

MISBEHAVED OR MISUNDERSTOOD:

SIR KAY AND HIS AUDIENCE IN FOUR ARTHURIAN ROMANCES



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INTRODUCTION

KAY AS PROBLEMATIC FIGURE

In medieval Arthurian literature, Sir Kay is a controversial character. Starting out as a hero and brave warrior in the Welsh and Latin traditions, the seneschal is transformed to a jesting, and sometimes even cruel, character in the works of Chrétien de Troyes and in the traditions following.¹ Over time, the general image is that Kay's character is changed and reduced from Arthur's number one knight into a jester who hardly ever leaves the castle. In her book on the character of the seneschal, Linda Gowans describes the seneschal as follows:

[Kay] becomes an over-confident, ineffective fighter whose frequent falls make him a figure of fun; an abusive seneschal who unleashes his sarcasm on those aspiring to knightly deeds, delivering verbal abuse even to Guinevere, and a more sinister character ready to attack at comparatively mild provocation, involved with murder attempted [...], suspected and perpetrated [...].²

It happens often in Arthurian romance that the (title) hero is mocked by Kay and then leaves the court to prove himself worthy. Often, Kay only makes an appearance in the opening scene or shortly after, and is reproached with the departure of the hero by Arthur and his courtiers. When the hero returns at the end of the story, Kay's character is no longer needed for the storyline and, usually, he is not mentioned anymore, or only to be beaten by the hero. While the 'revenge' is important for the storyline, as it completes the plot of the story, it hardly shows Kay in a favourable light.

Kay's mockery does not spare anyone, not even the king and queen themselves. While Arthur is generally very fond of Kay, despite his behaviour, Kay does not always listen to the king when he is reprimanded. Gawain, on the other hand, usually has more control over the seneschal in later texts. Kay is often represented as a passive mocker, and when he comes into action, he generally fails. In many stories, he is thrown off his horse at the first attempt in a joust, or almost comically beaten otherwise. In stories as *Perceval* or *Fergus*, Kay being defeated by the title hero after he has insulted him is the proof of the hero's prowess.

Kay as a jesting, obnoxious knight who fails at every attempt to prove himself, is the image usually assumed by the general public, both contemporary and medieval, and scholars

¹ See Appendix for a short overview of Kay in the Welsh, historical, and Latin traditions, and in Chrétien's works.

² L. Gowans, *Cei and the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988), 1

alike. In her dissertation on *Walewein ende Keye*, which I shall discuss later on, Marjolein Hogenbirk is likewise biased. She barely takes time to discuss his character and when she does, she gives a distorted image, conveniently leaving out parts that could be explained neutrally or positively, or purposely explaining them negatively. This ‘anti-Kay’ attitude is something I want to address in this thesis. Hogenbirk is not the only one with this opinion, however.³ In his discussion of *The Avowing of Arthur*, which I will discuss as well, John Burrow states: “No reader of Arthurian stories would expect Kay to match his words with his deeds”.⁴ While there is some truth to this claim, as Kay is known to fail often in combat in the Chrétien and post-Chrétien traditions, it implies that this always has been, and is, the case. In the introduction of their translation of *Le mantel mautaillié*, Glyn Burgess and Leslie Brook say about the conclusions Kay draws: “For once the acerbic nature of his observations seems justified”,⁵ implying that this is the only story in which this is the case. Thomas Hahn describes Kay’s character from the Middle English Gawain-stories,⁶ amongst them *Avowing*, as follows: “[H]e appears ambivalently aligned to both the older generation of King Arthur, and the reckless younger generation of Gawain, and is made to embody the worst tendencies of both.”⁷ Midred Day notes that in the Latin texts, “[Kay] is not the clumsy buffoon that he becomes in later romance.”⁸ While all these scholars are right in part, they are jumping to conclusions, and neglect to take in to account Kay’s whole character as described by the authors. One of the aims of my thesis is to disprove the claim that Kay is always represented as a failure, and to prove that there is more to his character than previously thought.

I am certainly not the first to attempt this. Harold Herman has dedicated his dissertation to the way Kay is portrayed in Chrétien’s stories and their Welsh counterparts. He comes to the conclusion that:

the transmitters of Arthurian legend, seeking to please their audience, ignored the traditional character of Kay (derived from the Welsh Kei) and bestowed upon Arthur’s seneschal numerous unworthy attributes, principally by contrasting Kay with the hero of the tale

³ In her edition of the text of *WeK* from 2011, Hogenbirk has a more nuanced approach. (M. Hogenbirk (ed.), *Walewein ende Keye. Een dertiende-eeuwse Arturroman, overgeleverd in de Lancelotcompilatie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2011))

⁴ J.A. Burrow, “The Avowing of King Arthur”, in M. Stokes and T.L. Burton (eds.), *Medieval Literature and Antiquities. Studies in Honour of Basil Cottle* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), 101

⁵ G. S. Burgess and L.C. Brook, “Introduction”, in G.S. Burgess and L.C. Brook (eds. and transl.), *French Arthurian Literature V. The Lay of Mantel* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), 32

⁶ For instance, *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle, The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle, The Greene Knight*, etcetera.

⁷ T. Hahn, “Introduction”, in T. Hahn (ed.), *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 25

⁸ M.L. Day, “Introduction”, in M.L. Day (ed. and transl.), *Latin Arthurian Literature* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), 6

(including Gawain) who, by placing Kay in a most humiliating position, would be applauded by the *conteur*'s audience.⁹

Jürgen Haupt has written about Kay in the Chrétien-stories, and their German translations by Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach. He concludes that two qualities (“Grundeigenschaften”)¹⁰ are essential for the image of Kay, which contradict each other: malignancy and competence/bravery (“Bosheit und Tüchtigkeit (Tapferkeit)”)¹¹. Moreover, the figure of Kay has a function of criticism at court. Haupt sees three steps in the development of Kay: in the pre-courtly time, his character was positive and brave; later, his character became that of the ‘evil seneschal’, as a criticism on the office of seneschal; and finally, it developed a comical aspect.¹²

Lastly, Gowans has published a monograph on Kay's character, focusing mostly on the Welsh, French and English traditions. She analyses the figure of Kay in many romances from all over Europe, starting with the oldest Arthurian stories known, from Wales, and ending with Scotland in the nineteenth century. In Celtic literature, Kay is a warrior-hero, seen by the narrators as a positive figure. However, in the Chrétien and post-Chrétien works, “Ceii's positive function is reduced to that of an irritant, though in many cases he still achieves results and retains a certain strength of personality.”¹³ Most of these stories she only touches upon, sometimes not giving them more than one paragraph for analysis. She concludes: “Ceii the hero is always in the background, and once this is accepted it is possible to bring a new understanding to bear on many of the ambiguities created by Continental writers' use of their sources – and to carry out a reappraisal of what the sources may have been.”

While the efforts of the above-mentioned scholars have undoubtedly not been in vain, the general image of Kay has not changed in the eyes of scholars, as they still view him as a negative character by default. Moreover, there has barely been any comparative research on Kay in post-(non)Chrétien Arthurian literature, and Gowans discusses many works only briefly. In my thesis, I aim to discuss a few neglected works intensively. By comparing four post-Chrétien stories from four different traditions (English, French, German, and Dutch), I aim to paint a clearer, inter-European image of the seneschal in Arthurian literature. Doing so,

⁹ H. Herman, *Sir Kay: A Study of the Character of the Seneschal of King Arthur's Court* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, [etc.] : University Microfilms International, 1960), 161

¹⁰ J. Haupt, *Der Truchsess Keie im Artusroman. Untersuchungen zur Gesellschaftsstruktur im hofischen Roman* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1971), 131

¹¹ Idem

¹² Ibid, 134

¹³ Gowans, 164

I will answer the following question: *How is the character of the seneschal Kay represented in Arthurian literature, and how is he viewed by the medieval audience, as represented by the audience within the story, in the chosen four romances?*

The four texts are, in my opinion, representative for Europe as a whole, even though they are from different periods. I have chosen texts in which Kay plays a prominent, yet at least ambiguous, role. With this, I mean that while some of his actions fit the image as painted above, the one of the sharp-tongued Kay as a failing knight, his role has also parts that could be described as neutral, or even positive. In addition, all the chosen stories are authentic, in the sense that they are not (to our knowledge) translations or adaptations from another language. To represent the French tradition, I have chosen the text *Le mantel mautallié* (hereafter *Mantel*, end of the twelfth, beginning of the thirteenth century),¹⁴ for the German, *Diu Crône* (hereafter *DC*, 1210-1240), for the Dutch, *Walewein ende Keye* (hereafter *WeK*, 1315-1320),¹⁵ and for the English, *The Avowing of Arthur* (hereafter *Avowyng*, 1375-1400).¹⁶

Methodology and Set-up of the Thesis

Part of my research question covers the response by the intra-diegetic audience, meaning the audience of events *inside* the story, as described by the narrator. In his article “Luisteren naar de spiegel”, Frank Brandsma argues that by studying the intra-diegetic audience in medieval literature, we can determine how the narrator of the story wanted the extra-diegetic audience (i.e. the audience listening to the story or reading the story) to react. For instance, if characters of the story laugh, the extra-diegetic audience is supposed to mimic this reaction and be amused by the events as well. Using characters to summon a sympathising reaction is a narrating technique, to draw the audience into the story and bring about a certain involvement to the story. Brandsma calls these characters, who are supposed to help the reading audience form a reaction, *spiegelpersonages* (‘mirror characters’). These characters observe the same event as the audience reading or listening to the story, and conjure the reaction that the audience ideally should show as well.¹⁷ Brandsma notes that spectators inside the story are

¹⁴ There is a debate about the relative chronology of *Mantel* and Robert Biket’s *Lai du Cor*, but no one has produced conclusive evidence yet. However, this is irrelevant for my research. (Burgess and Brook, “Introduction”, 7-8)

¹⁵ This is the date of the *Lancelot* Compilation, which contains *WeK*. See “Kay in Europe: the Corpus”, below.

¹⁶ I will use the spelling of the seneschal’s name as common in the corresponding story, i.e. when discussing *Mantel*, I will call him ‘Keu’, when I talk about *DC*, ‘Keii’, in *WeK*, ‘Keye’ and in *Avowyng*, ‘Kay’. When referring to the seneschal’s character in general, I will call him Kay. The same goes for Arthur’s nephew, who will be known as ‘Gauvain’ in *Mantel*, ‘Gawein’ in *DC*, ‘Walewein’ in *WeK* and ‘Gawain’ in *Avowing*. When speaking of his character in general, I will call him Gawain. With other names (such as the queen’s), I also use the spelling as common in that story.

¹⁷ F. Brandsma, “Luisteren naar de spiegel”, in R. Sleiderink, V. Uyttersprot and B. Besamusca (eds.), *Maar er is meer. Avontuurlijk lezen in de epiek van de Lage Landen. Studies voor Jozef D. Janssens* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 285

often the ones to evaluate the events and that their judgement is suggested to the extra-diegetic audience. Sometimes the intra-diegetic audience knows less than the external one, however, by which the narrator creates dramatic irony.¹⁸

Using Brandsma's theory, I will focus on the reactions as posed by the mirror characters in the stories I mentioned above. Reactions could be laughter, or annoyance, prompting the extra-diegetic audience to feel the same. However, while Brandsma's theory is helpful in understanding Kay, or at least how the narrator intended the audience to respond to Kay's actions and words, not all authors used this technique to influence their audience. Sometimes the narrator invades the story to comment on the events in the intra-diegetic audience's stead, but often, it is left up to the extra-diegetic audience to conjure a reaction of their own. In these instances, it can be difficult for us to grasp what we are supposed to think of Kay's character, and we will have to focus on different aspects of the story to understand.

Aside from the mirror characters, another part of my analysis will consist of close reading and comparing Kay in the four different traditions. By doing so, I attempt to note the differences and similarities between how the seneschal is portrayed in the four countries. In these four countries, Arthurian literature flourished in the Middle Ages, and each country has unique stories that originate there. Because of this, we can assume that Kay's character is portrayed as was common in that specific country, giving the opportunity to analyse him as uninfluenced as possible.¹⁹

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will look at Kay's different roles at court, where the other courtiers serve as his audience. The first is Kay in his role as seneschal, tasks that could be or are ascribed to that job, and how he carries them out. The office of seneschal was ascribed to him by Geoffrey of Monmouth,²⁰ and we can learn much about this job in the Middle Ages by studying the tasks Kay carried out. Secondly, I will look at a specific role, which is not necessarily part of his job description: being an advisor. I will focus on what kind of advice he gives, good or troublesome, and how his audience reacts to it. After that, I will move on to Kay as Arthurian knight, and his relation to his beloved. How does he treat his significant other in relation to the other courtiers and his lord? Next is Kay in his usual role, that of mocker. I will analyse if his taunting is merely meant to be amusing, or if it has a different goal as well. Finally, I will discuss the relationship between Kay and his lord at

¹⁸ Brandsma (2005), 290

¹⁹ Of course, Arthurian literature circulated through Europe, so none of the stories used have a truly unique and uninfluenced depiction of the seneschal. However, because the stories in their current form do not have a direct source in the same form, we can assume that the characters, including Kay, are portrayed as was common in that country (or at least the area where it was written).

²⁰ See Appendix, "The Historical Kay: Geoffrey, Wace and Layamon".

court. Arthur has given Kay the job of being his seneschal for a reason, and it is interesting to see how they interact with each other. All four of the stories will be mentioned in the chapter, but the focus will mostly be on *Mantel* and *DC*.

In the second chapter, I will look at Kay's role when he leaves the safety of the court, focusing mostly on *Avowyng*, *WeK* and *DC*. As in the first chapter, I will look at Kay's character from different angles. I shall start with one of his tasks as seneschal, leading an army. After that, I will look at how Kay fares in one-on-one fights, or jousts, and how he challenges his opponents with his mocking tongue. By doing so, I aim to confirm, adjust, or deny the general image I addressed above. Next, I will move on to Kay on quests, as he then does what an Arthurian knight is supposed to, participate in adventures. Later, I will address how he behaves as he goes on adventures with Arthur, comparing his behaviour towards his lord outside the court as opposed to at court with an audience of courtiers. Finally, I will pay attention to a special position that is only used in *DC*: Kay as Grail Knight, as his role is there predominantly positive, which gives an interesting perspective to his character.

Lastly, in the third and final chapter, I will discuss the special relationship between Kay and Gawain. Throughout most romances, Kay is loyal to his lord, and Arthur is fond of him, although this is not always the case, as I will demonstrate in the first two chapters. However, the relationship between the seneschal and Arthur's nephew can be either good or bad. In the chapter, I will look at their dynamics at court, where Arthur and the courtiers are present, following by their interactions outside of the court, where there is less or no audience. Finally, I will discuss a special episode in *DC*, where Keii thinks Gawain is beheaded, and mourns his death, an episode that shows a new dimension to their relationship.

Kay in Europe: the Corpus

As stated above, I will use four texts, chosen because Kay plays a considerable role in all, and, additionally, this role is ambiguous at best. Before I can begin my analysis, however, I shall start with a short synopsis of each of the stories in chronological order.

Mantel, also called *Lai du Cort Mantel*, *Lai du Mantel* and *Le Conte du Mantel*, tells how Arthur holds court at Pentecost, and refuses to have dinner until an adventure has taken place. At that moment, a youth arrives with a magical mantle: it will only fit a woman faithful to her husband or lover. The queen fits the mantle first, but it is too long on her. To hide her shame, she tells the other maidens and ladies present to fit the mantle as well. Everyone, except Caradoc's beloved, however, fails the test. Keu takes it upon himself to soothe the courtiers.

The translation I used is by Burgess and Brook, who have based their translation on MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouv. acq. fr. 1104, or simply S, rather than MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 837, f. 27r, col. 1-31r, col. 2, or T, on which most editions are based. They have chosen S because of that reason, to make an edition of another version of the text.²¹ However, S was modified by a fourteenth century hand, “as a revising scribe endeavoured to tone down what he evidently perceived as the forthrightness of some of the comments made following the failure of the ladies.”²²

The German story, *DC*, is with its 30,042 lines by far the longest story I will discuss. It is also the only story of which we know the author: Heinrich von dem Türlin. The story starts by briefly explaining Arthur’s youth, and then moves on to the first episode, a fidelity test with a tankard, where both male and female courtiers are tested. After this, the next scene takes place with Arthur is sitting in front of the fire, when Ginover makes fun of him and tells him about a knight who rides outside in the snow with hardly anything on. Arthur decides to ride out and find this knight, Gasozein, who then tells him Ginover was betrothed to him before she married Arthur. The story then follows Gawein’s adventures for a while, until Ginover is abducted by her brother. Her brother is overcome by Gasozein, who attempts to rape Ginover. Gawein saves the queen and takes her and Gasozein back to Arthur’s court, where the dispute is settled. After this, the next book starts with more adventures of Gawein, amongst them one where a knight who looks like Gawein is beheaded and his head brought to Arthur, and presented as being Gawein. Later, another fidelity test is held, this time with a set of gloves. These gloves are then stolen by a knight riding a goat, and Gawein, along with Lanzelet, Kalocreant, and Keii, goes out to seek him. They find a clue about the Holy Grail, before finally returning home.

The Middle Dutch story of *WeK* starts when Arthur makes Walewein ruler in his absence (he is, however, present at court the entire narrative). Prompted by jealousy, Keye tells everyone that Walewein has boasted that in a year, he can participate in more adventures than all other knights together. While this is not true, Arthur believes Keye, and Walewein leaves, vowing that he will not come back until he has fulfilled the boast. In an attempt to steal a march on him, Keye, along with twenty companions who back up his lie, rides out to participate in more adventures than Walewein. After a week, they arrive at a castle, where they are refused entrance because their group is too large. Furiously, Keye lays siege to the

²¹ G.S. Burgess and L.C. Brook, “Preface”, in G.S. Burgess and L.C. Brook (eds. and transl.), *French Arthurian Literature V. The Lay of Mantel* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), 2; and “Notes”, in G.S. Burgess and L.C. Brook (eds. and transl.), *French Arthurian Literature V. The Lay of Mantel* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013) 115,

²² Burgess and Brook, “Introduction”, 15

castle. The squire who refused them entrance and the castle lord himself come out and joust with Keye and one of his companions, Lichanor. They are defeated, but despite Keye's promise that the rest of his companions would stay out of the fight, they attack and capture the castle lord (still not knowing who he is). The castle lord is sent to Arthur, to whom he tells what happened. Arthur sends Gariet, Lyoneel, Hestor and Acglavael to capture Keye and his companions, but they have to wear a disguise. Keye is besieging the castle when the other knights arrive, and Keye is defeated by Acglavael. He is then taken prisoner along with most of his companions; four manage to escape, one is killed. The escapees manage to free Keye and the others, but Keye does not dare to return to court yet. In the meantime, Walewein has undertaken many adventures and has returned to court. Keye deems it safe and returns as well, only to be attacked by the knights Walewein has helped or defeated. Keye flees and does not come back in this story.

This text has only been handed down to us in the *Lancelot* Compilation, which tells of the life of Arthur from birth to death, and has Lancelot as its protagonist.²³ Of the Compilation stories *Wrake van Ragisel*, *Ridder metter mouwen*, and *Moriaen*, a fragment of the original translation or story (so outside the compilation) has been handed down to us. These fragments show that the compiler has altered the story to fit it into the *Lancelot* Compilation,²⁴ which means that other stories of which we have nothing of the original left may have been altered as well, including *WeK*.

Avowying, lastly, is the youngest romance I will analyse. The story tells of Arthur, Kay, Gawain and Baldwin, who each swear a vow. The vows of the first three are all tasks that can immediately be fulfilled; Arthur will hunt down a boar, Gawain will wake at the Tarn Wathelene all night, and Kay will search the forest for opponents. Baldwin's vows are more lifelong morals he will maintain: he will never be jealous of a woman, never refuse hospitality or food, and never fear death. The story of Baldwin holds up the second half of the poem, while the first half is about Arthur, Gawain and Kay fulfilling their vows.

²³ Between the three main stories of Arthur and Lancelot, which form the framework of the *Lancelot* Compilation (*Lanceloet*, *Queeste vanden Grale*, and *Arturs doet*), seven other stories are interpolated. These are *Perchevael* (a translation of *Perceval*), *Moriaen*, *Wrake van Ragisel* (a translation of *Vengeance Raguidel*), *Ridder metter mouwen*, *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet* (related to the Old French *Lai de Tyolet*), and lastly, *WeK*. (B. Besamusca, "The Medieval Dutch Arthurian Material", in W.H. Jackson and S.A. Ranawake (eds.), *The Arthur of the Germans. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 209)

²⁴ M. Hogenbirk, *Avontuur en Anti-avontuur. Een onderzoek naar Walewein ende Keye, een Arturroman uit de Lancelotcompilatie* ([S.l.] : [s.n.], 2004), 25

CHAPTER 1

KAY AT COURT

In many Arthurian romances, Kay does not leave the court to go on a quest, and stays at Arthur's side. Kay has duties as seneschal to perform, which usually keep him at court. However, not coming into action does not mean he plays a passive role. As shown in the introduction, Kay's sharp tongue is either used as a humorous motif, or as a plot device to give the hero of the story a reason to leave court. The comical aspect of his words often goes hand in hand with criticism on Arthur and/or his court.²⁵ In the first chapter of my thesis, I will look at the role Kay plays while staying at court, and how courtiers and guests respond to him.

A large part of this chapter will consist of the fidelity tests from both *Mantel* and *DC*. Fidelity tests are a popular theme in Arthurian literature. In his article "Characters and Narrators as Interpreters of Fidelity Tests in Medieval Arthurian Fiction", Bart Besamusca describes the test stories (or scenes, when they are sometimes embedded in a larger narrative, such as *DC*) as follows: "First of all, there is a testing device involved [...]. Secondly, a series of characters, be they exclusively female, exclusively male, or a mixed group, have to undergo the test. Thirdly, the event takes place during a social gathering." In *Mantel*, this testing device is a mantle, the test group is exclusively female, and the testing takes place when Arthur holds court at Pentecost. In *DC*, two of such scenes are described, the testing devices being a tankard and a glove, and contrastingly with most fidelity tests, both male and female characters are tested, the test with the tankard taking place at Christmas, while the glove test does not take place on a special day, but in a social gathering nonetheless.²⁶ In *DC*, there is also a mention of a test with a mantle, but this one is not included in *DC*. Besamusca suggests that this may imply that Heinrich von dem Türlim was thinking about *Der Mantel*, the German adaptation of *Mantel*, which is attributed to him.²⁷

Kay as Seneschal

Since Kay has been introduced as seneschal in *Historia Regum Britanniae*,²⁸ this job has had tasks ascribed to it throughout Arthurian romance. Kay is seen as serving food in the

²⁵ Haupt, 124, 132

²⁶ B. Besamusca, "Characters and Narrators as Interpreters of Fidelity Tests in Medieval Arthurian Fiction". *Neophilologus* 94 (2010), 295

²⁷ Idem

²⁸ See Appendix, "The Latin Kay".

historical tradition, and as leading (part of) an army.²⁹ At the end of his dissertation *Sir Kay: A Study of the Character of the Seneschal of King Arthur's Court*, Herman concludes that Kay's unfavourable interpretation by Chrétien is because of his position as seneschal, a job that was looked upon with contempt.³⁰ Gowans agrees and suggests that because the seneschal's responsibility includes the kitchen, there is no heroic place for him in literature.³¹ One of the romances I will discuss, *WeK*, however, proves that not all seneschals are seen as evil. When Walewein has killed a dragon, he faints, and a seneschal passes by. Thinking the knight is dead, he tries to take Walewein's horse. Walewein wakes up, and, happily, the seneschal tends to his wounds and then takes Walewein to his lord, where he truthfully tells what has happened. Contrary to a similar scene with the slaying of a dragon in *Tristan and Isolde*, and perhaps in a comment on that, the seneschal from *WeK* does not lie about having slain the dragon. However, in an Icelandic version called *Tristram*, Kay's name seems to be synonymous with (evil) seneschal, as the author replaces the pretender with Kay's name (*Kæi hinn*, or Kay the Courteous, evidently an ironic epithet).³²

Whether the position of seneschal is seen as bad or not, the job description brings along several tasks in the four romances. According to Gowans, the literary position of seneschal was open to a wide variety of interpretations, but the association with food has never disappeared in the Arthurian romances. In *Avowyng*, Kay is placed in charge of the meat of the boar Arthur has killed.³³ In *Mantel*, Arthur is holding court when Gauvain wonders why he has not started eating yet. Instead of asking Arthur directly, he turns to Keu, and Keu goes to the king. This can either be because Keu is in charge of food, or because he is used as a messenger.³⁴ In *DC*, it is also Keii who is in charge of the food:

Key daz ezzen ruof hiez
 Auf der burch in dem palas.
 (ll. 5421-2)³⁵

²⁹ See Chapter 2, "Kay as Leader of an Army".

³⁰ Herman, 168-9

³¹ Gowans, 46-7

³² M.E. Kalinke, *Arthur North-by-Northwest: the 'matière de Bretagne' in Old Norse-Icelandic romances* (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1981), 111-2

³³ See Chapter 2, "Kay and Arthur on Quests".

³⁴ Arthur tells Keu that he never eats during a festival until an adventure has happened. By doing so, the narrator proves that he knows Arthurian romances, as this is a well-used stock motif. Arthur refusing to eat is used in, amongst others, the French *Vengeance Raguidel*, where an adventure takes place right after this scene. The same happens in *Mantel*; Arthur has barely spoken the words, or the youth arrives.

³⁵ All Middle High German citations from *DC* are from: Heinrich von dem Türlin, "Diu Crône", in F.P. Knapp and M. Nieser (eds.), *Die Krone* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag GmbH, 2000), 1-381, and Heinrich von dem Türlin, "Diu Crône", in A. Ebenbauer and F. Kragl (eds.), *Die Krone (Verse 12282-30042)* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag GmbH, 2005), 1-502, depending on the verses.

Keii had a page announce that the meal would be served in the great hall.³⁶ (p. 61)

After dinner, Arthur tells Keii to order the cooks to go to Karidol and to have the chamberlains prepare to accompany Arthur on his journey. Keii is presented here as head of Arthur's household.

The first time Keii appears in *DC*, we are told that Arthur is well known for holding festivities, and for one such a celebration, Keii rides to Spain and returns home with many splendid steeds. Whether or not he does this of his own account or not the narrator does not say, nor if this was the goal of his journey. However, Arthur is allowed to give the horses away at the celebration. Keii does not have an audience in this, but the proof of his success is in the many steeds. However, whether he has obtained them through knightly prowess (by defeating the owners) or has bought them with money Arthur has given him is not clear.

