Imagining the Text: Ekphrasis and Envisioning Courtly Identity in Wirnt von Gravenberg’s *Wigalois*

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ABSTRACT

James Hamilton Brown. Imagining the Text: Ekphrasis and Envisioning Courtly Identity in Wirnt von Gravenberg’s *Wigalois*  
(Under the direction of Dr. Kathryn Starkey)

This study investigates the multiple functions of the rhetorical device *ekphrasis* – the verbal representation of a visual representation – in Wirnt von Gravenberg’s thirteenth-century verse romance *Wigalois*, one of the most popular and enduring Arthurian romances in the Middle High German literary tradition. The dissertation explores how the numerous ekphrastic descriptions provide narrative and thematic structure, harmonize potential conflicts in the text, and contribute to the construction of courtly identity. An examination of *Wigalois* manuscripts ranging from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries offers a new interpretation of *Wigalois* that takes into account the fluidity of the text in its material environment. The study thus elucidates the close connections between *ekphrasis* and medieval literary culture; demonstrates that the vibrant symbiosis of word and image is a crucial factor in explaining the poem’s sustained popularity and unbroken line of transmission for more than six hundred years; and contributes to the history of the book and to the historicization of medieval and modern modes of perception.
For my family, with love and gratitude.
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Part of this dissertation examines courtly conventions, and as I try to find the words to express my love and gratitude to my wife and my son, it seems there is little I can say that does not sound wholly conventional. I am thankful for Jacob and for the delightful, priceless time we have spent together as this dissertation slowly got written. I am deeply indebted to Susan for her friendship and all her patience, support, and love. I am grateful for her Zen approach to life as a doctoral student’s spouse, and she now knows more about ekphrasis, Wigalois, and the Middle Ages than she ever wanted to. One modern take on the Middle Ages that she and I have enjoyed together with our two nephews – over and over and over again – is Peter Jackson’s rendering of Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings; like Samwise Gamgee, Susan is the real hero of this particular quest. I am grateful for her unwavering encouragement, her willingness to edit chapters and conference papers, and for telling me candidly when what I’ve written is gibberish. She and Jacob are the joy of my heart, and I dedicate this work to them both.
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I. “Gemeistert dar mit worten”: Wigalois and Ekphrasis

Toward the end of Wirnt von Gravenberg’s thirteenth-century romance Wigalois, there is a splendid wedding celebration. The hero Gwigalois\(^1\) has defeated the heathen and devil’s accomplice Roaz and restored order to the Kingdom of Korntin; now he is marrying the princess Larie. Yet in the middle of the festivities, the newlyweds receive terrible news: a messenger comes and explains that one of the bride’s relatives has been attacked and murdered on his way to the celebration. Gwigalois quickly organizes a military campaign in order to avenge the killing and put the murderer to justice.

Yet before the audience learns anything about the plan of attack or even about the participants, the narrator first describes a magnificent, luxurious tent that the hero commissions for his bride Larie. Mounted on the back of a war-elephant, a colossal and opulent kastel towers high in the air, an impressive structure adorned with exotic tapestries, lush carpets, beautiful golden vessels, and even mosquito nets woven from silk (v. 10,342-10,408).\(^2\) Inside this remarkable tent sits the queen, whose clothing now becomes the subject of yet another description: her silk shift is “as white as a swan” (wîz als ein swan), her robe

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\(^{1}\) In the manuscripts, the hero’s name appears as Gwigalois, not Wigalois. This is explained as “Gwi von Galois” (v. 1574), then appears henceforth as the abbreviated Gwigalois (v. 1658). Why the G was dropped from the title remains unexplained. In this investigation, I adhere to convention and write the title of the poem as Wigalois, and the name of the hero as Gwigalois.

“more yellow than a glowing flame” (gelpfer danne ein gluot), and set upon her three-colored brooch made of emeralds, sapphires and rubies are the tiny figures of wild animals, two lions and an eagle. The narrator sees this as an opportunity to remind the audience of who actually made this brooch – he did, with his storytelling skills: “thus this brooch was skillfully fashioned – with words – by Wirnt von Gravenberg.” In Middle High German: alsus hât gemeistert dar / nâch dem wunsche ditze werc / mit worten Wirnt von Grâvenberc (v. 10,574-10,576).

Lavish descriptions such as this are known as ekphrasis, one of the most important and commonly used rhetorical devices in ancient and medieval literature.³ The origins of this rhetorical device date back to ancient Greece and the Progymnasmata, a series of rhetorical guidelines and exercises for schoolboys and would-be speechmakers. Defining the term by way of etymology, this “speaking” (phrazein) “out” (ek) has been interpreted broadly throughout much of literary history to mean very vivid description, or as Murray Krieger has written, “as any sought-for equivalent in words of any visual image, inside or outside art; in effect, the use of language to function as a substitute natural sign.”⁴ In much more recent scholarship, this definition has been narrowed significantly to mean simply a verbal representation of visual representation, an attempted imitation in words of a real object from the plastic arts, usually a painting or piece of sculpture.

Ekphrasis plays a decisive role in Wirnt von Gravenberg’s Wigalois; throughout the tale, shields, wondrous objects, castles and buildings, clothing and weapons are all described


in the most intimate detail. Indeed, as we shall see, ekphrasis is the decisive rhetorical technique in *Wigalois*. If we were to embark on a survey of Middle High German Arthurian romances, we would soon notice that, considered in its entirety, the genre is replete with examples of detailed ekphrastic descriptions, from the description of Enite’s horse and its saddle in Hartmann von Aue’s *Erec*⁵ to numerous descriptions of clothing and knightly accoutrements in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*.⁶ Other examples include Wolfram’s *Titurel* (ca. 1215), in which the poet describes a sumptuously decorated dog-collar and leash that is more than twelve fathoms (*klafter*) long and not only bears an inscription, but indeed tells the entire love-story of Ilinot the Breton and Florie.⁷ In Albrecht von Scharfenberg’s encyclopedic continuation known as *Der jüngere Titurel* (ca. 1260-1270), the reading aloud of the inscription on this same leash takes up 54 entire strophes!⁸ In the course of this survey, when we came to Wirnt von Gravenberg’s only known romance, it would become apparent that, when compared against its counterparts, *Wigalois* stands alone. From beginning to end, the work is practically dripping with highly visual descriptions, and in passage after passage, the narrator delights in describing a variety of objects for the audience, a variety that by far outnumbers the examples we find in other works of this genre. Yet despite the amount of recent scholarship on ekphrasis, despite the astonishing number of ekphrastic descriptions in *Wigalois*, despite the poem’s well-attested popularity during the

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Middle Ages and beyond, and despite the number of studies within the past twenty years devoted to *Wigalois*, there currently exists no scholarly investigation that examines the vital role that ekphrasis plays in *Wigalois*.

This dissertation contributes first to *Wigalois* scholarship by demonstrating that the strategic placement of ekphrases throughout the text and the important narrative, thematic, and identity-forming functions that these ekphrases fulfill make ekphrasis the single most important rhetorical device in the poem. More important to the larger field of word-and-image studies, this dissertation furthermore seeks a new, more inclusive definition of ekphrasis, one that accepts the tenets of the ancient, broadly inclusive “very descriptive writing” while simultaneously taking the theoretical considerations of the modern and more restrictive “verbal representation of a visual representation” into account. It is clear from the above sample of what Wirnt describes and from the description of the tent in my opening paragraph that the author of *Wigalois* does not devote lavish descriptions strictly to what we today think of as *objets d’art*, but also describes works of architecture, weaponry and military equipment, and everyday items such as clothing. This is consistent with the broader definition and use of ekphrasis in older literature, and indeed, in older scholarship. The critical stance I take in my own work, however, lies somewhere between the two extremes of ancient and modern understandings of ekphrasis: I restrict my study to Wirnt’s descriptions of *objects*, such as shields, clothing, or architectural structures, but not necessarily to those that modern critics would consider works of visual art. I thus adhere to the broader theoretical guidelines established by ancient and medieval rhetoricians in my study of ekphrasis and *Wigalois*, but certainly also include the contributions of modern ekphrasis scholars.
In this study, I define ekphrasis as a passage of intensely descriptive writing that expressly calls on the reader’s or listener’s visual imagination and places an object, be it a work of visual art or not, directly before the mind’s eye of the audience in order to trigger a particular series of reflections. As I show, these reflections frequently include drawing connections between the descriptive passage and the tastes and values of one’s own society and how this society perceives itself. I demonstrate furthermore that the descriptions in Wirnt von Gravenberg’s *Wigalois* often reveal much about literacy, listening, and reading practices. As I argue, in many instances, the descriptive passages in *Wigalois* are intimately connected to the idea of self-recognition, and they serve as self-reflexive commentary on, among other things, proper conduct, on the creation and uses of visual art, on the practice and production of Arthurian romance and on the class of people who first enjoyed it. Furthermore, in my definition, an ekphrastically described object must go deeper than the lavishly-described surface; it must play a role in pushing the plot forward and in structuring the narrative. An ekphrasis often thematizes its own description, and frequently also prescribes a set of ideals or values. Finally, some of the objects I investigate are not purely pictorial, but are also marked with inscriptions or captions, thereby raising important questions about how a medieval audience used words in conjunction with images.

One of the contributions of my dissertation is thus to bridge a current theoretical gap in the scholarship on ekphrasis and on *Wigalois* by simultaneously looking backward and forward. By examining the descriptions of a wider variety of objects, I return on the one hand to the older, indeed medieval, understanding of what constitutes an ekphrasis, yet by considering current ekphrasis scholarship and some of the ever more precise definitions and subcategories of ekphrases in my theoretical investigation of these objects, I bring a crucial
and much neglected aspect of this astoundingly popular work from the thirteenth century into critical dialogue with scholarship from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries for the first time.

Finally, it is my hope that this dissertation will make a contribution to the history of perception and imagination. By examining the continuities in and differences between three manuscript redactions of the *Wigalois* material from three different centuries, my dissertation provides new insights into how medieval German audiences used texts and images in the formation of memorial structures and group identity. This will help to strengthen our understanding of the symbiosis between not only word and image, but indeed between word and *imaginings*, between a text and the varying visions of cultural identity that it evokes for audiences from different historical periods.

II. What Was Ekphrasis?

To see why building a theoretical bridge between the thirteenth and twenty-first centuries is important at all, we must first remember that ekphrasis was one of the most commonly used rhetorical devices throughout the ancient and medieval worlds, and then consider just what the ancient understanding of ekphrasis entailed, and how medieval authors tended to use it. In one particularly illuminating investigation, for example, Ruth H. Webb has drawn attention to the rather wide discrepancy between ancient theoreticians and modern art- and literary critics in their respective definitions of ekphrasis. While many contemporary critics are content to use the narrow definition of ekphrasis as “verbal representation of visual representation” (i.e. art objects), in the poetic theories of antiquity, according to Webb, ekphrasis simply meant *highly descriptive writing*, be it a “description of a person, a place,
even a battle, as well as of a painting or sculpture.⁹ The storyteller who used ekphrasis in ancient (and medieval) times was thus not so concerned with the type of object to be described, but rather with the technique of describing it; in fact, as Webb points out, what tended to interest authors in the ancient world was not so much the description of an object, but the unfolding of a process.¹⁰ For ancient and medieval poets, then, the aim was to describe an object or a scene so vividly that the audience would believe that it had indeed been placed before their very eyes.¹¹

I maintain throughout my dissertation that placing objects vividly before the mind’s eye plays a crucial role in Wirnt von Gravenberg’s *Wigalois*. But what are some of the functions of this crucial role? Why ekphrasis? As James Schultz has shown, the narrative focus of many medieval authors is not so much on broad, overarching consistency, but rather on local detail in order to create striking and convincing individual scenes.¹² I would add that for Wirnt, as well as for other medieval German authors, ekphrasis is an important rhetorical tool in this focus on individual scenes. Medieval authors frequently use ekphrastic descriptions to slow the pace of the narrative, to draw the audience in and to revel in the detailed descriptions of wondrous or exotic objects, and to invite the audience to reflect more carefully about the events of the story. Moreover, my investigation demonstrates for the first time that Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis speaks to notions of aristocratic self-representation and calls attention to the German-speaking nobility’s shared sense of a common culture. In

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Wigalois, ekphrasis invites the audience to reflect on their own cultural identity: Scenes with ekphrastic descriptions contribute to the formation of cultural identity within the German-speaking aristocracy of the thirteenth century by acting text-internally and –externally as cues to individual and group memory.  

For example, Mary Carruthers’ discussion of the formation of group memory is especially important to my thesis about how the ekphrastic objects in my investigation operate. Carruthers shows that memory training, memorization and reading were part of a deliberate program of forming ethical values, of creating texts anew in a communal act of creating a better individual. This individual was expected in turn to be a more ethical member of a community. Reading thus became “communally experienced wisdom for one’s own life, gained by memorizing.” Carruthers demonstrates that the practice of reading and memory training served not only to create better, more ethical individuals, but to connect these individuals to a community—the entire community of past and present thinkers, readers, and writers. Although Carruthers’ discussion focuses primarily on examples from a clerical or monastic context, the function of ekphrasis in Wirnt’s secular, courtly context is nevertheless similar; the ekphrases in Wigalois build upon already established literary

13 Two of the most important books about memory in medieval and early modern society are Frances Yates, The Art of Memory. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966; and Mary Carruthers, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. See also Brilliant, Richard, “The Bayeux Tapestry: a stripped narrative for their eyes and ears.” Word and Image 7 (1991): 98-122. The collective, group dynamic is also vital to Richard Brilliant’s hypothesis about the performance of the Bayeux Tapestry; according to Brilliant, the reason why the tapestry would have been publicly performed and not just viewed was because it served to form a sense of political and cultural community among its original Norman-French audience. It helped to form a public memory.

14 Carruthers, The Book of Memory 162.

15 Carruthers, The Book of Memory 162.
traditions not only to remind courtly audiences of what constitutes proper courtly behavior, but also to remind them of their connectedness with other members of their social class, and to remind them moreover that the composition and enjoyment of poetic fiction is in itself a defining aspect of what it means to be courtly.

III. Recent Directions in Ekphrasis Research

Ekphrasis has received a great deal of scholarly attention in recent years. In the current literature on ekphrasis, however, most scholars concern themselves either with examples from the ancient world – the Shield of Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad* being the most famous instance – or with its use in the eighteenth century and beyond. In these discussions, medieval literature is woefully underrepresented, as if authors had stopped using this rhetorical device for hundreds of years and then suddenly rediscovered it. Nothing could be farther from the truth; ekphrasis was in fact a very common and important tool for medieval authors of numerous different genres.

I certainly do not mean to imply that recent ekphrasis scholarship has little to offer in discussions of medieval literature. Quite the contrary, I am deeply indebted to several investigations that contribute to my understanding of how ekphrasis functions in Middle High German literature in general, and in *Wigalois* in particular. In her work on the “ekphrastic model”, for instance, Tamar Yacobi expands the theoretical framework within which one might examine ekphrases and demonstrates that the ekphrastic discourse is not

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16 See Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* 50-81. Yates provides an especially thorough examination of how medieval society built upon and adapted the traditional memory treatises and techniques described in antiquity (such as Cicero’s *De oratore* or the pseudo-Ciceronian *Ad herennium*) and transformed them from mnemotechnical devices into an entire storehouse for ethical and theological thought.

restricted to a one-to-one relationship between a unique art-work and its re-presentation in a single work of literature. Instead, Yacobi proposes a four-part model wherein the ekphrastic relations are as follows:

1. The representation of a single visual text by a single verbal text.
2. The representation of a single visual text by more than one verbal text.
3. The representation of more than one visual text by a single verbal text.
4. The representation of more than one visual text by more than one verbal text.

As we shall see in later chapters, Yacobi’s ekphrastic model is especially important to the intertextual aspects of ekphrasis in *Wigalois*, where, for example, the description of Japhite’s magnificent tomb is but one of a number of similar tomb descriptions (i.e. “more than one visual text”) in the corpus of Middle High German literature (i.e. “more than one verbal text”).

Valerie Robillard provides another especially useful set of critical guidelines in her “scalar model” of ekphrastic relationships. Here, ekphrases and their intertextual relationships are evaluated according to:

1. *Communicativity*, the degree to which a particular artwork is marked in a text. “This ranges from vague allusions, to direct references in a title, to explicit marking in the body of a text.”

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2. *Referentiality*, a quantitative category that refers to the extent to which a poet actually uses a work of art in the text.

3. *Structurality*, which concerns the degree of structural imitation of a particular image within the text.

4. *Selectivity*, which refers to the “transposition of certain topics, myths, or norms and conventions of particular periods or styles of pictorial representation.”

5. *Dialogicity*, the degree to which the literary artist creates semantic tension in the “re-framing” of the visual representation.

6. *Autoreflexivity*, where the poet specifically thematizes the connections between his or her ekphrasis and the visual sources, i.e. between the verbal medium and the plastic arts.

This autoreflexivity is evident, for instance, in the example of Larie’s tent that I provided at the beginning of my introduction. I shall demonstrate, in fact, that in a number of instances in *Wigalois*, the narrator draws specific attention to his own verbal skills in creating splendid imaginary objects for the audience’s internal gaze.

The list of modern investigations of ekphrasis goes on: Important book-length studies on the topic include Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*;²² James Heffernan’s *Museum of Words*²³ and also *Space, Time, Image, Sign: Essays on Literature*

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and the Visual Arts; and Peter Wagner’s edited volume Icons-Texts-Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality. This recent scholarship has tended to narrow its definitions of ekphrasis into even smaller, more precisely honed sub-areas of word-and-image research. One important trend, represented by scholars such as James Heffernan, is to focus on ekphrasis as a function of narratology; here the visual and spatial elements of ekphrasis play a secondary role to those of meta-narratives, with ekphrasis serving as the inter- and intratextual mirror of the narrative process itself. We shall see that, similar to the autoreflexivity mentioned just above, in a number of instances, Wirnt von Gravenberg uses ekphrasis to remind his audience that they are in fact listening to or reading a story, and that narrating stories and telling tales was an important aspect of courtly identity.

Another direction in ekphrasis research – and more important to the functions of ekphrasis within Wigalois – is represented by scholars like Peter Wagner, who has pursued the ideas of intermediality and iconotextuality. In general, these intermedial studies in ekphrasis seek to define the boundaries and interactions between visual and verbal representations ever more precisely, and argue, for example, that all representations, be they primarily verbal or visual, are in essence heterogeneous. In light of the recurrent integrative function that many of the objects in Wigalois serve, such as Japhite’s Tomb, one is tempted to use Wagner’s term intermediality, where one finds, for example, “the ‘intertextual’ use of a medium (painting) in another medium (prose fiction).” One could certainly say that Wirnt von Gravenberg uses objects and their descriptions as intermediaries between the text and the


audience, but the intertextual aspects, or rather the very specific intertextual referencing that Wagner implies in his definition of intermediality, i.e. that a literary artist would refer to a specific, historically known work of visual art within a literary work, make it a not entirely accurate term for my discussion.27

This, in turn, raises the question of the “notional ekphrasis.” John Hollander, for example, has proposed to differentiate between descriptions of historically attested works of art and “notional ekphrases”, that is, a described object that does not exist (or never existed) in historical reality, but that is strictly the creation of the literary artist and only exists in the mind.28 We can say with certainty that all of the ekphrases in Wigalois are purely the product of Wirnt’s imagination and that the objects never “really existed”, but considering, for example, the myriad connections between Wirnt’s text and the very real and historical use of shields and heraldry,29 I agree with W.J. T. Mitchell when he writes that “all ekphrasis is notional, and seeks to create a specific image to be found only in the text as its ‘resident alien’.”30 Thus, the object described in an ekphrasis may or may not have existed in “real time” or in “real space”, and it may vary in its referentiality to historical events or practices, yet, as Mitchell concludes, all ekphrases exist in the mind.

On the other hand, Peter Wagner uses another important term, first coined by Michael Nerlich, iconotextuality, which Wagner defines as the presence of “an artifact in which the verbal and the visual signs mingle to produce rhetoric that depends on the co-presence of

27 See Wagner’s discussion of the definition of his terms from pp. 9-18.
29 I discuss this in chapter four, pp. 156-161.
words and images.” This somewhat vague definition is given more precise contours in another of Wagner’s studies, *Reading Iconotexts*. In this work, Wagner elaborates on the term and sees iconotextuality at work, for instance, in William Hogarth’s intaglio engravings from the eighteenth century, where written texts often appear within the images, thereby layering and weaving a complex network of visual and verbal meanings. Questions of iconotextuality are an issue to some extent in the ekphrases in the (standard scholarly) text of *Wigalois*, for example the long inscription included in the description of Japhite’s Tomb, yet as the second half of my dissertation demonstrates, they become especially important in the illuminated manuscript and print versions of the tale. For instance, in an exquisite illustrated codex from 1372, *Wigalois* manuscript B, also known as the Leiden manuscript or LTK 537, banderoles set within some of the images work together with the illustrations and the verses to communicate their enhanced meaning to readers and viewers. In *Wigalois* manuscript k, or Donaueschingen Codex 71, as well as in an early print version of the *Wigalois* material from 1519 known as *Wigoleis vom Rade*, the illustrations are preceded by *tituli* descriptive captions that inform readers about what the illustration contains, and that frequently summarize larger passages of main text. In these examples, as readers are provided with numerous opportunities to move back and forth from main text to caption to illustration, the images and text(s) work in concert with one another in a tripartite configuration of mutual illumination. My investigation of the representation of ekphrastically described objects and the overarching role they play within the illustrated manuscript recensions of *Wigalois* is, to my knowledge, the first to bring the issue of iconotextuality to bear on a set of medieval


manuscripts, certainly to the two extant fully-illustrated *Wigalois* manuscripts, which have received very little scholarly attention up to now.

One especially important function that the ekphrases in *Wigalois* perform is to invite the audience to think more carefully about the story, allowing them either to reflect on the ideas that the narrator has recently discussed, or to offer them a bit of foreshadowing of important things to come. This proleptic function is treated in two recent discussions of visually evocative descriptions in ancient and medieval literature. Mary Carruthers and Eva Keuls both refer to these strategically placed rhetorical images as Bildeinsätze, a term coined at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Austrian classical philologist O. Schissel von Fleschenberg. Keuls and Carruthers both delineate how a Bildeinsatz differs from an ekphrasis, Carruthers albeit rather more thoroughly. Keuls states that the ancient technique of Bildeinsatz was a means of “introducing a discourse or story by a description of a painting.” Carruthers claims that Bildeinsätze are “often conflated with ekphrasis” and that ekphrasis “always purports to be a meditative description of a painting, sculpture or the façade of a building.” A comparison of these two definitions makes it clear why such conflations occur! By the time this highly visual rhetorical technique came into monastic use during the Middle Ages, states Carruthers, the “orienting picture may be, but need not be, a work of art…the initiating compositional *pictura* can also describe a schematized landscape


35 Keuls, “Rhetoric and Visual Aids” 121.

in the form of a world map, or a figure like Lady Philosophy, or just about any of several formae mentis in common monastic use: a ladder, a tree, rotae, a rose diagram.”

Considering the wide variety of objects that Wirnt describes in Wigalois (and that I investigate in this dissertation), this leads us to ask whether perhaps Wirnt von Gravenberg does not use ekphrasis throughout his work, but instead Bildeinsätze. Should this dissertation not concern itself more properly with the notion of the Bildeinsatz? As the title of my study makes clear, my answer is “no”; the following reasons help to explain this decision. The most important differences between the ekphrases and the Bildeinsätze to which Keuls and Carruthers respectively refer are: First, that the Bildeinsatz must appear at the beginning of a work or at the beginning of a subdivision within a work, while an ekphrasis may appear at any point, and second, that the Bildeinsatz is proleptic, while ekphrasis is digressive. Considering first the much broader understanding in ancient and medieval literary conventions of what constitutes an ekphrasis – remember Ruth Webb’s discussion of ancient definitions of the word – second that the term Bildeinsatz is a thoroughly twentieth-century invention, and third, that some of the objects described in Wigalois are works of art (Joram’s golden wheel of fortune) while others clearly are not (the stone of virtue), I argue that despite the usefulness of the term Bildeinsatz for drawing finer distinctions among the various types of verbal descriptions of pictorial images, the term nevertheless does not accurately account for the use of descriptive passages in Wigalois. Although I am indebted to Keuls and Carruthers for their insight into these finer categorizations in word-and-image relationships, my work does not separate Bildeinsätze from ekphrasis, but instead follows the more inclusive precedent that Haiko Wandhoff has set in regarding the Bildeinsatz as a particular

37 Carruthers, The Craft of Thought 200.
type of ekphrasis, and I thus choose to retain the term ekphrasis in this investigation. In addition, my dissertation expands on the work of Keuls and Carruthers by considering how this particular sort of ekphrasis functions in courtly literature of the thirteenth century. Ekphrasis in courtly literature is the focus of Wandhoff’s study, to be sure, yet my study also expands on his investigation of *Eingangsbilder* by examining the ekphrases in *Wigalois*, a work that Wandhoff largely ignores in his monograph.

Haiko Wandhoff’s recent study, entitled *Ekphrasis. Kunstbeschreibungen und virtuelle Räume in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, is without question the most thorough study to date of ekphrasis in medieval literature. Beginning with examples drawn from classical antiquity, Wandhoff first surveys the various functions that these highly visual and vivid descriptions served in older literature, and then traces the path of ekphrasis through its adaptations as it continued to reflect attitudes of authors and audiences through the end of the thirteenth century. Wandhoff’s work focuses on ekphrasis as it functions in ancient to medieval literature in three important aspects: First, he investigates ekphrasis in its prescriptive as well as its descriptive role, arguing that ekphrasis serves a memorial function for the audience. Second, he sees ekphrasis as a tool for providing audiences with a microcosm of the tale being told, a tale within a tale, or as a vehicle for revealing in microcosm the macrocosm of the universe as its ancient and medieval audiences would have conceived of it. Finally, he investigates ekphrases as virtual spaces, demonstrating, for example, that a number of aspects of modern computer technology such as “windows” and “icons” and “virtual reality” have a long pre-history in the cognitive processes triggered by

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38 In his recent monograph, Haiko Wandhoff devotes an entire chapter to such descriptions and prefers the term *Eingangsbild* or *Bild-Eingang* to *Bildeinsatz*. More importantly, in his study, these *Eingangsbilder* are subsumed under the overarching category of ekphrasis. See Wandhoff, *Ekphrasis* 229-237.
ekphrastic descriptions in the literature of long ago. He draws from a wide variety of ekphrases from a number of different genres, and by also weaving numerous examples from Old French and twelfth-century Latin literature into his argument, he very convincingly demonstrates that medieval authors writing in the vernacular used ekphrasis as both a continuation of and emancipation from antique literary traditions.

Wandhoff’s study is thorough and far-reaching, but despite his casting a wide net, he does not deal at any length with the important role that ekphrasis plays in Wirnt von Gravenberg’s *Wigalois*. In fact, in the course of his otherwise exhaustive study, Wandhoff only devotes three paragraphs to *Wigalois*. There are certainly more famous examples of ekphrasis in Middle High German Arthurian romance – one usually thinks first of the lengthy description of Enite’s horse in Hartmann von Aue’s *Erec* – yet there is by far no other single work of this genre in which more ekphrases appear. Considering the popularity that *Wigalois* enjoyed during the thirteenth century (and far beyond), it is particularly surprising that the ekphrastic elements in *Wigalois* have received so little scholarly attention. My dissertation thus builds upon Wandhoff’s substantial and invaluable contribution to the scholarly discussion on ekphrasis in medieval literature by providing the first in-depth examination of this important, yet neglected, literary device in one of the most popular Arthurian romances in the Middle High German canon. My work furthermore expands the scope of the current discourse by examining the role of ekphrasis in the illustration programs of actual manuscripts and a print version of the *Wigalois* material, whereas Wandhoff restricts his investigation to the study of accepted scholarly editions. Examining (illustrated) manuscripts instead of an edition is an important contribution because it allows us, for the first time, to trace the changing and shifting role that ekphrasis plays in determining a particular
audience’s reception of the poem. Through the manuscripts that I investigate in my
dissertation, we shall see that over the course of three centuries, scribes, illuminators, and
printers use the same ekphrastic descriptions to place emphasis on decidedly different aspects
of courtly identity. These variations remain hidden from us if we only examine ekphrasis in
the scholarly edition of *Wigalois*; by contrast, investigating ekphrasis “at the source”
complicates and enriches our understanding of the role of the visual in medieval culture.

I have by this point mentioned the popularity that *Wigalois* enjoyed several times; let
us now turn to the story itself and consider the role that ekphrasis played its widespread
reception.

IV. *Wigalois*: A Brief Summary

Wirnt von Gravenberg’s *Wigalois* was in fact one of the most popular and enduring
Arthurian romances ever to emerge from the German-speaking lands during the Middle
Ages. Since the tale is generally not so well known today, however, especially compared
with romances such as Hartmann von Aue’s *Erec* or *Iwein*, or Wolfram von Eschenbach’s
*Parzival*, a brief synopsis of the main events is necessary. Similar to *Parzival*, *Wigalois*
begins with “prehistory” and tells of the hero’s lineage. The audience learns how the strange
knight Joram appears at the Arthurian court and offers the tale’s first ekphrastic object to
Queen Ginover, a beautifully adorned magic belt. When the queen refuses the gift and
returns the belt to Joram the next day, Joram then challenges the knights of Arthur’s court to
wrest the belt from him in single combat. After handily defeating many knights in such
contests, Joram is then challenged by Gawein, the greatest of all the knights of the Round
Table. Joram defeats Gawein too, and soon takes him as a captive back to his own enchanted
kingdom. Along the way, Joram reconciles with his prisoner by giving the belt to Gawein and revealing that it is in fact a magical object. Once in Joram’s mysterious kingdom, Gawein must marry Florie, Joram’s niece, whose lavishly described clothing includes a magic belt similar to the first one that appears in the poem. During these early scenes in Joram’s kingdom, the audience also hears an ekphrastic description of a wondrous mechanical wheel of fortune that Joram keeps on display in his hall, an ekphrasis that not only points to its owner’s great fortune, but one that also foreshadows another object that will have great significance for the hero as the story progresses, a heraldic device that displays the wheel of fortune. After a year, Gawein receives permission to ride out on adventures and to return to King Arthur’s court. After his travels, however, he cannot find his way back to Joram’s magic kingdom, where meanwhile Florie has given birth to her son by Gawein, the hero Gwigelais.

The boy Gwigelais grows up hearing tales of his father’s fame, and when he reaches young manhood, he decides to ride out in search of his father and of his own fortune. Along his way, an errant servant tells Gwigelais the way to the Arthurian court. Stopping to rest, the hero inadvertently sits upon a great and wondrous stone that will permit only the absolutely pure of heart to come near it. This stone is also the object of an ekphrastic description. Members of Arthur’s entourage witness this marvel, and Gwigelais is accepted immediately into the circle of the Round Table. Gawein is chosen to be the boy’s tutor, yet neither father nor son recognizes the other.

Soon thereafter, Nereja, a messenger from the Princess Larie of the Kingdom of Korntin, arrives at the Arthurian court. She explains that Korntin’s ruler, Larie’s father, has been murdered, and the kingdom captured by the powerful heathen and devil’s accomplice
Roaz. Gwigalois receives permission from Arthur to ride back to this kingdom with Nereja and pursue this adventure. He is invested as a knight and chooses as his heraldic device a golden wheel of fortune, a device that will appear again and again throughout the poem to remind him of the connection to the mechanical wheel of fortune in his uncle’s home, and as we shall see, to remind the audience of the hero’s moral perfection. Following an initial series of battles with a variety of adversaries, Gwigalois proceeds toward his major challenge, wresting the Kingdom of Korntin from this heathen usurper. With the help of God, Gwigalois defeats Roaz in a desperate battle. Immediately following Roaz’s death, the heathen’s wife Japhite dies of heartbreak, and Wirnt devotes his most refulgent description to her magnificent tomb. By defeating Roaz, Gwigalois thus wins the right to marry Larie and to become the new ruler of Korntin.

In the festivities that follow, Gwigalois is reunited with his father Gawein, whom he now recognizes. During the wedding celebration, however, Gwigalois also learns that Lion of Namur has murdered the knight Amire, who had been on his way to join in the marriage feast. Gwigalois, Gawein, and a host of other Arthurian heroes mount a spectacular campaign against Lion; here appears the elaborate description of Larie’s tent. In the ensuing battle, Gawein kills Lion. As the tale concludes, Gwigalois and Larie visit King Arthur in Nantes before finally returning to their own land in Korntin. Gwigalois receives advice from his father on how to govern well, and the hero’s reign, the audience is told, reaches the highest possible standard of both courtly and Christian ideals.
V. A Popular (and Underappreciated) Romance

Wirnt von Gravenberg composed *Wigalois* in the first half of the thirteenth century, most likely between 1210 and 1215, and the tale was well received by contemporary audiences. In fact, Wirnt’s name was already being praised in the thirteenth century by Konrad von Würzburg, who made Wirnt himself the protagonist of his brief poem from around 1267, *Der werlt lohn*; in Konrad’s poem, the author of *Wigalois* appears as a knightly servant to “frouw werlt.” Furthermore, with the exception of Wolfram’s *Parzival*, no other Middle High German Arthurian romance has survived in such an abundant number of manuscript and print versions. Although this is never an absolutely accurate measure of a work’s popularity, especially in comparison to other works, the number of extant sources for the *Wigalois* material attests nonetheless to a broad and long-lived reception throughout the German-speaking lands. Today, there exist thirteen complete *Wigalois* manuscripts and twenty-eight fragments.

In spite of the romance’s popularity among medieval audiences, very little definite information exists about Wirnt’s biography, and indeed, much of what we do know is what scholars have been able to glean from *Wigalois*, his only known work. Wirnt mentions his own name in lines 141, 5755, and 10,576, and scholarly consensus accepts Gravenberg (or Gravenberc, as it appears in some of the manuscripts) as modern Gräfenberg, which lies in


Bavaria between Nuremberg and Bayreuth. The dates of Wirnt’s birth and his death are unknown, and determining the exact dates of his work has also been difficult. The scholarly debate surrounding the exact dates of *Wigalois*’s composition hinges mainly on whether the narrator’s mention of the death of the “noble prince of Meran” (v. 8062-8064) refers to Baron Berthold IV of Andechs-Meran, who died in 1204, or instead to his son Otto I, whose passing is recorded in 1234. Some evidence that tends to support an earlier date of composition is provided by the oldest known recording of the poem, *Wigalois* fragment E. This is actually a group of three fragments, now kept in Vienna (Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 14612), Freiburg im Breisgau (Freiburg im Breisgau, Universitätsbibliothek, Hs. 445), and New Haven, respectively (New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, MS 481, no. 113). According to paleographic evidence, the most likely dates for Fragment E are between 1220 and 1230.44

Regardless of whether one agrees with the earlier or the later date, it remains clear that Wirnt was familiar with the works of Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach, both of whom he mentions in laudatory terms several times throughout the narrative. The Meran family residences at Andechs and at Dießen on the Ammersee in southern Bavaria are furthermore consistent with the early manuscript tradition and with what is known about

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Wirnt’s language, namely that they indicate a Bavarian origin. One important clue about the author’s identity is in Konrad von Würzburg’s use of the word her in Der werlt lohn (…von Grävenberg her Wirnt, v. 101); this designation suggests that Wirnt was a free knight and not a ministerial in the service of a higher-ranking lord. What we know about Wirnt’s education also comes strictly from Wigalois; Wirnt claims to have heard the story orally from a French squire, a knappe (v. 11,687-11,690), but his obvious familiarity with some of the major works of Middle High German Arthurian romance, such as Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s Lanzelet as well as Hartmann’s Erec and Iwein and Wolfram’s Parzival, indicate that he was literate. Further evidence in support of this claim is, for example, his reference to Dido and Vergil’s Aeneid (v. 2710-2726), and also Wirnt’s obvious familiarity with the literary tradition of the “Fair Unknown.” One of the most important works in this tradition is the Old French Le Bel Inconnu; this is in fact the work most closely associated with Wigalois.

Various redactions of Wirnt’s extremely popular tale remained in steady circulation until the end of the eighteenth century. Even without taking ekphrasis into consideration, this in itself sets Wigalois apart from many of the now canonical works of Middle High German literature. Whereas many medieval German works lay in relative obscurity until their rediscovery by philologists such as Johann Jakob Bodmer or August Wilhelm in the late

\footnote{Dick, “Wirnt von Grafenberg” 179. See also Bertelsmeier-Kierst, “Zur ältesten Überlieferung des ‘Wigalois’” 286-287. This latter article provides by far the most detailed description of the dialect in which this earliest known Wigalois manuscript is written.}

\footnote{Dick, “Wirnt von Grafenberg” 179.}

\footnote{I examine the relationship between Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis and the Fair Unknown tradition in chapter three, pp. 91-101.}
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the story of Wigalois was, in one adaptation or another, a popular and continuous presence in German literature for hundreds of years. Ulrich Füetrer composed a version for his Buch der Abenteuer (ca. 1490); between 1493 and 1664 there appeared at least nine different print versions; one of these, the prose adaptation known as Wigoleis vom Rade, printed in Strassburg in 1519, is in fact the focus of the final chapter of this dissertation. In addition, other prose versions were also translated into Icelandic and Danish; numerous versions of an adaptation called Ein schen maase fun kenig artus hof […] un fun dem berimtin riter Widewilt appeared in Yiddish or Jüdisch-Deutsch beginning in the fifteenth century, perhaps even earlier; a sixteenth-century Yiddish version was translated (back) into High German toward the end of the seventeenth century; and finally, the year 1786 brought a version of the tale in satirical prose, Vom König Artus und von dem bildschönen Ritter Wieduwilt. Ein Märchen.49

In 1819, Georg Friedrich Benecke’s edition of Wigalois: Der Ritter mit dem Rade made Wirnt’s poem available in Middle High German to the general reading public. Yet despite an initially enthusiastic reception to this first scholarly edition, not to mention a nearly unbroken line of transmission for almost 600 years, Wigalois was for the greater part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries considered to be a lesser Arthurian romance, a piecemeal and second-rate cousin to the towering works of Hartmann von Aue or Wolfram von Eschenbach. As I demonstrate in the first chapter of my investigation, much of this critical disparagement is based on the clear structural and narrative differences between


Wigalois and Hartmann’s and Wolfram’s works. Wigalois’s lesser standing within the corpus of Middle High German Arthurian scholarship is furthermore evident, for example, in that until Ulrich and Sabine Seelbach’s new edition and translation of Wigalois appeared in 2005, the most recent scholarly edition of the poem was published in 1926 by J.M.N. Kapteyn. It must be noted, however, that even the new Seelbach edition is based solely on the text in Kapteyn’s edition.

VI. Recent Wigalois Scholarship

The scholarly assessment of Wigalois has not remained entirely bleak, however. Contemporary scholarship has seen Wigalois as the focus of a number of full-length studies, among them investigations by Christoph Cormeau, Neil Thomas, and Jutta Eming. None of these works, however, examines in any depth the highly visual and material aspects of Wigalois, much less the crucial role that ekphrasis and seeing play in Wirnt’s poem. Nevertheless, this recent scholarship has greatly succeeded in reevaluating the tale and placing it in a more favorable position within the Arthurian canon. I am particularly indebted to several of these studies for the bearing they have on the focus and direction of my own investigation.

First, although it does not deal exclusively with Wigalois, one work that has contributed significantly to my examination of the structural role ekphrasis plays in Wigalois is The Shape of the Round Table, by James A. Schultz. In this work, Schultz distances

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51 James A. Schultz. The Shape of the Round Table. Structures of Middle High German Arthurian Romance. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.
himself from the traditional analysis of German Arthurian romance that sees *Erec*, *Iwein*, and *Parzival* and their *Doppelweg* ("double path" or "double course") schema with its ascent/descent/renewed ascent narrative pattern as the ideal structural model from which most of the later romances deviate and degenerate. He examines all the German Arthurian romances on their own structural terms and proposes a new model that takes the entire corpus into account, thereby complicating deeply entrenched classificatory notions about works such as *Wigalois* and the so-called "post-classical Arthurian romance." Schultz creates a model for the analysis of Arthurian romance that divides a given romance into what he calls the structural building blocks of the World, Society, the Other, the Hero, the Mediator, and the Recipient.\(^{52}\)

Although Schultz does not concern himself at all with ekphrasis in *Wigalois*, his study is important because it is the first work to call the long-predominant theoretical model into question and convincingly demonstrate that the collective corpus of Middle High German Arthurian romance in fact follows a different organizational pattern from that which has been unquestioningly accepted for decades. Schultz’s critical re-thinking of this predominant structuring principle is important for *Wigalois* because it recognizes the different structure of Wirnt’s work without implying that it is somehow inferior. The critical door that Schultz’s study opens is especially important for the second chapter of my investigation, in which I argue that the *Doppelweg* model is inadequate for understanding the structure of *Wigalois*, and that we must look at the ekphrastic passages instead if we hope to grasp the narrative and thematic structure of this important work.

Time and again, scholars have found that at the levels of narrative structure and thematic content, trying to place *Wigalois* into a neatly packaged critical category is a

\(^{52}\) Schultz, *The Shape of the Round Table* 3-64; see especially pp. 4-5.
frustratingly elusive task. Thus, *Wigalois* consistently needs to be “rescued” for the literary

canon. Similar to Schultz’s work, questions of structure and genre comprise the focus of

Neil Thomas’s new study entitled *Wirnt von Gravenberg’s Wigalois: Intertextuality and

Interpretation*. In this work, Thomas responds to the frequently heard criticism that *Wigalois*
is an epigonal pastiche of Wolfram’s *Parzival*. Although it is clear from Wirnt’s text that the

author was in fact familiar with at least the first parts of the *Parzival* material, Thomas offers

persuasive evidence that *Wigalois* is not simply a pale imitation, but is rather a “creative

confrontation with the thought-world of his more famous predecessor” Wolfram.\(^{53}\) He

convincingly demonstrates that medieval authors, including Wirnt, often saw their work as an

obligation to engage in critical dialogue with their literary forbears. Much like Schultz,

Thomas seeks to dislodge some of the all-too entrenched notions about the “classical” and

“post-classical” Middle High German Arthurian romance, and contributes toward explaining

Wirnt’s poetic rationale and toward finding a place for the romance in German literary

history more commensurate with its well-attested popularity among its earliest audiences.

Although the larger focus of my dissertation is not to argue for the literary merit of one

narrative or organizational principle over another, my work nevertheless builds upon that of

Schultz and Thomas; first upon Schultz’s by providing a concrete example of how this

particular Middle High German Arthurian romance does in fact use an organizational model

different from the much-lauded *Doppelweg* to trace the hero’s clear path of development, and

second upon Thomas’s by examining an additional factor that he ignores in his consideration

of what made *Wigalois* so popular with audiences for so long: ekphrasis.


2005. i.
Wigalois is furthermore the exclusive focus of Neil Thomas’ earlier study from 1987, *A German View of Camelot*. Here, Thomas seeks a more positive appraisal of Wigalois within the Middle High German Arthurian canon, and argues that the hero of Wigalois embodies the integration of what were often seen as conflicting traditions, the Christian and the Arthurian. While many medieval moralists regarded Arthurian material as seductive, even dangerous lies, Thomas demonstrates convincingly that Wirnt takes a positive view of the fictional Arthurian past.\(^{54}\) This is of particular importance to the focus of my second chapter, in which I examine Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis to integrate seemingly divergent ideas for his audiences, such as the harmonization of two distinct narrative traditions, or the weaving of overtly Christological aspects into the hero’s Arthurian mission.

A particularly thorough investigation of *Wigalois* is Jutta Eming’s work from 1999, *Funktionswandel des Wunderbaren: Studien zum Bel Inconnu, zum Wigalois und zum Wigoleis vom Rade*.\(^{55}\) As the title suggests, Eming’s is a comparative study that examines in great detail the role of the Wondrous and the Fantastic in three major sources of the *Wigalois* story’s transmission. My own investigation owes a great deal to her findings with regard to the function of fantasy and magic objects within the *Wigalois* material, but her work does not focus on the strongly visual nature of these wondrous things.

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VII. Dissertation Outline

My research is in many respects a response to the unfortunately still common view that Wigalois is a second-tier romance. Although contemporary critics are correct when they point out the structural and narrative incongruence between Wigalois and the so-called “classic” Middle High German Arthurian romances like Parzival and Iwein, these same critics fail to take into account the highly visual nature of medieval culture in general, and of Wigalois in particular. Thus, they have ignored one of the most important criteria by which a medieval audience would have received and judged a poem: how well can we picture the events in the story? Thus, although the vivid descriptions in Wigalois are surely not the only factor in determining its merit and explaining its popularity for so long, they are unquestionably an important factor, and the role that ekphrasis plays in the text certainly demands attention.

In the second chapter of my dissertation, then, I engage with other Wigalois scholarship, as well as with recent discussions about memory, word and image, and ekphrasis, to demonstrate that ekphrastic moments in the text provide the poem with narrative structure. Here I argue, for example, that the ekphrases in Wigalois demarcate important transitions along the hero’s (admittedly linear) path of development, and that they build thematic bridges between various points in the poem that allow the audience either to reflect carefully on questions that the author had raised previously in the narrative, or to anticipate important themes or actions before they actually take place.

Some of the themes that Wirnt takes up in Wigalois were rife with potential conflict among thirteenth-century courtly audiences. How, for example, does a knight live up to a high moral standard in accordance with Christianity while simultaneously achieving worldly
status and recognition? Even more important for the audience, furthermore, how does one reconcile the enjoyment of secular entertainment and the fantastic stories of the Round Table with the teachings of the Church and clerical moralists’ ideas about what sort of literature one ought to read? In my third chapter, I argue that Wirnt uses ekphrasis as an integrative device; with the help of this rhetorical technique, Wirnt is able to hold up his hero as the embodiment of the perfect knight, one who gains great worldly honor because of his exemplary piety and devout Christianity. Ekphrasis, I maintain, helps to resolve potential problems such as this and to better harmonize issues that Wirnt’s courtly contemporaries might very well have found troublesome or contradictory.

Wirnt’s focus on his courtly contemporaries and the world they wished to construct for themselves is the subject of my fourth chapter, where I argue that ekphrasis in Wigalois contributes to the construction of courtly identity. The objects that Wirnt describes and the way in which he describes them are prime examples of the German-speaking nobility’s tendency in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries to seek out and develop new ways to set themselves apart from other social groups. Many of Wirnt’s descriptions speak to this courtly desire for self-representation, and point out for the audience proper modes of dress and conduct. I demonstrate in this fourth chapter that the numerous ekphrases in Wigalois thus serve a prescriptive function as well as a merely descriptive one.

This simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive function is vital to the final two chapters of my dissertation, in which I examine what role ekphrastic descriptions play in determining the layout and illustrative program in three separate illustrated redactions of the Wigalois material. By examining three illustrated recensions of Wigalois that range from 1372 to 1519, I show that scribes and illuminators were very interested in the symbiosis
between word and image, and experimented in various ways with the representation of ekphrases. This fluidity in the notion of representation characterizes the medieval and early modern book. Through a survey of the visualization strategies used to depict ekphrastic objects in *Wigalois* manuscripts B (Leiden, Bibliotheek der Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde no. 537) and k ([formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donaueschingen 71), as well as the illustrated printed version known as *Wigoleis vom Rade* (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, Lo 2241.1), I show to what extent the structural, integrative, and identity-forming functions of ekphrasis are transferred to the illustrations, and how the illustrations visualize the objects described in the text to suggest a particular understanding of courtly identity, an understanding that reflects the ideals and tastes of the intended audience or patron.

Chapters five and six contribute two firsts to *Wigalois* scholarship. I offer for the first time a discussion of ekphrasis in manuscripts B and k. Ingeborg Henderson has written about the illustrations in manuscripts B and k and the questions they raise about literary genre, but does not at all consider the relationship between ekphrasis and the miniatures.56 With the exception of this one article, the only other field of research that to date has devoted any attention at all to these manuscripts is art history, and even this is minimal; in a short article from 1922, Victor Curt Habicht discusses questions of regional illumination style in manuscript B, but like Henderson, he leaves out any discussion of ekphrasis altogether.57 My second contribution is that these chapters represent the first side-by-side, diachronic


examination to trace the changes in word-and-image relationships in these two manuscripts and also in an important early print version of the tale, thereby providing a more complete picture of how the role of ekphrasis in this tale and its pictorialization changed over the course of three centuries.

Through this survey of the symbiosis between image and text in these three important examples from the *Wigalois* manuscript tradition, we see that although the role of ekphrastic descriptions changed between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries, these same descriptions and their visual representations nevertheless continued to shape audiences’ perception and reception of the story of *Wigalois*. The pictorial representation of ekphrastically described objects in these three material redactions of the text provided their medieval scribes and illuminators with a rich body of material with which to emphasize those aspects of courtly culture – descriptive or prescriptive, historical or imaginary – that they and their patrons thought most important. Likewise, they provide indispensable clues for us today in explaining what continued to attract readers and listeners to this story for the better part of six hundred years.
Chapter 2
Ekphrasis as a Structuring Device

“Wer hat mich guoter uf getan?
Si ez ieman der mich kan
Beidiu lesen und verstên,
Der sol gnade an mir begên...”

Wirnt von Gravenberg

And when he told them of the blue periwinkles, the red poppies in the yellow wheat, and the green leaves of the berry bush, they saw the colors as clearly as if they had been painted in their minds.

Leo Lionni

I. Introduction

A. The Functions of Ekphrasis in Wigalois: An Overview

“What good man has opened me? If it be someone who can both read me and understand me, then he will do right by me…” So begins one of the most widely read – and least understood – of all the Middle High German Arthurian romances from the thirteenth century, Wirnt von Gravenberg’s Wigalois. In its first lines, the poem makes an explicit reference to a material object that is bound with the act of seeing; it is a self-reflexive reference to its own existence between the covers of a book. The book wishes not only to

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60 This passage does not, however, appear in all the extant Wigalois manuscripts. Manuscripts A (in Cologne) and B (Leiden) contain the passage. The Leiden manuscript is from 1372, and is thus not the earliest example by any means, yet as far as all previous research has been able to determine, manuscript A dates from the first quarter to first half of the 13th century. This makes it one of the earliest pieces of manuscript evidence we have of the poem. Furthermore, manuscripts A and B are both exclusively devoted to Wigalois, i.e. no other works appear in the respective codices. The Benecke edition (1819) and Kapteyn (1926) both relied very heavily on A
be read, but also to be understood. But what does it mean to understand this book? An important part of the answer lies in this emphasis on materiality in the text. *Seeing* and *looking at material objects* guides the audience through the process of reading and listening, and points the way to a deeper understanding of the story of *Wigalois*.

Wirnt von Gravenberg’s *Wigalois* is a work especially concerned with objects and surfaces and the visual processes involved in understanding material culture. Heraldic devices and emblems play a major role in directing the events of the story and also in the author’s framing of the tale. Clothing, shields, helmets, jewels, and architectural structures are all described in rich, evocative detail, and mark important transitions for the characters and the audience alike. Wirnt includes many wonderful objects in his story, pointing them out to the audience, describing their splendor and magnificence, their colors and shapes and wondrous properties, and holding them up for the audience to behold as one would admire the sparkling facets of a rare jewel. These highly visual descriptions of material objects are examples of the rhetorical device of *ekphrasis*, usually defined as the verbal representation of a visual representation.\(^{61}\) The use of ekphrasis is very common in medieval German Arthurian romance, yet in no other work of this genre is ekphrasis so pronounced as it is in *Wigalois*.\(^{62}\) Ekphrastic descriptions mark the introductions of new characters into the story, indicate thematic changes in the narrative, show the audience and the characters alike that a new challenge awaits the hero, and point to the successful completion of adventures. Ekphrasis in fact permeates the poem from beginning to end, to the extent that it becomes

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\(^{61}\) See my introduction, pp. 2-20.

\(^{62}\) See my introduction, pp. 1-4.
Wirnt’s primary mode of presenting his ideas to his reading and listening audience. We shall see in later chapters, moreover, that ekphrasis provides important clues about how thirteenth-century audiences received and interpreted *Wigalois*.

