

 Arthurian studies lxii

WIRNT VON GRAVENBERG'S  
WIGALOIS

Neil Thomas

## ARTHURIAN STUDIES LXII

### WIRNT VON GRAVENBERG'S *WIGALOIS*

#### INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERPRETATION

Arthurian romance flourished in medieval Germany, but the pre-eminence of Wolfram von Eschenbach has perhaps overshadowed some of his successors. This book focuses on Wirnt von Gravenberg's *Wigalois*, the later thirteenth-century Arthurian romance. It argues that whereas authors such as Der Stricker and Der Pleier follow the example of Hartmann von Aue by limiting themselves to an exploration of the pragmatics of the (fictional) chivalric value-system, the lay ethicist Wirnt chooses to examine the spiritual dimension of knightly existence, a theme first broached in the German context by Wolfram in his Grail romance, *Parzival*. Wirnt frames his romance as a corrective to that of his predecessor by creating a form of kingship for his hero which is more practicable than Wolfram's millennial 'Grail realm'. Rejecting the notion of an ideal space altogether, Wirnt's naturalistic descriptions of his hero's kingship give expression to a harmonisation of Arthurian and theocratic elements. The author thus suggests that *Wigalois* is not so much a paler imitation of *Parzival* as creative confrontation with the thought-world of his more famous predecessor.

NEIL THOMAS is a reader in the department of German, Durham University.

**ARTHURIAN STUDIES**

ISSN 0261-9814

General Editor: Norris Lacy

Previously published volumes in the series  
are listed at the back of this book

WIRNT VON GRAVENBERG'S  
*WIGALOIS*

INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERPRETATION

Neil Thomas

D. S. BREWER

© Neil Thomas 2005

*All Rights Reserved.* Except as permitted under current legislation no part of this work may be photocopied, stored in a retrieval system, published, performed in public, adapted, broadcast, transmitted, recorded or reproduced in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the copyright owner

The right of Neil Thomas to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published 2005  
D. S. Brewer, Cambridge

ISBN 1 84384 038 3

D. S. Brewer is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd  
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK  
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.  
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA  
website: [www.boydellandbrewer.com](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com)

A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Thomas, Neil.

Wirnt von Gravenberg's Wigalois : intertextuality and interpretation / Neil Thomas.

p. cm. – (Arthurian studies, ISSN 0261-9814 ; v. 62)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-84384-038-3 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Wirnt von Gravenberg, 13th cent. Wigalois. 2. Guinglain (Legendary character)—Romances—History and criticism. 3. Arthurian romances—History and criticism. I. Title. II. Series.

PT1679.W8T486 2005

831'.21—dc22

2004016904

This publication is printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Great Britain by  
St Edmundsbury Press Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

# Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Abbreviations	viii
Introduction: The Problematic Reception	1
1 Contesting the Canon	11
The 'post-classical' challenge	11
<i>Wigalois</i> : tradition and innovation	21
2 Knights of Fortune	44
Fortuna's emissary	44
The Knight of Fortune's Wheel	49
3 Saint and Sinner	60
The hero's <i>descensus</i>	60
The father's rehabilitation	78
4 Realism and <i>Realpolitik</i>	86
The last battle	87
The matter of closure: <i>Parzival</i> and <i>Wigalois</i>	93
5 Romance and Exemplum	104
The Knight of King Arthur	104
The place of <i>Wigalois</i> in German literary history	112
Conclusion	119
Appendix: Summaries of related romances	124
Bibliography	134
Index	155

This book was published with the  
assistance of a generous subvention  
from the Vinaver Trust.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the Research Committee of the University of Durham for a study leave term in the summer of 2003 which afforded me valuable time for writing. As with my previous volume on *Diu Crône* (a work which, along with Wolfram's *Parzival*, provides an important intertext to *Wigalois* and yields a number of interpretive clues to Wirnt's work),<sup>1</sup> I have received valuable support from Miss Linda Gowans and from my wife, Dr Françoise Le Saux, who has shown great patience with my long absences in the study. A particularly substantial debt goes to the anonymous reader for the press who suggested a number of improvements to the manuscript as originally submitted. (It goes without saying that any remaining errors are those of the author himself.) I should also like to thank colleagues in Durham and in Reading for providing a congenial environment for my labours, and the personnel at Boydell & Brewer for their active help and encouragement. I should also like to put on record a fundamental indebtedness to the late Professor George T. Gillespie for having first drawn my attention to the romance and its literary *Umfeld* more than thirty years ago.

Neil Thomas. June, 2004.

<sup>1</sup> *Diu Crône and the Medieval Arthurian Cycle*, Arthurian Studies 50 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002). The two works have previously been studied in tandem by Christoph Cormeau, 'Wigalois' und 'Diu Crône', *Zwei Kapitel zur Gattungsgeschichte des nachklassischen Aventiureromans*, MTU 57 (Munich: Artemis, 1977), and by George Edward Harding, 'Tradition and Creativity. Narrative Elements in Wirnt von Gravenberg's *Wigalois* and Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône*', dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1985 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1987).

