L.M. Montgomery Meets Milton Acorn near the Arts Centre

DOI
http://doi.org/10.32393/jlmms/2024.0011
Published on
Wed, 08/14/2024 - 09:30

Brought back to life, in Charlottetown,
the first thing she does is shop
for jeans, a casual but not too revealing blouse,
handsome boots from a place called Roots.
Arriving in late Victorian garb,
she was waylaid by tourists
mistaking her for an actor portraying
a Mother of Confederation, an Avonlea matron
from *Anne*. Loved the period costume,
her *accent*. Though her head was spinning,
discombobulated, to say the least, she was
impeccably polite. Joined the throngs
at sidewalk cafés on Victoria Row, women
wearing *so little*, glasses of *wine* at their lips,
men with less hair, but still loud and beery.

She stands before a mammoth edifice
where the farmers' market once thrived:
Confederation Centre of the Arts!
A patriotic monument no surprise,
but a giant treasure chest teeming
with panpipes, poésie, pastels
on this Island? Then she sees the neon
marquee, how words flash across
like Perseids in an August sky.
The British Invasion? a musical?
red-coated soldiers playing pipes and drums
while they set fire to homes and herd
Acadians, singing dirges, onto boats?
Beatles and Rolling Stones, what's that about?
A Tribute to Stan Rogers? the one-armed
shipwright in Georgetown?
Then she sees, stunned and backing

into a double-decker London bus,
Anne of Green Gables. Nightly at eight.

Enters the building, the lobby, gazing
at photos of actors playing *her*
characters. A wondrous array
in the gift shop of ceramics and jewellery,
paintings and postcards—"The Land of Anne,"
"Anne's Island"—and, on shelf after shelf,

L.M. Montgomery's novels, learnèd studies
by scholars, the journals she recopied
for posterity, burning the originals.
Her face stares back at her, revealing
so little, concealing the most
important things. "Are you a Montgomery
fan?" a grey-haired, stately sales clerk asks—
she could almost be Marilla.

Maud composes herself. "You could say
I am familiar with her books."
"I was raised on Anne," says the woman,
"but now that I'm older, Emily means
so much more. Her resolve to be a writer,
not to marry till she'd found her dream."
Maud turns her back on the bookshelves.
"The way Montgomery herself succeeded."
Maud looks at a sketch of Anne's house.
"So sad, though, her marriage to the reverend,
you know about that? His depression, the strain
on her? Oh, you do. Then you've heard
the disclosure about her suicide."
Maud touches scarves on a rack near the counter.
"Do you have books by other Island authors?"

"Mostly coffee-table variety. Not much
call for anything but Montgomery. She
helps keep the Island in business. You're not
from here, I take it? From away?"
"Ontario," Maud says, and hastily
exits the shop, the Centre.

Sees a tall, gaunt man nearby
in workman's clothes, dishevelled,
a large notebook in hand, declaiming.
Knows the cadences of poetry, hears him
shouting love and anger for his Island home.

She hooks her arm in his
without speaking, leads him past
sidewalk cafés, bright chatter and music,
the Anne Shop bursting with souvenirs,
to the old hotel, the elegant dining room
much as she remembers, and orders
tea and cake and then sherry for two.

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Bio: Richard Lemm teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Prince Edward Island. His most recent book, a memoir, is *Imagined Truths: Myths of a Draft-Dodging Poet*. He has published six poetry collections, most recently *Jeopardy*, a short fiction collection, *Shape of Things to Come*, and a biography, *Milton Acorn: In Love and Anger*. He edited *Riptides: New PEI Fiction* and *Snow Softly Falling: Holiday Stories from Prince Edward Island*. He has been a writer-in-residence in Scotland, Tasmania, and, in 2023, France. He has served on numerous arts and academic juries, including for the Canada Council of the Arts and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. He cries every time Matthew dies in the musical.

Notes:

Milton Acorn (1923–1986), born and raised in PEI, is the only writer honoured as “The People’s Poet of Canada” by his peers, including Margaret Atwood and Leonard Cohen.

A version of “L.M. Montgomery Meets Milton Acorn near the Arts Centre” was published in Richard Lemm’s 2018 poetry collection *Jeopardy*, published by Acorn Press.

Banner Image: Victoria Row, photographed by Austen Clayton, 2018.

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