Despite the crucial role that ekphrasis plays in *Wigalois*, contemporary scholarship has ignored the poem’s highly visual and material aspects, and has paid scant attention to the importance of seeing in Wirnt’s only known work. I assert that it is precisely the ekphrastic moments that contributed to the text’s tremendous popularity from the thirteenth century on. It is my goal in the present chapter to examine the function of ekphrasis in *Wigalois*. I argue that Wirnt uses ekphrasis in three distinct but complementary ways. First, he uses ekphrasis as a *structuring device*, with which he demarcates important transitions in the narrative, builds thematic bridges within different sections of the narrative, develops thematic and narrative tension, and creates a crescendo of increasingly vivid and detailed spectacle as the story runs its course. We might also describe this effect as one of ever increasing rhetorical amplification. For example, this crescendo or amplificatory effect becomes ever more apparent as a number of shorter ekphrastic passages are clustered around a longer and structurally significant passage; these increase in number and detail as the story progresses. Second, ekphrasis is an *integrative device*, with which Wirnt seeks to harmonize what contemporary clerical critics considered conflicting sets of ideas, for example the ideals of a moral Christian life versus the potentially dangerous fantasy world of the Arthurian knight. Finally, Wirnt uses ekphrasis as a means of *courtly self-representation*, a kind of mirror in which the members of the aristocracy find their own ideals and practices reflected.

The number of ekphrastic descriptions in *Wigalois* is so great that a thorough investigation of each of them is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet there are five
ekphrases that, in their combination of theme and form, serve both as paradigmatic and unique examples of the three main functions I have just named. In the order in which they appear, they are descriptions of a magic belt (v. 321-342), an enchanted stone of virtue (v. 1477-1529), a golden wheel of fortune, which later becomes the hero Gwigalois’s heraldic device (v. 1823-1837; 1860-1869), a magnificent tomb built for the heathen queen Japhite (v. 8228-8324), and finally, a castle-like tent atop Queen Larie’s war elephant (v. 10,342-10,408). These examples are paradigmatically ekphrastic because, like the numerous other ekphrases in Wigalois, they slow the pace of the narrative and require the (courtly) audience to reflect carefully not only on the physical properties of an object, but also on what the description of this object might mean for the rest of the story, and even for themselves as members of the aristocracy. They are also unique, however, because of the degree to which they perform these retarding and memorial functions, and because of their strategic placement at crucial junctures in the narrative.

I have chosen to focus on these five objects and ekphrases in Wigalois because they are important examples of how ekphrasis functions within the work: as a vehicle for structuring the poem, for integrating potentially conflicting sets of ideas, and for constructing courtly identity. In Wigalois, ekphrastic descriptions influence how the audience responds to the text. The descriptions provide listeners and readers with landmarks throughout the poem in the form of graphic verbal pictures that help them to visualize the work’s most important ideas and transitions in the mind’s eye. Evoking highly pictorial images in the mind’s eye of the audience in order to signal thematic and narrative transitions is a rhetorical strategy that dates back to ancient Greece, and as Mary Carruthers has shown, was also a common
rhetorical and educational practice in European monastic culture during the Middle Ages. Carruthers argues that such rhetorical images were placed “at the beginning of a work (or of a major division or change of subject within a long work)…because a reader can hold the picture in mind as a way of recognizing the major themes of what follows.” In this chapter, I argue that Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis serves this same function. Because Wigalois so frequently includes detailed, vivid descriptions of material objects, and because these descriptions repeatedly force the audience to imagine what these objects look like and how they relate to the events of the narrative, I assert that Wigalois relies as much on envisioning images as it does on reading the written word.

**B. Dividing the Narrative in Wigalois: An Additive Model?**

Since the nineteenth century, critics who specialize in Middle High German Arthurian romance have often found fault with Wirnt’s organization of his material. As James Schultz has argued in his study *The Shape of the Round Table*, the critical urge among German medievalists to organize and divide these romances according to a single narrative and structural model has tended to skew scholarly interpretations of other works within this genre. This is especially true in the case of Wigalois. Because Wigalois does not conform to the famous *Doppelweg* narrative model that traces the Arthurian hero’s ascendance, crisis,
and eventual restoration or renewal onto a higher spiritual level, as exemplified in Hartmann’s *Erec* and *Iwein* or Wolfram’s *Parzival*, scholars have often seen Wirnt’s poem as inferior. That the hero in *Wigalois* does not commit a sin or experience a crisis in the same way that Hartmann’s *Iwein* or *Erec* do is clear from even the most superficial reading of *Wigalois*, and makes a critical analysis against the backdrop of the *Doppelweg* schema inappropriate, even irrelevant.

The questions thus arise: How does Wirnt structure his poem, and what sort of critical model should scholars use to examine the work? I assert that by failing to take into account the enormous role that ekphrasis plays in *Wigalois*, earlier scholarship has ignored an important key to understanding the text, a key that offers an alternative organizational model. In this chapter, I plead for a different critical examination of *Wigalois* and argue that instead of using this “double path” model, Wirnt von Gravenberg uses ekphrasis as a basis for structuring his narrative and organizing his ideas. Specifically, Wirnt uses the five ekphrastic descriptions that are the focus of this study to divide the poem into four distinct thematic sections and to mark the transitions between these divisions. Furthermore, these ekphrases contribute significantly to tracing a path of development in the story and in the growth of the hero. By examining *Wigalois* here and in subsequent chapters in the light of ekphrasis instead of the traditionally accepted *Doppelweg* schema, we shall gain new insight into how courtly audiences understood and enjoyed Wirnt’s poem in particular and medieval literature in general.

Past scholarship has offered many suggestions as to how one ought to divide the narrative sequence of *Wigalois*. Indeed, many critical voices lament Wirnt’s inability to “properly” organize his material in the first place and argue that the story is essentially a long
concatenation of more or less unconnected adventures in which the already all-too perfect hero, the “knight without a crisis” (*Ritter ohne Krise*), demonstrates his prowess to the audience again and again.66 This sort of traditional *Wigalois* criticism, which decries Wirnt’s additive or accretional model of composition, is found in a number of older treatments of the subject, such as Helmut de Boor’s comprehensive study of courtly literature, in which the author derogatorily refers to the text as a “chain of adventures” (*Aventiurenkette*).67 Even more recent scholars have written unfavorably about the organization of *Wigalois*: Werner Schröder has called the tale an epigonal mish-mash of quotations lacking unity or an organizing principle.68 In these sorts of critical analyses, which examine *Wigalois* within the context of the “classical” and “post-classical” Middle High German Arthurian romance, scholars typically do not consider such a “chain of adventures” to be the ideal structure for the narrative or developmental model for the hero.69 Instead, the *Doppelweg* model is the critical standard by which all other Arthurian romances have been judged.70

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69 Examples of the “classical” Middle High German Arthurian romance include Hartmann’s *Erec* and his *Iwein*, or Wolfram’s *Parzival*. “Post-classical” Arthurian romances include not only *Wigalois*, but also *Diu crône* by Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Daniel von dem blühenden tal* by Der Stricker, and *Daniel’s* corrective counter-example *Garel von dem blühenden tal* by Der Pleier. Scholarship has made classified these romances into the classical and post-classical categories not so much because of the romances’ chronological appearance as because of varying thematic emphases within the tales, i.e. romances that do not share the *Doppelweg* structure and the themes of *Erec* or *Iwein*, for example, have become known as post-classical. See for example Mertens, *Der deutsche Artusroman* 176-177, or for a convincing alternative to this classificatory schema, see Schultz’s *Shape of the Round Table*.

70 For a more thorough explanation of the *Doppelweg* schema, see for example Mertens, *Der deutsche Artusroman* 59-61, 127-143.
This sort of approach furthermore tends to be reinforced by more recent studies such as Christoph Cormeau’s, where Wigalois is examined within this “classical” and “post-classical” paradigm. Although Cormeau strives to free the genre from critical clichés, he nevertheless very carefully delineates where the structure of Wigalois adheres to typical classical patterns (“typgerechte Strukturmerkmale”) and where it deviates from them (“Abweichungen vom typgerechten Verfahren”). James Schultz calls such patterns into question and has created a new paradigm that does justice to the entire corpus of Middle High German Arthurian romances. When compared against Schultz’s model, which advocates a more linear developmental trajectory for the Arthurian hero, Gwigalois no longer appears “too perfect” or “static”, but instead follows a clearly organized path of development from boy to man, from novice to knight, from Arthurian knight to Christian hero, and finally to the ideal king. We shall see that Wirnt uses ekphrasis as an important rhetorical and structural tool to indicate significant milestones or thematic shifts along this path.

In reaction to this older criticism, more recent studies have sought to win a more favorable position for Wigalois within the Middle High German Arthurian canon, and have thus proposed alternative divisions of the tale into discrete thematic and narrative blocks. Two of these present two of the most plausible subdivisions of the text. Ingeborg Henderson posits five divisions: 1) the hero’s parentage; 2) Gwigalois’s adventures in the Arthurian realm; 3) his adventures in the Kingdom of Korntin; 4) the restoration of harmony; and 5) the Battle of Namur. Hans-Jochen Schiewer sees the narrative only slightly differently,


72 Schultz, The Shape of the Round Table. See also note 8 above.
claiming that it encompasses the following four distinct segments: 1) Gwigalois’s genealogy, his initial search for his father and eventual integration into the Arthurian circle; 2) Gwigalois’s series of adventures on the way to Roimunt; 3) the central adventure against the heathen and devil’s accomplice Roaz in the Kingdom of Korntin; and 4) Gwigalois’s wedding to Larie, the restoration of harmony and the battle of Namur. This same set of divisions is the structural model in Achim Jaeger’s recent monograph comparing Wirnt’s *Wigalois* to the anonymous Yiddish, or *jüdisch-deutsch*, adaptation of *Wigalois* known as *Widuwilt*.

The structural function that ekphrasis serves in *Wigalois* supports Schiewer’s four-part division, suggesting that his model may more closely reflect the medieval understanding of the text. I believe that Schiewer’s model is essentially correct, yet like other scholars, he does not factor the poem’s extraordinarily large number of ekphrastic descriptions into his divisions.

The divisions I propose here do not conform to the *Doppelweg’s* pattern of ascendancy, crisis, and renewal. Nevertheless, my examination of the text that recognizes ekphrasis as the organizational principle does retain a division of the narrative into four different stages similar to Schiewer’s, and shows the hero’s distinct path of development. Thus, I divide the text of *Wigalois* into the following four sections:

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1) Gwigalois’s genealogy and departure from home to search for his father; this first section of the narrative deals with Gwigalois’s genealogy and is marked by a magic belt (v. 321-342), which is passed from Joram to Gawein to Gwigalois’s mother and eventually to the hero himself. This section furthermore encompasses what Schultz classifies as W (or World = forests, divine order, and magic).76

2) Gwigalois’s rites of passage and integration into the Arthurian circle, and his adventures on the way to Roimunt; this second section tells how Gwigalois reaches Arthur’s court and undergoes two important rites of passage. It then recounts the long series of adventures that Gwigalois undertakes in the Arthurian realm and on the way to the Kingdom of Roimunt; this part begins with an enchanted stone of virtue (v. 1477-1529) that proves the hero’s birthright and integrates him into the circle of the Round Table, and is marked again by the description of Gwigalois’s heraldic device, a golden wheel of fortune (v. 1823-1837; 1860-1869). This section corresponds most closely with Schultz’s notion of S (or Society = courtly society or the Arthurian court).77

3) Gwigalois’s central adventure against Roaz; in a culture that placed great significance on the ecclesiastical and divine implications of the number three, it should come as no surprise that the third narrative section, set in the Kingdom of Korntin, contains the adventure that pits the Christian knight Gwigalois against the

76 Schultz, The Shape of the Round Table 47.

77 Schultz, The Shape of the Round Table 47.
heathen Roaz. After Gwigalois defeats the heathen, Wirnt uses ekphrasis at the end of this section to describe an *extravagant tomb* that acts as a vehicle for integrating Roaz’s widow Japhite into the fold of Christianity (v. 8228-8324). This section corresponds with Schultz’s O (or Other = opponents, companions or women).  

4) Gwigalois’s wedding, the restoration of harmony and the battle of Namur. The fourth section depicts first the unification of two families with Gwigalois’s wedding to Larie, followed by the battle against Count Lion of Namur. Here the audience is told about a *spectacular tent* that sits atop Larie’s war-elephant as she rides alongside her husband in the campaign against Count Lion (v. 10,342-10,408). This highly visual moment of rhetorical splendor culminates in a great heraldic spectacle of colorful shields and banners. This section represents a final return to what Schultz refers to as S, or Society.

There are five ekphrastic objects that mark the transitions between these stages. In order to support my claim that Wirnt uses these five ekphrases to structure his work and contribute to the development of the story and the hero, I turn now to a more thorough examination of each individual ekphrasis. The first example is the ekphrasis that appears early in *Wigalois*, a wondrous magic belt.

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78 Throughout the Middle Ages in Western Europe, the number 3 was associated with the Christian Holy Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine, for example, writes in his *On the Sermon on the Mount* that, because of its relation to the triune nature of God, three became the number of earthly perfection; in Church doctrine it also reflected the triadic structure of Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell. Understandably, multiples of 3 such as 6, 9, and 12 were also imbued with special theological significance. See Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism. Its Sources, Meaning and Influence on Thought and Expression*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1938. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2000.

79 Schultz, *The Shape of the Round Table* 47.
II. Ekphrasis as a Structuring Device

A. Setting the Stage: The Magic Belt

In this first section, I argue that Wirnt’s inclusion of ekphrastic (and often wondrous) objects is not simply meant to compensate for an otherwise stereotypical and uninteresting hero, but rather serves an important structural function within the narrative; the first of these objects is a magic belt. *Wigalois* begins, as we have seen, in the voice of the poem itself as it asks the audience a question. The poetic voice quickly shifts to that of a narrator, however, and following a prologue that includes the conventional apology for his lack of skill in storytelling, this narrator provides a brief account of the Arthurian court at Cariodel. The audience learns that Arthur and his knights always amused themselves with hunting and adventures, and that they always sought honor and lacked no virtue. Then, three-hundred lines into his nearly twelve-thousand verse poem, Wirnt describes a beautiful material object, brought as a gift by a knight who wanders unknown into King Arthur’s court. It is a wonderful belt that the strange and handsome knight named Joram gives as a gift to Ginover, King Arthur’s queen. When Ginover puts it on, truly amazing things take place: the belt immediately endows her with the gifts of strength and wisdom; her heart is filled with joy; she instantaneously becomes fluent in all languages; she is well versed in all arts and games; and because of the belt, the stranger himself seems to her to be a brave and gallant king:

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Den gürtel håt diu künigân.
Diu rieme was alsô getân
Daz ich iu niht gesagen kan
Welher hande er være.
Ez was niender lære
Von gesteine noch von golde.
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Swer einen wünschen solde,
Dern würde niemer alsō guot,
Der küniginne riet ir muot,
Daz si den gürtel umbe bant.
Dô hêt diu frouwe sâ zehant
Vreude unde wîsheit;
Si ne truobte deheiner slahte leit;
Die sprâche kunde si alle wol;
Ir herze daz was vreuden vol.
Swaz spiles man dâ begunde,
Si dühte wie si ez kunde;
Deheiner kunst ir niht gebrast,
Si dühte, daz der selbe gast
Wol möhte sîn ein rîcher kûnic.
Er dühte si biderbe unde vrümic,
Als ez wol an dem gürtel schein. (v. 321-342)

(The queen is holding the belt, which was so fashioned that I can’t tell you of what it was made, for it was completely covered with jewels and gold. No other belt that one could wish for would be so fine. She decided to put it on, and at once the lady had joy and wisdom: not even the slightest sorrow troubled her, she knew all languages well, her heart was full of happiness, she was a master at whatever game one could think of, and she lacked no art or skill. Because of the belt, it seemed to her that this stranger might well be a mighty king, and he seemed to her brave and gallant.)

This is the first of a number of wondrous objects that Wirnt describes in Wigalois.

The ekphrasis of this wondrous belt punctuates the opening sequences of the poem, which up to this point consists of the book’s direct address to the reader (v. 1-19), the prologue (v. 20-144) and information about the Arthurian court (v. 145-252), a general backdrop against which the story takes place. What is the function of this description? Is it strictly for entertainment or to keep the audience interested, as traditional Wigalois scholarship contends? In one discussion of Wigalois, for example, Volker Mertens has written that because the hero remains without a crisis and is thus relatively boring, Wirnt makes prodigious use of the Wondrous in order to spark interest among his audience.81
Contrary to this position, I argue that this belt serves the important structural purpose of setting the scene for the rest of the tale, giving Wirnt’s audience a taste at this very early stage of what sort of wondrous and beautiful objects they should expect to hear about from here on, and suggesting that these objects sometimes possess magical properties. These objects include a shimmering golden birdcage that holds a talking parrot (v. 2514-2552); the marvelous, sparkling castle of Glois (v. 7059-7089); and the heathen Japhite’s extravagant tomb, discussed in detail below (v. 8228-8324). Several of the objects are magical; for example, before Gwigalois sets forth on one particularly dangerous adventure, a priest gives him a beautiful sword with a long writ attached to its hilt; the words in the writ act as a protective charm against the snares of the devil (v. 4427-4430). Some are also structural; the description of the Castle of Glois, for instance, marks the hero’s entrance into one of the tale’s most beautiful buildings, but also into one of the most difficult adventures in his efforts to restore order to Korntin.

More important, however, the description of this magic belt is the first point of narrative transition from a general background account of the Arthurian court to the first important sequence of adventures. Although James Schultz’s work on the structures of Middle High German Arthurian romance does not discuss ekphrasis, Wirnt’s use of this rhetorical device here fulfills what Schultz refers to as “a dynamic function” and marks the exact spot from which the narrative moves forward from between “poles of action and repose.”82 Quite simply, this ekphrasis gets the story moving.83 Here we see that this

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81 “Weil der Held ohne Krise und ohne Selbstfindungswege vergleichsweise uninteressant ist, wird das Wunderbare, das im klassischen Roman eher selten ist, massiv zur Erzeugung von Interesse eingesetzt.” Mertens, Der deutsche Artusroman 183.

82 Schultz, The Shape of the Round Table 33.
ekphrasis serves an important double function in Wigalois: on the one hand, it temporarily arrests the flow of the narrative and allows the audience time to envision the object and its setting. Yet on the other hand, it sets in motion a series of events that establish for the audience who the major characters are and how they function in the story. The belt is also a recurring motif in the story of Gwigalois’s parents, and is passed from one family member to another in these early stages of the narrative. Although Wirnt reveals the significance of the belt only gradually as the story progresses – in fact, its significance changes depending on its bearer – we see nevertheless that it continues to appear throughout the first half of the poem. Joram offers it first to Ginover, for instance, who does not accept the gift and returns it. Joram later confesses that the belt is magic and gives it to Gawein, who remains undefeatable as long as he is protected by the belt’s powers. When Gawein later rides off in search of adventure, never to return, he leaves the belt behind with his young wife Florie. Finally, she gives it to her son, the hero Gwigalois, in order to protect him from harm as he sets out to find his father.

The ekphrasis of this beautiful golden belt also forms a structural and thematic connection to another ekphrasis, the description of another belt a brief four-hundred lines later in the poem. This second belt adorns the clothing of Florie, who is wearing it in her first encounter with Gawein (v. 742-800). Similar to the first belt, this belt also possesses magical properties; whoever wears it and sees the splendid, glowing ruby set in its buckle is rid of sad moods and lesser sorrows:

    als sie dehein swachez leit
    truobte in ir gemüete,
    sô benam des steines güete

Whenever any slight sorrow troubled her spirit, the power of the stone, with its sweet appearance, took away her distress as soon as she glimpsed its color; it did not want for virtue.

This second belt thus forms a symmetric counterpart to the belt that her suitor Gawein now possesses; simultaneously, it embellishes and strengthens the already strong visual impression that Florie has made on Gawein and on the audience.

Also, matching her clothing rather well was a belt that the maiden was wearing; this was a rather lovely belt of gold and precious jewels, large and small. From an emerald as green as grass the buckle had been carved, and embossed upon this was a gold eagle, expertly set in enamel. It was a truly magnificent piece of work. The clasps were formed of golden beasts, wrought with great care, and between these white pearls had been set; thus it was covered with precious stones.

Struck by the beauty of Florie’s clothing and outward appearance, Gawein is instantly smitten, and with Joram’s blessing, he takes an oath of loyalty and marries the maiden right away (v. 964-1018). The two ekphrastic belts set up a symmetric narrative balance between
these two important characters – the hero’s father and mother both possess beautiful and wondrous belts – and are also important visual markers at the moment when Gawein falls in love with the hero’s mother. Wirnt uses ekphrasis, then, not only to structure the narrative of the poem, but indeed to structure the hero’s family by helping to strengthen the connection between Gawein and Florie. From the first ekphrasis of the first wondrous belt, the stage is set for the role that ekphrasis plays throughout the rest of the poem in the development of the hero. In this case, one can even say that it is ekphrasis that helps bring the hero into the world in the first place, inasmuch as the magic belt and Florie’s belt help form a text-internal attraction and a common bond between the hero’s father and mother, while the ekphrastic descriptions of these belts are cues to the text-external audience to pay close attention to these connections.

Finally, Wirnt also uses the magic belt to confirm the familial connection between Gwigalois and his father Gawein, and to mark the transition in Gwigalois’s development as he moves from childhood into manhood. Neil Thomas, who probably has devoted more scholarly energy to Wigalois than anyone else in the English-speaking world, sees the role of the magic belt as follows:

Its more important function is as a token linking Wigalois with the chivalric standard of his father since in Wirnt’s semiotic system the concept of knightly good fortune (sælde) becomes broadly synonymous with Gawein’s peerless knightly reputation. Hence, when Wigalois later comes into possession of one of Fortuna’s supposed tokens (in the form of the magic belt which had originally been conferred on his father), the effective implication is that he becomes a knight following in his father’s footsteps…  

Gwigalois spends his youth in the company of his mother and of those whom she appoints to educate him. While we see similar motifs between the early lives of Gwigalois

and Parzival (both are fathered by Arthurian noblemen who abandon their pregnant wives in search of adventure), Florie never tries to conceal her son’s noble lineage from him, nor does she shy away from having him trained for the most rigorous knightly combat. When the young hero decides that his training has reached an end, he leaves his heartbroken mother and, like his father before him, rides off to seek adventure and renown. When Gwigalois leaves his mother’s care, Florie passes the magic belt along to her son with the words

‘Herre und lieber sunne mîn,
sît ichs dich niht erwenden kan,
sô nim ein kleinôt daz ich hân,
 behaltez unz an dînen tôt,
und wis sicher vor aller nôt;
daz ist ein gürtel, den mir lie
dîn vater, dô er jungest gie
von mir und urloup hêt genomen
als er wider solde komen
an mîne sêle bevalch er mir
daz ich den gürtel gæbe dir
als ich dir geseit hân,
ob du immer würdest ze man
swen du woldest hinnen varn.
Du solt den gürtel sô bewarn
Daz sîn iemen werde gewar.’
Vil heize weinde gap si in dar,
er kuste si und neic ir dô.
Di vrouwen wurden alle unvrô
Sus nam er urloup unde reit...

(v. 1362-1381)

(‘My lord and dear son, since I cannot dissuade you, take along something of mine which is very valuable: keep it until you die and thus be safe from all danger. It is a belt which your father left me when, meaning to return, he last went away from me and took his leave. He bade me on my soul to give you the belt, as I have told you, when you became a man and wanted to travel. You should take good care to let no one see it.’ With burning tears, she then gave him the belt; he then kissed her and bowed. All the ladies became sad as he thus took his leave and rode off.)

The magic belt thus functions for the hero as a tangible memento of his father, and signals to the audience that this first section of the narrative has come to an end. The belt
also marks the end of Gwigalois’s boyhood. Although this scene is set as a private conversation between Gwigalois and his mother, it is choreographed nonetheless as if it were a public ritual: The combination of Florie’s speech act, telling Gwigalois that he has become a man, with the act of placing the magic belt into his hands, confirms for the hero and for the audience that he is ready to move on to the next stage in his development.

**B. From Boy to Man, Part One: The Stone of Virtue**

Gwigalois does not have long to wait before finding adventure in his search for his father, nor does the audience wait long before the narrator provides another vivid pictorial image. As I discuss in greater detail below, Wirnt’s description of this image makes use of an important literary convention, the *locus amoenus*, to show his audience that something unusual is about to occur. The description of this next ekphrastic object once again marks a transition in the narrative from a point of relative repose to one of renewed action and indicates that the next important series of events is about to begin.

While riding along one day, Gwigalois meets a young page who informs him that King Arthur seeks knights to join him in a campaign against the King of England. The page gives Gwigalois directions on how to find Arthur. Along the way, he finds a great stone and thinks it a fine place to sit and rest a while:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Bî einer linden er dô sach} \\
\text{Ligen einen breiten stein} \\
\text{Des tugent im inz herze schein...} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(He then saw, lying by a linden tree, a broad stone whose power affected his heart.)\(^85\)

\(^85\) Note that Wirnt’s use of the word *tugent* is especially rich in various connotations for his audience. In Middle High German, *tugent* did mean in one sense “virtue”, as it does in modern German; it is thus quite well placed in this scene meant to demonstrate the hero’s superior moral status. It also, however, means
Similar to King Arthur’s traditional refusal to eat breakfast until he has heard news of some splendid adventure, the linden tree was familiar to medieval audiences as a common motif that precedes a wondrous tale. A linden tree standing alone on a meadow near a brook is a type of *locus amoenus*, a literary topos in medieval landscape description that sets the stage for an important event.\(^8^6\) In Middle High German courtly literature, one of the most famous examples of such a *locus amoenus* is the magical spring and the great linden tree that protects it in Hartmann’s *Iwein*, where first Kalogreant undertakes a dangerous adventure, and later the hero Iwein, having heard his friend recount the experience, rides off in secret and follows suit (v. 565-772; 988-1118).\(^8^7\) Thus, by placing the stone in a *locus amoenus* near a linden tree, Wirnt is participating in a well-established literary convention that indicates to his audience that something unusual is about to take place, and that everyone ought to listen closely. Wirnt then describes the stone for his audience in the most lavish of terms:

\begin{verbatim}
Gevieret und niht sinwel
Striemen röt und gel
Giengen dar durch etteswâ;
Daz ander teil daz was blâ,
Lüter als ein spiegelglas.
Sô grôziu tugent an im was
Daz deheiner slahte man
Der ie deheinen valsch gewan
Die hant niht mohte gelâzen dran.
Zuo der linden reit der gast;
Sîn pfârt haft er an einen ast,
\end{verbatim}

“usefulness”, and is appropriate in this sense, too, since Gwigalois simply needs a place to sit and rest for a moment. Because Gwigalois’s sitting on the stone of virtue causes such astonishment among the Arthurian court, however, it seems most appropriate to me to emphasize the stone’s magical and wondrous nature, and I have thus chosen to translate *tugent* here as “power”, another of the definitions provided by Lexer. See Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch*. Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1992.

\(^8^6\) Curtius, *European Literature* 195-200.

With its square shape, multiple colors and mirror-like clarity, the stone of virtue resembles one of the splendid jewels that adorn the magic belt, only on a larger scale. Within the structure of the narrative, this marvelous stone follows closely behind Florie’s passing the magic belt on to her son, and thus becomes the second ekphrastic object that significantly marks a transition in the poem. In the vivid description of this unusual object, and by placing it in a *locus amoenus*, Wirnt uses the stone first to signal to his audience that they should once again pay close attention.

Furthermore, just as the first magic belt had brought the first stages of the story from repose into action, so the description of the stone of virtue indicates to the audience that the next sequence of adventures is about to begin. The stone’s description introduces King
Arthur’s *active* participation in the story; his earlier appearance in the first three hundred verses of the poem was simply a mention of his name and a general background description of the Arthurian court.

In this next action-phase, the audience also sees that Gwigalois is moving out of boyhood and into young manhood. The visualization of this process began with Florie giving the belt to Gwigalois, and continues here with the description of the stone, which provides the intermediate stage of Gwigalois’s transformation. As I discuss in greater detail below, Gwigalois not only approaches this stone without being hurt, but indeed, to the amazement of everyone, he sits down squarely upon it. With this act, the text-internal witnesses as well as the poet place Gwigalois on a par with King Arthur himself. Gwigalois becomes a part of the Arthurian circle, and can thus no longer be considered a mere boy. In his description of the stone, Wirnt shows that the hero Gwigalois has not only left his home and his mother, but indeed that he has left his childhood behind him. Yet although the young Gwigalois is already courtly and pure of heart to an exceptional degree, it is only with the next ekphrastic object of this second narrative section, the golden wheel, that the transition from boyhood to manhood – indeed to knighthood – is rendered complete.

**C. From Boy to Man, Part Two: The Golden Wheel**

Wirnt has shown the audience two objects that point to Gwigalois’s changing from a boy into a man: the magic belt at the end of the first narrative section, and the stone of virtue at the beginning of the second. Yet the next few lines make it clear that although Gwigalois is part of the Arthurian circle and no longer a child, he is also still a novice and not quite a man. This is evident first in the term with which the narrator and King Arthur alike refer to
the hero, *juncherr* or “young lord” (v. 1545, 1591). More important is that this next stage is marked by a third object: a heraldic, golden wheel of fortune. The description of this heraldic wheel, like other ekphrases in *Wigalois*, participates in the structuring of the tale by helping the audience to draw connections between itself and other ekphrases throughout the tale. The description furthermore demarcates the next stage in the hero’s development and shows that he is now considered a knight, and thus a man. Finally, it marks for the first time the important role that heraldry plays throughout the text, and points to the hero’s particularly positive physical and character traits.

Wirnt tells the audience that from the time Gwigalois becomes a member of Arthur’s court, he spends all his time with the Knights of the Round Table, accompanying them to tournaments and serving the king with great alacrity. An unspecified period of time passes, but it is sufficient for Arthur and all his knights to recognize the young hero’s virtues, and for Gawein to have given Gwigalois thorough training in the chivalric arts. Two-hundred lines after Gwigalois sits on the stone of virtue and is incorporated into the circle of Arthurian knights, a beautiful female messenger named Nereja appears at the court and asks for help for her mistress Larie. Larie’s father, the King of Korntin, has been murdered and the kingdom stolen away; Nereja warns that riding to her aid on this adventure promises to be “like death” (v. 1718-1765). Although she had come with the hope of recruiting Gawein, Arthur instead decides that Gwigalois shall undertake the journey. Gwigalois now officially becomes a knight, and Wirnt’s eponymous hero chooses to wear a golden wheel of fortune as a heraldic device:

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Die knappen brâhten im balde
Ros, harnasch, und sper,
Und einen schönen schilt her,
Der was swarz alsam ein kol,
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Dâ was einmitten üffe wol
Ein rat von rôtem golde erhaben,
Daz wolder zeinem wâfen haben
Dâ man in bî erkande.
Diu künegîn im sande
Einen wâfenroc ze stiure
Zuo der âventiure,
Der was mit golde durchslagen,
Den soldor durch ir willen tragen.
Des begunder ir genâde sagen. (v. 1824-1837)

(Squires quickly brought him horse, armor, spear, and a beautiful shield that was as black as coal and embossed in the middle with a golden wheel, he wanted this for a device by which others would recognize him. The queen sent him a surcoat as an aid to the adventure; it was trimmed with gold. He was to wear it for her sake, and for this he began to thank her.)

Arthur asks God to bless the young knight as he rides forth on this first dangerous adventure. Before Gwigalois takes his leave, however, the audience learns that his heraldic device, the golden wheel, is modeled after a real mechanical wheel that had stood in his uncle’s hall. This is a prime example of a courtly poet’s thematizing the lively interplay between the visual and verbal arts, where, for example, a poem or a historical or fictional work of visual art inspires a character in the story to create a new work of art. One especially famous example of this is in the German Prosa-Lancelot: The captive Lancelot spies another artist illustrating the Aeneid, and is thus inspired to paint in his own cell a set of murals that depict his illicit love affair with the queen Ginover. In the case of Wigalois, the audience hears that the young knight had always liked this particular device, since it reminded him of the wheel of fortune he had grown up seeing in his uncle’s home. He is then girded into his armor by Gawein:

Her Gâwein der küene man
Wâfent in selbe mit sîner hant.
Einen helm er im üf bant,
Dar üf ein rat von golde gie.
Daz wâfen minnet der rîter ie,
(The bold Sir Gawein dressed him in armor with his own hands. He bound on him a helmet on which turned a golden wheel. The young man had always liked the device, for one went magically up and down in his uncle’s hall. For this reason, he wore the wheel as an ornament, as his heart had led him.)

Gawein’s ritualistic, public act of placing the outward accoutrements of knighthood onto the body of his son (whom he still does not recognize) is a sign that Gwigalois’s transition from boyhood to manhood is now complete. The first outward, visible sign – the helmet with its crest – is reinforced by a second, the public act of investiture. The transition is demarcated linguistically as well; from this point forward the hero is no longer referred to as a boy or a youth (jungelinc or juncherr), but as a knight (rîter). The description of the crest atop Gwigalois’s helmet, together with Gawein’s placing it upon his head, thus punctuate the end of the second narrative section of the poem and mark the completion of the hero’s growth from childhood into manhood. Furthermore, Gwigalois’s device provides an opportunity for the narrator to manipulate the idea of heraldic objects and signs as a vehicle for recognition, while at the same time indulging with his audience in the pleasure of a bit of mutually understood irony. The golden heraldic wheel that blazes upon Gwigalois’s shield and helmet is on the one hand a sign that the Arthurian court recognizes his identity as a nobleman, yet on the other, an important part of this identity (as Gawein’s son) remains unrecognized for now. Not until the end of the story does Gwigalois recognize that Gawein, the very man who invested him with these arms and this device, is his own father.

The description of Gwigalois’s heraldic crest is also important because it marks the first instance of the important structural and thematic role that heraldry plays throughout the
rest of the poem. With this description of the hero’s armor, Wirnt introduces an especially vivid means of making the ideals of a courtly knight visually legible to his audience. In a recent article about the use of heraldry in thirteenth-century German literature, Haiko Wandhoff describes how heraldic shields and devices served two opposite ends, depending on whether the shield was being used in actual combat or in a literary passage. In combat, the shield was utilitarian and helped knights identify one another on the battlefield as quickly as possible; in a literary text, it likewise served this identifying function for text-internal characters, but this function is also embellished by a second, complementary one. In literature, the heraldic shield was a narrative device used to make the mind’s eye linger over the passage and savor the details. The literary shield thus makes an important transition “from the protective to the projective mode”, whereby it not only repels text-internal attackers, but also attracts text-external readers and listeners and makes them eyewitnesses to the tale.\textsuperscript{88} In what Wandhoff calls an “epic gaze”, the verbal description of an object initiates “slow, high-definition scanning” and “navigates the reader’s gaze slowly and in several sequences over surfaces, curves, and elevations of the armour, over ‘real’ gems, ‘real’ furs, and ‘real’ charges.”\textsuperscript{89} I assert that Wirnt’s continuous use of surface, color and spectacle draws readers and listeners in and triggers this exact sort of protracted, intense gaze in the mind’s eye. Wirnt furthermore uses the description of Gwigalois’s device to remind the audience of an important leitmotif that had first appeared earlier in the story: the role of Fortune in the hero’s affairs.


\textsuperscript{89} Wandhoff, “The Shield as Poetic Screen” 62.
Similar to the thematic and structural connections that Wirnt establishes between the two beautiful and wondrous belts in the poem’s first narrative section, the description of Gwigalois’s armor here is another instance of connecting storylines and familial relationships by linking one ekphrasis to another. As the passage states (v. 1865-1866), this golden heraldic wheel is based on a golden wheel of fortune that stood in the home of Gwigalois’s uncle Joram:

Úf des küniges veste
Was daz aller beste
Werc von rötem golde
Gegozzen, als er wolde,
Ein rat enmitten úf den sal;
Daz gienc úf und zetal.
Dâ wâren bilde gegozzen an,
Iegelîchz geschaffen als ein man.
Hie sigen diu mit dem rade nider,
Sô stigen d’andern úf wider;
Sus gienc ez umbe an der stat.
Daz was des gelückes rat.
Ez hêt ein pfaffe gemeisterd dar.
Von rötem golde was ez gar.
Ez bezeichent daz dem wirte nie
An deheinem dinge missegie;
Wan daz gelücke volget im ie. (v. 1036-1052)

(In the king’s castle was the most splendid work of art, poured of red gold and fashioned according to his wishes: a revolving wheel in the middle of the hall. On it were cast figures of men; as some sank with the wheel, so rose the others. Thus it turned there. It was the wheel of fortune. A priest had formed it, all of red gold, and it signified that its owner never failed at anything, for luck always went with him.)

The wheel of fortune was a common allegorical figure in the Middle Ages that was frequently represented in both poetry and the visual arts. In most typical depictions, four human figures, situated at four different stages around a great wheel, represented the

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constantly shifting chances and fortunes that one encounters during life. Accompanying the human figures were often the four short Latin mottoes *regnabo*, *regno*, *regnavi*, and *sum sine regno* (“I shall rule”, “I rule”, “I ruled”, and “I am without rule”) [fig. 1]. Furthermore, there are numerous historical documents that attest not only to the popularity of this figure in literature or in book illustrations, but also to the actual construction, display and use of real mechanical wheels of fortune in dramas and at courtly ceremonies.\(^91\) There is thus some reflection of historical reality in Joram’s owning a working wheel of fortune, and similar to the tents that I discuss in my chapter about ekphrasis and courtly identity, this is an example of courtly poets taking objects that thirteenth-century audiences found interesting or delightful in their real lives and including these objects in literary works for the listeners’ further, meditative enjoyment.\(^92\) As such, this description also exhibits a high degree of what Valerie Robillard has dubbed ekphrastic *selectivity*, which refers to the inclusion of commonly shared topics, myths, norms or conventions such as the wheel of fortune.\(^93\)

Although the wheel of fortune traditionally represented bad fortune as well as good, here Wirnt makes a crucial adjustment in his reading of this common allegorical figure, and tells the audience that Joram’s mechanical golden wheel represents only its owner’s *good* fortune. This proves to be of great import for the young hero, for, as it did with his uncle, good fortune follows Gwigalos wherever he goes. On one hand the audience would take this


\(^92\) Also to be discussed is the lively interplay between poets’ accurately describing or reflecting courtly reality and their conscious, intentional construction of an ideal. Courtly poets, and apparently their audiences, took great pleasure nevertheless in descriptions of all sorts of examples of material culture: castles, tents, clothing, and weapons all make their way into the courtly literature of the thirteenth century. See especially Joachim Bumke. *Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986. 137-275.

\(^93\) See my introduction, page 11.
for granted, since Gwigalois is the son of Gawein, the greatest of all Arthurian knights. On the other, however, the audience sees time and again that the choice of heraldic device not only helps others to recognize his identity in combat, but also points to the inherent inner and outer qualities of the hero himself – radiant, glorious, and fortunate in all his endowments as well as his endeavors. That the lad’s character is immaculate enough to allow him to sit on the stone of virtue unharmed is but one example that testifies to this. There are numerous others. For example, the audience learns that God gave the boy Gwigalois “a beautiful body and every possible talent and virtue, which he kept all his life” (**nu gap im got in ñîner jugent / schænen lip und ganze tugent / die behelt er an ñîn ende** v. 1244-1246). Later, as King Lar recounts the tragic story of his own murder, this ghost-ruler of Korntin appraises Gwigalois’s inner and outer qualities and concludes that he was born to be the perfect knight and hero (**du solt von rehte ñîn ein helt** v. 4792). Finally, a fisher’s wife, upon seeing Gwigalois, is awestruck by his beautiful body (v. 5433-5444). She says for example that he is “the most beautiful man [she has] ever seen or known” (**ditz ist der aller schœnste man / des ich künde ie gewan!** v. 5443-5444).

The clear explication of what the original mechanical wheel of fortune signifies (v. 1050-1052), and later the explicit statement of the reason why Gwigalois chooses the wheel as his device (v. 1863-1869) thus establish a strong connection between the hero’s accoutrements, his outer appearance, and his inner qualities. As such, Gwigalois’s golden wheel is an example of what Haiko Wandhoff calls “canting arms”: heraldic devices that reveal “the character of their bearers.”94 Just as important is the structural role that such canting arms play in texts such as *Wigalois*. Wandhoff writes:

94 Wandhoff, “The Shield as Poetic Screen” 60.
Canting arms...often contain micro-narratives even though abridged in a single emblem. Their symbols, like the complex picture-stories on ancient shields, not only function as individual charges but also represent some sort of texts within the text that are shown in a visible form – on the “screen” of the shield – to the readers’ eyes. These emblems perform a commemorative purpose, for whenever they show up they remind the readers of a significant occupation of their bearers or even call up a leitmotif of the entire text.\(^{95}\)

This leitmotif aspect certainly applies to the narrative structure of Wigalois: By repeatedly referring to the heraldic wheel throughout the tale, Wirnt gives this particular ekphrastic object a high degree of what Valerie Robillard calls referentiality, which refers to how frequently a poet uses a particular work of art in the text.\(^{96}\) This referentiality serves an important deictic and memorial function in the text: Gwigalois’s heraldic shield appears again and again in order to remind the audience of the hero’s good fortune and exemplary knightly qualities, and to demonstrate these same qualities to the characters in the story.

After Gwigalois bravely defeats the Red Knight Hojir of Mannesfeld, a physically larger and much more experienced warrior than himself, he sends the vanquished Hojir off to pledge loyalty to King Arthur and instructs him to say that this was the work of “the knight with the wheel” (\textit{daz hât der rîter mit dem rade} v. 3103). In fact, Wirnt frequently juxtaposes Gwigalois’s golden wheel with the canting arms of his various opponents as a means of contrasting the hero’s character or the justness of his cause with that of his enemies. For example, Gwigalois defeats knights who bear respectively the emblems of a swan (v. 2289-2292), a death’s head (v. 2998-2999), a golden stag and a golden dish (v. 3893-3905), red, blazing fire on a black background (v. 4558-4562), the figure of Mohammed sitting atop a pillar of azurite and gold (v. 6569-6576), and a fearsome golden dragon against a field of

\(^{95}\) Wandhoff, “The Shield as Poetic Screen” 60.

\(^{96}\) See my introduction, page 11.
blue (v. 7363-7366). Just as Gwigalois’s golden wheel points to the hero’s qualities and good fortune, so are these various canting emblems indicative of some characteristic of the bearer or of an event within the tale: The golden dish indicates that its bearer is a seneschal, the red fire foreshadows the blazing spear with which Gwigalois drives this particular band of enemies away, and the image of Mohammed tells Gwigalois and audience alike that its bearer believes everything on earth to be under the dominion of the “god of the heathens” (durch daz vuorte er der heiden got v. 6575). The ekphrases of these two golden wheels, then, build a thematic and narrative bridge between the hero and members of his family, and repeatedly remind the audience of Gwigalois’s exemplary character traits. They thus perform a paradigmatically ekphrastic role by repeatedly placing important ideas before the mind’s eye of the audience, and giving the audience an opportunity to reflect on the significance of these ideas.

In the ensuing adventures as Gwigalois approaches Korntin, three things work together to keep the hero safe: his battle armor with the golden wheel, his magic belt, and his faith in God. At one point in his journey, however, Gwigalois loses consciousness after fighting a terrible dragon, and his armor and his belt are stolen (v. 5312-5412).

This moment is significant for two reasons: First, it represents for the first time in the story the more traditional interpretation of the wheel of fortune, that is, that the wheel symbolizes bad fortune as well as good. As I discuss in more detail below, it thus marks an important change in the hero’s relationship to God; Gwigalois relies hereafter strictly on God’s help, not his own knightly prowess. For the first time in the story, the hero Gwigalois is not at the top (regno), but instead at the bottom (sum sine regno), beneath the wheel, stripped of his senses as well as his armor. Second, although Gwigalois’s armor is eventually
restored to him, the magic belt remains lost. Once again, the audience sees that an ekphrastic object – or in this case, the absence of that object – plays a structural role and initiates a thematic shift within the story: This scene marks the half-way point of the tale, and from this point forward on the difficult road to Korntin, Gwigalois must do without the magic belt. Beginning here, Gwigalois sees that the belt is forever lost, and he thus no longer gives credence to the superstitious powers that it lent him, but instead goes forth armed with his horse, his sword, and his armor (v. 6007-6016).

His armor with the golden wheel is not the only thing that will protect him from this point forward, however; he also rides forth to his subsequent adventures with an unshakeable faith, having put everything in God’s hands (v. 6182-6203). Beginning here, the poem’s religious aspects assume an increasingly prominent role in the story, and Wirnt places ever greater emphasis on the hero’s dependence on God.

**D. Through God All Things Are Possible: Japhite’s Tomb**

Gwigalois’s adventures in the Kingdom of Korntin reveal time and again a hero who must rely on help from God as well as on his knightly prowess if he ever hopes to complete the tasks before him. Wirnt marks the conclusion of the poem’s third narrative section, the adventures in Korntin, by providing his audience an extremely lavish ekphrasis, a description of a marvelous tomb. The ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb plays a structural role: first by participating in the narrative’s amplificatory tendency toward an ever increasing number of longer and more superlative ekphrases, and second by acting as a micro-narrative; it allows the audience a splendid opportunity to re-envision pivotal scenes from earlier in the text while simultaneously previewing important themes yet to come.
In order to win the hand of the beautiful Larie, daughter of Korntin’s dispossessed and murdered King Lar, Gwigalois eagerly agrees to undertake an adventure against Korntin’s enemies. Along the way to his main adventure, Gwigalois successfully defeats and kills a host of adversaries, including the dreadful giantess Ruel, the heathen dwarf Karrioz, the fire-throwing centaur Marrien, and two threatening porters who stand before the gates of Glois – all with the help of God’s intervention.

It is in the Korntinian city of Glois, however, where he must face his most deadly enemy, Roaz. Roaz is a heathen who has increased his great power by bartering his earthly life and his soul in a deal with the devil: *er hat durch seinen zouberlist / beidiu sele und leben / einem tievel geben* (v. 3656-3658). In a fierce battle that lasts all night long, Gwigalois ultimately prevails and defeats the heathen with a death blow through the heart.

When Roaz’s wife Japhite sees her husband lying dead on the battlefield, her heart breaks with a resounding crack, and she dies on the spot out of grief. While Roaz’s corpse is fetched by demons that drag the body with them back to hell (v. 8136-8137), a different fate lies in store for the loving and faithful Japhite. Her body is laid in an extravagant tomb:

Vrouwen Japhîten truoc man sâ
Mit grôzer klage vür daz tor.
Dâ legt man die reinen vor
In einen röten jachant.
Den sarc man dâ stênde vant
Ûf zwein siulen êrîn.
Zwei glas gesetzt waren dar în
Zir vüezen und zir houbet;
Ichn weiz, ob irz geloubet,
Diu wârn gefult mit balsamô.
Den zunde man, und brinnet alsô
Noch hiute, als mir ist geseit.
Ûf den sarc wart geleit
Ein saffîr lâzûrvar. (v. 8228-8241)
(...and then, with great lamentation, they carried Lady Japhite immediately to the front of the gate. There they lay the Pure One in a red hyacinth. This casket stood there on two bronze pillars. Two glasses were placed inside it, one at her feet and one at her head. I don’t know whether you will believe it, but they were filled with balsam; this balsam was lit and is still burning today, as I am told. On the casket was also a blue sapphire.)

With ninety-six uninterrupted lines, Japhite’s tomb is by far the most lavish and complex of the ekphrastic objects in Wigalois up to this point. Wirnt turns the ekphrasis into a multi-sensory experience for his audience, evoking not only the sense of sight, but also those of sound and smell. Visuality plays the dominant role, however, and Wirnt indulges his audience’s delight in lavish descriptions of costly jewels, precious stones, and exotic details with particular zeal. On every level, Wirnt’s description invites readers and listeners to focus more carefully on the details and ideas of the story, to savor the splendor, and to initiate the slow, high-definition scanning of what Wandhoff describes as the epic gaze.

This particular ekphrasis is more than an elaborate or indulgent excursus meant to dazzle the audience, however. The lengthy description of Japhite’s tomb functions as a crucial structuring device. As the narrative progresses, Wirnt inserts ekphrastic passages with increasingly greater frequency and intensity, tending to group a number of shorter ekphrases around a longer, structurally important passage. Thus, the description of the tomb first contributes to the intensifying effect that Wirnt has been building with ekphrasis over the course of the narrative. The tomb is a paradigmatic example of Wirnt’s using ekphrasis to build tension and excitement in the story by including ever more elaborate descriptions and objects that tend to be of an ever-increasing scale. The ekphrastic descriptions begin, as we have seen, with the magic belt and Florie’s belt, and continue with the stone of virtue and

97 For a discussion of the genuine delight that courtly audiences took in such lavish descriptions and rich ornamentation, see especially Joachim Bumke, Höfische Kultur 178-189.
the golden wheels. Some of the other objects that Wirnt describes in the story up to this point include the splendid birdcage made of gold and adorned with precious stones that Gwigalois recovers from Hojir of Mannesfeld (v. 2514-2552), the numerous descriptions of Gwigalois’s opponents’ shields mentioned above, and even more elaborate than all these, the description of the Castle at Glois, which glows like a mirror and has vaulted ceilings resting on pillars of black marble, walls of green marble, trim of red gold, and a gate colored like a rainbow, with a ruby resting at its top (v. 7059-7089). The narrative of Wigalois is thus marked by the ever increasing length, frequency, or intensity of each of ekphrastic descriptions.

This tendency toward higher pitched narrative intensity is not only limited to descriptions of objects, however. In the moments directly leading up to the description of the tomb, Wirnt continues to build narrative tension by telling the audience about Japhite’s death and faithful love for her husband (v. 7737-7789, 7878-7903), by pleading with God to have mercy on Japhite’s soul (v. 8019-8036), by having Gwigalois give a homily about the saving and protective power of God and the Holy Trinity (v. 8142-8165), and by telling how Roaz’s vassal Count Adan is so deeply moved by Gwigalois’s homily that he converts to Christianity (v. 8166-8222). This ekphrasis thus serves a structural function in two respects: first, in the shorter perspective, it brings the ever-intensifying narrative crescendo that Wirnt builds up directly around the battle against Roaz to a splendid climax. Second, in the longer perspective, it marks the culmination of Gwigalois’s central adventure, to which all of the hero’s other adventures have been leading him since the maiden Nereja first appeared at King Arthur’s court (v. 1718-1765).
In addition to its participation in the increasing narrative tension, the description of Japhite’s tomb serves a third important structural function. As the description of Japhite’s tomb marks the conclusion of Gwigalois’s central adventure, it also marks an opportune moment to look backward and forward. Wirnt uses this ekphrasis as a vehicle for doing precisely that: Just as death is the threshold between this world and the next, so is the description of Japhite’s tomb at the pivotal point between what Gwigalois has accomplished on his long road to Kornitin and all that awaits him in his new life as Larie’s husband and as king of his own realm. The ekphrasis of the tomb is thus a micro-narrative that allows the audience to simultaneously review important events in the story and to preview some of the ideas and visual splendor that are yet to come.

One way in which it does this is through the inscription that Wirnt tells the audience is written on the tomb’s surface (v. 8261-8289). The words of the epitaph recapitulate for the audience the events that have just transpired. They remind readers and listeners once again that Japhite was noble, praiseworthy, and even courtly (hie lît in disem steine / vrouwe Japhîte, diu reine / der ganzer tugent niht gebrast v. 8261-8263); that she died because of her grief (ir schœnen lîp si verlôs / von herzenlîcher riuwe v. 8274-8275); and that the Christian hero Gwigalois defeated and slew the heathen knight Roaz (den tôt gap ir diu triuwe / die si Rôaz dem heiden truoc / den Gwîgâlois der christen sluoc v. 8276-8278). By mentioning that Japhite died unbaptized (von disem lîbe schiet si hin / leider ungetouffet v. 8280-8281), the epitaph recalls for the audience first that the narrator himself “baptized” Japhite (v. 8031-8032), and second that Count Adan asked to be baptized when he converted to Christianity (v. 8203-8208). By calling upon the audience to pray on behalf of Japhite’s soul (v. 8282-
8287), the epitaph reminds readers of the narrator’s own prayers for Japhite a few hundred lines earlier (v. 8019-8036).