## *Abbreviations*

<i>AbäG</i>	<i>Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik</i>
<i>ALMA</i>	<i>Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages</i> , ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959)
<i>ATB</i>	Altdeutsche Textbibliothek
<i>BBIAS</i>	<i>Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society</i>
<i>CUP</i>	Cambridge University Press
<i>DTM</i>	Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters
<i>DVLG</i>	<i>Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte</i>
<i>EETS</i>	Early English Text Society
<i>GAG</i>	Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik
<i>GLL</i>	<i>German Life and Letters</i>
<i>GRM</i>	<i>Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>LiLi</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>MTU</i>	Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>OGS</i>	<i>Oxford German Studies</i>
<i>OUP</i>	Oxford University Press
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>SM</i>	Sammlung Metzler
<i>UP</i>	University Press
<i>WW</i>	<i>Wirkendes Wort</i>
<i>ZfdA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum</i>
<i>ZfdPh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie</i>
<i>ZfrPh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie</i>

## *Introduction: The Problematic Reception*

To those accustomed to thinking of medieval literature in terms of the modern medievalist canon, it may be surprising to discover that after Tristan, Parzival and Arthur himself, the most commonly represented material from German romance in German art is the story of Wigalois.<sup>1</sup>

The early thirteenth-century *Wigalois* (*recte Gwîgalois*)<sup>2</sup> by Wirnt von Gravenberg (the modern Gräfenberg near Bayreuth) exerted as great an appeal for medieval audiences as did the 'classical' Arthurian romances of Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach. Since Wirnt's romance is not so well-known in our own age as those of Hartmann and Wolfram, a brief overview of its main stages is here given at the outset.<sup>3</sup>

*Wigalois* begins with the account of how Gawein is taken from the Arthurian court by Joram, the denizen of a distant realm where the goddess Fortuna is said to be the tutelary deity. Having arrived in Joram's kingdom, Gawein is married to Florie, Joram's niece, and presented with a belt of Fortune held to confer valour and well-being on its possessor. Without the belt (or having Joram as his guide) it is not possible for Gawein to return to Joram's kingdom, and the story of Gawein's son begins after his father has ridden back to Camelot but omitted to take with him the girdle of Fortune (which is later passed to his son). Gawein, who leaves knowing Florie is pregnant but not that she is bearing a son (who is to be named Wigalois), tries but fails to return to his wife, hence he and his family remain cut off from each other. Having heard many honorific stories about his father, however, when Wigalois reaches early manhood he seeks out

<sup>1</sup> James Rushing, 'The medieval German pictorial evidence' in William H. Jackson and Silvia Ranawake, *The Arthur of the Germans. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 257–279, citation 271.

<sup>2</sup> I keep to the conventional spelling used by the modern editor, Kapteyn, in order to harmonise my references with modern, electronic retrieval systems. There have been three editions of the romance: *Wigalois, der Ritter mit dem Rade, getihtet von Wirnt von Gravenberch*, ed. Georg Friedrich Benecke (Berlin: Reimer, 1819); *Wigalois. Eine Erzählung von Wirnt von Gravenberg*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer, *Dichtungen des deutschen Mittelalters* 6 (Leipzig: Göschen, 1847); Wirnt von Gravenberg, *Wigalois, Der Ritter mit dem Rade*, ed. J. M. N. Kapteyn, *Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde* 9, part 1 (Bonn: Klopp, 1926). Citations will be from Kapteyn's edition which is customarily recorded as the first volume of two because the text was originally planned to be followed by a *Kommentarband* which, however, never appeared. The only available continuous commentary comes in the form of the 'Anmerkungen' which Benecke appended to his *editio princeps*. On the circumstances surrounding the non-appearance of Kapteyn's *Kommentarband* see Wolfgang Mitgau, 'Bauformen des Erzählens im *Wigalois* des Wirnt von Gravenberg' (dissertation, University of Göttingen, 1959), p. 3, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> A fuller précis is given by Kapteyn in the Introduction to his edition, pp. 77–91.

his father at the Arthurian court where Gawein (whom, we are told, the son does not recognise by his name and reputation) is appointed as his chivalric mentor. Here the son, in an action portending his future preeminence, is able to sit on Arthur's 'stone of virtue'. Thereafter, in an initial series of skirmishes with sundry adversaries under the censorious gaze of a female emissary (Nereja), he manages to convince his sceptical guide that he is the equal of his father (whose services she had requested in preference to those of the youth). He thereby wins the qualification to proceed to the major challenge of defeating the Mohammedan necromancer, Roaz of Glois, the murderer of the good King Lar of Korntin, and so to release the unquiet soul of the 'undead' king. For this task (which takes place in a location styled as a purgatorial netherworld) he is endowed with an abundance of holy objects (but not with the belt of Fortune which has in the meantime been stolen). With God's aid he defeats a host of demonic enemies and the necromancer himself (who has concluded a pact with the devil). The work of salvation completed, he marries the old king's daughter, Larie, and rules over the now restored land of Korntin. In an extensive sequel he is joined by his father (whose identity has in the interim been formally revealed to him) and other Arthurian knights together with numberless converted foes in his campaign against a second malefactor, Lion of Namur. The siege of Namur successfully accomplished, Wigalois pays a 'state visit' to Arthur at Nantes before resuming kingship in the land of Korntin where his rule maintains standards of statesmanship and Christian compassion inaugurated by the late King Lar.

