

Major Barbara

(1907)

By

George B. Shaw
(1856 – 1950)

Irish Book Discussion
McClelland Library

April 29
10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Norton Library

Discussion Guide:

G.B. Shaw was born in Ireland (Portobello, Dublin, in 1856), but he moved to London in 1876, where he spent his productive years in writing novels and plays. In Ireland, his family belonged to the Protestant Ascendancy; in England he is considered second only to Shakespeare as a creative artist. As an avid learner, he was interested in Marxism, socialism, and the Fabian Society. It should be noted that Shaw held dual citizenship (English and Irish) from 1934-1950. (The Wikipedia article on Shaw is quite long but comprehensive. You may find fuller discussion of the aspects above.)

Mary and I remind you that Major Barbara is a play and requires different approaches. When reading the play, you get lots of stage descriptions; when viewing the play, you must imagine what the stage looks like and how people interact with each other. This means that the playwright must clue the audience into the characters and issues in the opening scenes. What clues do you discern in the first scenes of this play?

Select one of the following characters to analyze and be the spokesperson for: Lady Britomart, Barbara, Andrew Undershaft, Adolphus Cusins.

Shaw is known for his long prefaces to plays. What issues is he addressing in the one that occurs before this play?

This year we have been considering the emergence of Irish literature and we challenged ourselves to consider a working definition or description of that literature. What observations can you make about Irish literature after reading these works?

Looking ahead-----Mary and I are busy putting together the list of readings for next year. We'll try to have it posted in early summer so that you can begin reading. Please share the information with your friends and encourage them to join the group.