



Wednesday, January 22, 2003

Shaw/Chesterton debates to be staged

They were literary giants who loved to match wits, and they disagreed about almost everything, including marriage, socialism, religion and diet.

George Bernard Shaw, the famous playwright, and G.K. Chesterton, the author, engaged in a series of legendary debates in England between 1911 and 1927. When they locked horns, sparks flew, and the audiences enjoyed the intelligence and humor of both men.

Oakland University's **Department of English, Meadow Brook Theatre** and the **College of Arts and Sciences** are sponsoring "GBS vs. GKC," a one-time staged reading by Jean Morpurgo that reenacts these celebrated confrontations. The event takes place Saturday, Jan. 25, at 2 p.m. at Meadow Brook Theatre. Admission is free.

Brian Murphy, OU professor of English and associate director of the Honors College, will star as Shaw, while Arthur Beer, one of the area's premier actors, will play Chesterton. Mary Bremer, also an award-winning actor and director, will direct the proceedings and act as narrator.

Shaw, a social realist, believed in socialism and looked to the future and the evolution of a Superman. In contrast, Chesterton favored what he called "Distributism" and faith in Christian values. These differences of opinion created a fertile framework for intellectual fireworks.

"The fundamental difference between these two men is that Chesterton was a conservative or traditionalist, while the conception of evolution was central to Shaw's thinking," Murphy said. "Chesterton wrote books titled 'Orthodoxy' and 'Everlasting Man' and represented a long, traditional conception of humanity and God. He made a case for a religious view of the world. But Shaw represented the opposite. He was affected by the Darwinian revolution and believed in what he called the 'Life Force' – that the story of humanity is not everlasting, but that humanity is evolving.

"There is a deep British tradition in the rational debate. Both men were very accomplished speakers, and people really admired the virtuosity of their dialogues."

In her script, Morpurgo traces the complex relationship of these two men, combining passages from their debates and other sources, including letters. She captures both men's personalities and lively minds. She also encourages the audience to participate in the debate. Audience members should be prepared, as they will be assigned to support either Shaw or Chesterton orally when asked to do so.

This hour-long performance supports the residency of the **Shaw Festival of Canada** and its production of "**Candida**" at **Meadow Brook Theatre** from Jan. 8 to Feb. 2.

SUMMARY

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