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Testdriving CD-ROMs-Reviews of CD-ROM products

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TestDriving CD-ROMs — Reviews of CD-ROM products

**Twayne's United States Authors on CD-ROM,
and Learn Italian Now!**

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Learn Italian Now!

Version 6.0 Transparent Language, Inc.
22 Proctor Hill Rd. P.O. Box 575, Hollis, NH 03049
603-465-2230, fax: 603-465-2779 info@transparent.com
<http://www.transparent.com> \$129 IBM compatible 486 or
better computer, 16 MB RAM, VGA graphics (256 colors),
Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, 15 MB of free hard disk space
(20 MB recommended), double speed or faster CD-ROM
drive, sound card, speakers, microphone Macintosh 68020
processor minimum, 68040 or Power Mac for video,
System 7.1 or better, 4 MB RAM (4.5 MB Power Mac) 12
MB hard disk space (17 MB recommended),
256 color monitor, 2X CD-ROM drive.

Reviewed by **Norman Desmarais**
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Learn Italian Now! Version 6.0 is an activity-based language program that allows users to learn a new language by interacting with authentic native material. It follows an immersion approach to learning a foreign language that differs from most other programs. As not everyone learns the same way, students have the flexibility to jump right into the language or to follow a step-by-step approach if they prefer more structured lessons.

Students can select to begin with either of four titles: a cultural title (Guide to three Italian cities), a travel title (Around Italy with Gabriella and Piero), most common words, and survival phrases. These titles form the core of the work and have games, conversation practice, and Listen & Speak activities associated with them to supplement and reinforce the lessons and to build reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.

After selecting a title, the student sees a screen that seems very busy, with eight windows open and laid out across the screen. How-

ever, one can minimize six of these windows, as desired, to get more working space. The main window appears on the left, under the bar indicating the open title. This contains the text of the dialog in Italian. The sentence or segment appears in blue and the word under the cursor is red. The media window appears to the right. Students can also opt to close this window to enlarge the text area, if so desired.

Both the text and media windows have two sets of controls: one to play the dialog or the video in its entirety and another to play it segment by segment. Playing the dialog in its entirety lets the student see the whole lesson; but it will be too fast and overwhelming for the beginning student. That's where the second set of controls prove valuable. With these, the student can slow the dialog to examine sentences word-by-word or in segments. The translation of the segment appears in the window beneath the text. There are other windows for word meaning, root word, and phrase meaning.

As the student moves the cursor over the words and phrases, the text color changes and the meaning appears in the appropriate windows. Also, grammatical notes appear in the window in the lower right explaining the grammatical rules that apply to the particular word or phrase. All of these elements operate in sync with the text and video.

Another window appears just above the grammatical notes and below the media window. This is for recording personal notes about the grammar or other elements of the lesson or for adding or removing vocabulary words that need more attention. As students get more familiar with the language and need less prompting and assistance, they can close any unneeded windows except for the main text and notes/vocabulary windows.

The supplementary games consist of fill-in-the-blanks and unscrambling (arranging the words in proper order) activities, vocabulary (fill-in-the-blanks vocabulary builder), and crossword puzzles. For these last two, students can select a part of speech to focus on. Most

continued on page 46

Book Reviews *from page 42*

and decrepitude, but Murray dies before seeing the end of his great project. It is Winchester's achievement that we do feel deeply for Murray, for Minor, and for Minor's victim. Winchester never minimizes the evil Minor did in killing an innocent person—and in fact dedicates his book to that long-lost man, **George Merrett**. Yet he shows us all the good that was in Dr. Minor, and tries to provide a modern-day context for what ailed him—what we would now call paranoid schizophrenia. Minor's story, in Winchester's hands, is an alchemy in which tragedy yields inspirational accomplishment. As Winchester comments: "One must feel a strange sense

of gratitude, then, that [Minor's] treatment was never good enough to divert him from his task. The agonies he must have suffered in those terrible asylum nights have granted to us all a benefit for all time. He was mad, and for that, we have reason to be glad. A truly savage irony, on which it is discomfiting to dwell."

Throughout, it is impossible not to feel the great social, historical and intellectual significance—and beauty—of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Winchester manages to convey a sense of the scale, scope, and immensity of a project whose success was not at all foreordained, but whose unique achievement has made it seem so inevitable, so much a part of our landscape that it is inconceivable that it might not have come to being. And yet it could have not, without the stoic dedication and un-

dying commitment of Murray and Minor and others like them. Before reading *The Professor and The Madman*, this year's planned launch of the Web version of the OED (see <http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/98/11/circuits/articles/05oedd.html> for details), seemed natural, inevitable. Now, after reading the book, it seems a kind of miracle. In the space of a little over one hundred years the English-speaking world will have gone from having no complete dictionary to having its first such dictionary offered up for global consumption in streams of little zeros and ones. I won't open the pages of the OED—or flip around its Website—without feeling the deep history and significance of this great work. 🐼

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TestDriving CD-ROM's
from page 44

of the games have time limits and some have prompts available. They can challenge even people familiar with the language.