There are over forty surviving manuscripts of *Wigalois*<sup>4</sup> and an index of the high medieval status of the work comes in the form of an adjudicating review of a number of medieval works by Hugo von Trimberg in the course of which he accords 'hohen prîs' to *Wigalois*.<sup>5</sup> Further mentions or allusions are found in a number of other medieval works such as *Diu Crône*, *Der Göttweiger Trojanerkrieg* (a composite romance combining material from the Matter of Britain with legendary material concerning ancient Rome and the Trojan War)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> On the manuscripts see Heribert Hilgers, 'Zur Geschichte der Wigalois-Philologie', *Euphorion* 65 (1971), pp. 245–73; Hans-Jochen Schiewer, 'Ein rîs ich dar umbe abe brach/ von seinem wunder boome. Beobachtungen zur Überlieferung des Artusromans im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert', in *Deutsche Handschriften 1100–1400; Oxforder Colloquium 1985*, ed. Nigel Palmer and Volker Honemann (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988), pp. 222–78; Oskar Pausch, 'Handschriftenfunde zur Literatur des Mittelalters, 62. Beitrag. Eine Zwettler Überlieferung des *Wigalois*', *ZfdA* 108 (1979), pp. 340–45; A. Janko, 'Zwei Wigalois-Fragmente aus Ljubljana', *Acta Neophilologica* 15 (1982), pp. 3–15; Christa Bertelsmeier-Kierst, 'Zur ältesten Überlieferung des *Wigalois*. I. Die Handschrift E', *ZfdA* 121 (1992), pp. 275–90; Klaus Klein, 'Handschriftenkunde zur Literatur des Mittelalters. 112. Beitrag. Ein neues *Wigalois*-Fragment in Basel', *ZfdA* 122 (1993), pp. 453–59.

<sup>5</sup> See *Der Renner*, ed. Gustav Ehrismann, reprinted with a 'Nachwort' and augmentations by Günther Schweikle, 4 volumes (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970), lines 1221–6. The laudatory reference to Wirnt by Heinrich von dem Türlin (*Die Krone (Verse 1–12281) nach der Handschrift 2779 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, ed. Fritz Peter Knapp and Manuela Niesner, *Altdeutsche Textbibliothek* 112 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), lines 2949ff) has also been taken as documentation of 'die beachtliche Resonanz, die das Werk vermutlich noch zu Lebzeiten des Dichters erfuhr' (Bertelsmeier-Kierst, 'Zur ältesten Überlieferung', p. 275).

<sup>6</sup> *Der Göttweiger Trojanerkrieg*, ed. Alfred Koppitz, *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters* XXIX (Berlin: Weidmann, 1926). On the Arthurian associations of this romance see Manfred Kern,

and Konrad von Würzburg's *Der Welt Lohn*.<sup>7</sup> Konrad here takes Wirnt von Gravenberg as his protagonist, depicted as a man devoted to his worldly advantages who experiences a change of heart after glimpsing the hideous reverse side of the superficially seductive goddess, Frau Werlt. Seared by the vision, he resolves to devote his life to God by going on a crusade. Benecke included this short moral tale of 250 lines in his *editio princeps* and was inclined to see at least a kernel of historical truth in Konrad's account (see his 'Vorbericht', p. x); but subsequent scholars have been more sceptical.

Meanwhile, in the latter half of the thirteenth century the romance of *Wigamur* exhibits a number of ideological continuities with Wirnt's romance.<sup>8</sup> As with *Parzival*, *Tristan*, and other celebrated romances of the first half of the thirteenth century, scenes from *Wigalois* are to be found on the Runkelstein murals,<sup>9</sup> whilst some pewter figurines from Magdeburg bear further illustrations from the romance.<sup>10</sup> In the later Middle Ages Jakob Püterich von Reichertshausen, an enthusiastic chronicler of the courtly era, gives an honourable mention to *Wigalois* in his *Ehrenbrief*<sup>11</sup> and Ulrich Füetrer gives a condensed version in his *Buch der Abenteuer*.<sup>12</sup> The continuing popularity of the romance in the Early Modern period is revealed in a number of literary recreations. There is a prose version of 1493, *Wigoleis vom Rade*,<sup>13</sup> and translations of the romance into other European vernaculars, including a late seventeenth-century Yiddish redaction, *Der Artushof*, together with a printed version, *Widuwilt*, whilst a late Jewish version appeared under the title of *Historie oder moralische Erzählung von Ritter Gabein* as late as 1789.<sup>14</sup> A short, fragmentary poem by Ludwig Uhland,

*Agamemnon weint oder arthurische Metamorphose und trojanische Destruktion im 'Göttweiger Trojanerkrieg'*, Erlanger Studien 104 (Erlangen and Jena: Palm and Enke, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> In *Kleinere Dichtungen Konrads von Würzburg*, 3 volumes, ed. E. Schröder with 'Nachwort' by Ludwig Wolff (Berlin: Weidmann, 1959), I.