The description of the tomb also gives the audience a preview of some of the events and themes that follow this central adventure in Korntin. The epitaph’s emphasis on Japhite’s courtliness and on the death she suffered out of grief foreshadow a similar death, discussed below, that takes place after the Gwigalois’s wedding to Larie (v. 9991-10,037). Moreover, the repeated references to loyalty and faithfulness (triuwe, v. 8250, 8251, 8270, 8272, 8276, 8288), the large golden ring that is wrapped around the tomb to symbolize Japhite’s triuwe (v. 8248-8251), and the written inscription all prefigure the love letter that Gwigalois writes to his beloved Larie after successfully defeating Roaz. In this letter, Gwigalois tells Larie of his constant love for her, and he sends it along with a golden ring to symbolize this constancy and love (v. 8695-8711).

Even the architectural aspects of the tomb contribute to this micro-narrative review and preview. Japhite’s casket rests under a great marble vault that “gleamed red, green, blue and yellow” (under einem gewelbe marmelîn / der gap wider ein ander schîn / rôt, grüene, weitîn unde gel v. 8302-8304) and thus reminds the audience of the scintillating, colorful marble found earlier in the tale at the Castle of Glois (v. 7059-7089). Yet the paintings and gold ornaments that adorn the walls of the vault (daz gewelbe daz was sinwel / mit gemælde wol gezieret / von golde geparrieret v. 8305-8307) surpass the architectural splendor of Glois and hint at the even more luxurious and spectacular interior space of Larie’s tent, which appears later in the poem (v. 10,342-10,408).

In the development of the hero, the tomb shows that Gwigalois is now not only a worthy knight of the Arthurian court, which the stone of virtue and the golden wheel had
made evident, but that he also fully acknowledges God’s protection and saving intervention in his numerous adventures. For example, when Gwigalois prayed, God directly intervened and helped him overcome the giantess Ruel (v. 6461-6509) and lifted the devil’s dangerous, noxious fog that surrounded Gwigalois after his battle with Karrioz (v. 6805-6884). In the central adventure leading up to the tomb’s description, it is not only the hero’s own knightly prowess that allows him to defeat Roaz, but indeed holy intervention; a sacred text, blessed by a priest and attached to the hilt of Gwigalois’s sword (v. 4427-4430) acts in conjunction with the sign of the Cross to ward off the blows of the heathen and the devil who protects him (v. 7334-7342).

After this greatest, most dangerous battle, the nature of Gwigalois’s relationship to God changes. Up to this point the hero has only offered rather conventional prayers to God, such as the one he utters the night before setting out for Korntin: “May he who created the world give me help and guidance and comfort on my journey” (der al die werlt geschaffen hât / er gebe mir helfe unde rât / und trôst ze mîner reise v. 4343-4345). Following the terrible battle against Roaz, however, Gwigalois’s prayers are considerably more heartfelt as he tearfully thanks God for helping him (v. 8393-8396). Whereas the former prayer was said in the presence of others and may thus have been as much a conventional display of piety as anything else, this latter, tearful prayer is offered privately and silently (vil tougen v. 8394), thus reinforcing the hero’s sincerity. More important, the hero now puts his faith into concrete action by giving a short sermon, and he even assists Roaz’s servant Count Adan in the latter’s conversion to Christianity (v. 8142-8222). By showing that the hero now actively acknowledges God’s help in all these victories and that he puts his beliefs into practice, Wirnt shows that the hero Gwigalois has proven himself the ideal combination of Arthurian
knight and Christian hero. The culmination of this process takes place in the battle against Roaz, and the culmination of this central adventure is marked visually with the description of the tomb.

Finally, the ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb demonstrates that the hero has successfully converted what James Schultz refers to as O- (the negative aspect of The Other), in this case the challenge posed by the fearsome heathen Roaz, into O+ by defeating his enemy, integrating the non-Christian Japhite into the Christian faith, and by restoring the kingdom to its rightful ruler.98 Because of this successful conversion of negative into positive, the story can move forward from its point of repose (the description of the tomb) to a new point of action. The ekphrasis thus signifies that the narrative is leaving the old and moving into new thematic territory. In the fourth and final division of the narrative, Wirnt introduces the audience to Gwigalois the husband and king. Yet important structural and thematic connections with the ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb remain; the crescendo effect continues in the last narrative section, and important questions about love, faith, and Christianity touched upon in the ekphrasis of the tomb are also present in the final great ekphrasis in Wigalois, the architectural wonder-tent that sits atop Larie’s war elephant.

E. The Final Stages: Larie’s Tent

Following the powerful scenes of Roaz’s defeat and Japhite’s burial, Wirnt tells of the long-awaited wedding ceremony that unites Gwigalois and Larie. Despite numerous obstacles and perilous battles, Gwigalois ultimately emerges victorious, is crowned king and married to his beloved. This final section is marked by the elaborate description of a ______________________________

98 See Schultz, The Shape of the Round Table 31-33.
luxurious tent that the hero commissions for his bride Larie. As I discuss below, in its length
and synaesthetic qualities, this description contributes to the poem’s increasing narrative
amplification. Another of the most important narrative and structural functions that this tent-
description serves is that it allows the audience to draw comparisons between the heathen
Roaz and Gwigalois, the Christian hero and king.

In the middle of the hero’s wedding festivities, a page arrives and informs the guests
that the villainous Prince Lion of Namur has murdered a fellow knight, Amire. Amire had
been traveling to the wedding celebration when Lion assaulted and killed him, and then
abducted his wife Liamere. Liamere is a cousin to Gwigalois’s wife Larie. Everyone present
is outraged, and Gwigalois and the other knights act immediately: in order to exact justice
and revenge, they decide to mount a truly spectacular military campaign against Lion.

Surprisingly, once Gwigalois and his knights decide to go to war, the first thing that
Wirnt tells the audience is neither which knights accompany the newly-crowned king, nor
what sorts of shields or weapons they bring along, nor even what their concrete plans might
be. Instead, the audience hears about an extremely elaborate, towering tent that Gwigalois
has constructed for his new bride:

Er hiez bereiten, durch ir gemach,
Ein harte schönez kastel,
Ze mäze hœch, und sinewel,
Geriht üf einen helfant,
Daz man vil wol bedecket vant
Mit pfelle von Alexandrē;
Drinne mîn vrouwe Lârîe
Mit zwelf juncvrouwen reit
Vil grôz gezierde truoc man drîn.
Mit rîchen tepten südin
Bestreuwt man daz kastel.
Ein pfelle röt und gel
Die wende al umbe gar bevienc.
En mitten dar inne hienc
Ein mückennetze sîdîn. (v. 10,345-10,360)

(For her comfort he had a most splendid tower built. It was rather tall, and round, was mounted on an elephant, and it was thoroughly covered with silk from Alexandria. Lady Larie rode inside it with twelve maidens, noble and lovely. There was a great deal of splendid decoration inside. Costly silk rugs had been laid throughout this castle. A cloth of red and yellow silk lined the walls from top to bottom. Hanging down in the middle was a mosquito net made of silk.)

This ekphrasis, the last one in my investigation, demarcates the beginning of the poem’s final stages, which deal with Gwigalois’s new role as king. In the story’s concluding narrative section, the hero Gwigalois, now at the absolute peak of his power, demonstrates just how the ideal Arthurian and Christian king ought to govern. The segment marked at its beginning by the ekphrasis of Larie’s great tent articulates a number of aspects vital to successful rule, including setting a good example through the correction of injustices and the punishment of evildoers, the importance of family ties, and the use of dazzling visual displays as a demonstration of power and prestige.

Part of this description’s structural function is evident in its abundant revelry in superlatives: The ekphrasis of Larie’s tent surpasses all of the poem’s other ekphrases in its listing of the most minute, fantastic details imaginable, and is thus the final example of the swelling ekphrastic effect that Wirnt builds up throughout the structure of his work. Wirnt’s decision to place Larie’s war elephant and tent at the very front of the battle procession is also revealing; the tent’s splendor anticipates the dazzling parade of banners and spears and shields that follow, and is thus another example of the poet placing a striking, graphic verbal description of an object at the beginning of a new section or transition within the work. Following the description of Larie’s tent, the audience also hears about the heraldic arms of King Rial of Jeraphin, which were white and red and bore the image of an ornate, golden
elephant (v. 10,477-10,486); it hears about the bright banners and white helmets of Iwein and Erec and the three thousand knights who accompanied them (v. 10,644-10,653); about the elegant banners of the Kings of Zaradech and Panschavar, which bore an ermine eagle on green cloth interwoven with red gold (v. 10,699-10,706); about Erec’s banner of red silk that displayed a wheel of green silk (v. 10,899-10,905); and even about the banner of the new king: Gwigalois’s golden wheel appears against a black banner adorned with many jewels (v. 10,687-10,694). As the last example here makes especially clear, this vivid display of heraldic arms is thus not only evidence of Wirnt’s tendency toward ekphrastic amplification, but also continues to connect one ekphrasis to another by reminding the audience of the canting arms in the descriptions of Gwigalois’s and other heraldic devices.

Larie’s tent and the events surrounding it also establish structural ties to the ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb. Both scenes are informed by the themes of faithfulness (triuwe) and courtly love (minne) and by the conventional theme of a courtly woman dying out of love for her slain husband. Both descriptions invite the audience to make thoughtful comparisons between Japhite and Larie, between a heathen and a Christian, between a lady who watches her husband fight a battle and a lady who actively leads the way into battle, and between the proper or improper reasons for constructing such magnificent architectural spectacles in the first place. Larie’s tent thus not only punctuates the beginning of the last, climactic stage in the narrative, but similar to the connections between the magic belt and Florie’s belt, or between Gwigalois’s heraldic golden wheel and the mechanical wheel of fortune that inspired it, the tent also reminds audiences of similarly choreographed scenes and thus establishes ties to another ekphrasis.
In the page’s report to the wedding party, for example, the audience hears about Liamere’s suffering and death in the wake of her husband’s murder. Similar to the scenes leading directly to the ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb, Liamere is so devastated by her husband’s death that she can carry on no longer and dies of a broken heart (v. 10,006-10,007; also 10,240-10,242). Similarities in structure and choreography also extend into the ekphrasis itself: twelve noble maidens accompany Larie as she rides into battle atop the elephant, just as Japhite had been accompanied by her entourage of twelve while she watched the desperate fight between her husband and Gwigalois. An important difference between the two scenes, however, is that Larie is not simply a passive observer – she is not dead – but is indeed an active participant at the very front of the battle.

In another similarity to the description of Japhite’s tomb, Wirnt turns the ekphrasis of the tent into a multi-sensory experience. In addition to the sense of sight, the description of Larie’s tent evokes sound, touch, and smell. Horst Wenzel notes that for courtly audiences, symbolic visual and verbal representation often evokes “all dimensions of sensory perception.”100 As I discuss in greater detail in chapter four, this synaesthetic quality is deeply connected to courtly self-representation, and thus to Larie’s status as the hero’s queen.

In this description, sound is provided by little golden bells that hang from the ends of the mosquito net (das netze was gestricket wol / guldīner schellen hienc ez vol / niden an dem ende v. 10,389-10,391). The sense of touch is invoked by a container filled with a precious balsam; all maladies disappear when the salve is rubbed onto the skin (und wirt diu salbe

99 For some of the implications of the number twelve, see note 21. See also chapter five, pp. 202-203.

gestrichen dran / si ne müeze deste semfter sîn v. 10,373-10,374). This reminds the audience of the balsam that sits in two vases before Japhite’s sarcophagus and “still burns to this day” (und brinnet also noch hiute v. 8234-8239). Even more wonderful than the salve’s healing powers is its smell:

Inside this, hanging by a golden chain, was a crystal – clearer than glass – which was filled with a balsam that gave off a sweet aroma. Even musk or spikenard could not rival its sweetness. Would you like to know what that is? The aroma was like this:

No one was ever so unhappy but that its smell melted his sorrows away […] The salve is costly and unknown. It is brought from the land of the Old Man, from far-away pagandom. Its strength comes from herbs which are weighed with gold, and that is why its odor rightly surpasses that of all herbs. As I have heard it, its sweetness has no equal.)

This likewise reminds the audience of the sweet-smelling thymiamata that burns in a censer inlaid on the top of Japhite’s casket (dar inne man zallen ziten vant / mit süezem smacke brinnen da / diu reinen thymiamata v. 8296-8299).

Also like Japhite’s tomb, Larie’s tent was commissioned for a beautiful lady by a brave and wealthy man. Yet this connection also provides an opportunity for the audience to
make a comparison, for while Roaz had the tomb built because of his arrogant pride (durch
sînen hôhen muot v. 8318), Gwigalois is motivated by his wife’s beauty and by his loving
concern for her comfort. At the very beginning of the description Wirnt tells us:

Swar mîn her Gwîgâlois nu rit,
Vrouwe Lârie im volget mit;
Wander die schœnen gerne s ach.
Er hiez bereiten, durch ir gemach,
Ein harte schœnez castel...
(v. 10,342-10,346)

(Wherever my Lord Gwigalois went now, Lady Larie followed, because he liked
to see the beautiful one. For her comfort he had a splendid tower built…)

Whereas Roaz was as much concerned with his own glory as with honoring his wife,
Gwigalois is concerned with providing his wife comfort. Whereas Roaz focused on the
beauty of the material thing – the tomb itself – Gwigalois focuses on the beauty of his
partner. As far as what motivates a man to build a beautiful structure is concerned, then,
Wirnt shows the audience that Gwigalois has his priorities in better order than Roaz, and
provides a positive counterexample to Japhite’s tomb.

Finally, with the description of Larie’s tent, Wirnt invites the audience to make a
comparison between the pain that devoted lovers must suffer when one of the pair dies and
the joy that lovers can revel in when they are together. Japhite’s tomb is ultimately static and
holds her body alone, separated from that of her dead lover; Roaz does not lie beside her in
death, but has been taken away to hell (v. 8136-8137). By contrast, Larie’s tent is mobile; it
sits atop a war-elephant on its way to battle, and Gwigalois and Larie thus happily move
forward together on the campaign against Lion of Namur as well as into their future lives as
rulers of Korntin. Although the words on Japhite’s epitaph express hope for the future of her
soul and that she may join God in heaven, her magnificent tomb nonetheless ultimately
commemorates her sorrowful earthly death, caused by the painful loss of her husband.
Larie’s tent, on the other hand, demonstrates the loving affection that Gwigalois has for his bride, the splendor with which he wishes to surround her, and celebrates the happy result of two lovers having found each other and not wanting to be separated again. Immediately prior to the description of Larie’s tent, for example, Wirnt informs the audience that

\[
\text{Wand ez ir beider minne riet,} \\
\text{diu si nimmer më geschiet.} \\
\text{Swar min her Gwîgâlois nu rit,} \\
\text{Vrouwe Larie im volget mit} \quad \text{(v. 10,340-10,343)}
\]

(For her love as well as his did not want them ever to be parted again. Wherever my Lord Gwigalois went now, Lady Larie followed.)

The structural and thematic connections between Larie’s tent and Japhite’s tomb, as well as the connections between the other examples I have discussed, thus support the argument that Wirnt uses ekphrasis to do more than maintain the audience’s interest in a more or less static, uninteresting hero. Indeed, the ekphrasis of Larie’s tent provides the final demonstration that the hero is anything but static; he has changed not only from boy to man, from Arthurian knight to Christian hero, but he is now a ruler in his own right. I argue that this ekphrasis helps to demonstrate what sort of ruler he in fact is. First, he is a just king who respects the importance of family ties and seeks to correct injustices within his realm; it is, after all, a murder and the subsequent death of his wife’s kinswoman that prompts Gwigalois to initiate a military campaign in the first place. By responding so quickly and decisively to Larie’s sorrow, and by building such an extravagant tent for her to accompany him into battle, he also shows proper respect and affection for his courtly wife. Finally, the ekphrasis of Larie’s tent is a vivid demonstration that Gwigalois is powerful enough to put on such a splendid display of heraldic arms and to muster a force of thousands that includes other members of King Arthur’s circle. Gwigalois has developed from the boy equipped with the
magic belt who rides off in search of his father into the eager lad who sat on the stone of virtue and unwittingly became a member of the Arthurian court. He has developed from a newly-invested knight into an experienced warrior who, armed with his sword, shield and helmet with the golden wheel, as well as with an unshakeable faith in God, defeats a fearsome enemy. Finally, he has developed into a just and powerful king, and throughout the course of the poem, ekphrastic descriptions have structured the work and helped to trace the path of this development.

III. Conclusion

From the time of its composition early in the thirteenth century, Wigalois enjoyed immense popularity and the praise of other contemporary authors. The tale also saw successful transmission in prose as well as verse forms for over six-hundred years, well into the eighteenth century. Yet within the canon of Middle High German Arthurian romances, traditional criticism has failed to place Wigalois in a position commensurate with its original popularity.

One reason for this is because scholars have tended to overlook the crucial role that ekphrasis plays in the poem. Using the five paradigmatic examples of the magic belt, the stone of virtue, the golden wheel, Japhite’s tomb, and Larie’s tent as paradigmatic examples, I assert that ekphrasis serves three important but complementary functions in Wigalois: ekphrasis structures the work, integrates potentially conflicting sets of ideas both text-internally and –externally, and simultaneously comments on and constructs courtly identity. I maintain that these functions may help explain the poem’s original success.

101 For example, Wirmt’s name was already being praised in the thirteenth century by Konrad von Würzburg as a knightly servant to “frouw werlt” in his Der werft lohn (ca. 1267). See my introduction, pp. 22-26.
In this chapter I have argued that as a structuring device, ekphrasis provides a structural framework for the text and divides the story into discrete thematic units, in which readers can trace the hero’s distinct path of development from boy to man, from eager apprentice to invested knight, from Arthurian knight to Christian hero, and finally to the ideally just and powerful ruler. In its structural capacity, ekphrasis also establishes connections from one ekphrasis to another, thereby allowing the audience to revisit the poem’s important ideas and to make comparisons between various events and characters.

In the following chapters, I examine Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis in its two other functions, as an integrative device and as a vehicle for courtly identity and (self-) representation. Here I pursue the following questions: First, to what extent does the ekphrasis contribute to a discourse on integration, either text-externally or text-externally? That is, what potentially conflicting ideas or ideals are thematized in the description, and how does Wirnt resolve them? Next, in what ways does the ekphrasis reflect – or allow the audience to reflect on – courtly identity? To what extent does the ekphrasis participate in the construction of an ideal courtly society? Is the ekphrasis only descriptive, or is it also prescriptive?

One of the most important of these recurrent ideas throughout Wigalois is that of integration, be it the attempt to establish unity between two separate groups in the story where none had existed before, or to suggest to the audience that one set of ideas need not exclude another. In the following chapter I examine how Wirnt uses ekphrasis as a vehicle for articulating potential conflicts in the text, and for bringing these conflicting ideas into greater harmony with one another.
Chapter 3
Ekphrasis as an Integrative Device

I. Introduction

In the first years of the thirteenth century, the poet Walther von der Vogelweide composed a poem that articulated one of the most important issues for knights and members of courtly society: how to correctly integrate social norms with Christian responsibilities. Speaking in the first person, the poet stages a scene in which he sits upon a stone and ponders the question of how one ought to live in the world:

Ich saz ûf eime steine
Dô dahte ich bein mit beine,
Dar ûf satzt ich mîn ellenbogen;
Ich hete in mîne hant gesmogen
Daz kinne und ein mîn wange.
Dô dâhte ich mir vil ange,
Wie man zerwelte solte leben.
Deheinen rât kond ich gegeben,
Wie man driu dinc erwurbe,
Der keines niht verdurbe.
Diu zwei sint êre und varnde guot,
Daz dicke ein ander schaden tuot.
Daz dritte ist gotes hulde,
Der zweier übergulde. (2 I, 1-14, L. 8, 4)\textsuperscript{102}

(I sat upon a stone and placed one leg over the other, and rested my elbow upon them. In my hand I nestled my chin and one of my cheeks. I then pondered with great concern how one ought to live in the world. I could find no answer to the problem of how one should maintain three things without spoiling any one of them. Two of them are honor and wealth, which often do harm to each other. The third is God’s favor, more valuable than the other two.)

Walther sits thinking about how to successfully harmonize the worldly aspects of a knight’s existence, honor and wealth, with the demands placed on one as a Christian seeking God’s favor and grace. As his poem indicates, many perceived this as a difficult dilemma, and indeed, seeking to integrate the demands of the courtly here and now with the Christian hereafter became a serious topic for many courtly poets.

Many authors contemporary with Walther deal with questions of how to lead a well-integrated life as a knight. In medieval German Arthurian romance, one of the most famous examples of this theme is in Hartmann’s Erec: in this story, the hero falls into disfavor with his knightly peers as well as with God because he has lived a decidedly un-integrated life: he has succumbed to the pleasures of marriage and failed to perform his duties as a knight. He must then undertake a series of adventures in order to restore harmony and balance to his life, and to reintegrate himself into courtly society. Similarly, in his romance Iwein, Hartmann thematizes the question of integration once again. This time, Gawein chides the hero Iwein for having become too soft since marrying Laudine, and even compares him to Erec (v. 2767-2798); Gawein then convinces Iwein to seek out further adventures (v. 2899-2912). Laudine grants her husband a one-year leave (v. 2913-2934), but Iwein becomes too engrossed in his knightly exploits, forgets about his deadline, and fails to return home to resume his responsibilities as a husband (v. 3082-3087). Laudine’s maidservant Lunette then comes to King Arthur’s court, publicly excoriates Iwein for his neglect, and Iwein must seek the path back to his wife and to a more harmonious, integrated life (v. 3111-3200). Integration is also one of the most important themes in Wolfram’s Parzival, whose hero

undergoes many arduous adventures before he ultimately reconciles knighthood with Christian ideals. At the conclusion of *Parzival*, Wolfram reminds his audience:

swes lebn sich sô verendet,
daz got niht wirt gepfendet
der sêle durch des lîbes schulde,
und der doch der werlde hulde
behalten kan mit werdekeit,
daz ist ein nütziu arbeit. (XVI, 827, 19-24)104

(He whose life is concluded in such a way that God is not robbed of the soul through the fault of the body, and who nonetheless maintains worldly respect and good standing with dignity, that is useful and worthy toil.)

Harmony and integration were thus important themes in courtly literature in general, and are especially important in *Wigalois* in particular. In this chapter, I argue that like his contemporaries, Wirnt von Gravenberg is also concerned with these themes, and that ekphrasis is one of his most important tools in *Wigalois* for articulating them for his characters as well as for his audience.

How, then, does Wirnt thematize “integration”, and what does this term mean in the context of *Wigalois*? Does disintegration or disharmony ever threaten Gwigalois, the “already perfect” hero? As I argued in the previous chapter, the hero’s linear path of development from boy to man and from knight to Christian king demonstrates that Gwigalois does not adhere to the “classic” Arthurian Doppelweg of rise, fall, and redemption. The same is true when we approach the question of ekphrasis and integration in *Wigalois*. The hero of *Wigalois* does not have to integrate himself into courtly society or back into Arthurian society in the same way that Hartmann’s Erec or Iwein must. Unlike Hartmann’s heroes or Wolfram’s Parzival, Gwigalois makes no grave blunders and commits no sins of omission,

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but Wirnt von Gravenberg concerns himself nonetheless with similar questions about harmonizing the sacred and the secular that his courtly contemporaries did.

By integration, I mean first Wirnt’s successful joining of two different narrative traditions: Wirnt uses the magic belt to integrate the “Fair Unknown” tradition (which, as I discuss in more detail below, is characterized by a strong reliance on magic and allusions to a mysterious faerie realm) with the literary tradition of the Arthurian romance and its emphasis on courtliness and knightly adventure. I show that Wirnt’s description of the magic belt, and later of Florie’s belt, acts as a catalyst for integrating these two different fictional worlds within the text, that is, the Arthurian world of Gwigalois’s father Gawein and the fantastic, faerie realm of his uncle Joram and his mother Florie. This integrative function of ekphrasis is also at work in the description of the second important object in my investigation, the stone of virtue, which serves as the vehicle for integrating the young hero into the Arthurian circle and the Knights of the Round Table.

The ekphrases of the three remaining objects, the golden wheel, Japhite’s tomb, and Larie’s tent, engage more actively and explicitly with the audience to comment on issues that courtly listeners and readers might have found especially pertinent. In the case of the golden wheel, the question of integration is similar to that which Walther von der Vogelweide addresses in Ich saz üf eime steine, and which would have been quite familiar to Wirnt’s thirteenth-century courtly audience: how to reconcile worldly goods and an honorable, chivalric reputation with the requirements of leading a good Christian life. Taking a more positive approach to the question than Walther, however, Wirnt uses Gwigalois’s heraldic device, the golden wheel, to point to the harmony that can in fact exist between the worldly adventures and duties of a knight and the moral responsibility of a Christian.
The integration of religious and secular is also what I understand to be at work in the extensive ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb, although here the emphasis is different. In this case, the description of Japhite’s magnificent burial site is also the site where Wirnt raises questions about whether a non-Christian can receive the Christian God’s favor, and how a Christian audience ought to react to an exceptional Muslim who exhibits all the courtliness and virtue they would expect from a Christian heroine. In this ekphrasis, first the narrator, and later the inscription on the tomb itself act as intercessors for the heartbroken Japhite, who dies a heathen but ultimately receives God’s blessing and is integrated into the loving fold of Christianity.

In the ekphrasis of Larie’s tent, I see integration first as Wirnt’s continued effort to better integrate Christian and heathen characters; for example, the heathen Lady Japhite’s two brothers are prominent members of the colorful entourage that Larie leads into battle. I see it second as a comment to the text-external audience about courtly ladies and leadership roles. Wirnt’s description of Larie in her splendid tent, at the head of a great military campaign, helps make a place for women as leaders and integrates the hero’s wife into the story not only as a beautiful and desirable woman, but also as an important partner on a more equal footing with her husband.

As we shall see, Wirnt uses ekphrasis to thematize topical, important, and even potentially controversial issues to his audience. Specifically, these are the seemingly disparate issues of the Fair Unknown and Arthurian traditions, the question of heathen versus Christian, and the issue of women and lordship. Through ekphrastic descriptions, Wirnt points toward possible resolutions and toward achieving harmony both within his poem and beyond it.

II. Ekphrasis and Integration
A. Harmonizing Families and Fictional Worlds: The Magic Belt

We have already seen that the magic belt plays an important structural role for the early stages of *Wigalois*: it introduces the audience to the first of many splendid and even magical objects in the poem that invite the audience to see with the mind’s eye; it marks the dynamic point from which the story moves from a “pole of repose” to one of action; forms narrative ties to another ekphrasis later in the tale (that of Florie’s beautiful magic belt), and in establishing this narrative connection, it also helps enable the hero’s father, Gawein, to fall in love with Florie, Gwigalois’s mother. It is with this last point that I am concerned in this section. The magic belt and its description play an important part in bringing together not only Gwigalois’s father and mother, but the belt also helps to integrate two different fictional worlds: the courtly, Arthurian circle from which Gawein comes, and the mystical, wondrous faerie realm where Joram and Florie are at home. Indeed, the magic belt proves to be an important multi-functional and -faceted device for the poet. In this section, I argue first for the existence of these two separate fictional realms in the early sections of *Wigalois*. I then argue that the belt itself combines fantastic, magical qualities with courtly ones. Finally, I show that although the magic belt first appears to disrupt the harmony and balance in the Arthurian realm, it eventually helps to forge bonds between members of the hero’s family, and also between these two fictional worlds, between the Arthurian and non-Arthurian circles.

Let us first examine what evidence exists of a separate, mysterious, and fantastical Otherworld in *Wigalois*.

1. Arthurian and Faerie Realms in Wigalois
The magical Otherworld is a frequently occurring feature in stories from the “Fair Unknown” tradition, in which the hero is raised in seclusion, without knowing his father or his other antecedents, and receives instruction in the ways of the (courtly) world from an older tutor. The most famous representative of this tradition in German is Wolfram’s *Parzival*, and other examples include the Old French *Le Bel Inconnu* (the work most closely associated with *Wigalois*), the Middle English *Libeaus Desconus*, the Italian *Carduino*, the Lancelot cycle, and the entire corpus of Perceval stories.\(^{105}\) Often, the hero is also the offspring of a knightly father and a faerie mother.

In her investigation of the Wondrous in *Le Bel Inconnu, Wigalois, and Wigoleis vom Rade*, Jutta Eming makes a convincing argument that although the boundaries between them are fluid, there are nevertheless two different fictional worlds at work in *Wigalois*—particularly in the “pre-historical”, opening sections.\(^{106}\) J.W. Thomas also speaks of the “enchanted land” as being an important motif in *Wigalois*;\(^ {107}\) Neil Thomas writes in his most recent monograph that “*Wigalois* is a syncretic work whose material lies athwart a number of story-types and genres,”\(^ {108}\) and Hans-Jochen Schiewer notes that Wirnt weaves a number of themes into his tale that are “foreign to the genre of Arthurian romance.”\(^ {109}\) These two


\(^{108}\) Neil Thomas, *Intertextuality and Interpretation* 22.

literary worlds, the Arthurian and the Wondrous, operate with different sets of rules, and the narrator places emphasis on the differences between these worlds early in the tale.

Beginning at verse 145, the audience is first introduced to the Arthurian court. The narrator mentions the sorts of worldly qualities that are so important to the concept of knighthood, and that are reminiscent of those that Walther von der Vogelweide discusses in his poem. In Wirnt’s rendering of the Arthurian court, the most distinguishing and important characteristics are honor and social standing (ère), valor (vrümecheit), fame won at tournaments (lob), knights’ virtues (tugent) and the King’s kindness, magnanimity and generosity (milté). In Arthur’s world, knights always strive for honor and act only in the best manner (daz beste si alle tâten v. 196), and the King is full of pure virtue, prudent, constant, and, without false counsel, shows love and esteem to each man (er was reiner tugent vol / gewizzen unde stæte / âne valsche ræte / minnet er iegelîchen man v. 204-207). The narrator also places great emphasis on the importance of material wealth at the Arthurian court: he mentions the stateliness of Arthur’s grounds and estate, and the unsurpassed wealth of the princes who live at Caridoel as a part of the King’s retinue (v. 176-221).

One of the traditions at Arthur’s court, so the narrator tells us, is that the King never took his breakfast until he had heard news of some adventure (daz er ze tische nie gesaz / des morgens ê er eteswaz / von âventiure hêt vernomen v. 249-251). At this moment, the strange knight Joram rides up to the castle where Ginover is gazing out over the wall; he addresses the queen and offers her the marvelous belt as a gift, asking her to keep it overnight and to let him know in the morning if she would accept it permanently (v. 281-288).
Only a few hundred verses later, the narrator shows the audience a world different from Arthur’s realm of honor and virtue and tournaments. This is the first concrete evidence of an actual magical faerie-world, as Gawein enters Joram’s kingdom for the first time:

Ich wæn ie iemen würde erkant  
Ein lant sö vreuden rîche:  
Ez bluot allez gelîche  
Bluomen unde boume.  
Wie er in einem troume  
Wære, des bedûhte in så.  
Der vogel sanc was michel då.  
Daz lant gar âne liute was:  
Niwan bluomen unde gras  
Der was daz gevilde vol. (v. 636-645)

(I suppose no one has ever known a land so full of joy: flowers and trees were blooming at the same time. It immediately seemed to him as if he were in a dream. The air was full with the sound of singing birds. The land was completely devoid of people: the meadow was filled with nothing but flowers and grass.)

Gawein, preeminent hero of the Arthurian world, feels himself to be in a waking dream: the absence of any other human beings lends the atmosphere a vaguely haunting quality, and singing birds and the blooming trees and flowers evoke impressions of having walked into a paradise. Yet there are strange rules that set Joram’s magical kingdom apart from Gawein’s Arthurian world, as Gawein soon learns. He wishes to return to the Arthurian court, but whereas the initial trip into the strange country with Joram had lasted only twelve days (v. 648-649), Gawein’s return journey takes him six entire months (v. 1129-1130). Then, almost immediately after he finally reaches Arthur’s court, Gawein longs to return to his wife and to his “secret land” (in sins geswîgen lant v. 1174). Here, too, the strange rules that govern Joram’s kingdom present the Arthurian knight with a problem:

Im was daz leider unerkant  
Daz niemen mohte in daz lant  
Ân des küniges geleite komen;  
Un hèt er daz ie vernomen
Sô hêt er sichs vil wol bewart
Daz es im immer ûf die vart
Alsô komen wäre. (v. 1095-1101)

(He unfortunately did not know that no one could enter the land without being accompanied by the king. If he had heard that, then he most likely would have never undertaken the journey in the first place.)

After a full year of riding around and aimless searching (reminiscent of Parzival’s fruitless effort to return to that more famous realm of mystery set within an Arthurian romance, the Grail Castle), Gawein has still not found his way back. He is not aware that the magic belt is the only possible key that would allow him to re-enter the faerie kingdom:

Sus reit er umbe ein ganzes jâr
unz er diu lant alldiu gâr
vor den bergen durch reit.
Daz was ein verloniu arbeit:
Als ichz ofte hân vernomen,
in daz lant moht niemen komen
ern hêt den giertel den er lie
sînem wîbe... (v. 1190-1197)

(Thus he rode around for a full year until he had ridden through all the lands in front of the mountains, but this was a wasted effort: as I have often heard, no one could ever enter the land unless he had the belt, which he had left with his wife…)

These several examples demonstrate that there is a world within Wigalois that differs significantly from the Arthurian court, a world where magic objects govern the rules about entry and re-entry into the kingdom itself. Moreover, as Eming correctly notes, the differences between the two worlds in this first part of the text present the Arthurian realm as a considerably more peripheral and even weaker realm than audiences might expect.\(^{110}\) Most of the events in this first sequence take place outside the Arthurian court, for instance, and even when the scenes are staged at Arthur’s court, the Arthurian knights are represented as physically weaker than Joram. This is significant for the first part of the tale because it

\(^{110}\) Eming, *Funktionswandel* 162.
establishes the power of Joram’s faerie kingdom as a foil to the Arthurian court in general, and emphasizes the magical strength of Joram’s belt in particular.

2. Integrating the Arthurian and the Wondrous

One of the single most important characteristics of *Wigalois*, however, is that although boundaries between the two worlds do in fact exist, these boundaries are fluid and traversable. Indeed, the most important key to making these boundaries between the Arthurian world and what Eming refers to as the “âventiure-Welt” so fluid in these early scenes in *Wigalois* is the magic belt. With the help of the magic belt, Wirnt demonstrates to his audience that, as Hans-Jochen Schiewer writes, his hero “is able to succeed in all narrative worlds.”

How does the belt contribute to making these boundaries so fluid? Even in its very description, the magic belt is a vital factor in integrating the faerie world and the courtly, Arthurian world. We remember from chapter two that as soon as Ginover places Joram’s magic belt around her waist, very unusual things indeed happen to her:

Dô hêt diu frouwe sâ zehant
Vreude unde wîsheit;

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112 “…daß er in der Lage ist, in allen erzählerischen Welten zu bestehen.” Schiewer, “Prädestination und Fiktionalität” 157.
Si ne truobte deheiner slahte leit;
Die sprâche kunde si alle wol;
Ir herze daz was vreuden vol.
Swaz spiles man dâ begunde,
Si dûhte wie si ez kunde;
Deheiner kunst ir niht gebrast,
Si dûhte, daz der selbe gast
Wol möhte sîn ein rîcher kûnic.
Er dûhte si biderbe unde vrümic,
Als ez wol an dem gürtel schein.     (v. 331-342)

(At once the lady had joy and wisdom: not even the slightest sorrow troubled her, she knew all languages well, her heart was full of happiness, she was a master at whatever game one could think of, and she lacked no art or skill. Because of the belt, it seemed to her that this stranger might well be a mighty king, and he seemed to her brave and gallant.)

That the belt can instantaneously invest its wearer with these unusual gifts and strange impressions demonstrates that it is inherently magic and as such belongs to Joram’s mysterious faerie realm. But what sorts of gifts does the belt actually bestow? As I investigate more thoroughly in chapter four, the gifts and skills that Ginover receives when she puts the belt on are unquestionably courtly: her wisdom, her knowledge of foreign languages, her lacking neither art nor skill, and even the joy she feels are all model characteristics for the ideal courtly lady.\footnote{See Joachim Bumke. Höfische Kultur. Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986. 470 483.} The notion that the Arthurian court is not the only courtly society is a common theme in German literature of this period; compare the courtly aspects of the Grail society in Parzival or the noble characteristics attributed to the heathen King Etzel in the Nibelungenlied. What is unique about Wigalois, however, is that all the elements of courtliness from the Otherworld are embedded and crystallized in a single, wondrous object that has the power to bestow courtly qualities to whomever happens to put it
on. Thus in its very essence, the magic belt proves to be a combination of otherworldly magic and courtly qualities.

In addition, Joram’s niece Florie wears clothing that reveals the integration of the courtly world with the Otherworld: Florie is the niece of the king of this magical kingdom, and she lives in this kingdom herself, yet her costume is described as being proper and courtly. The belt that Florie wears in her first encounter with Gawein is only a small part of the apparel that Wirnt describes for the audience; in addition to the belt, she also wears a beautiful gown and blouse with gold and ermine trim. The audience is told outright that Florie is dressed “as a noble maiden ought to be” (*so was diu junvrouwe gekleit... als ein edel maget sol* v. 742-744).

To understand the magic belt’s role as an integrative device between these two fictional worlds more fully, we must next ask why Joram has brought the belt to Arthur’s court in the first place. Wirnt chooses to reveal the motivation behind this only gradually, but it eventually becomes clear that the belt is a means for Joram to lure Gawein, the best and courtliest of all King Arthur’s knights, into his magical kingdom so he can marry off his niece to him. The magic belt is thus a vehicle for establishing a marital alliance between Joram’s kingdom and the Arthurian court. Yet the magic belt appears at first not as an object of integration, but instead as an object of conflict.

The conflict is one of etiquette and authority. With his initial gift of the belt to Ginover, Joram makes a gesture of knightly flattery in an attempt to win the love of a courtly lady, and thereby to establish a connection to the Arthurian court. The exchanging of gifts was one of the most common and most important methods of establishing bonds between
social equals in the Middle Ages. A close look at the rules governing the giving and receiving of gifts among members of the nobility, however, reveals an ambivalent system. Generosity and largesse were certainly highly esteemed courtly qualities, but ones that required a certain amount of finesse and knowledge of the rules. If one presented a gift that was too great for one’s station, or a gift that could not possibly be reciprocated by the receiving party, this constituted “aggressive gift-giving” and was usually seen as a challenge. This is indeed how Gawein and the Arthurian court interpret Joram’s gift (v. 343-383). They see the magic belt as an attempt at seduction, or even as an attempt to discredit the authority of Arthur’s court. If we remember the sexual connotations that a costly belt has in the Nibelungenlied, for example, when Siegfried takes Brünhild’s belt on her wedding night, and Kriemhild later interprets this as proof that he had sexual relations with her, then such a reaction from Gawein is entirely justified.

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115 This was especially true for rulers, and Joram is a king. “In diesem Zusammenhang war die Herrschertugend der ‚Freigebigkeit‘ (liberalitas, largitas) von besonderer Bedeutung, die sich christlich im Almosenspenden (largitas elemosiarum), in der liebenden Fürsorge für die Bedürftigen (caritas) und in kirchlichen Stiftungen manifestierte. Ihre weltliche Erscheinungsform war die Aufwendigkeit der kaiserlichen Bewirtungen und Geschenke. Man konnte sich auch auf die Bibel berufen, um zu belegen, daß der gute Herrscher nicht geizig sein durfte. In den Sprüchen Salomos wurde der ‚gerechte König‘ (rex iustus) dem ‚geizigen Mann‘ (vir avarus) gegenübergestellt.” Bumke, Höfische Kultur 385-386.


Wirnt assumes that his courtly audience is well aware of these rules of etiquette, and uses the object and Joram’s offer as a means to draw attention to a potential conflict within this set of courtly customs. Joram in fact tells Ginover outright that if she does not accept the belt, she should no longer think of it as a gift to her, but as a prize that the knights of Arthur’s court must wrest from him in combat (v. 286-294). When Gawein advises Ginover to reject the belt, and when she in fact returns it to Joram, this leads to the challenge by combat that Joram had warned of. The stranger then fights with a number of the Arthurian knights, and one by one, all the heroes of Arthur’s court – including Gawein – are bested in combat.

Here Wirnt reveals that the magic belt is ultimately not an object of contention, but instead a means of integrating the Arthurian court with Joram’s magical Otherworld. If we apply the model that James Schultz has convincingly proposed, Joram represents the Other that stands as a challenge to Gawein, who represents the Arthurian world of courtliness and order. Gawein must overcome this challenge, but he fails to do so in his attempt at combat with Joram. Schultz claims that the Other (O) begins as a negative challenge (O-), but that the Arthurian hero rises to the challenge and converts the negative into a positive (O+).\textsuperscript{118} In Wigalois, the Arthurian hero Gawein makes this conversion not through his own skills in combat, but instead by accepting the ekphrastic magic belt, which then becomes the means by which the O- fantastic realm is integrated with the Arthurian realm to become O+.

After defeating Gawein in combat, Joram makes him swear an oath of allegiance to him, takes the great Arthurian knight prisoner, and leads his captive into his own country. Along the way, Joram attempts to reconcile himself to Gawein by addressing him as an equal, as a \textit{herre} and as a \textit{geselle} (v. 605), and then freely offers the belt to him when it is

\textsuperscript{118} James A. Schultz. *The Shape of the Round Table. Structures of Middle High German Arthurian Romance.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983. 31-33.
clear that Gawein did not win the belt in combat (v. 610-612). Joram tells Gawein that without the magic power of the belt, he would never have been able to defeat him (v. 610-627). Gawein then accepts the belt gladly, and the enmity that one would expect the two knights to have for each other is then instantaneously forgotten. When they arrive at Joram’s home, the king introduces Gawein to his niece Florie. He makes Gawein redeem his pledge of loyalty to him and insists that Gawein take his niece for a wife (v. 956-963). The integration of the Arthurian court with Joram’s Otherworld is thus fulfilled, the first step being when Gawein accepts the magic belt from Joram, and the second when Gawein – whose ardor is stoked by Florie’s ekphrastically described garments – marries Joram’s beautiful niece, thus establishing a dynastic marital alliance.

We thus see that the magic belt functions as an integrative device: by combining magical and courtly qualities, and by establishing a familial connection between Joram and Gawein and thus between the magical Otherworld and the courtly Arthurian circle that these two characters respectively represent. The belt is the catalyst that helps to harmonize the Arthurian circle with the vaguely haunting realm of wonder and magic where Joram and his niece Florie are at home. Gawein marries Florie, and their son Gwigalois is the product of the integration of these two worlds. It is altogether fitting that Gwigalois should carry this symbol of the first stage of the story into the second. He takes this magic belt with him when, the end of his boyhood rapidly approaching, he leaves his mother and his home in order to seek his father and his fortune. This journey leads the hero into the heart of the Arthurian court, where the transition from boyhood to young manhood is then punctuated by the appearance of the second important ekphrastic object in Wigalois, the stone of virtue.
B. The Stone Integrates the Hero into the Arthurian Circle

The next ekphrastic object that the audience hears about is the stone of virtue. When Florie passed the magic belt on to her son Gwigalois, this indicated that the boy was ready to leave home and search for his father, but as I claim below, it is the stone of virtue that first indicates that Gwigalois is in fact an exemplary member of the nobility. It shows the audience, in fact, that he is the moral equal of Arthur, the great king himself. The stone of virtue furthermore continues the discourse on the merging and integration of the fantastic faerie world and the courtly Arthurian realm.

When Gwigalois rides off from his mother, he has already heard many great things about his father Gawein, about his valor (vrümicheit) and about his bravery and manliness (wie manhaft er wäre), yet it causes Gwigalois much sadness that he does not know whether his father is even alive or dead; indeed, the only thing that clouds his happiness is never having known his father (v. 1273-1285). When Gwigalois meets the young page along his journey and hears about King Arthur’s search for knights, however, he has no idea that he is about to encounter the very circle of knights to which his famous father belongs. The magic belt that Florie has passed on to her son reminds Gwigalois of his father Gawein, yet it is the next ekphrastic object, the stone of virtue, that brings Gwigalois into direct contact with the Arthurian circle and thus with his own father.

The use of an extraordinary object as a test of the hero’s virtue, indeed even the use of a magic stone, is certainly not unique to Wigalois; consider King Arthur’s sword Excalibur, or the Grail in Parzival, or the magic table that appears at the beginning of Der Stricker’s

119 Jutta Eming notes the multiple functions that the belt (among other wondrous objects) serves in the poem: “Plötzlich fungiert der Gürtel als Erkennungszeichen für die Vatersuche, während er bislang, auf der Ebene der Feenerzählung, das Unterpfand für den Eintritt in die Feenwelt war.” Eming, Funktionswandel 157.
One example that is particularly similar to that in *Wigalois* is in Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s *Lanzelet*, which is roughly contemporaneous with Wirnt’s poem. In this example, Lanzelet is seeking Walwein (Gawein) in order that he might take the latter’s place and fight for Queen Ginover’s honor against King Valerin. He finds Walwein and Ginover both sitting on a stone of honor (*nu saz Wâlwein der reine / ûf der *Eren steine* v. 5177-5178)*. Lanzelet joins them on the stone, and everyone present is impressed because, like the stone of virtue in *Wigalois*, this magic stone would not allow anyone with falseness or malice to sit on it (*daz er den man niht vertruoc / an dem was valsch oder haζ v. 5180-5181*).

There are, however, important differences between how Ulrich and Wirnt allow their respective stones of virtue to function in the two works. First, Ulrich’s *Lanzelet* provides no description of the *Eren stein’s* outward appearance. Furthermore, in *Lanzelet* the hero’s admittance to the Arthurian court takes place halfway into the romance, and unlike the stripling Gwigalois, the hero of Ulrich’s tale is a well-established knight who has already proven himself honorable in a number of adventures. By contrast, in *Wigalois* the stone of virtue scene occurs relatively early in the tale, before the hero has even become a knight, and indeed acts as the means for showing the audience and the Arthurian court that he is worthy of investiture. In *Wigalois* this investiture and integration into the Arthurian circle also comes with strong familial connections. The emphasis that Wirnt places on the connection between the wondrous object and the hero’s father – it is the successful sitting on the stone

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120 In Der Stricker’s *Daniel*, the magic *tavel* is mentioned at the very beginning of the tale, and in a much more general sense than in either *Wigalois* or *Lanzelet* – no specific hero is mentioned in connection with the table, only that it stood in Arthur’s hall. Furthermore, the passage provides no details at all about the *tavel’s* appearance. Der Stricker. *Daniel von dem blühenden Tal*. Ed. Michael Resler. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1983.

that brings Gwigalois into contact with Gawein – helps to make the integrative function of
the stone of virtue in Wirnt’s romance particularly prominent.

A final and decisive difference between the two romances is who is allowed to sit on
the respective magical stones. Whereas Walwein and Ginover are seated on the stone of
honor in *Lanzelet*, only Gwigalois and King Arthur himself can even approach the stone of
virtue in *Wigalois*, much less actually sit on it. This is what sets the hero Gwigalois apart
from the other knights, and is how Arthur recognizes his extraordinary worthiness. Although
Gwigalois does not know it, the stone has magical properties that allow only the purest of the
pure-hearted to approach it:

\[
\begin{align*}
Sô \ grôziu \ tugent \ an \ im \ was \\
Daz \ deheiner \ slahte \ man \\
Der \ ie \ deheinen \ valsch \ gewan \\
Die \ hant \ niht \ mohte \ gelâzen \ dran \ [\ldots] \\
Swer \ dehein \ untugent \ ie \ begie \\
Dern \ mohte \ dem \ steine \ nâher \ nie \\
Komen \ dan \ eins \ klâfters \ lanc. & (v. 1486-1489, 1496-1498)
\end{align*}
\]

(It had such great power that no man who had been false in any way could place his
hand on it…whoever had committed an unworthy deed could not come within six feet
of the stone.)

This is not an obstacle for the young hero, who is more virtuous and pure than all the other
knights of the Round Table:

\[
\begin{align*}
Sîn \ herze \ was \ âne \ mein, \\
Und \ ledic \ aller \ bösheit; \\
Sîn \ muot \ ie \ nâch \ dem \ besten \ streit. & (v. 1493-1495)
\end{align*}
\]

(His heart was without guile and free of all evil, and his spirit always strove
toward lofty goals.)

Indeed, Arthur himself is the only other person who can sit on the stone:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ezn \ was \ dâ \ vor \ nie \ geschehen, \\
Daz \ ie \ ieman \ würde \ ersehen \\
Ûf \ dem \ selben \ steine
\end{align*}
\]
In the act of sitting on the stone of virtue, indeed by even being able to approach it at all, Gwigalois unwittingly proves that he is a worthy counterpart to Arthur himself.

Sitting on this ekphrastic object thus proves that Gwigalois is not only noble, but regal. This is more than one can say even of his renowned father Gawein, the greatest of all Arthur’s knights. The stone thus both acts as a “materielle Gerichtsinstanz”\(^{122}\) that legitimates his future role as a ruler in his own right and as a catalyst that integrates Gwigalois into the Arthurian circle to which his birthright as Gawein’s son entitles him. This is clear from Arthur’s ensuing invitation to Gwigalois to join him and his knights (v. 1530-1571): Having seen the lad sitting on the stone, King Arthur at once recognizes his worthiness and insists on bringing him into his court:

\[
\text{Enpfâhe wir in! Des ist er wert,} \\
\text{Und wizzet, swes er an mich gert} \\
\text{Im ze vrumen, daz ist getân;} \\
\text{Und wil er hie bî mir bestân,} \\
\text{Ich behalte in nâch sînem rehte.} \quad (v. 1536-1540)
\]

(Let us receive him! He is worthy of this, and know that whatever he may want me to do for him shall be done. And if he wishes to remain here with me, then I shall care for him as is fitting for his station and merit.)

The King then bids Gwigalois welcome (\textit{der hiez in willekomen sîn} v. 1555), because he and his queen could see nothing but good in the lad:

\[
\text{Si nâmen an im beider war} \\
\text{Libes unde muotes:} \\
\text{Dône vundens niht wan quotes} \\
\text{Wand er was alles valsches blôz}
\]

\(^{122}\) Jaeger, \textit{Ein jüdischer Artusritter} 237.
Dar zuo was sîn sælde grôz (v. 1558-1562)

(They observed both his body and his spirit, and found nothing but goodness, for he was free of all falseness, and great was his good fortune, grace, and perfection.)

Wirnt does not simply use the ekphrastic object to integrate the young hero into the Arthurian circle, however. The stone of virtue shows furthermore that wondrous and fantastic objects are not unique to the magic world where Gwigalois was born and raised, but that they can also be a legitimate aspect of the Arthurian kingdom. Jutta Eming has convincingly argued that one of the hallmarks of *Wigalois* is Wirnt’s repeated and successful blurring of the lines between the ideal courtly sphere and the sphere of the Fantastic. The stone thus functions as an integrative device through which Wirnt brings fantastic and wondrous objects similar to the ones Gwigalois saw in his magical boyhood home into greater harmony with life at the Arthurian court. Whereas the magic belt was the first ekphrastic and wondrous object to thematize the integration of Arthurian and Fantastic worlds, the stone of virtue makes this connection stronger. It confirms that there are not only elements of the courtly world in Joram’s magical kingdom (e.g. the courtly style of Florie’s clothing), but that the converse is true as well, and that there are also elements of the Fantastic in the world of the Arthurian court.

As a final comment on how the stone of virtue acts as an integrative device within the text, it is noteworthy that Jutta Eming sees parallels between the use of the stone of virtue in *Wigalois* and the ambivalence of the Church in the earlier Middle Ages with regard to magic objects and religious miracles. For example, the Church frequently superimposed Christian meaning onto objects that once had symbolic significance in pre-Christian Europe, adapting

123 “Die höfische Welt steckt voll Wunderdinge...Die Episode zeigt....daß sich im *Wigalois* die Grenzen zwischen höfischer und wunderbarer Sphäre grundlegend verwischt haben.” Eming, *Funktionswandel* 197.
and transforming the meaning of the object in order to better suit its own purposes. To her, the stone of virtue episode demonstrates that there exists no basic conflict between Gwigalois’s Christian mission and the wondrous objects that fill the tale from beginning to end.  

