Too Many Bends in the Road

The Bend in the Road: An Invitation to the World and Work of L.M. Montgomery®.

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 software. 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 Education 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 grandson 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 Gakkio 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 unsupported; 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):


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. MontgomeryTM leaves us lost, dazed, and a bit confused as to what is going on. Less time spent pleasing the CDROM award-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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