Re-imagining Narrative in *Wigoleis vom Rade*

Poetry, like every art form, defines its essence by leaving out what it views as nonessential.

Paul J. Stern

The ekphrasis of Japhite’s tomb is arguably the most striking and complex of all the descriptions in *Wigalois*: it 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, Count Adam and an entourage of ladies

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

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(...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 ekphrases. 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 of an increasingly rational worldview. Yet no *Wigoleis vom Rade* schol-