<sup>8</sup> See Neil Thomas, 'The sources of *Wigamur* and the German reception of the Fair Unknown legend', *Reading Medieval Studies* 20 (1993), pp. 101–13.

<sup>9</sup> See Dietrich Huschenbett, 'Beschreibung der Bilder des *Wigalois-Zyklus*', and Ernst Karl Waldstein, 'Zeichnungen zum *Wigalois-Zyklus*', in *Runkelstein. Die Wandmalereien des Sommerhauses*, ed. Walter Haug, Joachim Heinzle, Dietrich Huschenbett and Norbert H. Ott (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1982), pp. 178–93 and 170–7.

<sup>10</sup> For a description of the *Zinnfigurenstreifen* see Helmut Nickel, 'About a crown found and a Grail tournament held at the "Castle of the Maiden" (sc. Magdeburg)', *Arthuriana* 7 (1997), pp. 36–44.

<sup>11</sup> 'Der Ehrenbrief Jakob Putrichs von Reichertshausen, *Die Turnierreime* Johann Hollands, *Der Namenkatalog* Ulrich Füetters: Texte mit Einleitung und Kommentar', ed. Martha Mueller, dissertation (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich Füetrer, *Wigoleis*, ed. Heribert A. Hilgers, ATB 79 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1975).

<sup>13</sup> *Wigoleis vom Rade in Prosaauflösung. Studien zur Rezeption der höfischen Epik im frühneuhochdeutschen Prosaroman*, ed. Alois Brandstetter (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1971), pp. 190–235. On the Early Modern stage of transmission see John L. Flood, 'Early printed versions of Arthurian romances', in *The Arthur of the Germans*, ed. Jackson and Ranawake, pp. 295–302, and Guy Borgnet, 'Le *Wigoleis* d'Ulrich Füetrer. Etude comparative de trois versions du Chevalier à la Roue: Wirnt von Gravenberg, Volksbuch, Ulrich Füetrer', in *König Artus und der Heilige Gral. Studien zum spätharthurischen Roman und zum Graals-Roman im europäischen Mittelalter*, ed. Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok, Greifswalder Studien zum Mittelalter 17; Wodan 32 (Greifswald: Reineke Verlag, 1994), pp. 51–64.

<sup>14</sup> See *Arthurian Legends or the Hebrew-German Rhymed Version of the Legend of King Arthur*, ed. Leo Landau, *Teutonia* 21 (Leipzig: Avenarius, 1912); and *Ritter Widuwilt. Die westjiddische Fassung des 'Wigalois' des Wirnt von Gravenberg mit dem jiddischen Druck von 1699*, ed.

'Ritter Wieduwilt' (on the subject of Joram's initial challenge), appeared in 1809/10.<sup>15</sup>

The first modern edition of the Middle High German text was that of Benecke in 1816, so it may be claimed that, unlike other medieval narratives which were 'rediscovered' only in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *Wigalois* maintained its popularity for eight consecutive centuries. The early favour enjoyed by the romance in the aftermath of the Romantic era was, however, to be eclipsed by the advent of a positivist trend in German literary scholarship which led to more negative verdicts concerning the 'derivative' nature of Wirnt's work as a late manifestation of the Fair Unknown tradition (at the head of which stands the late twelfth-century *Le Bel Inconnu*).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, scholars of the later nineteenth century and many twentieth-century critics were inclined to work with a donor-and-recipient model of literary composition in mind and to view *Wigalois* (together with many other later works written in both German and French) as 'epigones' of the 'classical' predecessors, Hartmann, Wolfram or Chrétien de Troyes. Meanwhile, the lack of a morally problematical dimension in the protagonist's fictional identity caused disquiet to critics wishing to fit Wirnt's romance into the 'binary' literary sequence inaugurated by Hartmann and Wolfram (in which the hero, after an initial reverse in his moral life, labours to achieve a rehabilitation of chivalric standard).<sup>17</sup> Criticism in the last few decades, on the other hand, has drawn attention to the elasticity of medieval genres, arguing that 'romance – and, more generally, any literary genre – has no meaningful existence as a static category. Rather, is it a question of genre as process: the functional literary life of romance involves a series of generic transformations over time resulting in a kind of dynamic continuum.'<sup>18</sup> That analysis undergirds many of the following arguments; meanwhile my footnotes contain further references to various scholarly and critical writings which will indicate to readers the fresh critical direction(s) which have been taken in the last two decades.

The rules of evidence governing speculation about the authorship, patronage and dating of medieval works have become considerably more stringent in the

Siegmond A. Wolf, *Sprach- und Geisteswissenschaftliche Texte 1* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1974). On the Jewish adaptations see Achim Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter. Studien zum jüdisch-deutschen 'Wieduwilt' (Artushof) und zum 'Wigalois' des Wirnt von Gravenberc* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), and Robert G. Warnock, 'Wirkungsabsicht und Bearbeitungstechnik im altjiddischen *Artushof*', *ZfdPh* 100 (Sonderheft) (1981), pp. 98–109.

