

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

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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, learned 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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