This last level of integration, between the religious and the secular, becomes ever more prominent in the course of the poem, as the next object of this investigation shows, the golden wheel.

C. The Golden Wheel: Integrating Religious Elements into Wigabius

In his poem *Ich saz ûf eime steine*, Walther von der Vogelweide laments that the three things he is concerned with maintaining – honor, worldly wealth, and God’s favor – cannot dwell together in harmony in one heart:

Die wolte ich gerne in einen schrîn  
Ja leider desn mac niht gesîn  
Daz guot und weltlich êre  
Und gotes hulde mêre  
Zesamene in ein herze komen.  

(These I would gladly place into one vessel, but unfortunately it is impossible for wealth, worldly honor and prestige, and also God’s grace to come together in one heart.)

Indeed, one of the sharpest criticisms leveled against courtly knights in the High Middle Ages was this perceived incongruity between the physical beauty, pride, wealth, and desire for renown that many knights displayed in addition to (or instead of) piety and  

virtue.  

In this section, I argue that Wirnt uses the ekphrastic wheel of fortune to begin a


125 See for example Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 421-432.
dialogue with his audience about better integrating the worldly aspects of knighthood with the expectations of the Church. In one scholarly discussion of this issue, Joachim Bumke writes that those who subscribed to the notion of the *militia Christi*\textsuperscript{126} believed in the distinction between worldly knights – “who not only because of their violent ways, but also because of their courtly splendor, were cursed to damnation” – and those religious knights who served Christ exclusively.\textsuperscript{127}

One of the most important points that Wirnt von Gravenberg makes to his audience in *Wigalois*, however, is that the successful integration of things sacred and secular is in fact possible, and is embodied in his hero Gwigalois. This integration is symbolized in Gwigalois’s heraldic device, the golden wheel of fortune. Connecting the concepts of Christian piety and knighthood was by no means novel when Wirnt composed *Wigalois* in the thirteenth century. Indeed, using the accoutrements of knighthood to symbolize Christian piety and responsibility dates back to St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, where the shield is given particular prominence: “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Ephesians 6:16).\textsuperscript{128}

Wirnt takes great pains to demonstrate that the hero of his poem is the ideal integration of Arthurian knight and Christian knight. He makes frequent nostalgic comments

\textsuperscript{126} The notion is that true soldiers of Christ do not involve themselves in worldly pursuits; this has its origins in St. Paul’s second letter to Timothy: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” (II Timothy 2:3-4).

\textsuperscript{127} “Die *militia Christi* Idee beruhte auf der Unterscheidung zwischen weltlicher Ritterschaft, die nicht nur wegen ihrer Gewalttätigkeit, sondern auch wegen ihres höfischen Prunks der Verdammung verfiel, und der religiösen Ritterschaft, die ganz auf Gott gerichtet war.” Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 419.

\textsuperscript{128} Although the work deals with this idea in the centuries following when Wirnt composed *Wigalois*, a good treatment of Christianity and the symbols of knighthood can be found nevertheless in Andreas Wang, *Der ’Miles Christianus’ im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert und seine mittelalterlichen Tradition. Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von sprachlicher und graphischer Bildlichkeit*. Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Peter Lang/Herbert Lang, 1975.
about an idealized Arthurian past, as well as remarks critical of his own times. He remarks, for example, that back in the days of King Arthur, nobles were bound to uphold the sanctity of an oath, and ruefully adds that people in his own society would do well to learn a lesson from the Arthurian knights (v. 2146-2158). These frequent interjections may be seen on one hand as an attempt to correct the slippage that he perceived between the ideal Christian knight that St. Paul describes and the all too worldly knights at the courts in the thirteenth century. As J.W. Thomas writes, “the narrator bases his social criticism on the assumption that people have neglected God’s law” (v. 10,256-10,257). At the same time, however, his presentation of Gwigalois as Arthurian and Christian knight can be seen as an attempt to provide balance to the criticism that some of the more conservative clerical authorities in his day exercised against Arthurian romance.

To be more specific, a number of moralists in the Church took a critical stance against the popular stories of King Arthur and his knights, viewing them as a corrupting and dangerous influence on the moral rectitude of courtly society; particularly illuminating are the reports of the “electrifying effect” that the stories of King Arthur had not only on members of the secular court, but also on the novices and other clerics themselves. Yet scholars such as Neil Thomas have convincingly demonstrated that Wirnt sees the fictional Arthurian past as a positive model for the aristocrats in his audience. I agree with Thomas and expand upon this thesis by showing that ekphrasis plays a role in the positive


130 See for example Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 709-712.

presentation of this Arthurian “history.” Wirnt uses ekphrasis to demonstrate that the gallant Arthurian knight and a moral Christian life need not be mutually exclusive concepts.

How, then, does Gwigalois embody the integration of these ideas, and how does the golden wheel provide a visual symbol of this integration? To begin with knighthood: As the scene at the stone of virtue makes clear, Gwigalois is integrated into the Arthurian circle and thus begins to participate in all the requisite activities of the worldly and knightly Arthurian court: he jousts in tournaments, displays courage and manliness, serves the king, and is indeed foremost in all knightly pursuits (v. 1607-1618). Wirnt then reveals the key to all this success in the knightly sphere: Gwigalois constantly looks to God.

Gelückes er dar zuo genôz
Daz im vil selten missegie
Wand er hêt vor augen ie
Got, der die sînen nie verlie (v. 1617-1621)

(He also enjoyed good luck and things almost never went wrong for him, for he always kept his eyes on God, who never forsakes his own.)

The attempt to integrate knightly pursuits with Christian ideals was common to most courtly romances, as Bumke reminds us: “Most courtly poets sought to bring the knight’s religious obligations into greater harmony with the courtly/worldly motifs of knighthood, which reached their most pointed expression in the Service to Ladies.” Wirnt, however, is especially concerned with directing his audience’s attention again and again to this integration of sacred and secular. Gwigalois’s piety and his constant invocations of heaven, God, and Christianity appear with a frequency that is unmatched in any other Middle High German Arthurian romance. Indeed, the religious aspects of Wigalois are so pronounced that

nearly every scholar who has written about the work, no matter what the particular focus of the study in question may be, has commented on Wirnt’s moralizing comments, Gwigalois’s pious prayers, and the frequent assistance that God lends to the hero. One example of such scholarship is J.W. Thomas, who points out that “the most consistent and prominent aspect of his character [is] devoutness.”

The most important symbol of Gwigalois’s connection to God – and to knighthood – is the golden wheel. As I have demonstrated in chapter two, Gwigalois’s choice of heraldic device, the golden wheel, is an example of “cantiing arms”, heraldic images and symbols that reveal important information about the bearer’s inner qualities. As such, it is clear that Gwigalois is the “Knight of Fortune’s Wheel” and is marked as Fortune’s child, a Glückskind. Especially important in Wigalois is Wirnt’s close intertwining and melding of gelücke (luck; fortune) – equivalent to the concept of fortuna adapted from Roman antiquity – with the concept of diu sælde (good fortune, grace and blessings received as a gift from God). From the very beginning of the poem, the connection between good fortune, knightly deeds, and Christianity is an important theme, and the narrator urges the audience to emulate those to whom God has granted sælde (v. 29-32). In the course of the story it becomes ever clearer that the relationship between fortuna, gelücke, and the Christian God’s grace and protection conveyed in diu sælde is so close as to be practically one and the same, and that this is embodied in the figure of the hero Gwigalois. J.W. Thomas writes that

133 J.W. Thomas, Wigalois 50.


Wirnt’s treatment of *diu sælde* “appears to be identical with Fortuna, who, largely because of the popularity of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, played an important role in medieval literature.”  

The first symbol of the integration of *fortuna*, *gelücke* and *diu sælde* that the audience sees is the golden wheel that stood in Gwigalois’s uncle’s hall. One of the most striking characteristics of this golden wheel is that “it was fashioned by a priest” (ez *het ein pfaffe gemeistert dar v. 1048*). That his uncle’s golden wheel was fashioned by a *priest* may at first seem highly unusual, yet scholarship has shown that by the High Middle Ages, the originally antique notion of *fortuna* had been assimilated into Christian culture and was not understood to be in conflict with its teachings. Nevertheless, Wirnt surely mentions this detail first in order to arouse curiosity and closer attention among his audience, and second to foreshadow the important role that Fortune and Christian piety and responsibility will play for his hero. It is in fact of great consequence, as it is a first indicator of the extent to which Wirnt uses ekphrasis to integrate what conservative Church authorities saw as conflicting sets of ideals: those of a pious Christian versus those of an Arthurian knight.

The descriptions of Joram’s and Gwigalois’s respective golden wheels are vital to Wirnt’s attempt to bring moralizing Christian ideas and the deeds of fictional Arthurian heroes into greater harmony with one another. This is evident in Wirnt’s unusual interpretation of the wheel’s meaning. He does not tell the audience that the wheel of fortune

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stands for the incalculability of life, as the typical interpretation goes, but rather that it stands for constancy.  

Ez bezeichnet, daz dem wirte nie
An deheinem dinge missegie;
Wan daz gelücke volget im ie.  

(v. 1050-1052)

(It signified that its owner never failed at anything, for luck always went with him.)

Already the audience sees that Wirnt is clouding any absolute distinctions between secular and religious motifs; a priest made the wheel, but it is *Fortuna*, a notion adopted from pre-Christian antiquity, that follows Joram wherever he goes. Indeed, this version of fortune stands in direct contrast to the traditional interpretation. The wheel stands not for life’s random unpredictability, but instead for the luck that always follows the wheel’s bearer, and as the story bears out, it also stands for the constant grace and protection that God shows to those who love him. The author’s use of the word *missegie*, from *missegân* or *missegên*, is also important, as it can mean “go wrong” or “go astray” in a religious as well as a secular sense. Indeed, this priestly rendering of a common allegorical representation of Fortune gives the audience its first hint of the ideal combination of Christian knight and Arthurian knight that Gwigalois embodies.

For the “Knight of Fortune’s Wheel,” as Gwigalois comes to be known, these connections between his heraldic device, his own fortunes, and the God of Christianity become ever more apparent. Indeed, it is this very combination of heraldic shield and God’s protection that enables Gwigalois to, as St. Paul writes, “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” As Gwigalois travels further along on his way into Korntin, for example, he faces increasingly dangerous obstacles and enemies, and with an equally increasing frequency he

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must beseech God to help him. Soon after Gwigalois receives his heraldic shield and crest, the audience learns that without God’s help, the adventure in Korntin will prove fatal:

Wand ir was daz wol bekant  
Daz diu âventiure  
Was sô ungehiure  
Swer si wolde erwerben  
Daz der dâ müese ersterben  
Ezn wolde got dan understên;  
Ân den mohtez niht ergên.  
(v. 2454-2460)

(For she well knew that the adventure was so frightful that anyone who tried it would die without God’s aid; without Him there was no chance.)

In another instance, as Gwigalois tries to enter the castle at Glois, in the Kingdom of Korntin, he is attacked by Marrien, a fearsome beast with a head like a dog and a body like a horse. Gwigalois seems to have nothing but his armor to protect him:

Her Gwîgâlois hie blôzer stê;  
Niht mê er ze schirme hêt  
Niwan sîn barez îsengewant.  
Vil schiere wart im daz bekant,  
Daz sînem halsberge lieht  
Diz selbe listviuwer nieht  
Mohte geschaden: des wart er vrô.  
(v. 6987-6993)

(Sir Gwigalois stands here naked; nothing more than his bare armor protects him. He at once found out that the magic fire could not harm his splendid hauberk: of this he was glad.)

Again Wirnt articulates the connection between the heraldic armor and God. Just twenty-seven lines later, the audience learns that it was God’s intervention that kept him from harm:

Sus ernerte sich der degen;  
Und hêt sîn got niht gepflegen,  
Er wêr ze tôde dâ verbrant  
(v. 7019-7021)

(Thus the hero saved himself; and if God had not taken care of him, he would have burned to death.)
Finally, the golden wheel is not the only material object described in the text that exemplifies the integration of overtly Christian morals and knightly deeds. Indeed, there are other objects in addition to the golden wheel that articulate the possibility of integrating the sacred and the profane: As Gwigalois sets out for the Kingdom of Korntin, for example, he simultaneously receives two gifts, one of which represents protection from supernatural evil, the other is meant to serve his basic bodily needs. The combined use of these two objects in the same scene is one further example of the integration between sacred and secular.

First, a priest gives him a special sword with a blessed, holy writ on its hilt; this is to keep him safe from devilish sorcery (v. 4427-4430). Similar to Gwigalois’s heraldic shield, attaching the written word to a sword is also a symbolic act reminiscent of St. Paul, who writes about “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). In this same scene, Gwigalois’s amie Larie gives him a magical loaf of bread to ward off earthly hunger. Even the smallest bite from this loaf will sustain the hero for up to seven days without further need for food (v. 4467-4479). While the one wondrous object protects the hero’s soul, the second nourishes his body. Although the sword with the blessed writ and the wondrous bread are not described ekphrastically, these are nevertheless examples of how Wirnt relies not only on the hero’s actions, but also on material objects throughout the text that act as res significantes and push forward his program of binding the more worldly qualities of courtly knighthood together with the devout Christianity of a miles christianus.

At the end of the second narrative section, the golden wheel of fortune that was made by a priest, and that was a source of fascination and pleasure for Gwigalois the boy, becomes the symbol of strength and identity for Gwigalois the man. It is evidence of the poet’s increasingly overt efforts to bring the ideals of Christian moralists into a more happily
integrated unity with the popular stories of an idealized Arthurian past. Nowhere, however, does this latter theme reach a more pointed or visually resplendent climax than in the ekphrasis that appears at the end of the third narrative section, the description of Japhite’s tomb.

D. Triuwe, Riuwe, Roaz, and Japhite’s Tomb

Wirnt uses Japhite’s death and the description of her tomb to thematize the relationships between important Christian and non-Christian figures in the romance, and ultimately to harmonize the audience’s perception of these figures. This is in keeping with the integration of religious and secular topics already thematized by the golden wheel and Gwigalois’s heraldic device, and is of particular importance to Wirnt’s thirteenth-century audience, among whom the Crusades and encounters with the Muslim world surely aroused curiosity. Through the ekphrasis of the tomb, the narrator expresses his belief that the heathen Japhite’s high degree of courtliness makes her worthy of being integrated into the loving care and mercy of the Christian God. He does this first by emphasizing Japhite’s courtliness, especially her triuwe, or fealty. Triuwe was a term that originally described the legally binding relationship between feudal lords and their vassals, but which over time was applied more generally to imply any number of different binding relationships between people, or even the relationship between God and humankind.139 In this particular context, Japhite’s triuwe should be understood here as her faultlessness and faithfulness in love, the binding force between her and her husband. Because Japhite displays such triuwe to her

139 Bumke, Höfische Kultur 416-418.
husband, she feels exceptionally deep sorrow, or viwe, when he dies. For the narrator, this viwe becomes the deciding factor in integrating her into Christianity.

Wirnt then uses the tomb’s description as the staging ground for a comparison between Japhite’s exemplary courtliness and the worldly pride and arrogance of her husband Roaz. In this passage, Wirnt demonstrates – and works through – his ambivalence toward non-Christians: he contrasts Japhite, whose faithful viwe to her husband is highly praiseworthy, with Roaz, a murderous usurper who has made a pact with the devil. The juxtaposition of these two figures’ positive and negative characteristics serves an important didactic function for the audience, whose members by now have already “seen” other objects become the vehicle for Wirnt’s moralizing. The integration of the exemplary heathen Japhite into the fold of Christianity is made visually legible through the exquisite tomb in which she is laid to rest, and Wirnt ultimately converts the tomb from a symbol built out of Roaz’s worldly pride into a monument to Japhite’s ideal courtly qualities.140

Before actually describing the tomb, however, Wirnt builds up to the ekphrasis by prefacing it with a plea to the audience. Beginning what becomes a flurry of religious ideas, this plea introduces readers and listeners to the idea of integrating a non-Christian into the circle of the faithful. By using the language of prayer, the author himself acts as Japhite’s intercessor:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Owê, wan soldich quotes biten} \\
\text{Ir sêle, der lîp alsô verdarp!} \\
\text{Diu vrouwe von herzeleide starp.} \\
\text{Ich geloube, daz si sül genesen;} \\
\text{Diu wâre viwe ist gewesen}
\end{align*}
\]

140 It should be noted that Jutta Eming, for example, argues quite convincingly that Wirnt’s view of Japhite, and also of Roaz, is anything but simple or one-dimensional. Just as the courtly and the fantastic spheres are allowed to coalesce, so is it difficult to see the heathens as completely evil or completely lacking in praiseworthy characteristics. See Eming, Funktionswandel, especially 185-186 and 207-215.
Ir touf an ir ende.
Herre got, nu sende
Ze schirmen ir dîne barmecheit
Diu manger sêle ist bereit!
Herre, getûrrë es ieman gern,
Sô soltu si genâden wern
Daz sie geneize ir triuwe!
Ir touf was diu riuwe
Die si dolte umb ir liep.
Dô kom der tôt als ein diep
Und stal dem reinen wîbe
Daz leben úz ir lîbe,
Als ich iu ê hân geseit.  
(v. 8019-8036)

(Alas, if only I might pray for the welfare of her soul, whose body thus died here! The lady died of a great heartbreak. Yet I believe she will recover; true sorrow was her baptism at the end. Lord God, now send Thy grace, which aids many souls, to protect her. Lord, if one may dare to ask it, Thou shouldst show mercy, that she may be rewarded for her faithfulness. Her baptism was the sorrow she suffered for her loved one. Then death came as a thief and stole the life from the body of this pure woman, as I told all of you before.)

The narrator states not once but twice in this passage that Japhite’s sorrow and contrition serve the functional equivalent of the rite of baptism; her emotion, because it is so sincere, inspires the narrator to act as if he were in fact a priest and, in verses 8024 and 8031, to verbally “administer” the religious sacrament of baptism. *Triuwe* and *riuwe* in fact function in this passage as vehicles for her ultimate eternal salvation: Wirnt first uses the notion of *triuwe* to thematize Japhite’s religious difference, and then emphasizes her sincere *riuwe* in order to integrate her into the religion of the poet and the audience, Christianity. Because of her *triuwe* and her *riuwe* and the exemplary qualities of loyalty and steadfastness that she displays, the heathen Japhite is “reconciled” with God and with the audience.

Wirnt intensifies the religious tone of this third narrative section even further as he continues to build up to the ekphrasis. In a brief scene that directly precedes the description of the tomb, Count Adan, a vassal of Roaz, first sees his liege slain in battle and taken to hell,
and then sees Roaz’s lady die of a broken heart. He finds these events so upsetting that he pledges his loyalty to Gwigalois and, with his new master as his witness, converts to Christianity (v. 8166-8208). Forswearing the sinful path of Islam, Adan invokes the Christian Trinity:

Er ist got al ters eine  
Und iedoch endriu genamt,  
Sîn gotheit diu ist ensamt  
Und iemer ungescheiden.  
Swie gar ich sî ein heiden,  
Von dem gedanke kom ich nie,  
Ich minnet iedoch den got ie  
Der uns geschuof von nihte.  
Nu bin ich an die rihte  
Alrêrst des gelouben komen.  

(He alone is God and yet is one of three, his divinity complete and is never parted. Though I may be a heathen, I never strayed from the thought that I would love forever the God Who created us from nothing. Now I have finally come to the straight way of the faith…)

Gwigalois is overjoyed to hear Adan’s words, but as no priest is present, the actual rite of baptism cannot be performed immediately. Note the contrast between Adan and Japhite and their respective baptisms, between the living and the dead: Adan must be baptized by a priest, while Japhite is “baptized” by the poet. In this dire situation, Japhite’s extraordinary love and faithfulness require drastic measures, a baptism by necessity: the narrator assumes the role that normally a priest would play. The narrator takes it upon himself to speak directly to God and the audience on behalf of the dead, and presides over a literary baptism by proxy.  

141 While the Church wrestled with the number and nature of holy sacraments until well into the twelfth century, the rite of baptism had always been recognized as a sacrament. With regard to heretical baptism up to this time, Philip Schaff writes: “Heretical baptism was now generally regarded as valid, if performed in the name of the triune God. The Roman view prevailed over the Cyprianic, at least in the Western church; except among the Donatists, who entirely rejected heretical baptism (as well as the catholic baptism), and made the efficacy of the sacrament depend not only on the ecclesiastical position, but also on the personal piety of the officiating priest.
At this point the mourners lay Japhite’s body in the tomb. In addition to the opulent jewels that shimmer on the surface and the sweet-smelling balsam that burns night and day, the sarcophagus also bears an inscription, carved in gold letters upon the face of the tomb.

With this inscription, written in French and “heathenish”, Wirnt juxtaposes and harmonizes elements from the familiar courtly world of the audience and the exotic world of heathendom, and uses the tomb to bring the task of integration to a moving conclusion. He ushers the idealized heathen Lady Japhite into the fold of Christianity by staging a text within a text:

Mit guldînen buochstaben
Gesmelzet ûf den jâchant
Ein épitâfîum man vant
Gebrievet von ir tôde hie,
Heidenisch und franzois, wie
Si starp von herzeleide.
Diu schrift sagten beide:
„Hie lît in disem steine
Vrouwe Jâphite, diu reine,
Der ganzer tugent niht gebrast.
Ir kiuschetruoc der êren last.

Augustine, in his anti-Donatistic writings, defends the validity of heretical baptism by the following course of argument: Baptism is an institution of Christ, in the administration of which the minister is only an agent; the grace or virtue of the sacrament is entirely dependent on Christ, and not on the moral character of the administering agent; the unbeliever receives not the power, but the form of the sacrament, which indeed is of no use to the baptized as long as he is outside of the saving catholic communion, but becomes available as soon as he enters it on profession of faith; baptism, wherever performed, imparts an indelible character, or, as he calls it, a “character dominicus,” “regius.” He compares it often to the “nota militaris,” which marks the soldier once for all, whether it was branded on his body by the legitimate captain or by a rebel, and binds him to the service, and exposes him to punishment for disobedience. Proselytized heretics were, however, always confirmed by the laying on of hands, when received into the catholic church. They were treated like penitents.” Philip Schaff. History of the Christian Church, Volume III: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity, A.D. 311-600. 20. November 2003. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc3.iii.x.xix.html>. Furthermore, two paragraphs concerning the sacrament of baptism, taken from the Council of Florence in 1439, may help shed some light on the Church’s doctrine with regard to this rite, and how this relates to these passages from Wigalois: “The ministrant of this sacrament is the priest, for baptism belongs to his office. But in case of necessity not only a priest or deacon may baptize, but a layman or a woman, nay, even a pagan or a heretic, provided he use the form of the Church and intend to do what the Church effects.” [DS 1316] “The efficacy of this sacrament is the remission of all sin, original sin and actual, and of all penalties incurred through this guilt. Therefore no satisfaction for past sin should be imposed on those who are baptized; but if they die before they commit any sin, they shall straightway attain the kingdom of heaven and the sight of God.” James Harvey Robinson, ed., Readings in European History: Vol. I. Boston: Ginn and Co., 1904. 34854 [= Denzinger-Schönmetzer, Enchiridion, 1310-27]. 20. November 2003. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1438sacraments.html>.
An stæte gewancte nie ir muot,  
Si was gewizzen unde guot 
Und truoq die wâren minne.  
Mit zühticlîchem sinne  
Lebt si nâch wîplîchem sit;  
Dem volget ganze triuwe mit.  
Si was geborn von hôher art.  
Getriuwer wîp niene wart  
Geborn noch so valschlôs.  
Ir schoenen lîp si verlôs  
Von herzenlîcher riuwe.  
Den tôt gap ir diu triuwe  
Die si Rôaz dem heiden truoq  
Den Gwîgâlois der kristen sluoc.  
Diu vrouwe was ein heidenin;  
Von disem lîbe schiet si hin  
Leider ungetouffet.  
Im selben er sælde koufet  
Swer umbe den andern vrumt gebet.  
Nu wünschet gnâden an dirre stet  
Der sêle, swer die schrift hie lese,  
Daz ir got genædic wese  
Durch sine grôze erbarmicheit;  
Wan si den tôt von triuwen leit,  
Diu riuwe ir abe daz herze sneit.“ (v. 8254-8289)

(In letters of gold fused to the hyacinth, an epitaph in Arabic and French told of her death, how she died of grief. Both inscriptions read: “In this stone lies the Lady Japhite, the Pure, who possessed all virtues. Her modesty bore the burden of great honor. Her spirit was ever steadfast, she was wise and good, and she bore true love. With pleasing spirit, she lived just as a woman should, and was also the soul of faithfulness. She was highborn, and a more loyal woman never lived, nor one so fully without deceit. She lost her life and beautiful body because of heartfelt sorrow. Her death was caused by her faithfulness to Roaz, the heathen, whom Gwîgâlois, the Christian, slew. The lady was a heathen; she left this life, sad to say, unbaptized. He who remembers others in prayer buys himself salvation and God’s grace. Let him who reads this ask help for her soul, that God in his great compassion may be gracious to her, for she died of loyalty, and her heart was pierced with grief.”)

This epitaph is formed of golden letters that are melted (gesmelzet) onto the stone, symbolic of the fusion not only of Japhite’s heart to that of her slain husband, but also of the new bond between her loyal soul and the loving Christian God to whom the narrator prays on
her behalf. Finally, the description of her triuwe also provides an overt juxtaposition of Islam and Christianity in the comparison between “Roaz the heathen” (Roaz dem heiden) and “Gwigalois the Christian” (Gwigalois der Kristen). In this contrast it becomes quite clear which religion Wirnt wants the audience to see as superior, and which religion rightfully deserves to lay claim to a woman as beautiful and faithful as Japhite.

Why does the author even include a written inscription? Part of the answer lies in the perceived authority of a written text, especially where Christian doctrine is concerned. Wirnt has already told the audience that her sorrowful riuwe is the functional equivalent of the holy rite of baptism. The golden inscription intensifies and strengthens this idea by emphasizing her triuwe and her other courtly qualities. This petition to the audience listening to the actual performance of the poem, and also to the text-internal “readers” of the epitaph, admonishes both audiences to pray on behalf of Japhite’s soul. By making his appeal to the audience’s sympathy in a written inscription, Wirnt invests the petition with extra authority as a call to action, and the ekphrasis now bears the authoritative weight of a text. Christianity, after all, is a religion of the book. The written petition thus assumes a doctrinal tone that reminds the Christian audience of the power of scripture.

The last lines of the description mark the contrast between Japhite and Roaz; Wirnt turns the ekphrastic object the medium through which he offers a comparison between Japhite’s model behavior and that of her dead husband:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Daz gewelbe hêt gemeistert dar} \\
\text{Rôaz durch sînen hôhen muot.} \\
\text{Er hêt âne mâze guot;} \\
\text{Daz schein an der gezierde wol.} \\
\text{Nu was sîn hochvart als ein kol} \\
\text{Mit dem lîbe erloschen gar.} \\
\text{Sus wâren verendet sîniu jâr} \\
\text{Als ich iu gesaget hân.}\quad (v. 8317-8324)
\end{align*}
\]
Roaz built the vault out of his great pride. He had wealth beyond measure; this much was obvious from the adornments. But now his arrogant pride was extinguished with his life, like a coal. Thus his days were ended as I have told you.

These few lines are evidence of Wirnt’s ambivalence about Roaz. The poet’s long and lavish description is proof enough that he admires the beautiful object that the heathen had commissioned and built, and that he wants the audience to admire it too, but it also shows that when such a beautiful structure is built out of pride (durch sînen hôhen muot), it can lead to one’s own destruction. Hôher muot was a loaded term in the thirteenth century. In a courtly context, it implied the high-mindedness and general sense of exaltation that befitted a proper and well-bred knight. Among religious writers, however, the term generally was synonymous with arrogance and overweening, lordly pride.\footnote{Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur} 427.} Considering the narrative and thematic weight that Wirnt places on Roaz’s ignominious demise at the hands of the Christian hero, I believe that the second, rather negative interpretation of hôher muot is ultimately more correct here. Wirnt’s use of the word hochwart in verse 8321 supports this interpretation; this word translates into modern German as Hoffart, that is, “haughtiness” or “arrogant pride.”

Questions of integration also factor into the fifth ekphrastic object of my investigation, the tent that Gwigalois has built for his wife Larie. In the ekphrasis of the tent, Wirnt presents the audience with what at first may seem unusual: a courtly lady at the head of an army going to war. Here too, however, ekphrasis has a part in making Gwigalois’s queen an integral part of the battle campaign.
E. A Lady, a Tent, and the Final Harmonization

As we recall from chapter two, Wirnt marks the transition into the final segment of his poem with the extended ekphrasis of Larie’s tent, a luxurious “castle” that sits atop a war-elephant (v. 10,342-10,408). In this final section of Wigalois, Wirnt places Larie and her tent not only at the forefront of the military campaign against Lion, but indeed at the forefront of an entire section dedicated to the re-integration of numerous characters and themes from earlier points in the narrative.143 This is important for the story as a whole as it indicates, in a striking visual format, the “conciliatory” and integrative tone that Wirnt takes at the end of the hero’s journey. As Neil Thomas writes, “The conciliatory tone of [the] narrative…is underlined by the welcome shown to many (converted) Muslim adversaries in the ecumenical closure of the romance.”144 My discussion then closes by showing that this ekphrasis also thematizes integration and conventional roles for courtly ladies.

Joining Gwigalois and Larie in the poem’s final narrative segment are the well-known heroes from the Arthurian Round Table, Erec and Iwein (v. 10,644-10,653), as well as Count Moral and his wife Beleare, for whom Gwigalois fought against the dragon Pfetan earlier in the story (v. 4867-5140), and also the Queen Elamie, for whom Gwigalois fought against the Red Knight Hojir von Mannesfeld (v. 2485-3090). Perhaps most striking among the panoply of figures who join the new king and his queen in this final adventure are the non-Christian knights: not only are there thousands of Christian soldiers fighting in the campaign, but also two kings from Asia, the Kings of Zaradech and Panschavar (v. 10,699-10,706). So

143 See Jutta Eming on this point as well, who writes, “Dabei ist der Autor offensichtlich bestrebt, Erzählstränge, die vorher angelegt, und Figuren, die früher eingeführt worden sind, wieder in die Handlung hineinzuholen.” Eming, Funktionswandel 216.

144 Neil Thomas, Intertextuality and Interpretation 9.
important is the integration of various strands from other parts of the poem to Wirnt that he includes these two kings, who are the brothers of the noble heathen Japhite! As mentioned above, this is an outstanding example of what Neil Thomas refers to as Wirnt’s “conciliatory atmosphere…where sectarian boundaries and other rifts between persons are erased”\textsuperscript{145} and is further evidence that the poet concerns himself with integrating religious and knightly themes into a harmonious balance: all soldiers are welcome on this campaign, be they Christian or Muslim, as long as they are concerned with justice, peace and good governance.

At the front of this magnificent array of Christian and non-Christian knights is Larie and her tent. It is striking that Wirnt chooses to tell his audience about Larie’s magnificent tent before he goes into any detail about the actual battle plan or tells about any of the male participants. In addition to the integration thematized by the staggering array of thousands and thousands of knights, the ekphrasis of the tent itself also serves an integrative function in that it places a courtly lady, Gwigalois’s wife and Minnedame, into a rather unusual position: at the fore of a major military undertaking, gloriously leading the way with her husband. More precisely, Wirnt uses the ekphrasis of the tent as an opportunity to re-integrate the courtly lady into a more prominent leadership role; in the earlier Middle Ages, up into the tenth and eleventh centuries, it was not uncommon for male rulers to refer to their spouses as co-rulers.\textsuperscript{146} Likewise, historical documents attest to noble ladies frequently accompanying their men on military campaigns, yet with the exception of Hartmann von Aue, who recounts

\textsuperscript{145} Neil Thomas, \textit{Intertextuality and Interpretation} 90. See also pp. 86-103.

\textsuperscript{146} Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur} 484-485.
in *Erec* how the Lady Enite rode at the head of the small party going to do battle at the Castle of Brandigan (v. 8056-8075), \(^{147}\) most courtly poets avoided this topic rather assiduously. \(^{148}\)

By placing Larie and her glorious tent atop a war-elephant and allowing her to lead the way into battle along with her husband, Wirnt reintegrates women into a literary context where other poets were frequently reluctant to put them, and where there was moreover an actual historical precedent for such a role. Neil Thomas, for example, has recently argued that one of Wirnt’s main objectives in *Wigalois* is a “creative confrontation” with some of his literary peers by providing more naturalistic and practicable depictions of the hero’s kingship. \(^{149}\) With this ekphrasis, Wirnt thus re-presents an important function of the ideal courtly queen to his audience, and brings historical reality into a closer and more harmonious relationship with contemporary poetic practices.

It is also important to mention, however, that although Larie is at the fore of this military campaign, she does *not* overstep the boundaries of a courtly lady and does not actually take up arms, but rather keeps her husband company. The most famous counterexample to the image that Wirnt provides here is Kriemhild in the *Nibelungenlied*. In her blood-stained lust for revenge against the Burgundians who murdered her husband Siegfried, Kriemhild does in fact take up the sword. By doing so, she crosses her prescribed courtly boundaries and is held up as an example of a woman who deserves to be severely punished – executed in fact – for her vengeful, man-like rage.

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\(^{148}\) Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 488-489.

\(^{149}\) Neil Thomas, *Intertextuality and Interpretation* 1-10.
III. Conclusion

In Wigalois, ekphrasis not only helps to structure the narrative, but as I have argued here, it also acts as an integrative device, where the poet uses descriptions of objects first to draw attention to potentially conflicting ideas in the text, and then to help integrate these ideas into a more harmonious and balanced relationship. Especially significant is Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis to integrate what many clerical critics in the thirteenth century saw as conflicting sets of values, the Christian and the Arthurian. In the ekphrases of the golden wheels and of Japhite’s tomb in particular, I have shown that Wirnt offers his audience an alternative model to the rather bleak view of thirteenth-century knighthood and society offered by Walther von der Vogelweide. Wirnt’s protagonist demonstrates that ëre and varnde guot and gotes hulde can all dwell in harmony within one breast; he is the integrated model of the Arthurian hero, one who participates fully in the adventures of the fictional Arthurian world while remaining firmly grounded in the exemplary moral life of a good and pious Christian.

In the next chapter, I examine how the five ekphrases in my investigation participate in the description, prescription, and construction of courtly identity. In order, I argue that these ekphrases help to construct ideals of courtly femininity and masculinity, thematize storytelling as an important part of courtly life, comment on the historical and literary uses of heraldry, and reveal clues about courtly reading practices and medieval modes of perception.
Chapter 4
Ekphrasis and Courtly Identity

We ought to transform what we read into our very selves, so that when our mind is stirred by what it hears, our life may concur by practicing what has been heard.

Gregory the Great150

The courtier himself is a work of art, his appearance a portrait, his experience a narrative. It is more than just a whimsical metaphor to say that court life is literature operating in the medium of reality rather than the written word.

C. Stephen Jaeger151

I. Introduction

A. Courtly Identity and Self-representation

Early in Heinrich von dem Türlin’s *Diu crône* (ca. 1220-1230),152 the hero Gâwein is being held captive by the princess Amurfina, who has put him under a love-spell that causes him to lose all memory of his identity. One day, Amurfina holds a banquet and shows all her guests a wonderful dish engraved with the image of Gâwein fighting another knight and with a caption labeling the two knights. She proudly has the dish carried from table to table and has the story behind the dish explained individually to each of the knights present. As Gâwein contemplates the words and images on the dish before him, he repeats to himself the stories he has heard about himself.

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The dish was returned and placed before them both [i.e. Amurfina and Gâwein] so that they could look at it. Gâwein looked at it very closely and saw what the writing said, but he didn’t understand any of this; rather he followed the story told by the figures: how they protected themselves with their shields and attacked each other eagerly with many blows. He kept gazing at the contest until he had recovered his mind enough to read his name and thought: “I believe that I myself was once called that.”

When Gâwein recognizes his own name and image, he soon remembers a number of stories that have been told about him. As he repeats his own literary canon to himself, the sense of self-reflection and self-recognition becomes palpable: Is that knight on the dish not he? Does he perhaps know him? Has he only heard about him? No! He has seen him perform deeds of valor! Indeed, he and the knight on the dish are one and the same! This triggers an instantaneous recovery from his stupor, and he then rides forth in search of knightly adventure.153

This scene from *Diu crône* is paradigmatic for how ekphrasis functions in Middle High German courtly romances in general, and provides a line of inquiry to guide our current

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153 Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Diu crône*. This entire episode is recounted in verses 8832-9091.
investigation of *Wigalois* in particular and how it contributes to a discourse on courtly identity. Especially vital to this discourse is the notion of *self-representation*.

The self-representative, identifying and identity-forming function thematized by this particular ekphrasis recurs throughout courtly culture at numerous levels, and is one of the most important functions of ekphrasis in *Wigalois*. As Horst Wenzel has shown, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the German-speaking nobility begins to develop “new standards of self-representation and to establish a courtly system of symbols with which it communicates internally while simultaneously distinguishing itself from other social groups externally.”

This system of (visual) symbols manifests itself throughout all aspects of courtly culture, from matters of jurisprudence to the public display of (official) status and power, from demonstrating Christian doctrine about God and the world to what is my particular concern here: inculcating a set of common values and ideals through the medium of fictional literature.

My understanding of “representation” and “self-representation” is drawn from Wenzel and from Hasso Hoffman, who names as one of the primary functions of the (German) term *Repräsentation* “the self-articulation of a collective as an ‘identity-representation.’” In other words, the literary forms of representation and self-

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155 See Wenzel, “Repräsentation und schöner Schein” 175.

representation at work in my investigation are those whose aim is the “acquisition of a group identity.”\textsuperscript{157}

Most crucial to this new understanding of self-representation among the nobility, and especially important to my own understanding of self-representation in this discussion of ekphrasis, is the indispensable role of the visual: it is one’s physical \textit{appearance} and the visual impression that one makes which sets one apart as noble.\textsuperscript{158} Equally important to this self-representation is the \textit{mental visualization} and \textit{imagination} of physical appearance. In medieval clerical culture, for example, mental visualizations of material objects – \textit{imaginis} – were one of the most important structuring devices for the mind itself and for the organization of knowledge.\textsuperscript{159} In thirteenth-century courtly culture, basing one’s values and behavior on what one has \textit{seen} was equally important. The viewed becomes part of the viewer, who can then base his or her actions upon it accordingly. In his great didactic work from 1215-1216 \textit{Der welsche gast}, the Italian cleric Thomasin von Zerclaere writes:

\begin{quote}
Siht er daz im mac gevallen  
Daz låz niht von sîm muote vallen;  
Siht er daz in niht dunket guot,  
Daz bezzer er in sînem mut.  
\end{quote}

(v. 623-626)\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{157} “Für uns ist dieses Wertverhältnis epistemologisch zu fassen durch den Repräsentationszusammenhang selbst, durch die Semantik der Repräsentation, die auf die Gewinnung von Gruppenidentität abzielt...” Wenzel, “Repräsentation und schöner Schein” 183.


\textsuperscript{159} See especially Mary Carruthers, \textit{The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture} Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

(Should he see something that is important to him, he should not let that out of his mind. Should he see something that does not seem right to him, he should correct it for himself.)

Thomasin’s work is important, as it represents the first book of conduct written in German for a secular, courtly audience, and it was intended as a guide in the education of young aristocrats. As a didactic treatise, it is a work that falls outside the boundaries of literary fiction, and it thus provides an important historical complement to *Wigalois* and other romances.\(^{161}\)

As Thomasin’s work suggests, the act of reading was often linked to seeing and modeling proper behavior. Books of conduct like Thomasin’s *Der welsche gast* were considered “mirrors” that served as memory-supports for the members of the courtly nobility and provided an example by which one could measure oneself.\(^{162}\) In thirteenth-century courtly society, the acts of seeing and visualization were key factors in structuring one’s mind and structuring one’s life.\(^{163}\) Thus, Wirnt uses ekphrasis as a vehicle for making his ideas about the ideals of courtly culture and the formation of a courtly identity visually “readable,” as a strategic attempt to place the proper modes of thought and behavior before


\(^{163}\) In his important study of the complex interplay between hearing, seeing, writing, and memory in medieval culture, Horst Wenzel has pointed to the predominant role of *seeing* in the formation of courtly identity. “Höfisch-repräsentatives Verhalten ist primär angelegt auf Sichtbarkeit und verlangt eine intensive Schulung der optischen Wahrnehmung. Nicht das Ohr, wie viele geistliche Autoren und manche Theoretiker der oral poetry schlicht konstatieren, dominiert die höfische Kultur, sondern im Ensemble aller Sinne dominiert das Auge.” Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen* 32.
the audience’s eyes and to render them visible. The audience is meant to internalize the message through its protracted imagined gaze.

How do we see this self-representation at work? Let us take a moment and return to a few concrete examples from the scene in *Diu crône*: Like Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis, Heinrich first uses this dish in order to slow the pace of the narrative and to invite the audience to think more carefully about the story. Gâwein’s reliance on pictures together with words in order to recognize himself furthermore exemplifies the complementary relationship between reading words and seeing pictures characteristic of thirteenth-century reading practices. It is furthermore significant that Amurfina, a female character, is also able to read the dish; in his discussion of literacy versus illiteracy in German courtly culture, Joachim Bumke states that in many thirteenth-century German courts, the primary readers were in fact not men but women. Amurfina’s having the story behind the dish explained to each of the knights reveals is also reflective of the dependence that medieval literature had on the human voice, on a *performance*.

164 See Haiko Wandhoff, “The Shield as a Poetic Screen: Early Blazon and the Visualization of Medieval German Literature 1150-1300” *Visual Culture and the German Middle Ages*. Eds. Kathryn Starkey and Horst Wenzel. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Remember that according to what Wandhoff calls an “epic gaze”, the verbal description of an object initiates “slow, *high-definition* scanning” and “navigates the reader’s gaze slowly and in several sequences over surfaces, curves, and elevations of the armour, over ‘real’ gems, ‘real’ furs, and ‘real’ charges” (See chapter two above, pp. 60-61). Likewise, the dish in this scene with Gâwein and Amurfina draws the reader in and triggers this exact sort of protracted, intense gaze in the mind’s eye.


167 A groundbreaking essay on the subject of vocality in medieval poetry is Paul Zumthor, (trans. Marilyn C. Engelhardt) “The Text and the Voice”, *New Literary History*, Volume 16, Issue 1, Oral and Written Traditions in the Middle Ages (Autumn, 1984), 67-92. Zumthor correctly refers to the importance of the *performative* aspect of medieval poetry, reminding critics and scholars that poetry in the Middle Ages tended to be a public,
Perhaps most important in connection with Wigalois, however, is that Heinrich’s use of the dish reminds Gâwein of what it means to be courtly, and acts as the catalyst and vehicle for the hero’s return to courtliness, to the group of knights to which he properly belongs. Just as I shall demonstrate in Wigalois, the ekphrasis of the dish here functions text-externally as well, reminding the courtly audience listening to the story about what it means to be courtly. Ekphrastic scenes such as this contribute to the formation of cultural identity within the German-speaking aristocracy of the thirteenth century by serving a didactic function and contributing to individual and group memory. They build upon already established literary traditions, including ekphrasis, not only to remind courtly audiences of what constitutes proper courtly behavior, but as I discuss later in this chapter, also to remind

168 Two of the most important books about memory in medieval and early modern society are Frances Yates, The Art of Memory. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966 and Mary Carruthers, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Carruthers’ discussion of the formation of group memory is especially important to my thesis about how the ekphrastic objects in my investigation operate. Carruthers shows that memory training, memorization and reading were also part of a deliberate program of forming ethical values, of creating texts anew in a communal act of creating a better individual. This individual was expected in turn to be a more ethical member of a community. Reading thus became “communally experienced wisdom for one’s own life, gained by memorizing” (162). She demonstrates that the practice of reading and memory training served not only to create better, more ethical individuals, but to connect these individuals to a community—the entire community of past and present thinkers, readers, and writers.

169 Frances Yates provides an especially thorough examination of how medieval society built upon and adapted the traditional memory treatises and techniques described in antiquity (such as Cicero’s De oratore or the pseudo-Ciceronian Ad herennium) and transformed them from mnemotechnical devices into an entire storehouse for ethical and theological thought. The Art of Memory 50-81.
that the composition and enjoyment of poetic fiction is in itself a defining aspect of what it means to be courtly.

B. Courtly Ideals and Romance

Just how, then, did courtly culture identify and represent itself, especially in literature? What did it mean to be a courtly knight? Although there was never, as Joachim Bumke points out, one single standardized system of “courtly virtues”, there is certainly enough evidence in the poetic literature – as well as in the contemporary polemic literature that criticizes the excesses and shortcomings of courtly culture – to allow us to name a number of terms that served as ideals to which members of the German-speaking nobility held themselves accountable. The courtly knight had to be well-mannered, brave, and skillful in all questions of weapons and combat. A knight had to be physically beautiful, and had to exhibit the appropriate appreciation for feminine beauty by displaying proper behavior toward women. Hartmann von Aue provides a good example when he describes his eponymous protagonist in Gregorius:

Er was schöne unde stœr,
Er was getriuwe unde guot
Und hete geduldigen muot.
Er hete künste genuoge,
Zucht unde vuoge. (v. 1238-1242)

(He was beautiful and strong, he was loyal and good and possessed patience. He had talents in abundance, as well as a good upbringing and proper manners.)


171 Bumke, Höfische Kultur 425.

A courtly knight had to possess constancy (Middle High German *stæte*), loyalty (*triuwe*) and, as discussed in the previous chapter, the harmonious, balanced integration of worldly concerns and Christian piety (*mâze*). A knight who possessed all these qualities – as the hero of *Wigalois* certainly does – could thus expect to enjoy the good reputation and social prestige known as *êre*.

Many of these same qualities and ideals were also the expected standard for courtly ladies. For example, physical beauty was absolutely essential and, as we have seen in connection with the noble heathen Japhite, constancy, loyalty and fidelity (*triuwe*) were the only proper behaviors toward one’s male counterpart. In contrast to young men, however, who were expected to master the chivalric arts and weapons play, important aspects of a young woman’s education in courtly society included learning how to read and speak foreign languages, and how to sew and make clothing and other textiles. Young women were also expected to learn how to play chess and other games, for example, or to play a number of stringed instruments. Concrete visual evidence that supports this can be found, for example, in the great collection of Middle High German lyric poetry from 1305-1340 known as the Codex Manesse (Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 848); on folio 13r, a full-page illustration depicts Count Otto IV of Brandenburg sitting and playing a game of chess with a female companion.

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177 Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 476.
In our examination of ekphrasis and courtly identity in *Wigalois*, however, (or when discussing any courtly romance), it is important to remember the interplay between historical reality and poetic idealization. Scholarship has shown that in innumerable instances, the ideals propagated by the poets stood, as Joachim Bumke has written, “in a relationship of crass opposition” to the realities of everyday life at court.\(^{178}\) This was, of course, no deterrent to courtly poets, who perhaps for this very reason continued to use the romance as a vehicle for prescribing as well as describing courtly values; through the medium of courtly romance, poets could on one hand describe life at court the way the nobility wished to see it represented, while on the other remind their noble audiences of the standards to which they claimed to subscribe. As C. Stephen Jaeger writes in his discussion of “Courtliness in the Romance”:

This is yet another factor that commended the figure of the knight to the clerical authors of romance. Their own world was the dispiriting realm of intrigue and self-seeking, tinseled with external pomp and gaiety, the court. It must have been like a return to innocence to escape to the pure realm of Celtic fairy tale and amorous adventure where courtliness could be practiced with only the highest of motives.\(^{179}\)

Finally, it was not only the authors of romances who saw the Arthurian heroes as worthy knights whose example members of courtly society ought to follow. Thomasin von Zerclaere recommends that young men model their moral behavior on that of some of the most famous figures from Arthurian romance:

\[
\text{Juncherren sunn von Gâwein} \\
\text{Hœren, Clîes, Érec, Êwein,} \\
\text{Und sunn rihten sîn jugent} \\
\text{Gar nîch Gâweins reiner tugent.}
\]

\(^{178}\) “Das höfische Ritterideal und die gesellschaftliche Realität des adligen Lebens standen zueinander im Verhältnis krasser Gegensätzlichkeit.” Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 430.

Volgt Artus, dem künge hêr,  
Der treit iu vor vil guote lêr...  
(v. 1041-1046)

(Young men ought to hear about Gawein, about Cliges, Erec and Iwein, and should lead their young lives according to the example of Gawein’s pure virtue. Emulate King Arthur, he will provide you with exemplary lessons…)

Thomasin could just as easily have included Gwigalois, the embodiment of the ideal Arthurian and Christian knight, and, I argue, a worthy example of courtliness. In the following, I demonstrate that the five objects of my investigation and their ekphrastic descriptions are the means by which Wirnt von Gravenberg represents courtliness in its best light and provides the audience with numerous instances of courtly self-representation and identity-forming moments. In *Wigalois*, the magic belt, the stone of virtue, the golden wheel, Japhite’s tomb and Larie’s tent each comment upon courtly culture and allow the audience to simultaneously see their own practices reflected while inviting them, in turn, to reflect on these practices and ideals. The opening ekphrases in *Wigalois* describe items of clothing and the ladies who wear them; my discussion of Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis as a means of commenting on and constructing courtly identity thus begins with the magic belt and Florie’s clothing.

**II. Ekphrasis and Courtly Identity in Wigalois**

**A. 1. Ekphrastic Belts and the Construction of Courtly Femininity**

In addition to their structural and integrative functions, the ekphrases of the magic belt and of Florie’s belt also speak to issues of courtly identity. More specifically, they are examples of Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis in an effort to construct the ideal courtly lady. With its magnificent gold-covered surface, the magic belt points first to the importance of having
beautiful clothing in courtly society.\textsuperscript{180} It is difficult to determine with perfect accuracy to what extent Wirnt’s descriptions are purely a construction, or how closely they accurately reflect the actual clothing of the aristocrats for whom he composed, since precise and concrete information about the lavish clothing of the noble class is comparatively scant in the extant records of thirteenth-century clerics or historiographers.\textsuperscript{181}

In her important study of clothing and fashion in the German courtly epic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, Elke Brüggen lists a number of historical examples that clearly demonstrate that poetic descriptions of luxurious clothing “by no means lack a connection to reality.”\textsuperscript{182} For instance, Brüggen cites the clothing descriptions in chancery records of the princes of Tirol from the end of the thirteenth century, and points out that in Ottokar’s \textit{Österreichische Reimchronik}, there is written testimony about the wedding of King Albrecht I, where the nobles wore unusually costly and colorful clothing that was even interwoven with gold.\textsuperscript{183} Indeed, Brüggen provides sources of clothing descriptions in thirteenth-century courtly culture from a variety of different literary genres; in order to gain a clearer picture of the accuracy of poetic descriptions, for example, one may compare them to


\textsuperscript{181} Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur} 172-187.

\textsuperscript{182} “Es gibt aber einige historische Nachrichten, an denen sich ablesen läßt, daß der in den Epen beschriebenen Kleiderprunk keineswegs den Bezug zur Wirklichkeit entbehrt.” Brüggen, \textit{Kleidung und Mode} 70.

\textsuperscript{183} “von golt die besten wät.” Brüggen, \textit{Kleidung und Mode} 70.
those found in the droll stories known as Schwänke, in religious and didactic poetry, in rhymed chronicles and also in sermons.\textsuperscript{184}

Such a comparison makes it clear that although we must be careful not to depend \textit{exclusively} on the poets’ claim to truth when describing some of these clothes – Wernher der Gartenære’s famous ekphrasis of Meier Helmbrecht’s fancy hat is a case in point\textsuperscript{185} – Brüggen points out that poetic descriptions and reality are not mutually exclusive, and that such descriptions have a significant basis in historical fact.\textsuperscript{186} On the one hand, as with many other aspects of courtly culture, accurately reconstructing the “reality” of courtly clothing and fashion has meant piecing it together from the critical and negative assessments offered by conservative, monastic clerics.\textsuperscript{187} On the other, Brüggen convincingly reminds us that the descriptions of clothing found in poetry and fiction not only far outnumber descriptions from any other source, but that without these poetic sources, our knowledge of the actual terms for all these items of clothing would be non-existent.\textsuperscript{188} Thus, the overwhelming abundance of poetic descriptions of costly materials and beautifully adorned costumes makes it clear that

\textsuperscript{184} See Brüggen, \textit{Kleidung und Mode} 19-20.