<sup>15</sup> Printed and discussed in Achim Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter*, pp. 390–2.

<sup>16</sup> See the up-to-date *Forschungsbericht* in Achim Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter*, pp. 97–116. The issue of tradition and innovation will be discussed more fully in Chapter One.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the work of Christoph Cormeau, who saw *Wigalois*'s fully-formed character as being 'highly inconvenient' for a critic wishing to fit the romance into the literary sequence inaugurated by the 'classic' writers ('eine Irritation für eine Gattungsgeschichte'): 'Zur Gattungsentwicklung des Artusromans nach Wolframs *Parzival*', in *Spätmittelalterliche Artusliteratur*, ed. Karl-Heinz Göller, Beiträge zur englischen und amerikanischen Literatur 3 (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zurich: Schöningh, 1984), pp. 120–31.

<sup>18</sup> Editorial Introduction by Kevin Brownlee to *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985), p. 1. See also Simon Gaunt, 'Romance and other genres', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 45–60.

last few decades, the result being that those concerning themselves with the understanding of thirteenth-century romances must resort less to (unverifiable) historical speculation than to the exercise of 'practical criticism' through a close reading of the texts themselves.<sup>19</sup> This can be observed most dramatically in the rejection of many opinions which were held about Heinrich von dem Türlin for the best part of the twentieth century. Whilst it was formerly supposed that Heinrich came of a burgher family from St Veit an der Glan, and that he stood in the employ of Duke Bernard of Carinthia (1202–1256), such identifications were rendered highly problematical by the work of Bernd Kratz in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, nothing certain can be known of the author of *Wigalois*<sup>21</sup> beyond his given name, the information that *Wigalois* was the author's first work (although this information is embedded in a humility formula which for rhetorical reasons may have been framed to do less than complete justice to the totality of the author's literary activities),<sup>22</sup> and his putative connection with the town of Gravenberg. The dating of the romance also presents considerable problems<sup>23</sup> with theories having been put forward dating it to from 1205 to 1235 or later,<sup>24</sup> but more recently some time in the second decade of the thirteenth century has been favoured.<sup>25</sup>

Franz Saran once speculated that narratorial references to the lawlessness of his age indicated that *Wigalois* must have been composed towards the end of the interregnum in the period 1197–1208 when there was fighting between the two rival claimants for the imperial crown, Philip of Suabia and Otto of Brunswick.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> 'Literaturwissenschaftliche Forschung, die Ernst machen möchte mit der Forderung, jedes Wortkunstwerk als ein Gebilde eigenen Rechtes und Wertes unabhängig von seiner geschichtlichen Bedingtheit zu verstehen, findet im Bereich der altdeutschen Dichtung eine Ausgangslage vor, die sich in der neuen erst künstlich schaffen müßte' (Werner Schröder, 'Zur Chronologie der drei großen mittelhochdeutschen Epiker', *DVLG* 31 [1957], pp. 264–302, 264).

<sup>20</sup> 'Zur Biographie Heinrichs von dem Türlin', *ABäG* 11 (1977), pp. 123–67.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the useful *Realien* assembled in *Wigalois. The Knight of Fortune's Wheel*, translated by John Wesley Thomas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), Introduction.

<sup>22</sup> 'nu wil ich iu ein maere/ sagen, als ez mir ist geseit./ zeiner ganzen wârheit/ trûwe ich ez niht bringen;/ wan eines wil ich dingen:/ daz ir durch iuwer hövischeit/ dem tihtaere des gnâde seit/ der ditze hât getihtet, mit rîmen wol berihet,/ wan ditz ist sîn erstez werç' (lines 131–40).

<sup>23</sup> On the general difficulties of medieval literary dating see Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture. Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 14–15.

<sup>24</sup> Benecke argued for 1212 ('Vorbericht' to his *editio princeps*, p. 12), Friedrich Neumann for 1210–15 ('Wann verfasste Wirnt den Wigalois?' *ZfdA* 93 [1964], pp. 31–62), but datings later than these have been proposed. Albert Schreiber: 1229–35 ('Über Wirnt von Gravenberg und den Wigalois, *ZfdPh* 58 [1933], pp. 209–31); Ruth Bauer: 1220 (*Studien zum Wigalois des Wirnt von Gravenberg* [Berlin: Ebering, 1936]); Helmut de Boor: end of the third decade of the thirteenth century (*Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. de Boor and Richard Newald, 8 volumes, II, *Die höfische Literatur* [Munich: Beck, 1953], p. 87); Volker Mertens: c. 1235 ('*Iwein* und *Gwigalois*-der Weg zur Landesherrschaft', *GRM*, new series, 31 [1981], pp. 14–31).

<sup>25</sup> See H.-J. Ziegler, entry on *Wigalois* in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters, Verfasserlexikon* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), volume 10, columns 1252–7.

