

Cambridge Festival talk reimagines the Arthurian Legend and its modern relevance

A Cambridge Festival event is set to offer a fresh and thought-provoking perspective on the Arthurian legend.

In his talk, [Who was King Arthur](#), on Saturday 22 March, Kit Treadwell from the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge provides a new way of looking at one of our most enduring legends, one that challenges us to reconsider the intersection of history, culture, and the narratives that shape our understanding of both past and present. Treadwell delves into Arthurian romance literature, with a particular focus on the iconic *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, while also exploring lesser-known texts from medieval Wales and England.

Treadwell's work goes beyond the surface-level fantasy often associated with these tales of knights, monsters, and magic. Instead, he uncovers the deeper reflections of the historical tensions between the English and Welsh peoples, set against the backdrop of the late 13th century, a period marking the end of native Welsh rule. His research reveals how these medieval stories, often seen as mere escapism, are powerful commentaries on the political and social divides of their time – and strikingly relevant to the issues facing our modern world.

In an era where debates around cultural appropriation, identity, and societal division dominate public discourse, Treadwell's research uncovers the ways these medieval narratives speak directly to the social issues of both their time and ours. The texts, written in the borderlands of England and Wales, frequently tackle the theme of conflict resolution – not through glorified violence, but through calls for understanding and tolerance between warring cultures. In these stories, knights are not only tested by strange and magical lands, but by the very notion of accepting and respecting the unfamiliar – offering a timely message of empathy and unity for today's divided world.

What sets Treadwell's approach apart is his in-depth engagement with these works, placing them firmly within their historical context while analysing their literary elements. Treadwell argues that these romances – often dismissed as purely fantastical – offer profound insights into the fragile relationship between the English and Welsh during a time of political upheaval. Far from simply providing escapist entertainment, these tales advocate for respect across cultural divides, a message that resonates strongly as contemporary societies struggle with similar challenges of division and reconciliation.

With the rise of the Romantasy genre and an increasing trend of drawing cultural inspiration from the medieval period, Treadwell's work offers a crucial historical perspective. By examining the themes of cultural exchange, respect, and unity in medieval romance, he shows how these narratives can inform current debates about our collective identity. As we look to the past for guidance in a world often divided by

difference, Treadwell's research provides an invaluable and timely contribution to the ongoing conversation.

Treadwell's re-imagining of the Arthurian legend serves as a powerful reminder that empathy, understanding, and shared humanity are timeless values. By reframing these ancient stories, he challenges not only how we think about medieval literature, but also how we navigate the cultural divides of the present day.

For further details visit www.cam.ac.uk

Press Contact: Becky Mann PR | Email: beckymannpr@gmail.com | Phone: 07739 131820

Socials: Facebook: CambridgeFestival | Instagram: @Camunifestivals | LinkedIn: cambridge-festival | Blue Sky: @cambridgefestival.bsky.social | Tik Tok: @cambridgefestival

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About the Cambridge Festival

The Cambridge Festival is an annual multidisciplinary event that brings together the University of Cambridge's cutting-edge research and creative thinking. Offering a diverse array of events across science, technology, health, arts, humanities, and social sciences, the festival invites all to explore new ideas, engage with experts, and engage in conversations that shape our understanding of the world.

About the University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge, founded in 1209, is one of the world's oldest and most prestigious academic institutions. With a commitment to research excellence and global impact, the university continues to lead in education and innovation across a wide range of disciplines. It remains at the forefront of scientific discovery, social progress, and cultural understanding.