Learn Italian Now! Version 6.0 lets users record their own pronunciation and compare it both aurally and visually to the native speaker's pronunciation. Students can practice pronunciation or take dictation of words and sentences. In the pronunciation segments, they can compare the graphs of their speech with that of the native speakers, examining articulation, loudness, pitch, timing, and voicing (whether sounds are produced from the vocal chords or by air forced around the teeth, tongue, or lips). These graphs are a unique aspect of this program. Other programs include a feature to record and view one's pronunciation; but none have such a variety of options to do so. This feature is based on advanced speech analysis technology originally designed as a tool for the hearing impaired. It lets users see how closely they approach the model of the native speaker. These graphs allow users to hone their pronunciation skills while realizing that no comparison will ever be perfect due to differences in voices and recording qualities.

Learn Italian Now! Version 6.0 comes on 2 CDs that contain both the Windows (95 and 3.1) and Macintosh versions. A bonus CD includes seven more conversations and videos; a detailed grammar with quizzes for the different parts of speech; Accent, a multilingual word processor that includes foreign language keyboards, a multilingual spell checker, and online thesauri; and Berlitz Interpreter which lets students translate over 50,000 words to or from English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian.

Geared to the adult learner, **Learn Italian Now!** is a well-integrated product and should be commended for the way it keeps media, text, and explanations synchronized with each other. It is an excellent product that combines both total immersion and translation techniques, thereby accommodating different learning styles. The series is also available in Spanish, French, German, Russian, Latin, English (for Spanish speakers), Swedish, Dutch, and Portuguese. Students can sample each of these editions, as there is a sample page available from the main menu. The Product Catalog, also contained on the disc, provides further information about each title as well as the several Transparent Language, Inc. complementary titles that reinforce the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary skills. Highly recommended.

Twayne's United States Authors on CD-ROM

Author/editor of reviewed resource: G. K. Hall & Co.
1633 Broadway New York, NY 10019-6785
tel. 914-773-1628 (tech support) 0-7838-1716-9 \$995

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Twayne's United States Authors on CD-ROM is an expanded and updated version of DiscLit. This new edition contains approximately 200 titles from the Twayne's U. S. Authors Series. The print version consists of more than 700 volumes in a numbered series, many of which have gone out of print. Most of the corresponding volumes on the CD do not indicate volume numbers; but they cover the most important authors and include many of the more recently published print works. The CD also includes many revised editions. Other titles in the CD-ROM series include *Twayne's English Authors* and *Twayne's World Authors*.

Twayne's United States Authors on CD-ROM presents critical work by scholars on the authors and their work. Each title on the disc contains a chronology of key events in the author's life, bibliographies of the author's primary and secondary works, and a reference

bibliography. The table of contents screen for each author has links to go directly to a section or topic of interest. Even the author pictures on the main screen have active links to the appropriate books. The main screen also has a Citation button that shows how to cite the work in a bibliography.

The product uses the Netscape browser as the user interface. This facilitates use as it minimizes the learning curve. The first search option on the main menu is for an In Depth Search which uses the following search criteria: Author Name, Genre, Sex, Key Words, and Time Period. The Genre and Time Period options include drop-down menus for easy selection. Genre includes children's literature, drama, essay/criticism, letters, memoirs/autobiography, non-fiction, novels, philosophy, poetry, and stories. Time Period includes options for 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th century and post World War II. Students can use the Boolean operators AND, OR, and NOT as well as wild cards. Boolean operators only search chapters and tables of contents. Wild cards can appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. Wild card and Key Word searches operate on the complete text. Students can also search for phrases by including them in single quotation marks.

Including them in double quotation marks, as in other search engines, executes a Boolean AND search which is the default operator.

Students interested in a particular author can select Authors A-Z to view the complete list of authors to make a selection and move among chapters, jump to a timeline, or review the bibliographies for a particular book.

The Research Ideas screen lists ten "curriculum-related topics," that generally group authors by time periods or activities, such as poets or children's writers, or other topic such as women or Afro-American authors. This feature may help generate ideas for search terms and research topics; but it can hardly be considered a tool to spur evaluation and critical thinking.

New additions to this CD-ROM include color-coded screens, screen-sensitive help, and citation information. The citation information for a specific work appears at the beginning and end of every article. End notes are linked so one can go from the reference to the note and back again with a single click. With the Netscape browser, researchers can turn the navigation, location, or personal toolbars off to expand the text window, as desired. A Guide button helps identify interesting places on the Internet while a Search button permits searching the Internet for more specific information. **The Twayne's Authors Series** do not include bookmarks or highlighting features; but they do include a unique ClipPrint utility that allows copying, saving, and printing selected text. ClipPrint launches automatically when the program begins. It operates much like the Windows Clipboard; but, unlike Clipboard which overwrites any content when a new copy operation is executed, ClipPrint adds the text below the previous selection. This means that the student only needs to print at the end of a research session. One can select the "Always on Top" setting for faster access; but this may obstruct viewing of the underlying text.

Students will find **Twayne's United States Authors on CD-ROM** a valuable resource for term papers. The print editions are in frequent demand in most libraries. Even those libraries that have a pretty complete collection of this series may be missing some of the revised volumes or some of them may be marked up or mutilated. Having this collection in electronic form makes all the volumes easily accessible. The powerful search engine retrieves information quickly and easily; and the links with the Internet expand the product's capabilities immeasurably. This title belongs in every library that supports research in American authors and literature.