<sup>26</sup> 'Über Wirnt von Grafenberg und den Wigalois', *Beiträge* 21 (1896), pp. 253–420, here 269. As Saran conceded, 'die chronologie des Wigalois kann nur mittelbar durch combination festgestellt werden' (p. 267) and his speculations have more recently been adjudged an

The early dating was supported by reference to a number of verbal echoes once held to prove that Wirnt knew only the first six books of Wolfram's *Parzival* (which probably appeared in some form of 'fascicle' sequence in the period 1204–1210). Such views are now regarded as speculative and J. W. Thomas summarised present thinking in these terms:

Although the narrator's aphoristic intrusions into the story far outnumber those which criticise thirteenth-century society, the latter have received more attention from scholars, partly from those who wish to use the novel as a source of specific historical data, partly from those who wish to date it by matching the contemporary society described by the narrator with that of a particular decade of the the thirteenth century. Actually, however, the social criticism in *Wigalois* is of such a nature that it reveals no specific relationship to a particular society and, indeed, does not significantly differ from the social criticism of *Le Bel Inconnu* or, for that matter, in the works of Chrétien.<sup>27</sup>

At the other end of the chronological spectrum, on the other hand, the attempt by de Boor to use similar criteria as those of Saran as a means of advancing a *late* dating (in the 1230s) has been questioned on the grounds that it depends on a subjective, 'decline-and-fall' notion of courtly culture.<sup>28</sup>

Wirnt's lofty praise of Wolfram as 'the fine-feeling sage of Eschenbach whose verses have never been bettered by any layman' ('her Wolfram/ ein wîser man von Eschenbach/ sîn herze ist ganzes sinnes dach/ leien munt nie baz gesprach')<sup>29</sup> has more recently been taken to imply an acquaintance with *the whole* of *Parzival*.<sup>30</sup> It is even possible, given the lapidary tone of the encomium, that Wirnt may have been repeating at second hand a judgement on Wolfram which had had time to become proverbial.<sup>31</sup> The consequential possibility of a date in the second decade of the thirteenth century has in turn led to the speculation that Wirnt knew Wolfram's *Willehalm* (c. 1217), or else that he might have been composing at approximately the same time that Wolfram was composing that epic.<sup>32</sup> The exact chronology remains unclear, but it is likely that *Wigalois*

'Ausdruck der damaligen Hermeneutik mittelalterlicher Texte' (Christoph Cormeau, '*Wigalois*' und '*Diu Crône*'. *Zwei Kapitel zur Gattungsgeschichte des nachklassischen Aventiureromans*, MTU 57 [Munich: Artemis, 1977], p. 73) and as an 'Überinterpretation' (Wolfgang Mitgau, 'Bauformen des Erzählens', p. 7).

<sup>27</sup> *Wigalois. The Knight of Fortune's Wheel*, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> 'Die Meinung de Boors, daß es sich wegen der Zeitkritik im *Wigalois* [...] um den "Vorklang der epigonalen Verbürgerlichung des Artusromans" handele, halte ich für fragwürdig. Eine solche Meinung erinnert sehr an die Abwertung der romantischen Literatur im Hinblick auf die Weimarer Klassik' (Dietrich Homberger, 'Gawein. Untersuchungen zur mittelhochdeutschen Artusepik' [dissertation, University of Bochum, 1969], p. 63, n. 2).

<sup>29</sup> Lines 6343–6.

<sup>30</sup> The references to Wolfram appear to reveal 'eine im Abstand gewonnene *Parzival*-Kenntnis, die nicht vor dem zweiten Jahrzehnt des 13. Jahrhunderts möglich oder zu erwarten ist' (Friedrich Neumann, 'Wann verfasste Wirnt den *Wigalois*?', p. 33).

<sup>31</sup> For this conjecture see Cormeau, '*Wigalois*' und '*Diu Crône*', p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Werner Schröder ('Der synkretische Roman des Wirnt von Gravenberg. Unerledigte Fragen an den *Wigalois*', *Euphorion* 80 (1986), pp. 235–77, especially 245–7) argues that Wirnt knew *Willehalm* (that is, that *Wigalois* was written after 1217, accepting the conventional dating for Wolfram's epic). Cf. also Hans-Jochen Schiewer, 'Prädestination und Fiktionalität in Wirnts *Wigalois*', in *Fiktionalität im Artusroman*, ed. Volker Mertens and Friedrich Wolfzettel

was enriched by a broader acquaintance with Wolfram's work(s) than was supposed by an earlier generation of scholars.

Forty years ago Friedrich Neumann counselled against dismissing the literary claims of a text which had stood the test of time so well,<sup>33</sup> yet despite the appearance in the last two decades of a number of publications on *Wigalois*, it continues to present unresolved cruxes.<sup>34</sup> In the attempt to seek solutions to some of these problems, this study will offer a critical re-reading<sup>35</sup> of the romance in the context of putative sources and analogues and in the light of its literary posterity. I adopt this comparative and diachronic approach because other treatments of the same basic themes may confirm or clarify readings or else suggest alternative realizations of a theme, helping us to recognize what any given poet was doing by showing us what (s)he chose not to do and what possibilities were ignored.<sup>36</sup> The following remarks on the layout of the book are intended as a guide to the critical problems which will be dealt with in detail in the body of this study.