In his role as messenger, Keu also welcomes the youth as a guest in *Mantel*. He greets the youth politely:

“Amis, et Dex te beneïne,”	“And may God bless you, my friend,”
Ce li dit Keuz li seneschaus.	Said Kay the seneschal to him.
“Tressuez est vostre chevaus,	“Your horse is bathed in sweat,
Car me dites ou vos irez.”	Tell me where you are heading.” ³⁷
(ll. 144-7)	

Keu's politeness in *Mantel* towards the stranger can be sharply contrasted against his behaviour towards guests in other Arthurian romances. Kay's words are often the reason the hero is driven from court in order to prove himself, for instance in the stories of *Yvain* and *Perceval*. In *Mantel*, Keu starts out as polite, and helpfully directs the youth to Arthur when he asks who the king is. This kind of politeness might be unexpected in a post-Chrétien work, yet the narrator does not comment on it directly, or via characters in the story. No such welcoming by Keii takes place in either the scene with the tankard, the episode with the glove, or any other scene with a guest arriving in *DC*. In *Mantel*, Keu, in his role as

³⁶ All translations from *DC* are from: Heinrich von dem Türlin, *The Crown. A Tale of Sir Gawain and King Arthur's Court*, translated and edited by J.W. Thomas (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

³⁷ Both the edition and the translation from *Mantel* are from: Anonymous, “C'est le lay du Cort Mantel”, in G.S. Burgess and L.C. Brook (eds. and transl.), *French Arthurian Literature V. The Lay of Mantel* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 59-101.

messenger, is sent, along with Gauvain and Yvain, to the queen by Arthur, to ask her to try on the mantle.³⁸

Gowans notes that in literature, “the seneschal could be a very influential person, closely involved with the administration of justice, and at times exercising the full responsibilities of government in the absence of an overlord.”³⁹ The story of *WeK* starts with Arthur’s decision to make Walewein his deputy,⁴⁰ and because of this, Keye becomes jealous:

Dit beneet Keyen sean,	Keye soon became jealous
Dat Waleweine aldus scone staet,	of Walewein’s good fortune,
Dat hi des conincs raet	that he had become the king’s councilor
Ende dlant algader an hem stoet,	and was obeyed by all throughout the realm,
Ende men dor hem also nine doet,	for he, Keye, was not treated thus,
Want hi drossate was al daer. ⁴¹	despite being the king’s seneschal. ⁴²

(ll. 14-9)

Keye is jealous and angry because Arthur gives the task of deputy ruler to Walewein, while Keye as the king’s seneschal should be handling this task, and because Walewein earns respect with it, which Keye does not receive. Even though Arthur is not actually absent in *WeK*, he gives away a task that belonged to the seneschal, not merely something Keye could lay claim on, as Hogenbirk puts it in her dissertation,⁴³ making Keye’s anger more understandable for the audience.

Finally, Kay’s role as seneschal includes protecting the court, as Gowans suggests happens in *Erec* when Kay challenged Erec.⁴⁴ In *WeK*, Keye does the opposite of protecting by leaving the court. This is not the case in *DC*, however. When a knight riding a goat arrives at court, he tells Gawain that by putting the golden ring he has on his finger, all hatred would vanish. Suddenly a young maiden appears and warns Arthur that he is being betrayed before she leaves again. Keii is the first person who realises the Knight with the Goat might be the

³⁸ However, Keu is not the only messenger at the court. When the youth wants to take the mantle back with him, Arthur sends people to have the court searched for any more maidens or ladies, and it is Griflet who darts off and finds Caradoc’s beloved.

³⁹ Gowans, 46

⁴⁰ The reason for doing so is not mentioned in the text.

⁴¹ All citations from *WeK* are from: Anonymous, *Walewein ende Keye. Een dertiende-eeuwse Arturroman, overgeleverd in de Lancelotcompilatie*, with introduction and comments by M. Hogenbirk, in cooperation with W.P. Gerritsen (Hilversum: Verloren, 2011).

⁴² All translations from *WeK* are from: D.F. Johnson and G.H.M. Claassens (eds), *Dutch Romances. III Five Romances from the Lancelot Compilation* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 368-523.

⁴³ M. Hogenbirk, *Avontuur en Anti-avontuur. Een onderzoek naar Walewein ende Keye, een Arturroman uit de Lancelotcompilatie* ([S.l.] : [s.n.], 2004), 35.

⁴⁴ Gowans, 50-1

one to cause them harm, even if he cannot see proof of this. Because he cannot plainly insult the messenger, as Arthur would not allow it, Keii decides to use his jesting powers, which I will return to later in this chapter, for good. He holds a speech in which he says:

“Merckent die auentùre reht
Die ùch dirre güt kneht
Wil zeygen von siner kunst
Vnd auch frauw Salden gunst!
[...]
Frau Salde sante niht her jn
Vmb sust die cleine magt
Die gronszen schaden hat gewissagt.
Dem widersteent, e ir jne claget!”
(ll. 25183-223)

“I don’t think it would be amiss to consider carefully the favor of Lady Fortune and what sort of trick this good knight wants to show us. [...] It was not for nothing that Lady Fortune sent in the little maid who foretold mischief. You should oppose it before you have to lament it.”
(p. 283)

Some courtiers are pleased by Keii’s advice, others think it is offensive, but no one praises or condemns it in public. Rather, they talk amongst themselves and give their opinion. This gives mixed messages to the extra-diegetic audience, as they could either be amused or annoyed by Keii. In this case, the extra-diegetic audience does not know any more than the intra-diegetic audience does, and because of Keii’s reputation, extra-diegetic audience might be inclined to side with Arthur and the courtiers. Arthur does not heed Keii’s advice and allows the messenger to continue. The Knight with the Goat puts on the gloves from the earlier test,⁴⁵ which make him disappear without a trace. Keii goes in search of him, but to no avail. Arthur still believes the knight to be standing next to him and the rest of the courtiers remain in the hall, while Keii sets off in pursuit. Finally, Arthur realises as well that the messenger has left with the gloves, and Keii, along with others, goes into the courtyard. The narrator says:

Vund hatt yme Kay da erdoht
Einen list, den er auch volbraht

⁴⁵ See “Kay as Mocker”, below.

Der jne doch wenig verfinng.
(ll. 25491-3)

[T]he seneschal did something clever that occurred to him, but the stratagem did not succeed.
(p. 286)

Using dramatic irony, the narrator already gives away that the plan will not work, before explaining what it is. Keii bars the gate to cut off the messenger's escape and then continues the search, following the tracks of the goat. The messenger realises what he is doing and evades him with ease. Again taking control, Keii orders everyone to come help him, but the Knight with the Goat manages to escape by jumping over the wall.

While it is never stated explicitly that these tasks belong to the job of seneschal, it is at least noteworthy that Kay is the one to carry them out. In none of the cases described above does the narrator or the audience within the story seem to be surprised by Kay's behaviour and actions, implying that, while perhaps not necessarily in Kay's job description, it is not odd for him to carry those tasks out.

Kay as Advisor

Above I described a scene in which Keii, using his trademark sarcasm, tries to warn Arthur not to trust the Knight with the Goat. He is using his position as seneschal to act as advisor. In *Mantel*, the seneschal does a similar thing. All the knights are upset by the failure of their ladyloves, but Keu soothes them:

“Seignors, ne vos corouciez pas. Molt oel sont parti nos gras Quant chascuns en porte son fais. Bien doivent par nos desormais Estre chieries et amees, Car bien se sont hui esprovees, Si nos doit ce reconforter, Que l’un ne puet l’autre gaber.” (ll. 689-96)	“My lords, do not get angry. Our jokes are evenly distributed, Since each man has his own burden to bear. They must henceforth Be cherished and loved by us, For today they have been well tested, And we must take comfort in the fact that We cannot mock ⁴⁶ each other.”
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⁴⁶ Burgess and Brook translate *gaber* as ‘to mock’, but it has other meanings as well, such as ‘to boast’, ‘to deride’ and ‘to deceive’. (A. Tobler, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, edited and republished by E. Lommatzsch (Berlin [etc.]: Weidmann, 1915-2008), 18-22)

Keu concludes that they are all in the same boat, hence, none of the knights can mock another without being mocked himself. He also encourages the other knights to love their ladies regardless of the events of the day, or rather, because of those events. Gauvain is worried about the knights mocking each other, but Keu continues:

<p>“Mal dahez ait qui ce crera, Ne qui ja le creantera Que bon chevalier soit honni Se s’amie a fet autre ami; Ainz s’en doit il bien escondire. Que doit il de ce estre pire S’ele est de mauvestié prove? [...] Sor celui soit qui l’avra fet!” (ll. 709-18)</p>	<p>“But a curse on anyone who believes this, Or who ever approves it, That a good knight is shamed If his beloved has made another man her lover; Rather must he find a good reason for it. Why should he be any worse for it, If her wickedness has been proven? [...] Let the blame fall on he who is responsible!”)</p>
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Keu, the character who usually is described as an agitator, is now a peacemaker, stating that they should love their ladies regardless of their flaws. Burgess and Brook remark:

“Surprisingly, Kay, who has always had a predilection for a barbed witticism, is here looking in the bright side and actually seems to take comfort from this new joke-free environment.”⁴⁷

Keu seems to say that, while a knight’s honour should not suffer from his lady’s infidelity, that the blame of it does lie with the knight himself, and that the reason for her disloyalty can be found, and, therefore, perhaps solved.⁴⁸ One of the knights, Tor, states that Keu has given bad counsel, but that he has spoken the truth nevertheless.

When it is the turn of Caradoc’s beloved to try on the mantle, Caradoc begs her not to put on the mantle, as he does not wish to know about her wrongdoings. Keu, once more, replies:

<p>Lors li dit Kex li seneschaus, Qui tant fu fel et desloiaus: “Don’t ne doit il ester molt liez?</p>	<p>Then Kay the seneschal, who was Very evil and disloyal, said to him: “Should such a lover be very happy then?</p>
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⁴⁷ Burgess and Brook, “Introduction”, 31-2

⁴⁸ Keu’s encouragement to love the ladies regardless stands in sharp contrast with the ‘solution’ proposed by Arthur in one of the Norse versions of this story called *Skikkju rímur*, namely, riding out to find better women (how he is planning to achieve that is not clear).

Vos en serez ja molt iriez	You are going to be filled with grief
Se vos l'amez tant bonement.	If you love her so much.
Veze en la seoir plus de cent	Look at more than a hundred sitting there,
Que on cuidoit jehui matin	Who were thought this morning
Plus esmerees que or fin.	To be more pure than gold.
Or les pouez totes veoir,	Now you can see them all
Por lor mesfet el renc seoir.”	Sitting in the row because of their misdeeds.”
(ll. 813-20)	

Burgess and Brook take Keu's words to mean that, if Caradoc takes such a point of view (i.e. not trust his ladylove by not letting her put on the mantle), he is bound to suffer, and instead, he should be happy about what happened. They state: "Although he is wrong about Caradoc's maiden, Kay's general conclusions seem, in spite of his occasional irony and sarcasm, to present an accurate view of what transpires in this lay."⁴⁹ Therefore, it seems odd that this late in the poem, Keu is described as "fel et desloiaus" ("very evil and disloyal", l. 812).⁵⁰ Keu's words do not seem to be out of disloyalty, and the other knights agree that Caradoc's beloved should try on the mantle, just like every other maiden and lady. In their notes, Burgess and Brook point out that in another manuscript, T, rather than describing Keu as evil and disloyal, Keu's speech starts in that line, saying: "Et cil que pert sa desoiaus" ("And he who loses his disloyal lover").⁵¹ Aside from noting the difference, Burgess and Brook do not draw conclusions from this variant. The word "desloiaus" rhymes with "seneschaus" in the previous line. To have the word incorporated into Keu's speech rather than as a description of him seems to make more sense, as in this lay, he has been described as nothing but polite, loyal and a peacemaker, albeit a sarcastic one. For the narrator to call him disloyal at such a late stage does not seem to make sense, especially since it does not fit in with the character description in the rest of the lay. However, the sentences differ in such a way that it is unlikely to speak of a scribal error. Whether the author decided to put in a description of Keu that would be recognisable for his audience, albeit not consistent with the rest of his picture of the seneschal, or if a copyist changed the sentence, however, is unclear, although the latter seems more likely.

Keu's advice maintains the peace at court, despite the discovery that none of the ladies have been faithful to their husbands and lovers. In *DC*, however, when Arthur goes to Keii

⁴⁹ Burgess and Brook, "Introduction", 32

⁵⁰ It reminds of how Griflet is described in line 594, "fel et engrès" ("treacherous and cruel").

⁵¹ Burgess and Brook, "Notes", note to lines 812-3, 115. See also Introduction, "Kay in Europe: the Corpus".

after Ginover has insulted the king, Keii rather seems to be stirring up discontent between the royal couple than make peace. Arthur's knights sneak away to fight in a tournament, and only three knights do not go with them: Gales Lithauz, and Aumagwin and "der zuhtlose" ("the ill-mannered", l. 3265, p. 38) Keii. At night after dinner, Arthur goes to sit in front of the fire because he is cold. The queen asks him why he humours himself like a woman in front of the fire. She goes on telling about a certain knight who can ride in the snow wearing only a white garment. The king is saddened by her words, as she calls his manhood into question while praising another knight. Arthur leaves the room and asks the remaining knights' advice. Keii, is the first to respond:

Ze dirre red antwurt Key,
Des zvng vil selten wol gesprach
Vnd des angel ie stach
Mit bitterlicher var,
Der oft vil vndar
Zem besten chvnd sprechen
Des wolt niht zebrechen
Sein reht der schalcheit.
Er sprach nah alter gewonheit
Also ze dirre sach:
[...]
"Da wider stet ein swach gewin.
Swer weip lat ze verre vür
Der gwinnet sein vil chlein gevüer.
Daz ist an meiner vrowen schein.
Si scholt in ir chamer sein
Vnd liez vns schaffen ünser dinch.
Mit ir ist müelich gerinch.
Si hat ir willen also vil,
Daz si sprichet swaz si wil.
Daz is tie doch ein swachez spil."
(ll. 3457-82)

The first to reply was Keii, who never spoke well of anyone, whose barbs always stung with bitter guile, and who wouldn't give up his role as knavish jester. [...] "[O]ne gains nothing by favoring a woman too much. This can be seen with my own wife, who ought to stay in her

rooms and let us take care of our affairs. It's difficult to content with her, for she has had her way so much that she says whatever she wishes; it is not amusing."⁵² (p. 41)

The narrator makes it a point, not once, but twice within two hundred lines, to emphasise Keii's character. First, he only gives him the epithet of 'ill-mannered', but the second time, Keii's description takes up as much as eight lines. Ironically, Keii, along with Gales and Augmagvin, have stayed to temper the king's anger because his knights, including Gawein, have snuck away. Arthur is not pleased with his seneschal's words, and reprimands him for talking in such manner about his wife, who is loyal and faithful.⁵³ After Arthur's words, the narrator, who is quite invasive in *DC*, comments that sometimes a man does not mean to say the wrong thing, but that it slips out, implying that Keii did not mean to say those things, and spoke without thinking. In a didactic manner, the narrator continues, stating that a man should protect his wife as himself, and he who does not, pays the price, like Keii did when Arthur scolded him. Keii remains silent, unlike the previous time he was lectured by the king during the tankard-episode.⁵⁴ This is a good thing according to the narrator, because his words have aroused the king's anger.

Kay's words as advisor seem to be wise when the peace at court is at stake, with the arrival of the Knight with the Goat in *DC*, and in *Mantel*, when fighting threatens to break out. In the former, Keii already takes action even if Arthur and the other courtiers are annoyed with him, but later they change their mind and help Keii. In *Mantel*, only Gauvain and Tor respond to Keu's words. In private, however, Keii's words to Arthur are rash, and the king is not pleased by them, implying that the extra-diegetic audience should not either, which leads to him putting Keii in his place.

Kay as Significant Other

In both *Mantel* and *DC*, we are told Kay has a wife or lover. In *DC*, she is called Galaida, and in *Mantel*, Androete. In *Mantel*, Keu asks her to try on the mantle after the queen and Hector's beloved have failed the test. The queen, to hide her shame, wants all the ladies to try on the mantle, and when they recoil, Keu summons Androete, saying:

⁵² His words about his wife are in contrast with what Keii said during the tankard-challenge, where he did not want the ladies to suffer alone.

⁵³ It seems that either the adventure with the tankard is already forgotten, as Galaida, Keii's wife, could not drink from it, or Arthur is being ironic.

⁵⁴ See "Kay and Arthur", below.

“Bele,” dist il, “venez avant.
 Voiant ces chevaliers me vant
 Que bien le pouez afubler.
 N’i avez compaigne ne per
 De loiauté ne de valor;
 Vos en porteroiz hui la flor
 De çaienz sanz nul contredit.”
 (ll. 381-7)

“Fair one,” he said, “come forward.
 In the presence of these knights I boast
 That you can put it on easily.
 You have no companion or peer
 To equal your loyalty and worth.
 Today you will vanquish all those who
 Are present here, without question.”

Keu’s boast already foreshadows trouble, especially when his beloved hesitates. He places trust, seemingly blindly, in his beloved’s loyalty, and this backfires. Keu takes Androete’s refusal as fear for ill-will from the other ladies, so he reassures her that they will do no such thing. The lady puts on the mantle, and, of course, it becomes too short. One of the courtiers by the name of Brun sans Pitié⁵⁵ calls out:

“Voirement n’i avez vos per!”⁵⁶
 [...]
 “Molt doit ester joillant et lié,
 Messires Keuz li seneschaus,
 Car provee estes a loiaus!”
 (ll. 406-10)

“Truly you have no peer!”
 [...]
 “Master Kay the seneschal
 Must be joyful and happy,
 For you have proved to be loyal!”

Contrary to the scenes with the tankard and with the glove in *DC*, which I discuss below, Kay does not seem to have brought Brun’s taunting upon himself by mocking others; the seneschal has done nothing yet that fits his usual role in Arthurian stories. To this point, he is only shown to be polite and to have faith in his lady. Brun has taken on the role usually ascribed to Kay, using sarcasm to make Kay’s and Androete’s shame even worse. After all, Keu has just boasted in front of everyone about Androete’s faithfulness, and has now been disproven by the mantle. As in *DC*, Keu is embarrassed by his lover’s failure:

Quant Kex li vit si messeoir
 Il nel vosist por tot l’avoir
 Que li rois peüst arramir,

When Kay saw that it fitted her so badly,
 He would not have wanted this for all the money
 The king could pledge,

⁵⁵ A name that describes his character well.

⁵⁶ Burgess and Brook note that in manuscript S, the line is addressed to Androete, while in T, the onlookers are addressed: “Voirement n’i avoit son per!” (Burgess and Brook, “Notes”, 108)

Qar ne pot sa honte covrir
Que de tantes gen zest veüs.
(ll. 411-5)

For he could not disguise his shame,
Which had been witnessed by so many people.

The intra-diegetic audience in this case has another function than being a mirror for the extra-diegetic audience: because they have witnessed the event, Keu's shame has increased. He is publicly humiliated. Yder adds a little extra by saying that he who ridicules others every day now has to taste his own medicine. Yder's words prove that the narrator is well aware of Kay's reputation as jester in Arthurian literature. In this story, however, Kay has held his tongue at every occasion where he could mock up to this point.

In the similar episodes in *DC*, Keii does not make predictions based on his confidence in his wife. In the tankard-scene, he also does not escape without being embarrassed. The tankard is handed to Lady Galaida, who is the sister of the duke of Landrie, and Keii's sweetheart. The narrator of *DC* makes it a habit of foreshadowing misfortunes that do not actually come about. While in *Mantel*, we are implicitly warned, the narrator of *DC* states:

Daz sah man an ir spor,
Daz tief lak vnd niht enbor
Nv hæert welh ein wunder
Daz dirre kopf besvnder
Sei so auz den andern nam.
Da galt den spot ir beiden scham,
Den Key, ir vrvint, geprüfet het.
(ll. 1443-9)

Her fall was far worse than that of the ones before her, as could be seen by the deep tracks she left. Now listen to something surprising: the tankard treated her differently than it had the others, so that she and her lover, Keii, paid for his ridicule with disgrace. (p. 18)

Unlike in *Mantel*, in the tankard-scene, Keii has done nothing but ridicule everyone who failed up to that point (they started with the ladies), including the queen. The narrator implies that Keii, through Galaida, gets what he deserves, even though it does not stop him from continuing his mockery. Instead of spilling on herself, Galaida cannot grab the tankard at all. Keii is embarrassed, as he is in *Mantel*, and, tongue-tied, he blushes in shame. His reasons for his embarrassment seem to be different than in *Mantel*. There, Androete is the third lady who

tries the mantle and fails, after he has boasted about her loyalty, whereas in *DC*, several ladies have gone before Keii's beloved, but the tankard treats Galaida differently, and worse, than them. In both cases, however, Kay is publicly humiliated. Like Yder in *Mantel*, one of the knights in *DC*, Greingradoan, seizes the opportunity with both hands to ridicule the ridiculer.

In *Mantel*, Keu tries to save face by replying:

“Seignors, trop vos poez haster.	“My lords, you are too hasty.
Nos verron ja sanz demorer	We shall now see without delay
Comment il ert a vos seant;”	How many of yours it will fit;”

(ll. 425-7)

He is ridiculed now, but Keu will be the last to laugh when all the ladies, except Caradoc's beloved, fail the test. *DC*'s Keii, on the other hand, says nothing in his defence. Rather, it is the narrator who stands up for him, by saying that, while Keii might be unpleasant and without manners, he is brave and will not shy away from any monster. Additionally, he says, Arthur has surrounded himself with people free of deceit, and Keii would not have remained one of them if he was truly evil. He just likes to scoff, and spares no one.⁵⁷ The narrator's comments seem to be intended to influence the extra-diegetic audience, who might laugh or sigh at Keii's failure.

In the glove-episode at the end of *DC*, in which the courtiers try on a glove that makes the 'innocent' body parts disappear, while 'guilty' ones are bared for all to see, a similar thing happens to Galaida as in the scene with the tankard. Once again, the narrator foreshadows trouble, as he comments that neither Keii nor Galaida is happy when it is her turn to put on the glove, and, once she puts on the glove, only her eyes disappear, while the rest is bare. Additionally, we are told that Keii's words to her are even more biting than to any other lady. He says:

“Nú wil ich jehen
Das man vnder disen frauwen
Nieman mag so wol getruwen
Als miner fründin.
[...]

⁵⁷ These words later seem to be contradicted, when Keii is on a quest to obtain a bridle for a maiden, and his mount, a mule he is not allowed to steer, is about to cross a sharp bridge, and we are told that Keii was fearful of the river and turns back (see Chapter 2, “Kay as *Aventiureritter*”). Yet, throughout *DC*, Keii never backs out of a fight with a living creature, implying he only fears the dangers of nature itself.

Sie getar die augen kein frist
Vf getün vor grosser schamm.
Sie git iren lip vngebeneden
Wie jne man sùchet.
Sie würt selten verfluchet
Vm vfschub ader versagen.”
(ll. 23911-35)

“I maintain that none of these ladies can be so fully trusted as my darling,” stated Keii. “[...] She does not dare to open her eyes a moment for modesty. [...] She gives herself unasked in any way a man wants; no one ever condemns her for declining or delaying.” (p. 268)

The implications of his words are clear, and not very flattering for Galaida. The narrator tries to excuse Keii for deriding his love:

Des sal man yme auch vertragen,
Höret man jne an den andern sagen,
Das ùchbedünckt missezemen.
Er wolt niemen usz nemen
An schimpfe vnd an solchem spotte.
(ll. 23963-7)

[Y]ou should be tolerant if he says things about others that you think unseemly; he simply did not want to exclude anyone from his humor and ridicule. (p. 269)

The intra-diegetic audience does not respond to Keii’s words, so the narrator takes it upon himself to try to influence the opinion and reaction of the extra-diegetic audience. Keii’s words could be seen as shocking, and to soothe the audience, the narrator explains Keii’s motive.

While in *Mantel*, Keu only sees his lover fail, in both fidelity tests in *DC*, he himself fails as well. In the tankard-scene, Keii is the last to try to drink from the tankard, after the messenger himself. Keii insists that the messenger goes first, as he had requested to drink from it even before Arthur did. The messenger passes the test, protected by his virtue. Handing the tankard to Keii, he seems to have learned from the latter’s jesting as he says:

“Trincht ouch ir, ez ist guot

[...]

Da von trinchet chleine

Wider erst ze mazen seine.

Das rat ich iv, mein her Key,

Wan ez swaret same in pley

Vnd leget sich dem hyrn bey.”

(ll. 2507-27)

“Now you drink some; it is splendid. [...] I [...] advice you, Sir Keii, to drink it carefully at first and in moderation, for it will settle in the brain and be heavier than lead.” (pp. 29-30)

Keii is amused by the raillery, as, according to the narrator, people who like to jest usually can handle being mocked themselves better than people who do not jest, but, he warns us, jesting people are bolder as well, as can be seen in the experience of Keii. The narrator seems to refer to other stories implicitly, which makes it a case of intertextuality. He calls stories that tell of the seneschal into the recollection of the audience. The narrator also makes use of dramatic irony, foreshadowing Keii's his failure by stating that here, as elsewhere, ridicule loses. This might be a didactic technique as well, as it indicates that ridicule almost never pays off. In any case, Keii tries to drink from the tankard, but his arms will not listen to him, as was the case with his lover, Galaida, but unlike with her, the tankard turns around above his head and he is drenched in wine. This punishment is enough to silence the sharp-tongued seneschal, if only for a while. The courtiers are pleased by his misfortune and laugh loudly, adding to Keii's shame. Kulianz the Fool seizes the opportunity to mock Keii even further.

In the glove-scene, instead of being last, Keii is the first to try it on, after the messenger, although this happens accidentally. Keii is so eager to harass the ladies, who will try the glove on first, that he snatches it before Gawein and Iwein can take it. Again, the narrator foreshadows Keii's failure by stating that Keii suffered severe punishment. The ladies of the story hope that he will fail firstly, and the messenger, who has already been ridiculed by Keii, shares this wish. When Keii takes the glove, it winds itself around his hand, squeezing and burning him, and he is forced to confess all the offences he has committed. The pain only stops when he has berated himself for ridiculing others. The narrator tells us that everyone present is both pleased and troubled by his cries, but they do not dare to show their feelings for fear of his tongue, as everyone has been defamed by him without provocation. Only Kalocreant dares to mock him, avenging himself, states the narrator. As after Galaida's first failure, Keii is ashamed, bowing his head and keeping silent, but he resolves to pay

Kalocreant back. However, this does not stop him from mocking everyone else who tries on the glove.⁵⁸

In *Mantel*, Keu's boasting makes his shame even worse. Brun and Yder respond to Androete's failure by taunting Keu. The intra-diegetic audience does not respond as a whole, however, and only serves to make Keu's humiliation public. In the tankard-scene, *DC*'s Keii is embarrassed by Galaida's failure as well, as he is taunted because of it. However, when it is his own turn to drink, he takes the messenger's mockery with good grace. When he fails and is taunted, he remains silent. In the glove-episode, the ladies of the court hope he will fail, which is exactly what happens. The intra-diegetic audience is pleased by his cries, implying that the extra-diegetic audience should feel the same.

