

## George Bernard Shaw plays sidestep copyright headaches

By: [Jennifer Kavur](#) - Computer World Canada (16 Apr 2009)

York University is taking advantage of network restrictions and IP filtering on the fibre optic ORION network to sidestep copyright issues associated with Shaw's work.

George Bernard Shaw is about to make a comeback in Canadian high schools.

Roughly 800,000 students across Ontario will have access to a collection of resources on two plays by [the Nobel Prize winner](#) - The Devil's Disciple and In Good King Charles's Golden Days - through the ORION-Shaw Project.

The result of a partnership between [York University](#) and the [Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network](#) (ORION), the ORION-Shaw Project will provide the materials through a Web site only accessible on the ORION network.

ORION, a fibre optic network that spans 5,800 km across Ontario, offers speeds 100 to 1,000 times faster than the commercial Internet. As a private network for research and education (R&E), membership is limited and commercial access is not granted. Over one million users are on the network, including seventeen school boards in Ontario.

The ORION-Shaw Project - which includes annotated texts, links to related materials, study guides tailored to the Ontario curriculum, a search engine and video clips - will benefit from the "virtually unlimited, unconstrained bandwidth," but the true value of being part of the ORION network is its restricted access.

While copyright law in Canada allows writers' works to come into the public domain 50 years after his or her death, most other countries - including the United States - have a 70 year copyright rule, explained Dr. Leonard Conolly, professor of English Literature at [Trent University](#).

"Shaw died in 1950, so in the year 2000, Shaw's work came into the public domain in Canada ... but almost everywhere else in the world except Canada, Shaw is still in copyright until 2020. Therefore, for projects of this kind, royalties would have to be paid to the Shaw Estate," he said.

The Estate was concerned about how to collect royalties from someone using the service outside of Canada, so the project had to be restricted to users that are located in this country, said project leader Kay Li, [Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies](#) at York University.

"We can make sure the content will not cross the border because the ORION network is an optical network that has restricted access," said Li.

"Because ORION is a private network that is available only in Ontario and accessible by institutions that are connected to it in Ontario, we made a logical partner to work on this initiative," said David Koa, Senior Director of Partnerships & Strategic Alliances at ORION.

Schools across Canada that are connected to [CANARIE](#), Canada's national R&E backbone network, will also have access to the materials. "The ORION-Shaw Project is available to any institution that is either connected to ORION or CANARIE, so it solves the copyright issue," said Koa.

"This is very innovative because it is through ORION and it is dealing innovatively with copyright and technology and classroom learning and also academic pursuits," said Li.

Conolly - corresponding scholar with the [Shaw Festival](#), literary advisor to the Shaw Estates and VP of the [International Shaw Society](#) - supervised and approved the commentary and materials with the help of Trent University graduate students Henry Bakker and Christopher Gray.

The most important content remains the text, but the explanatory and contextual materials haven't been available before, Conolly pointed out. "It becomes an engaging way of study because it begins with the text but goes far beyond the text through these links," he said.

"I think it's the kind of educational process and technology that students are comfortable with. [Students] are much more likely to become attracted to and engaged by the plays if we use this kind of method," he added.

While Shaw's plays are still widely produced in the U.K., Chicago, New York and in Canada at the Shaw Festival, they aren't taught very much in high school curriculums anymore, he pointed out.

"He's gone out of favour, at least for the time being ... he's doing fine in professional theatre, but not so well in the high schools," said Conolly.

Students become "invariably engaged" by the plays once they get to know them, said Conolly. "For those of us interested in Shaw, the challenge has been getting the plays back into the schools and this, we think, is an effective way of doing it."

The two plays featured in the ORION-Shaw Project are scheduled for performance in the Shaw Festival [2009 season](#).

"The other innovative thing about this is the immediate connection between the educational experience online and then the opportunity to go see the plays," said Conolly. "That's the big bonus for the Shaw Festival - this is a way of increasing contact with the school system and creating audiences of the future."

The ORION-Shaw Project is the first of many collections York University plans to provide through the larger [Sagittarius initiative](#), which aims to digitize literary resources for use in Canadian high schools. A second project is scheduled for release this fall on African Canadian literature.