

OSCAR AND GBS

Two writers so famous--or infamous--in their own times, and ours, that their names are iconic. We'll read Wilde's plays *The Importance of Being Earnest* (possibly the funniest play ever written) and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (about a daughter's virtue and a mother's love), as well as his witty, paradoxical, and profound essay, "The Decay of Lying." (And possibly some real-life dialogue from the trial that sent him to Reading Prison for two years at hard labor for the crime of being gay). And we'll read Shaw's daringly contrarian plays, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (about prostitution as capitalism, or vice-versa), *Man and Superman* (including the long interval called "Don Juan in Hell"—a decidedly pre-feminist dialogue), and *Major Barbara* (about good deeds versus social capital). Each writer was in his own way a champion of social justice; each wielded the sharp weapon of comedy against the false pieties of the old Victorian age. They were contemporaries, although one died young and the other lived to see his image emblazoned on Broadway. We'll spend the first half of the course on Wilde, then shift gears (grindingly) to Shaw. We'll treat each writer on his own terms—which sometimes overlapped and sometimes were the opposite of the other's. We'll try to read them in their historical context while occasionally asking how well they stand the test of our own troubled times.

Because we'll want to read some of their sparkling dialogue out loud, we'll need to be on the same page, literally. Please acquire these editions: *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* in the so-called Wordsworth Library Collection (ISBN 978 1 8402 2550 1): it contains more than we'll need but is cheaper, and nicer, than individual paperbacks. Same thing goes for *George Bernard Shaw Plays Collection* (sic) (979 8 5615 2954 2).

LEADER: Lawrence Danson is professor emeritus of English at Princeton University. He has written articles and books (including *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres*) about Renaissance drama and about Victorian and Edwardian literature.

LOCATION: Zoom

TUESDAYS: 10:00 a.m. to noon, 8 weeks beginning March 1 through April 19

MAXIMUM: 16