\textsuperscript{185} The description of this hat, which depicted among other things detailed scenes from the Trojan war, images of birds and other creatures, and dance scenes, was at one time seen by some critics (for example Alwin Schultz) as an altogether accurate reflection of historical clothing, even among the peasant class to which the protagonist of Wernher’s tale belonged. More recent research such as Brüggen’s has demonstrated that other sources and literary genres must be taken into account to reconstruct a more accurate idea of historical reality. See Brüggen, \textit{Kleidung und Mode} 20. For an examination of the symbolism in Helbrecht’s cap, see Gabriele Raudszus, \textit{Die Zeichensprache der Kleidung. Untersuchungen zur Symbolik des Gewandes in der deutschen Epik des Mittelalters}. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1985. 158-170.

\textsuperscript{186} Brüggen, \textit{Kleidung und Mode} 21-22.


courtly society held such things in high esteem, and Wirnt takes full advantage of courtly
tastes in his descriptions of the magic belt and of Florie’s clothing.

In these descriptions, Wirnt participates in a poetic tradition of highly detailed
clothing ekphrases that, in the German tradition, are traceable to the description of Dido’s
hunting costume in Heinrich von Veldeke’s *Eneasroman* (ca. 1170-1190). Wirnt’s
descriptions also indicate the visual splendor and prestige-markers characteristic of the
nobility’s preferred methods of self-representation: Costly and beautiful clothing was a
symbol of power, and a means by which aristocrats expressed their self-assurance and their
“gesellschaftliches Hochgefühl,” or what we might understand as a “state of inner, exalted
happiness of heart.” Gold, for example, particularly when woven into silk, was an
especially clear indicator of material wealth and power. In her first encounter with
Gawein in Joram’s castle, for instance, the maiden Florie wears just such a dress, green and
red samite, woven with gold. The magic belt and Florie’s clothing are the first of a
staggering array of examples in which Wirnt demonstrates to his courtly audience that by
wearing richly decorated, costly clothes, aristocrats turn their bodies into spectacular visual
objects that project their noble inner qualities outward to those who see them. Beautiful
clothing makes the courtly body visually legible, and turns it into an object whose signs can
be read.

190 Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 187
192 Brüggen, *Kleidung und Mode* 55-56.
Equally important to the projected, outward effect of beautiful clothing on the beholder, however, is the effect that it directs inward toward the person wearing it. For example, by putting the magic belt around her body at the beginning of the story, Ginover instantaneously becomes a sort of courtly super-woman, an idealized figure that embodies everything an audience could imagine when trying to envision the perfect courtly lady: recall that she was “a master at whatever game one could think of” (swaz spiles man då begunde / si dâhte wie si ez kunde v. 336-337) or that “she lacked no art or skill” (deheiner kunst ir niht gebrast v. 338).

This first ekphrastic passage from *Wigalois* thus does more than merely describe the magic belt’s beautiful appearance. By describing all the qualities that it passes along to its wearer, it simultaneously offers an ideal and thus uses the power of suggestion to prescribe proper behavior for a courtly lady. As the poem continues, we learn that Ginover accepts the belt initially, then seeks the advice of Gawein to help her decide whether she ought to keep the gift or not. Gawein advises her against keeping it,193 and she returns the gift to Joram. I shall return shortly to why this last point is important; for the moment, however, let us turn our attention to Wirnt’s description of the belt and the other clothing worn by Florie, the hero’s mother.

In addition to Jorams’/Ginover’s magic belt, this strongly idealizing function of ekphrasis is also evident in the description of the rest of Florie’s clothing. Indeed, Wirnt introduces her to the audience in the most visual of terms. Lengthy descriptions of clothing

193 One reason is because the belt is laden with sexual connotations, and Gawein sees it perhaps as an attempt to seduce Ginover, who is already Arthur’s queen. See Jutta Eming, *Funktionswandel des Wunderbaren: Studien zum Bel Inconnu, zum Wigalois und zum Wigoleis vom Rade*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1999. 149-151.
are in fact often the way in which courtly poets first introduce female characters. The audience is able to “read” Florie’s inner qualities through the description of her outer characteristics and her physical appearance. Wirmt’s contemporary, the didactic poet Thomasin von Zerclaere, also subscribes in *Der welsche gast* to the close connection between one’s outer appearance and inner condition:

\[
\text{Der lîp wandelt sich nàch dem muot.}
\]
\[
\text{Des lîbes gebaerde uns dicke bescheit,}
\]
\[
\text{Hât ein man lieb ode leit.}
\]
\[
\text{Dâ von mac ein iegelîch man,}
\]
\[
\text{Der die gebaerde bescheiden kan,}
\]
\[
\text{Bî der gebaerde, ob er wil,}
\]
\[
\text{Verstên dinges harte vil.}
\]

(v. 912-918)

(The body acts in accordance with the inner condition. The body’s gestures often reveal to us whether one is experiencing joy or suffering. Those who can properly interpret the body’s gestures can thus, if they so choose, understand many things.)

What Florie is wearing thus not only enhances her outer beauty, but is also a mirror of her inner beauty:

\[
\text{Als uns diu âventiure seit,}
\]
\[
\text{Sô wa s diu juncvrouwe gekleit,}
\]
\[
\text{Nâch ir rehte harte wol,}
\]
\[
\text{Als ein edel maget sol.}
\]
\[
\text{Si truoc einen roc wîten,}
\]
\[
\text{Von zwein samîten}
\]
\[
\text{Gesniten vil gelîche,}
\]
\[
\text{Eben unde rîche.}
\]
\[
\text{Der eine was grüene alsam ein gras,}
\]
\[
\text{Der ander rôter varwe was,}
\]
\[
\text{Von golde wol gezieret.}
\]
\[
\text{Er was gefurrieret}
\]
\[
\text{Mit vil grôzem vlîze;}
\]
\[
\text{Herme vil wîze}
\]
\[
\text{Hêt er bedecket.}
\]
\[
\text{Der pellez was gestrecket}
\]
\[
\text{Neben dem rocke gelîche.}
\]

---

194 Brüggen, *Kleidung und Mode* 41.
(As the story tells us, the girl was well dressed, in keeping with her position and as befits a noble maiden. She wore a full gown made from like pieces of two different kinds of samite, both smooth and rich. The one was green as grass, the other red, adorned with gold. It was carefully furred; gleaming white ermine extended the entire length of the garment. A skillfully pleated blouse was underneath. The knight was astonished that it was so very bright: The blouse was like a shining mirror.)

The dress that Florie wears is fully in keeping with what one would expect for a maiden of her social position. Likewise, the words Wirnt uses to describe its outer qualities also point to Florie’s inner qualities. Like the dress, Florie comports herself with a graceful and noble bearing (eben unde rîche v. 749), and the young woman’s courtly education would most certainly have been cultivated with great diligence and care (mit vil grôzem vlîze v. 754). Most important is that her garments act in the same deictic and illuminating way as her physical body. The shift under her dress points to the beauty and nobility of her soul as well as of her body, and it is so bright that it glistens and gleams like a shining mirror. Like her body, it projects Florie’s inner beauty outward to Gawein and to the audience. Furthermore, the “shining mirror” of her shift (liehtez spiegelglas v. 763) reflects an image as it simultaneously projects one, for in the “mirror” of the description, the courtly audience receives a glimpse of itself, and sees in the described visual images the defining qualities of courtly femininity.  

195 See for example Wenzel, who writes in “Repräsentation und schöner Schein am Hof”: “In der Literatur, die als Medium der Repräsentation zugleich die Darstellung von Repräsentation leistet, manifestiert sich ein Metasphäre, die Repräsentation nicht nur abbildet, sondern auch reflektiert.” Wenzel, “Repräsentation und schöner Schein” 204-205.
Note that a number of phrases used to describe Florie’s dress and shift are also used when telling about her belt; phrases like “as green as grass” (grüene alsam ein gras v. 750 and v. 775) and “with great diligence and care” (mit vil grôzem vlîze v. 754 and v. 782) reveal that while the clothing and the maiden are of striking beauty, they are not necessarily unique. Wirnt’s description makes her in fact not so much a beautiful maiden in her own right as one whose body and inner qualities are legible, as an object whose signs can be read. Comparison with clothing descriptions in other courtly epics and romances reveals the strongly stereotypical aspect of these phrases; Brüggen writes that the vast number of ekphrases that liken beautiful clothes to green grass, white snow, black coal, or red blood is beyond reckoning. Yet the colors in Florie’s dress and shift are also clear indicators of status: red and green were long considered the noblest of colors. This was not simply poetic convention, but is also based on the realities of thirteenth-century technology: green was among the most difficult, time-consuming and costly colors to produce. We see yet further evidence of Wirnt’s mirroring of courtly conventions in the colors of Florie’s dress: Verses 746-752 describe it as being made of two symmetrical pieces of silk, one red, the other green. This is an example of the mi parti color scheme, a term borrowed from heraldry in which two symmetrical divisions of color ran vertically across a shield or an article of clothing; this sort of color configuration held particular fascination for medieval audiences.

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196 Brüggen, Kleidung und Mode 62-63. See also pp. 19 and 41.
197 Brüggen, Kleidung und Mode 63.
198 Brüggen, Kleidung und Mode 63.
Indeed, Wirnt continues the description of Florie’s clothing and body for another one hundred and fifty-five lines, up to verse 950, during which he uses only the brightest reds, the most grass-like greens, and consistently repeats words and phrases such as “smooth” or “even” (eben), “with great diligence and care” (mit grôzem vlîze), and “as clear as a mirror” (lûter als ein spiegelglas). This formulaic repetition of stock phrases indicates that the clothing, the maiden, and even the narrator telling the story all conform to accepted, familiar patterns: patterns of design, of conduct, behavior and appearance, and even of the successful delivery of a verbal work of art.200

A. 2. The Magic Belt and Chivalric Masculinity

A return to the first magic belt reveals further descriptions and prescriptions of courtly behavior. It soon becomes clear that this belt is not only able to endow its wearer with amazing courtly qualities, but that it in fact bestows these gifts according to gender. As the situation may demand, it fulfills the requisite courtly roles of either knights or ladies. As Joram leads the defeated Gawein into his enchanted kingdom, for instance, the two knights find themselves approaching a forbidding wilderness. Before they enter the woods, Joram offers the belt that Ginover rejected to his captive:

Herre und lieber geselle,
Seht ir daz gevelle
Und die steinwende?
Daz ist âne wende
Wir müez en rîten dar an.
Nu nem t den gürtel den ich hân;

Behalt in unz an iuern tôt,
Uns sît sicher vor aller nôt.
Wan daz ir siglôs sît ersehen
Daz ist von sîner kraft geschehen. (v. 605-614)

(Dear comrade, do you see the tangled forest and rocky chasms? We have no other choice – we have to ride that way. Now take this belt that I have; keep it until you die and you will be safe from all need and danger. You were defeated because of the belt; this happened because of its power.)

Although Gawein had earlier advised Ginover not to accept the belt, he has in the meantime seen (and heard) that it possesses wonderful powers: here Gawein learns that it was the power of the belt, and not Joram’s knightly superiority per se, that caused his embarrassing defeat. Joram also tells him, for instance, that with this belt he will never go astray (missegên), and thus he accepts the gift quite gladly. This is on one hand what the audience might expect; after all, what knight would turn down a chance to guarantee his own safety in any future combat? On the other hand, however, Gawein’s gracious acceptance of the belt and his refusal to bear his captor any rancor is an example of the courtly virtue of mansuetudo, patience and graciousness in the face of offense or defeat.201 Once he accepts the belt and puts it on, Gawein feels a change similar to the one Ginover had experienced earlier:

Mit triuwe neic im dô der helt.
Der gåbe wart er harte vrô.
Er gnâdet im, und gurte dô
Den gürtel under sîn îsengwant;
Dâ von enpfienc er zehant
Vil grôze sterke und manheit. (v. 628-633)

(The hero bowed to him in loyal gratitude. The gift made him very happy. He thanked him and girded on the belt under his armor; at once he felt great strength and courage.)

201 See Jaeger, Origins of Courtliness 149. See also Scaglione, Knights at Court 50.
Once again the magic belt invests its wearer with unusual powers, in this case great bravery, courage, and courtliness. In fact, in Georg Friedrich Benecke’s 1819 edition of Wigalois, the belt provides these courtly and chivalric qualities in such abundance that it can serve not one, but ten knights! Here, verses 632-633 read: “He then immediately possessed the strength and courage of ten knights” (do het er ouch zehant / wol zehen riter manheit).

In the magic belt and Florie’s clothing, we have seen that Wirnt uses the object of an ekphrastic description to comment on what kinds of qualities courtly audiences held in esteem: games, art and skills for women, the courage and strength of ten knights for men. While not all of the clothing that Wirnt describes in Wigalois is endowed with such wondrous or magical properties, it is nonetheless true that for the nobles wearing these beautiful clothes, looking courtly was absolutely essential to being courtly. I shall return to this point when I discuss courtly self-representation and Gwigalois’s heraldic device. For the moment, however, I turn again to the stone of virtue, and how its ekphrasis comments on aspects of courtly culture that run deeper than outward appearance.

**B. The Stone, Lofty Goals, and Storytelling**

The stone of virtue also points to some of the courtly qualities that any young man who wished to become a knight ought to have, qualities that Gwigalois already possesses: his heart should be “without guile and free of all evil,” and his spirit should “always [strive] toward lofty goals” (sin herze was âne mein / und ledic aller bôsheit / sîn muot ie nâch dem besten streit v. 1492-1494). These qualities fit in seamlessly with the long list of knightly virtues that, for example, Joachim Bumke enumerates in his work that has become the standard scholarly study of literature and culture in the German High Middle Ages, Höfische
A knight was expected to be, among other things, good, pious, chaste, loyal, honest, strong, and honorable (guot, biderbe or vrum, reine or kiusche, triuwe, starc and wert). He should practice moderation (mâce) and should always adhere to whatever is good.\textsuperscript{202}

Yet the ekphrasis of the stone of virtue is not simply a description, but also a prescription of courtly values. One of the most remarkable aspects of \textit{Wigalois} is its unusually pronounced nostalgia for a utopian courtly past; this is a common motif throughout most Arthurian romances, but in \textit{Wigalois} it stands especially at the forefront.\textsuperscript{203} Frequent interjections from the narrator lament the decay of courtliness and chivalry, and remind the audience about how true knights once comported themselves in the past. C. Stephen Jaeger points out that these examples of \textit{laudatio temporis acti} were, in the thirteenth century, not simply formulaic, but based on true decline:

\begin{quote}
But no, the \textit{topos} is not empty, but an observation of contemporary reality. There had been real changes in the economy of Germany. The weakening of the emperor had begun that was to continue in a more or less straight line until the unglorious end of the Holy Roman Empire. The impoverishment of the German nobility had begun, a development that found effective resistance only in the Lutheran reformation.\textsuperscript{204}
\end{quote}

The prescriptive function that the ekphrasis of the stone of virtue serves becomes especially clear when examined in the light of Bumke’s discussion of the rather substantial gap that lay between the ideals that the poets envisioned and the crass realities of knightly

\textsuperscript{202} Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur} 416-419.


\textsuperscript{204} Jaeger, \textit{Origins of Courtliness} 257.
behavior that clerical writers often fulminated against.\footnote{205 Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur} 430-432.} According to these reports, knights spent far less time striving toward lofty goals than they did robbing, plundering, and doing whatever they could to disgrace the status of knighthood. One such example in \textit{Wigalois} is a rape that Gawein is said to have committed in the past. Remember that the ekphrasis of the stone of virtue thematizes a knight’s obligation to behave properly toward women; here, Gawein’s inability to touch the stone serves as a material reminder of his singular offense. In this particular instance, part of Wirnt’s strategy for demonstrating the moral superiority of his hero is a juxtaposition of his behavior with his famous father’s past sexual indiscretion:\footnote{206 On this point, see Eming, \textit{Funktionswandel} 163-164. For a thorough discussion of Wirnt’s moral rehabilitation of Gawein, see the chapter titled “Saint and Sinner” from Neil Thomas’s new monograph on \textit{Wigalois}. Neil Thomas, \textit{Wirnt von Gravenberg’s Wigalois: Intertextuality and Interpretation}. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005. 78-85.}

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
Her Gâwein der reichte dar  
Mit der hant, und niht baz;  
Ich sagiu wie er verworhte daz  
Er zem steine niht moht komen,  
Als ichz ofte hân vernomen:  
Eine maget wol getân  
Die greif er über ir willen an,  
Sô daz si weinde unde schrê.  
Deheiner slahte untugent mê  
Er von sîner kintheit nie  
Unz an sînen tôt begie;  
Diu selbe in zuo dem steine niht lie. (v. 1508-1517)
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

(Sir Gawein reached toward it with his hand, but that was all. I shall tell you why he could not approach the stone: As I have often heard, he once laid hands on a beautiful maiden against her will, so that she wept and cried out. Never again did he commit such an unworthy act, even until his death, but this is what did not allow him to touch the stone.)

Rape and other such examples of “impropriety” or “unworthy deeds” (\textit{untugent}), as Wirnt all too apologetically phrases it, is one important reason why Middle High German
poets preferred to set their stories in an idealized Arthurian past; the contrast with reality gave the poets’ nostalgic look back all the more critical weight and urgency.\textsuperscript{208} It is clear, then, that the stone of virtue is prescriptive as well as descriptive. In comparison with the prescriptive function of the belt-ekphrases, however, this prescriptive act contains more implicit social criticism; it would certainly have been easier for noblewomen to adorn themselves with rich clothing than it would for young men to reach the same idealistic, even unattainable, state of moral rectitude that Gwigalois possesses. Nevertheless, Wirnt uses ekphrasis in the hope that it might have some inspirational influence on his audience.\textsuperscript{209}

If the purity of the young hero’s heart was perhaps in itself too lofty a goal for the first courtly audiences of \textit{Wigalois}, then at least listeners could easily recognize another aspect of courtly life in the stone of virtue: that of storytelling and leisure. The ekphrasis of the stone thematizes storytelling to the audience within the text as well as outside it.

\begin{quote}
Dô man den knappen dar üf sach,  
Einem rîter wart vil gâch  
Vür den kùnic, und sprach alsô:  
„Herre, ir sult wesen vrô!  
Ein äventiure ist hie geschehen:  
Ich hån üf dem steine ersehen  
Sitzen einen jungelînc.“  
Daz dühte si alle samt ein dinc  
Grôz unde wunderlîch.  
Der edeln rîter iegeleîch  
Îlte vür den andern dar,  
Und nâm en der geschiht war.  
\textsuperscript{(v. 1519-1530)}
\end{quote}

(When they saw the youth on it, a knight hurried to the king and said, “Lord, you should be most glad! A wondrous event has taken place here: I saw a boy

\textsuperscript{207} On this point, see Neil Thomas, \textit{Intertextuality and Interpretation}. 78-85.

\textsuperscript{208} Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur} 432.

\textsuperscript{209} See Bumke, who on this point writes: “Auf der anderen Seite ist der Appellcharakter des höfischen Ritterideals nicht zu übersehen. Die poetischen Schilderungen waren offensichtlich nicht nur auf literarische Erbauung der adligen Zuhörerschaft angelegt, sondern sie wollten auch auf die gesellschaftliche Praxis Einfluß nehmen.” Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur} 432.
sitting on the stone!” They all thought this strange and marvelous. Each and every noble knight crowded up in front of the others and heard the story.\textsuperscript{210}

Wirnt uses this stone of virtue to turn the respective text-internal and –external audiences into eyewitnesses to an extraordinary event – the amazement is shared by the knights who see it and the listeners and readers who hear about it. This parleys into an opportunity to have the characters within the poem mimic the act of storytelling that is taking place at that very moment for the historical audience. Telling tales and swapping stories is in fact one of the most recurrent leitmotifs throughout the poem; as Joram and Gawein ride into the wilderness, for example, they entertain themselves with storytelling (\textit{mit maren vertriben si den tac} v. 660). On the way to Korntin with the Lady Nereja, Gwigalois tries to make the journey seem shorter by telling tales (\textit{dô saget er ir mære / und kurzet ir die stunde / als er beste kunde} v. 1924-1926); later in the same journey, Nereja’s dwarf tells yet more “lovely stories” to his mistress and to Gwigalois (\textit{mit vreuden riten si dô dan / der getwerge einez in began / sagen schœniu mære} v. 3286-3288); and when Gwigalois meets a young maiden who has been robbed of a prize that she had rightfully won, it becomes a chance for the maiden to recount her woes and tell a story within a story (v. 2514-2602). Thus, the stone of virtue also becomes an instance of self-reflexivity and the creation of a story within a story, similar to Kalogreant’s telling his peers about his own failure at the adventure of the magic fountain at the beginning of Hartmann’s \textit{Iwein} (ca. 1200).\textsuperscript{211}

Recall also the ekphrasis of Amurfina’s dish: Similar to the scene with the stone of virtue, this scene from \textit{Diu crône} self-reflexively thematizes vernacular literature and reflects

\textsuperscript{210} One could also interpret \textit{und nàmen der geschiht war} as “they investigated the truth of the matter.” This emphasis on empirical “truth” becomes important in later redactions of the \textit{Wigalois} material; see chapter six, pp. 245-248.

the widespread popularity of Arthurian romance: after seeing the dish, Gâwein recognizes himself by recounting stories he has heard told about himself, the ideal Arthurian knight. Gâwein’s recounting of his own deeds, like the examples cited above, acts as a story within a story. At the same time, it reflects the cultural memory of the audience that would be well acquainted with Gâwein’s exploits, and reflects the important role that literature played for courtly audiences in forming and defining their collective identity. Not only Gâwein may recognize his courtly identity in the dish, therefore, but also the audience.

Finally, Wirnt implies at several points in his poem that a crucial component of such identity-forming storytelling is ekphrasis: In his description of Florie’s clothing, for example, he self-reflexively comments not once, but twice, on his own rhetorical skill:

\begin{verbatim}
Ich gesach ir nie deheine –
Geworht âne zungen –
Diu sô wol bedrungen
Mit gezierde wäre
Als an disem mære
\end{verbatim} 

(v. 787-791)

(I never saw anything like it [made by hand] – and not by tongue – that was so ornately decorated as the one in this tale.)

And again, before he begins to describe Florie’s hair, he proclaims:

\begin{verbatim}
Wan ez ist âne ir aller schaden
Swaz ich ûf si mac geladen
Von sîden und von borten
Und von gezierde, mit worten
\end{verbatim} 

(v. 859-862)

(...for it does no harm to anyone, whatever silks or lace or other finery I might heap upon her with words.)

Thus, the stone of virtue and the other examples I have provided from Wigalois exhibit a high degree of what Robillard calls ekphrastic autoreflexivity, where the poet specifically thematizes the connections between the verbal and the visual. The description
of the stone of virtue also serves as a reminder to the class of people for whom Wigalois was composed that courtly identity consists not just of performing knightly deeds, but indeed of having sufficient free-time and leisure—Middle High German _muoze_—to tell stories of knightly deeds. As Wirnt reminds the audience early in the poem (v. 247-251), according to tradition, even the great fictional King Arthur himself refused to take his first meal of the day before some member of his court could tell him of some new wonder or adventure; why should historical members of the aristocracy not like to see themselves in a similar light?

**C. Gwigalois’s Wheel and the Literary Uses of Heraldry**

Gwigalois’s heraldic golden wheel also speaks to issues of knightly practice and courtly identity. It is first and foremost reflective of the increasing historical use of heraldic emblems and devices among knights in the thirteenth century. This was based on a very real need for knights to be able to identify other knights on the battlefield as quickly as possible in order to distinguish friend from foe. That Gwigalois, like his numerous opponents who are also outfitted with heraldic emblems on their armor, consistently uses the same device throughout the poem is also reflective of the increasing standardization of heraldic motifs as the thirteenth century progressed. In _Wigalois_, the heraldic device serves as a means of

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212 See chapter one, page 11.

213 See for example James Rushing, _Images of Adventure: Yvain in the Visual Arts_. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995. 113. In his investigation of the Iwein mural cycle at Schmalkalden, Rushing demonstrates that the main point of the narrative structure of the cycle is not the Iwein story itself, but rather the narrating of the story. Rushing writes: “Courtly narration belongs to _muoze_: the events depicted here do not, but the narrating of them does…the purpose was not so much to identify the patrons and viewers as belonging to the class of heroes who experience such adventures, as to identify them as belonging to the class that tells itself these stories.” See also pp. 125-126.

making the hero legible; the device is a visual code that points not only to the hero’s physical body, but also renders his inner qualities visually “readable.”

The golden wheel is thus, as I discussed in chapter two, an example of “canting arms” that reveal “the character of their bearers.” Moreover, as an outward sign of the inner man, it is indicative of an ethical aspect of courtly identity known as kalokagathia, the harmony of the inner and outer person. This term was “rooted in the classical notion of symbiosis of the beautiful and the good, and…could be defined as perfect rectitude united with urbanity and good breeding.”

Or, as the famous historian Johan Huizinga writes, “…the ideal of knighthood was built into a noble fantasy of male perfection, a close kin of the Greek kalokagathia, a purposeful striving for the beautiful life that energetically inspired a number of centuries.” To use comparable Middle High German terms, we can understand this as the schœne and hövesche zuht that were required attributes of the ideal courtly knight.

In addition to reflecting the historical relationship between heraldic devices and knightly identity, as well as the harmony of his inner and outer self, Gwigalois’s heraldic golden wheel also acts text-internally and is a crucial visual cue for the hero himself and for his own sense of identity. At one point in the story, Gwigalois fights a fearsome dragon called Pfetan for Beleare, a woman whom Gwigalois finds lamenting her husband Moral’s abduction by the dragon (v. 4867-5140). Gwigalois kills the dragon, but not before he is

215 See chapter two, pp. 64-66.

216 Scaglione, Knights at Court 50-51 and 56. See also Jaeger, Origins of Courtliness 147-152.


218 See Bumke, Höfische Kultur 425-427.
himself rendered unconscious by the dreadful beast. A poor fisher couple discovers the unconscious hero lying on the ground, and seeing an opportunity to improve their lot, they strip the knight of his magnificent armor in hopes of eventually selling it (v. 5312-5412). When Gwigalois awakes in the forest and finds himself naked, he asks himself: “Gwigalois, pray tell me – how on earth did you end up here?!” (Gwigalois, mach du mir sagen / waz wunders hat dich her getragen? v. 5802-5803). He recites to himself a list of his family members and his courtly pedigree, yet it is the visual cue that proves decisive; without his armor with the golden wheel, he does not look courtly, and therefore he cannot possibly be courtly. In fact, he cannot even possibly be Gwigalois:

Nû bin ich ungehiure.  
Waz touc diu rede! Si ist enwiht.  
Gwigâlois heize ich niht.  
Ich bin et sus ein armman,  
Und sol büwen disen tan  
Als mîn vater hât getân. (v. 5831-5836)

(Now I am something uncanny. What good is such talk?! It’s useless. I am not Gwigalois. I am now a poor wretch who must live as a peasant, cultivating the land in this forest as my father did.)

Gwigalois’s reliance on the identity-forming signification that his armor provides him is especially pointed, for now he himself lies at the very lowest point on the wheel of fortune. Indeed, by stating that he is now a “poor wretch” (armman) forced to cultivate the land (büwen), he makes it clear that he could not possibly be any further removed from courtliness or knighthood. Everyone among Wirnt’s courtly audience would know that “like the title of nobility, the dignity of knighthood was incompatible with the practice of mechanical arts, especially farming. A nobleman must not be confused with a peasant.”219 To be a peasant, a

219 Scaglione, Knights at Court 20.
*rusticus*, was synonymous with all that was boorish and unsophisticated – in the language of the German court, *dörperlich*.

Later, Beleare discovers the theft and recovers Gwigalois’s armor for him. Most of it is too badly damaged for him to use ever again, but even after he has been fitted with a new set of armor, Gwigalois is only truly fit for renewed adventure once he has set his old helmet upon his head and taken his old shield into his hands – both of which display the golden wheel (v. 6146-6169). When the hero looks the part, then he not only acts the part, but rather he *is* the part. Because knights in the thirteenth century often chose heraldic arms that revealed an aspect or aspects of their family history or pointed to their noble status,

we see that Wirnt uses the Gwigalois’s heraldic device here in a manner reflective of genuine historical practice. Gwigalois’s shield and helmet-crest thus become a device that complicates the boundaries between the imaginary world of the tale and the real world of the audience, thereby inviting the audience to reflect more carefully about the role that heraldry and visual images play in defining courtly identity.

Gwigalois’s temporary madness and loss of identity, spurred by the loss of his heraldic armor, is furthermore reminiscent of a similar scene from Hartmann’s *Iwein*: The eponymous hero of Hartmann’s tale, having just received a severe browbeating from Lunete for abandoning his wife Laudine and forgetting his promise to return, is overcome with shock, loses control of his senses, rends his clothes from top to bottom and runs – now completely insane – into the forest (v. 3231-3238). *Iwein* spends a period of time living in the woods like a wild man, and here we see another instance of the close connection between

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220 See Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 426. For *urbanus* vs. *rusticus*, see also Scaglione, *Knights at Court* 56-57.

221 See Neubecker, *Heraldry*.
clothing, outward appearance, and courtliness: Calling him a “noble fool” (*der edel tôre*), Hartmann says that the naked forest dweller no longer resembles anything courtly, but looks instead like a Moor (v. 3345-3349).

Although Iwein’s sanity is eventually restored by a magic salve and not with the help of an ekphrastically described object, other literary examples demonstrate quite clearly that Wirnt was not alone in connecting visual signs, identity, chivalry and courtliness. The restoration of Gâwein’s sanity and identity by means of Amurfina’s ekphrastic dish in *Diu crône* is one example, as we have already seen. Another example is in the anonymous *Lancelot und Ginover* or *Prosalancelot* (ca. 1215-1230). Here, Queen Ginover receives a shield that depicts the perfect knight and his beloved, but the shield is split down the middle and is held together only by its silver buckle.\(^{222}\) She later gives this shield to Lancelot, but only when Lancelot and Ginover consummate their love are the two halves mysteriously fused back together.\(^{223}\) Later in the tale, Lancelot is rendered insane and sits imprisoned while the Knights of the Round Table are engaged in a fearsome battle against the Saxons. After numerous failed attempts to bring Lancelot back to his senses, the Arthurians finally arrive at the proper solution: In a moment strikingly similar to *Wigalois*, Lancelot’s mind and identity are only fully restored as soon as his great shield is placed upon his shoulders – only then can he return to his former self and thus to the fight.\(^{224}\)

These examples demonstrate that in thirteenth-century courtly society, German-speaking poets and audiences had an appreciation for the symbiosis of outward signs and


\(^{223}\) *Lancelot und Ginover* (vol. I, pp. 1238, ll. 16-22).

\(^{224}\) *Lancelot und Ginover* (vol. I, pp. 1255, ll. 13-17).
group identity as members of the nobility. They also reveal connections to a variety of texts that all thematize what it meant to be courtly in the German High Middle Ages. In fact, *Wigalois* is full of direct and oblique intertextual references to different works of literature, from a pretty maiden’s reading the story of Aeneas (v. 2713-2722) to the similarities between Gwigalois’s and Parzival’s respective upbringings. In the following discussion I examine how the ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb contributes to a discourse on the medieval reception of literature.

**D. The Tomb’s Inscription and Courtly Literary Culture**

Japhite’s tomb offers a particularly positive view of how even a non-Christian, if he or she possesses the right qualities, might be integrated into the fold of Christian believers and “saved” for the audience as well as for God. Yet it is also just one example of a number of descriptions of tombs, gravesites, or burials in medieval literary fiction. I argue here that by participating in a medieval discourse on the reception of literature, the description of Japhite’s tomb contributes to the construction of a courtly group identity. It does so namely in the following ways: First, the description (directly or indirectly) cites other courtly romances and epics, and thus reminds audiences that *muoZe*, the leisure to enjoy literature, was part of courtliness. Second, by emphasizing the shimmering materiality of the tomb instead of the linear pictorial sequences typically found in ancient ekphrases, and by including a long written inscription on Japhite’s tomb, Wirnt contributes to an aspect of

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225 Like Parzival, Gwigalois spends his youth not knowing his father; Gawein, as we remember, leaves Florie in search of adventure and never returns. Unlike Parzival, however, Gwigalois’s mother never tries to conceal the identity of his father from him, nor does she refuse to have him trained in the chivalric arts. With regard to the Aeneas reference, it is not clear from Wirnt’s text whether the maiden is reading from Vergil, from the Old French *Roman d’Eneas* by an anonymous poet, or Heinrich von Veldeke’s *Eneasroman*.

226 See page 156 above, note 64.
ekphrastic tomb descriptions that is uniquely courtly. In addition, I show that the description draws attention to the creative process of adapting a foreign text for a German audience, and emphasizes orality and the performance of texts, despite the poem’s own opening reference to itself as a book. Finally, I argue that by making an appeal in this ekphrasis to the authority of the fictional King Arthur, Wirnt seeks to confirm the legitimacy of Arthurian romance as a genre, a genre through which courtly audiences in turn sought to set themselves apart as a group, to elucidate their particular ideal of hövesheit as a class, and to emancipate themselves from other literary conventions. As Erich Auerbach writes: “A self-portrayal of feudal knighthood with its mores and ideals is the fundamental purpose of the courtly romance.” These issues are important to Wigalois because they demonstrate that part of the reason for the success of Wirnt’s romance among courtly audiences is its use of ekphrasis to engage with other works of literature that these audiences enjoyed.

Wirnt makes implicit as well as explicit references to descriptions of tombs, gravesites, or burials from other contemporary (German) works of fiction, references calculated to please and impress those members of his audience familiar with all these stories. Some of these other tomb descriptions include those in the respective Old French and Middle High German adaptations of Vergil’s Aeneas: In the Roman d’Eneas as well as in Heinrich von Veldeke’s Eneasroman, for example, the graves of Dido, Pallas and Camilla are all described in great detail. There are also grave descriptions in the Latin epic


229 For a thorough comparative investigation of these tomb-ekphrases, Wandhoff, Ekphrasis 69-116; Wandhoff convincingly demonstrates that these medieval tomb descriptions were “this era’s most important answer to the
tradition of the twelfth century: in Joseph of Exeter’s *Frigii Dareis Ylias* (ca. 1180), we find a description of King Teuthras’ tomb, and in Walter de Châtillon’s *Alexandreis* (ca. 1184) there is an ekphrasis of the grave of the Persian King Darius. This leads to questions about how the ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb functions within the greater corpus of vernacular German fiction that was growing ever larger during the thirteenth century, and to what extent the tomb’s engagement with these other texts contributes to the construction of courtly identity.

In his recent study of ekphrasis in medieval literature, Haiko Wandhoff has shown that one characteristic that distinguishes courtly tomb descriptions from their ancient counterparts is a tendency away from pictorial sequences and toward a decidedly more pronounced emphasis on surface, structure, and materiality. The first few verses describing Japhite’s tomb, where the queen’s body is placed into a hyacinth sarcophagus covered with jewels, demonstrate first this strong courtly emphasis on materiality, and second Wirnt’s familiarity with a strikingly similar passage from Heinrich von Veldeke’s *Eneasroman*, where the dead Camilla, like Japhite, is laid to rest in a marvelous tomb. Like Camilla’s tomb, Japhite’s sarcophagus is reported to be of such visual and architectural splendor that it stretches the imagination to even conceive of such a structure, much less

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actually build one or represent it in a tangible visual medium. As with Camilla’s grave, so is Japhite’s tomb also equipped with a censer in which burns a sweet-smelling balsam; like that in Heinrich’s Eneasroman, this is a balsam that still somehow burns to this day (dui wârn gefult mit balsamô / den zunde man, und brinnet alsô / noch hiute… v. 8237-8239). Thus Wirnt, like Heinrich before him, evokes the audience’s sense of smell in addition to that of sight. This multi-sensorial aspect of the ekphrasis is also a constituent part of noble self-representation; as Horst Wenzel reminds us:

To summarize, representation is described as a symbolic form of the public demonstration of status, which, in the person of the status-bearer, presents interpersonal connections to values and order so that they are perceivable to all the senses.

In addition to the sweet-smelling embalming spices, the description of the lavish tomb proceeds with precious and colorful jewels, a golden ring to fasten the casket-lid, and a vault, adorned with paintings that gleamed red, green, blue, and yellow (under einem gewelbe marmelin / der gap wider ein ander schên / rôt, grüene, weitên unde gel v. 8302-8304). Japhite’s tomb thus caters to the courtly predilection for tomb ekphrases with descriptions of lavish, colorful surfaces and building materials.

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233 A fascinating attempt to render Camilla’s tomb visually can be found in one of the most famous extant illustrated Eneit-manuscripts, the Berliner Bilderhandschrift (Ms. germ. fol. 282). On folio 62v, the illustrator has faithfully depicted the great bird with the censer in its beak as it sits atop the sarcophagus, and has managed to give the reader/viewer a sense of the splendid arches and vaulting that form part of the tomb’s architecture, yet the magnificence of the structure as Heinrich describes it far surpasses anything that an illustrator could hope to transmit in a two-dimensional pictorial format. In his recent discussion of one current approach to ekphrasis, i.e. ekphrasis as a theory of representation, Haiko Wandhoff explains that in some respects, an ekphrasis does not so much help the audience visualize a “realistic” object, but instead seems to make the separation between visual and verbal art even greater: “Aus dieser Perspektive wird dann auch deutlich, warum die Beschreibung von Kunstwerken in vielen poetischen Texten kaum den Effekt hat, dem Wortkunstwerk visuelle Qualitäten zu verleihen, sondern diese bisweilen geradezu ‘undurchsichtig’ macht.” See Wandhoff, Ekphrasis 10-12.

234 “Repräsentation ist demnach resümierend zu beschreiben als eine symbolische Form öffentlicher Statusdemonstration, die mit der Person des Statusträgers interpersonelle Wert- und Ordnungszusammenhänge für alle Sinne wahrnehmbar zur Darstellung bringt.” Wenzel, “Repräsentation und schöner Schein” 180.
Wirnt continues to demonstrate his familiarity with his literary contemporaries in the next lines, where he makes specific reference to another poetic burial, this time that of Gahmuret, the slain father of the hero in Wolfram’s *Parzival*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wart Gahmuret ze Baldac} \\
\text{Von dem bâruc bestat et baz,} \\
\text{Deiswâr, daz láze ich âne haz;} \\
\text{Wand er hêt grôze rîchei t. (v. 8244-8247)}
\end{align*}
\]

(If the caliph buried Gahmuret at Baghdad with more splendor, I shall truly accept it without being vexed, for he was very rich.)

This seems a very carefully chosen intertextual reference indeed, for in *Parzival*, it is the Christian who receives a lavish burial at the hands of the Muslim caliph (II, 107-108); in *Wigalois*, Wirnt has returned the generous favor. In one respect, this is further evidence of the “conciliatory atmosphere” between Muslims and Christians so prominent throughout the latter sections of *Wigalois*,

\footnote{235 See Neil Thomas, *Intertextuality and Interpretation* 86-93. See also chapter three of this dissertation, pp. 124-127.}

and in another, it is Wirnt’s implied — if somewhat conventional — nod to the narrative skills of his more famous predecessor Wolfram.

The tombs of Camilla, Gahmuret, and Japhite all bear inscriptions. The inscription on Japhite’s tomb (v. 8254-8289) is thus one of a number of similar ekphrases in courtly literature that set themselves apart from ancient tomb ekphrases in this way. With Japhite’s inscription, Wirnt attempts to set his own work apart from Heinrich’s or Wolfram’s in one additional respect: in his desire to *improve* upon the descriptions found in the work of his contemporaries. In his most recent monograph about *Wigalois*, for instance, Neil Thomas cites numerous examples from other Middle High German and Old French works of various genres and convincingly demonstrates that courtly authors often saw their work as an
obligation to engage in critical dialogue with their literary forbears. Although the tombs of Camilla and Gahmuret both have inscriptions written on them, only Japhite’s is written in two languages. This is an attempt to outdo his peers. Although Wirnt does not inform his audience specifically about why he lists two different (foreign) languages, this exotic enhancement and improvement over Heinrich or Wolfram and their tomb-descriptions can also be seen as an effort at literary one-upmanship. Ernst Robert Curtius has shown that this “outdoing” was a common topos in medieval literature, especially in passages of eulogy or panegyric.

In addition, the two languages inscribed in letters of gold on the surface of the tomb thematize linguistic difference and the role of the narrator as translator in courtly literature. Written in “heathenish” and French (heidenisch und franzois v. 8258), the words of the epitaph make the tomb seem more exotic and unusual, and remove it a step or two from the everyday world of the audience. Wirnt never indicates to which specific language he refers in his use of the term heidenisch – most likely it is Arabic – but considered in the context of the entire Roaz/Japhite stage of the narrative, the main idea behind his choosing this term

236 Neil Thomas, Intertextuality and Interpretation.

237 Ernst Robert Curtius. European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages. Trans. Willard Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953. Seventh printing 1990. Curtius writes: “If a person or thing is to be eulogized, one points out that he or she or it surpasses anything of the kind, and to this end employs a special form of comparison, which I call ‘outdoing’. On the basis of a comparison with examples provided by tradition, the superiority, even the uniqueness, of the person or thing to be praised is established…In the panegyric style writers allow themselves the most daring ‘outdoings’; elsewhere they gracefully admit the pre-eminence of the ancients…At the very height of the Middle Ages, poets were entirely conscious that ‘outdoing’, or at least the indiscriminate employment of it, could arouse demurrall…Its [i.e. panegyric’s] chief trope is the hyperbole.” 162-164.

is that the language is not spoken by Christians.\textsuperscript{239} The juxtaposition of French, for most German-speaking courtly audiences the language of high culture in the Christian world,\textsuperscript{240} with “heathenish” on the surface of a single edifice furthermore places the familiar in direct contact with the non-Christian Other. This joining of apparent opposites, the fusing of the two languages onto the surface of one space, suggests once again the conciliatory, non-sectarian tone of the message conveyed in the epitaph’s words.\textsuperscript{241} Finally, these two languages enhance the impression of Wirnt’s overall sense of fascination with the wonders of the Orient, which is already evident and abundant in the rest of the description, and in keeping with courtly culture’s fascination with the Orient in general.\textsuperscript{242}

Especially important to a discourse on courtly literary reception is the narrator’s translating of the epitaph into German for the audience. As many of the first-generation authors of Arthurian romance in the German lands drew considerably from French source materials, this accurately reflects the tasks of translating and re-working that these literary pioneers set before themselves. We must understand the term “translation” rather loosely, however, in connection with how German poets handled their French source material. In

\textsuperscript{239} For further discussion of multiplicity of non-Christian languages and how they were perceived by German-speaking audiences, see “Traversing the Boundaries of Language”, chapter two in Kathryn Starkey, \textit{Reading the Medieval Book: Word, Image, and Performance in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Willehalm}. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004. 23-46.

\textsuperscript{240} See for example Starkey, \textit{Reading the Medieval Book} 39: “Poets used French for both social and didactic purposes. In didactic terms, the use of French terms potentially served to teach a German court audience a fashionable, courtly vocabulary...there is a certain social advantage to coloring one’s German with foreign [i.e. French] words.” See also Bumke, \textit{Höfische Kultur} 112-114.

\textsuperscript{241} See chapter three, pp. 124-127.

\textsuperscript{242} Jutta Eming writes convincingly about the fluent admixture of courtly and exotic elements in \textit{Wigalois}, especially in the Korntin sequence. She demonstrates that Wirnt displays a fascination for the Wonders of the Orient at various stages of the poem, for example: “Florie, von der einmal (v. 5817) gesagt wird, sie komme aus Syrien, die Teilnehmer am Kampf um den Schönheitspreis, Larie – sie alle verfügen in der einen oder anderen Form über Edelsteine, kostbare Stoffe, oder Wunderdinge, die einen Abglanz von den Wundern des Orients geben. Diese Wunder des Orients sind in \textit{Wigalois} grundsätzlich Chiffren für Reichtum, Schönheit und Exotik.” Eming, \textit{Funktionswandel} 210.
many cases, they adapted the material, shifting the emphasis in places, abbreviating some passages, and in many others extending their length by as much as five times in order to make the material fit better into a specifically German context.\textsuperscript{243} The narrator’s translating the inscription here shows that Wirnt is concerned with suggesting to his audience what it means to be German as well as courtly.

Translating the message into Middle High German for the audience is also an opportunity for the narrator to thematize his own importance and the audience’s dependence on him in order to properly understand the story. This is important as it self-reflects on the performative aspects of courtly literary reception. As I discussed in chapter three, Wirnt’s narrator interjects his opinions rather frequently into the tale;\textsuperscript{244} here, translating the epitaph into German for his listeners is an attempt to persuade the audience to interpret the events of the poem a particular way.\textsuperscript{245} As such, it is an example of the medieval text’s dependence on a voice, on a spoken medium of transmission or explication. The French medievalist Paul Zumthor has written, for example, that scholars cannot at all hope to understand medieval literature without taking into account that what we are all too often tempted to refer to as “texts” are in their very essence dependent on the human voice and on a singular, unique

\textsuperscript{241} See also on this point Starkey: “Translators embroidered the tales they translated, adding more extensive descriptions of characters, of battle scenes, and of clothing and expanding or cutting to appeal to their own audiences. Medieval German ‘translations’ of literary texts are thus not conventionally true to the word, but rather represent an interpretation of the material.” Starkey, \textit{Reading the Medieval Book} 40. One area where this extending of the material was particularly prominent was in ekphrasis; compared to its Old French counterpart, for example, the description of Dido’s hunting costume in Heinrich von Veldeke’s \textit{Eneasroman} is five times as long. Brüggen, \textit{Kleidung und Mode} 39.

\textsuperscript{244} See chapter three, p. 108-109.

\textsuperscript{245} See also Starkey, who discusses a very similar phenomenon in Wolfram’s \textit{Willehalm}: “The narrator’s interjections are an integral part of the narrative structure. They contribute to the development of the metanarrative layer, in which the narrator presents himself as an oral performer of the story.” Starkey, \textit{Reading the Medieval Book} 38.
Wirnt allows his narrator to set himself up before the audience as the oral performer and translator of the poem, to establish his voice as the operative channel transmitting the tale. Since the text he is in the midst of translating has been written down on the imagined surface of the tomb as well as on the real surface of a manuscript page, however, his performance can be repeated again and again. This interaction between written text and spoken performance is indeed the very first issue that confronts the audience of Wigalois: Remember that the poem begins by “speaking” in its own voice and emphatically pointing to its own existence between the covers of a book. We must also recall, however, that most of the surviving Wigalois manuscripts do not contain this opening passage. Sabine and Ulrich Seelbach, in fact, suggest that one reason for this is because these self-reflexive verses are inconsistent with the common thirteenth-century practice of performing courtly literature.

Regardless of whether particular manuscripts omit this passage, I must make it clear that this interplay between orality and literacy is completely consistent with the historical transmission and reception of courtly literature. Even from the very beginning of Arthurian romance in German-speaking courtly culture, German poets like Wirnt took creative advantage of the interplay between oral and written modes of composition and transmission. Yet when Arthurian romance became popular in Germany during the late

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246 Zumthor, “The Text and the Voice.”

247 See Wigalois. Ed. Sabine and Ulrich Seelbach, 287. See also chapter two, note 3.

248 The German Arthurian poets are well aware of the transitional place their work holds in the space between orality and literacy, and they make references to their own literacy and to the textual and intertextual nature of their work over and over again. The knight who introduced the Arthurian romance to German-speaking audiences, Hartmann von Aue, makes proud and conspicuous reference to his own erudition; in Diu crône, Heinrich von dem Türlin again and again flaunts his literacy and his familiarity with the literature of classical antiquity as well as with the entire corpus of Arthurian material, and effortlessly weaves references to the deeds
twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the relationship between orally transmitted stories and written vernacular literature was in flux. In his exhaustive study of reading and listening practices in medieval German society, D.H. Green argues for the notion of “intermediate modes of reception”, that works were often performed aloud in front of an audience of varying degrees of Latin- or vernacular-literacy, either recited from memory or performed from a fixed text.\textsuperscript{249}

Wirnt also contributes to the construction of a courtly group identity in this description by pointing to the fictionality of his work. Through the description of Japhite’s tomb, Wirnt uses ekphrasis to contribute to what was in the thirteenth century a growing literary discourse about the place of the fictional genre of Arthurian romance. As Michel Zink has shown, thirteenth-century literature reveals a developing consciousness of fictionality,\textsuperscript{250} and D.H. Green has pushed this thought further by demonstrating that the German authors of courtly romance were not only self-reflexive about the fictionality of their work, but that they also sought legitimacy and acceptance for the romance as a genre by self-reflecting on its being written down.\textsuperscript{251} The description of the tomb concludes with a literary of Lanzelet and Parzival, Artus and Ginover, Gâwein and Keie into his narrative; we have already seen that in Wigalois, Wirnt von Gravenberg opens his tale with an overt reference to the story’s material support between two covers of a book, yet as the story unfolds, references to the oral transmission of stories abound, and the romance ends not with another reference to its existence within a book, but to its oral transmission to Wirnt from the lips of a squire. For important contributions to the study of orality and literacy, see Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, and Albert B. Lord. The Singer of Tales. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960. Second edition 2000.


\textsuperscript{251} Green, \textit{Medieval Listening and Reading.} 249-264.
reference to King Arthur, a reference whose aim is to finally convince the audience of the sheer, unsurpassable splendor of the tomb:

Der rîche künic Artûs  
Möhte mit aller sîner habe  
Die gezierde an dem grabe  
Niht hân erzuget und den stein  
Dô er aller rîchest schein,  
Dar inne diu vrouwe bestatet was.  
Der estrich was als ein glas  
Lûter, grüene, spiegelvar.  

(The mighty King Arthur with all his wealth could not have afforded the ornaments at the grave nor the splendidly gleaming stone in which the lady was laid. The flagstones were like glass: clear, green, and polished like a mirror.)

In order to assure the audience that Japhite’s tomb is of unimaginable magnificence, Wirnt makes an appeal to the authority of King Arthur. Such a comparison must have surely made an impression on the audience, who would have been quite familiar with the reports in other literary works of King Arthur’s wealth. It might also seem odd that Wirnt does not compare the tomb’s riches to those of any historical personage, but instead to those of a beloved character from literary fiction. Yet Neil Thomas argues that for Wirnt’s didactic purposes, the distinctions between historical kings and the fictional Arthur is immaterial; Arthur’s superior moral and chivalric qualities make him just as “real” to a courtly audience as, say Charlemagne or one of the Ottonians.\textsuperscript{252} By investing a fictional king with the same authority and status as real historical rulers, Wirnt strengthens the effect that his comparison

\textsuperscript{252} Neil Thomas writes, for example: “Wirnt does not problematise the figure of Arthur or question his historicity, as the somewhat ambiguous exordium of Hartmann’s Iwein appears to do to judge from the distancing focalisation employed when references are made to Arthur as a king whose continued existence is merely claimed by his kinsmen…On the contrary, Wirnt strives to establish the figure of Arthur as a king whose chivalric comparators include such well-authenticated historical exemplars as Charlemagne and Hojir von Mannesvelt, the early twelfth-century commander of troops in the German imperial party…Wirnt invokes the legendary Arthurian era to support his didactic ambitions, implicitly according Arthur a de facto historical identity. In this way he is able to realize his pedagogic aims by appealing to the authority of a particularly charismatic role model.” Thomas, \textit{Intertextuality and Interpretation}. 104-106.
will have on the audience: not even Arthur had such riches. Thus, by calling on the authority of a fictional source within a work of fiction, this comparison makes a claim for the legitimacy of Arthurian romance.

Further examples of great wealth, intertextuality, and other aspects of courtly literary culture are also present in the final ekphrasis of this investigation, Larie’s tent.