Kay as Mocker

Kay's role as mocker originates with Chrétien, leaving aside his habit in the Celtic tradition of taunting his opponent.⁵⁹ In Chrétien's works, and especially in *Yvain* and *Perceval*, Kay taunts indiscriminately friend or foe. I will restrict my discussion of Kay's taunts in this chapter to his mocking of fellow courtiers while he is at court, while I will discuss Kay mocking his opponents in the next one.

In *Mantel*, Keu's mocking is kept to a minimum. He only makes sarcastic remarks twice, once to Yder as revenge, and once to Gauvain.⁶⁰ When it is the turn of Yder's beloved, Yder already regrets mocking Androete and Keu, as he does not trust his own ladylove to succeed where all the others have failed, and he sees his beloved hesitate to put on the mantle. Still, he orders her to do so. The mantle seems to fit, until the knights notice that her rear is showing. Griflet is the first to mock her, followed by Keu, but the narrator adds that he does so because Yder taunted him first, instead stating that it is Keu's nature. Keu says:

“Mal se cuevre qui li dos pert!	“She whose rear shows covers herself badly!
Or vos en dirai sa maniere:	Now I tell you how things are:
Ses amis la doit avoir chiere,	Her beloved must cherish her,
Si com li manteaus nos devise!”	Just as the mantle shows us!”
(ll. 656-9)	

⁵⁸ See “Kay as Mocker”, below.

⁵⁹ See Appendix, “The Welsh Kay”.

⁶⁰ For the latter, see Chapter 3, “Kay and Gawain at Court”.

Burgess and Brook note that line 658 has been substituted by the manuscript's reviser⁶¹ because it was too sexually explicit in his opinion. The original line, as found in manuscript T, ('El se fet cengler par derriere', l. 662) implies that the lady likes to be mounted from behind.⁶² Keu is not the only one making sarcastic remarks. While in *DC*, other knights only chime in when Keu or his beloved fail the tests, in *Mantel*, Guivret and Griflet give their opinions after others fail as well, even when Keu does not respond.⁶³ Griflet mocks Yder before Keu takes his turn. In the unrevised form, characters in *Mantel* refer to the ladies' supposed preferred sexual positions. Besamusca comments that "it does not matter whether the knights speak the truth. Their interpretations serve other goals. Obviously, they are intended as a source of humour, because Keu calls them [...] jokes. However, it is telling that none of the comments causes the listening characters to laugh."⁶⁴

There is only one mention of someone laughing and that is Keu himself. After his beloved has failed the test, Keu has taken it upon himself to lead all failed ladies to one corner. When Perceval's ladylove fails as well, Keu takes her to the rest of the ladies who did not fit the mantle and comments that they should not distress themselves, as he only brings them company. They are not pleased by his words, but Keu returns laughing. In his book on gestures and looks in medieval narrative, Burrow, following Ph. Ménard, argues that in Old French literature sometimes the word *rire* ('to laugh') is used to describe a smile.⁶⁵ According to Ménard, the word *sourire* ('to smile') becomes common around 1250, which is later than the suggested date of the *Mantel*.⁶⁶ As such, when it is described that Keu "tornez riant", we can take it to mean that he returned either laughing or smiling. However, Ménard's conclusion that in the Middle Ages people laughed or smiled at similar things as we do today is no decisive factor in this case.⁶⁷ What is clear is that Keu is no longer embarrassed, but rather amused by the events, or by the irony of the situation.

In *Mantel*, the queen is the first to try on the mantle, not knowing of its magical attributes. To see if it really works, Yvain suggests that the beloved of Hector, who is about the same height as the queen, should try it on as well. While it was too long on the queen, it shrinks when the maiden puts it on. The queen asks if it was longer on her. Keu replies:

⁶¹ See Introduction, "Kay in Europe: the Corpus".

⁶² Burgess and Brook, "Introduction", 18

⁶³ When Yvain's ladylove is called, Arthur thinks she has earned the right to the mantle, but Guivret, rather than Keu, speaks out his doubts. After the lady has failed, Guivret holds a rather misogynistic speech, which was again altered by the reviser. In manuscript T, Guivret comments on the lady's sexual mores. (Burgess and Brook, "Introduction", 16-7)

⁶⁴ Besamusca (2010), 293

⁶⁵ J. A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76

⁶⁶ Ph. Ménard, *Le rire et le sourire dans le roman courtoise en France au Moyen Âge (1150-1250)* (Genève : Librairie Droz, 1969), 430

⁶⁷ Ménard, 432

“Dame,” dit Keuz li seneschaus,	“My lady,” said Kay the seneschal,
“I. petit estes plus loiaus	“You are a little bit more faithful
Qu’el n’est, mes c’est de molt petit.	Than she is, but it is by a very small amount.
Et si ai ge malement dit,	I have expressed myself badly,
Car plus leaus n’estes vos mie,	For you are not more faithful,
Mes mains a en vos vilenie”	There is just less villainy in you.”)
(ll. 317-22)	

His words to the queen are more of an observation based on the information he received from the youth, rather than an attempt to make fun of her.

The queens in *DC*, however, does not escape Keii’s ridicule. The ladies do not know the implications of failing to drink from the tankard, as they did not in *Mantel*, but on Ginover’s insistence, the queen of Laphunt is offered the tankard first. She spills a lot of wine over herself, and Keii, who does know about the tankard’s magical attributes, says sarcastically:

“Sein müest ein ris haben frist,
 Ob er erheben solde
 Disen chopf von golde
 Mit stein so gewæhet,
 Vnd der mit staten væhet
 Claretes einen amen.
 Wie solde des geramen
 Ein vrowe, sein wurd begozen?”
 (ll. 1245-52)

“It would be difficult for a giant to lift this mass of gold adorned with so many jewels [the tankard]. How could a lady manage it without spilling on herself?” (p. 16)

Keii implies that the spilled wine was just an accident, because the tankard was too heavy for the queen. The knights and the audience of the story, however, know that this means the queen of Laphunt is unfaithful to her husband, creating dramatic irony. Keu continues, reassuring Ginover, who is next to drink from the tankard, that if she is careful, she will not spill wine on herself. While Ginover does not respond to Keii’s words verbally, the narrator reveals that she is dismayed and worried as she raises the tankard to her lips. Only a little

wine is spilled this time, hardly enough to notice, but Keii does so anyway and speaks up again:

“Vrowe, ich het ivch wol gelert,
Wan daz iuch gacheit verchert
Nv an dem ende.
Jr habt missewende
Vns gezeigt ze angesiht.
Jch het mite u phliht,
Solt vnder dirr geselleschaft
Die vrowen schiezen den schaft.
Swie sich div sterch an iu barch,
Jr sit grimme armstarch.”

(ll. 1283-7)

“I gave you good advice, lady, [...] but you moved too quickly at the last and thus revealed your shortcoming to everyone. Yet so much strength has been hidden in you that I would want to be on your side if the ladies of this company were to compete in spear throwing; you are frightfully strong of arm.” (p. 16)

The implication of spilling with the tankard still has not been explained to the women, but here Keii implies to them that there certainly is one. While his words are said with the usual sarcasm, as spear throwing was hardly seen as a fitting passing of the time for a lady, a hint of admiration is hidden in Keii’s words as well. After all, the queen hardly spilled a drop, much less than the Queen of Laphunt or any of the ladies after her, for that matter. Just as in the glove-scene, Ginover almost passes the test, but is mocked by Keii nonetheless. The narrator, however, seems to have a much higher opinion of her than the narrator from *Mantel* has for his queen.

We are told Arthur and Gawain are amused about the ladies’ misfortune, but there is no reaction to Keii’s words yet.⁶⁸ This happens after the next two ladies are given the tankard, Lady Laudin, Iwein’s ladylove, and Lady Enite, Erec’s sweetheart. Keii’s words here function

⁶⁸ Martin Baisch points out that the Vienna manuscript has “claghten” (‘lament’) instead of “lachten” (‘laugh’) that is written in the Heidelberg manuscript, which would give Arthur’s and Gawain’s reaction a less misogynistic meaning. (M. Baisch, “Welt ir: er vervellet; / Wellent ir: er ist genesen!/: Zur Figur Keies in Heinrichs von dem Türlin ‘Diu Crône’”, in M. Baisch, H. Haufe, M. Mecklenburg, M. Meyer and A. Sieber (eds.), *Aventiuren des Geschlechts. Modelle von Männlichkeit in der Literatur des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: V&Runipress GmbH, 2003), 156)

as a reminder of Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain* (or their German translations), as Keii summarises parts of the stories. His words evoke a reaction from the other courtiers:

Den kopf nam wider der bot
Disiv red vnd dirre spot
Prüeft ein lvt lachen
Vnd niwet doch sein swachen
Vil manigem, der den schimph nam
Mit verborgens hertzen scham.
Der sein amyen sach
An stætes hertzen zeichen swach,
Daz was wol sein vngemach.
(ll. 1389-97)

This mockery evoked loud laughter at the same time as it inquired into the weakness of many who listened with hidden shame and uneasily observed signs that their sweethearts lacked fidelity. (p. 17)

The knights are uneasy and ashamed about the infidelity of their loved ones, but contrary to their reactions in *Mantel*, they try to hide it by laughing at Keii's remarks. The extra-diegetic audience has no need to be ashamed, and is just supposed to be amused.

After the ladies have all drunk from the tankard, or at least tried to, it is the turn of the knights to try their luck. Keii does not keep silent with them either and comments on the outcome of the test of well-known knights, such as Lanzelet, Erec, Iwein, Kalocreat and Parzival. All these usually virtuous knights fail the test, and Keii takes it upon himself to mock them, as well as bring some of their adventures into the recollection of the audience of the story. The mentioning of all these stories functions either as a reminder of the deeds of these knights, or is an attempt to show off by the narrator, showing how many stories he knows. Besamusca comments that:

we are dealing with an intratextual game (a reference to the biographical past of a character, intended to amuse the spectators, or challenge their memory) and a literary game (a reference to another narrative, intended to amuse those listeners to Heinrich's romance who are acquainted with the literary tradition).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Besamusca (2010), 296

Besamusca states that these type of interpretations are hardly mocking, and are intended to challenge the literary expertise of the listeners of the story.⁷⁰ His conclusion sounds plausible, as the narrator does not mention a reaction evoked from the bystanders in the story at the failings of any of these knights, neither from shock nor amusement, implying that the narrator did not have a reaction in mind. He seems to be merely challenging his audience intellectually.

The glove-scene is written in a similar fashion. First, the ladies of the court try it on, starting with Ginover. She once would have passed the test if it were not for one small thing; her lips are still visible. Keii calls attention to it, and this time refers to something that has happened in the first book of *DC*: the kidnapping of Ginover. Perhaps in an attempt to test the audience's knowledge of his own story, the narrator has Keii state that Ginover's lips are visible because Gasozein kissed her against her will. However, if sexual assault and rape count as infidelity, one could doubt at the result of the mantle-test as well. In any case, Keii's words seem to reflect admiration rather than of mockery as he says:

“Jr stund auch der mandel wol;
Wie der kopff were vol,
Sie begosz sich da mit niht.
Man endarff kein miszgeschiht
Da sùchen, der sie prüfen wil.
Sie is taller frauwen trùwen zil,
Trùwe hat sie me den vil.”
(ll. 23656-63)

“The mantle fitted her so well, and although the tankard was full, she did not spill wine on herself. Who wants to test her will find no mishap there. The queen is a model of faithfulness for all women; she has more than enough of it.” (p. 265)

His words are curious, as they seem sincere rather than an attempt to ridicule the queen. This is supported by the fact that neither the queen nor other bystanders comment or react to Keii's words. However, the queen did spill a little bit of wine on herself in the tankard-test. Has the narrator forgotten about what he wrote himself? Or are Keii's words to be taken as sarcastic

⁷⁰ Idem

after all? It seems unlikely after he has explained that Ginover's lips are visible because of sexual assault. The intra-diegetic audience is of no help, so the audience of the story could conjure their own reaction.

Keii interprets the failings of Klarisanz, Gawein's sister, and Igern, Arthur's mother, as well. The narrator tells us that Klarisanz does not like what Keii says, and many of the bystanders laugh at his commentary of Igern. When it is the turn of Kalocreant's ladylove, Janphie, Keii takes his chance to get back at Kalocreant, as he ridiculed Keii when he failed the test. He compares Janphie to Galaida, saying that since Keii and Kalocreant are such good friends, that their loves took it upon themselves to have the same kind of love affair. As when the messenger left, Galaida's infidelity is called into the recollection again, showing Keii once again in a misogynistic light. When it is Kalocreant's turn, however, Keii only refers to his failing at the fight against the knight of the fountain in the beginning of Yvain. The narrator's foreshadowing of Keii paying Kalocreant back for his ridicule at Keii's failing seems therefore carried out a bit anticlimactically. The other knights and ladies who fit the glove are not spared Keii's taunting, just as in the tankard-episode, and his interpretations are either based on intertextuality or, in Besamusca's words, "his extensive interpretations are too cryptic to make sense."⁷¹ Both his and the narrator's comments lack an ethical aspect.⁷² The laughter of the intra-diegetic audience implies that we are not to take the comments by Keii seriously. They merely serve to amuse both the intra- and the extra-diegetic audience of *DC*.

Keii's mockery is well-known in *DC*, and also feared. After Arthur has met Gasozein, he calls his council together. The queen wants to know what all the fuss is about and asks a maid to tell her. The maid replies:

“Der chünich hat geclagt
Über ivch den fürsten allen
– Daz ist da vor daz schallen –,
Vnd zeihet ivch, ich weiz wes.
Da stat her Key vnd spotet des.”
(ll. 10386-90)

“The reason for the uproar is that the king has complained about you to the princes and accuses you– of what, I don't know. Keii is there with his ridicule.” (p. 116)

⁷¹ Besamusca (2010), 295

⁷² Idem

While the narrator has not mentioned the seneschal in this part except in the retelling of the events by Arthur, the maid's final words sound like a warning. Not only is Ginover's honour at stake because Arthur has complained about her for whatever reason, Keii is also there to make things worse if possible, which seems to be her fear. This also builds up the tension for the extra-diegetic audience, even if we are not told that Keii's presence actually changes anything.

In *Mantel*, Keu is surprisingly silent when it comes to mockery. He only taunts Yder's beloved because Yder mocked Androete and Keu first. Keu's words to the queen are more of a statement than mockery, and his words serve to explain to the queen herself and to the extra-diegetic audience what the mantle means. In both fidelity tests in *DC*, Keii has something to say about everyone, either a reference to another Arthurian story or an amusing interpretation. Characters from *DC* laugh at Keii's sarcastic remarks, although it does not happen every time he opens his mouth. The extra-diegetic audience is encouraged to laugh as well, and the narrator challenges their knowledge of *DC* itself and other Arthurian fiction by making references to other texts.

Kay and Arthur at Court

Kay can be obnoxious at times, as shown above, although he is usually harmless, as in his comments in *DC*. However, sometimes he goes further. In *Perceval* for example, Keu hits a maiden and a fool. Nevertheless, Arthur usually holds Kay in high regard and forgives him his wrongdoings, however grave his actions.⁷³ He often reprimands the seneschal, whether Kay listens or not. In *Merlin*, written around 1190 by Robert de Boron, Kay's backstory is explained, and with that, the reason of Arthur's constant forgiveness. As a baby, Arthur is taken in by Ector and is nursed by his wife, while Kay, Ector's biological son, is nursed by a wet nurse. When Arthur has pulled the sword from the stone and is declared king, Ector asks him to make Kay his seneschal. Ector explains to Arthur that while he was nursed with good mother's milk, Kay was nursed somewhere else, and that that is the reason Kay will occasionally do something stupid. Kay should not lose his job because of a slip-up. Arthur swears to honour this request.

In *Mantel*, Keu only interacts with the king directly once, when Gauvain asks Keu to ask the king why he is not eating. We do not learn much from this about their relationship,

⁷³ This is not the case in *WeK*. I will discuss this further in Chapter 2.

although Keu is one of the knights sent to fetch the queen. The other two are Gauvain and Yvain, two esteemed knights, implying that Keu is one of that select group.

In *Avowying*, Kay draws attention to the fact that, while Arthur, Gawain, and Kay himself have all fulfilled their vows, Baldwin has not. He says to Arthur:

“Sire, a mervaelle thinke me* Of Bowdewyns avouyng*, Yusturevyn* in the evnyng, Wythowtun any letting*, Wele* more thenne we thre.” (ll. 576-80)	<i>wonder it seems to me</i> <i>vow</i> <i>Yesterday</i> <i>Without lie</i> <i>Even</i> ⁷⁴
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Arthur agrees with Kay that Baldwin’s vow should be tested, and Arthur comes up with a scheme. Kay should bar the road and set up an ambush, but, Arthur warns him, he should be careful, because Baldwin is strong: “Is none of yo but that he mun fele” (‘is none of you [excepted] that he (may not) overcome’, l. 599). Arthur does not only imply that Kay should take accomplices, which he does, but also that he does not trust Kay to win a fight with Baldwin. While there is no mention of Kay being offended, or any reaction from him at all, the lack of trust in Kay’s abilities as a knight is a recurring phenomenon. In *Lancelot*, Kay wants to fight Meleagant with the queen as wager, and both Arthur and the queen herself plead him to back down. In *DC*, the maiden of the bridle starts to lament when Kay offers his services, as she knows he will not be able to fulfil the quest.⁷⁵

In *DC*, Keii’s role is more ambiguous. While the narrator is constantly justifying his behaviour and standing up for his character, there are several times when Arthur and Keii go head-to-head. In the tankard-scene, after the ladies have tried their luck, the messenger refills the tankard and asks Arthur permission to drink before the king will, as it is proper where he comes from. Of course, Keii has to say something about this as well, praising the custom sarcastically, and stating that the messenger, of course, would know how not to spill on himself. Keii goes on like this until Arthur snaps:

“Verfluochet sei iwer bitter galle,
Daz si schier überwalle

⁷⁴ Both the Middle English citations and the translation of words are from: Anonymous, “The Avowying of Arthur”, in T. Hahn, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 119-50

⁷⁵ See Chapter 2, “Kay as *Aventiureritter*”.

Vnd ivch müez zebrechen.
Jr chünnet niht sprechen
Wan den argen alle wege.”
(ll. 1745-9)

“Damn your bitter gall – may it soon fall upon and destroy you! You can never speak anything but evil.” (p. 21)

Arthur’s rant takes up about fifty lines, and his scolding makes his feelings for the seneschal – at least at the moment – quite clear. Keii, however, is completely unfazed. According to the narrator, he is not disturbed at being scolded by the king. Instead, he becomes more arrogant and goes on as he has done before. This time, however, his ridicule is aimed at Arthur himself. Keii comments dramatically:

“Ay, here,
Jr chünt ouch schelten!
Wolt ir mich des lan engelten,
Daz ivch der dvrst twinget?
[...]
Daz er müez versinchen,
Der daz ezzen so versaltzen habe!
Da dürestet ivch so vast abe.
[...]
Claret ist bezzer danne wein.
Da büezzert iwern durst mit,
Herre, vnd habt guoten sit,
Al sir da vir tat
Vruo vnd spat
Nah der tvgend rat.”
(ll. 1785-814)

“Well, my lord, you can scold too? Do you want me to suffer because you are thirsty? [...] Damn him who salted the food so heavily that you are plagued with thirst! [...] Claret is better than other wine: quench your thirst with it, my lord, and be good-tempered, as virtue teaches and as you were before.” (p. 21)

While veiled in his usual sarcasm, Keii's message is clear: he scolds Arthur for losing his temper, something that is not becoming to a monarch. Arthur does not respond to Keii's words, but drinks from the tankard anyway, implying he realises Keii is right. Many of the courtiers, however, including the messenger, are secretly amused by Keii's jests towards the king, winking at each other and nudging one another. The extra-diegetic audience should therefore be as well. However, one of the courtiers, who is not identified by the narrator, does not seem pleased:

“Wer möht vor Keyn beliben
Vngespotet nah der missetat,
Da er des chünges gespoten hat,
Seines herren, an schulde?”
(ll. 1846-9)

“Who could escape Keii's derision after a mishap, when he has made fun of his lord, the king, without cause?” (p. 22)

The courtier fears Keii's mockery. The seneschal's sharp tongue is often a reason for the hero of a story to leave the court and prove himself, and it is also motivation not to return empty handed. Such is the case in the Middle Dutch *Roman van Walewein*, where Keye mocks Walewein as he leaves to find the flying chess-set by saying that Walewein should have tied a string to it, so Walewein could have reeled it in. His mocking tongue is feared by Walewein throughout the story, as Walewein does not dare to return empty handed for fear of scorn.

The same person also comments that Keii's facial expression is surly. That Keii's words are sharp is nothing new, but the comment about Keii's appearance is interesting. We do not often read a description of Kay, except by Chrétien de Troyes, who describes him as a very handsome man. However, the comment does not aim at his features, but at his apparently surly facial expression.

Arthur drinks from the tankard without incident, causing the company to fall silent before this miracle. Of course, this also prompts a reaction from Keii:

“Vil wol ez tohte
Vreunde vnd vrevndinne,
Daz si ir zweir mine
Mit stær vnderbunde,

So daz si niemer kunde
Vnstæter chranch enbinden.
[...]
Vnd ein ia vnd ein nein.
Daz mag man kiesen dar an,
Daz mein vrowe vndern vrowen gewan
Vnd under üns mein herr den preis
Hat gewonnen allen weis.”
(ll. 1908-24)

“How suitable it would be [...] if the affection of two lovers would tie them together with such a firm bond that no inconstant weakness could loosen them. [...] There is but one yes and one no, which is why my lady did the best among women and my lord won the prize without question among us men;” (pp. 22-3)

The narrator wonders what good Arthur’s success did him, if he still was Keii’s target for ridicule. However, as in the case where Ginover fits the glove, Keii’s words seem to be praising rather than mocking. The narrator’s remark implicates that we have to take Keii’s remark as sarcastic, however. No one responds to Keii’s words this time, giving the extra-diegetic audience no reaction to mirror.

After the tankard-test, Keii is dejected by the disgrace he has suffered and challenges the messenger to a duel, under the guise of giving the messenger the fame he has asked for. Distraught, Arthur calls his seneschal to order, saying that it only concerns the ruler and reminding Keii that it could bring him shame as easily as fame. The other knights have been embarrassed as well, so if they all challenged the messenger, the jousts would go on for more than a year. Arthur also seems worried about the messenger’s safety, calling him a “guoten chneht” (“good youth”, l. 2738, p. 32) and prompting Keii to challenge a “reken, der nah preise vert” (“warrior seeking fame”, l. 2740, p. 32). Keii replies offended:

“Künich vnd herr, mich dvnchet des,
Jch engelt ziv ich enweiz wes,
Daz ir mir so gehaz seit.
[...]
Von schulden ist der wolf gra,
Wan swaz in er in der werlt tuot,
Ez sei übel oder guot,

Wan hat ez doch vür arch.
[...]
Lig ich vnder, er swēb obe
An der Sælicheit rade.
Wan swa ich mich überlade
Mit schanden, daz ist mein schade.”
(ll. 2745-79)

“My lord and king, [...] as you are angry with me, it seems like I should atone to you for something, but I don’t know what it is. [...] There is a reason why the wolf is gray: anything he does, good or bad, is considered evil. [...] Should I descend on Fortune’s wheel, he will rise, and if I bring disgrace upon myself, I am the one who will suffer.” (p. 32)

Keii seems to be assuming that Arthur will not let him fight because he is angry with Keii, even if Arthur says the joust will do Keii no honour, whether he wins or loses. Arthur does not seem to doubt Keii’s abilities per se, but he does state that he would be pleased if Keii does well. It is possible that the narrator intended to be ironic when Keii compares himself to a wolf; after all, in most stories, he brings his misfortune upon himself. On the other hand, it is also possible that the narrator attempted to create sympathy for Keii’s character, as he is not only negatively, but also quite positively portrayed throughout *DC*. In any case, Keii seems to think the joust could go either way. If he loses, Keii is the one who will suffer, and he is willing to take that risk. After a long discussion, Arthur allows the joust.⁷⁶

At the end of the first book of *DC*, Ginover is abducted by her brother, who in turn is overcome by Gasozein. Gasozein wants to take Ginover with him to his castle and attempts to rape her, but Gawein arrives in time and defeats Gasozein. The three of them return to Karidol, where a maiden spots them and tells the king. She then tells Keii, who, as messenger, in turn spreads the news. When Ginover arrives, many knights have gathered and Keii helps the queen to dismount. He comments:

“Das ist ein riche hab,
Die min frauw braht hat
Das sie blosz one sarwat
Zwen ritter hat bezwungen.
Jr ist da gelungen,

⁷⁶ See Chapter 2, “Kay in Jousts”.

Da minem herren gebrast,
 Der niht wolt disen gast
 Zü velde dorch sie bestan.
 Sie hat es aber dorch jne getan
 Vnd hat jne manlich entworcht.
 Jr hertz ist gar vneruorcht,
 Sie sal von rethem gund
 Die stat zer tafelrund
 Haben von ir manheit.”
 (ll. 12474-87)

“My lady has brought back a rich prize; although without armor, she has conquered two knights. She succeeded where my lord, who didn’t want to fight this stranger for her, had failed. And for his sake she manfully cut the warrior to pieces. Her heart is quite without fear, and if favour is granted according to merit, her courage should win her a place at the Round Table.” (pp. 138-9)

The narrator states that everyone laughs loudly at his words, except Arthur, who is angry. Keii’s words question Arthur’s manhood, as the seneschal basically says that a woman, a lady no less, succeeded in doing what the king himself failed to do. Arthur had renounced the fight with Gasozein, in favour of letting the queen decide whom she wanted. Keii also ridicules the Knights of the Round Table by suggesting the queen could be a member, but aside from Arthur, everyone accepts the seneschal’s comments good-naturedly.

Finally, in *WeK*, the relation between Arthur and Keye is even tenser than in *DC*. When Arthur sends four of his knights to capture Keye, he impresses upon them not to hurt Keye and his companions too much, but also, strangely enough, to disguise themselves so Keye will not recognise them. As Hogenbirk points out in her edition of the text, this is a strange order for Arthur to give.⁷⁷ Knights not revealing who they are is a common theme in Arthurian literature. In *Wrake van Ragisel*, Walewein pretends to be Keye, and in the *Prose Lancelot*, Lancelot puts on Kay’s armour (even if no one believes him to be Kay). Yet these disguises have a goal. Walewein tries not to be killed, and Lancelot tries to improve Kay’s fame. There are also instances where knights do not pretend to be someone else, but merely not reveal themselves, as is the case in, for example, *Yvain*. However, this again serves a goal: Yvain is too embarrassed to reveal himself. In *WeK*, at least as we have it now, the point of

⁷⁷ Hogenbirk (2011), note to l. 1338, 123

the disguise seems to be lost. The knights obey Arthur's command, but Arthur's reasoning is not clear. The king's decision is not very bold, contrary to what Hogenbirk states in her dissertation. There, she deems that Arthur has a strikingly positive and powerful role in the story.⁷⁸ The only courtly thing he does, however, seems to be when he asks the knights not to hurt Keye too much.

