historical narrative. Tragically, this representation should have been present in the original books and its subsequent adaptations to start with. It is thus the task of contemporary authors and screenwriters to consider the diversity of the world and its history before they put pen to paper.

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