Chapter One is concerned with matters of literary polemics and illustrates from a range of texts how several later German writings within and outside the Matter of Britain cycle reveal a nuanced and often critical attitude to those works of predecessors accorded laureate status in much modern literary historiography. *Wigalois* will be situated within this general trend towards literary dissent, my specific argument being that Wirnt's reframing of the ideological parameters of the Fair Unknown tradition serves to dissociate *Wigalois* philosophically not only from its European analogues (*Le Bel Inconnu*, the Middle English *Libeaus Desconus* and the Italian *Carduino*) but also (and more significantly for the German tradition) from the best-known German exemplar of the Fair Unknown tradition, Wolfram's *Parzival*. In particular, the emphasis placed on *Wigalois* as a hero who (albeit purportedly unbeknownst to him) receives early instruction from his supposedly lost father seems rather to oppose the premise of a

(Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), pp. 146–58, especially 157. More recently, a date of about 1217 has been favoured by L. Peter Johnson: 'Wir vermuten, der *Wigalois* ist nach dem *Parzival* und etwa gleichzeitig mit dem *Willehalm* entstanden' (*Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit*, ed. Joachim Heinzle [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999], volume 2, *Die höfische Literatur der Blütezeit*, part 1, pp. 365–72, 367).

<sup>33</sup> 'Wir sollten uns hüten, einen solchen Erfolg nur wie eine Nebensächlichkeit zu betrachten' ('Wann verfasste Wirnt den *Wigalois*?' p. 32). Cf. also L. Peter Johnson: 'Wirnt hat bei seinem zeitgenössischen Publikum grossen Anklang gefunden; offenbar haben die mittelalterlichen Auftraggeber von Handschriften und mindestens zwei achtbare Dichter anders gedacht als manche Germanisten' (*Die höfische Literatur der Blütezeit*, p. 368).

<sup>34</sup> Stefan Fuchs in particular has called attention to the 'zahlreiche sich widersprechende Interpretationen und Bewertungen' which the romance has received (*Hybride Helden. Wigalois und Willehalm. Beiträge zum Heldenbild und zur Poetik des Romans im frühen 13. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurter Beiträge zur Germanistik 31 [Heidelberg: Winter, 1997], p. 100).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Neil Thomas, 'Literary transformation and narrative organisation in Wirnt von Gravenberg's *Wigalois*', *MLR* 80 (1985), pp. 362–71, and *A German View of Camelot: Wirnt von Gravenberg's 'Wigalois' and Arthurian Tradition*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, series 1, volume 963 (Berne, Frankfurt, Las Vegas: Lang, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> A comparatist trend has recently been discernible in studies of *Wigalois*. Cf. Jaeger, *Ein jüdischer Artusritter*, Jutta Eming, *Funktionswandel des Wunderbaren. Studien zum 'Bel Inconnu', zum 'Wigalois' und zum 'Wigoleis vom Rade'* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1999), Volker Honemann, 'The *Wigalois* narratives', in *The Arthur of the Germans*, ed. Jackson and Ranawake, pp. 142–54.

(temporarily) fatherless and therefore untutored (*tump*) lad which characterises *Parzival* and the Fair Unknown tradition as a whole. The 'coaching' administered by Gawein to his son must have counted as a provocative innovation in the context of a romance ostensibly offering an *hommage* to the spirit of the Fair Unknown stories, and is one indication that the socially conservative Wirnt was tendentially rejecting the egalitarian basis of the 'brave man slowly wise' idiologeme given such influential currency by Wolfram.

The second chapter presents the case that the ostensibly supernatural tokens of Fortuna (whose emblematic wheel [*rota fortunae*] gives the romance its editorial subtitle, 'The Knight of Fortune's Wheel') are an example of a phenomenon common to medieval tradition of 'magic that fails to work magically but that does work for the poem',<sup>37</sup> in this case metonymically since the winning of Fortune's favours is so intimately associated with Gawein's experience. Fortuna's token of the magic belt (which, as will be observed below, has a legendary connection with Gawein in a number of medieval texts) plays only a small role as a magic object since its wonder-working abilities are limited. 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 (*saelde*) 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 rather than one under the supernatural tutelage of the goddess.

My third chapter seeks to demonstrate that the moral kinship of son and father is only *temporarily* annulled by the messianic nature of the protagonist's central challenge. Although the Christological dimensions of the Roaz adventures place Wigalois on a different existential level to that occupied by the flawed Gawein (who puts up a notably poor showing at the testing 'stone of virtue' on account of a past sexual misdemeanour), the narrator's undaunted partisanship for Gawein permits him to undergo a moral rehabilitation which in turn enables him to offer credible support to his son in the establishment of his kingship. Although the role of Gawein as a more or less negative foil to a hero surpassing him in either chivalric or spiritual standard is a literary commonplace in a host of medieval texts, Wirnt rejects that model, avoiding the binary distinction inherent in the topos by underscoring the capacity of father and son to *pool* their individual talents in the final section of the romance.