At the end of the story, Keye's companions return to the court, but Keye himself does not. Keye's companions are not as loyal as they had appeared, as they tell Arthur that Keye made them testify falsely, even though in the beginning of the story they seemed quite eager to do so.⁷⁹ Arthur curses Keye thoroughly:

“Hi heeft menege quaetheit gedaen, “He has done many an evil thing;
Laettene ten duvelvolen gaen!” the Devil take him!”
(ll. 3655-6)

According to Hogenbirk, this is an unprecedentedly crude language for the king, aside from the fact that Arthur is usually kindly disposed towards Keye.⁸⁰ Robert's *Merlin* has been translated by Jacob van Maerlant into Dutch in 1262, so Keye's background story was known in the Netherlands at least around the time that the *Lancelot* Compilation was made. Hogenbirk explains Arthur's unusually fierce anger with Keye because the seneschal has become unnecessary. In other stories, he has to remain seneschal, but in *WeK*, Keye has been replaced by Walewein. Hogenbirk suggests that that might be the reason Arthur can keep him out of court even at the end of the romance.⁸¹ This is certainly a possibility, and it would explain why the compiler has to organise Keye's return at the beginning of the next romance in the compilation, *Lancelot en het hert met de witte voet*. There, the compiler tells us that the queen has reconciled Arthur and Keye, who has his former position back at court. Haupt agrees with this view, saying that the removal and the elimination of the seneschal, the end of the Kay-figure, is meant symbolic for the decline of Arthurian romance.⁸² However, these views are based on the text as we have it now. It would appear strange that an author tries to get rid of a well-known Arthurian character. Without the original, we can only speculate.

Kay's relationship with the king is fairly good in both *Mantel* and *Avowyng*. In the former, Keu does his job as seneschal by inquiring why Arthur has not eaten yet and by

⁷⁸ Hogenbirk (2004), 91

⁷⁹ Hogenbirk (2011), note to line 3644, 218

⁸⁰ Ibid, note to line 3656, 219

⁸¹ Hogenbirk (2004), 104

⁸² Haupt, 120

fetching the queen. In *Avowyng*, Kay helps Arthur by testing Baldwin's first vow, which is never to fear for his life. However, in *DC*, Keii is regularly scolded by Arthur, but Keii also keeps the king sharp and reprimands him when he loses his temper or when Keii disagrees with his choices. However, as the narrator points out, Arthur has chosen him to be close to the king, and Keii would not have remained there if he was truly evil. Finally, in *WeK*, Arthur blames Keye for Walewein's departure and curses him thoroughly at the end of the story. There is no reconciliation in the version of *WeK* as we have it, this happens in the following story of the Compilation, and only because of the queen's interference.⁸³

Conclusion

Kay has different parts to play, not only between the stories, but also within them. He is Arthur's seneschal, who has different tasks assigned to him. He is in charge of food, he has a role as messenger and is host to welcome guests in *Mantel* and *DC*. As a lover, he is deceitful, as is his beloved, Androete in *Mantel* and Galaida in *DC*. His love for mocking others is both harmless amusement for the intra- and the extra-diegetic audience of the story, and, for Arthur, to keep his king on his toes. The relationship between the seneschal and Arthur is sometimes good, sometimes ambiguous and sometimes, as in *WeK*, bad. For the most part, however, Kay is loyal to his lord, and tries to advise him to the best of his abilities, however questionable those might be, and even in *WeK* he wants nothing more than return to court at the end of the story.

To the audience, in this case the courtiers, he is a source of amusement, but, especially in *DC*, they also fear his mocking tongue. However, the extra-diegetic audience would have had no such fear, and could laugh out loud about Kay's failure.

⁸³ See Chapter 2, "Kay as *Aventiureritter*".

CHAPTER 2

KAY ON QUESTS

While Kay's duties usually keep him at court, he still is one of the Knight of the Round Table and as such, he sometimes goes out on adventures. He meets other knights on his way, and these meetings often result in jousts, as Kay's tongue is as sharp as his sword. In this chapter, I will look at Kay's role when he leaves the safety of the court, focusing mostly on *Avowyng*, *WeK* and *DC*.

Kay as Leader of an Army

In the stories of the historical tradition, Kay's only task as seneschal outside of the court is to lead (part of) an army, and the Latin story of *Historia Meriadoci regis Cambrie* tells us that Kay has to take care of battle supplies.⁸⁴ Kay as leader of an army is rarely adopted into post-Chrétien Arthurian romance, even if he does leave the court.

In *DC*, when it turns out Gawain is still alive, aside from arranging the festivities, Keii also takes it upon himself to summon an army for him. The army rides off, and Keii is in charge. The narrator even mentions that this is proper, implying that it is part of Keii's job as seneschal. None of the characters comment on it, another hint that this is the natural thing for Keii to do. Keii gives orders to set up camp near the castle where Gawain is. Battle is avoided by arranging a marriage, and Keii is sent ahead to Karidol to make preparations for the wedding. However, he is expected to be able to lead an army as seneschal, and he does so adequately.

Kay in Jousts

In three of the four romances under consideration, Kay participates in two or more jousts. For the majority of the time, these jousts end with Kay being unhorsed and/or taken prisoner.⁸⁵ Often, one thrust is all it takes to throw Kay out of the saddle, a concept that originates with the works of Chrétien de Troyes.⁸⁶ In post-Chrétien works, this notion, both the jousts and the one thrust to conquer Kay, is often adopted. In *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal*, Kay boasts that he has never failed to unhorse a man who attacked him. Daniel of course manages to beat Kay, and tells Kay not to boast anymore and never to fall off again, unless he must. The

⁸⁴ See Appendix, "The Latin Kay".

⁸⁵ For Kay as victor, see "Kay as Grail Knight", below.

⁸⁶ See Appendix, "Kay in Chrétien's Works".

narrator then comments, foreshadowing, that in the future, Kay will fall in a like manner very often.

The first joust in *DC* is held after Keii feels the tankard test has humiliated him and he challenges the messenger to a joust. As the messenger has no armour, Arthur has some brought in, but none of it fits the messenger. Keii, on the other hand, is in full armour. The narrator compares them to a scale, which has on one side a warhorse and on the other side a piece of satin. However, using dramatic irony, the narrator adds that success awaits the one without armour. The audience of the story already knows Keii is going to lose even before the battle has started, but still the narrator tries to create suspense. He describes how both of them were determined to unhorse and capture the other and how they displayed much knightly skill before the contest was over, hereby also implying that even though Keii loses, he will perform well.

Keii is soon unhorsed, being paid back for his arrogance, the narrator notes, and tries to sneak away without anyone noticing him. The messenger sees him, however, grabs him by the helmet and drags him along in what can hardly be described as a courtly fashion. Keii begs for mercy, as he feels both his body and his honour suffering, and even promises to be the messenger's subject if he lets Keii live, but, surprisingly unknighly, the messenger continues to drag him along. The company watches the scene and does not act until they hear Keii's pleas and they then tell the queen about it. Believing his death to be near, Keii implores the queen's kindness, who eventually, albeit reluctantly, asks the knight to pardon Keii for her sake and give him in her keeping, as is knightly custom. The narrator states (ironically?):

Do tet er same in guot chneht,
Der tuon vnd lazen chan
Vnd überbaze nie gewan,
Vnd gab in ze ir gebote dar,
So daz er wær ir aigen gar,
Wan si im her helf was chomen
Vnd het im den tot benomen.
(ll. 3096-102)

Acting like a nobleman who knows what should and should not be done and always avoids excess, he therefore placed the seneschal in her care. (pp. 35-6)

The joust is humiliating for Keii for several reasons, the first of course being the fact that he lost, but more importantly, he lost to someone barely wearing any armour. Moreover, the messenger is several times described as a youth, even by Arthur himself, indicating that, while he is in fact a knight, he was probably knighted only recently, making him barely more than a squire, as opposed to Keii, who is supposed to be an experienced knight. The motive of Kay losing to someone less experienced than himself is used more often throughout Arthurian literature. In *WeK*, Keye is unhorsed by a squire.⁸⁷ The reaction of the company in *DC* is not described by the narrator, giving the audience of the story no reaction to mirror. Only when the messenger ignores Keii's pleas, do the courtiers feel like it has gone too far and tell the queen about it. Keii's defeat is watched by the entire court. Keii fails to establish his knightly prowess in this scene, not only by being unhorsed, but also by being dragged along and having to be saved by the queen.

Later in the story, when Ginover has told Arthur about Gasozein, Arthur sets out to find him, taking Keii, Gales and Aumagwin, the only three remaining knights, with him. Arthur sends Keii ahead, where he meets the knight who they are looking for. The knight only wears a thin white garment and carries a sword, a shield and a spear. The knight replies to Keii's taunting⁸⁸ in a friendly manner, prompting Keii to assume he can make the knight do whatever he wants. The narrator supplies several wise pronouncements, which are meant for the extra-diegetic audience to take to heart, such as that they should think before they act. Obviously, the narrator does not think one should follow Keii's example. Keii tells the knight he will now take him prisoner and asks him for his name. The other knight points out that that would be uncourtly and the only way to win honour is to fight. Keii scoffs:

“Ir saget mir ein mære
Her ritter, von der alten e.
Swie ez vmb di red erge,
Sagt mir, wie ir heizet,
Ald, dest war ir gereizet
Jv selben solhen chvmben,
Daz nie man so tumber
Jn die werlt wart geborn,
Ern het die sinne gar verlorn,
Er chvnd in vil wol verbern.

⁸⁷ See below

⁸⁸ See “Kay as Challenger”, below

[...]

Ja sült mit kinden
Von solhen dingen sprechen,
Wan slahen vnde stechen,
Daz ist iwe gewissen tot.”

(ll. 3912-29)

“Sir Knight, [...] you are telling stories from the olden days. However things may have been then, you are to give me your name or you will cause yourself trouble that the stupidest man ever born would manage to avoid unless he had completely lost his senses. [...] You should talk about such matters only to children, because spear thrusts and sword blows would surely be the death of you.” (p. 45)

It seems that Keii thinks fighting where the winner can take the loser as a prisoner is something that is no longer done, and warns the other knight that he will lose if it came to a joust. Keii thinks himself to be superior to the other knight, the narrator tells us, misled by his friendly words. His confidence in his own prowess reminds us of several other stories from Arthurian literature. Keii is concerned about his honour, as he has stated that he will not kill the knight, but he is also bone idle; if he can avoid combat, he will.

The other knight states that a joust is the only way Keii will learn his name. Keii is vexed and haughtily says that, should he have mercy and spare his opponent's life, he will make Gasozein tell him his name and where he comes from. His words contrast with what he said earlier about honour and sparing the knight; it would seem that his temper gets the better of him. However, he is not the only one fed up, as the other knight, proving himself to be an excellent taunter, replies that Keii isn't worth courtesy, and comments that Keii's tongue cuts better than his sword. In contrast to his response to jests at the court during the tankard-episode, Keii does not laugh it off and becomes angry at the other knight's words; he is actually insulted. He cries:

“Nv ist mein ere
Gar auz der aht gewachtet.
Daz han ich selb gemachet,
Daz ich ivch so lang han gespart.

[...]

Habt auz! Iv sei widerseit!”

“My honor has been sullied beyond measure! It is my own fault for having spared you until now. [...] It is enough: I challenge you!” (p. 46)

It would seem that, in the safety of the court, Keii can handle being mocked, especially when it is done by the other courtiers, who are his friends. After the joust with the messenger, Keii took his loss with good grace, probably because he was still at the court. Being taunted by an opponent, an enemy, away from the court, however, Keii does not take well. According to the narrator, Keii pays dearly for the joust. His opponent unhorses him with such a force that he falls full-length on the ground and nearly dies. Gasozein takes Keii’s horse and leaves him lying on the ground. For the second time in the story, Keii is unhorsed by a knight wearing less armour than himself. In contrast to the previous time, however, this time there is no audience to witness his defeat. The only proof of this is the strange knight, who has claimed Keii’s horse as a prize. While the unhorsing of Keii, after he insulted his opponent, is common in Arthurian literature, both Arthur’s other companions, Gales and Aumagwin, also fail to defeat the stranger – although they do not insult him like Keii did. Aumagwin even has to be rescued from drowning by Keii and Gales.⁸⁹ The narrator does not seem to have intended Keii to be the butt of the joke, at least not alone. His defeat, in which he nearly dies, comes swiftly, even though the narrator has foreshadowed it.

In an article about humour in *WeK*, Hogenbirk suggests that the jousts are intended as humorous, as is every description of Keye in the story.⁹⁰ In *WeK*, the first joust takes place when Keye and his companions are refused admittance into the castle. The squire challenges Keye to a fight, which Keye rightly refuses. He says:

“Bi Gode [...] dat soude mi Onward hebben nu van di, Dat ic soude jegen enen knecht Speren breken over recht. Mar doch hier comen dinen here, ic breke jegen hem ene spere.” (ll. 1157-62)	“By God, [...] it would be an unworthy thing for me to break lances with a squire, to be sure. But have your lord come out, I would gladly break a lance against him.”
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⁸⁹ Aumagwin’s landing in a brook is similar to Arthur’s and Kay’s landing in the river in the Latin story of *De Ortu Waluuani nepotism Arturi*. (See Appendix, “The Latin Kay”)

⁹⁰ M. Hogenbirk, “A Comical Villain: Arthur’s Seneschal in a Section of the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* Compilation”, in K. Busy and R. Dalrymple (eds.), *Arthurian Literature XIX. Comedy in Arthurian Literature* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), 175

While some of his actions in this story are questionable, it makes sense for Keye to refuse the fight, as the squire is not yet a knight. Having a fight between a squire and a knight is highly unusual. In *Roman van Walewein*, Walewein lends his horse to a squire so he can go to Arthur and be knighted before he can fight the knight who killed his brother. In *WeK*, Keye does accept to fight the lord of the castle, as he is of the same rank as Keye. However, the squire dresses up as a knight and comes out of the castle along with his lord. This seems to be a very strange passage in the story. Of course, the squire has been insulted by Keye, but, as demonstrated in the *Roman van Walewein*, as a squire, he should be powerless to do anything about it. The fact that the lord of the castle would have allowed the squire to dress up as a knight seems implausible. Moreover, it seems merely a plot device to humiliate Keye even further, as losing to someone who is not even a knight yet would taint his honour further than losing to a knight. Similarly, but more logically carried out, is the scene in *DC*, in which Keii loses to someone who is called a youth, who is already a knight, but only barely. *WeK*'s Keye takes on the knight who he thinks is the lord of the castle, although in reality, this is the squire. Lichanor, one of Keye's companions, fights the real castle lord. As leader of the group, it makes sense that Keye would fight the person of the highest rank (who he thinks the squire is).⁹¹ Keye is described as fighting "manlike" ("bravely", l. 1221), but he is still defeated by the squire. Keye does not, as in for example *DC* or *Wrake van Ragisel*, beg for mercy at the end of the fight. Lichanor does not fare any better than Keye and is beaten by the lord of the castle. The audience for the fights are Keye's companions, whose reactions are not described, until Keye and Lichanor lose. However, while the extra-diegetic audience knows that the person Keye fights is the squire, the intra-diegetic audience of the story does not.

Despite the fact that Keye has promised that his companions would stay out of the fight during the first joust, when they see Keye lose, they attack. They manage to capture the real lord of the castle, while the squire flees inside. However, the knights do not know they have captured the lord; instead, they still assume the squire is the owner of the castle. They decide to send the lord to Arthur. While sending defeated knights to the king is not unusual (Walewein does so throughout the story and it happens in many other romances as well), the group of knights apparently count themselves still as one, as twenty defeating one does not seem to be very heroic. Perhaps it could be seen as a play on scenes in which one knight defeats many (in for instance *Erec et Enide*, where Erec fights several robbers at once, or the *Roman van Walewein*, in which Walewein singlehandedly infiltrates a castle, killing everyone

⁹¹ It shows a trait which Kay has always had, since the Welsh literature: faith in his own prowess. However, in later literature, this confidence remains, but the actual ability to win has disappeared. (See Appendix, "The Welsh Kay")

in his way). In this story, participating in an adventure is a competition, Walewein against Keye and his companions, so it appears that Arthur's court is being used as some sort of scoreboard. The lord of the castle tells Arthur what has happened, complaining about Keye instead of singing his praise. The scene is, in all, a bit strange. Arthur is furious when he hears about Keye's deeds, but instead of calling him to order himself, he sends Gariet, Lyoneel, Hestor and Acglavael to capture Keye and his companions. Gariet, one of Walewein's brothers, and Keye have a difficult relationship, as demonstrated in *Wrake van Ragisel*. There, Keye disguises himself as someone else to win the hand of a damsel. He is beaten by another suitor and reveals himself, but instead of granting him mercy, Gariet, who is also present, tells the suitor to cut off Keye's head. The suitor finally spares Keye's life, which Gariet only begrudgingly accepts.

The newly arrived knights in *WeK* are each willing to fight five of Keye's knights at once, but, as Hogenbirk points out, Keye, is an advocate of a fair one-on-one fight, as he says:⁹²

“Wi IV willen riden Jegen u viren op dat gi dorret.” (ll. 1434-5)	“Four of us will ride against four of you, if you dare.”
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Keye and Acglavael are the first to joust. Keye's spear breaks, however, without hurting Acglavael.⁹³ Acglavael manages to throw Keye off his horse without too much effort, “Dat hem dat herte dochte breken” (“that he thought his heart would burst”, l. 1467). However, unlike the messenger from DC, Acglavael is courtly enough to help Keye up. Keye is hurt quite badly:

Keye hadde so grote noet, Dat hi ne sprac clein no groet. (ll. 1475-6)	Keye was in such great pain that he could not say a word.
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His pain is similar to his suffering after Keii's joust with Gasozein in *DC*, where he nearly dies after he is unhorsed. However, Keye's pain is not so severe that he does not try to escape, as he tried after the fight with the messenger in *DC*. As shown above, the messenger uncourteously grabbed his helmet and dragged Keii with him. The castle lord in *WeK* does

⁹² Hogenbirk (2011), note to line 1435, 127

⁹³ This can perhaps be seen as irony, as Keye challenged them to “break spears”.

something similar, which is also does not seem very knightly: he hits Keye in the neck from behind, and Keye almost falls into the moat. No one comments on this action, however.

In *Avowynge*, after having told about Arthur's adventure, the narrator turns to Kay. We are told that he meets a knight, and a lady, who is crying. She begs for help, because her companion has taken her against her will. Kay, as is the chivalrous thing to do, challenges the knight as he calls out:

“Recraiaand* knyghte,	<i>Renegade</i>
Here I profur* the to fighte	<i>challenge</i>
Be chesun* of that biurde brighte*!	<i>By reason; lovely woman</i>
I bede* the my glovus*.”	<i>offer; gloves (throw down the gauntlet)</i>

(ll. 293-6)

In his article about *Avowynge*, Burrow comments that “[w]hen Kay encounters Sir Menealfe leading his abducted damsel through the forest, he makes all the right noises, swearing to take vengeance on the recreant knight and to release his captive”.⁹⁴ Kay has vowed to fight anyone who bars his way, and it is not stated that this is the case with Menealfe, but it rather seems to be the damsel's pleas that lead him to challenge the stranger. Menealfe accepts Kay's challenge, and they start their joust. As seen in many other Arthurian stories, Kay is overcome by his opponent at the first try, his shield splinters, and he falls off his horse. He is then taken prisoner.

The second joust in *Avowynge* takes place when Kay lays an ambush to test Baldwin's vows, encouraged by Arthur.⁹⁵ Kay leaves with five companions to set up the ambush, dressed in green. The fact that they dressed as such implies that they are attempting to disguise themselves. In the notes to his edition, Hahn draws a comparison between the green garment and traditional garb of highwaymen and forest outlaws such as Robin Hood.⁹⁶ Kay fighting with multiple companions against one reminds us of *WeK*, in which Keye takes twenty companions with him on his search for adventure. This time, however, it is Arthur's idea, and the scheme is merely set up to test Baldwin and his ability to keep his vow. When Baldwin approaches, the six knights are certain he fears for his life, and Kay tells Baldwin that he must fight or flee. Baldwin calls them “herdmen hinde” (l. 643), which Hahn translates

⁹⁴ Burrow (1987), 103

⁹⁵ See Chapter 1, “Kay and Arthur at Court”.

⁹⁶ Hahn, “Notes”, in T. Hahn (ed.). *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), note to line 610 ff, 161

as “boorish shepherds”. He states that: “[I]t strips these disguised knights who far outnumber [Baldwin] of any claim to noble status, and deprives them of any possible honor in the combat that ensues.”⁹⁷ Baldwin attacks Kay first (it is stated nowhere that he recognises the seneschal):

Kay stode nexte him in his way:
 He joppot* him aure on his play*; *toppled; over with his thrust*
 That hevy horse on him* lay – *[Kay]*
 He squonet* in that squete*. *swooned; struggle*
 (ll. 661-4)

Kay loses for the second time in the story, unhorsed by Baldwin’s thrust, and swoons because the horse has fallen on top of him. Baldwin overcomes the other knights as well and goes to Arthur to attend mass.

Kay’s motivation to joust is different almost every time. He jousts out of pride (the first joust of *DC*), because of Arthur’s command (second joust in *DC* and the second joust of *Avowing*), out of stubbornness (the first joust of *WeK*), because he is challenged (second joust of *WeK*), or because he vowed to do so (although the damsel’s pleas seem to be motivation as well) in the first joust of *Avowing*. Kay being thrown off his horse at the first try is a common occurrence and happens almost every time in the jousts above. Usually, he is hurt quite badly, sometimes nearly dying. In two instances, Kay tries to flee after losing, but is (in an uncourteous manner) stopped by his opponent. However, in neither situation the narrator nor the intra-diegetic audience responds to it.

Kay as Challenger

In the previous chapter, I have discussed Kay in his role as mocker, when he taunts the people at the court, including the royal couple. However, outside the court, Kay uses his sharp tongue just as often, especially when he is about to joust.

In *DC*, Keii loses the joust with the messenger after the tankard-scene. Despite being completely humiliated, however, Keii is certainly not humbled. When the messenger once again tries to take his leave, the seneschal says:

“Ir eilt ze vaste.

⁹⁷ Hahn, “Notes”, note to line 643, 161

[...]
Jr sült von den maiden
Vnd von meinr vrowen e
Nemen vrlop, e daz erge,
Vnd scheidet dann hinnen.
Si hand iv ze minnen
Behalten guot chleinot
Von gimmen vnd ouch vol gold rot.
Des si in alles hant gedaht,
Dar vmb daz ir hant gebraht
Meinem herren disen kopf her,
Wan er ist des ir gewer,
Daz si cheusch vnd valsch sint.”
(ll. 3135-48)

“You are in too much of a hurry; [...] You must take leave of the maidens and my wife before you go. They have many fine trinkets of gold and precious stones to give you for bringing my lord the tankard, since it was a witness that they are chaste and free of deceit.” (p. 36)

Keii also makes a reference to Diogenes of Sinope, a Greek philosopher who denounced all material goods, perhaps in an attempt of the narrator to show off his knowledge. Keii’s jesting, which is a reminder of the ladies’ failing with the tankard, but not of the knights’, again a sign of Keii’s misogyny, is once again met by laughter, and the narrator states that he who ridicules is not upset by being disgraced (as will be proven after the next joust).

When Arthur goes looking for Gasozein, he orders Keii to ride ahead and if he encounters the mysterious knight, to ask him who he is. Keii replies that he or the knight will conquer or die. Aumagwin and Gales will take different positions, so that they will have a better chance to ambush the mystery knight. The narrator turns to Keii and tells us how cold the seneschal is, he can only focus on staying warm. His distress is so severe that he can no longer stand, and Keii laments his fate. He regrets going on the mission and, seemingly in an attempt to create sympathy for him, the narrator states that no one suffered a worse night than he. This could be a case of irony, as the other knights and Arthur are of course waiting in the snow as well and, therefore, are just as cold as Keii is. Keii tries to stay warm, but eventually falls asleep from pure exhaustion in a ditch beside the road. When Gasozein rides by, Keii thinks he is dreaming and only wakes up when his horse becomes unruly. Keii does not waste

a second, seemingly completely recovered,⁹⁸ and rides after the other knight, calling after him in his own sharp-tongued way:

“Kere, ritter, kere,
Durch riterlich ere!
War eilt ir so vast hin?
Seht ir niht, daz ich bin
Ein ritter, der ivch wil?
Jv ist der rede gar ze vil,
Daz ir niht wider cheret.
Der muot, der ivch daz leret,
Der wirdet leicht gvneret.”
(ll. 3736-44)

“Come back, knight, come back for your honor’s sake! [...] Where are you going in such a hurry? Don’t you see that a knight wants you? This affair is too much for you – that’s why you won’t stop – but such a spirit brings disgrace.” (pp. 43-4)

Keii’s words quickly go from trying to get the knight’s attention to taunting him in the final sentence, as he implies that the knight is afraid to stop. The other knight does not hear Keii and therefore does not respond, so Keii resorts to flat out insults and threats:

“Jr mügt wol ein Törper sein
Daz ir vart ze dirre zeit.
Jch wæn wol, daz ir seit
Ein vil erchenter zag.
Jr getrowet nummer be idem tag
Sam ander riter riten,
Wan so müest ir streiten,
Ob iv niemen wider rite.”
(ll. 3756-63)

“You must be a peasant to be traveling at this time of night, or a disgusting coward who doesn’t dare to ride by day like other knights for fear of being challenged and having to fight.”
(p. 44)

⁹⁸ This reminds of Keii’s ‘adventure’ later in the story, when he tries to obtain a bridle. (see “Kay as *Aventiureritter*”, below)

Keii insults the knight's ladylove, his honour, his social status, his bravery and his manhood all at the same time. While his taunts to his fellow courtiers were playful or cryptic, this time his insults are easy to understand and obviously taint the knight's honour. Moreover, Keii states that he could kill the knight, implying his confidence to win, as we also saw in *WeK* above. This time, Gasozein does hear him, but does not respond to his insults, which gains him the praise of the narrator, who states didactically that he who answers rudeness with courtesy is esteemed. Therefore, this would be the courtly way to react to Keii, in this text.

In *Avowing*, Kay is allowed to look for Gawain after he has lost from Menealfe.⁹⁹ Gawain manages to defeat Menealfe, and, falling back into his usual role, Kay cannot help but taunt:

“Thou hase that thou hase soghte!*	<i>You got what you asked for</i>
Mi raunnsun is all redy boghte*;	<i>completely paid</i>
Gif thou* were ded, I ne roghte*!	<i>If you [Menealfe]; wouldn't care</i>
Forthi come I hedur.”*	<i>This is what I came for</i>

(ll. 393-6)

After Kay's scorn, Menealfe admits defeat and tells Gawain he has freed Kay fairly. Gawain then again challenges Menealfe for the maiden, and once again defeats him. Again, Kay is not able to hold his tongue:

“Thi leve hase thou loste	
For all thi brag or thi boste;	
If thou have oghte on hur coste*,	<i>spent</i>
I telle* hit for tente*.”	<i>consider; as lost</i>

(ll. 429-32)

This time, however, he is reprimanded by Gawain. That does not stop Kay from taunting Menealfe again, saying that he has lost both his maiden and his life (ll. 445-6). Gawain rebukes him for that, as Menealfe has fought boldly. Hahn argues that Kay's taunting is a “vivid if ungracious example of the linkage between knightly honor and speech acts.”¹⁰⁰ Kay's words remind one of a child hiding behind its bigger sibling for protection, which often

⁹⁹ See Chapter 3, “Kay and Gawain on Quests”.

