

Chapman University  
**Presidential Seminar Spring 2021**  
Katharine Gillespie Moses and Bart J. Wilson  
Zoom, 6:45 – 8:00 p.m. (Tuesdays)

Texts (please buy these editions of the book):

Armitage, Simon (Translator). *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. (\$13.45)  
<https://www.amazon.com/Gawain-Green-Knight-Verse-Translation/dp/0393334155>  
ISBN: 978-0393334159

McCloskey, Deirdre N. *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. (\$22.50)  
<https://www.amazon.com/Bourgeois-Virtues-Ethics-Age-Commerce/dp/0226556646>.  
ISBN: 978-0226556642.

Text Available Online:

Shoaf, R. A. *The Poem as Green Girdle: Commercium in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gainesville, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1984. (free) Download here:  
[https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/06/73/11/00001/AA00067311\\_00001.pdf](https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/06/73/11/00001/AA00067311_00001.pdf)

Tentative Schedule

- February 9: *Sir Gawain*, Fits (Sections) 1-2
- February 16: McCloskey, Chapters 1-3, 26, 28, 31 (pp. 63-87, 303-313, 320-331, 346-351)
- March 2: *Sir Gawain*, Fit (Section) 3
- March 16: McCloskey, Chapters 16-20 (pp. 201-250)
- April 6: *Sir Gawain*, Fit (Section) 4
- April 13: Shoaf, Introduction and Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-30)
- April 27: McCloskey, Chapters 21-25 (pp. 251-300)
- May 11: Shoaf, Chapters 3-4 (pp. 31-76)

The Spring 2021 Presidential Seminar explores the tensions between aristocratic virtue and commerce, pairing *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with Deirdre McCloskey's *The Bourgeois Virtues*. McCloskey argues that most of the modern world lives and thinks and moves in the ordinary business of life as a member of bourgeoisie. We all, she claims, adhere to a code of ethics conducive for and derivative from commerce—honesty, enterprise, and responsibility. But such virtues were not always widely valued. Prior to the beginning of great enrichment in the eighteenth century, great works of literature valued the virtues of aristocratic warriors: honor, courage, and justice. What is it like to think and act and see the world as an aristocrat? *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a late fourteenth-century chivalric romance, serves as our lens for understanding the honor code of the aristocracy. Curiously, the author, who is unknown, seems to use the language of commerce throughout the poem—contract, price (*prys*), exchange—even though there is not one actual commercial transaction in the poem.

How did a bourgeois ethic, as McCloskey identifies it, supplant the aristocrat-peasant-clerisy triad of ethical characters? Why is it hard for us modern bourgeoisie to understand, think, and act with an aristocratic ethic? And yet, why do we yearn for the aristocratic virtues in our art?