When King Arthur met the Venus: Romantic Antiquarianism and the Illustration of Anne Bannerman’s “The Prophecy of Merlin”

Abstract
The first edition of Bannerman’s Tales of Superstition and Chivalry (1802) contained an erotic engraving of a naked Venus figure, which was declared ‘offensive to decency’ by Scottish audiences in the poet’s native Edinburgh. Garner’s account investigates the controversy surrounding the engraving and the puzzling disparity between it and the ballad it illustrated: the Arthurian-themed ‘Prophecy of Merlin’. Using evidence from Bannerman’s correspondence with noted Scottish male publishers and antiquarians, this essay argues that decision to include the dangerous engraving was symptomatic of current anxieties surrounding a female-authored text which threatened to encroach on antiquarian and Arthurian enquiry.

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Merlin warned the king that Guinevere would cause Arthur a lot of problems but he didn’t care. Arthur asked Guinevere’s father if Arthur could marry Guinevere and was told yes.

Excalibur. Lancelot had ended up in the city of Corbenic where he met King Pelles and his daughter, Elaine. Elaine loved Lancelot but Lancelot was in love with Guinevere. Elaine used magic to trap Lancelot and ended up having a son. As he lay dying, Arthur asked that both Excalibur and the magic scabbard be returned to the lake where he had gotten them. When Arthur arrived at the lake, three Fairy Queens arrived and took Arthur’s body to Avalon, an island in the middle of the lake.

How Arthur was chosen king, and of wonders and marvels of a sword taken out of a stone by the said Arthur. THEN stood the realm in great jeopardy long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many weened to have been king. Then Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and counselled him for to send for all the lords of the realm, and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should to London come by Christmas, upon pain of cursing; and for this cause, that Jesus, that was born on that night, that he would of his great mercy show some miracle, as he. Arthur, with the aid of Merlin, conquers the Kings of the North, thus proving he is worthy of his crown, by birth and by prophecy. Now I have warned thee of thy vain glory and of thy pride, that thou hast many times erred against thy Maker. Beware of everlasting pain, for of all earthly knights I have most pity of thee, for I know well thou hast not thy peer on any earthly sinful man. Arthur was both man and king, who struggled with the limits of his mortality and yet ironically became a myth in the process.

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