¹⁰⁰ Hahn, “Notes”, note to line 425 ff, 158

gives it the courage to taunt. It was, after all, Gawain's prowess that set Kay free, and that fulfilled Kay's promise to the maiden. Gawain, however, remains courteous as ever, and he tells Menealfe to pay no heed to Kay's "wurdes kene" ("sharp words", l. 453). Despite the wounds he has obtained from the joust, Menealfe is more hurt by Kay's words. Kay's taunts usually serve as a reason for the hero to prove himself, as is the case in *Perceval* and *Fergus*. In *Roman van Walewein*, Walewein does not dare to try to grab the flying chess set while he is still in view of the courtiers, or to return to court empty handed, as he fears Keye's ridicule if he fails. In these instances, Kay's words serve as a motive for the heroes to prove him wrong, or to maintain their honour, as in Walewein's case. In *Avowyng*, however, Kay's taunts are more of a kick when a man is already down. Not only does it show the contrast between Gawain, the courteous, exemplary knight, and Kay, the rude knight with the shape tongue, Kay's words also may be intended as humorous for the extra-diegetic audience. After all, there is no better entertainment than someone else's suffering.¹⁰¹

Kay's taunting usually is the thing that provokes a joust, as happens with Gasozein in *DC*, but often enough, he mocks his opponents after a fight, no matter that he has lost. In *DC*, he mocks both the messenger and his wife at the same time, referring to the tankard-test that all women failed. Kay's words to Menealfe are meant to rub in his failure. Kay has the same function in the *Mantel* and the two similar episodes in *DC*, as the people he taunts have already failed the test and are humiliated, which Kay's words only add to.

Kay as *Aventiureritter*

While Kay's job as seneschal usually keeps him at court, or at least near Arthur, in several stories, he goes on his own adventure or quest, either because he wants to or because he is asked to.

In *DC*, a maiden requests one of the knights to retrieve a bridle, and Keii is the first to offer his services. Apparently, he hears the maiden's request because he was standing closer to her than the other knights, even though it is Pentecost and Arthur holds court. His eagerness to be the first to try is a recurring phenomenon in Arthurian romance. In *Wrake van Ragisel*, an unknown knight lies dead and it is said that the person who draws the spear from the corpse will be the one to avenge his death. Keye asks Arthur for the first try, but fails to remove the spear. He also was the first to try to joust with Yvain in *Yvain*. In *DC*, Keii says:

¹⁰¹ "Er is geen beter vermaak dan leedvermaak", Dutch proverb.

“Sit ir her komen,
Frauwe, dorch solcher rede sitt,
So diene zü dirre hochzijt
Minem herren, we nü welle;
Vnd were er in der helle
Des kund mich nicht bedragen,
Jch wolte mich da wagen,
Vmb uwer mynne, frauw min;
Vnd lant uwer weynnen sin.
Jch wil da hin, kiesent mich!”
(ll. 12715-24)

“Lady, [...] since you have come on such a matter, I’ll let someone else serve my lord during the festivities. I don’t care if the bridle were in hell, I’d go after it for your love. Don’t weep; I want to go. Kiss me.” (p. 142)

In all, this seems to be a strange passage, as Keii seems to be implying that he wants to obtain the bridle for her love, while we have already heard that he is a married man. However, the kiss he asks for does not necessarily have to have an erotic connotation and probably does not, as seeking a mistress in public would be frowned upon. After all, the whole court, including the ladies, is present because of the arrival of the maiden. The other courtiers do not respond to Keii’s request, however, not even Arthur, who would be the closest to Keii and the maiden. In his book on gestures and expressions in the Middle Ages, Burrow has noted that in medieval English and French literature, greeting and parting are often accompanied by kisses and embraces, no matter if the participants are both knights or a knight and a lady. According to Burrow, the gesture was too ordinary to be described, but when this is done, the kisses are given on the mouth.¹⁰² There is a difference between public and private kisses, as the latter have an erotic connotation and are exchanged between lovers. Kisses exchanged in public are of the polite kind, exchanged between friends or strangers.¹⁰³ However, Burrow also notes that “[p]ublic kisses between men and women always carry at least the possibility of erotic implication.”¹⁰⁴ The kiss Keii asks for seems to fall into the last category; he wants a kiss in

¹⁰² Burrow (2004), 33

¹⁰³ Ibid, 51

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 55. However, Burrow rightly points out that “there can be no doubt that conventions did indeed vary from country to country in the Middle Ages as they do today; and one also has to reckon with changes over time, as well as with variations according to circumstance and social class.” (51) The things he notes are taken from English and French stories, so there is no guarantee that this applies to German romances as well. More research on this subject will have to shine light upon this.

parting, but they are surrounded by courtiers, so the kiss will be public and therefore probably considered polite, yet there is a possible erotic implication as well.

The maiden promises to kiss him, but only after he has retrieved the bridle. Keii will first have to prove himself. The kiss she will bestow will then not be a kiss in parting, but a kiss as a reward. Being refused the kiss, Keii is embarrassed, but does not dare to pursue the matter further. He mounts the mule the maiden gives him and is forbidden to turn it aside from the direction where it wants to go. This seems to be foreboding what will happen later in the story, as usually warnings such as these are not heeded, but tend to come true. The maiden then begins to weep and wail that the task is too much for Keii and that he will return empty handed. Her promise to kiss him when he succeeded seems now void; she promised she would when she already knew he could never succeed. Her lack of faith in him does not discourage Keii, however, and he sets out on the mule. Keii soon arrives in a forest full of wild animals, which frighten the seneschal, but the beasts do not attack because of the mule's mistress. After the forest, the mule descends into a valley which the narrator can only compare to hell, or so he says. The valley is hardly a nice place to be, and because of the vivid description, the extra-diegetic audience can sympathise with Keii's hardships. For the second time in the story, he thinks he is going to die, this time from the heat instead of the cold in the adventure with Gasozein. Even when he has survived the heat, a chill comes over him that he is sure he will perish. The predicament was so severe that Keii thought he was in the valley for a year, even if it was only briefly. After this part of the adventure, Keii reaches a spring, shaded by a tree. He cares for his mule by brushing it with twigs until all of its weariness is gone. Keii is already eager to continue, as we are not told he rested himself; he only cares for the mule before resuming his journey.¹⁰⁵ Finally, Keii arrives at a river without a bridge or boat in sight, except for a footbridge made of sharp steel.¹⁰⁶ Here the story becomes anticlimactic: after surviving the dark forest and almost dying in the valley, Keii does not dare to cross the river. He thinks the bridge is too narrow and that he will probably fall into the river and drown. His eagerness to continue, which showed at the spring, has completely vanished. He does not seem to care about the kiss from the maiden anymore either, as he thinks:

“Entruwen, ich wolt des E swern,
Daz ich von mynne nymmer fro

¹⁰⁵ Just as in the adventure with Gasozein, Keii is immediately recovered when he can continue his adventure.

¹⁰⁶ A “sword bridge” is also used in for instance Chrétien's *Lancelot*.

Wùrd, E ich ertrüncke so.”

(ll. 12863-5)

“Truly, I would sooner swear to renounce forever the joys of love than drown like this.” (p. 143)

His words again give another hint that the kiss Keii requested was not as innocent a parting kiss. There is no debate on whether or not his honour is at stake; Keii only cares for returning home, kiss or no kiss. He does not even attempt to cross the bridge. Keii turns the mule and rides back the way he came. The warning of the maiden about not turning the mule does not have any implications, making the entire passage with Keii rather anticlimactic.

In *WeK*, after Walewein has left the court, Keye starts his search for adventure along with the twenty companions who backed up his story. Hogenbirk points out that going on a quest with a group is sharply contrasted with the stories by Chrétien (and Walewein’s adventure in this romance), where a quest is meant for personal development.¹⁰⁷ Leaving in a group, albeit they are usually smaller, unless they form an army, is not necessarily unusual. In the Middle Dutch *Moriaen*, Moriaen, Walewein and Lancelot leave together, and in *DC*, they even leave with a group of four on the Grail-quest. However, Hogenbirk states that on crucial moments, meaning moments that are crucial for a knight’s personal development, the knights have been separated and are alone.

After seven days, Keye and his companions arrive at a castle, in which they want to spend the night. The squire who welcomes them refuses them entrance, however, as he deems there are too many in their group and they could take over the castle. He will allow them entrance if Keye tells him who he is. Keye replies uncourtly:

“Quade besceten horstront!¹⁰⁸
Hoe spreectstu soe te mi ward.
Haddic di hier nu vor min pard,
Ic soudi anders sprekene leren.”
(ll.1142-5)

“You vile horse turd
How dare you speak to me like that!
If I had you here in front of my horse
you’d be singing a different tune!”

¹⁰⁷ Hogenbirk (2004), 86

¹⁰⁸ Contrary to most scholars, Hogenbirk translates “horstront” not with ‘horse turd, but with ‘son of a whore’. (Hogenbirk (2004), 88)

This kind of foul language is unusual in Arthurian romance. In his role as jester, Kay mocks people, but does not stoop to ordinary name-calling.¹⁰⁹ In the Middle Dutch tradition, this type of scolding is unusual for Kay's character as well, and *WeK* is the only example in which he uses it. In other stories, his verbal traits are similar to the ones given to him by Chrétien. The name-calling is, therefore, a curious phenomenon. It is not consistent with Keye's personality throughout the *Lancelot* Compilation, making it plausible that it was part of the original story. Why the compiler, who has changed the stories and shortened them whenever he saw fit, has left this part in, will probably remain a mystery. Perhaps the name-calling was intended to be coarse humour, or just a way to make Keye less appealing as a character. That Keye refuses to tell the squire his name, however, leaving aside the uncourtly way in which he does it, is not uncommon for knights. In *DC*, Gasozein also refuses to do so until he meets Arthur.

After fighting with Arthur's knights, Keye is taken prisoner, as well as his companions, but four manage to escape. The escaped knights return to the castle to free Keye and the others, not with a siege this time, but with a scheme. They disguise themselves and pretend to come from Arthur to take Keye back to the king for Whitsuntide. Hogenbirk calls this scheme "cowardly".¹¹⁰ However, using tricks is certainly not uncommon. The knights Arthur sent already used one by not revealing who they were, and in *Avowyng*, Kay plans a scheme to surprise Baldwin with five companions. In *WeK*, realising he may have gone too far, Keye says:

“Nu vort mere	“Henceforth
Sele wi hebben grote onnere	we will have great shame
Dat ons dit nu es gesciet.”	because of what happened to us.”
(ll. 1799-1801)	

It is not clear what Keye means with “dit” (“this”), whether he means the whole action of the siege or their escape. He is, however, aware of the fact that they cannot return to Arthur's court, at least not until they find out if Arthur is still angry with him. The knights who freed Keye and the others have confessed to using a ruse, so Keye is aware that Arthur has not actually sent for him. Keye decides to wait seven miles from the castle until he hears news. Cleverness, or at least the ability of self-preservation, is a trait of Kay that is more common in

¹⁰⁹ Hogenbirk (2004), 88

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 92. These kind of adjectives are, of course, a matter of opinion, but it shows that Hogenbirk has a personal aversion to Keye (and his companions), which influences her judgement in her dissertation. Necessity is the mother of invention, after all, and since the knights have proven not to be strong enough, they have to be smart.

Arthurian literature. While Kay is shown not to shut up easily, as in *DC* when he is defeated by the messenger, or in *Roman van Walewein* when he is reprimanded by Arthur, he is often described as knowing when to give up when he is defeated, and in those cases he uses his head. In *Wrake van Ragisel*, he begs for mercy after being defeated, as he does in *DC*. In the scene with the bridle in *DC*, he also seems to be aware that he is in over his head, as he returns home when he has arrived by the river, instead of pushing on. In *WeK*, he decides to play it safe as well, instead of barging into Arthur's court (the king does not know Keye is freed).

Interestingly, Keye does not seem to have problems finding lodging here, as the narrator states “hi was daer wel bekint” (“for he was well known in this parts”, l. 1819), unlike, apparently, in the parts where the castle they besieged was. The word “daer” (“there”) could also imply the specific castle. While he stays there, he hears:

Dattie coninc Waleweins ongeval	that the king planned to make him
Keyen sal doen ontgelden al,	pay for Walewein's misfortune,
Want hijt Keyen antijt, Godweet,	for God knows he blamed
Dat hi hem es dus ongereet.	his current absence on Keye.

(ll. 1820-4)

Keye is obviously not (yet) welcome at the court, so he wisely decides to stay away. Instead, he hopes that the queen will reconcile him with Arthur. It is not clear why he thinks she would do that, as when Walewein leaves “Si vloecte Keye utermaten” (“She cursed Keye vehemently”, l. 179), even if almost a year has passed since then. Hogenbirk explains this passage by means of two other stories from the Compilation, *Wrake van Ragisel* and *Ridder metter mouwen*, as in those two romances Keye is the queen's kin; and, as his niece, she would have to put in a good word for him. This is probably an innovation by the compiler, as the queen and Keye being family is used in no other tradition.¹¹¹ Because of this familial bond, which would give the queen the moral obligation to help her kin, it is probable that Keye's hopes of reconciliation would not have been in the original story, which may not have contained this relationship between the queen and the seneschal. In most stories, the relationship between Kay and the queen is not good. In *Yvain*, Guinevere hauls Kay over coals after he insults Calogrenant. However, after his fight with the messenger, Keii pleads for

¹¹¹ Hogenbirk (2004), 135

mercy with the queen and she is the one to save him, even though that is mostly out of womanly kindness.¹¹²

In *DC*, the adventure with the bridle ends rather anticlimactically, as Keii seems to prefer facing a known danger (the valley) to try facing a new one (the sharp bridge). Hogenbirk states that in *WeK*, Keye exacts adventure, which would imply that he besieges the castle to have an adventure.¹¹³ However, his motivation to refuse to say his name or fight the lord of the castle is stated nowhere. What all these adventures have in common, however, is that Kay fails in all of them.

Kay and Arthur on Quests

While Arthur is often depicted as a passive ruler in Arthurian literature, there are several times he leaves the court to go on an adventure, despite Gawein's argument that Arthur should leave quests to the knights at the end of *DC*. In both *DC* and *Avowing*, the king takes Kay as one of his companions.

After Arthur has managed to learn Gasozein's name in *DC*, he finds his companions, who have to support each other in order not to collapse in exhaustion. Arthur is amused at their expense and asks what has happened, jesting that he hopes they have not killed a knight with barely any armour on. Keii does not mind being the centre of a joke, as the narrator tells us that he accepts the king's raillery good-naturedly and without embarrassment. One of Keii's talents seems to be to turn his own humiliation in the mocking of others. He says:

“Do er an der erste lage
Mich nider von dem örse stach
Vnd mir ab den arm brach,
Do wart ich wol gerochen.
Er wart ouch gestochen
Mit zwein örsen zuo dem meinem,
Die er ouch mit dem seinem
Vor leide vuorte hin,
So groz wart sein vngewin.
(ll. 5203-10)

¹¹² See “Kay as Challenger”, above.

¹¹³ Hogenbirk (2004), 86

“When he unhorsed me at the first station and broke my arm, I was well avenged, for two other steeds besides mine charged him, and his loss was so great he led them away in sorrow.”
(p. 58)

As he does not mind being mocked by the other courtiers at court, Keii does not mind that his lord pokes fun at him. He recounts honestly that he has been unhorsed (although his injuries already imply that). Gales and Aumagwin, however, are not pleased by Keii’s words, as it reminds them of their failure. Arthur mocks them some more, until Aumagwin pleads him to stop and the king obliges.

In *Avowing*, Arthur calls his knights together to make his vow.¹¹⁴ Kay is described as “kene” (“bold”, l. 116), which sharply contrasts with his Middle Dutch epithet of “metter quaden treken” (‘with the mean tricks’), which he receives in *WeK*. After Arthur’s and Gawain’s vow, Kay says:

“And I avow,” sayd Kaye,
“To ride* this forest or* daye, *[throughout]; before*
Quoso wernes* me the waye, *[And] whoever denies;*
Hym to dethe dighte.” *To fight him to the death*
(ll. 133-6)

Kay vows that he will fight anyone who bars his way when he rides through the forest. While his vow is similar to Arthur’s and Gawain’s, Hahn states that “Kay’s windy recklessness, and his seemingly inevitable humiliation, are a stock motif in popular Arthurian romances.”¹¹⁵ The pattern of Kay making bold promises and of him losing is recurring in the Middle English poems about Gawain.¹¹⁶ However, one would have to know Kay’s reputation to label his vow “reckless”, as it seems no more rash than Arthur’s vow to slay a boar. In contrast, Patricia Ingham describes Kay’s, along with Gawain’s, vow as a mirror to Arthur’s vow; they all promise to protect a part of Arthur’s land, and Kay takes care of Inglewood Forest.¹¹⁷ She

¹¹⁴ It is interesting that Arthur decides to take Kay (along with Gawain and Baldwin) with him while he goes hunting. It reminds one of the historical tradition in which Arthur took Kay and Bedevere with him, or, more perhaps rather the Latin story of Arthur and Gorlagon the werewolf, in which Arthur takes Kay and Gawain as his companions. (See Appendix, “The ‘Historical’ Kay”; “The Latin Kay”)

¹¹⁵ Hahn, “Notes”, note to line 133 ff, 153

¹¹⁶ For instance, *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, *The Greene Knight*, etcetera.

¹¹⁷ P.C. Ingham, “Masculine Military Unions: Brotherhood and Rivalry in ‘The Avowing of King Arthur’”, *Arthuriana* 6 (1996), 33

says: “The scene of their vowing foregrounds an untroubled loyalty amongst warriors [until Baldwin takes his turn].”¹¹⁸

When they each have fulfilled their vow, except for Baldwin, the knights and Arthur come together again, along with Menealfe. Arthur places Kay in charge of the meat of the boar, something that appears to have to do with his job as seneschal.¹¹⁹ Arthur asks how they won the lady, and Kay tells the story honestly, including his own defeat, as he did in *DC*. The lady cuts in and emphasises that Kay has been taken prisoner: “He toke him there to presunnere” (‘He took [Kay] there as prisoner’, l. 509). Kay’s honesty about his defeat is not self-evident. In *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal*, Kay returns home after being defeated by Daniel, but when Arthur asks what has happened, Kay does not reveal anything.

When Kay’s ambush on Baldwin fails, he once again tells Arthur the truth. Unexpectedly from the seneschal, he praises Baldwin’s prowess:

“We ar all schente* Of* Sir Baudewyn, your knyghte: He is nobull in the fighte, Bold, hardy, and wighte* To bide on a bente.* Fle wille he nevyr more: Him* is much levyr dee thore.* I may banne hur* that him bore, Suche harmes* have I hente!” (ll. 692-700)	<i>done in</i> <i>By</i> <i>powerful</i> <i>deal with on the battlefield</i> <i>To him; preferable to die there</i> <i>curse her</i> <i>received</i>
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Unusually complimentarily as he is, Kay does not have a reason to lie about the events, as he did not have one with their previous adventure. After all, Baldwin has come home without a scratch, while Kay barely survived the encounter. Baldwin and Kay’s companions serve as witnesses for the events, as are Menealfe and the maiden to his first fight.

In both *DC* and *Avowing*, Kay’s and Arthur’s conversations outside the court consist of Kay telling his lord honestly about his failings. In *DC*, Arthur is amused and mocks his knights, which Keii accepts good-naturedly. In both cases in *Avowing*, Arthur does not mock Kay, but rather praises Gawain and Baldwin respectively. Kay’s vow, while perhaps

¹¹⁸ Ingham, 33

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 1, “Kay as Seneschal”.

foreshadowing his failure, is in the same line as Arthur's and Gawain's promise, and therefore does not seem unreasonable.

Kay as Grail Knight

In *DC*, Keii is placed in a unique position for the seneschal: he becomes one of the Grail knights. In his article about the figure of Kay in *DC*, Martin Baisch points out that, while there are several indications of a changed interpretation of Kay's character, the fact that Keii not only becomes a "Aventiureritter", but also a "Gralskämpfer" is the decisive factor.¹²⁰

After the Knight with the Goat has stolen the gloves, Gawein decides to go after him to obtain the stolen items, and later to find the Grail, as he has promised to do so. Every knight present wants to accompany Gawein, but at every request, Keii makes scornful remarks, which the narrator says he does not want to repeat because the end of the story is near.¹²¹ Parzival, who is usually the Grail Knight, following Chrétien's *Perceval*, is taunted by Keii as well, making a reference to the story of *Parzival*. Baisch points out that by using Parzival's failing at the Grail Castle, Keii prevents Parzival's participation to the Grail-quest in *DC*, and creates another case of intertextuality.¹²² However, Keii himself insists on leaving, no matter the objection, and Lanzelet and Kalocreant want to leave as well.¹²³ Keii gives an overly dramatic goodbye speech to the court, evoking both laughter and embarrassment. He starts by ironically saying that he has always enjoyed the king's favour, and that it will be hard without him, but they have to let him go nonetheless. He continues:

“Jch emag ùch niht verbieten,
Jr mûszent mich clagen hinnach.
Vnd sal aber niht sin zugach,
Dar ir sin nü begynnent
Darvmb, obi r mich mynnent
Vnd mir sint von herzen holt,
Das ich vil lang han geholt,

¹²⁰ Baisch, 150-1

¹²¹ All knights wanting to go is quite the opposite to the start of several Arthurian stories, in which none of the knights are willing to take on the adventure presented to them, until the hero of the story does. Such is the case in, for example, *Roman van Walewein* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. However, this scene in *DC* mirrors the eagerness of the knights to leave in *La queste del Saint Graal*.

¹²² Baisch, 171

¹²³ The usual Grail knight are Bohors, Perceval and Lancelot's son Galahad. Interestingly, in *La queste del Saint Graal*, Lancelot and Gawain are two of the failures to whom the story devotes much attention. (Elizabeth M. Willingham, "An Introduction to *La queste del Saint Graal* Yale 229", in Elizabeth M. William (ed.), *La queste del Saint Graal (The Quest of the Holy Grail) from the Old French Lancelot of Yale 229 with Essays, Glossaries and Notes to the Text* (Turnhout: Brepolis Publishers, 2012), 2)

Wann ich ùch ie versprach
 Vnd was vwer schammen tach.
 [...]

Jch wil ùch doch alle bitten,
 Das ir mit wibes guten sitten
 Vwer grosze clage maszent
 Vnd mich ein wijle laszent
 Vsz, obich icht bejage.
 Wann got müsze vwer clage
 Vernemen so zü hant!
 (ll. 26003-49)

“I can’t forbid you to lament later, but you should not be in too much haste to begin. I have long deserved that you should be very fond of me, for I have always made excuses for you and covered up your offences. [...] But whether I return or not, I ask you to moderate your loud wailing with proper woman’s decorum and release me for a while so that I can try to find something, for God could not fail to hear your laments at once.” (p. 293)

Keii’s speech is filled with sarcasm and, as Baisch points out, misogyny. The ladies’ laughter at Keii’s departure can be contrasted with the departure of Parzival and Gawein in *Parzival*.¹²⁴ The irony is evident in his words, and Ginover and the other ladies’ laughter present an example for the extra-diegetic audience that they should be amused as well. Keii seems to take it a little too far, as he keeps joking and, once he leaves, he is not greatly lamented by any of the courtiers. The extra-diegetic audience should therefore not be sad either.

The four knights ride out and soon come upon a stronghold that blocks their path. Keii is the first one to charge, as he often does in Arthurian stories, and is wounded right away when he is thrown off his steed. His opponent wants to take his head, but instead of begging for mercy or being taken prisoner, as he usually does when he is defeated in other Arthurian stories and in *DC* itself when he jousts with the messenger at the beginning of the story, Keii manages to ward his opponent off and take him prisoner. This scene can be contrasted against Kay’s fight in *Avowying* and in *WeK*, in which he is taken prisoner himself. The Knights of the Round Table fight like a small army, and the lord of the stronghold finally surrenders. They stay in the castle until Keii is well again and then travel on. After several adventures, they find themselves in battle once again with four other knights. They choose their opponent,

¹²⁴ Baisch, 171-2

as knights usually joust one-on-one, as Keye prefers in *WeK* as well. All of the knights are flung out of the saddle, except for Keii,

mit ritters werde
Vnder jne allen eyne gesasz.
(ll. 27021-2)

who kept his seat with knightly dignity. (p. 303)

In this last adventure, the narrator proves he is rather fond of Keii's character, as he says:

Jch engunde es zware nyeman basz
Darvmb daz v fritters getat
Jne maniger gescholten hat
Der sin wol hett gehabt rat.
(ll. 27023-6)

Truly, there is no one whom I would rather see do this, because his knightly deeds have been faulted by many who would have liked to be free of him. (p. 303)

In this late stage of the story, it seems that the narrator is trying to change Kay's reputation in Arthurian literature, again referring to the many other stories he knows, by making him a real knight and hero, not one who always loses. Moreover, Keii is the only one to remain seated in the saddle, therefore surpassing Gawain, with whom he is contrasted against negatively in many stories, including *Avowing* and *WeK*.¹²⁵ Gawain, Lanzelet and Kalocreant have defeated their opponents, but Keii (not Gawain!) is fighting the best of them and their battle continues. The narrator tells us that Gawain worries about Keii, as Keii has become reckless, creating suspense for the extra-diegetic audience. Finally, Keii manages to defeat his opponent by thrusting his sword under his opponent's shield and through the split in his hauberk. The knight dies instantly. Keii is heavily wounded and his old wound has opened, making his victory all the more praiseworthy. Keii did not only win, he defeated a tough opponent while being wounded and therefore weakened himself.

Soon after, another battle is held to regain the stolen gloves, and again Keii comes out as victor, even before Lanzelet and Kalocreant this time. After this, the four knights ride on

¹²⁵ See Chapter 3.

for twelve days, following Gawein's lead, until they reach a lake. Unlike the time when Keii reached the river during the adventure with the bridle, he does not shy away from the water here and follows his companions. On the other side, they reach a branch in the road, giving them four options. They split up and each take a road. Gawein meets a goddess who tells him that his companions will encounter many hardships. She predicts that Keii will be taken prisoner and has to battle nine knights. For this, he needs to be protected against magic and he could lose. To prevent this, the goddess advises Gawein to give Keii his hauberk; then he will win. The goddess does not mention Lanzelet and Kalocreant.