**E. Larie’s Tent, Courtliness, and Virtual Splendor**

Similar to the description of Japhite’s tomb, poetic practices and literary culture are also important to the ekphrasis of Larie’s towering, traveling tent, as it demonstrates that Wirnt is once again contributing to another common ekphrastic convention in courtly literature: in this instance, the description of a wonderful tent. This tent is important because it provides a description that goes beyond the mere surface of the ekphrastic object and describes instead a luxurious three-dimensional interior space. Important to the question of courtliness and identity-formation, I draw on previous scholarship to demonstrate here that Larie’s tent participates in a discourse on the literary use of narrative and narrated space in the formation of a collective identity.

Other examples of ekphrastic tents include the one in Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s *Lanzelet* (ca. 1210-1214), where the hero receives a marvelous tent as a wedding gift, a structure whose entrance bears three written mottos and whose top consists of a mechanical singing eagle and a magic mirror (v. 4745-4931). Another such tent is one that may in fact have been inspired by Wirnt’s description of Larie’s tent: In a later Arthurian romance by Der Stricker, *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal* (ca. 1230), a great giant arrives at King Arthur’s court and, in an effort to intimidate the king, tells of how his master makes a habit of taking

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massive wooden beams and constructing elaborate fortresses, which are then mounted upon the backs of war elephants (v. 605-634).  

Members of Wirnt’s thirteenth-century audience who were familiar with other works that included tent-descriptions would surely have derived great pleasure from such an ekphrasis and from hearing what sort of novel or captivating details Wirnt’s example might include. Moreover, Wirnt’s description shows once again a parallel between literary fiction and an instance of historical reality in medieval German courtly life: As historical documents and poetry alike demonstrate, thirteenth-century nobles did in fact spend a great deal of time in richly-appointed tents, especially during periods of travel or when on a military campaign. For many medieval princes and kings, the peripatetic life of moving from court to court frequently made living in such tents a necessity. Finally, Wirnt’s use of the term kastel atop the elephant demonstrates that these tents were quite often thought of as castles or moveable fortresses.  

One of the most appealing aspects of the ekphrasis of Larie’s tent is the luxurious and evocative comfort that Wirnt describes:

\begin{verbatim}
    Vil grôz gezierde truoc man drîn.
    Mit rîchen tepten sîdîn
    Bestreuwet man daz kastel.
    Ein pfelle rôt und gel
    Die wende al umbe gar bevienc [...] 
    Ouch wâren die wende
    Mit betten umbe und umbe beleit.
\end{verbatim}

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256 Bumke, *Höfische Kultur* 169.
Von rîchen pfellen kultur breit
Wâren drûf gestrecket,
Die wende gar bestecket
Mit bluomen, und daz hûs bestreut,
Der tac, des schön diu herze vreut
Schein al umbe durch diu glas,
Swen ez an ñinem zîte was.
Sus was gezieret schöne
Drinne der vreuden krône,
Des wünsches âmîe,
Diu künegîn Lârîe,
Durch gemach solde rîten.  

(There was a great deal of splendid decoration inside. Costly silk rugs had been laid throughout this castle. A cloth of red and yellow silk lined the walls from top to bottom. … and all along the walls lay beds which were covered with broad and costly silk quilts; flowers decked the walls and were strewn throughout the room. The sun, whose light gladdens the heart, shone through the glass all around during the daytime. With the interior thus beautifully adorned, this crown of joys, this ideal beloved was to ride in comfort.)

This is once again evidence of the sheer delight that courtly audiences took not only in lavish material items, but also in poetic descriptions of lavish material items.257 By showing their appreciation for such descriptions, as well as for the actual items, courtly audiences affirmed the wealth and status that set them apart from monks and peasants, and indulged in the self-representative muoze that allowed them to hear poets reflect this status in works of literature. Throughout courtly literature, descriptions appear of expensive and exotic silks from places such as Persia and Syria, Libya, Alexandria or Nineveh.258 Costly materials and objects from the Holy Land and the Orient were especially prized. The historical record shows that nobles returning from Crusades often brought with them costly items and rich fabrics from the East.259 In one such example, the influence that Henry the

257 See Bumke, Höfische Kultur 178-187.
258 Bumke, Höfische Kultur 178.
Lion’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1172 had on him was evident not only in the jewels he brought back for his wife, but also in a number of the Oriental patterns and designs in the illuminations for the magnificent Gospel Book he commissioned in 1183. Poetic descriptions of such splendid items abound throughout Middle High German Arthurian romance, with Wolfram von Eschenbach and his inventive examples of place names in Parzival being particularly prominent. As Elke Brüggen writes, such fantastic place names enhanced the wonder that historical audiences felt at the thought of costly items having come from other parts of the world; they helped the audiences to “conjure visions of a distant world and to invest the luxurious materials with exotic flair.”

We have already seen in chapter two that the ekphrasis of Larié’s tent does not simply call upon the audience’s (imagined) sense of sight, but that it also evokes, among other things, the sounds of bells (das netze was gestricket wol / gudiner schellen hienc ez vol / niden an dem ende v. 10,389-10,391) and the smells of sweet balsams (der vil wol gefülltet was / mit balsam der gap guoten smac v. 10,363-10,364). Horst Wenzel reminds us that in this synaesthesia there is also an element of courtly self-representation:

The spectrum so presented allows us to recognize what a powerful effect the signs of courtly semantics have on the senses. Representation as a symbolic act involves all dimensions of sensory perception: touch, smell and taste; acoustic, but primarily optical perception…

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259 Bumke, Höfische Kultur 179.

260 Bumke, Höfische Kultur 179.


262 “…Vorstellungen von einer fernen Welt heraufzubeschwören und und die luxuriösen Stoffe mit exotischem Flair zu belegen.” Brüggen, Kleidung und Mode 54.

263 See chapter two, pp. 79-80.

264 “Das vorgeführte Spektrum läßt erkennen, wie stark die Zeichen höfischer Semantik auf die Sinne wirken. Die Repräsentation als symbolisches Handeln involviert alle Dimensionen der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung – die
Yet the ekphrasis of Larie’s tent also demonstrates quite clearly one of the most important developments in ekphrasis as it evolved from antiquity through the medieval period: the element of tangibility. Haiko Wandhoff provides convincing examples of how medieval authors place an increasingly greater emphasis on sparkling jewels, glittering stones and other objects in order to enhance the plasticity of the imagined object.265 Wigalois offers the audience numerous examples of such tactile ekphrases, as the descriptions of the richly-adorned belts from early in the tale prove. Yet the ekphrasis of Larie’s tent goes even farther than the other examples I have investigated here. Whereas the belts, the stone, the wheels and the tomb are all concerned primarily with the ekphrastic surface, Larie’s tent provides the audience for the first time with an imagined three-dimensional space,266 a room the audience must “enter” and gaze at from wall to floor to ceiling. Although the focus of his recent Wigalois study is not ekphrasis, Neil Thomas comments nevertheless on this very description and how its “realistic representations of temporal and spatial dimensions” contribute to a discourse on courtly identity: These descriptions “serve to evoke a positive, ‘courtly’ atmosphere for the ideal of the protagonist’s kingship being evoked.”267

The three-dimensionality and kinetic aspects of ekphrases in courtly literature are deeply connected with medieval modes of perception and with how audiences acquired and

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Berührung, den Geruch und den Geschmack, die akustische, aber vor allem die optische Wahrnehmung...” Wenzel, “Repräsentation und schöner Schein” 185.


266 Approaching ekphrasis in terms of virtual space is one of the more fascinating aspects of Haiko Wandhoff’s recent monograph. In it, he claims for example that a number of aspects of modern computer technology such as “windows” and “icons” and “virtual reality” have a long pre-history in the cognitive processes triggered by ekphrastic descriptions in the literature of long ago. See Wandhoff, *Ekphrasis* 325-342.

Scholarship has shown, for instance, that there are numerous examples of ancient and medieval picture cycles whose composition constitutes a “narrativity of images.” One poetic example is the literary ekphrasis in Vergil’s *Aeneid* that describes a narrative mural that depicts the history of the Trojan War (I, 453-493). Although the *Canterbury Tales* were composed later than *Wigalois*, Geoffrey Chaucer’s description of Theseus’s three temples in *The Knight’s Tale* is an especially famous example of an ekphrasis that evokes an expansive three-dimensional space. Historical examples include the Bayeux Tapestry, whose pictorial story unfolds from left to right and thus demands to be “read”, and whose visual layout would require that the tapestry be displayed, in its full length, in an oblong hall approximately 93 feet long and 26 feet wide. Perhaps most important for the Bayeux Tapestry, according to Richard Brilliant, is that the tapestry would...
have been publicly performed and not just viewed; by actively engaging viewers and requiring them to follow the images throughout the hall in which it was displayed, it served to form a sense of political and cultural community among its Norman-French audience. It helped to form a communal, public memory. Two things are common to these picture cycles and ekphrastic spaces: First is the visual narration of an identity-forming moment or event in a particular group’s history, and second is the implicit active participation of the audience in the presentation. Whether members of the audience actually had to walk the length of the picture cycle or move about within a space in historical reality, or whether the reading or listening audience had to imagine itself viewing such a cycle with the mind’s eye, in both cases there are strong connections between communal memory, seeing, and kinetic bodily motion within the narrative space. In his discussion of these types of narrative picture cycles, Haiko Wandhoff writes:

Here the individual images are not actually informative, rather they remind the audience of well-known, critical phases of their own history, of culture-forming events in their collective memory that were most likely strongly laden with emotion. The individual scenes therefore resemble to a certain extent the imagines agentes of the ancient art of memory, which was likewise concerned with storing and recalling complex memories and memory functions with the help of active, that is ‘acting’, but also emotionally effective units of images.

In order to fully understand the significance of the identity-forming moment, then, the audience must travel along the narrative space, real or imagined, and read it with its body.

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273 An especially thorough and interesting treatment of reading and the formation of a collective memory is in Mary J. Carruthers. “Memory and the Ethics of Reading”, chapter five from The Book of Memory, pp.156-188.

The ekphrasis of Larie’s tent participates in this sort of imagined three-dimensional interactivity, but with a slight difference. In this ekphrasis, the audience does not only travel along the narrative space (as the elephant moves forward at the head of the army), but must also navigate within the space of the ekphrastic tent. Wirnt brings the audience into a space where there is no pictorial narrative of an historical event per se, but rather into a place where one is surrounded on all four sides by lavish items from the Orient.

The elements of identity-formation and of movement are not missing, however. First, Wirnt anticipates the pleasure that his listeners would derive from his descriptions of Larie’s luxurious rugs and the colorful tapestries, thereby thematizing the material nature of courtly culture. Second, the audience enters the three-dimensional space and shares in the comfort that the narrator describes. More important, by entering this imagined space, readers and listeners “join” the queen as she participates in the campaign against Lion, the very first important, identity-forming act of the new King Gwigalois’s reign. Finally, as the mind’s eye of the audience gazes at the cultural cues implicit in the luxury of the tent, the kinetic aspect that often accompanies such “culture-forming” ekphrases is also thematized: readers and listeners look around and move about within the tent, while the tent itself moves forward into battle with each of the elephant’s lumbering steps.

III. Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was on ekphrasis’s role in the construction of courtly identity; I have provided examples of Wirnt’s use of ekphrasis to comment implicitly or explicitly on courtly society. From the importance of fine and costly clothing to the historical and literary uses of heraldry, from the telling of stories and Arthurian romance to
imagining luxurious spaces, the numerous ekphrases in *Wigalois* simultaneously describe actual courtly customs while also prescribing ideals, and reflect how members of his thirteenth-century courtly audience defined themselves.

The opening words of *Wigalois* are: “What good man has opened me?” Lending the poem itself a narrative voice, Wirnt begins his work by thematizing its existence in book form. *Wigalois* was certainly one of the most widely-read romances in the entire Middle High German Arthurian tradition. But what about reading the poem *in a book*? We have seen how ekphrasis functions in the accepted scholarly edition of *Wigalois*, but do these same functions hold true in the numerous manuscripts and fragments that transmit the poem? Do ekphrastic objects and descriptions also structure the narrative, integrate potentially problematic issues, and construct courtly identity in the poem’s various material supports? In the next chapters, I examine how ekphrasis functions, and similarly how the illustrations that accompany the text function, in the some of the first and oldest books in which the story of *Wigalois* survives.
Chapter 5
Ekphrasis and Visualization Strategies in the Illustrated Wigalois Manuscripts

My paintings reveal what the mind, not the eye, sees. But painting, as you know quite well, is a feast for the eyes. If you combine these two thoughts, my world will emerge.

Orhan Pamuk

Thus the visual presentation of a text was considered, at least by the learned, to be a part of its meaning, not limited to the illustration of its themes or subjects but necessary to its proper reading, its ability-to-be significant and memorable.

Mary Carruthers

I. Introduction

We have seen thus far that “understanding the book”, as the opening lines of Wigalois challenge readers to do, is intimately connected with imagining material objects. Again and again throughout his poem, Wirnt von Gravenberg invites readers to picture an object and mentally trace its every contour, savor its every detail, and to reflect on its deeper significance. In the preceding three chapters, I have demonstrated that the author of Wigalois uses the rhetorical device of ekphrasis and the imaginings it triggers to provide his romance with narrative and thematic structure, to integrate potentially problematic issues for his audience into a more harmonious whole, and to offer courtly audiences numerous opportunities for self-representation.

But what happens when we turn the poet’s words into pictures? Did scribes and illuminators attempt to translate these visually evocative descriptions from the text into


concrete images? Is there any correlation between the verbal images in the text and the pictorial images meant to illustrate them? Of the forty-one surviving Wigalois manuscripts and fragments, only two are fully illustrated. In my estimation, there are two possible reasons for this, neither of which is mutually exclusive: One reason lies in the seemingly innumerable ekphrases and the relative difficulty of accurately lending visual form to such detailed verbal descriptions, and the other is that scribes and patrons found Wigalois already so rich in verbal imagery that illustrating the text seemed superfluous. But what sorts of visualization strategies did the illuminators of the illustrated manuscripts in fact devise in order to do justice to, or perhaps to compete with, the ekphrastic textual images? Examining these questions will give us deeper insight into how medieval audiences used pictures in conjunction with texts in order to interpret works of literature. By examining these two manuscripts, we shall see how different pictures of verbal images in two versions of the same text steer the act of interpretation and speak to changing notions of what constitutes courtly identity.

In the following chapter, I examine the relationship between text and image in Wigalois manuscripts B (Leiden, Bibliotheek der Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde no. 537) and k ([formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donaueschingen 71), the only two fully-illustrated Wigalois manuscripts known to exist. I argue that the pictorialization of ekphrastic descriptions and their selective placement throughout the respective manuscripts fulfill structural, integrative, and identity-forming functions similar to those of the descriptions themselves. A close examination of both manuscripts reveals at once continuities as well as shifts in thematic emphasis in accordance with the circumstances of production and the intended audience. As an example of
continuity, we can cite that the five ekphrases that have been the focus of this investigation – the magic belt, the stone of virtue, the golden wheel of fortune, Japhite’s tomb, and Larie’s tent – are all recorded in the text of both manuscripts. Yet we see a shift in emphasis as the illuminators have chosen not only different strategies for pictorially representing the various ekphrastic objects, but indeed differ in their choice of which objects from the text to represent in the first place.

I focus my discussion first on the older of the two codices, *Wigalois* manuscript B. In the first part of this section, I demonstrate that there is a striking emphasis on materiality consistent with the numerous ekphrases in the poem itself; the forty-seven miniatures in this codex, for example, are in many cases framed with gold-leaf and focus on the heraldic splendor of the hero and other characters. Indeed, in the accurate pictorial representation of many of the figures’ heraldic devices as described in the text, the illustrator brings the “notional ekphrasis”, the visual image that exists in the mind, out from the text and places it into material reality.277 In the second part of this chapter, I examine a second and equally important aspect of manuscript B: its emphasis on integration. For instance, the manuscript’s unusual presentation of a secular, vernacular text in a format typically reserved for sacred books is analogous to the author’s repeated efforts to integrate Christological elements into the hero’s secular, Arthurian mission. As it reflects the patron’s self-representational envisioning of courtliness, it furthermore speaks to notions of cultural identity.

The next part of this chapter focuses on ekphrasis in the thirty-one illustrations in *Wigalois* manuscript k. After briefly describing the manuscript and its history, I show that on the one hand the artist has chosen to represent fewer of the ekphrastic objects from the text, but that on the other, the objects he does choose to illustrate and their placement throughout

277 See my introductory chapter, pp. 13-14.
the book emphasize a social and interactive element not found in the other manuscript's vision of courtliness. Whereas the emphasis on heraldry and materiality in LTK 537 lends its illustrations a rather static quality, the figures in Donaueschingen 71 are infused with action; they gesture to one another, look directly at one another, and interact with one another in idealized situations. A crucial aspect of this interactive and idealizing element, I claim, is the inclusion of captions that precede each of the illustrations. Consistent with Peter Wagner’s use of the term *iconotextuality*, I demonstrate that with the help of these captions, word and image work in close relationship with each other to provide readers with more complex layers of meaning than the poem or the illustration can supply in isolation. Most important, these captions work together *deictically* and *didactically* with the miniatures to summarize information from the main text and to direct readers toward ideal modes of aristocratic dress and behavior.

Despite the differences that exist between manuscripts B and k, I maintain that ekphrasis provides a basis from which the scribes, illuminators, and the respective patrons of both manuscripts continued to keep the poem vibrant and relevant for their contemporary audiences, and thus helped keep the *Wigalois* material alive for more than six-hundred years. By tracing continuities and divergences in the pictorialization of ekphrastic passages, we learn more about the history of imagination and cognition; comparing these two manuscripts provides us with a deeper understanding of how particular communities ranging from the High to the Late Middle Ages used images and texts to interpret and reinterpret this important poem. I turn first to the older codex, *Wigalois* manuscript B.
II. Heraldry and Integration: Manuscript B

A. Basic Description of the Manuscript

The oldest illuminated *Wigalois* manuscript, known either as manuscript B or by its abbreviated shelf number LTK 537, is also by far the most opulent example of material support for the poem.\textsuperscript{278} The manuscript’s splendor and its emphasis on materiality is the focus of this first part of my discussion, but a brief glimpse at the book’s basic characteristics will help to put this materiality into clearer perspective.

With this codex we have not only precise information about its date of production, but also about the illuminator and the patron. This most lavish of all surviving *Wigalois* manuscripts was completed in 1372 at the Cistercian monastery Amelungsborn for the Duke of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen, Albrecht II (1361-1384), and has been called the only significant German illuminated Arthurian manuscript of the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{279} That this manuscript, as a German codex containing secular literature in the vernacular, is even illuminated at all makes it exceptionally unusual for this time period. Hella Frühmorgen-Voss describes the almost complete dearth of illustrated German secular manuscripts in the fourteenth century, compared with a number of illustrated manuscripts from the thirteenth century and the virtual flood of such manuscripts in the fifteenth.\textsuperscript{280} The scribe who completed the manuscript, Jan von Brunswik, lists his own name on folio 117v, as well as

\textsuperscript{278} On manuscripts as “material supports” for the fluid notion of what constitutes a text in the Middle Ages, see Andrew Taylor. *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.


that of his patron and the date of completion. There is a small portrait of a monk believed to be Jan on the page immediately following, folio 118r. The commonly accepted notion that Jan was also the illuminator has been challenged in the past, but as yet there exists no convincing evidence proving that there was another artist. Whether Jan was in fact the miniaturist or not, in this section I will follow the example of Ingeborg Henderson in attributing all the important executive decisions about the completion of this codex to him.

The manuscript was executed on parchment and is in generally good condition. As stated above, it was commissioned by Duke Albrecht II of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen. Other known owners of the codex are a Count of Mansfeld, a Cyracus Spangenberg until approximately 1570, and by the end of the sixteenth century, around 1670, it had passed into the hands of Eustachius and Alexander Wiltheim in Luxembourg. The codex has been in the Netherlands since the nineteenth century.

The text of the poem is written in two columns per page of Littera gothica textualis script, with a golden decorative initial at the beginning of the text. The number of lines per column on the unilluminated pages varies between twenty-seven and twenty-eight. Within the text there are blue and red initials that extend two lines in length, sometimes with even longer tails and swashes on either the ascending or descending strokes. These alternating initials are not simply visually pleasing, but are in fact used to divide blocks of the poem into thematic units, indicating to the reader that something new is about to happen in the poem.

281 It has been suggested that Jan von Brunswik was not in fact the miniaturist. See Wolfgang Stammler, Wort und Bild. Studien zu den Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Schrifttum und Bildkunst im Mittelalter. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1962. 143-144. See also Victor Curt Habicht, “Zu den Miniaturen der Leidener Wigalois-Handschrift” Cicerone 14 (1922) 471-475.


Through the center of the initial letters of each verse, which are slightly larger than the rest of the letters in the line, there runs a descending red line. This also helps guide the reader through the text, indicating that at the end of each line, one should continue to read down instead of wandering across into the next column. The dialect of the manuscript is Thuringian; considering that the manuscript was produced in Lower Saxony, this most likely indicates the language of the manuscript from which Jan van Brunswik copied the poem. The manuscript contains 117 folios arranged into sixteen gatherings. The leaves are approximately 241 x 170 millimeters each, while the writing space, carefully ruled in black ink, averages 183 x 138 millimeters. The codex was (re-)bound in its smooth leather binding, which is gilt on the back with the inscription Manvscrī, sometime during the eighteenth century.

B. Heraldic Visualization

One of the most distinctive features of LTK 537 is the illuminator’s obvious familiarity with the poem, and the painstaking care with which the artist rendered the visual splendor and heraldic elements from the text into his 47 colorful and gold-trimmed miniatures. I demonstrate in this section that the artist’s familiarity with the Wigalois material and these heraldic elements greatly determine the manuscript’s illustration program.

First, however, I want to be very careful to distinguish between an illustrator’s familiarity with a text and the illustrations’ fidelity to the text. James Rushing has convincingly demonstrated that many book illuminations, as well as other representations of Arthurian material in the visual arts, follow their own sort of narrative and iconographical logic, thereby seriously relativizing the entire debate about a given illustrator’s “fidelity to
the text.” Nonetheless, for Arthurian literature, there was nothing resembling the sort of pre-existing iconographical tradition that influenced the illustration of sacred texts. Compare, for example, Rushing’s statements about the Yvain/Iwein picture cycles:

Indeed, not only can the visual narratives be understood without reference to the texts, they very often must be read independently in order to be understood properly at all. The best reading of the images is never one that relies heavily on the Chrétien/Hartmann text; in several instances, too much knowledge of the text can actually interfere with understanding the images.284

A comparison of the text of Wigalois and the illuminations in LTK 537 quickly reveals, however, that relying on the words in this case does not skew our interpretation of the image so much as it gives us a deeper appreciation of the artist’s sensitivity to the material. In Jan’s mostly half-page illustrations, framed with gold-leaf, we see an emphasis on materiality in keeping with the opening lines of the poem and its reference to itself as a material object, “What good man has opened me?” (Wer hat mich guoter uf getan? v. 1). This is in fact one of the two important Wigalois manuscripts that contain these introductory words; most of the other surviving manuscript redactions omit these self-reflexive verses.285

In LTK 537, there is an intentional reification of the image, and indeed the pictures themselves have become splendid and wondrous objects. The rather flat and stylized figures, as well as the symmetry that characterizes the miniatures, are reminiscent first of textile designs from the period, but this flattening, symbolic stylization, and symmetry are furthermore reminiscent of historic artistic practices in heraldic shield design, and are thus an example of what Haiko Wandhoff has dubbed the “heraldic” visualization strategy.286


285 See chapter two, page 35, note 3.
The strategy is heraldic for two reasons. It first has to do with the text itself: Throughout the tale, Wirnt’s narrator describes the numerous shields and heraldic devices of the characters, an example of the tendency in thirteenth-century vernacular literature to emphasize the plasticity of the object, instead of elaborating on the cosmological picture-narratives found in ancient shield descriptions such as the Shield of Achilles, the most famous ekphrasis in Western literature.²⁸⁷

The visualization strategy in manuscript B is heraldic furthermore because for the illuminator, it is a question of representability. For example, ekphrases like the description of Achilles’ shield contain so much information that attempts to translate the poet’s words into images frequently prove futile; the described object, as James Heffernan writes, “is shielded by the very language that purports to reveal it to us.”²⁸⁸ Using a heraldic visualization strategy in LTK 537, however, yields a different result. In many cases, the shield descriptions in *Wigalois* are so precise that it is easy for the illuminator to make an accurate picture of them. As we shall see, even when the ekphrastic description is so complex that it defies a one-to-one pictorial representation, Jan van Brunswik nonetheless draws from the iconographical storehouse of heraldry in order to synthesize the most important ideas from the ekphrasis and crystallize them into a coherent and “readable” image. In order to best reflect the important identity-forming function of the ekphrastic objects from the text in a two-dimensional pictorial format, such as the golden wheel of fortune that represents the hero’s courtly and moral perfection, the artist intentionally


²⁸⁷ See Wandhoff, “The Shield as Poetic Screen” 56-62.

simplifies the ekphrases and projects the ideals they thematize onto the page in colorful, symmetrical, and eye-catching patterns, as if the parchment were a shield.

The intensely heraldic character of the Leiden illustrations is not only about representing “details such as heraldic devices and costumes that faithfully record contemporary taste”, as Ingeborg Henderson has noted, but in fact goes further to specifically reflect this particular patron’s notions of courtliness and self-representation. The codex was explicitly commissioned by Duke Albrecht, and in the manuscript’s last miniature on folio 118r, we see clear visual references to the patron’s family and to the heraldry of local history [fig. 2]. This is a full-page decoration, framed like most of the manuscript’s other miniatures by a border consisting of intricate quatrefoil patterns. The pictorial space is divided into four quadrants of roughly equal size; the lower two quadrants are separated by the four-leaf pattern, but the upper two are divided by the slim, stoic figure of a noble knight who holds a lance with both hands, pointing upward. In the upper left quadrant is a shield emblazoned with two leopards guardant, one above the other, who face outward toward the viewer. This had been the heraldic device of the Guelfish House of Braunschweig since 1267, and is a clear reference to the familial origins of the patron. This is supported by the scribe’s naming of the patron on the immediately preceding folio: “This book belongs to Duke Albrecht, Lord of Brunswick” (dit bok hort / hertzoghen alberte here tho brunswc folio 117v).

289 Henderson, “Manuscript Illumination” 65.

290 In heraldry, leopards are traditionally distinguished from lions by the fact that they always face out toward the observer. Ottfried Neubecker, Heraldry: Sources, Symbols and Meaning. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976. 112.

The upper right quadrant also contains a shield – or more precisely, unfortunately only the outline of where a shield once was. The manuscript has been vandalized and the shield itself cut out and removed. That it was most likely a Guelfish device is supported nonetheless by the battle helmet that sits above the missing shield; this helmet is crested by the white stallion that to this day is symbolic of Lower Saxony, the Sachsenross. This is not only another clear heraldic reference to the patron and his family, however, but is in fact the earliest recorded representation of the stallion as the helmet crest in all of Guelfish heraldry.  

But how does the illuminator treat the ekphrastic objects that are actually described in the text? How does a heraldic visualization strategy work in these cases? The emphasis on heraldry, and the heraldic pictorialization of ekphrastic descriptions, is clear first in the illustrations’ tendency toward flatness, stylization, and symmetry frequently associated with heraldic shield designs. We see this specifically in the artist’s painstaking effort to record faithfully the heraldic devices of the romance’s main figures as they are described in the poem. One example is the illustration on folio 71v, which depicts Gwigalois’s battle against Karrioz before the gates of Korntin [fig. 3]. As readers expect, Gwigalois’s heraldic wheel is set against a black background, and Karrioz’s shield depicts the head of a man resting atop a sort of pedestal, representing Mohammed sitting on the column as described in the text (Machmet dar âffe saz v. 6572). The other clear indicator that this is in fact Karrioz is the large red ruby that tops his splendid helmet:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{An síñem helme lac grôzer vlîz} \\
\text{Von golde und von gesteine,} \\
\text{Grôz unde kleine;}
\end{align*}
\]

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Daz was mit vlîze geleit dar în
Zaller obrist ein rubîn,
Der was grôzer danne ein ei. (v. 6580-6585)

(On his helmet was grand work in gold and precious stones, great and small; set therein with great care, at the very top, was a ruby that was larger than an egg.)

Another example of this heraldic visualization strategy is the second illustration in the manuscript [fig. 4]. On folio 1v, the artist shows us a festival at King Arthur’s court; seated above are Arthur and Guinevere, around them are guests and servants. The pictorial space is dominated, however, by a great round table, which the artist allows us to see not from the side, but rather from above. On the table’s surface we see dishes and knives that also resemble the spokes of a wheel, and the round object in the center of the table – perhaps a platter? – is reminiscent of the buckle of a shield. There are moreover six knives around the table, which correspond exactly to the six spokes of the wheel of fortune in Gwigalois’s heraldic device (which appears with great frequency throughout the manuscript). This table is thus not simply a “table” or the Round Table, but also represents, with heraldic immediacy, the leitmotif of the poem and the most important symbol associated with the hero, the wheel of fortune.

The depiction of this wheel- or shield-like table refers back to two passages in the text. Remember that at the beginning of the poem, the narrator describes a marvelous, golden wheel of fortune that demonstrates that its owner never goes astray:

Úf des küniges veste
Was daz aller beste
Werc von rôtem golde
Gegozzen, als er wolde,
Ein rat enmitten úf den sal;
Daz gienc úf und zetal.
Dâ wâren bilde gegozzen an,
leigelîchz geschaffnen als ein man.
Hie sigen diu mit dem rade nider,
In the king’s castle was the most splendid work of art, poured of red gold and fashioned according to his wishes: a revolving wheel in the middle of the hall. On it were cast figures of men; as some sank with the wheel, so rose the others. Thus it turned there. It was the wheel of fortune. A priest had formed it, all of red gold, and it signified that its owner never failed at anything, for luck always went with him.

The figures that surround this heraldic table on folio 1v are clearly analogous to the “figures of men” that were cast on Joram’s mechanical wheel of fortune. Remember also that in remembrance of his uncle, Gwigalois later chooses this symbol as his heraldic emblem:

(The bold Sir Gawein dressed him in armor with his own hands. He bound on him a helmet on which turned a golden wheel. The young man had always liked the device, for one went magically up and down in his uncle’s hall. For this reason, he wore the wheel as an ornament, as his heart had led him.)

In fact, later in the text the hero’s heraldic wheel is even confused with a golden round table: “upon his shield was fashioned a golden round table” (an sînem schilte was ein / guldîn tavelrunde / geworht v. 5613). Thus the illuminator links the hero to the ultimate personification of courtly ideals, King Arthur, and this “table” at his court represents accordingly the ingenious combination of two of the most important ideas from the text, the
hero’s courtliness (hövescheit) and the God-given good fortune that always accompanies him (diu sælde).

A final example of this heraldic visualization strategy is on folio 79r [fig. 5]. Here we see an episode from the conclusion of the poem’s third section, when Gwigalois defeats the fearsome, murderous, heathen usurper Roaz in knightly combat. When Gwigalois kills his opponent, Roaz’s wife Japhite dies immediately of a broken heart. In no fewer than ninety-six verses, the narrator then describes this noble heathen’s opulent tomb, a gravesite whose shimmering splendor can hardly be imagined, and whose inscription makes it perfectly clear that Japhite’s extraordinary triuwe, her loyalty and devotion to her husband, demands that she be integrated into the loving fold of Christianity and not sent directly to hell like her husband.

It would be especially difficult to depict the visual splendor of the ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb and the courtliness and triuwe that it thematizes directly in a one-to-one visual representation, much less somehow display the discourses on Christianity and Islam that it evokes, and the artist in fact does not attempt to do so. But here the illustrator has nevertheless found a successful solution. We see the emphasis on heraldry and on heraldic visualization first in the accurate representation of Gwigalois’s and Roaz’s heraldic crests in the lower half of the miniature. We are already familiar with Gwigalois’s crest; here Roaz wears a helmet that matches the description in Wirnt’s poem:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Von golde drûf gemeistert was} \\
\text{Ein tracke als er lebte} \\
\text{Und ob dem helme swebte.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(On top was a dragon fashioned from gold; it was as if it were alive and hovering above the helmet.)
The symmetric composition and immediacy of the presentation also bespeak a heraldic visualization strategy. The quatrefoil patterns in gold leaf surrounding Japhite’s throne lend the image a strongly architectonic aspect, as if this were in fact a glorious, shining tomb, and Japhite’s central placement at the top of the miniature indicates her regal status. The artist’s inclusion of a genre-like detail, the small lap-dog that Japhite holds in her left hand, marks her as a lady of courtly refinement and leisure. Although the artist does not attempt a word-for-word visualization of the tomb in LTK 537, he nonetheless successfully emphasizes the noble heathen Japhite’s exemplary status and courtliness, and places these ideas directly before the reader’s eyes.

C. Integration in Manuscript B

Jan van Brunswik’s pictorial representation of Japhite, so similar to Wirnt’s verbal description of her qualities in the thirteenth-century text, provides an ideal opportunity to examine the idea of integration in LTK 537. I shall return to my discussion of the miniature on folio 79r shortly, but let us first take a step back and examine the two important aspects of integration at work in this manuscript. In one sense of the word “integration”, there is a close integration of word and image in LTK 537 at the most fundamental level, evident in the illustrations’ layout on the page: All except three of the miniatures in the Leiden codex are roughly half-page in size, and are set within the double-columns of text, indeed squarely within the very words of the passages they are meant to illustrate. The high degree to which image and text complement each other in the mise-en-page throughout this manuscript is an important reflection of the artist’s appreciation for the poem’s lively symbiosis of reading or listening to words and imagining objects.
The illustration on folio 47v demonstrates this aspect of text-image integration [fig. 6]. Here Gwigalois follows the spirit of the murdered King Lar, the rightful ruler of Korntin, into Korntin castle. Lar’s spirit does not appear in the bodily form that the king bore during his life, but has assumed instead the shape of a leopard.\(^{293}\) In the poem, Wirnt describes the castle as follows:

Dem tiere kêrter aber nâch
Vür daz hûs ze Korntîn.
An des gezierde was wol schîn,
Daz daz lant rîche was;
Diu mûre glaste alsam ein glas
Lûter unde reine,
Von edelm märmelsteine
Geworht vil meisterlîche.
Ein palas harte rîche
Lac enmitten drinne,
Gemûrt mit grôzem sinne
Von lûtern kristallen
(Daz muose im wol gevallen),
Mit vlîze gewelbet âne dach;
Durch die mûre man wol sach
Allez daz dar inne was;
Wande si was lûter als ein glas;
Daz hûs was erbûwen wol
Und maniger gezierde vol. \(^{(v. 4590-4608)}\)

(He followed the beast to Korntin castle. From its splendor it was clear that the land was rich. The walls glistened like glass, clear and beautiful, and were skillfully built of costly marble. A grand palace lay inside its center, surrounded by walls made with great art of clear crystal – which must have pleased him greatly – and which, with great effort, had been arched over so that there was no roof. Through the walls one could see everything inside, for they were as clear as glass. The castle was well built throughout with many fine ornaments.)

We see here that this half-page image is set directly within the passage of text that it illustrates. The script serves two important purposes in addition to describing the ekphrastic

\(^{293}\) This makes for a close, if perhaps coincidental, connection between the poem and the patron; remember that the leopard had been the heraldic device used by the Guelf family of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen since 1267.
image: first, it leads the reader/viewer’s eye directly from the words into the image itself, from left to right. Second, the block of text becomes part of the image by forming a symmetrical counterbalance to the uppermost section of the picture. To the left, one reads the following words:

Vür daz hûs ze Korntîn.
An des gezierde was wol schîn,
Daz daz lant rîche was;
Diu mûre glaste alsam ein glas
Lûter unde reine,
Von edelm märmelsteine

(...to Korntin Castle. From its splendor it was clear that the land was rich. The walls glistened like glass, clear and beautiful... of costly marble.)

To the right, this block of text is balanced visually by the turret and crenellation of the palace’s great tower. The tower rises out from the framed pictorial space and into the lined space that is elsewhere reserved for the text. The left-to-right, symmetrical layout is repeated in the rest of the illustration as well, so that one can follow and read the image as one might read the text. The king’s leopard-like spirit actually appears to penetrate the surface of the castle walls; this is perhaps a clever way for Jan to represent pictorially the narrator’s claim that whoever beheld the castle could “see everything inside.” To the right lies the castle, glistening “like glass” (alsam ein glas), a multi-tiered structure of sparkling resplendence, covered with intricate patterned blocks that lend its surface the appearance of an exotic, glimmering precious stone. Jan van Brunswik’s effort to match textual splendor with pictorial splendor, indeed to merge image and text into one another as closely as possible on the page, is one important aspect of integration in this manuscript.

In a different sense of the word “integration”, I maintain in this section that the illuminator of manuscript B integrates Christian ideas and iconography into this secular book
in much the same way that Wirnt allows the Arthurian elements of his text to coalesce with its more overtly religious aspects. An examination of LTK 537 shows, in fact, that the integration of the sacred and the secular is evident in nearly every facet of the codex.

For instance, integration in this sense is clear first in the manuscript’s place of origin. LTK 537 was produced at the Cistercian monastery at Amelungsborn during a period of intense artistic activity; art historians have described this activity in the period around 1350 as unusually worldly. ²⁹⁴

The integration of sacred and secular is furthermore evident even in its most basic material aspects. The manuscript’s reputation as an extraordinary example of secular book illumination is based first on the lavish illustrations, and second on the choice of expensive parchment instead of paper, which “contributes substantially to the overall effect of glamour.” ²⁹⁵ Although using parchment for a secular manuscript was still fairly common in the German-speaking countries during the fourteenth century, by the late 1300’s it was increasingly falling out of practice; ²⁹⁶ this, in addition to the obviously expensive illustrations, suggests that the book was intended as a luxury item. J.J.G. Alexander’s 1992 study of Medieval Illuminators and their Methods of Work supports this view: he notes that parchment remained the writing surface of choice for luxury books in Western Europe long after paper had become a more cost-effective alternative beginning in the thirteenth century. ²⁹⁷


²⁹⁵ Henderson, “Manuscript Illumination” 66.

Also unusual for a fourteenth-century secular manuscript in the vernacular is the choice of script used in its execution. *Littera gothica textualis* was a hand that had begun to emerge from the western areas of the German-speaking lands around the middle of the thirteenth century, and was most commonly reserved for the transcription of Latin liturgical texts, Bibles and for important legal documents that demanded the highest possible quality and legibility of writing.\(^{298}\) By the middle of the fourteenth century, when the Leiden *Wigalois* manuscript was completed, this was still predominantly the case, and codices containing secular literature in German were by this time written in the increasingly popular – and quicker to execute – cursive scripts.\(^{299}\) That *textualis* had ceased to realize any further significant stylistic development by the mid-fourteenth century\(^ {300}\) makes the Leiden manuscript all the more unusual, and bespeaks not only the great wealth of the patron Albrecht, who could afford to commission a codex written in such a precise and time-consuming hand, but also a certain traditional, even nostalgic, sentiment.

The idea of Duke Albrecht’s wealth and sense of tradition is reinforced even more strongly when one considers that by the end of the fourteenth century, when book production had become an increasingly compartmentalized activity divided among a series of lay specialists, a codex executed by a single monastic craftsman was somewhat anachronistic.\(^ {301}\) It also reveals important clues about the patron’s, if not also the scribe’s, attitudes toward *Wigalois* as an Arthurian romance. Wirnt’s recurrent emphasis on integrating the ideal


\(^{298}\) Schneider, *Paläographie und Handschriftenkunde* 36-38.

\(^{299}\) Schneider, *Paläographie und Handschriftenkunde* 49.

\(^{300}\) Schneider, *Paläographie und Handschriftenkunde* 49-50.

Arthurian knight with expressly didactic, moralizing Christianity in *Wigalois* lends itself well to receiving such a lavish presentation in codex form, a presentation traditionally reserved for sacred texts, and indicates that the patron believed this romance a particularly worthy example of secular literature.

The integration of religious elements into a secular manuscript is evident furthermore in the selection of which scenes to illustrate. A perusal of the illustration program clearly shows the artist’s (and patron’s) fascination with Gwigalois’s adventures in the otherworldly Kingdom of Korntin – a very palpable version of hell. The very atmosphere in the text is characterized by a noxious, miasmatic fog in which the hero must fight an evil dwarf and confront a magic wheel of swords; only through direct intercession to God is the fog lifted so that the hero can continue his adventures (v. 6539-6910). Roaz, the usurping ruler of Korntin, is not only a heathen, but someone who has made a deal with the devil (v. 3656-3658), and one of the poem’s main themes is the triumph of Christianity over paganism. One also must not forget that when Wirnt composed *Wigalois* in the early thirteenth century, the Crusades were an important part of the political and religious landscape.

In turn, the artist has devoted an unusual amount of pictorial space to the events that take place in Korntin. To make a comparison with the Donaueschingen manuscript, which has nine illustrations depicting episodes in Korntin, the Leiden manuscript has twenty-four. When comparing the number of Korntin illustrations to the number of remaining illustrations, we see the Leiden artist’s fascination with Christian themes even more clearly. The Donaueschingen codex has thirty-one total illustrations, the Leiden manuscript forty-seven; thus, the Leiden artist has devoted more than half of his illustrations to the episodes in the Otherworld, the hell of Korntin.
Gwigalois’s battle against Roaz is the most exciting scene set in Korntin, and another look at the miniature on folio 79r provides further evidence of the integration of religious elements in the illustration program. In the poem, Wirnt tells the audience that twelve maidens proceed before Japhite as she follows her husband to the battle:

Sîn wîp, diu vrouwe Japhîte,
Nâch im mit hôhem muote gie,
Vor ir zwelf mägde, die
Wären sùberlîch genuoc.
Eine kerzen ir iesliciu truoc,
Grôz, gwunden, diu vaste bran.  

(v. 7395-7400)

(His wife, Lady Japhite, followed him with noble bearing, and before her walked twelve maidens, who were lovely enough. Each carried a candle, tall, twisted, and brightly burning.)

This ceremonial procession with twelve maidens shows obvious similarities to the Grail procession in Wolfram’s Parzival, for example (V, 232, 9-233, 30). Although the illuminator Jan has cut the number of attendants in half from twelve to six, the change does nothing to diminish the impression of splendor and of courtly ceremony. More important, the Christian significance of the numbers 12 and 6 was surely no secret to either Wirnt or Jan. To educated medieval minds, at least, the numbers 12 and 6 both carried deeply important symbolic weight. As well as being a factor of 12, 6 was considered to be a perfect number (for example, God had created heaven and earth in six days) while 12 evoked innumerable associations to Christ’s twelve disciples and faith in the Trinity, divided through

302 Compare Rushing on this point, who reports that manuscript illuminators often vary in their adherence to the words of the canonical versions of (written) texts, often including details from the text, but just as often employing strictly visual solutions for the presentation of the information: “More common is the creation of images that do not follow the text in detail but reflect knowledge of the story and careful consideration of how best to narrate certain incidents in the visual medium.” Rushing, Images of Adventure 258.
the four parts of the earth (3 x 4 = 12). As a monk, Jan von Brunswik would certainly have been aware of the significance of these numbers.

Japhite’s central placement at the top of the miniature and her direct frontal gaze is furthermore suggestive of the iconographical tradition of Carolingian and Ottonian ruler portraits, which were in turn derived from portraits of the Four Evangelists and even Christ himself, seated in judgment. This treatment is also reminiscent of contemporary representations of the Virgin Mary, such as the panel painting from circa 1335 – also produced in a Cistercian monastery – known as “Maria als Thron Salomonis”, where the figure of Mary is likewise centrally placed at the top of the image, flanked by a symmetrical configuration of female figures who represent Marian virtues [fig. 7].

As a final example of the vibrant symbiosis of sacred and secular traditions, and what this symbiosis might have meant for the patron who commissioned the Leiden *Wigalois* manuscript, I now return to the illumination on folio 118r [fig. 2]. The strong emphasis on heraldry, on descriptions, and on Arthurian adventure intermingled with Christian ideology that permeates both text and manuscript from beginning to end all reach their culmination in this fascinating miniature. It is an iconographically rich statement about the harmonization of secular and sacred traditions, and about the patron’s ideas concerning courtly identity and self-representation.


I have already discussed the shields and heraldic elements in the upper half of the image, but in this particular aspect of my discussion it is also important to remember that in the New Testament, the shield is the object that St. Paul most closely associates with the idea of Christian faith and the “armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11-16).

The lower right quadrant of this miniature also contains a secular image: A tree stands in the center of a pastoral or a hunting scene. Immediately to the right of the tree is a bird; below this are two hunting dogs, which in their positioning one above the other provide a visual counterbalance and symmetry to the leopards in the upper left. The two dogs face left and are chasing a small rabbit. Seen in the light of courtly self-representation, this miniature tells readers that the commissioning patron is proud of his noble status, that hunting is a proper activity for noble families (as is the enjoyment of romances like the one in this manuscript), and finally, that nobles have the wealth and leisure to commission expensive manuscripts and engage in such activities.306

Religious elements are integrated into the scene in the lower left quadrant; this part of the miniature contains the image of a monk standing at a writing table. This is in all probability a portrait of the scribe himself, Jan von Brunswik. Dressed in his grey and white habit, Jan stands beneath an archway that rests upon two decorated columns, while the page that lies open before him bears the single word TODE. Directly above the writing table hovers a round heliomorphic object that emits golden rays from its center. To the immediate

306 Compare this to James Rushing’s analysis of the Iwein mural cycle at Schmalkalden: “Courtly narration belongs to muoze: the events depicted here do not, but the narrating of them does…the purpose was not so much to identify the patrons and viewers as belonging to the class of heroes who experience such adventures, as to identify them as belonging to the class that tells itself these stories.” Rushing, Images of Adventure 113. See also pages 125-126.
left is a bird, which hovers statically above the writing table and faces right toward another bird in the opposite quadrant.

Similar to the iconography used to portray Japhite and her entourage, Jan’s self-portrait is another direct borrowing from the tradition of sacred book illumination. Author or scribe portraits similar to this had been a familiar part of manuscript illumination since pre-Christian antiquity, and became especially important in the Middle Ages as portraits of the Four Evangelists. The bird hovering above Jan’s writing table particularly evokes the tradition of Evangelist portraits: it reminds readers of the symbolic eagle that traditionally accompanies portraits of St. John the Evangelist.

Like the monk in this miniature, such portraits often depict the Evangelist in question as a scribe sitting or standing beneath a pair of arched columns or some other architectural structure, pen in hand, shown in the self-reflexive act of writing. Thus, this miniature, like similar portraits in sacred texts, thematizes the act of text-making and the creation of manuscripts. Yet while St. John is usually depicted writing the words that begin his section of the New Testament, *in principio erat verbum*, Jan is shown here writing the word *TODE*, a *memento mori* to remind readers not only of death, but perhaps also of the distinction between the eternal truth of the Bible, the sacred book of God, and the more transitory secular fiction contained between the covers of this particular manuscript. This is certainly not to say, however, that the patron Duke Albrecht considers secular literature unworthy; the opulent presentation of a secular romance in this codex demonstrates clearly enough that he holds *Wigalois*, at least, in high esteem. The combination of images in this final miniature shows that the reading of Arthurian romances was an important and worthy part of what it meant to be courtly in late fourteenth-century Brunswick. The assortment of heraldic and
ecclesiastical iconography can provide important clues not only about how Duke Albrecht II might have thought of himself, but also about why he chose to commission such a luxurious manuscript version of *this* particular romance, where in the end the hero Gwigalois’s rule as king “conforms to the highest standards of both courtly and Christian conduct.”

As we shall now see, the highest standards of courtly conduct become of special importance in the second illustrated *Wigalois* manuscript I examine, a codex from the first quarter of the fifteenth century, Codex Donaueschingen 71.

III. Didactic höveseit: Codex Donaueschingen 71

A. Basic Description of the Manuscript

From the very first page of Donaueschingen 71, we notice an important difference to LTK 537: The opening lines in the Donaueschingen manuscript are not “what good man has opened me?” (*wer hat mich guoter uf getan?* v. 1), but instead “whosoever seeks fame and loves loyalty and honor follows good counsel, that will much improve him” (*Wer nach eren sinne / Truwe und ere mynne / Der volget güter lere / Daz furdert in vil sere* v. 20-24). These lines appear just slightly later in Wirnt’s prologue. Although on the one hand this might simply be attributable to the source manuscript from which the scribe copied the text, it does suggest nevertheless that the emphasis of the story has less to do with materiality and imagining objects than with self-improvement and living up to a high courtly standard. The illustration program in Donaueschingen 71, as I discuss in the following sections of this chapter, bears this thought out; the shift in thematic emphasis is important because this manuscript demonstrates how ekphrastic objects and visuality played a role in reinterpreting

the *Wigalois* material and keeping it alive for a new audience approximately two-hundred years after courtly audiences first enjoyed the poem.

Consistent with this different opening passage, a completely different visualization strategy determines the illustration program of our second *Wigalois* manuscript, Codex Donaueschingen 71 or manuscript k. This manuscript differs from LTK 537 in a number of important aspects, but as I demonstrate in the following discussion, the most notable difference is its inclusion of captions that precede each of the images. These captions raise questions about *iconotextuality*, which Peter Wagner has described as the presence of “an artifact in which the verbal and the visual signs mingle to produce rhetoric that depends on the co-presence of words and images.”

The captions also serve as an aid to the reading process by dividing the work into “chapters” and summarizing and contextualizing information from the main text. Most important, these captions, in cooperation with the illustrations, serve a *deictic* and *didactic* function in the manuscript: they present the figures from the romance in exemplary courtly modes of dress and behavior, and thus serve as an ideal model for courtly readers to follow. Before examining these issues, however, I shall first describe the manuscript’s basic characteristics and review what is known about its provenance.

This codex is executed on paper instead of parchment, and is overall in good condition. As far as current research has been able to determine from watermark analysis, as well as from stylistic and iconographical comparisons, it was produced between 1415 and

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1421 in the area of the Upper Rhine, possibly in the famous workshop of Diebolt Lauber in Hagenau, but more likely in the so-called Workshop of 1418.309

There are 220 folios arranged in nineteen gatherings; the size of each leaf is 270 x 205 millimeters (thus slightly larger than LTK 537), and the writing space measures 185 x 85 millimeters. The manuscript was given new pagination in the twentieth century. The text is written in a single unruled column; the line count varies between twenty-six and thirty-one lines of text per page. It is written in a consistent and fairly sweeping Bastarda script, typical of the majority of handwritten codices in the vernacular during the early fifteenth century.310 A red line extends vertically through the center of the initial of each line. There are chapter headings and initials extending over two lines in red. The dialect is Alsatian; this is important when considering the book’s intended audience, as it clearly demonstrates that it was adapted to suit the reading tastes of a local buyer in Strassburg or thereabouts. The scribe is unknown. This was apparently a deliberate choice; at the end of the manuscript, the scribe writes in imperfect Latin: “The name of him who wrote me is unknown” (qui me scribebat nomen suum nesciebat).

Not much is known about its previous owners, either. Unlike a substantial number of the manuscripts from the Workshop of 1418, the Donaueschingen Wigalois does not include any depictions of historically attested heraldic devices that would point to a particular Strassburg family or patron.311 Rudolf Kautzsch suggested in 1895 that it had been part of a


310 Schneider, *Paläographie und Handschriftenkunde* 66.

private royal library in “southern Germany” before making its way into the Fürstlich-
Fürstenbergische Hofbibliothek in Donaueschingen during the nineteenth century. It
remained in Donaueschingen until the Hofbibliothek’s manuscript holdings were sold to the
German State of Baden-Württemberg in the spring of 1993 for 48 million DM. This
collection was then divided between the state libraries in Karlsruhe and Stuttgart; the
Donaueschingen Wigalois supposedly went to Karlsruhe, home of the Badische
Landesbibliothek.

