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 Pamuk1

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 Carruthers2

“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, we have seen how Wirnt uses the rhetorical device 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 and reflection.

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 surviving *Wigalois* manuscripts and fragments, relatively few contain illustrations, and only two have survived with a fully realized illustration program.\(^3\)

What sorts of visualization strategies did the illuminators of the illustrated manuscripts devise in order to do justice to, or perhaps to compete with, the ekphrastic textual images? Pursuing 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.

This chapter will 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. We will see 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

\(^3\) In addition to the illustrations in manuscripts B and k, *Wigalois* manuscript W (Berlin, SBB, Ms. germ. 8’ 483) contains an image on folio 174v of a bearded man’s head wearing a hat typically required to be worn by Jews in the fifteenth century; fragment f (Wiesbaden, Hauptstaatsarchiv, Abt. 3004 Nr. A147) reveals column-wide spaces, twelve lines high, for three miniatures; fragment n (Munich, Sb cgm 190/111) has an image displaying a coat-of-arms with a field divided into thirds and a lion; and manuscript Z (London, British Library add. 19554), which also contains Hartmann von Aue’s *Iwein*, has an illustration on folio iv showing the arrival of a lady greeting Gwigalois, and even had spaces set aside in the *Wigalois* text for fifty-four separate, small illustrations, which were never completed. See Sabine and Ulrich Seelbach, “Wirnt von Grafenberg: *Wigalois*—Eine Bibliographie”. *Perspicuitas. Internet Periodicum für mediävistische Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft*. http://www.perspicuitas.uni-essen.de-aufsatz-Seelbach.pdf. See also James Rushing, "The Medieval German Pictorial Evidence." *The Arthur of the Germans*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000. See 271–272 for information about the illustrated *Wigalois* material.