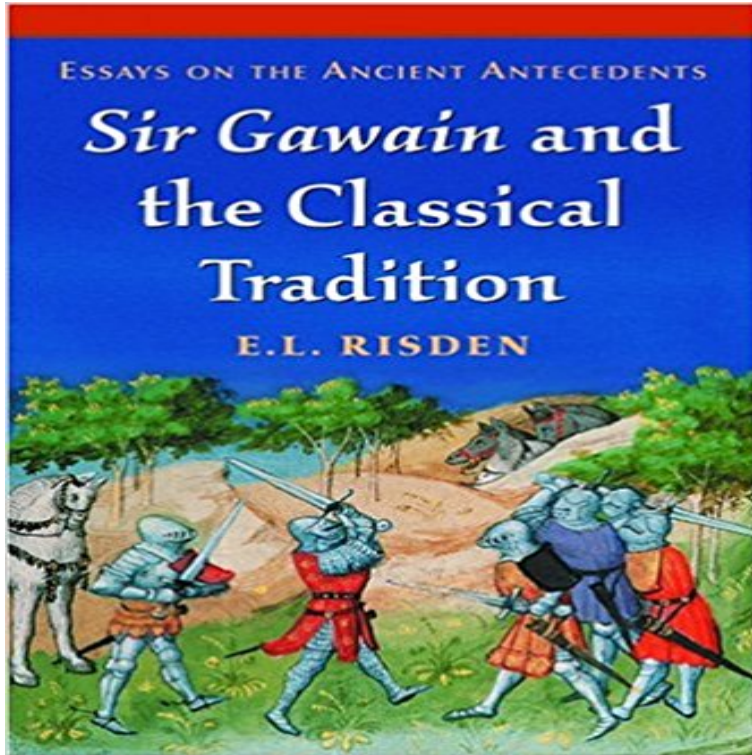


Sir Gawain and the Classical Tradition: Essays on the Ancient Antecedents



The 14th century English alliterative poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is admired for its morally complex plot and brilliant poetics. A chivalric romance placed in an Arthurian setting, it received acclaim from the peasantry of its time for its commentary regarding important socio-political and religious concerns. The poem's technical brilliance blends psychological depth and vivid language to produce an effect widely considered superior to any other work of the time. Although the poem is a combination of English alliterative meter, romanticism, and a wide-ranging knowledge of Celtic lore, continental materials and Latin classics, the extent to which Classical antecedents affected or directed the poem is a point of continued controversy among literary scholars. This collection of essays by scholars of diverse interests addresses this puzzling and fascinating question. The introduction provides an expansive background for the topic, and subsequent essays explore the extent to which classical Greek, Roman, Arabic, Christian and Celtic influences are revealed in the poem's opening and closing allusions, themes, and composition. Essays discuss the way in which the anonymous author of *Sir Gawain* employs figural echoes of classical materials, cultural memoirs of past British tradition, and romantic re-textualizations of Trojan and British literature. It is argued that *Sir Gawain* may be understood as an Aeneas, Achilles, or Odysseus figure, while the British situation in the 14th century may be understood as analogous to that of ancient Troy.

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