Sometime between 1993 and 2003, however, the manuscript went missing. It was
rumored to have been sold around 1990 to a private book collector in the United States, well
before the collection was acquired by the State of Baden-Württemberg. In its discussion of
Baden-Württemberg’s acquisition and subsequent redistribution of the collection, the official
statement from the Badische Landesbibliothek reads: “The manuscript, which comes from
the famous atelier of Diebold Lauber in Hagenau, seems just in the past few years to have
become lost. In research literature from the nineteen-eighties it was still mentioned as
property of the Donaueschingen library.” This statement, however, does not represent the
most current knowledge about the manuscript’s whereabouts. In November of 2003,
Donaueschingen 71 was put up for sale at auction in Basel by the Hamburg rare book dealer

312 Rudolf Kautzsch. “Diebolt Lauber und seine Werkstatt in Hagenau” Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen 12
(1895). 78.

hss.html>>

314 “Die aus dem bekannten Atelier Diebold Laubers in Hagenau stammende Handschrift scheint erst vor
wenigen Jahren abhanden gekommen zu sein. In der Forschungsliteratur der achtziger Jahre wird sie noch als
karlsruhe.de/blb/blbhtml/besondere-bestaende/handschriften/don-hss.html#N_7_>>.
Jörn Günther for a price of 2.4 million Euros; as far as I have been able to determine, it was not sold and is still in the possession of Jörn Günther.315

At first glance, and especially compared to LTK 537, Donaueschingen 71 does not at all appear to be a luxury item. Consider, for example, the use of paper instead of parchment, the easier and quicker to execute Bastarda script instead of the more time-consuming Littera gothica textualis, and the by comparison rather rough ink-wash drawings; one could cite any of these characteristics as evidence that the Donaueschingen Wigalois is a considerably more utilitarian manuscript and was never intended as a luxurious status symbol.

Nevertheless, there are a number of factors that indicate that precisely the opposite is true. First, as Lieselotte Saurma-Jeltsch demonstrates in her exhaustive art-historical study of the manuscripts from the Workshop of 1418 and the Diebolt Lauber atelier, during the first quarter of the fifteenth century, paper was indeed a cheaper alternative to parchment, but it was still by no means inexpensive or easy to acquire. Not until the 1460’s, in fact, were there enough paper mills in northern Europe to bring about the sort of drastic reduction in the price of paper to make the book trade a truly large-scale and profitable commercial enterprise.316 The layout of the text in a single column demonstrates furthermore that the scribe and illuminator who completed this manuscript were not so concerned with making the most economical use of the writing surface, but instead with presenting the customer with an easy to read text in a relatively luxurious format. Finally, an illustrated codex, as opposed to an unillustrated example, indicates that the work was considered important enough to engage the extra labor of an illuminator, and would thus necessarily raise the cost of the book. Thus,

316 Saurma-Jeltsch, Spätformen mittelalterlicher Buchherstellung 6-7.
already at this level we see continuities as well as differences in comparison with LTK 537; I turn now to a discussion of one of the most important differences, the inclusion of captions before each illustration.

**B. The Role of the Captions**

In the Donaueschingen *Wigalois* manuscript, we can no longer speak of a heraldic visualization strategy, but rather of a *deictic-didactic* depiction of the ekphrastic passages from the text. In contrast to the Leiden manuscript, the miniatures in Donaueschingen 71 are no longer precious, beautiful objects in themselves, but instead fulfill a structuring and teaching function. Each illustration in Donaueschingen 71 is preceded by a caption of varying length; in this section I first discuss the deictic and didactic function these captions serve, and next move to a discussion of the captions’ iconotextual aspects. From there I examine how the illustrations, together with the captions, help to steer the act of reading and to provide the text with an interpretation different from the emphasis on materiality, heraldry and integration in LTK 537.

The Greek word *deiknyai* means “to show” or “to prove.” The captions and illustrations in Donaueschingen 71 serve a deictic function by showing readers first where the important divisions in the text are, and second who the figures in the illustrations are, what they are doing, and by implication, why this is important.

First the captions: In many instances, the *titulus* does not stand directly above the illustration, but falls at the bottom of the immediately preceding page. Furthermore, the content of the illustration frequently adheres more closely to the words of the caption than to the verse romance itself. This is the first evidence of the captions’ deictic function: They are
intended not only to help reveal the meaning of the image, but also function as a set of instructions for the illustrator, to show the artist what to depict. It should be mentioned that, in his considerably broader discussion of instructions for illuminators, J.J.G. Alexander advises caution and reminds us that such captions may or may not have served as “instructions”; often, for example, the actual instructions were penciled in for the artist and were either erased, drawn and painted over, or cut from the edges of the manuscript before the codex in question assumed its final form. Alexander notes that is important to ascertain, where possible, the sequential processes in the making of a manuscript on a case-by-case basis.\textsuperscript{317} Although Lieselotte Saurma-Jeltsch does not mention the Donaueschingen Wigalois specifically in this context, she nonetheless concludes generally that the \textit{tituli} in manuscripts from the Workshop of 1418 were also used as instructions for the illuminators.\textsuperscript{318}

That the captions in Donaueschingen 71 most likely did in fact double as a set of artist’s guidelines is supported not only by their length and the amount of detail included in many of them, but also by the frequent use of either the imperative or a modal auxiliary verb such as “should” in the caption. Compare, for example, the caption at the bottom of page 80, which precedes an image on page 81 of Gwigalois fighting another knight on horseback:

\begin{quote}
  hie ritet uz einer burge ein riter verbunden mit eime helm mit sinen knechten und sol sin sper undergeslagen sin und sol her wigeliß ouch also riten gegen ime und durch den riter stechen
\end{quote}

(Here a knight rides out from a fortress, equipped with a helmet and accompanied by his pages; his lance should be set under his arm, poised for attack, and Sir Gwigalois should also thus ride out against him and pierce through the knight)

\textsuperscript{317} See Alexander, \textit{Medieval Illuminators} 52-71.

\textsuperscript{318} Saurma-Jeltsch, \textit{Spätformen mittelalterlicher Buchherstellung} 38.
The captions’ function as a set of instructions for the artists has been discussed in general terms in other scholarship on the manuscripts from the Workshop of 1418, most notably in that of Saurma-Jeltsch. But the captions that precede each of the illustrations in Donaueschingen 71 also raise questions about iconotextuality, which no scholarship has explored in connection with this manuscript before. Peter Wagner has defined iconotextuality in his recent ekphrasis research as “the presence of an artifact in which the verbal and the visual signs mingle to produce rhetoric that depends on the co-presence of words and images”, or also as “a mingling of pictures and words in one object or within a given framework.”

Can we in fact describe the relationships between the captions, illustrations, and main text of the Donaueschingen Wigalois as iconotextual? I maintain that we can; the amount of “interpenetration of texts and images” that takes place between the main text, the captions and the illustrations place the illustrative program well within the theoretical boundaries that Wagner establishes in his work.

For example, the captions first act in a manner similar to an actual ekphrasis; they temporarily interrupt the flow of the narrative and force the audience to “see” and reflect on what is important in the story. Similar to the micro-narrative function of ekphrasis I discussed in greater detail in chapter two, the captions allow readers to scan back and revisit earlier themes and events from the text while simultaneously revealing clues about important information yet to come.


320 Wagner, Reading Iconotexts 12.

321 See chapter two, pp. 71-73.
In addition, these captions are similar to the objects and eighteenth-century prints that Wagner investigates in his work in the following respects: On the one hand, the captions in Donaueschingen 71 are texts in their own right, a fact underscored by the red ink that sets them apart from the main text. Yet they also act as iconotexts because semantically, they cannot be divorced either from the main text or from the images they are meant to illustrate. Like the iconotexts that Wagner examines in his study, the images and the captions and the main text are all three deeply interconnected and force readers to “juxtapose, and indeed bring into play, our knowledge of images and texts” in order to interpret the verbal and visual message. Taken as singular semantic units, the main text, caption or illustration provide the reader only fragmentary information; considered in unison, the interpenetration of text and image serves to sharpen the reader’s focus, to clarify and place limits on how one reads the picture, and ultimately to guide the act of interpretation.

The iconotextual function of the captions is further evident in the intertextual, or extratextual, references we find in them. In many instances in Donaueschingen 71, the information in the captions and illustrations calls upon readers to draw intertextual and extratextual references from other (con-)texts common to the intended audience that help to steer the reader’s interpretation of the word-and-image relationships in their entirety. As an example of this, consider the two illustrations on pages 10 and 15 (discussed in greater detail in the next section), which depict the Queen Ginover looking down from the walls of a castle [fig. 8 and 9]. This not only refers to the two specific scenes from the poem, in which the queen does in fact conduct her business with the strange knight Joram while peering down at him from the top of Caridoel castle, but also makes an extratextual reference to a common

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322 Wagner, Reading Iconotexts 11.
and popular literary topos, the numerous scenes from other works in Middle High German literature in which courtly ladies gaze down from the heights upon the knights and surrounding scenery below, such as from the *Nibelungenlied*, when Brünhild and her maidens observe the arrival of Gunther and Siegfried in Iceland (VII, 389-395). Similar to the way courtly audiences would have appreciated the intertextual aspects of ekphrasis, such as that of Japhite’s tomb (discussed in chapter four), this sort of visual intertextuality depends on, and manipulates, the interpenetration of images and texts and invites readers and viewers to draw connections to other commonly known images and texts, and to thus place them within a broader courtly context.

Finally, in many instances in Donaueschingen 71, the text in the caption refers either to details from the text not depicted in the illustration, or vice-versa. On the surface this appears to confuse the relationship between image and text, but I maintain that it is instead consistent with the didactic function of caption and illustration, and with the tendency to place emphasis on one’s place as a member of aristocratic society. We see an example of this on page 223 of the codex [fig. 10], where the caption states that it is a miller who shows the Lady Beleare where Gwigalois lies unconscious and who negotiates with her over the hero’s armor; in the poem, it is not a miller, but a *fisher*. For the overall message of the illustration and caption, however, this is unimportant; important instead is the juxtaposition of idealized, aristocratic figures with someone of lower social standing. Regardless of whether the audience sees a miller or a fisher, the miller-figure’s dress is typical of the lower orders and would have been familiar to the audience from outside the context of the poem, and courtly readers would recognize him as *dörperlich* all the same.323

323 Compare this miller, for example, with the figure of a miller from the Bedford Book of Hours, produced in France around 1423 (British Museum, Ms. Add. 18850). About this and similar figures, Mary G. Houston
C. Deictic and Didactic Visualization

We have seen so far that the captions play a demonstrative and teaching role in the Donaueschingen Wigalois, but what about the images themselves? How do ekphrasis and its pictorialization function here? Do the images also help to provide the manuscript with structure? How do they help the audience to determine what are the most important ideas to be gleaned from Wigalois? In cooperation with the red captions that precede each image, the illustrations in Donaueschingen 71 also divide the text into shorter, digestible chapters and thus fulfill an important structural function similar to the structuring role played by the ekphrastic descriptions themselves. I show furthermore in this section that the illustrations also serve as deictic and didactic guides throughout the manuscript; the captions point out exactly where and what the figures are doing, while the images show how they are doing it. In fact, the pictures show the audiences how they themselves ought to do things; as Lieselotte Saurma-Jeltsch writes in her study of the Lauber workshop, we can justifiably speak of “illuminated manuscripts as a means of propaganda.”324 By representing the poem’s main characters in a series of exemplary, courtly situations, the images in the Donaueschingen Wigalois prescribe ideal courtly conduct and seek to legitimate the values of the noble target audience. The captions and illustrations work together to reinterpret the already two-hundred year-old material for an aristocratic audience that, in its various conflicts with the bourgeoisie in Strassburg during the years around 1418-1419, was very concerned with asserting its noble status and legitimating its own courtly ideals.325

writes: “These Frenchmen are not clothed very differently from their fellows in England or Germany…except that the German sower and scythesman wear more pointed shoes.” Mary G. Houston. Medieval Costume in England and France: The 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries. New York: Dover, 1996. 171-172.

324 Saurma-Jeltsch, Spätformen mittelalterlicher Buchherstellung 48-51.

325 See Saurma-Jeltsch, Spätformen mittelalterlicher Buchherstellung 42.
For our discussion of the interplay between ekphrastic objects and the illustration program in Donaueschingen 71, it is first important to note that, taken as a whole, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the manuscripts produced in the Workshop of 1418 is that precise details from the text are very seldom rendered visually. One of the most important functions of ekphrastic objects in Donaueschingen 71, then, is that they often provide the only indication that the rather interchangeable images are in fact illustrations of the *Wigalois* material and not of some other courtly romance. This is particularly true of the heraldic golden wheel, for example; in illustrations depicting knightly combat, such as that found on page 81, without the visual aid of this device, it would be impossible to tell one adversary from the other [fig. 11].

How the captions and illustrations divide and structure the manuscript also provides key information as to how readers were expected to react to and interpret the text: For example, in most cases the illustrations and their respective captions are placed either in the middle or immediately at the end of a scene from the text in which the figures are either greeting one another or departing from one another. In contrast to the emphasis in LTK 537 on the Christian themes in *Wigalois* and the hero’s adventures in the Kingdom of Korntin, the pictorial emphasis in Donaueschingen 71 overwhelmingly suggests that the intended audience placed an especially high value on proper courtly rituals of greeting and leave-taking, on proper decorum and modes of interaction with one’s social peers, and that these were important indicators of status and good breeding. Of the manuscript’s thirty-one illustrations, in fact, twenty-three depict scenes in which the figures are engaged in some sort

of interactive ritual such as greeting, leave-taking, conducting a wedding ceremony, investing a knight, or crowning a king.

The illustrator’s treatment of the ekphrastic magic belt in particular offers evidence of how the images in Donaueschingen 71 present the audience with an ideal and thus function as a set of deictic and didactic guidelines, and how these images call attention to the social and interactive aspects of courtly identity instead of making associations with heraldry [fig. 8 and 9]. Early in the poem, the narrator describes a beautiful belt, adorned with gold and wondrous jewels, that bestows amazing abilities and ideal courtly virtues to whomever puts it on (v. 321-342). On page 10, we see an unknown knight (his helmet and visor cover his face, and the knight has not been named yet in the main text) on horseback as he presents a crowned, courtly lady – dressed appropriately for her social standing – with a belt [fig. 8].

We find concrete details about these two figures in the caption that begins at the bottom of the preceding page; this caption serves the deictic and didactic function common to all the illustrations. It first provides a description of the place and the figures:

hie stot ein schöne burg und ein küniginne uff der burg...

(Here stands a beautiful castle, and also a queen at the top of the castle…)

The word hie functions deictically and points out where the scene is taking place. The description then becomes even more concrete:

...in einem sal und sicht herab.

(…in a hall, and she looks down.)

Next follow concrete details about the knight’s actions:

do hebet ein ritter uff einem stech rosse und het ein sper in der hant dar an hanget ein güldin gürtel bereite er der künigin.
(There [or then] a knight sets out upon a tournament stallion; he has a lance in his hand, upon which hangs a golden belt that he gives to the queen.)

Especially important in this part of the caption are the words *do* ("there" or "then") and *dar an* ("upon this" or "upon which"); as in the first part, these words guide readers and point out exactly where the scene is set and what the figures are doing. The caption thus not only provides concrete information about the content of the image, but is furthermore deictic in that it provides readers with an orienting verbal and visual aid that summarizes the main events in the immediately preceding chapter of text.

Shortly after this illustration, the magic belt is depicted a second time in the manuscript, and here we see especially clearly how ekphrastic objects and the alteration of specific details serve to emphasize proper courtly conduct and dress rather than materiality and heraldry [fig. 9]. On page 15, the illustration shows a crowned male figure riding a horse and gesturing toward the lady, also wearing a crown, looking down from the castle walls at the right of the image. At the bottom right sits the magic belt. The caption informs readers that the man is in fact Gawein, and the lady is the queen, who has thrown the belt down to Gawein from her perch.

Also her gawin uff einem rosse saß mit rotem verdecket und het ein krone mit einem rubin und ritet zu einer festen do wirfft ime ein künigin einen güldin gürtel her abe

(How Sir Gawein sat upon a horse decked in red and has a crown with a ruby and rides to a fortress; then a queen throws down a golden belt to him)

This illustration is placed immediately after the scene in the poem when Gawein has advised Queen Ginover to refuse Joram and to return his magic belt to him (v. 343-383), a scene in which the main characters from the story are, in fact, greatly concerned about questions of proper courtly etiquette, and where, furthermore, the questions revolve
specifically around this marvelous ekphrastic object, the magic belt.\textsuperscript{327} Most revealing in respect to the deictic-didactic visualization of ekphrastic objects, however, are the relationships between caption, image, and main text. In this particular case, the illustration adheres precisely to the words of the caption, but caption and illustration have included details that are nowhere to be found in the scene between Gawein and Ginover in the main text; Gawein is not mounted on a horse, for example, and no mention is made of his clothing.

Instead, the caption and illustration depict details from the scene that immediately follows, when Ginover returns the belt to Joram (v. 390-430). In this scene, Ginover does in fact cast the belt down from the castle wall, and Joram rides a horse covered with a red saddlecloth. The conflation of Gawein’s name with Joram’s image, however, is not so important in this illustration as the artist’s representation of two figures in exemplary courtly dress and situations. In medieval iconography, for example, red and gold often indicated hierarchy and regal status.\textsuperscript{328} To this end, the artist has in fact altered two important details from the main text in order to mark the figures’ aristocratic status in no uncertain terms: Here the Gawein/Joram figure is draped in red, not the horse, and whereas the main text states that it is Joram’s \textit{heraldic shield} that displays a golden crown set with a ruby, here the heraldic crown has become a real crown that rests on Gawein’s/Joram’s head. In this illustration we thus see that the placement of image and caption within the text, and the decisions about what to depict, do not present readers with the symmetrical and balanced immediacy of the heraldic visualization strategy in LTK 537 (as seen, for example, in the depiction of the

\textsuperscript{327} See chapter three, pp. 99-100.

Round Table/wheel of fortune), but focus instead on the interaction between ideal courtly figures in exemplary aristocratic costume.

A deictic-didactic approach is also evident in the representation of another ekphrastic object, this time the illustration depicting the stone of virtue. On his way to King Arthur’s court, the young hero Gwigalois finds a multi-colored stone beneath a linden tree, and since he is tired, he sits down on it to rest. This causes quite a stir among Arthur’s knights, for this magic stone will allow no one except King Arthur himself to even approach it, much less sit down. By sitting on the stone, Gwigalois unwittingly proves that he is of the noblest possible character and a worthy member of the Arthurian circle (v. 1477-1529).

The stone of virtue is depicted visually on page 58 [fig. 12], but once again the artist’s emphasis rests not so much on the object itself as on the actions and exemplary gestures of the figures. In this as well as the following illustration on page 61 [fig. 13], we see that Gwigalois possesses a pure spirit and a noble heart by looking at his gestures, his hands, and the astounded reaction of the Arthurian court. Yet we also see that the concretization of some details depends more on the words of the caption than on the words of the poem itself. The caption tells readers that the young hero is sitting on a stone, but gives no information at all about the stone’s appearance:

Hie haffte her wigelig sin pferde an ein linden ast vor künig artuß bürg und saz nider uff einen stein

(Here Sir Gwigalois tied his horse to the branch of a linden tree in front of King Arthur’s castle and sat down upon a stone)

Furthermore, the illustrator here obviously follows the rather vague directions of the caption and not the ekphrasis in the main body of text, which reads:

Gevieret und niht sinwel
Striemen röt und gel

214
Giengen dar durch etteswâ;
Daz ander teil daz was blâ,
Lûter als ein spiegelglas. (v. 1481-1485)

(Squared-off and not round, with red and yellow streaks here and there; the other part of it was blue, clearer than a mirror.)

Indeed, the image here actually contradicts the information given in the verses: In direct opposition to the words of the poem, the stone that the hero in this manuscript sits upon is sinewel, that is “rounded” or “oval”, and not “squared off”, or gevieret. Yet there is a didactic purpose to this discrepancy. Although this is clearly inconsistent with the ekphrasis from the main text, it is absolutely consistent with the deictic and didactic visualization strategy: To show the audience that the hero is of superior moral bearing and is worthy of being accepted into the Arthurian circle, it is altogether fitting that the ekphrastic object that he sits upon should resemble a throne and not a stone.

A final example of the differences in the respective visualization strategies in LTK 537 and Donaueschingen 71 is the latter manuscript’s treatment of the Japhite episodes. Like Jan van Brunswik, the illuminator from the Workshop of 1418 also does not attempt to render the opulent description of Japhite’s tomb directly into an illustration. But whereas the illustrator from Amelungsborn nonetheless succeeded in providing readers with the impression of shimmering architectural grandeur, the artist in the Donaueschingen Wigalois chooses to emphasize Japhite’s triuwe and her courtliness by focusing attention instead on the emotional aspects of the scene [fig. 14]. Directly above the illustration on page 298, the caption reads:

Also frouwe Japhite iren man Roaß in iren arm nam also in her wigeliß erslagen und wie sie vor leide neben ime tot gelag

(How Lady Japhite took her husband Roaz in her arms and how Sir Gwigalois slew him, and how, out of grief, she lay down dead next to him)
In telling contrast to Japhite’s direct frontal gaze in LTK 537, the illustration here depicts the Lady Japhite’s extreme compassion and sadness at her husband’s death; in a posture reminiscent of the poignant *pieta* iconography associated with Mary and the dead Christ, here the “noble heathen” does not look directly at the reader viewing the illustration, but instead looks forlorn as she holds her dead husband’s body and looks into his eyes. Gwigalois appears to the right, holding his sword in one hand and gesturing with the other toward the sad figures of Japhite and Roaz.

IV. Conclusion

In *Wigalois* manuscripts B and k, we have seen that ekphrastic objects were important within the greater context of the poem itself – LTK 537 and Donaueschingen 71 both contain all of the ekphrases that I have discussed in the previous chapters: the magic belt, the stone of virtue, the golden wheel, Japhite’s tomb, and Larie’s tent. We have also seen that these objects, and the strategies that illuminators employed for translating ekphrastic descriptions into concrete images, play a pivotal role in determining the respective manuscript’s presentation, and ultimately influence the audience’s interpretation of the work. Are material culture, lavish objects, and heraldry the most important aspects of *Wigalois*? Should readers pay special attention to the integration of Christian and secular themes in the poem? Or are proper conduct and appearance and social interaction the most important facets of Wirnt’s text? Is the emphasis on courtly demeanor the good counsel that will much improve those who seek fame and love loyalty and honor? As I have shown in this chapter, the answers to these questions greatly depend on which manuscript redaction of *Wigalois* we read. Regardless of how the respective scribes and illuminators approached the text, however,
consistent throughout is the role that seeing and imagining play, not only in the completion of a codex, but indeed in the construction of courtliness.

In the following and final chapter, I move from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries into the early sixteenth, where I examine the relationship between ekphrasis and the illustration program in an early print version of the *Wigalois* material, the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade* from 1519. Here I pursue the question, “What happens when the ekphrastic descriptions are missing?” The answer, as we shall see, demonstrates that although the evocative descriptions from the thirteenth-century text are gone, “understanding the book” still has everything to do with picturing objects.
Chapter 6  
Restructuring Narrative in the 1519 Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade

Poetry, like every art form, defines its essence by leaving out what it views as nonessential. 
Paul J. Stern^329

I. Introduction

The ekphrasis of Japhite’s Tomb is the most striking and complex of all the descriptions in Wigalois. As we have seen, this ekphrasis continues for ninety-six lines and guides the mind’s eye over richly jeweled surfaces, over magnificently colored stonework, over wall-paintings trimmed with gold. It guides the audience through the words of an ornately carved epitaph in French and Arabic that thematizes the steadfast loyalty and Christian-like qualities of the deceased. The ekphrasis also comments on listening and reading practices among the courtly audiences for whom Wigalois was composed in the thirteenth century.

In the sixteenth-century prose adaptation of Wigalois known as Wigoleis vom Rade, the narrator also mentions this tomb. Although Japhite’s name has been changed in this new redaction to Larie, the main events are still intact: the devoted wife of the heathen Roaß looks on as her husband fights a desperate battle against the hero Wigoleis. As in the verse romance, when Roaß is killed, his lady dies immediately afterward of a broken heart. The audience then learns that after tending to the wounds of the battle-weary Wigoleis, the Count Adam and an entourage of ladies

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... namen die frawen Larieyt die durch groß lieb und staete treüe ir leben verloren hat und brachten die zuo dem grab woelliches grab mit soelicher grosser reycheyt von edlem gesteyne unnd gold gezieret das wunder davon zu sagen waer. (folio 42r) ▶

(…took the Lady Larie, who lost her life out of great love and steadfast loyalty, and brought her to the grave, which was adorned with such great riches and precious stones that it would be wondrous to tell about it.)

Important is the redactor’s use of the subjunctive “would be”, for in the next sentence he informs the audience that he in fact will not tell them about it at all.

das laß ich durch kürtze underwegen. dann soellich groß kost und reychtumb bey uns gantz ungeleublich sinnd. auch an soellicher sag nit mer vil ligtt denn das die hystori dardurch gelengert würde. (folio 42r)

(I shall leave that aside for the sake of brevity, for such costly things and such wealth are, to us, completely unbelievable. Besides, not much more is important about such a tale, for our story would be lengthened by it.)

Indeed, one of the most striking differences between the 1519 prose edition of Wigoleis vom Rade and its thirteenth-century verse predecessor Wigalois is this noticeable lack of ekphrastic descriptions. Whereas Wirnt von Gravenberg used ekphrasis to structure his work and to guide the mind’s eye in order to form a clear picture of the ideal courtly and Christian knight, the prose redactor of Wigoleis vom Rade drastically abbreviates these descriptions or simply omits them outright. As a result, the narrative and illustrative programs of this story also changed. Previous scholarship, such as the work of Helmut Melzer, Alois Brandstetter, and Albrecht Classen, respectively, has convincingly demonstrated that the narrative emphasis in the prose Wigoleis is on the uninterrupted, linear flow of the action itself, and on the presentation of believable events that fit into the bounds

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of an increasingly rational worldview. Yet no Wigoleis vom Rade scholarship has discussed the important role that the woodcut illustrations play in reconstructing these narrative strategies.

In this chapter, I explore the following question: What is the relationship between word, image, and the restructuring of narrative in the printed 1519 Strassburg redaction of the Wigalois material known as Wigoleis vom Rade? It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to attempt to list or examine all of the numerous differences that exist between Wirnt’s verse romance and the prose Volksbuch redactions. Instead, I focus on the prose redactor’s

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331 See Alois Brandstetter, Prosaauflösung: Studien zur Rezeption der höfischen Epik im frühneuhochdeutschen Prosaroman. Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1971. Brandstetter examines the prose redactions of three high medieval romances, namely Tristram und Isalde (first printing 1484), after Eilhart von Öberg’s romance from ca. 1170; Wilhelm von Österreich (first printing 1481) after Johannes von Würzburg’s romance of the same title, completed in 1314; and the focus of the present investigation, Wigoleis vom Rade (first printing 1493). Brandstetter pays special attention to the abbreviation or omission of a number of stylistic and rhetorical techniques, and comes to the conclusion that these shifts reflect the redactors’ desire to concentrate more “effectively” on the uninterrupted flow of narrative events. He argues that these changes are not necessarily synonymous with a reduction in literary quality, that the amplificatory rhetoric in Wirnt’s Wigalois is not better than the abbreviated style in the prose version, only different, and claims instead that the end result of the prose redactions is a more consistent, streamlined, and “objective” narrative. See also Helmut Melzer, Trivialisierungstendenzen im Volksbuch. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1972. Melzer’s study uses the term “trivialization”, often thought of in connection to more modern literature, and applies the model of the trivialization process to the prose redactions of the same three romances that Brandstetter examines. His conclusions about the prose novels are, however, considerably more negative than Brandstetter’s. In the systematic reduction that Melzer sees taking place at the levels of style, language, and content, he ultimately argues that the figures, especially the hero, become little more than pale, empty patterns instead of full-fledged characters, and that “the defining characteristics of this redaction in the Volksbücher do not rest, however, in a creative re-forming of the material derived from new experience or a stylistic will of one’s own” (“Die bestimmenden Merkmale der Bearbeitung liegen in den Volksbüchern jedoch nicht in einer schöpferischen Umgestaltung des Stoffes aus neuem Erleben und eigenem Stilwillen” 139). For a thorough, yet more general overview of the entire genre of late-medieval German prose romances or Volksbücher, as well as their reception in the nineteenth century, see Albrecht Classen, The German Volksbuch: A Critical History of a Late-Medieval Genre. Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.

treatment of ekphrastic descriptions and, where applicable, the illustrations of these described objects. My investigation furthermore does not seek to judge the aesthetic quality or merit of one version of the text in favor of another (scholars have frequently considered the Volksbücher to be inferior counterparts to their verse predecessors), but instead examines the Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade on its own terms and within the historical and cultural context that produced it. By focusing on the most important ekphrastic passages from the verse romance, or on the illustrations that have replaced them, I demonstrate that although the ekphrastic descriptions are gone, the strong emphasis on visuality that marks the thirteenth-century verse romance is not missing from the sixteenth-century prose edition. Instead, this visual information has been lifted from the text and put into the thirty-five woodcut illustrations.

Moreover, I show that the illustrations in this work are not, as Helmut Melzer has written, “durchaus dekorativ.” Instead, they play an important role in restructuring the narrative. I argue that in conjunction with their accompanying captions, the illustrations reflect the increased importance of reading and literacy among Wigoleis vom Rade’s

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333 Although the term Volksbuch has its problems, for my discussion I have chosen to follow the example of Albrecht Classen in using it in favor of such terms as Prosaroman, Prosa-historie, volkstämmlicher Ritterroman or even Kaufmannsbuch. See Classen, The German Volksbuch 6-12, also 75-81.

334 The two monographs mentioned above (note 3) handle these differences in far greater detail than can be the focus of this study. For a painstaking investigation of the differences at a grammatical, syntactical, and rhetorical level, see Brandstetter, Prosauflösung. For an examination of the reductive, “trivial” aspects of the new Wigoleis material, see Helmut Melzer, Trivialisierungstendenzen im Volksbuch. While Wigalois is not the exclusive focus of either study, it does receive very thorough attention from both authors. The Wigalois material is, however, the exclusive focus of an important investigation into the role of the fantastic and the wondrous in Jutta Emings Funktionswandel des Wunderbaren: Studien zum Bel Inconnu, zum Wigalois und zum Wigoleis vom Rade. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1999.

335 See as a counterexample Brandstetter, who discusses this tradition in detail, and argues against the notion that the prose redactors’ rhetorical alterations automatically imply a work of poorer quality than the verse source material. Brandstetter, Prosauflösung 161-166.

336 Melzer, ed. Wigalois. Deutsche Volksbücher in Faksimiledrucken. 3.
sixteenth-century urban audiences. Specifically, they reflect these audiences’ particular, idealized understanding of courtliness, or rather, for a certain segment of readers, the upper bourgeoisie’s attempts to emulate and identify with noble ways of life. In the Strassburg Wigoleis, the illustrations and captions assume the narrative, structural, descriptive and prescriptive functions once found in the now absent ekphrases, acting on the one hand as narrative markers throughout the text, but on the other hand steering readers and viewers toward a closer identification with the hero. Through an examination of the ekphrastic descriptions, the captions and the illustrations, this chapter delineates what role the changes in word and image relationships played in the newer audiences’ reception of the Wigalois material. Conversely, we may also speculate to what extent the new demands of an increasingly literate and diversified audience helped determine the prose version’s presentation.

In the following chapter, I discuss first the basic layout and physical characteristics of the Strassburg Wigoleis, then move on to an examination of how the text was reconceived to accommodate a different reading public; in this section, I engage with questions about the prose redaction’s literary quality, about who the audiences actually were, and how the increased importance of reading and literacy is reflected in the text. Continuing with a discussion of the relationships between visuality and narrative structure, I examine the important role that empirical, eyewitness experience plays in the restructuring of narrative, then discuss the narrative guiding and linking functions that the illustrations fulfill. I show where the illustrations contribute to the process of narrative streamlining and simplification, and conclude with an examination of the illustrations’ descriptive and prescriptive roles –
how they contribute to the envisioning of a courtly identity among the sixteenth-century audience in Strassburg.

II. The Strassburg Wigoleis and its Layout

Before we can begin our examination of the reconceived relationship between word and image in the Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade, a few words are necessary about the printed edition’s layout and the general characteristics of the re-shaped Wigalois material. The Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade was printed in 1519 in the workshop of Johannes Knoblauch, and was based directly on the first print version of Wigoleis vom Rade, a folio edition executed in Augsburg in 1493. The Strassburg edition was printed in quarto format and consists of fifty-five folio leaves. The text is the work of an anonymous redactor. It is in prose, not verse, and is divided into short, easily digestible segments by

337 Folio 55r: “Gedruckt zuo Strassburg durch Johannem knoblauch / nach der geburt Christi M.D. xix.” Knoblauch (also spelled Knoblouch) was active from 1500 to 1527, and was important in the Strassburg printing community because he was not only a printer, but also a publisher, and often had books printed by other workshops at his cost. See Paul Kristeller, Die Strassburger Bücher-Illustration im XV. und im Anfange des XVI. Jahrhunderts. Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1888. Reprint Nieuwkoop: DeGraaf, 1966. 12-14. Furthermore, as Jutta Eming points out in her chapter about Wigoleis vom Rade, relying on the 1519 edition of Wigoleis has become an accepted practice, primarily because this edition is more easily accessible and is more complete than the 1493 Augsburg printing. See Eming, Funktionswandel 246, footnote 36. As an appendix to his Prosauflösung, Brandstetter provides a transcription of the 1493 printing; I have examined this transcription and confirm the general scholarly conclusion that the text of the 1519 printing is in fact more complete than that of 1493, and that it follows its predecessor in all important aspects.

338 Melzer, ed. Wigalois. Deutsche Volksbücher in Faksimiledrucken 2-3. The Augsburg edition was printed by Hans Schönsperger; it has twenty-nine folio leaves, four of which are blank, and is accompanied by 28 woodcuts of approximately 63 x 63 millimeters. Furthermore, three pages are missing from the Augsburg edition, the title-page and pages aII and aVIII. Melzer lists other differences as being, for example, the Strassburg version’s modernization of some “older courtly expressions” (“ältere höfische Ausdrücke”) and its more unified appearance (“In ihrem äußeren Erscheinungsbild ist die hier vorliegende Ausgabe allerdings übersichtlicher und eindrucksvoller gestaltet”). See also Paul Heitz and Fr. Ritter, Versuch einer Zusammenstellung der deutschen Volksbücher des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts nebst deren späteren Ausgaben und Literatur. Strassburg: Verlagsbuchhandlung J.H. Ed. Heitz, 1924. 208-210. The only known copy of the first Augsburg printing is now housed in Munich at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

339 Although it is not known in this specific case why the redactor of Wigoleis vom Rade chose to remain anonymous, there are a number of theories as to why so many of the authors of the German Volksbücher are
the inclusion of illustrations and their accompanying *tituli*. There are thirty-five of these black-and-white woodcut illustrations, approximately a third of a page in size, each surrounded by a simple black frame. In twenty-five instances the image precedes the body of text it is meant to illustrate, while in the remaining ten it follows immediately after. Six of the woodcuts are used twice.\(^{340}\) Each woodcut is preceded by a *titulus* that in most cases explains the content of the picture in greater detail; some illustrations, however, do not correspond to the text either in the *titulus* or in the prose text of the tale itself.\(^{341}\) In one of these instances, for example, the illustration actually depicts an episode from the verse romance that the prose redactor omits, when Gwigalois has a love-letter sent to Larie via Count Moral (*Wigalois* v. 8641-8781). These sorts of discrepancies and overlaps are not uncommon in the prose version. In nine instances, the *titulus* does not stand directly above the illustration, but falls instead at the bottom of the page immediately preceding the woodcut image.\(^{342}\) The printer has distributed the illustrations evenly throughout the text, with a woodcut appearing approximately every two to three pages. A decorated initial, also in black and white, follows every illustration and marks a new “chapter”, except the woodcut at the bottom of folio 49v, where the text continues on 50r without decoration.

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unknown: Among these are the author’s fear of censorship or imprisonment; the author’s desire to appear humble before, and yet still compete with, the large body of Latin literature being printed in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; or because the authors were women, who wished to avoid having their work rejected simply on the basis of their sex. See Classen, *The German Volksbuch* 49-52.

\(^{340}\) Melzer incorrectly counts only five; there are six. Folios 1r and 2r; 13r and 19r; 23r and 47r; 27r and 36r; 28r and 35r; 42v and 51r.

\(^{341}\) For example folio 19r, where the battle between Wigoleis and the knight Schaffilun takes place in front of a castle instead of a tent; on 38r, where the hero presents the Count Adam with a letter, which is never mentioned in either the main text or in the *titulus* (the hero does, however, hand Count Moral such a letter in the verse romance); or on 39r, where the battle between Wigoleis and the murderous Roß is witnessed by a lone male servant and not by the “frauwen und jungfrauwen” mentioned in the *titulus*.

\(^{342}\) Folios 15r, 21v, 22v, 25r, 34v, 37v, 42r, 48r, and 50v.
III. A Reconceived Text for a New Audience

A. A Question of Literary Quality?

How do the word and image relationships in the Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade reflect a new audience? How had audiences’ expectations and modes of reception changed since Wigalois was composed in the thirteenth century? As with other courtly romances that survived into the Early Modern period and beyond, such as Wilhelm von Österreich or the Tristan material, Wirnt’s poetry gave way to prose. In the reconceived Wigalois material, the predominant role that visuality and ekphrastic descriptions played in the original verse romance gave way to an increasingly linear, straightforward, action-oriented narrative structure that in most cases omitted “superfluous” or even “boring” descriptions of objects.343 As a result, the illustrative program for Wigalois/Wigoleis also changed. Important information, ideas and descriptions that appealed to the mind’s eye, once contained in the text, now appeared almost exclusively in the prose version’s woodcut illustrations.

The absence of description is part of an intentional program of adapting the tale of Wigalois in order to appeal to the changing demands of a more diverse, no longer exclusively aristocratic audience. One way of approaching the matter (and one of the more positive scholarly assessments of the changes from poetry to prose) comes from Alois Brandstetter, who sees the prose version as a reaction to the older version of the tale and as a highly selective, well-thought-out adaptation of the material to suit the needs of these changing audiences. In his study of three prose retellings of older courtly romances,344 Brandstetter

343 See for example Classen, The German Volksbuch 30-35.

344 Namely, Tristrant und Isalde (first printing 1484), after Eilhart von Oberge’s romance from ca. 1170; Wilhelm von Österreich (first printing 1481) after Johannes von Würzburg’s romance of the same title, completed in 1314; and the focus of the present investigation, Wigoleis vom Rade (first printing 1493). Brandstetter, Prosauflösung. (See also note 3 above).
suggests that the redactors saw the works of their epic precursors as raw material to be re-fashioned as Hartmann or Wolfram had done with the works of Chrétien in the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{345}

In another work on the Volksbücher, Helmut Melzer identifies the prose redactors’ systematic reduction of their poetic source material at the levels of content, style, and language. He cites the intentional simplification of the narrative, the abbreviation of longer descriptive passages, and the “stiffening” of the main characters into stenciled, stereotypical figures in order to facilitate the audience’s identification with the hero (Vereinfachung, Verkürzung, Erstarrung).\textsuperscript{346} Although I agree with Melzer that these three characteristics or processes are plain to see, I am not concerned here with his notion of the “trivialization” of the material; in this regard, I adhere to Brandstetter’s claim that the prose Wigoleis vom Rade is a well planned and carefully executed adaptation of the Wigalois story. Indeed, if one considers the care with which the prose redactor altered the material to suit the specific needs and tastes of sixteenth-century readers, Melzer’s all too negative interpretation of trivialization is inaccurate, if one understands “trivialization” to be synonymous with a reduction in literary merit.\textsuperscript{347} As Albrecht Classen points out in his study:

Stylistic analyses…confirm the impression of a high literary standard in the Volksbücher. It is not the mere factuality of the account which interests authors and their readers, but the reduction of redundant information and the concentration on the action, not to speak of the high quality of the language. The emphasis on chivalric accomplishments shifted to more universally appealing topics; that is, the individual’s role in society and subsequent interaction with the environment. Consonant with this, the Volksbücher offered an emotional spectrum that was previously lacking. Instead of idealistic concepts and thoughts,

\textsuperscript{345} Brandstetter, Prosauflösung 21.

\textsuperscript{346} Melzer, Trivialisierungstendenzen, 18-23.

\textsuperscript{347} Or as Alois Brandstetter writes: “Das Ergebnis einer Vereinfachung braucht aber nicht unbedingt ‘schlecht’ zu sein, es kann beispielsweise auch ‘schlicht’ sein.” Brandstetter, Prosauflösung 137.
these prose texts focus on feelings, sensations, experiences, and actions of the chief characters.\textsuperscript{348}

How, then, does the language and literary standard in the Strassburg \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade} compare to this statement? In the first dissertation devoted to the \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade} redactions, written in 1910, Otto Weidenmüller speaks of the stylistic and rhetorical alterations and concludes that “omissions due to a lack of understanding of the source text do not appear.”\textsuperscript{349} In the prologue to the \textit{Wigoleis} text itself, the redactor claims “not to completely understand the finer points of Latin”, and that his (or her) German follows neither the rules of the poets nor of German authors who do know Latin.\textsuperscript{350} Yet consider this statement from another angle: The redactor also does not claim complete ignorance of Latin, and the plea to readers to forgive the “poor common speech”\textsuperscript{351} in which the tale is now being presented has the unmistakably familiar ring of the highly conventional modesty formulae inherited from the literature of centuries past.\textsuperscript{352} Consider also the redactor’s tendency to replace older courtly terms with newer ones: for example, \textit{thyost} is replaced with \textit{ritt} or \textit{kampf}, \textit{werlichis} replaced with \textit{stoltz}, \textit{hochgeteuert} becomes \textit{hochberümpt}, and

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\textsuperscript{348} Classen, \textit{The German Volksbuch} 31.
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\textsuperscript{350} “…wie wol ich mich des lateins in sunderheit nit gentzlich verstee / noch der kostlichen gesetzen teütsch nach dem latein / noch nach dem sitten der Poeten…” Folio 2v.
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\textsuperscript{351} “nach schlechter gemeiner rede.” Folio 2v.
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\textsuperscript{352} The long tradition in European literature of affected modesty dates back to pre-Christian times. Ernst Robert Curtius writes: “In his exordium it behooved the orator to put his hearers in a favorable, attentive, and tractable state of mind. How do this? First, through a modest presence. But one has to draw attention to this modesty oneself. Thus it becomes affected.” A recurrent theme in these modesty formulae is one’s rude and unpolished speech, the same sort of “schlechte gemeine rede” we read about in the prologue to \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade}. Even such a refined orator and writer as Tacitus would have his audiences believe, for example, that his \textit{Agricola} was written “in artless and unschooled language.” See Ernst Robert Curtius, \textit{European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages}. Trans. Willard Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953. Seventh printing 1990. 83-85.
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*ellsreich* becomes *erentreich*. This tailoring the text to suit the current reading tastes does not point to a reduction in artistic or literary value, but indicates rather that the redactor, like the printer-publisher Johannes Knoblauch, was in fact quite literate and knew exactly how to appeal to the contemporary tastes of sixteenth-century urban audiences. As John Flood writes in a recent article about the late medieval book market:

> The sheer range of ideas contained in books meant that the printer, but above all the publisher and bookseller, needed a certain degree of education that went beyond what most purveyors of commodities required. The printer-publisher needed linguistic skills, above all Latin…and the publisher-bookseller had to possess the requisite sound judgment for selecting books for their quality and interest. Successful publishers needed to be aware of existing intellectual currents and have a keen sense of likely future developments.

**B. Different Audiences**

Who, then, were the audiences to whom the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade* appealed? One enormous difficulty in determining precisely who the readers of *Volksbücher* like *Wigoleis vom Rade* were lies in the confusion among scholars over what exactly the term *Volk* means. In the prologue to *Wigoleis*, however, the prose text’s anonymous author provides at least one clue by claiming to have undertaken the work at the repeated request of “noble and other persons, both men and women.” These “other persons” imply a reading audience not exclusively composed of the aristocracy, but of other social classes as well.

353 See Weidenmüller, *Das Volksbuch von Wigoleis vom Rade* 7.


356 *Wigoleis vom Rade*. “Durch etlich edel und auch ander personen / mann und frawen...” Folio 2r.
This is not to say that the aristocracy was no longer interested in courtly romances like *Wigalois*; on the contrary, “in Germany, and probably elsewhere too, the sixteenth-century nobility consistently attempted to improve their image and delighted in finding corroboration for their self-perception in these prose novels.”

In addition, as scholars such as Classen or Melzer have shown, many of these other readers came from among the city burghers, and later comprised an even broader readership that included, to some extent, merchants and craftsmen. Another clue as to who comprised the audience of the Strassburg *Wigoleis* lies in the size and cost of its printed format: Knoblauch’s edition from 1519 was printed in quarto, and was thus neither so costly as a folio edition (most of the *Volksbücher* were printed in folio) nor so inexpensive as an octavo. Thus, although the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade* was not the most expensive book that one could buy, its cost was still prohibitive to the lowest socio-economic strata. Also telling is that all but two of the woodcut illustrations were obviously made expressly for this edition; by 1519, the unity of pictorial sequences in illustrated books was not the general rule. This reveals one on hand that the specially commissioned illustrations would have raised the cost.

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359 According to Melzer, of all the 269 known *Volksbücher* that appeared before 1550, 154 were in folio format, 96 in quarto, and only 19 in octavo, the least expensive. Melzer, *Trivialisierungstendenzen*, 174. For comparatively similar prices of the related genre of the *Volkskalender*, see Francis Brévart, “The German Volkskalender of the Fifteenth Century” *Speculum* 63, 2: 312-342. Brévart demonstrates that the prices for these items were usually only within reach of the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie. Brévart 335.

360 The third woodcut (folio 3r), which is meant to depict King Arthur at court, was taken from a 1499 edition of *Kunig salomon* printed in Strassburg by Matthias Hupffuff; woodcut number seven (folio 8v) shows Wigoleis training in the art of swordsmanship and comes from *Das buoch der geschücht des grossen Alexanders*, printed in 1503 by Bartholomaeus Kistler (uff Grieneck), also in Strassburg. All the other woodcuts were commissioned specifically for this particular edition *Wigoleis vom Rade*. See Kristeller, *Die Strassburger Bücher-Illustration* 77-127.
of the book, but also shows just how popular the story of *Wigalois/Wigoleis* actually was, since Knoblauch was willing to undertake the financial risks of illustrating, printing, and publishing *Wigoleis vom Rade* in what was then a relatively uncertain book market.\(^{361}\)

Furthermore, as Melzer’s thorough discussion of the educational background of various socio-economic groups in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Germany makes clear, a solid foundation in unhindered reading and writing in the vernacular was taken for granted by the upper stratum of city burghers, and was a necessity for economic survival among the more highly skilled craftsmen, but we cannot assume that it was anything but sporadic among the lower-skilled craftsmen, journeymen and other workers.\(^{362}\) Thus, the idea of a readership that reached very far beyond the classes that shared the most in common with the aristocracy – the upper strata of patrician city burghers and merchants – is hardly tenable. Erich Kleinschmidt, who has written extensively on the role of literature in city life in early modern Alsace, Switzerland, and southwestern Germany, notes that “access to the courtly texts of high-medieval provenience in the newly formulated narrative garb of prose was, for the most part, only possible for a small upper stratum, whose orientation to the noble lifestyle cannot be overlooked, even in, and especially in, the cities.”\(^{363}\) We can conclude, at

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\(^{361}\) See John Flood: “One really fundamental change brought about by printing concerned the relation of the product to the consumer. Though bibles, breviaries, and missals were often printed for a specific market (a bulk order for a particular diocese, for instance), seldom were individual books printed for the sole use of a specific customer...Printing was essentially a speculative enterprise. The identity of the reader, the end-user, now became an unknown factor, which made estimating print-runs and publishing printed books a hazardous enterprise. The printer found himself faced with the conundrum of how to take advantage of the low marginal cost of each additional copy produced without being left with unsaleable, unwanted merchandise.” Flood, “Printed Books as a Commercial Commodity” 141. For the common practice of printers using the same series of woodcuts for whatever editions seemed suitable, see Lilli Fischel, *Bilderfolgen im frühen Buchdruck. Studien zur Inkunabel-Illustration in Ulm und Strassburg*. Konstanz and Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1963. 10-11.


\(^{363}\) “Der Zugang zu den höfischen Texten hochmittelalterlicher Provenienz im neuformulierten, prosaischen Erzählgewande war im 15. Jahrhundert meist nur einer kleinen Oberschicht möglich, deren Orientierung an
any rate, that Wigoleis vom Rade enjoyed a broader general audience than the earliest versions of the Wigalois material did.

C. Reading and Literacy

Especially important to the new conception and transformation of the Wigalois material is that it also reflects an emphasis on reading and literacy among its intended audiences. This literary aspect is crucial to the sixteenth-century urban audience’s envisioning of what it means to be courtly and noble, as it reflects the bourgeoisie’s attempts to place itself on a more equal footing with the nobility through education, the so-called “nobility of the pen.” Throughout the period during which Wigoleis vom Rade appeared, there was an ever-increasing tendency in the cities to equate knighthood with learning and literacy, and as literacy increased, heredity and material wealth gradually became less and less the sole factors determining who achieved positions of status.

Where is this emphasis on reading apparent in the Strassburg Wigoleis? It is evident first in the printer Knoblauch’s choice of typeface, textura. Although textura or textualis scripts were extremely time-consuming for scribes during earlier centuries, they were nevertheless long considered the preferable scripts in expensive manuscripts and codices because of their relative clarity, uniformity and beauty. Textura thus became a preferred


Kleinschmidt, “Literatur und städtische Gemeinschaft”, 75.
typeface among printers, not just because the printed page mimicked the look of costly handwritten codices, but above all because it was easy to read. This is especially true when compared to the quickly executed cursive Bastarda scripts that had become the standard for vernacular manuscripts such as Codex Donaueschingen 71 and others produced either in the Lauber workshop or nearby.

The emphasis on reading and literacy is also clear, however, from the material itself. One such example concerns the education of the hero: In the verse romance, young Gwigalois receives the best knightly education possible, learning all the chivalric arts before setting off in search of his father:

Aller han de rîter spil
Lêrt en die rîter vil:
Buhurdieren unde stechen,
Diu starken sper zerbrechen,
Schirmen unde schiezen. (v. 1254-1258)

(Many knights taught him all sorts of chivalrous games: how to ride the bohor and to joust, how to shatter strong lances, how to parry blows with his shield, and how to shoot.)

In Wigoleis vom Rade, however, the boy first learns to read and write; only after he has mastered these skills is he taught the art of swordplay:

Und da er nuton von den brüstlin entwenet warde und anhuobe zuo wachsen / leret man in lesen und schreiben und auch anders / das dann solicher iugent gebüret. Darnach leret man in was zuo der ritterschaft und anderer behendikeit gehoert. (fol. 9r)

(And since he had been weaned and had begun to grow, he was taught reading and writing and other things appropriate for such a youth. After that, he was taught those things that belong to knighthood, and other skills.)

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We thus see the redactor draw a clear parallel here between knighthood and scholarship. Especially important to the discourses on visuality in *Wigalois/Wigoleis* is that the increased societal value placed on reading and writing is also manifest in the illustrations: two of the woodcuts, on folios 38r and 45r, depict the hero exchanging letters and notes with other figures from the story. In the Leiden *Wigalois* manuscript (LTK 537), there is a miniature that depicts a monk at his writing desk, but there are no illustrations that thematize writing among the laity, and similar illustrations depicting letters or writing do not appear at all in Donaueschingen Codex 71.