In the meantime, Keii arrives at Illes, where many tales of the Grail are told. There is also a chapel in a castle and it is said that whoever enters will learn the story of the Grail and free many men and women who were prisoners. However, things do not go as planned. Keii only finds a statue in the chapel and, his temper getting the better of him, he breaks it. By doing so, he traps himself, as the person who breaks the statue will spend the rest of his life in prison, unless he defeats nine knights in a row without pause. These knights have never been defeated and are protected by magic that ensures this. The prediction the goddess made to Gawein has come true. Keii can never return unless the ladies pray for him, and the narrator says worryingly:

Ob er ie geprüfet spott
Des must er nú zü büsze stan.
(ll. 29065-6)

[N]ow he must atone for his jesting. (p. 324)

The narrator continues by turning to the ladies, pleading with them to be merciful. The narrator appeals to the ladies' mercy, he warns them that doing the opposite will cost them their good name in an almost threatening way and, lastly, points out what kind of rewards are awaiting them if they pray for Keii. He argues that sparing Keii would make him their protector and will only increase their renown. The narrator seems to be addressing the women in the extra-diegetic audience directly, as if they can influence the story. The narrator also stresses the point that Keii should not perish because of his jokes, implying that that is the worst offence Keii has ever committed.

Gawein meets up with Lanzelet and Kalocreant, who have had their own adventures, and they hasten to Illes where Keii is. While Keii is not bound, he still cannot leave the

chapel. His companions lament his fate and swear they would take his place if they could. Gawein follows up on the goddess' advice and gives Keii his hauberk. As there is nothing more they can do for him, the three ride home. The narrator tells us that Keii was sorely lamented by all courtiers, contrasting with his departure, and they pray for his safe return, implying that he is a treasured member of Arthur's court, despite his flaws.

Later, Keii defeats the nine knights, and they have to accompany him to Arthur's court. He tries to catch up with Gawein and arrives at Arthur's court on the first day of the festival. The courtiers are grieving for him, while the king refuses to eat or drink, not because he is waiting for an adventure to happen, but because of grief for his seneschal. Keii rides into the court in full armour and with his captives, and exclaims in his usual manner:

“Der wirt hab dang,
Das er min gebiten hab!”
(ll. 29864-5)

“I thank my host for having waited for me!” (p. 333)

His entrance is rather spectacular, as Keii returns (unexpectedly?) successful, with even witnesses of his prowess, namely, the captive knights. Riding into court in full armour can be seen as rude, as Fergus does in the story of the same name, but he does not know any better. However, presenting Keii as rude does not seem to be the intention here. Rather, the narrator describes a dramatic entrance, as well as perhaps a surprising outcome of the events.

By making Keii one of the knights who go on the Grail-quest, even if he never sees the Grail himself, the narrator transforms the usually failing seneschal into an esteemed knight. Throughout *DC*, Keii is unhorsed several times in a joust, and, most times he is speaking, he is being sarcastic. During the Grail adventure, however, Keii is presented as being the best knight, winning two tough jousts, and even surpassing Gawein in them. The narrator only pays attention to Keii's and Gawein's parts of the quests, summarising Lanzelet's and Kalocreant's parts in one sentence. The narrator almost indignantly points to other authors who have made a joke out of Kay's character. He finishes the story by implying that he has done his best to present Keii as a good knight, and that he has nothing to do with it if other authors do not follow his example.

Conclusion

In all the stories, almost all of Kay's jousts end in failure, no matter how good his intentions are. While in *DC*, Kay jousts because he has to, or because of stubbornness, Kay's intentions to joust Menealfe seem to be pure, as he hopes to rescue a damsel in distress. However, things do not go as planned, and, as in the other instances, Kay is unhorsed. As a knight on adventure, Kay does not fare any better, especially not in *WeK*. When Kay interacts with Arthur outside the court, it is mostly to tell the king about his failed adventures. However, Kay's sharp tongue is used as much on opponents as it is on fellow courtiers. Sometimes, his taunting is the reason for a joust, but just as often, Kay is not humbled after losing and mocks his opponent anyway. At the end of *DC*, the narrator seems to have wanted to remove Kay's character from the negative spotlight once and for all, by making him one of the Grail Knights, who wins surprisingly often. While other stories usually contrast Gawain and Kay by making Kay fail where Gawain succeeds, Kay as Grail Knight is presented as equal, or even better than Arthur's nephew.

CHAPTER 3

KAY AND GAWAIN

Kay and Gawain have a special relationship in most Arthurian literature. Chrétien de Troyes started comparing them in *Erec*, making Kay the example of how one should not act, and having Gawain succeed where Kay fails. This concept is adopted in different degrees by many post-Chrétien authors. In the same *Erec*, Kay is portrayed as having respect for Gawain, and when the latter asks him to do something, he does it without complaint. Also in *Yvain*, Kay listens when Gawain reprimands him, but does not when Arthur does it.¹²⁶ The latter, however, is not always the case. In the Middle Dutch *Roman van Walewein*, Keye does not take heed when Walewein asks him to stop his taunting. Burgess and Brook call their relationship in Arthurian romance “often prickly”¹²⁷, something that is demonstrated throughout the stories discussed here.

Kay and Gawain at Court

Both Gawain and Kay are close and very dear to Arthur, Kay because he is Arthur’s seneschal (and his foster brother in some traditions) and Gawain is the king’s nephew. Also with the other courtiers, they have a certain authority.

Keu is behaving fairly well in *Mantel*, as we have seen in Chapter 1. He does not comment on the failing ladies, unless he is provoked. However, when it is the turn of Gauvain’s ladylove, Keu seizes the opportunity with both hands. Glad he will not be the only one mocked, he takes it upon himself to do so, saying:

“La demoisele o le cler vis
Si se fit espoir emdormie,
Et s’auquns qui de druerie
La requeroit auqun matin
La vint veoir, si con devin,
Si i pot bien tel chose faire
Que l’an ne doit mie retraire,
A tel besoeing com je vos di.”
(ll. 474-81)

“The fair-faced maiden
Perhaps fell asleep,
And if anyone, such as a sorcerer,
Had visited her one morning
And sought her favours
He could have done to her a deed
The like of which should not be recorded
In circumstances such as I am relating to you.”

¹²⁶ See Appendix, “Chrétien’s Kay”.

¹²⁷ Burgess and Brook, “Introduction”, 30

Burgess and Brook note that the reviser of the manuscript once again has altered the text, but this time, he has not made it less sexually explicit. In manuscript T, Kay interprets the fact that the flap of the mantle does not cover Venelas' knee, as proof that she would have raised that leg and curved over the other when she committed a transgression.¹²⁸ However, Besamusca comments rightly that “[i]t is, after all, not only unlikely that [Kay and the others who mock] really know how each of the tested women prefers to make love, the mantle’s form can also be easily interpreted in other ways than in correspondence to sexual preferences.”¹²⁹ While in the version of manuscript T Kay comments on the sexual position of Venelas, in the revised version, Kay seems to imply that she was sexually assaulted, which makes it not her fault. His words are similar to Keii’s words to the queen in *DC*, in the glove-scene, where he also blames sexual assault for her failings. We are told by the narrator that Gauvain is so upset he does not speak a word, but whether that is because of Venelas’ (supposed) unfaithfulness, Keu’s words, or a combination thereof, is not clear. Keu takes Venelas by the hand to sit her down by his own beloved. The gesture in itself seems gentle, but the message is clear: ladies who fail will be put in the same corner so everyone can see their shame.

During the tankard-scene in *DC*, Keii spares no one, until the tankard is handed to Gawain. The narrator is quick to say that there is no fault in Gawain, as he is usually presented as the perfect knight, except once he made a mistake and violated a lady. The narrator laments this error, but it does cause Gawain to fail the test of the tankard. Yet, no response from Keii comes. Gawain is the only one who escapes Keii’s ridicule, except for Galaida, Keii’s wife.¹³⁰ Perhaps this is because of Gawain’s virtue, aside from his one mistake, but the equally virtuous Arthur was jested nonetheless. The reason is not commented on by the narrator, and he moves on to the next knight to drink from the tankard, Lanzelet, who is again mocked by Keii.

However, in the glove-episode in *DC*, Gawain is not spared Keii’s ridicule. Gawain brings the glove around to the ladies, and after Arthur has passed the test with flying colours – again – Gawain declares that the knights should be allowed to skip the glove-test, as Arthur has won the right to it. Keii disagrees and points out that Gawain must atone for his sin of taking a belt from a knight. He continues:

¹²⁸ Burgess and Brook, “Introduction”, 15-6

¹²⁹ Besamusca (2010), 293

¹³⁰ See Chapter 1, “Kay as Significant Other”.

“Wöllent ir die ritter vnderwegen
Laszen an ir missedat,
Sit man vor die frauwen hat
Da mit alle bewart?
[...]
Wùrd dirre bott des bezigen
Vnd sin frauw dar zü,
Das sie den hentschüh nü
Vf wibes hasz sande
Her von jrem lande,
War mohten genieszen?
Ob sin die ritter lieszen
Der künig vnd der bott,
So möhten die frauwen clagen got,
Das wir an jne prüfeten spott.”
(ll. 24374-89)

“Do you want to ignore the faults of the knights after the ladies have already been tested? [...] What good would it do you to have this messenger and lady accused of having sent the glove here out of hate for women? If the king and the messenger were to excuse the knights, the ladies might well lament to God that we were only making fun of them.” (p. 273)

Keii challenges Gawain to put on the glove, because he deems it unfair if only Arthur should win fame. Keii’s statement is probably a reference to the story of the mantel, or similar fertility tests, and, through Keii, the author shows that he knows of these fertility tests in which only the ladies are tested, but he finds this unjust, an opinion which is mirrored in Keii’s words and stressed several times throughout the story.

Despite Keii’s hopes and expectations, Gawain passes the test with the glove, prompting Keii to say:

“Wie taugen
Das vor vns ist ergan,
Das er den hentschuch an
Mit losen hat gewonnen,
Das er yme sin sal gùnnen!

[...]

Sust kan er erkauffen
Mit losen, was er haben wil.
Es hilfft jne hie nit züuil,
Wie vile r künne losen.
Sin blidecliches kosen
Vnd sin wiplicher sitt,
Da verfhahet er nü wenig mit.
Wie gar frantzoyes er nú sij,
Er müsz sin doch nú wesen frij,
Wann vns der künig nú nihts erlat,
Der yne vor yme gewonnen hat,
Wie es halt dar nach ergat.”

(ll. 24426-47)

“How furtively this took place before our eyes [...] as he so fully deceived the glove that it gave itself to him! [...] Gawein’s flattery usually gets him anything he wants, but it won’t help much this time. His lighthearted chatter and womanish manner will only achieve very little, for however much of a Frenchman he is, he can’t take charge of the glove, because the king won it first and won’t let him.” (p. 274)

The remark about Gawein’s golden tongue is an obvious reference to Gawein’s reputation as womaniser, but the comment on his mannerisms is not entirely clear. It does, however raise the question why Keii held his tongue the first time, during the test with the tankard that Gawein failed, but not during the glove-test, which Gawein passed. The narrator does not linger on it, nor do any of the courtiers reply to Keii’s mockery, not even Gawein himself. It seems that Keii’s words are for the amusement of the extra-diegetic audience only.

When the gloves are stolen by the Knight with the Goat, the king and his retinue are distraught and return to the courtroom. Gawein says:

“Jr hant alle wol vernomen,
Das vns die vil cleine magt
Der schaden vor hat gewissagt,
Als wir in haben erfunden.
Leider don enkunden
Wir vns der rede nit verstan,

Hett es her Kay nit getan.
 Was verding den die manung?
 Darvmb, daz sin zung
 Manig ernsthaftige rede verbert
 Vn schimpff vnd spott lert
 Vnd dick da zü rates zijt
 Helffebaren rat git,
 Des wart sin rat helffelosz,
 Wann jne zü erst nyeman kosz.
 Zü schimpff er verfangen wart.”
 (ll. 25630-45)

“You all heard the little maiden foretell the misfortune that befell us. Unfortunately, only Sir Keii understood her and his warning was in vain, for although he often gives timely and helpful counsel, he also distorts sober comments and teaches jests and ridicule. His advice therefore was useless because no one took it seriously: it was thought to be a joke.” (p. 289)

His words seem to be reprimanding Keii, but also contain didactic material: do not joke too much or you will not be taken seriously anymore when it counts.¹³¹ Gawein insists on retrieving the gloves, but when Arthur offers to go with him, he tells the king he has to stay at court. He goes on praising his fellow knights that they bring Arthur honour, and he includes Keii, calling him “min frünt” (“my friend”, l. 25866).

In *WeK*, Walewein and Keye do not interact much, except in the beginning of the story. Arthur has called Walewein to him to ask if Keye’s accusations are true. Walewein denies that, calling Keye “die quaet” (“wretch”, l. 112). Keye says he has heard the bragging himself, and Walewein turns directly to him:

“Ay Keye, queat cleppere ende fel, “Ah Keye, evil, false gossip,
 Dicke hebdi gestaen na min onnere.” you have often sought to dishonor me!”
 (ll. 128-9)

By using the word ‘often’, the narrator points to other stories in which this has happened as well, creating intertextuality. Hogenbirk points out that Walewein does not call Keye ‘Sir’,

¹³¹ This brings to mind Aesop’s fable of the boy who cried wolf. While Keii does not necessarily lie, it seems that the courtiers have trouble discerning whether Keii is being sarcastic or not, and, considering he is usually the former, they will assume he is when he is serious. (Aesop, *Aesop’s Fables*, translated by V.S. Venon Jones, with an introduction by G.K. Chesterton (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), 52-3)

expressing his contempt for the seneschal.¹³² Walewein then turns to the king and swears upon his honour that he is innocent. However, the reason for his departure is not necessarily Keye's accusations, but rather the fact that Arthur believed them:

“Maer om dat gi bat gelovet nu.	“But because you now more readily believe
Hem dan di doet min onscoude,	him than you do in my innocence,
So willic rumen met gewoude	I will leave your court at once
U hof ende scuwen vordane.”	and henceforth avoid it.”

(ll. 132-5)

Arthur's anger at Keye later in the story seems therefore to be unfounded, as he is himself to blame for Walewein's departure, even if the narrator, Arthur, and the other knights disagree with that view.

In both *Mantel* and *DC*'s glove-scene, Kay is ready to mock Gawain. In the latter, however, Gawain does not reply, while in the first, Gauvain is angry, but it is not clear if that is because of Keu's words. In *WeK*, Walewein is angry with Keye for spreading lies, but he is more upset that Arthur believed the seneschal instead of him. Finally, in *DC*, Gawain lectures Keii, but also calls him his friend, something that does not happen in the other stories.

Kay and Gawain on Quests

In *Avowing* and the Grail Quest in *DC*,¹³³ Gawain and Kay ride out together, but later split up. In *WeK*, they do not travel together at all. However, in all these cases, they are compared to each other. Gawain is often the example of goodness, while Kay behaves badly.

In *DC*, after Keii has returned from the bridle-adventure empty handed,¹³⁴ the maiden asks the king for a champion (confirming she never saw Keii as one). Lanzelet offers to serve her, but she only wants Gawain. Gawain is still wounded from his fight with Gasozein, but still does not refuse the request, unlike Keii, who rode out healthily. Gawain travels until he comes to the place where Keii turned back, but instead of doing the same, he encourages the mule and crosses the river. After several adventures, Gawain manages to obtain the bridle and returns to Arthur's court. Once again, Arthur's nephew succeeds where the seneschal failed. However, the narrator tells us that Keii was scorned when he came back empty handed, but when the courtiers hear what Gawain went through to obtain the bridle, none of them think

¹³² Hogenbirk (2011), 73

¹³³ See Chapter 2, “Kay as Grail Knight”.

¹³⁴ See Chapter 2, “Kay as *Aventiureritter*”.

Keii acted cowardly when he turned back. Keii's failing to obtain the bridle is therefore not seen as a failing to prove himself as a knight; instead, it asserts Gawein's position as bravest of men.

While Keye and Walewein do not have much interaction with each other in the story of *WeK*, the two knights are constantly compared to each other and presented as opposites by the narrator. During his quest, Walewein is thrown in a dungeon, and the narrator leaves no doubt whose fault this is:

Keye, God moet u werden gram!	Keye, may God visit His wrath upon you!
Gi bracht toe dat hi daer quam,	It is you who put him there
Met uw valscher tongen quaet! ¹³⁵	with your evil, lying tongue!
(ll. 598-600)	

After Walewein has left Arthur's court, Keye and his companions also leave to undertake more adventures than Walewein. Walewein's departure was accompanied by many tears and people begging him not to leave. With Keye's departure, however, no one sees them off or seems to be there, even. There is no reaction from any of the courtiers, not even to try to stop them, so they might have left in secret. In several Middle Dutch Arthurian romances, including *WeK*, Walewein has the epithet "der aventuren vader" ('father of adventures'),¹³⁶ which already implies Keye's quest is in vain. Keye receives an epithet as well, as mentioned in Chapter 2, "Keye metter quaden treken" (l. 1084). Johnson and Claassens translate this as "Keye and his evil ways", but a closer translation would be 'Keye with his mean tricks'. Hogenbirk points out that Kay is known as having an evil tongue, but not to play tricks on people.¹³⁷

The more people there are in the group, the more adventures they can participate in, that seems to be Keye's reasoning to take his twenty companions with him. He says to them:

"Ende laet sien oft Waleweine daer near	"And we shall see whether afterwards Walewein
Also menege aventure sal gesciens	shall have experienced as many adventures
Also ons allen sal binnen dien."	in that time-span as all of us together."
(ll. 1096-8)	

¹³⁵ As demonstrated in Chapter 1, "Kay and Arthur at Court", Walewein left because Arthur believed Kay, not because of Kay's lie itself.

¹³⁶ For instance, this epithet can be found in *Roman van Walewein, Moriaen* and several others. (Besamusca (2000), 222)

¹³⁷ Hogenbirk (2011), 113

Keye's reason for dishonouring Walewein is because Arthur gave away his tasks as seneschal, and at the beginning of the story we are told that Keye's future companions hate Walewein because fortune smiles upon him often. They all ride out with the same goal: to disgrace Walewein. Keye's intention, to spare no one they encounter, is similar to his vow in *Avowing*, where he states he will fight everyone who blocks his way. Keye leaves with the same motivation as Walewein, but fate is not favourably disposed to him. While Walewein finds one adventure after another, Keye has to wait a week before something happens. Hogenbirk states that from the beginning, Keye's adventures are in stark contrast with Walewein's. Keye is contrasted with Walewein again, when he refuses to tell the squire his name. While refusing to state a name is not unusual, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, Keye's refusal is opposed to Walewein, who does tell his name when asked.

When Keye assumes the queen will reconcile him with the king, despite her having cursed him at Walewein's departure, he does this because she is his kin.¹³⁸ "By making Keye a relative to the queen, [the compiler] brings to mind another family connection in the Compilation, namely that of the king and Walewein. Keye, just like Walewein, is closely related to the royal couple, but is in many ways Walewein's opposite," Hogenbirk states.¹³⁹

At the end of the story, Walewein returns to the court, as does Keye, even though the reason for the latter to do so is unclear. After all, Keye decided to wait until the queen had reconciled him with the king, which she still has not done.¹⁴⁰ However, he never reaches the court. Seven knights whom Walewein has defeated or helped and sent to the court attack Keye on sight. Keye is hurt badly, but manages to flee. Hogenbirk calls this "de afrekening met de hofmaarschalk"¹⁴¹ ('the reckoning of the seneschal'). While this is often a fight with the hero, Hogenbirk proposes Keye does not fight Walewein to avoid having Walewein fight a fellow Knight of the Round Table.¹⁴² Fights between Arthur's knights are not uncommon, as proven in this story when Gariet and the others fight Keye and his companions. Gawain, however, seems to avoid fighting his companions in most stories (though not all). In *Yvain*, he stops their battle as soon as he recognises Yvain as his opponent.

In *Avowing*, Kay, knowing where Gawain will be because of his vow, asks Menealfe if he may look for Gawain after he is taken prisoner, so that he can pay Kay's ransom. Burrow notes that Kay calls Menealfe 'Sir' and uses the polite plural 'ye', trying to get on his

¹³⁸ In the meantime, almost a year has passed.

¹³⁹ Hogenbirk (2003), 174

¹⁴⁰ This is perhaps an indication that the original story of *WeK* was longer than the Compilation version we have left.

¹⁴¹ Hogenbirk (2004), 102

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 102-3

opponent's good side.¹⁴³ Menaelfe agrees, and soon Kay finds Gawain. When Gawain asks who is there, Kay replies:

“I, Kay, that thou knawes* *whom*
That owte of tyme bostus and blawus;* *at the wrong times boasts and brags*
Butte* thou me lese* wyth thi lawes*, *Unless; release; courtesy;*
I lif nevyr more.”* *I am dead*
(ll. 353-6)

In many Arthurian stories, as we have seen, Kay uses his sharp tongue to insult and mock people, and he is known to have much faith in his own prowess, but he is not often seen to boast, except in *Mantel* about his ladylove. Usually, his defeats are told honestly, either by himself, as in this story, or by others, as in for example *Wrake van Ragisel*. That Kay describes himself as someone who boasts and brags at the wrong time seems therefore odd, or at least unfitting in this story. His words are those of uncharacteristic humility, however.¹⁴⁴ Gawain agrees to help Kay, after the seneschal has told him what has happened.

In *DC*, but especially in *WeK*, Gawain's and Kay's adventures are diametrically opposed to each other. However, in *DC*, it seems rather to make Gawain stand out than to humiliate Keii. In *WeK*, Keye is jealous of Walewein, and thus tries to dishonour him by participating in more adventures than Walewein, failing miserably. Walewein never fights Keye himself, however. In *Avowing*, their relationship seems to be better, as Gawain does not hesitate to come to Kay's rescue.

Kay Mourning Gawain

DC contains a special scene in which the relationship between Keii and Gawain is made clear more than anywhere else. During one of his quests, Gawain meets a knight called Gigamec whose foe is named Aamanz. Because of his similarity in features to Gawain, the latter is named “den andern Gawain” (“the other Gawain”, l. 16523). Gawain defeats Aamanz for Gigamec and leaves him in his care, but Gigamec beheads Aamanz and takes his head to Arthur's court. He declares he has defeated Gawain and chopped off his head. Because the head is covered, the king and the attendants of the court think it is a joke, as Gawain's reputation is impeccable, and they laugh about it. Then Keii speaks up:

¹⁴³ Burrow (1987), 103

¹⁴⁴ *Idem*

“Warzu taugt dirre spott?
Wiszent ir, das der ware got
Alle ding getün mag?
[...]
Ûbel mag es sin geschehen,
Wann Gawein was so mannhafft;
Doch so ist wider glückes krafft
Niht, deme s wege ist.
Wir erfinden in kurtzer frist
Sinen dot ader sin genist.”
(ll. 16822-44)

“What are you laughing about? You should know that the true God can do all things. [...] It isn't likely that this happened, because Gawein has always been very bold; still, he who had Luck with him can do anything. Well, we'll soon find out whether or not Gawein is dead.” (p. 190)

Keii acknowledges Gawein's reputation and prowess, but he also reminds the courtiers that even the great Gawein is not invincible. God works in mysterious ways and it could be very well that He has slain Gawein as punishment for their sins.¹⁴⁵ Of course, his words add to the dramatic irony, as the audience already knows this is not the real Gawein, but merely someone who looks like him. Keii's words in *DC* are the exact opposite of his opinion in the Middle Dutch *Roman van Walewein*. In this story, a squire Walewein has lent his horse to, arrives at Arthur's court to be knighted. When the courtiers see him approach, they recognise the horse and immediately presume that the squire has killed Walewein in combat. Keye is the only one who believes Walewein is still alive – even if he jests about him. Arthur and his courtiers immediately jump to conclusions and already make plans to slay the approaching man, who is only a squire at that point. Keye is the only one to believe Walewein is still alive; nonetheless, he is reprimanded by Arthur. In *DC*, there is evidence of Gawein's death, albeit the head belongs to someone else, and the messenger is an actual knight; Keii even acknowledges his powerful looks. Yet Keii is the only one who believes Gawein can be slain.

¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, Keii insists Gawein would have been slain because of the sins of the courtiers and not Gawein's own, while in the glove-scene, Keii would love to see Gawein fail and is upset when he does not.

Baisch points out that this scene is the opposite of what usually happens: the courtiers react frivolously and with jests, while Keii acts sensibly and cautiously.¹⁴⁶

Keii's words in *DC* are not well received, as they displease the courtiers and Arthur especially. They do not seem to believe Gawain can be defeated. Keii has a bad feeling about the whole ordeal. He then decides to reveal the truth, uncovering the head. The face is turned to Keii and, when he sees it, he is overcome with grief:

Vnder sine arm er es gefing
Vnd solche not da mit beging
Von klagen vnd von weynen
Vnd began das so meynen,
Das da trùwe must beschijnen.
(ll. 16863-7)

Holding [the head] in his arm, he began to weep and wail in great distress and to treat it with such affection that one could easily see his loyalty. (p. 191)

As shown in the above, the relationship between Kay and Gawain is usually problematic, with Gawain being the 'good' knight, while Kay is the 'bad' one. Here, Keii's feelings towards Gawain become clear, as he is clearly grieving the loss of a friend.

The extra-diegetic audience already knows that the real Gawain is not dead, which creates dramatic irony. In her article about cognition and affect in mourning scenes about Gawain, Carolyne Larrington states that "the 'mirror characters' [...] encourage an audience response which, although socially congruent with the situation within the text, is at odds with the audience's cognitive assessment of the episode."¹⁴⁷ Keii does not know the head he is holding is the head of Aamanz, not that of Gawain. While the situation is not real (Gawain is not actually dead), Keii's mourning, and therefore his feelings, are sincere. The text gives no reason to doubt that Keii has no idea he is holding the head of Aamanz.¹⁴⁸ Keii shows several expressions of grief. Usually, women are the ones that maim themselves in grief by tearing at their hair and clothing, although it is not uncommon for men to do so as well.¹⁴⁹ Keii lets himself fall to the ground while he does so. This display of nonverbal communication is a way

¹⁴⁶ Baisch, 166

¹⁴⁷ Carolyne Larrington, "Mourning Gawain: Cognition and Affect in *Diu Crône* and some French Gawain-Texts", in Frank Brandsma, Carolyne Larrington and Corinne Saunders, *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature. Body, Mind, Voice* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015), in press, 124

¹⁴⁸ Baisch, 166-7

¹⁴⁹ Burrow (1987), 39

for the narrator not only to show that the person is grieving or in distress, but also to what degree. Keii's grief is so severe he needs to express it by hurting himself. Keii also kisses the head and continues weeping and wailing, sometimes falling quiet to kiss the head, until finally, he faints. Swooning, sometimes even several times in a row, as a sign of grief is quite common in medieval literature. In *Morte Darthur*, Arthur swoons three times in a row when he finds Gawain dying, and Lancelot swoons when Guinevere is buried.