The hero's kingship forms the subject of the fourth chapter. The notion that Wigalois might be predestined to establish a theocratic kingship remote from the standards of the feudal, 'Arthurian' world is opposed by the comparison of Wigalois's rule with Wolfram's Grail realm (from which Wolfram's Gawan is

<sup>37</sup> Helen Cooper, 'Magic that does not work', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976), pp. 131–46, 134. With reference to a number of English examples such as Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and *Richard Coeur de Lion*, Cooper points out that 'there is frequently – indeed normally – a lack of excitement in the treatment of such talismans, and this is often reinforced by the minimal part they play in the plot itself' (p. 131).

significantly excluded). Wirnt, unlike Wolfram, permits no terminal gulf between protagonist and deuteragonist, and the rehabilitated Gawein is given a symbolically significant place at the new king's court. The conciliatory tone of a narrative in which Gawein plays such an important symbolic role in the new king's rule (he arrives flanked by three further Arthurian knights, thus acting in both paternal and representative capacities)<sup>38</sup> is underlined by the welcome shown to many (converted) Muslim adversaries in the ecumenical closure of the romance.

The realistic features which characterize the description of the hero's kingship have commonly been seen as a proof that Wirnt was improvising the last c. 4000 lines of his narrative. Untrammelled by any known source, Wirnt in these sections reveals much about his own preferred working methods, and in my analysis I point to the effectiveness of realism as the literary mode favoured by the 'improving' narrator to *exemplify* his conceptions of what feudal kingship might best consist in. I also draw attention to a previously unremarked intertextual implication of a mode of treatment sometimes criticised for its prosaic tone. That is, the naturalistic detail of this section will be shown to carry a deliberately programmatic force suggesting the desire to tilt against some of the more fantastical/escapist features of Wolfram's Kingdom of the Grail. Wolfram's grandiose conception, which depends to a considerable degree on the Oriental myth of Prester John, lacks the kind of familiar cultural reference points which might have shown contemporary listeners that this exotic kingdom might represent a *realisable* goal.

On the basis of a reading of Wolfram's later epic, *Willehalm* (which largely forsakes the realm of romance fancy by addressing the stubborn geopolitical realities of the Cross/Crescent divide), it is possible to infer that Wolfram himself may have come to see in his earlier work the abdication of an implicit mandate to provide a *concrete* evocation of an ideal kingship comprehensible to his medieval peers. It is a mandate to which Wirnt appears to have been particularly attentive since his romance is, as regards its mode of depiction, 'made over' into an epic (*chanson de geste*) in its later phase – this being a creative fusion of genres functioning as a generic signal that a 'serious' theme was being appropriately treated, that is, in a way which distinguishes *Wigalois* from the somewhat frivolous hyperbole of Wolfram's account.<sup>39</sup>

Issues of kingship are further explored in the fifth chapter entitled Romance and Exemphum where I analyse ways in which Wirnt instrumentalised his

<sup>38</sup> It will be noted that I disagree with the view of Wolfgang Mitgau that the appearance of the Arthurian knights 'schafft keine höfisch-gesellschaftliche Atmosphäre, sondern das Privat-Intime kommt dabei zum Ausdruck [. . .] Von der Eigenschaft Gaweins als des ersten Ritters des Artushofes und Repräsentanten der höfischen Gesellschaft ist hier nichts mehr zu spüren' ('Nachahmung und Selbständigkeit Wirnts von Gravenberg im *Wigalois*', *ZfdPh* 82 [1963], pp. 321–37, 335).

<sup>39</sup> Erich Auerbach pointed out that whilst Arthurian knights do not generally perform political tasks in a recognisable historic context, the soldiers of the epic *do* act within such a context, albeit 'simplified and distorted in the manner of a legend' (*Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by Willard Trask [New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1957], p. 133). It is precisely that distinction which Wirnt's switching of generic conventions is calculated to exploit as he presents images of a form of kingship with which his first audiences could more easily identify.

material for homiletic purposes. The sobriety of his tone indicates that Wirnt's purposes as a moralist were of a particularly practical kind. There is a conspicuous absence of reference in Wigalois's form of kingship to the motif of the Grail – even though *Diu Crône*, using very similar material (some of which will have been culled from Wirnt), *does* include this motif. *Wigalois* does not attempt to show how the role of Arthurian chivalry is eclipsed by a superior dispensation only accessible in the imaginative world of literature – as is the case in *Parzival* and in the later romance based on Wolfram, Albrecht's *Jüngerer Titurel* (c. 1280/1300). In *Wigalois*, by contrast, there is no evasion and no escape into a quasi-transcendent sphere. Rather, the moral equality of Wigalois and Arthur is stressed in what appears to be a literary rejoinder to Wolfram making the attempt to *harmonise* the conflicting God/World imperatives left unresolved in Wolfram's notoriously ambiguous closure (where the rank and file members of the 'Arthurian' world are left out of account). Wirnt as a self-styled moralist co-opted the resources of the romance form to create an Arthurian *exemplum* with a more satisfyingly transparent ethical structure than that which is apparent in the work of his more famous literary predecessor. *Wigalois* may in that sense, I argue, be more properly accounted a counterblast to *Parzival* than an imitation of it.

I finish with a conclusion drawing together in summary form the implications of previous chapters to suggest a new understanding of Wirnt's still underrated romance.