This is not to assume, however, that the audience for *Wigoleis vom Rade* consisted exclusively of those who could read and write fluently. In various studies of medieval reading and listening practices, D. H. Green has attuned scholars to the many variations on what actually constituted “literate” and “illiterate” in the Middle Ages, and thus to the different performance situations in which audiences of widely varying reading and writing skills encountered works of literature. As Green has shown, literature was not only read privately by a single reader, but indeed was far more often either performed and received in “intermediate modes”, that is, recited from memory by a skilled performer, performed with the help of written cues, or read aloud to an audience from a prepared text.\(^{368}\) Green focuses primarily on the thirteenth century, but even in the early sixteenth century, reading was still very much a communal and community-building activity, and it was not uncommon for one person to read a book aloud to a group of friends or family members; this was naturally because of varying reading skills on one hand, but it also had very much to do with the

deictic and prescriptive function of literature among the community of recipients. Here, too, the layout of the edition and the inclusion of illustrations reveal something about the expected literacy levels among its target audiences and the way these audiences might have read the book: That the illustrations were intended as narrative guides is clear when one notes that the overwhelming majority of these early books printed in the German vernacular were illustrated, while books published in Latin by the same printers were not. Johannes Knoblauch, who printed and published the Strassburg *Wigoleis*, for example, devoted his professional efforts between 1500 and 1527 primarily to editions of Latin literature, most of which were unillustrated; one account lists the number of Latin volumes from Knoblauch at 200 and the number of German ones at 70.

This inclusion of illustrations in the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade* thus indicates that visuality was still a vital factor in sixteenth-century audiences’ reception of vernacular literature, yet the omission of the highly verbal descriptions so important to the thirteenth-century text makes it equally clear that the role of the visual in the text was changing. I turn now to the question of why these ekphrastic descriptions no longer appear in the text, and later address how the illustrations in the Strassburg *Wigoleis* supplement or replace the visuality of the missing ekphrases.

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IV. Visuality, Structure and Narrative in Wigoleis vom Rade

A. Eyewitnessing and a New Attitude toward Description

How exactly did the prose redactor of the Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade alter the source material? Where do abbreviation and simplification, or reaction and adaptation occur? More specifically, where do these changes appear in the language and the pictures, in the descriptions and illustrations of the ekphrastic objects that played such a vital role in the verse romance Wigalois?

In order to appeal to a broader reading public, the Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade is in prose, or as the narrator calls it, “grobes teütsch”,372 and is divided into short, easily digestible segments by the illustrations and their accompanying captions. These divisions thus serve a structural role similar to the structuring function of ekphrastic descriptions in the verse romance. Furthermore, by inserting a woodcut into the text every two to three pages, the printer establishes a rhythm for reading. The pace of this rhythm is quick. Throughout the tale, the redactor frequently shifts from the imperfect tense to the present indicative, lending this version an element of immediacy and urgency that intensifies the strict focus on the action, pushes the tale forward and seems to leave no time for lengthy digressions or descriptions.

The descriptions of shields, clothing, structures and surfaces found everywhere in the thirteenth-century text of Wigalois are thus nowhere to be seen in Wigoleis vom Rade. As the abbreviation or outright omission of lengthy descriptive passages is also typical of other German Volksbücher in general, this leads to the conclusion that these highly visual,

372 Wigoleis vom Rade, folio 2v.
ekphrastic descriptions fall out of use in the popular literature of the sixteenth century, even
if they are an important part of the respective source texts. Why?

An important key to understanding the changed relationship between word and image
in the prose Wigoleis, especially the omission of important ekphrases, is the concept of
Erfahrung or Augenschein, of witnessing and verifying events with one’s own eyes. In one
investigation of literary strategies in the prose novels and Volksbücher of the fifteenth and
sixteenth centuries, Jan-Dirk Müller notes that

What was ‘believed’ should also be ‘provable.’ Efforts at verification were
numerous. The traditional standard of proof with a written (and where possible
Latin) source, or pointing in general to the almighty power of God when
confronted with particularly incredible objects was, for the most part, no longer
acceptable by itself...The intensive use of the topos points to a new interest in a
reality of experience that one has ‘seen for oneself’ or ‘experienced for oneself.’

Indeed, this literary desire to verify what one has read by comparing it to one’s own
experience appears at the very beginning of Wigoleis vom Rade. We see this already in the
work’s title: Ein gar schöne liepliche und kurtzweilige History Von dem Edelen herren
Wigoleis vom Rade. The words history, historey or historie in the title and throughout the
narrative demonstrate an intended contrast between what one has merely heard or read about
and empirical experience. The Wigoleis redactor, like numerous other authors of German
prose Volksbücher, seeks to claim authority for the work by appropriating the mode of
historiography, also traditionally written in prose.

373 “Was ‘geglaubt’ wurde, soll ‘nachprüfbar’ sein. Die Verifikationsbemühungen sind vielvältig. Der
herkömmliche Wahrheitsbeweis mit der schriftlichen (evtl. lateinischen) Quelle oder der allgemeine Hinweis
auf Gottes Allmacht bei besonders unglaubwürdigen Gegenständen reichen allein meist nicht aus...Die intensive
Verwendung des Topos...weist auf ein neues Interesse an einer ‘selbst gesehenen’, ‘er-farenen’
Erfahrungswirklichkeit.” Jan-Dirk Müller, “Volksbuch/Prosaroman im 15./16. Jahrhundert – Perspektiven der
Forschung.” Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur, 1. Sonderheft. Tübingen:
Niemeyer Verlag. 1985. 66.
Indeed, the opening sentences of the Strassburg Wigoleis tell the readers how important eyewitness experience is. Immediately following the prologue, the actual story begins with the following words:

Man sagt in manigen historien von dem hochgepreißten mylten künig Artus / von Britannia / wie gar herlich unnd miltiglich er gelebt und hoff gehalten habe / mit den aller teüristen rittern / so in der selben zeit lebten / umb deß willen sich künig / fürsten / und manig werder helde uff eruober / zuo erforschen und selbs besichen / ob künig Artus und sein hochberuempte geselschafft der Tafelrunde / pillich so hoch zuorienen waeren oder nicht. (folio 3r)

(It is said in many histories of the highly praised and magnanimous King Arthur of Britain how grandly and magnificently he lived and held court, with the noblest of knights who lived at the same time. For this reason, kings, princes and many other worthy heroes began to investigate and see for themselves whether King Arthur and his renowned company of the Round Table were truly so worthy of such high praise or not.)

These introductory words are in fact emblematic of the intertwined discourses that appear throughout the text: We see here the intricate interplay between oral storytelling and written texts and historiography, or between trusting one’s ears versus one’s eyes. The Arthurian court is presented on one hand as a primarily literary instance, as something that carries the weight of some authority because it is written about in texts (in manigen historien), yet because so many kings, princes, and other worthy figures have only heard or read about it through what others have told (man sagt), they need to verify the “histories” they have read about by investigating the matter and seeing the truth for themselves (zuo erforschen und selbs besichen). These lines are thus not only self-reflexive reminders to the audience about the established popularity of Arthurian romances, but also suggest that sixteenth-century Strassburg audiences wanted the story of Wigoleis laid out for them in pictures as well as words. The interplay of these discourses on hearing, reading and seeing is

furthermore evident in a number of the illustrations. In one example, the illustration on folio 6v [fig. 15] depicts the figures of Gabon and King Floreys (Joram in the verse romance) looking at each other, engaged in conversation about the wheel of fortune that stands before them. The caption above this illustration tells us, however, that the king has led Gabon into the palace in order to see its beautiful decorations (*da fuort in der künig zeschawen das schloß und palast die mit mangerlaey kostlichkeit und hüpscheit gezieret waren*). For recipients of Arthurian legends both inside and outside the text, seeing is believing.

A further example of the importance of eyewitness experience is seen in the text and illustration of Wigoleis on the stone of virtue, on folio 10r [fig. 16]. In keeping with the rational tone that underscores the work in general, this description mentions nothing of the stone’s color or sparkling, reflective qualities, but instead immediately provides a logical explanation for why the hero sat down on it: in order to take a rest. Yet the redactor has not completely purged the entire passage of everything visual. In a telling contrast to the verse romance’s emphasis on narrating, Wigoleis’s sitting on the stone in the prose version becomes an opportunity to demonstrate the increased emphasis on eyewitness seeing. Instead of having just a single knight see the youth sitting on the stone and then run to tell King Arthur and the other nobles about it, the prose redactor has instead adjusted the scene so that there is more than one witness. We read that a number of nobles see the wondrous act with their own eyes, and are thus themselves eyewitnesses to the event. As they lounge about near the castle windows, the nobles take turns showing one another the strange boy sitting on the stone:

375 *Wigalois* v. 1521-1544.
Nuon waren etlich ritter und frauwen uff dem schloß in den vensteren / ligen und sahen do den iüngling auff dem stein sitzen. Durch verwundern / zeyget eyner dem andern dar zuo sehen wer diser tugendthafft iüngling sein moechte... (folio 9v)

(Now a number of knights and ladies were lying down in the castle windows and saw the lad sitting on the stone. In amazement, one shows the other, in order to see who this virtuous young man might be.)

The illustration that follows on folio 10v furthermore allows readers and listeners to see the events themselves, thus making them eyewitnesses, too. This reliance on seeing in order to confirm the truth of what one has heard or read thus helps to explain the different approach to presenting the visual and the verbal in the prose version, and why much of the visual information that the verse romance contained in words has been transferred to the illustrations. One example of this is the layout of the book and the more frequent and consistent distribution of illustrations throughout the text; readers are only allowed to progress between two and three pages of text before the printer provides the next woodcut image. Seeing the story laid out in pictures before one’s own eyes lends an element of factuality that a description does not necessarily provide. Seeing an event for oneself confirms its empirical “truth”, while an event recounted, by contrast, must be verified. It also adds finality, however, and places limits on the imagination and directs the audience to a particular understanding of the story.

Why did the redactor of the prose Wigoleis vom Rade abbreviate or omit so many of the descriptions of objects? One possible path toward explaining the lack of ekphrastic descriptions lies open for us if we examine first what is in fact described in the prose text. A much-cited term in previous scholarship on Wigoleis vom Rade is the “distancing” from the wondrous and the fantastic, but Jutta Eming has convincingly demonstrated that this is not
entirely accurate. In fact, as Eming notes, nowhere does the word *wunder* appear more frequently than in the prose version of the *Wigalois* material.\(^{376}\)

In *Wigoleis vom Rade*, the lengthiest descriptions are not of wondrous *objects*, but instead of fantastic or hellish creatures such as dragons or beastly women. The prose redactor is thus fascinated with the fantastic and the wondrous, but it cannot be overemphasized that this fascination serves a different purpose than it did in the verse romance. Important here is the critical tone of these lengthier descriptions. Brandstetter correctly points out that the prose descriptions, when even present at all, tend to ignore or greatly reduce the laudatory aspects and to emphasize instead the vituperative, critical ones.\(^{377}\) Whereas the thirteenth-century text uses ekphrastic descriptions to draw the audience’s attention to particularly beautiful or positive examples of clothing, architecture, or heraldry (and thus, in most cases, to positive modes of courtly, aristocratic conduct), the prose redactor provides elements of the fantastic with predominantly negative connotations. The *Wigoleis* redactor’s use of description is thus a decidedly different mode from that of the medieval manuscripts. One example of this in *Wigoleis vom Rade* occurs when the hero fights against the dragon Pfetan.\(^{378}\) The narrator describes the encounter as follows:

Er ritte nicht lang / er hoeret die baum so in dem wald waren sere laut erkrachen und ernidervallen. Er ritte dem gedoene nach / unnd kame gerichtes auff des wurmes spore. Als er den ersahe / gesegnet er sich offt mit dem zeychen des heiligen creützes / unnd het groß verwunderen / das gott der herr sollich grausam ungeheür creatur auff erden hette lassen werden. Es was ein sollich ungeschickt grausam thier / das ich durch wunder ein teil seiner gestalte hie sagen muoß. Sein haupte was on massen groß unnd auch zuo mal ungestalt / mit schwarzem ungeschlaffnem har / dar auff einen kampp als ein han / aber on massen groß und

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\(^{376}\) Eming, *Funktionswandel* 270.

\(^{377}\) Brandstetter, *Prosaauflösung* 91.

\(^{378}\) The same passage is found in *Wigalois*, v. 5028-5075.
hohe / sein schnabel bloß wol einer klaffter lanck und einer elen breyte vornen an
gespitzet / und schneyde als ein neiwgeschliffen sper / sein zen waren geschaffen
als einem eber schwein/ aber sere lanck und breyt / die augen rot und greüwlich
zesehen / der coeper sinwel vast groß und lang / der bauch gruen und in den
seyten geel / und von dem haupt biß in den schwantz einen starckten scharppfen
grad / gleich dem cocodrillon unnd an der farb val. Er hette auch groß ungeheüir
flügel / gespiegelt als eines pfauwen gefider. Die fueß groß als ein griffen / und
rauch als einem beren. Der halß was im vast nider gebogen zuo der erden / unnd
von grossen starckten knorren als die wyder hoerner. Sein hautte was alle hürnen
mitt breyt en schueppen über den gantzen leibe. Was soll ich von den der
grausamlichen / schedlichen creatu r meer sagen / Es hatt nie kein man so
ungeheüires / erschrockenliches gesehen / und von dem so manig mensch und thier
ir leben verloren haben. (folio 26v)

(He had not been riding long when he heard the trees in the forest splitting and
cracking and toppling over. He rode toward the din and was directly on the
dragon’s trail. When he saw it, he blessed himself again and again with the sign
of the holy cross and was greatly amazed that the Lord God had let such a
monstrous creature come to be on this earth. It was such an awkward, gruesome
beast that I must, out of wonder, relate a part of its appearance here: Its head was
immeasurably large and malformed, with black, disheveled hair and a comb like a
rooster, but immeasurably large and high, its beak alone probably a fathom long
and two feet wide and pointed at its tip like a newly forged spear. Its teeth were
shaped like those of a boar, but very long and broad, its eyes red and fearsome to
behold. Its rounded body was great and long, with a green belly and yellow on
the sides, and from its head to its tail ran a long, sharp spine just like a
crocodile’s, the color pale and sickly. It also had great, monstrous wings that
shone like those of a peacock. Its feet were as large as a griffin’s and as rough and
hairy as a bear’s. Its throat hung down nearly to the ground and was of great, strong
bone like the horns of a steer. It had horned skin with broad scales over its whole
body. What more shall I say about this gruesome, harmful creature? No one had ever
seen such a monstrous, terrifying thing before, something that caused many a man
and creature to lose their lives.)

The prose redactor’s description of Pfetan is nearly as long and detailed as Wirnt’s
description of the dragon in Wigalois, but nowhere in the new version of the story is there a
description of shields or clothing of comparable length. Instead, the author has chosen to
enumerate the shocking, ugly physical characteristics of a dragon. This is consonant with
other fantastic elements in the Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade, which tend to fall under the
rubric of zauberey\textsuperscript{379} – to be understood here as black magic – and are used as a point of entertaining, fear-inspiring contrast to the increasingly bourgeois and altogether linear, logical sphere within which the hero operates.\textsuperscript{380}

An especially important aspect of this contrast is the sixteenth-century redactor’s (and audiences’) new understanding of what constitutes model behavior in a hero. No longer is it appropriate for Wigoleis to rely on help from wondrous objects, as Gwigalois did in the verse romance, but to demonstrate his \textit{manheit} instead through self-reliance, courage, and sheer strength.\textsuperscript{381} One explanation for the lack of lengthy descriptive passages in \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade} then, especially of the many wondrous objects, shields, and buildings, lies in this different, self-reliant model of the hero: The redactor believes that Wigoleis simply has no need for such things, so there is consequently no need to mention many of them, much less describe them in detail.

A prime example of this is the prose redactor’s treatment of the magic belt. In \textit{Wigalois}, Wirnt describes a magic belt that the strange knight Joram offers to Queen Ginover. In the thirteenth-century poem, this description takes up twenty-one lines (v. 321-342) and comprises a total of 118 words. We have already seen that when Ginover puts this belt on, she is instantaneously endowed with wondrous powers and becomes the splendid embodiment of all that is courtly and feminine.

\textsuperscript{379} As Jutta Eming points out in her study of \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade}, even the use of the term zauberey indicates a far-ranging simplification of narrative complexities and character ambiguities that play an important role in the thirteenth-century source text. In the prose version, for example, the hero is no longer fighting against a heathen adversary who possesses a highly ambivalent combination of devilish heart but praiseworthy knightly skills, against a complex mixture of man and demon, but instead against the general concept of black magic. Eming, \textit{Funktionswandel} 261-264.

\textsuperscript{380} See for example Melzer’s introduction to \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade}, pp. 4-6; also Melzer, \textit{Trivialisierungstendenzen} 18-24, and especially 121; Classen, \textit{The German Volksbuch} 45-48; or Brandstetter, \textit{Prosaauflösung} 20-29, 40-53.

\textsuperscript{381} Eming, \textit{Funktionswandel} 266.
In the prose version, Joram’s name has been changed to Floreys, and the redactor describes the belt in nine words within a single sentence, calling it simply “a very costly belt made with jewels and gold” (*einen gürtel vast kostlich von gestein und von gold* folio 4r). The character Floreys does elaborate on the belt somewhat when he compares it to the queen, stating that he “holds the belt in little regard next to her” (*wann die kostlichkeit so dar an ligt schoetz ich gegen eüch gar geringe* folio 4r). Yet the diminished emphasis on verbal descriptions and on wondrous, ekphrastic objects is clear in this case: Although the belt still plays a role in the story – it establishes the initial link between Wigoleis’s maternal lineage and the Arthurian court – it is not depicted in any of the illustrations, as it is, for example, in the Donaueschingen *Wigalois* manuscript (on pages 10 and 15). In the prose redaction, moreover, Ginover never tries the belt on, and is thus never endowed with all the fantastic and courtly qualities described in *Wigalois*. The prose redactor has chosen to include only the general gist of the belt’s significance, remarking briefly on its beauty, but omitting entirely any reference to its wondrous nature or its exemplary courtly qualities as in the thirteenth-century poem.

This abbreviation or omission of many ekphrastic descriptions in the prose *Wigoleis* seems at first to have eliminated much of the visuality from the work, yet this is balanced out by the images in the thirty-five woodcut illustrations. The descriptions in the verse romance operate on a meta-textual level that allows hearers and readers to impress the tale’s important ideas into the mind’s eye as mental *imagines*. In the Strassburg *Wigoleis*, the illustrations have taken on much of the work of mental visualization, and in a number of instances provide information that was originally available in the ekphrastic descriptions, but which is now absent from the prose text. In total, four of the objects that receive an ekphrastic
description in the verse romance are illustrated here in *Wigoleis vom Rade*: the golden wheel, Wigoleis’s heraldic device, the stone of virtue, and Larie’s (i.e. Japhite’s) tomb. The remaining illustrations, as I discuss later in this chapter, depict a variety of scenes that are not necessarily ekphrastic, but which nevertheless present readers with an ideal of courtly identity, such as scenes of greetings and leave-takings or of knightly combat. Three of the four ekphrastic objects, however – the wheel, the stone, and the tomb – are in fact mentioned in the prose text, but they are by no means described at length. The hero’s heraldic device is neither mentioned explicitly nor described.

Especially important is how the *structural* role that the numerous ekphrastic descriptions play in the verse romance *Wigalois* is now transferred to the illustrations. I turn now to the specific structural functions that these illustrations fulfill in *Wigoleis vom Rade*, namely, how they help to guide the audience through the text, and how they link chapters of main text to one another.

**B. Woodcut and Caption: Guiding and Linking**

One of the first and most important ekphrases in the thirteenth-century *Wigalois* is the description of a golden wheel of fortune. Wirnt describes it in detail from verses 1036-1052, and it plays a pivotal role for the identity and future development of the hero. In the 1519 Strassburg *Wigoleis*, the golden wheel is also present in the text as well as in an illustration, and reveals the shifting relationships between word and image in the new version of the story. In contrast to the verse romance, the prose redactor keeps the description of this wheel minimal, and relates the most basic facts about its appearance in only thirteen words:
Here we see an important example how the visual information from the ekphrasis does not all appear in the main text, but is completed in the illustration. Missing from the text of the prose redaction is the passage in the thirteenth-century description about the human figures that moved up and down on the wheel as it rotated (dâ wären bilde gegozzen an / Iegelîchz geschaffen als ein man v. 1042-1043). These human figures are, however, depicted in the woodcut illustration on folio 6v [fig. 15]. Whereas readers and listeners of Wirnt’s verse romance are told about the figures that move up and down on the wheel as it rotates, the audiences for the prose Wigoleis are not. Instead, they are shown the same information.382

Furthermore, this is a prime example of how the image and caption work together to perform a narrative role. Here, as elsewhere in the Strassburg Wigoleis, the words above and the pictures below frequently work in symbiosis to guide the audience through the text and help them to visualize the most important events and ideas. In thirty-one of the thirty-five captions, this guiding function is clear from the deictic use of the opening words hie, wie and

382 Also noteworthy is that although Wirnt von Gravenberg does not give a specific number of figures in his description of Joram’s golden wheel, the figures on Floreys’ wheel in the Wigoleis woodcut are interesting inasmuch as they are inconsistent with traditional representations of the rota fortunae; in most depictions of Fortune’s wheel, only four figures are shown, representing the four stages regnabo, regno, regnavi, and sum sine regno (“I shall rule”, “I rule”, “I ruled”, and “I am without rule”). See for example Michael Schilling, “Rota Fortunae. Beziehungen zwischen Bild und Text in mittelalterlichen Handschriften.” Wolfgang Harms and L. Peter Johnson, Ed. Deutsche Literatur des späten Mittelalters. Hamburger Colloquium 1973. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1975. 293-313. See also Alan H. Nelson, “Mechanical Wheels of Fortune, 1100-1547.” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. 43 (1980). 227-233.
Similar to the frequent use of the Latin *hic* in the captions to the great Bayeux Tapestry, and also to the function of the captions in Donaueschingen Codex 71, these adverbs point to the scenes depicted below and tell readers, viewers and listeners either what has just happened or what is about to happen in the story.\(^{384}\)

In this particular woodcut, moreover, as in other cases, the caption and image work together as narrative *links* between chapters. Here, the caption begins with the word *als*, and is thus on one hand a guide that explains the content of the image below, but at the same time, it is a sentence in its own right that allows the flow of narrative to continue uninterrupted:

> Als der ymbis volbracht ward da stunden sie uff von dem tisch / da fuort in der künig zeschawen das schloß und palest die mit mangerley kostlichkeit und hüpscheit gezieret waren.  

(When the meal was over, they stood up from the table. Then the king took him to see the castle and the palace, which were both adorned with many costly and lovely things.)

Another example of this linking function, where the word *als* serves as a continuation of the text, is found in the illustration depicting the young hero’s training (folio 8v):

> Als nun Wigoleis gewachsen: und zuo seinen tagen kommen was da bestalte man im streytbare maenner das sie in solten lernen fechten.  

(As Wigoleis was now grown and had reached the right age, they arranged for men skilled in combat to teach him how to fight.)

The captions and illustrations in *Wigoleis vom Rade* do not, however, necessarily rely on the word *als* in order to function as narrative links between chapters. This is clear from

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\(^{383}\) Twenty-seven captions begin with *hie*, one with *wie*, and three with *abentheür wie*, making a total of thirty-one. Two begin with *als* (folios 6v and 8v), while the remaining two are the title page on folio 1r (“Ein gar schöne…”) and folio 2r (“Herr Wigoleys vom Rade der hochberiempt und edel Ritter von der tafel runde”).

the illustration depicting another of the important objects described in the verse romance, the stone of virtue [fig. 16]. In the verse romance, the young Gwigalois finds a great stone lying beneath a linden tree, and he decides to sit down on it and rest from his journey to King Arthur’s court. Wirnt tells his audience that the stone is squared off (gevieret), and describes it in lavish, colorful terms, presenting it to his audience in all its shimmering materiality. The act of sitting on this stone proves Gwigalois’s noble lineage and legitimates his place among the Knights of the Round Table (v. 1477-1505).

In the Strassburg Wigoleis, the stone of virtue is depicted in the woodcut illustration on folio 10r. The image shows Wigoleis, who appears for the first time in his battle armor, standing atop a small, square stone. This information is included in the long, detailed caption that accompanies the illustration:

Hie sietz herr wigoleis auff einem gevierten stein / vor einer bürg under einer grünen linde n / und wie künig Artus unnd die künigin / auch ander ritter und knecht die giengen im entgegen / den ritter zuo empfahen. (folio 10r)

(Here sits Wigoleis on a squared-off stone, in front of a castle and under a green linden; and how King Arthur and the Queen, along with other knights and servants approached him in order to greet the knight.)

In the main text’s description of the stone of virtue, however, no such “gevierter stein” is mentioned. In fact, the main text gives no information whatsoever about the stone’s visual appearance; thus the little square platform in the picture corresponds not to the main text, but directly to the words of the caption – and also to the ekphrasis in the verse romance! It is clear once again that the prose adaptation omits such visual information in its narrative program and shifts it into the illustrative program.

385 “Striemen rőt und gel / Giengen dar durch etteswā / Daz ander teil daz was blā / Lûter als ein spiegelglas.” (Wigalois v. 1481-1484).
We also see here how the image itself serves as a narrative link between two chapters of main text: The meeting of the knight’s gaze with that of the royal party is emblematic of the illustration’s connecting, linking function. Other evidence of linking or of making a transition is that Wigoleis is depicted standing instead of sitting, as the caption states; perhaps the young knight has risen to greet the King. Most important is that in the body of text immediately preceding the caption and the woodcut, readers learn how Wigoleis finds the stone and sits upon it; this is depicted in the left and center sections of the picture. On the right side, viewers see the king and queen coming to greet the young knight, a moment the narrator describes in the first sentence of the new chapter immediately following the illustration: “…they immediately decided to receive him in a praiseworthy manner” (…und vereinten sich zestund in loblichen zuo empfahen folio 10v). Thus the left-to-right act of reading is also enacted in the viewing of this illustration. This is similar to the process that Lilli Fischel describes in her study of pictorial sequences in early printed books:

Viewing the pictures must have meant something like reading to these people then, who were still mostly unversed in their letters. The so-called “continuing” method of presentation, which has since become lost, but which at the beginning of the incunabula era was still frequently used, leads to this conclusion...The scenic episodes...are usually ordered from left to right; they could be read like the word and, in some cases, instead of the word. They did not intend the viewing of a temporally fixed situation, but rather a fluent sequence, a telling like the word itself, which carries the reader away to this thought or another.386

This linking function within the image itself is also found in illustrations such as that depicting a young maiden’s arrival at King Arthur’s court (folio 11v) [fig. 17]: In the main

386 “Die Bilder aufzunehmen, muß für den meist noch schriftunkundigen damaligen Menschen etwas wie ein Lesen bedeutet haben. Die sogenannte ‘kontinuierende’ Darstellungsweise, die sich seitdem verloren hat, aber zu Beginn der Inkonabulzeit noch häufig angewendet wurde, läßt darauf schließen...Die szenischen Episoden...sind gewöhnlich von links nach rechts angeordnet; sie konnten abgelesen werden wie das Wort und gegebenenfalls auch statt seiner. Sie haben nicht den Anblick einer zeitlich bestimmten Situation gemeint, sondern fließenden Ablauf, Mitteilung wie das Wort selbst, das den Leser hinwegträgt zu dieser oder jener Vorstellung.” Fischel, Bilderfolgen 8.

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text immediately *preceding* the illustration, we read about how the King and his knights set up a table in the middle of a field where they all might eat and talk together. This is then depicted in the left half of the woodcut. In the right half of the image, we see the maiden and a dwarf arriving on horseback and asking the King for help in a perilous adventure in the Kingdom of Korntin; this is then at the beginning of the chapter that immediately *follows*. Further illustrations in which the left-to-right composition mimics the act of reading and links the immediately preceding and following bodies of text are on folio 45r, where Wigoleis hands Count Adam a ring and a letter, or on folio 47r, where Wigoleis and his beloved Larie are reunited.

These acts of visual and narrative linking contribute to the streamlining of the text’s presentation. Such streamlining is suggestive of the term that Melzer prefers to use in his study of the *Volksbücher*, simplification (*Vereinfachung*). Where do we see specific examples of simplification in the narrative or in the illustrations? The prose redactor’s treatment of two ekphrastic objects from the verse romance, Japhite’s tomb and the hero Wigoleis’s heraldic golden wheel, provides two good examples of how the illustrations in the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade* contribute to the process of simplification and narrative streamlining throughout the text. Let us first examine the tomb.

### C. Narrative and Illustrative Simplification

As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Japhite’s tomb is a vivid example of a material object whose description serves a memorial and prescriptive function, inviting readers and listeners to “see” more closely with the mind’s eye. The prose redactor also
mentions this tomb, and it is depicted in one of the woodcuts, but here it exemplifies the narrative trend toward simplification. The first difference one notices between the older and the younger versions of the tale is that the redactor of the prose *Wigoleis* has changed the noble heathen’s name from Japhite to Larie. More important here, however, is that the redactor has also reduced the description drastically, and appends a statement explaining that he has done so for the sake of brevity. Consequently, the abbreviation of this description significantly alters the role that the tomb plays in the story and all but eliminates many of the discourses it raises in the verse romance. Gone, for instance, is the staging of a text within a text, gone is the intense fascination with the wonders of the Orient, or questions about the integration of a heathen into the fold of Christianity. Whereas the description in the verse romance continues for ninety-six verses, the *Volksbuch* redaction provides only a single sentence, in which the actual description requires a mere nineteen words.

The prose redactor’s handling of this tomb reveals the tendency toward simplification once again in the transformation from verse romance to *Volksbuch*: This represents a new conception of what constitutes good storytelling and how one should go about it. In the thirteenth-century text, Wirnt’s frequent interruptions and digressions from the main course of the narrative only serve to further enhance the overtly visual and material aspects of the poem, turning the story itself into a colorful and splendid jewel that he holds up for the audience to gaze at in all its many facets and possibilities. The emphasis in the prose *Wigoleis* is, by contrast, on the action itself, on the uninterrupted, linear flow of narration,

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387 The woodcut actually appears twice, on folios 42v and 51r. On 51r, the image is meant to illustrate the gravesite of Lady Lyamire, the paternal cousin of Wigoleis’s wife Larie. That this is possible at all is indicative of the illustrator’s tendency to adhere to medieval “types” in the images instead of attempting portrait-like, individual likenesses.
and on the presentation of “believable” and “provable” events and objects that fit into the bounds of an increasingly rational world.

This simplification is also evident in the illustration depicting the tomb on folio 42v [fig. 18]. The illustration appears at the very top of the page; at the bottom of the preceding page, the illustration’s *titulus* reads simply:

Hie ligt die schon Larie begraben. (folio 42r)

(Here the beautiful Larie lies buried.)

In marked contrast to the very detailed caption preceding the illustration of Wigoleis on the stone of virtue (folio 10r), this caption is even shorter than the text of the tomb’s description only a few lines above it.

The woodcut is equally simple and direct. It depicts the figure of a woman lying prone, her arms crossed in front of her, her eyes closed and her face expressionless. From each of the lower four corners rise slender columns, about two-thirds the height of the woman’s figure, whose tips rise to elaborate points as if they were the spires of small cathedrals. These Gothic columns support a shingled canopy that covers the female figure from above. Quite simply, this looks like a real tomb from the period, and is once again evidence of the emphasis on the observable and the empirical, on the presentation of a sarcophagus that readers might be able to recognize from their own experience.

Simplification is also evident in the prose redactor’s treatment of the hero’s heraldic golden wheel. This device, a golden wheel on Wigoleis’s shield and upon the crest of his battle helmet, is far and away the most frequently depicted object in the *Wigoleis vom Rade* illustrations. The device appears in no fewer than twenty woodcuts.388 In the thirteenth-

388 Folios 1r, 2r, 10r, 13r, 14v, 15v, 17r, 19r, 22r, 23r, 24r, 27r, 28r, 31v, 35r, 36r, 38r, 45r, 47r, and 52v.
century text, the narrator draws a direct parallel between Joram’s mechanical wheel of fortune and the identity-forming device that Gwigalois chooses for his armor; the audience learns that Gwigalois “had always liked the device, for one went up and down in his uncle’s hall. For this reason, he wore the wheel as an ornament, as his heart had led him” (v. 1864-1869). This is, however, not the case in *Wigoleis vom Rade*. Although the frequency with which the device appears in the illustrations clearly indicates its importance, this obvious importance nevertheless stands in strange contrast to the fact that the text never makes a connection between the hero’s device and the wondrous work of art that inspired it in the verse romance, the golden wheel of fortune in his uncle’s castle. In fact, the prose text is rather vague about whether the mechanical wheel that appears first in the text is actually a traditional wheel of fortune or simply an example of automata, pieces of sculpture or other mechanical devices with moving parts that enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the Middle Ages. Michael Camille informs us that such objects were “important to the rise of the concept of the artist outside the theological constraints of ‘secondary’ maker”\(^{389}\) and that “these were fashionable not only in sacred but more especially in secular contexts.”\(^{390}\) How, then, does the image of Wigoleis’s heraldic wheel function in the illustrations here and within the narrative as a whole? It contributes to the overall process of simplification that, as Melzer has shown, is evident throughout the text and that, as I argue, is also evident in the illustrations.

The main function of this heraldic wheel of fortune is to identify the hero for the text-external viewers reading the book as well as for the characters within the pictorial space of


\(^{390}\) Camille, *The Gothic Idol* 245.
the illustrations. The device is thus as close to a portrait as one will find in the Wigoleis illustrations. In the image on the title page, for example, the hero is depicted alone, riding his horse and carrying a banner emblazoned with a wheel [fig. 19]. Although it has yet to play a part in the story itself, the device here establishes that this is in fact Wigoleis, the Knight of the Wheel and the hero of the tale. In woodcuts depicting battle scenes, this heraldic wheel sets the hero apart from the other knightly combatants, identifying him for the readers as well as for the ladies within the image who often look on from the tops of castles or from behind a tent.

Most important, the depictions of the heraldic wheel in the Strassburg Wigoleis reveal a crucial narrative and interpretive contrast to the verse romance. In the verse romance, Wirnt von Gravenberg describes a staggering array of heraldic devices throughout the entire work: remember that the thirteenth-century text provides descriptions such as the emblems of a swan (v. 2289-2292), a death’s head (v. 2998-2999), a golden stag and a golden dish (v. 3893-3905), or red, blazing fire on a black background (v. 4558-4562). None of these shields or emblems appears in Wigoleis vom Rade.

The Strassburg Wigoleis furthermore stands in stark contrast to the illustrated Wigalois manuscript from 1372, LTK 537, where the heraldic devices of all the major characters are painstakingly recorded in both image and text. In Wigoleis vom Rade, the hero’s heraldic device is never – not once – described in words. Moreover, Wigoleis is the only knight depicted with a shield or a heraldic device. Whereas readers and viewers of LTK

391 Such as those on folios 13r, 15v, or 17r.

392 Note for example LTK 537 folio 79r, where the heraldic devices of both combatants, of Gwigalois and Roaz, are depicted precisely the way they are described in the text.

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537 were invited to revel in the ekphrastic splendor of both poem and picture, to savor the words and the images in all their colorful facets, the illustrations in the Strassburg Wigoleis steer the audience toward a simpler, considerably more “black-and-white” interpretation: the unmediated identification of, and with, the hero.

This “black-and-white” aspect deserves further comment. One of the most important and obvious differences between the illustrations in the Wigalois manuscripts LTK 537 and Donaueschingen Codex 71 and the woodcut illustrations in the Strassburg Wigoleis is that the prose version’s images are not colored. We can explain this on one hand by simple economics: in the early sixteenth century as well as today, it was and still is cheaper and faster to print books with black-and-white illustrations instead of colored ones. In contrast to LTK 537 especially, the black-and-white woodcuts reflect that the Strassburg Wigoleis vom Rade was intended furthermore not as a luxury item for a single wealthy patron, but rather for a more general reading audience. Yet there are also important psychological aspects inherent in black-and-white versus color illustration that play an important role in the transformation of Wigalois the verse romance into Wigoleis the prose Volksbuch. Melzer cites for example the crucial role that black-and-white visualization plays in the trivialization process in literature; the simplified, highly-contrastive use of positive and negative space helps audiences to more easily create order out of potentially complicated situations, and thus aids the process of simplification so that readers can more easily identify with the characters in the story.393

Finally, the decision to depict only the hero’s emblem and no one else’s is evidence that simplification not only takes place at the textual level, but demonstrates that it is intentionally implemented in the illustrative program, too. This has an important influence

393 Melzer, Trivialisierungstendenzen, 17-18.
on how the audience is expected to respond to the story. First, at the most basic level, by not coloring the woodcut illustrations, the printer has simplified the actual process of making the images. Accordingly, with no colors, the act of viewing has been simplified as well. This presents on one level a considerably less-cluttered pictorial space, and on another level the simplification – and intentional limitation – of the act of interpretation. With fewer images to decipher, the reading viewer has fewer choices to make, thereby facilitating the audience’s identification with the hero.

**D. Envisioning Courtliness in the Strassburg Woodcuts**

That the illustrations in the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade* are designed to lead the audience to a simpler and closer identification with the hero suggests that the illustrations are not just descriptive in their rendering of contemporary costumes and armor, but that they also fulfill a prescriptive function by showing the audience examples of ideal knightly behavior. As Erich Kleinschmidt writes, a crucial function of literature in cities such as Strassburg during the sixteenth-century was to be didactic. Literature was meant to provide readers with good examples of how to live, and these examples were frequently taken to heart:

> Even the contemporary polemics against literature and the affirmative reactions of the audience, to the extent that they have been transmitted, demonstrate that the fictional text assumed in many respects the role of an argumentative commentary for its users, that within the framework of the problems it presented, it conditioned basic modes of behavior and possibilities for experiencing reality. On the intellectual level, literature thus appears in the cities as a part of leading one’s life, and its corresponding ideological content is not to be overlooked. The process of exchange between societal norms and the goals of proper behavior that were formulated through the medium of literature is reciprocal and cannot be definitively divided in its causal effect.394

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394 “Aber auch die zeitgenössische Polemik gegen die Literatur und die affirmativen Reaktionen des Publikums, soweit sie in Einzelfällen überliefert sind, zeigen, daß der fiktionale Text vielfach die Rolle eines argumentativen Kommentars für seine Besucher besaß, der im Rahmen seiner jeweiligen Problemstellungen...”
A vital component in the reception of literature among urban audiences in the sixteenth century, Kleinschmidt continues, was the visual.\textsuperscript{395} It was not enough to simply hear or read about proper modes of behavior or of an ideal of courtliness, but the frequent inclusion of woodcut illustrations helped to show audiences how they ought to comport themselves.

One way in which the illustrations perform this prescriptive and memorial function in the Strassburg \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade} is through their adherence to a “typical” medieval style, that is to say, there are no portrait likenesses of any of the figures in the illustrations, nor is there any attempt to provide these figures with particularly distinguishing or personal physical characteristics. As Lilli Fischel reminds us, the repetitive use of these “types” of figures, “types” of architecture or even of entire cities, did not strike the late-medieval reader as repetitive or boring or unrealistic, but was instead “a desired remembering” or “a desired reminding.”\textsuperscript{396} The reader or viewer of a text such as \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade}, Fischel writes, was not concerned with “the variety of the images”, but rather expected to see the depiction of a norm.

Thus, the illustrations in the Strassburg \textit{Wigoleis vom Rade} do not depict portrait likenesses of any of the characters, but instead help guide readers and listeners of widely varying degrees of literacy through the story by allowing them to recognize important

\textsuperscript{395} Kleinschmidt, “Literatur und städtische Gemeinschaft” 80-81.

patterns or recurring motifs. The most obvious example of this is the depiction of Wigoleis’s heraldic device in twenty of the illustrations. This is also evident, however, in the woodcuts on folios 3v or 25v, where the relative importance of the figures or the architecture is indicated by their size and placement within the pictorial frame; or on folio 8v [fig. 20], where it is nearly impossible to tell which of the two dueling figures is Wigoleis and which is the hero’s trainer. Both wear costumes and hairstyles typical of young noblemen of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Important is not who is who, but rather that these are the types of young men whom one would expect to be well-versed in the art of swordplay.

We see a similar example in the illustration on folio 10r [fig. 16], when Wigoleis finds the stone of virtue and meets the king and queen. The hero stands as he holds his battle shield, which is emblazoned with the image of a wheel. He faces the figures of a king and a queen, who appear in the right third of the pictorial space; the king holds a scepter in his right hand, while he extends his left in a gesture of welcome to the knight. To the far left we see the knight’s horse tied to a tree. This was a common motif from illuminated medieval manuscripts that audiences would have understood to represent knight errantry. Readers also know from the preceding body of text that this is a linden tree, thus indicating an enchanted locus amoenus, where something fantastic or unusual is about to happen. The attentive reader will surely have noticed, however, that the words of the caption tell the audience that the hero is sitting on the stone (Hie sitzet herr Wigoleis auff einem gevieren stein), but in the image, he clearly is standing. In the relationships between image and

caption and main text, then, some slippage can obviously occur. Moreover, there is no castle in the image, as the *titulus* tells readers there should be.

This inconsistency can be ascribed to the illustrator’s reliance on types of figures rather than portrait likenesses or absolute fidelity to the text(s), and also demonstrates quite clearly that in order to tell the story most efficiently and effectively, visual artists often rely on different narrative strategies than their verbal counterparts.\(^{399}\) The most important thing for the artist to show here is not that the stone is wonderful to look at or that it even looks like a stone, but the hero’s superior status. The audience is shown in no uncertain terms that Wigoleis is the type of young man worthy of approaching this stone of Virtue and of receiving a king’s greeting. This information is best conveyed by depicting the figure of the hero standing erect in full knightly regalia, his horse by his side and his shield in his hand.

Furthermore, although I must stress that it would be difficult at best for a completely illiterate member of the audience to accurately reconstruct the entire *Wigoleis* story by simply viewing the woodcut images alone, it is nevertheless productive for a discussion of the envisioning, describing or prescribing of courtliness if we leave the main text and the captions aside for a moment and ask: What sort of story do the images themselves tell? If we take a general overview of the illustrations and examine them strictly as visual images and not in connection with the *tituli*, we find that out of thirty-five images, twelve of them, nearly one-third, depict scenes of greeting or leave-taking. Ten illustrations show combat or battle scenes. There are five illustrations that depict fantastic creatures or characters. The remaining illustrations are more difficult to categorize so strictly, but include other courtly

types of situations such as a representative scene at Arthur’s court (folio 3r), Wigoleis, attended by a woman, in his bed recovering from his battle against Roaß (folio 41v), or the wedding of Wigoleis and Larie, performed by a bishop (folio 48v).

Considering the purely visual information in these illustrations – the preponderance of scenes of greeting and leave-taking or of knights in combat, for example – and compared with the scenes of exemplary courtly behavior we have already seen modeled in the Donaueschingen illustrations, we can see shifts not only in how the tale’s important ideas are transmitted to the audience, but also in what ideas are considered important in the first place. As in the Donaueschingen Wigalois manuscript, proper decorum when greeting someone or taking one’s leave is considered important, and is represented accordingly in the illustrations. Compare, however, the number of illustrations devoted to scenes of combat: in Donaueschingen Codex 71, there is but one scene of a knight fighting against another knight in single combat; in the Strassburg Wigoleis, there are six. In the Donaueschingen manuscript, there are two scenes depicting dragons or fantastic creatures; in Wigoleis vom Rade, there are five. Completely new, as we have already seen, is the inclusion of illustrations in the prose Strassburg redaction that thematize writing and literacy among the laity by depicting the exchange of letters or notes. Differences such as these suggest that for the sixteenth-century audience of the Strassburg Wigoleis, the mental image that one had of the ideal knight and of knighthood had become more complex and varied, reflective perhaps of a more complicated world: the courtly aristocrat was on the one hand expected to be well-versed in the art of combat, but on the other hand to be equally well-versed in the skills of reading and writing, skills necessary for many members of the urban audience if they wished either to maintain courtly, aristocratic status, or simply aspired to emulate it.
V. Conclusion

In the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade*, the prose redactor writes that it “would be wondrous” to tell us about costly things and precious stones – if he only had the time! Likewise, in this chapter, I have only been able to touch upon a very few of the questions that this text raises about word and image and the growth of vernacular literature. For example, of the forty-one extant *Wigalois* manuscripts and fragments, only two are fully illustrated: What more might the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade* reveal about verbal splendor versus economy, about the spread of literacy, or about the differences between hearing a story performed and reading it in private? Nevertheless, perhaps I have offered some new ways to think about the fluidity in the notion of representation in the *Wigalois* material, and how the captions and the images below them contributed to the formation of a new narrative aesthetic in the Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade*.

In this new narrative, word and image truly work together. Where descriptions demarcate important junctures and transitions in the thirteenth-century poem, this structural function has been taken over in the sixteenth-century version by the woodcut illustrations. The descriptions in the verse romance operate on a meta-textual level that allows hearers and readers to impress the tale’s important ideas into the mind’s eye as mental *imagines*. In the Strassburg *Wigoleis*, the illustrations have taken on much of the work of mental visualization, and in a number of instances provide information that was originally available in the ekphrastic descriptions, but which is now absent from the prose text. In conjunction with the captions, the illustrations serve on the one hand as guides and links throughout the text, but on the other hand steer the readers and viewers toward a more exclusive and intense focus on the hero.
Indeed, the hero of *Wigalois* was at the center of one of the most popular and enduring stories to emerge from the German Middle Ages; various versions of the tale appeared well into the eighteenth century. In this particular case, we see how word and image worked together to keep a popular story from the thirteenth century vivid and vibrant for new generations of readers into the sixteenth century – and beyond.
Chapter 7
Conclusion: Understanding the Book

_Hie hât daz buoch ein ende._

Wirnt von Gravenberg400

When I first read Wirnt von Gravenberg’s _Wigalois_, I was astonished at the number of highly visual descriptions. As I continued to explore the text and the secondary literature about it, I was equally surprised by two things: first, by the dismissive tone that characterizes much of the older _Wigalois_ scholarship; and second, that no one had ever investigated the role of verbal description and imagination in the text. I therefore first undertook this project with two questions in mind: What is the role of these ekphrastic descriptions? And are ekphrastic descriptions somehow connected to the poem’s well-attested popularity with German-speaking audiences throughout the Middle Ages?

My study has shown that in _Wigalois_, ekphrasis is not simply a rhetorical embellishment meant to draw attention to the narrator’s verbal acuity, or what Michael Camille once referred to as “the basis for rhetorical amplification.”401 We have seen instead that it provides the poem with narrative and thematic structure, articulates difficult subject matter and integrates it into a more harmonious whole, and helps to construct courtly identity among its aristocratic audiences. Furthermore, the three illustrated manuscript and print

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Redactions of the *Wigalois* material that I have examined provide us with evidence that ekphrastic objects, and artists’ different strategies for visualizing these objects, did in fact play an important role in audiences’ reception and interpretation of the text. Yet the text continues to arouse curiosity from a variety of critical approaches. The number of recent scholarly attempts to rehabilitate *Wigalois*’s standing in the Middle High German Arthurian canon demonstrates this clearly enough, and shows that other questions remain open for exploration if we hope to “understand the book.”

One question that, out of necessity, my study has left unanswered is where to situate *Wigalois* in the substantial body of scholarship devoted to orality and literacy. The unusually large number of surviving *Wigalois* manuscripts is evidence that audiences found the poem important and entertaining enough to write down, but the number of ekphrastic descriptions, coupled with the recurring emphasis on oral storytelling and the swapping of tales throughout the text, suggests that the emphasis on visualizing and imagining is rooted in the live, oral performance of the text. Perhaps one reason for *Wigalois*’s longevity is that medieval audiences simply loved to hear about splendid objects and to picture them in their minds. Conversely, perhaps the growing spread of literacy, the emphasis on reading, and the gradual development of a different narrative aesthetic are what eventually engendered the negative critical responses to *Wigalois* in later centuries.

Ekphrasis and the focus on imagining objects also invite questions about the place of *Wigalois* within the broader context of material culture in the German Middle Ages in general. Episodes and scenes from Arthurian material were depicted in murals, in illuminated manuscripts, on woodcarvings in churches, and even on shoes.\(^{402}\) Objects

decorated with scenes from these romances were one important manifestation of the popularity of the Arthurian material among members of the courtly nobility. Indeed, decorated objects in general such as mirrors, little boxes, and tapestries were very popular in the courtly society of the thirteenth century. Visual materials such as these attest to the immense popularity that this new form of literature enjoyed, and demonstrate that fiction was beginning to exert a powerful influence on the everyday lives of at least one stratum of medieval German society. Roger Sherman Loomis was perhaps the first to conduct an in-depth study of Arthurian material in the visual arts, and although later scholars owe much to his careful, detailed work, his catalogue is far from complete. Roger Sherman Loomis, Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1938. Kraus Reprint Company, 1975.

James Rushing has provided a thorough and illuminating investigation of visual material and the Yvain/Iwein story, and has drawn convincing connections between the visual representations of Arthurian material and the growth of a vernacular literary tradition in medieval Europe. A similar investigation of depictions of scenes from the Wigalois material outside the text, such as the Wigalois murals at Schloss Runkelstein in southern Tyrol, could tell us more about the reciprocal influence of historical contexts and fictional texts. By looking more closely at the images from Wigalois with which medieval audiences chose to surround themselves, we might also learn something about ourselves and our own responses to literature: that audiences interpret fictional texts, and that likewise, fictional texts shape audiences.


Figure 1. The Wheel of Fortune, from the *Punktierbuch* of King Wenceslas IV of Bohemia. (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. 2352, fol. 86r).
Figure 2. Guelfish heraldic devices, hunting scene, and illuminator portrait. (Leiden, Bibliotheek der Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde no. 537, fol. 118r).
Figure 3. Gwigalois (left) fights against Karrioz (right). Note the large ruby atop Karrioz’s helmet. (Leiden, Bibliotheek der Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde no. 537, fol. 71v).
Figure 4. The Round Table/The Wheel of Fortune. (Leiden, Bibliotheek der Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde no. 537, fol. 1v).
Figure 5. Gwigalois fights against Roaz (below), while Lady Japhite and her entourage look on (above). (Leiden, Bibliotheek der Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde no. 537, fol. 79r).
Figure 6. Gwigalois follows the ghost of King Lar into the castle at Korntin. (Leiden, Bibliotheek der Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde no. 537, fol. 47v).
Figure 7. *Maria als Thron Salomons*. In the lower center sits King Solomon, above him the (only fragmentarily preserved) figure of Mary; flanking her are personifications of Marian virtues such as purity, humility, prudence, patience, and mercy. (Ca. 1335, tempera on canvas-covered wood panel. Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie).
Figure 8. An unknown knight (Joram) offers Ginover the magic belt. ([Formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donaueschingen 71, page 10).
Figure 9. Ginover throws the magic belt down from the castle walls and returns it to Joram (or, as the caption reads, Gawein). ([Formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donaueschingen 71, page 15).
Figure 10. A miller shows Lady Beleare where Gwigalois lies unconscious; in the poem, it is not a miller, but a fisher. ([Formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donaueschingen 71, page 223).
Figure 11. Gwigalois fights against the Knight of the Nearby Castle. ([Formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donaueschingen 71, page 81).
Figure 12. Gwigalois sits on the stone of virtue. ([Formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donaueschingen 71, page 58).
Figure 13. King Arthur and his court see Gwigalois seated on the stone of virtue, and come out to greet him. ([Formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donauenschingen 71, page 61).
Figure 14. Lady Japhite holds the body of her slain husband Roaz, as Gwigalois, holding a sword, looks on. ([Formerly] Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Donaueschingen 71, page 298).
Figure 15. Floreys (Joram) shows Gabon (Gawein) the wheel of fortune. (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, Lo 2241.1, fol. 6v).
Figure 16. Wigoleis on the stone of virtue, as King Arthur and the Queen come to greet him. (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, Lo 2241.1, fol. 10r).
Figure 17. Nereja comes to the Arthurian court to seek help for the Kingdom of Korntin. (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, Lo 2241.1, fol. 11v).
Figure 18. Larie’s (Japhite’s) tomb; the caption at the bottom of the preceding page reads *Hie ligt die schon Larie begraben* (“Here the beautiful Larie lies buried”). (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, Lo 2241.1, fol. 42v).
Figure 19. Title page from the 1519 Strassburg *Wigoleis vom Rade*. (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, Lo 2241.1, fol. 1r).
Figure 20. Wigoleis receives training in the art of swordplay. (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, Lo 2241.1, fol. 8v).
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**Primary Literature: Wigalois Editions**


Primary Literature


**Secondary Literature**