Apparently, the whole time Keii was grieving, the rest of the courtiers were simply watching him. After Keii has swooned, the company begins to lament Gawain as well. The crowd hurries over to Keii. Even fainted, Keii still holds the head, and nobody can take it from him until he regains consciousness. The narrator says:

Under this jammers schall,
Den gemeinlichen über al
Ûbten, die da waren,
Her Kay begunde varen
Einer klage, die so senlich was,
Das von ire in adamas
Gar möhte sin zercloben.
Des heiset jne das bûch loben
Vnd sin meister Cristian¹⁵⁰
Das jne sin müt ie lie began
Die tugent vnd die manheit,
Wann er mit hantzen truwen kleit
Dis edeln ritters dot,
Als mir es die auentûre enbot:
Des hatt er reht vnd ted yme not.
(ll. 16933-47)

Then, above the din of general mourning, Keii sought to express his anguish in a lament that was so distressing that it might well have cleaved a diamond asunder. The book and its author, Chrétien, declare that he is to be praised because his spirit bade him celebrate excellence and

¹⁵⁰ It is implausible that the narrator has taken this scene from Chrétien de Troyes, as there is no such scene in the works we have left of him (unless one of his works has been lost). More likely is that Heinrich sought authority for his story and therefore mentioned Chrétien. The narrator also claims to have taken the glove-scene from Chrétien's works, which is just as improbable. Larrington suggests that it might meant as a reference from the author to the reaction of king and court to Gawain's absence at the end of the *Conte du Graal*. (Besamusca (2010), 294; Larrington, 126)

courage, for he deplored with complete loyalty the death of this noble knight, so I have been told; he had to do this and it was right that he should. (p. 191)

Keii believes that God is the cause of Gawein's death, implying that no human would be able to defeat Gawein. Gawein's death is punishment from the Lord himself for their sins, according to Keii, apparently not Gawein's own. He calls Gawein the best knight to ever bear shield or spear, and "der rein" ("the faultless", l. 17001), which is odd in light of the glove-scene, in which Keii seems certain that Gawein is not perfect. The lament is no critique, but serves as an example for the other courtiers.¹⁵¹ Keii also uses other epithets to describe Gawein's greatness, such as "ein blüme aller ritterschaft" ("a flower of knighthood", l. 17008). His lament takes up one hundred and thirty seven lines in total:

“War zü taugt den min leben?
[...]
Künig Artus, ir sollent vf selen
Das rich vnd die krone,
Vnd gebent yme das zü lone,
Das uwer freud an yme stund,
Also fründen fründe tunt.
[...]
Nu geent alle zü mir her
Vnd sint der clage min gewer!”
(ll. 16998-7091)

“What good is my life now? [...] King Arthur, you should relinquish the realm and crown and give them as a reward to him on whom your joy depended, as a friend does with friends. [...] Come now to me, all of you, and be guarantors of my grief.” (p. 193)

Keii's lamentation, which is also a rhetorical work of art in which the narrator shows off his skills, has a central position, in the middle of the story, and shows the importance of Gawain, the protagonist, at Arthur's court.¹⁵² Not only does Keii acknowledge Gawein's prowess as a knight, his own life does not seem to have meaning anymore. Interestingly, he suggests that Arthur should give his realm and crown to Gawein, as something similar happens in *WeK*, in

¹⁵¹ Baisch, 167

¹⁵² Idem

which Keye becomes jealous. Perhaps because Walewein is not presumed dead? Larrington comments: “Renouncing the throne in favour of a dead man can scarcely amount to practical politics, and we might wonder whether the mourning creates a space in which uncomfortable truths can be uttered.”¹⁵³ With these “uncomfortable truths”, Larrington means Keii’s imaginative parallel world “in which Gawein is not only restored to life, but also exercises royal rule.”¹⁵⁴ In any case, the lament shows the close bond Gawein and Keii have in *DC*, and it also marks the beginning of a reassessment in the role of Keii.¹⁵⁵

Keii’s lament is even longer than that of Gawein’s ladylove, Amurfina, who also kisses the head and swoons. After his lament, Keii faints again, and only then, the head is brought to Arthur, who begins to lament. The narrator says at the end that he cannot describe all the grief, but it is interesting that he did choose to describe Keii’s, instead of Arthur’s.¹⁵⁶

Later, a squire comes to King Arthur’s court and tells them Gawein is still alive, but that he needs Arthur’s assistance. The narrator states:

Kay prüefet dise freude gar
 Vnder alle dire schar
 Doch Gaweins fruntscahfft,
 Wann jne der selig krafft
 An Gawein mit gewalt bant,
 Das er gût vnd lant,
 Herren, sele vnd lip,
 Mage, kint vnd wip
 Ee alles hette verlaszen,
 Mit al verwaszen,
 E yme icht ledes were geschehen.
 (ll. 22132-42)

Keii arranged the festivities for the entire company because of his friendship for Gawein; this holy force bound him so firmly to the knight that he would sooner give up everything – goods,

¹⁵³ Larrington, 127

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 129

¹⁵⁵ Baisch, 167; M. Meyer, *Die Verfügbarkeit der Fiction. Interpretationen und poetologische Untersuchungen zum Artusroman und zur aventiurehaften Dietriechepek des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverslag C. Winter, 1994), 137

¹⁵⁶ Larrington also suggests that Kay leads the others in the mourning process because it is his job as seneschal. That would explain why the narrator has chosen Keii instead of Arthur. However, it is also possible the narrator chose Keii to show him in a more favourable light, as seems to be his intention in the second book of *DC*. Meyer states that Keii’s lament implies that Arthur is not currently capable to act verbally. (Larrington, 127; Meyer, 138)

land, lords, soul, body, kinfolk, wife, and children – than have Gawain come to harm.” (p. 249)

Once again, the narrator confirms that Gawain and Keii are friends rather than rivals; Keii would rather give up his wife and children than have Gawain come to harm. The narrator also takes this opportunity to explain that Keii’s ridicule does not spring from spite; rather, everyone receives their share of Keii’s censure.

This grieving scene makes Keii’s feelings about Gawain quite clear, and no one can doubt that they are, in fact, friends, even if their relationship sometimes seems “prickly”.

Conclusion

In the texts I study, the best example of Gawain’s and Kay’s being opposites is *WeK*, in which Walewein and Keye are presented as opposites: while Walewein finds one adventure after another and succeeds, while Keye has to make his own adventure and fails.¹⁵⁷ The same we will see in *Avowing*. In *Mantel*, Keu is pleased to see Gawain’s ladylove fail. However, in *DC*, this ‘opposites’-concept becomes rather blurred, as especially in the last scene Keii is placed on the same level as Gawain, or even higher. On top of that, the narrator stresses several times throughout the story that they are good friends.

¹⁵⁷ Of course, this view is simplistic, but it shows the general outline of the story. However, in my thesis I have demonstrated that there is more than meets the eye in this story.

CONCLUSION

MISBEHAVED OR MISUNDERSTOOD?

In my thesis, I have shown how the character of the seneschal is portrayed in four different traditions, by looking at four Arthurian stories: the French *Le mantel mautallié*, the German *Diu Crône*, the Dutch *Walewein ende Keye*, and the English *The Avowying of Arthur*. Each of these stories are discussed in their own country by scholars to a certain extent, but receive hardly any international attention.

In research, Kay is often overlooked or ignored. When scholars do pay attention to the seneschal, Kay is often not seen in a favourable light, as they tend to jump to conclusions about his character. By doing so, scholars do no justice to the complexity of Kay's character. In the words of Susan Reynolds: "Labels do not encourage analysis."¹⁵⁸ By accepting an image of Kay, or any other character, without analysing him or her, labelling him or her, much of the character, and therefore the story, is lost. People like Gowans have made an attempt to change the general perception of the seneschal, but because of limited space, Gowans sometimes has to jump to conclusions as well.

In my thesis, I have tried to do justice to the complexity of Kay's character in the world of Arthurian narrative, which is not always obvious in other scholarly works. Using only four stories, I had the opportunity to study Kay's persona in-depth, and so could unravel his character. By comparing four stories from four different countries, I had the opportunity to paint an inter-European picture of the seneschal, and to note the differences and similarities between the representations of Kay by the different authors.

Kay in the Romances

Keu's role in *Mantel* is prominent, but not in the mocking way as he is in *DC*'s tankard- and glove-scene. Keu only mocks twice: when Gauvain's beloved failed, and when Keu takes revenge by mocking Yder once his ladylove fails. The narrator of *Mantel* seems to be aware of Keu's reputation as jester, as Yder mocks him because Keu ridicules others every day. The intra-diegetic audience is rather passive in the story; the only reactions to Keu's words are mocking ones from Brun and Yder when Androete fails the mantle test, and later Tor agrees with Keu's advice to love their ladies and not to mock. Later on in the story, Keu is described as evil and disloyal, but this seems to be out of place in the lay. This description is either not

¹⁵⁸ S. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals. The Medieval Evidence Interpreted* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 33

to be taken seriously, or, more likely, this was an insertion by a copyist who knew of the seneschal's reputation.

In *DC*, the narrator often points out Keii's positive aspects or explains why Keii says what he says. The narrator also emphasises that Keii's words are meant as a joke most of the time. The mirror-characters, the Arthurian community, often confirm this by laughing after Keii has spoken, men and women alike.

The character of Keii in *DC* is a complicated one, more complicated than the one-dimensional character he is usually portrayed as. Often, Kay is only mentioned a few times to challenge the hero of the story and does not return at the end of the narration. The Keii from *DC* is different in that aspect. He has different sides, good and bad, making him a complex, and therefore round, character. While he fails as a knight in some scenes, in others he is the model of knightly prowess. Despite his sharp tongue, he is well liked amongst the Arthurian court as is proven at the end of the story. In *DC*, Keii plays several roles. He is jester, seneschal, advisor and knight all at the same time. The narrator could not avoid the first two, as these roles for Kay were established and accepted since Chrétien de Troyes' works. The narrator is faithful to his sources and, especially in the first book, portrays Keii in his usual role of jester and failing knight. In the episodes with the tankard and the similar one with the glove, Keii goes all out mocking the ladies and his fellow knight and does not even spare his lord Arthur or his friend Gawain either (except in the scene with the tankard). Despite being humiliated himself as well, the narrator points out several times throughout the story that Keii has a good sense of humour and laughs at being ridiculed. He is excellent at self-mockery. He takes failing better than his fellow knights, as he also proves several times. He continues to jest after he has been defeated by the messenger with the tankard, even though he was almost killed, and the queen had to come to his rescue.

Keii's sharp tongue is known and feared at Arthur's court, as Ginover's maiden proves when she warns the queen that Keii is present when Arthur has complained about Ginover. However, this does not mean Keii is not a beloved member of the court. Time and again, Keii's jesting is met by laughter and, when he is captured in the last adventure, all the courtiers, knights and ladies alike, grieve and pray for him. Keii's temper often gets the better of him, when he challenges the messenger for feeling insulted and when Gasozein does not respond to his taunts. Keii plays the role of a general dogsbody, as he rides to Spain to obtain steeds for Arthur, acts as a messenger, arranges festivals, and leads the army into battle. These jobs all seem to belong to a seneschal's job description.

Especially in the second book, the narrator portrays Keii positively. He tries to show the audience that Keii is more than what some of his colleagues have made of him. He concludes his story by including Keii and placing him next to Gawein:

Nu ist Gawein kome wider jn.
Des müste er mit heil wesen!
Lant auch dorch got Kay genesen!
Er hat sich wol erhauwen.
Nû frauwen sich die frauwen
Das got ir bed hat vernomen,
Das er jne ist wider kome,
Wann er wil nû ir kemoff sin.
Jch nym sin siht vf die truwe min,
Das die rede also geschehe.
Jch vörchte, das man noch sehe
Vnd höre, das man spottes pflüge.
Der schult ich vf jne selbs lege,
Tritt er irgent uszer dem wege.
(ll. 29895-908)

Gawein has returned to them; may good luck attend him! And Keii has fought a good fight; in God's name may he prosper! Let the ladies now rejoice that God has heard their prayers and brought him back to them, for he now wants to be their champion. But I do not give my word that it will turn out this way, for I fear that one may yet see and hear him jesting, and I shall take none of the blame if he strays from the path of righteousness. (p. 333)

The narrator seems to be saying that he has done his best to portray Keii in a positive way, but that he does not control Keii's actions, meaning the writings of other authors. Hardly any authors have followed his example by portraying Kay in such a favourable light. *DC*'s Keii is portrayed as clever and loyal, and, unlike in most romances, a good knight when it comes to the Grail quest. The narrator goes out of his way to prove the friendship between Gawein and Keii. When Keii thinks Gawein is beheaded, his mourning process is described most elaborately, even more than Gawein's ladylove Amurfina's or Arthur's. Keii arranges the festival for Gawein out of loyalty, and Gawein calls Keii his friend. When Gawein rides out for the last time in the story, Keii is the one to accompany him. Even though Lanzelet and

Kalocreant are present as well, the narrator only focuses on Gawain's and Keii's adventures. While Gawain and Arthur are the protagonists of the story, Keii never seems to be far away. Arthur asks Keii to accompany him on his trip when he is in search of Gasozein, and Keii remains at the court to fulfil his duty as seneschal, until he decides to ride with Gawain in the last adventure. Having him take the stage throughout the story and not only use him as a jester or the example of a bad knight, the narrator seems to have an ulterior plan for the seneschal: giving his character a positive spin. The narrator could not ignore Keii's mocking ways, as they were accepted by other authors of Arthurian literature and therefore known by the audience, but he has gone out of his way to prove that the seneschal also has positive traits and exploits those as well. The result is a round character with positive and negative traits, who is more realistic than the hero Gawain.

In *WeK*, Keye is disliked at the court (except by the twenty companions, whom he has no trouble recruiting), is called a wretch even by Walewein, and receives the epithet "Keye metter quaden streken" ('Keye with the mean tricks', l. 1086), as opposed to Walewein who is called "der aventuren vader" ('the father of adventure').¹⁵⁹ Keye mostly seems to be used to make Walewein look better, and Walewein of course manages to fulfil the boast Keye said he made. Yet, Walewein's and Keye's roles are not as black and white as usually assumed. Of course, Walewein is the hero, and he is certainly favoured by the narrator, but Keye is still a knight, who knows he cannot fight a squire and who prefers one-on-one fights, even if (when) he loses. More importantly, he is not the cause for Walewein to leave, despite what the narrator wants the audience to think.

In *Avowing*, Kay is presented as a most chivalrous knight, who is willing to defend his lord's country and to rescue a damsel in distress, although he does not succeed in that. The seneschal is a loyal companion to Arthur, as he is allowed to go hunting with the king; he trusts in his own abilities, even if Arthur does not; he is honest about his failings; and he is not afraid to praise his fellow knights.

Kay's Audience

Kay's character fulfils multiple roles for the extra-diegetic audience. Often, he explains a situation or event to other characters in the story, so that the extra-diegetic audience knows what is going on as well. Examples for this we have seen in *Mantel*, where Kay explains to the queen why the mantle does not fit her, and in *DC*, in the tankard- and glove-scene.

¹⁵⁹ Hogenbirk points out that Kay is rather known as someone with an evil tongue than as a prankster, although he does help Arthur to trick Baldwin in *The Avowing of Arthur*. (Hogenbirk (2011), note to line 1086, 113)

Sometimes his comments challenge the knowledge of the audience, by calling other Arthurian works or earlier events in the same story into the recollection. He also works as a humorous factor in the story, either with his comments, as in the tankard- and glove-scene in *DC*, or with his actions, like when he loses jousts in *Avowing*, *WeK*, and *DC*. Kay is also a catalytic agent, as he moves the plot forward. Such is the case in *WeK*: had Keye not lied about Walewein's bragging, there would not have been a storyline.

The narrator of *DC* went out of his way to give the extra-diegetic audience guidelines as to how they should react, either by letting the intra-diegetic audience laugh or react otherwise, or by making didactic comments throughout the story. He also tried to change Kay's image by giving him positive traits as well as negative ones, and by making him a Grail knight at the end of the story. His example is only followed by a few authors.¹⁶⁰ However, it is not always easy to deduce how the extra-diegetic audience would have responded to Kay. Not every narrator includes a reaction from the intra-diegetic audience. In *WeK*, the narrator gives us a few hints, by stating that Keye is the cause for Walewein to leave, and having Arthur repeat that, even if it contradicts what Walewein himself said. The reviser of manuscript S of *Mantel* obviously found the comments of the knights, amongst them Keu, too sexually tinted to be acceptable, yet it would seem that those remarks are intended to be humorous, at least to the contemporary audience. In *Avowing*, Kay is every bit the courteous knight, as he tries to save a damsel in distress and follows his lord's orders without question. Yet, perhaps his losses are intended to be humorous as well, either *an sich* or because it is part of Kay's character as it originated with Chrétien.

Without the reactions of the intra-diegetic audience, or comments from the narrator, it is nearly impossible to say something valid about how the narrator intended the audience to respond to Kay's character. More intensive research to his character, with a view to the characters surrounding Kay, is required. That, and a neutral approach to his character, will lead to more insight in the complexity that is Kay. Kay may be misbehaved in certain texts, but he is certainly misunderstood as well.

¹⁶⁰ Another example of a story where Kay is shown in a positive light is the Old French *Escanor*.

APPENDIX

KAY IN PRE-CHRÉTIEN AND CHRÉTIEN'S WORKS

In this final part of my thesis, I will discuss Kay in pre-Chrétien works and the works of Chrétien de Troyes himself, to see how Kay's character came to be, and how he was shaped throughout the years. I will start with the oldest Arthurian texts we have left, which came to us from Wales. Next, I will move on to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon, and how they described the seneschal without the magical elements from the Celtic tradition. After that, I will discuss the Latin Arthurian tradition, which came into existence almost simultaneously with the works of Chrétien. Lastly, I will pay attention to Kay as interpreted by Chrétien.

The Welsh Kay

Despite Kay's bad reputation in the scholarly field, the seneschal was not the jester in the oldest Arthurian tradition. In early Welsh and Latin texts, Kay was known as one of Arthur's best knights. Below, I will discuss two of such Welsh stories.¹⁶¹ His first known appearance is in the poem *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* (*Which Man is the Gatekeeper?*, hereafter *Pa gur*), thought to have been written around 1100.¹⁶² The poem is written in the form of a dialogue, in which Arthur tells of the deeds of his knights, who have died. The poem has not been handed down in its entirety and breaks off during Kay's battle with the Cat of Palug (probably a lion).¹⁶³ While Bedevere and especially Kay are formidable heroes in the poem, there is no mention of Gawain anywhere.

Before the early break-off of the story, Kay is mentioned several times. He plays the role of "companion, virtually the partner of Arthur, who goes to praise him in glowing terms."¹⁶⁴ When the gatekeeper asks the names of who is there, Arthur replies: "Arthur and Cai the fair."¹⁶⁵ Gowans states: "The portrayal of Cai is entirely straightforward. He is shown as a hero of the early type, whose manners are quite alien to the future world of knighthood,

¹⁶¹ I have excluded the Welsh stories that have a French counterpart (i.e. *Gereint*, *Peredur* and *The Lady of the Fountain*) from this discussion, as well as *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, as it is my aim to explain the interpretation of Kay's character before Chrétien's texts. This is assuming, as most scholars do today, that the stories were translated from French to Welsh and not the other way around.

¹⁶² Gowans, 4

¹⁶³ P. Sims-Williams, "The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems", in R. Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, B.F. Roberts (eds.), *The Arthur of the Welsh. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff: university of Wales Press, 1991), 38, 45

¹⁶⁴ Gowans, 5

¹⁶⁵ All quotations from *Pa gur* are from: Sims-Williams.

but fully compatible with the atmosphere of saga or epic poetry.”¹⁶⁶ Patrick Sims-Williams casts doubt upon this observation in the commentary to his translation. In the poem, Arthur describes how Kay fights ‘them’:

Stout were my servants
defending their rights.
[...]
Cai would entreat¹⁶⁷ them
As he cut them down.
(ll. 17-26)

Sims-Williams proposes the interpretation that Kay is cutting down the servants, instead of enemies. In this case, Kay would have turned on Arthur, or the servants had to be traitors. In the first scenario, Kay would show his less appealing colours. The ambiguity in the poem remains, however, so no definite conclusions can be drawn.

Kay is a formidable foe, called “Prince of plunder” (l. 66), and it is described how he slays his enemy as if he is a one-man army (ll. 72-3). Only God himself can slay this warrior (ll. 74-5). His deeds on the battlefield are retold as well:

Cai the fair and Llachau,
they performed battles
before the pain of blue spears (ended the conflict).
(ll. 76-8)

Sims-Williams considers the possibility that Kay and Llachau, Arthur’s son, would be battling against each other. In the Welsh translation of *Perlesvaus*, the name of Loholt, the son of Arthur killed by Kay, is replaced with Llacheu.¹⁶⁸ Again, ambiguity prevents drawing any conclusions. Gowans rejects this explanation.

The poem breaks off and, therefore, does not explain more about Kay’s character. Despite that, Gowans is convinced that “*Pa gur* leaves us in no doubt of Cei’s status as

¹⁶⁶ Gowans, 5

¹⁶⁷ Rachel Bromwich translates the second ‘entreat’ as ‘mock’. However, this seems to be an odd choice as the verb is *eiriolaf*, which means ‘to entreat’, ‘to beseech’ etc.. My thanks go to Lian Blasse for helping me with the translation. (R. Bromwich, “Celtic Elements in Arthurian Romance: A General Survey”, in P.B. Grout *et al* (eds.), *The Legends of Arthur in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 41-55)

¹⁶⁸ Sims-Williams, 44

Arthur's foremost warrior".¹⁶⁹ She argues that *Pa gur* was probably known on the continent, whether or not in translation, as it would explain several points of misconception in the poem that are integrated in continental stories. First of all, Kay's mocking tongue, which was an accepted part of the heroic fighting style; secondly, the idea of a feud with Arthur's son; and, finally, the concept of invulnerability, as Kay, "in spite of serious misdeeds [...] is reinstated or, at worst, allowed to escape."¹⁷⁰ Yet, she argues, "[t]he status of Cei in *Pa gur* is only second to that of Arthur himself, and Cei may once have held an independent and very special position in Welsh heroic legend." Kay's qualities as a "mocking, savage and [...] terrifying opponent in battle"¹⁷¹ are positive traits in the context of the poem and the Celtic tradition.

Culhwch ac Olwen (*Culhwch and Olwen*, hereafter *CaO*) is another Welsh story in which Kay plays a prominent role, and is, according to Gowans:

"the oldest example we have of a story in which a young unknown arrives at Arthur's court, and it is important to remember that Culhwch will meet there, not a sarcastic and unwelcoming seneschal, but a formidable Celtic warrior who has himself arrived at Arthur's court from a legendary past which long antedates the world of medieval knighthood."¹⁷²

The story was probably composed at the end of the eleventh century.¹⁷³ Gowans states that the first and last appearance of Kay are usually considered to herald to his troublesome future.¹⁷⁴ *CaO* tells of a young man by the name of Culhwch who falls in love with a giant's daughter named Olwen, and goes to his uncle Arthur to ask him to help him woo her. When Culhwch arrives at the court, however, the courtiers have already started their meal and it is custom that nobody may enter then, unless he is a craftsman. Culhwch is not, but he threatens to scream so loud all women will have a miscarriage if he is not allowed inside. The gatekeeper runs inside to ask Arthur's permission. The king allows this, but then Kay says: "By the hand of my friend, if my counsel was acted upon, the laws of the court would not be broken for his sake."¹⁷⁵ (p. 83) Gowans points out that his words are not gratuitous rudeness: "He is, in fact, expressing the ancient, deep-rooted fear of breaking a taboo."¹⁷⁶ Taboos are rules that forbid

¹⁶⁹ Gowans, 7

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 8

¹⁷¹ *Idem*

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 16

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 11

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 16

¹⁷⁵ All quotations from *CaO* are from: Anonymous, *The Mabinogion*, translated by G. Jones and T. Jones (London [etc.] : Dent [etc.], 1993).

¹⁷⁶ Gowans, 16

or impose something on someone. They may not be broken, or the person they are casted on will die or suffer otherwise. Taboos are often used in Celtic stories, as well as in *CaO* itself. The reason Culhwch falls in love with Olwen itself is a taboo, imposed upon him by his stepmother. While the breaking of the taboo at Arthur's court (someone entering after the courtiers have started their meal who is not a craftsman) does not have any implications in the story – or at least not in the version handed down to us – Kay's fear is legitimate. In his dissertation, Harold Herman has a different explanation. Considering Kay to be a “distein”, Herman argues that it is Kay's job to uphold the laws of the court. Kay has not seen Culhwch yet, nor does he know he is Arthur's cousin, so the only information Kay does have is that a handsome stranger is at the port while it rains, which is not a valid reason to violate the laws of the court.¹⁷⁷

Against Kay's advice, Culhwch is allowed to enter the court. Arthur agrees to help him and sends messengers to find Olwen. However, after a year they return with no news, and, angrily, Culhwch threatens to leave the court and take Arthur's honour with him. Here, Kay intervenes and offers to go with Culhwch in search of Olwen.

As often in Celtic stories, Kay has several special attributes, “for the superhuman element in hero-tale is seldom very far from the supernatural.”¹⁷⁸ Kay can stay underwater for nine days and nine nights, and can be without sleep the same amount of time. When he wounds someone with his sword, no physician can heal it. He can become as tall as a tree when he pleases, and he radiates such a heat that he will not become wet when it rains.

Arthur calls several knights to accompany Kay, amongst them Bedevere and Gawain, to fulfil the quest of finding Olwen. While Culhwch is the actual protagonist of the story, Kay takes on the leader role – and not, as we would expect in later stories, Gawain. Olwen is found with relative ease, but before her father is willing to hand her over, Culhwch has to fulfil a list of tasks. Kay saves Culhwch several times and proves to be a valuable addition to the party. Amongst other things, he collects the sword of Wrnch the Giant and the beard of Dillus the Bearded. When Kay hands the beard to Arthur, the king sings an *englyn* (traditional Celtic poem):

“Cei made a leash
From Dillus' beard, son of Eurei.
Where he alive, thy death he'd be.”

