Too Many Bends in the Road

The Bend in the Road: An Invitation to the World and Work of L.M. Montgomery™.
L.M. Montgomery Institute, 2000. 342 nodes multimedia presentation. $39.95. ISBN
0-9687298-0-0.

This visually attractive CD product from the L.M. Montgomery Institute (LMMI)
has all the design features that can be wrung out of the Macromind Director soft-
ware. With its many wonderful gems of audio and video from various sources, *The
Bend* gives what it promises with its exclusive photos and interviews in addition to
its "guided tour through journals, scrapbooks, handiwork & memorabilia." And
according to their media page <http://www.upei.ca/~lmmi/media.html> it has
enough awards — from the Baddeck International New Media Festival, the U.S.
International Film & Video Festival, the Association for Media Technology in Edu-
cation in Canada (AMTEC), as well as the Atlantic New Media Award for Creativity
— to prove it.

The difficulty with *The Bend* is with what it is not. The LMMI's media page
claims its CD is designed for scholars, fans, school children, and graduate students,
but things do not work as promised. A myriad of design flaws, omissions, and
errors mar the CD's usefulness as a scholarly or pedagogically valuable resource,
while its problems with navigation and internal logic would confuse a casual user.
For instance, the CD begins with a choice between "Wanda Wyatt Tribute," a video
about the project's major funder, the Wyatt Foundation, and "The Bend in the
Road." It may be unclear to some viewers that Wanda Wyatt is not an integral part
of the LMM community. This sort of ambiguity plagues the CD, resulting in a level
of discomfort regarding the content.

Further, the main body of the CD is difficult to navigate. Long texts must
be clicked through one line at a time without a proper scroll bar. There is no site
map, search functions, or bookmarking — all one would expect from a twenty-
first-century product. Many image captions stay behind long after the images have
changed. Video quality, like the images, is adequate, but not scholarly or archival.
Some images are as mundane as photographs of the LMMI office staff. Instead of
high-quality images of first edition book covers, we have sepia-toned outlines as
background to text, which is less than useful. Overall, layout and design are not
consistent, as navigation elements move about the screen, and you must click on a
left-facing arrow to access a link to the right. There is no way to easily scroll through
the long lists of text or to move to the top of a page, nor are there any keyword
searching facilities. After finding a wonderful video clip of Montgomery's grand-
son David Macdonald, we have searched in vain to find it again.

The section about LMM and Japan is restricted to a single paragraph that is
not only wrong but wonderfully inadequate. Despite what the CD claims, there is
no nursing school named for LMM or Anne, though the Bell Gakuen Bell Sogo
Fukishi Senmon Gakko nursing school <http://www.harenet.ne.jp/berusen> is
nicknamed "The School of Green Gables." As well, the Anne Academy <http://
anneacademy.com> is listed elsewhere as being in Tokyo, even though it is in
Fukuoka, 1,100 km away. As with other sections, content is vague and unsup-
ported; here, supplemental material is merely a single (though very nice) interview
with Terry Kamikawa, who lives in PEI, telling of what drew her to the place. There

are no references, statistics, or factual information relating to the socio-politics of Anne in Japan, to the tourism industry, nor to the depth of the fondness the Japanese have for Anne and PEI.

The Learning section is limited to Selective Bibliography, Web Resources, and Holdings Locations. The bibliography has no ability to save or copy the content, and there is no hot indexing between the index and the fuller references. In the Impact section, both Education & Canadian Identity links go to a single "Education and Canadian Identity" section; though the User Guide says that clicking on "Education" will lead to questions, these could not be found. As well, both Licensing and Legal Impact links go to a single place, leaving us to wonder why the advertised "seven main subject headings" lead to only five subjects. Meanwhile, the bibliography is not sufficiently compendious to be of value to a researcher who requires detailed accuracy. The film section is rife with errors that could be corrected by visiting the Internet Movie Database (http://www.imdb.com) or by consulting Benjamin Lefebvre's filmography in *CCL* 99. For example, the 1919 and 1934 film adaptations give incorrect information (corrections in square brackets):

Anne of Green Gables. Dir. Unknown [William Desmond Taylor]. Realert [Realart], 1919.

Anne of Green Gables. Dir. Sam Mintz [George Nicholls Jr.; Screen Play by Sam Mintz]. RKO Pictures [RKO Radio Pictures], 1934.

And the promised hotlinks are not hot at all, just a list of URLs with titles. No annotation or evaluation. Some links have moved more than three years ago, while other important sites are missing. In terms of content, the most obvious — and unconscionable — omission is the lack of full, searchable text of all of LMM's works that are out of copyright.

All in all, this CD is a very nice visual diversion, a must-have for the complete collector. Though it only runs on Windows PCs, it is far superior to the previous CD offering in the field of LMM studies reviewed in *CCL* 91-92. But as LMM says of Gilbert "having tried to please both sides, succeeded, as is usual and eminently right, in pleasing neither" (*Anne of Avonlea*, ch. 4), *The Bend in the Road: An Invitation to the World and Work of L.M. Montgomery*™ leaves us lost, dazed, and a bit confused as to what is going on. Less time spent pleasing the CDROM awards-giving industry and the funding agencies and more thought on the user experience would have left us with a less vaunted but ultimately more interesting and useful tool. Anne, herself an educator, would have problems with this work: too much thought given to delight, and not enough to useful instruction.

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