¹⁷⁷ Herman, 23

¹⁷⁸ Gowans, 11

Because of this, Kay grows angry, and, with difficulty, the warriors of the Island make peace between them, “[b]ut nevertheless, neither for Arthur’s lack of help, nor for the slaying of his men, did Cei have aught to do with him in his hour of need from that time forward.” (106) This passage has been a reason for some scholars to assume that the character of Kay has always been a troublesome one. Brynly Roberts, for instance, argues that Kay “already displays that cantankerous aspect of a mean spirit which his characteristic feature in later romance.”¹⁷⁹ However, Gowans explains Kay’s reaction once again from the Celtic culture. “Something which is conveyed very strongly in the stories of Irish heroes is a horror of being satirised. [...] The suggestion that Cei might have met his match would alone cause great offence, but in addition, the border between satire and what would now be seen as prophecy or curse is an indistinct one,” she argues.¹⁸⁰ The question remains then why Arthur feels the need to satirise who is obviously one of his most valued warriors. Gowans suggests the whole episode is a literary device used by the author merely to remove Kay from the story, and to introduce Arthur as the hero for the next three episodes.¹⁸¹ Sïan Echard treats *CaO* as a parody: “Culhwch actually performs almost none of the tasks set for him; despite his physical splendour, also described at length in the opening of the narrative, he is almost completely ineffectual.”¹⁸²

In the early Welsh Arthurian tradition, it is clear that Kay is one of Arthur’s best warriors, if not the best. In *Pa gur*, he is a warrior champion who mocks his enemies as he defeats them. In *CaO*, he gains more depth, showing “his ready wit, his willingness to take the vulnerable under protection, his pride in his own prowess and the status of the king he serves, and his ingenuity when faced with inevitable tasks a hero must complete.”¹⁸³ Kay can be compared to other Celtic heroes, like Lugh and CuChulainn, rather than to the chivalric knights of the later Arthurian literature. “Cei appears in *Culhwch and Olwen* as a hero from an earlier world, who is already feeling rather awkward and a little out of place at Arthur’s court on the threshold of the Age of Chivalry,” Gowans concludes.¹⁸⁴ In this tradition, Kay and Bedevere are

¹⁷⁹ B. Roberts, “*Culhwch ac Olwen*, The Triads, Saints Lives”, in R. Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, B.F. Roberts (eds.), *The Arthur of the Welsh. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff: university of Wales Press, 1991), 79

¹⁸⁰ Gowans, 22-3

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 23

¹⁸² S. Echard, *Arthurian narrative in the Latin tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 202

¹⁸³ Gowans, 24. In later Arthurian literature, the trait of taking the vulnerable under protection seems to have been taken over by Gawain.

¹⁸⁴ Gowans, 24

inseparable, rather than Kay and Gawain. The story of *CaO*, as shown above, can and has easily been misinterpreted. Yet, in the light of the Celtic tradition, Kay is the greatest hero at Arthur's court.

The 'Historical' Kay: Geoffrey, Wace and Layamon

The term 'historical' is strictly used here to refer to stories that are presented as being a history, not in the modern sense. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (hereafter *HRB*) (ca. 1136) describes the story of Arthur as king-hero. According to Gowans, because Geoffrey uses Welsh names, Geoffrey must have learned about Kay's (and Bedevere's) special position from the Welsh tradition.¹⁸⁵ Kay is introduced relatively late, after Arthur has invaded France. Kay is bestowed the County of Anjou, and Bedevere, Normandy. Of those receiving land, only those two are mentioned by name.¹⁸⁶ Geoffrey introduces these two quite abruptly, but gives them a close connection to the king, which "demonstrates that Geoffrey is aware of their importance."¹⁸⁷ Kay is Arthur's seneschal and Bedevere the king's cupbearer. As to why and how Kay has gained the position of seneschal is not clear. Gowans suggests that might be because of Kay's association with fire and water in *CaO* that Geoffrey has transmitted it to a domestic context.¹⁸⁸ In any case, "[t]he position of seneschal at the court of a great king such as Arthur was a major responsibility".¹⁸⁹ Both Kay and Bedevere are mentioned as guests of a festival held by Arthur. During this feast, Kay is shown to perform one of the duties that are associated with being a seneschal: severing the dishes. After this, Arthur makes Kay and Bedevere his companions on his expedition against the giant of Mont Saint-Michel. However, Kay plays a rather passive part here, as Bedevere is the one to meet the lady whose niece has been raped and killed by the giant, and Arthur kills the giant. Kay is merely present.

Kay's last moment of glory is in the battle against the Romans. He, along with Bedevere, is appointed to command part of the army. Bedevere is killed soon after the battle has started, and Kay is mortally wounded in an attempt to avenge his death, "[n]evertheless, brave soldier as he was, he cut a way through with the force which he was commanding, scattered the Medes and would have retreated to his own support-group with his line of battle

¹⁸⁵ Gowans, 37

¹⁸⁶ Herman, 44

¹⁸⁷ Gowans, 38

¹⁸⁸ Idem

¹⁸⁹ Idem

unbroken, had he not come up against the legion of King of Libya” (p. 252).¹⁹⁰ Kay dies of his wounds and is buried in Chinon. Herman points out that, while Kay has been stripped from his miraculous powers and his crudeness, he still holds the same position in society and “is characterised by the same warlike virtues” which he had in the Welsh tradition.¹⁹¹ He has died a heroic death in battle, but, Gowans argues, his early departure from the story gives Geoffrey the opportunity to promote Gawain’s role.¹⁹² As shown above, in *CaO*, Gawain was one of Arthur’s best knights, but not as good as Kay and Bedevere. In the time that Geoffrey wrote his work, Gawain’s fame and popularity were growing, and, in later stories, it is Bedevere who is first removed from the position of Arthur’s best knight, even before Kay. However, in *HRB*, the echo of the heroic status of these two can still be heard loud and clear.

In Wace’s *Roman de Brut* (hereafter *RdB*, ca. 1155), Kay’s debut is the same as in *HRB*; he is introduced when Arthur bestows Anjou and Angers upon him. Wace, however, adds one detail to this: “These lords, Kay and Bedevere, were Arthur’s faithful friends, knowing the inmost counsel of his mind.”¹⁹³ (p. 62) This remark, that Kay and Bedevere are Arthur’s friends, gives their relationship a different dimension than in *HRB*, where Kay and Bedevere are just his servants. The story progresses the same as in *HRB*, but when Arthur hears about the events on Mont Saint-Michel, Wace again gives a small detail Geoffrey does not. In *HRB*, we are told that Arthur departs with Kay and Bedevere, but in *RdB*, Wace says: “When Arthur heard these lamentable tidings he called to him Kay the seneschal and Bedevere his cupbearer, for he would open his counsel to no other man.” (p. 81) Again, more than in *HRB*, we gain a little insight into the relationship between Arthur, Kay and Bedevere. While Geoffrey implies these two knights are special, as Arthur takes him with him on his secret mission, Wace is more explicit about it. Kay and Bedevere are the only two Arthur trusts enough to take them along, and they are his faithful friends.

During the battle against the Romans, Wace goes into more detail. Kay and Bedevere still command one party, but they have it divided. Kay and Bedevere are also shown to be brave, more so than in *HRB*. On the battlefield, they prove to be essential: “Many fair deeds had they done, but none so fair as they did that day. They divided the forefront of the battle,

¹⁹⁰ The quotation from *HRB* is from: Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, translated and with an introduction by L. Thorpe (London: Penguin Group, 1966).

¹⁹¹ Herman, 44

¹⁹² Gowans, 40

¹⁹³ All quotations from *Roman de Brut* are from: Wace, “Roman de Brut”, in *Wace and Layamon. Arthurian Chronicles*, translated by E. Mason, with an introduction by G. Jones (London, Melbourne and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1962), 1-114

and cleaving a passage with the sword, opened a road for their fellows.” (p. 103) Bedevere charges ahead, followed in his footsteps by Kay. However, in their desire to seek fame in battle makes them rash. “They trusted beyond measure in their strength, and in the strength of their company,” Wace says (p. 103). In this, later characteristics of Kay can perhaps be seen: his rashness, and his confidence in his own strength (even if he fails). Bedevere is then killed by King Bocus. Once more, Wace gives more detail about the relationship between Kay and Bedevere, as he says: “Kay lighted upon Bedevere lying dead. Since he loved him more than any living man, he was determined the pagans should not triumph over his body.” (p. 103) Kay’s and Bedevere’s relationship is a close one, and Wace makes sure to underline that, more than Geoffrey has done. Kay calls upon his men and attacks the pagans once more, but he is mortally wounded by Sertorius, king of Libya. Still, he defends Bedevere’s body and takes it from the battlefield. Kay dies in Chinon, the castle he had built and called after his own name.

Wace follows *HRB* faithfully, but gives the story and the characters his own twist. More than Geoffrey, Wace makes sure to underline the relationship between Kay and Bedevere, and between them and Arthur. Gowans comments: “Ceï and Bedwyr are noble characters who meet a heroic end.”¹⁹⁴ Wace is also sure to highlight their prowess as knights, not as an echo of Welsh stories, as Geoffrey seems to do, but as knights in their own right. As in *HRB*, Gawain is only introduced after Kay’s death, and the two therefore never interact. However, Kay’s status in *RdB* is indisputably the one of Arthur’s number one knight, called “a loyal and chivalrous knight” (p. 59), along with Bedevere.

In his *Brut* (1190), Layamon mentions Kay for the first time in the battle against France. Kay’s and Bedevere’s ranks as seneschal and cupbearer are not mentioned yet. This happens only when Arthur has conquered France and bestows land on the both of them. Arthur gives Anjou to Kay for his loyal service. Like Wace, Layamon empathises the good relationship Arthur has with Kay and Bedevere, making them his friends and confidants, rather than just servants. On Whitsuntide, Arthur holds a festival and, as in the stories of Geoffrey and Wace, Kay is in charge of the food. He is described as the “the greatest noble in the land under the king” (p. 155).¹⁹⁵ Kay has picked many noble knights to serve the food.

¹⁹⁴ Gowans, 42

¹⁹⁵ All quotations from *Brut* are from: Layamon, *Layamon’s Arthur. The Arthurian Section of Layamon’s Brut*, edited and translated by W.R.J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg (London and New York: Longman, 1989)

Layamon is the first to introduce Kay not only as Arthur's knight and seneschal, but as his relative as well. When Arthur hears about the giant of Mont Saint-Michael, "he called to him the earl Kay who was his kinsman and relative" (p. 183) and also Bedevere. What kind of relative Kay is to Arthur, Layamon does not say. In Wace's story, however, this is not mentioned, and it is possible that from this the fact that Kay becomes Arthur's foster brother in later tradition is derived. Gowans suggests that since the word 'kinsman' (*maei*) is used only as a rhyme for *Kaei*, that this is the only motivation for the author to use the word.¹⁹⁶

In the battle against the Romans, Kay leads one troop and Bedevere another. Layamon follows Wace in his description of Kay's and Bedevere's bravery, as they ride into battle. They slay Romans here and there, but "they were too eager and too reckless, and fought too rashly and advanced too far, and spread themselves too widely over the broad battlefield." (p. 227) Bedevere is killed, and Kay takes his body with him, fighting with all his might, until the king of Libya arrives. He mortally wounds Kay, as he did in *HRB* and *RdB*. Kay is carried from the battlefield by his men and later is brought to Kinun, where he dies. In his memory, we are told that Arthur names the city after Kay (Caen). Bedevere receives a similar honour.

Layamon follows Wace closely in his depiction of Kay, showing him to be a loyal and strong knight, faithful to Arthur and Bedevere. He adds an extra dimension to Kay's character, however, by describing him as Arthur's kinsman, whatever his motivation for this might have been.

In the historical tradition, Geoffrey follows the Welsh stories in making Kay and Bedevere Arthur's most faithful knights. He does this more implicitly than Wace and later Layamon, who both describe the relationship between Kay and Bedevere, and them and Arthur as a special one. In *HRB*, we see Kay lose in battle for the first time, and he meets his end. His death is a heroic one, and, especially in *Brut*, he is mourned by Arthur.¹⁹⁷

The Latin Kay

There is also a Latin Arthurian literary tradition, which is usually neglected by scholars who study Arthurian literature in the vernacular, causing a gap between these two traditions. Yet, it is visible from the Latin texts that they were known by authors of the vernacular stories, as influence of them can be seen in later texts.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Gowans, 134

¹⁹⁷ For a more elaborate analyses of Kay in *HRB*, *RdB* and *Brut* see Herman, 41-58

¹⁹⁸ See Day (2005), 18-23, 35-7, 43-6, 48-52

De Ortu Waluuanii nepotism Arturi (hereafter *DOW*) is a twelfth century Arthurian story. Along with *Historia Meriadoci Regis Cambrie* (see below), it is one of two full-length Latin romances we have left.¹⁹⁹ Robert of Tornigni, an abbot of the monastery of Mont St. Michel, is thought to be the author of *DOW*.²⁰⁰ The work is contemporary to Chrétien's stories, but the latter is not used as source. Instead, the works are written parallel to each other.²⁰¹ Day supports this argument in the following way: "The characterization of the well-known figures – Arthur, Kay, Gwendoela, Gawain – are similar to their early representations rather than their late ones".²⁰² The story speaks about the birth and youth of young Gawain, King Arthur's nephew, and how he becomes a Knight of the Round Table. Kay is only mentioned three times by name, but "[he] is a loyal, faithful knight of King Arthur. He is not the clumsy buffoon that he becomes in later romance."²⁰³ Kay only appears relatively late in the story, when Arthur asks him to accompany him to an approaching knight (Gawain). As he was in the historical tradition, Kay (but not Bedevere!) is Arthur's confidant. Arthur decides to leave in secret, and Kay is the only one he trusts enough to take him along. Arthur meets the mysterious knight, and Arthur accuses him of traits later attributed to Kay: a "quick tongue" and "wickedness" (p. 111).²⁰⁴ After exchanging insults, Arthur grows impatient (again, a characteristic of the later Kay) and attacks. Gawain, not knowing whom he fights, manages to throw Arthur into the river. Kay, introduced as his seneschal, which is an influence from *HRB*,²⁰⁵ is immediately ready for action:

Kay the seneschal, wanting to avenge his lord, spurred his horse and engaged [Gawain], but just as before, with the first blow he was piled on top of Arthur in a single heap. [...] Those two who had come to this place as knights returned home as foot soldiers with no little shame. (p. 111)

This is the first time in the stories discussed above that Kay fails to win, with the exception of the deadly battle in the historical tradition. Kay survives being lifted from his saddle, and this is the first defeat of many to come in Arthurian literature. Gawain has no trouble throwing both Arthur and Kay from their horses, but while they are humiliated, it shows mostly how

¹⁹⁹ Day (2005), 2

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 3-5

²⁰¹ M. L. Day, *The Rise of Gawain, Nephew of Arthur: Translation and Study of De Ortu Waluuanii Nepotis Arturi, a Medieval Latin Prose Romance* (Alabama, 1975), cxlviii

²⁰² Day (1975) cxlviii

²⁰³ Day (2005), 6

²⁰⁴ All quotations from the Latin stories are from: Day (2005)

²⁰⁵ Gowans, 44

great of a knight Gawain is. The point of the scene is not to ridicule Kay and Arthur, but to increase Gawain's fame. The scene also shows how loyal Kay is to Arthur. The seneschal is immediately ready to avenge Arthur, no matter the consequences.

Contrary to the Welsh tradition and the historical tradition, Bedevere does not play any part in the story. We can only speculate why he has been left out by the author. However, Kay still has the traits he had in the historical and Welsh tradition: he is Arthur's most faithful knight.

It has been suggested that *Historia Meriadoci regis Cambrie* (hereafter *HM*) was written by the same author as *DOW*.²⁰⁶ In the story, Kay's first appearance, again introduced as Arthur's seneschal, is as he rides through the woods along with Urien, king of Scotland. They part ways when Kay turns back. Urien kidnaps a girl, Meriadoc's sister Orwen, and Kay stumbles upon Meriadoc himself and his guardian, Ivor. Kay's behaviour seems to be no less questionable as Urien's as the text tells us:

Kay, marvelling at the splendid beauty of the youth – for he was fair-haired, handsome, tall, broad chested, and quite lithe of body – spurred his horse after the two fugitives. When he had driven Ivor away in terror, Kay took Meriadoc captive and, rejoicing, carried him off with him. (p. 139)

The kidnapping of both Orwen and Meriadoc raises some questions about the morality of the two knights, but the siblings are quite happy with where they land. Two years after the abduction, Morwen, Ivor's wife, goes after Orwen, who willingly marries Urien, while Ivor goes after Meriadoc. Meriadoc testifies to Kay how Ivor has saved his life, and Kay accepts Ivor into his service. Not long after that, Kay travels to Urien along with Ivor and Meriadoc. We are told that he could not go before "because of his responsibility for keeping Arthur's battle supplies in constant readiness." (p. 143) We have heard that Kay's responsibilities in earlier stories included to serve food at festivals and command part of an army. Now, another task has been added to the seneschal's job description.

After Kay and Meriadoc have returned to Arthur's court and several years have passed, the Black Knight of the Black Forest appears at the court, demanding that the Black Forest should be legally his. He will fight for it, a duel against forty of Arthur's best knights

²⁰⁶ Gowans, 45

on successive days. All knights are defeated, and there are only three days left. Desperately, Arthur turns to Kay and says:

“I have known you on many occasions to be mightier in strength and cleverness than others. When others fail, it is you who undertake [*sic*] the effort of hard work for me and, when my personal retinue is pressed and thrown back, it is you who bring [*sic*] the reserves to their aid.” (p. 153)

It becomes clear from Arthur’s words that Kay is one of his best knights. Only Gawain is thought to be better, as Arthur wants him to fight if Kay fails, and will do battle himself if Gawain loses.²⁰⁷ Kay accepts and considers carefully “how gracefully, nobly, and bravely he should wage the duel.” (153) Kay does not get the chance to put his prowess to the test, as his protégé Meriadoc, who has been knighted three years before by Kay, asks him if he may go in Kay’s place. He argues that:

[I]t was quite improper and would not increase Kay’s renown to do battle with a man known to have laid low so many honorable men. Because if one who had until now been considered of greater prowess than the rest should himself be defeated and incur the fate of the defeated, he would undoubtedly be exposed to greater disgrace than the others [...]. (p. 153)

Again, Kay’s status as one of the best knights is emphasised. Kay is at first reluctant to give in because he has given Arthur his word, but is finally persuaded to give Meriadoc the opportunity to prove himself.

While the abduction of Meriadoc is certainly not something one would expect from a knight, Kay becomes Meriadoc’s mentor, grants him knighthood and gives him the opportunity to prove himself as a knight. According to Gowans: “Ceï is a respected warrior and a trusted and conscientious seneschal, and when an army is to be faced we learn from a speech of Arthur’s that, although Gawain is now next to the king in line of precedence, Ceï’s own reputation has not suffered in the least.”²⁰⁸

Finally, in the Latin story of *Narratio de Arthuro rege Britanniae et rege Gorlagon lycanthropo*, Kay merely appears as Arthur’s companion, in the king’s quest to find out the

²⁰⁷ In vernacular Arthurian literature, Kay is usually the one to ask to try the challenge first, as I have discussed, and generally fails. Here, Arthur has faith in him that he will succeed where thirty-six other knights have failed.

²⁰⁸ Gowans, 45

nature of the mind of a woman. Kay is still one of Arthur's most trusted companions, along with Gawain, who seems to have taken over Bedevere's position.

In the Latin tradition, Kay's reputation has remained the same as in the Welsh (and historical) tradition. Gowans states that his status has changed from the historical tradition onwards, "from hero companion of a king to that of the same king's seneschal."²⁰⁹ However, this does not mean he is less of a knight and warrior, as he is still regarded as one of Arthur's number one knights. It is Bedevere who has been stripped from his position as cupbearer and Kay's companion in the Latin works, never to be restored again.

Chrétien's Kay

In the narratives discussed above, Kay's character is described predominantly positively. From the warrior-hero in the Welsh tradition, he is slowly moulded into his role of seneschal, but continues to be Arthur's number one warrior, even though his companion Bedevere is replaced by Gawain, and Kay and Gawain do not form an inseparable team.

This changes in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, and Kay's character is reduced from a hero to a sharp tongued and obnoxious mocker. This change of character is gradual, as Chrétien goes a step further in every romance he writes. In his first romance, *Erec et Enide*, Kay is introduced as one of the best knights at Arthur's court. He is still portrayed as courteous when he talks to Gawain, and listens to him when Gawain orders him to tell the news of an arriving party to the queen, as "an element of subservience has been added to Cei's position."²¹⁰ Kay's final appearance is when he meets Erec, the hero of the story, who he does not recognise. Kay has taken Gawain's horse and weapons, but does not wear any armour, and without greeting Erec, demands to know who he is and invites him to Arthur's camp. Erec declines, and they start a joust. Kay is overthrown rapidly by Erec. Herman defends Kay by stating that while his actions may be considered presumptuous and rude, seeing that he wants to help a wounded knight, "Kei's action does not seem too bad."²¹¹ He does describe Kay as tactless and obstinate when the seneschal's suggestions are ignored.²¹² Gowans states that Kay is acting out his duties as an unknown knight passes close to Arthur's encampment, and Kay is trying to find out who he is, but "his impulsive manners lack the

²⁰⁹ Gowans, 45

²¹⁰ Ibid, 48

²¹¹ Herman, 70

²¹² Idem

quality of courtliness required in an ideal knight.”²¹³ Gowans suggests that Chrétien may have known *DOW*, which causes him to use the overthrowing of Kay from there, to promote Gawain’s role.²¹⁴ This could very well be the case, but it is also possible that it was not the intention to deface Kay, but to promote Erec. Kay has been introduced as one of Arthur’s best knights, and to have the wounded Erec overthrow him, albeit without wearing armour, would only increase his fame, as it did Gawain’s in *DOW*.

In Chrétien’s next romance, *Lancelot*, “Ceï’s status inclines towards the domestic rather than the military/administrative.”²¹⁵ A knight arrives at court, challenging anyone who wishes to joust with him, with the queen as stake. Kay immediately wants to go, but both Arthur and Guinevere plead him to stay. Finally, using a Rash Boon as ruse, Kay manages to get his way. This is the first story in which Arthur (and Guinevere) lack confidence in Kay’s prowess. Kay, however, loses, but his defeat does not seem to have been a swift one, judging from the broken reins and saddlebow, and bloodied stirrup-straps of Kay’s horse, unlike his fight with Erec. During his captivity by Meleagant, the challenger, Kay is accused of lying with the queen, but the queen defends him, calling him courtly and loyal. Despite his wounds, however, Kay is prepared to fight to prove his innocence, although Lancelot finally stands in for him. Herman argues that Kay’s behaviour at the beginning of the romance is not contrasted by Guinevere’s praising words of him, as Kay’s motivation to trick Arthur was not to have Guinevere abducted, but to prove himself, mistakenly believing himself capable of defeating Meleagant. Herman continues that the “inevitable outcome is naturally his being defeated”, yet it seems to me that the only thing “natural” about Kay’s defeat is that he is not the hero of the story, nor is he Gawain. The story does not say that Kay’s use of arms is “mediocre”;²¹⁶ moreover, we do not see him fighting at all. We know he has lost, that much is obvious from the bloodied horse Arthur finds, and Kay’s captivity, but how he has fought and how long the fight lasted, we are not told. The only thing we can conclude from this story is that Meleagant has bested Kay and wounded him severely, and the status of Kay’s horse implies that it was not a swift fight. The portrayal of Kay in *Lancelot* is similar to that of him in *Erec*, he still has confidence in his own prowess, is cunning, and has the love of especially Arthur and also of the queen.

In *Yvain*, however, many of Kay’s good traits have disappeared, and Gowans is right to note that “[w]e are not entirely prepared for the torrent of sustained abuse which Ceï

²¹³ Gowans, 50-1

²¹⁴ Ibid, 51

²¹⁵ Ibid, 59

²¹⁶ Herman, 78

unleashes on his companions, and on the queen”.²¹⁷ Kay insults Calogrenant and Yvain, and is reprimanded by the queen, whose words imply that Kay’s sharp tongue is already a familiar part of his reputation, even though it has never surfaced in Chrétien’s romances before.²¹⁸ Does this imply that Kay’s sharp-tonguedness is derived from somewhere else? Kay’s words, however, prompt Yvain to leave alone and in secret, and the seneschal for the first time uses his words to drive away the hero (although it should be noted that Kay’s actions did the same in *Lancelot*). Gowans argues that Kay’s words provide both motivation for the hero to leave, and amusement for the audience.²¹⁹ Contrary to *Lancelot*, in which Arthur did not want to let Kay go, the narrator remarks that should Kay have asked for the adventure, it would have been granted to him, rather than to Yvain. This is partially proven when Arthur rides with his knights to the fountain, which is now guarded by Yvain after defeating the former guardian, and pours water over the stone. Yvain, not recognised by his fellow knights, answers the call, and Kay asks for the first encounter, which he is granted. Kay accuses Yvain of being a coward, until he is silenced not by Arthur, but by Gawain. Kay is unhorsed by Yvain, who remarks that this is the first time that has happened to Kay. This is probably meant ironically, as we have already seen this happening in *Erec* and *Lancelot*.²²⁰ When Kay finds out whom he has fought, he is overcome with shame. In *Yvain*, Kay’s sharp and mocking tongue is introduced as motivation for the hero to leave, a plot device taken over by many post-Chrétien authors. Both Herman and Gowans, however, assume that Kay’s defeat by Yvain is meant as humorous, and focus on Kay being overthrown, rather than on Yvain being the victor.

In Chrétien’s final work, the unfinished *Perceval*, Kay’s character development takes a turn for the worse. In *Yvain*, his mocking tongue drove the hero from court, and in *Perceval*, he does the same, only this time, the hero is a newcomer and not an established knight. Kay is wounded at the beginning of *Perceval*, but that does not stop him from sarcastically daring Perceval to get the armour of the Red Knight. Perceval makes a maiden laugh, who then proclaims he will be the finest knight ever, prompting Kay to slap her harshly and then to kick the fool in the fire who said that the maiden would never laugh until she met the one who would be the greatest knight. This uncourtly behaviour is unexpected, as it is against the knightly code to attack non-knights, and striking a maiden is certainly condemned. Still, it is Perceval who promises to avenge the maiden, and no one else at court reacts to it. Perceval defeats one knight after another, and Arthur blames Kay for his departure. Chrétien describes

²¹⁷ Gowans, 64

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 65

²¹⁹ *Idem*

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 69; Herman, 86

Kay as the most handsome knight, and well dressed, but because of his mocking tongue, everyone avoids him. He also makes a reference to Kay's bravery, which seems inconsistent with Kay's depiction throughout Chrétien's romances. Arthur and his knights ride out to find Perceval, and after mocking Sagremor for failing to fetch him, Kay himself is sent to Perceval. Kay is happy for the opportunity, but ends up being unhorsed by Perceval, his collarbone dislocated and his right arm broken. Arthur is sure Kay is dead, and he mourns the seneschal, until he is assured that Kay will make a full recovery. Gawain offers to go get Perceval, and Kay mocks Gawain's famous golden tongue. Contrary to *Yvain*, in which a reprimand from Gawain is enough to have Kay shut up, Gawain responds rather prickly, making fun of Kay's broken arm. When Gawain returns with Perceval, Kay remarks sarcastically that the fight must have been a heavy one, because Gawain returns as cheerfully as he has left. The relationship between Kay and Gawain, which Burgess and Brook call "prickly", is established in *Perceval*. Kay's storyline is concluded with a remark from the narrator that Kay spoke his mind, rightly or wrongly (ll. 4532-3). *Perceval* has not been finished by Chrétien, but Gowans argues that Kay's participation is concluded. This seems to be a valid assumption, as in *Yvain*, the hero has avenged himself on Kay for his words, so the narrator would not have need to bring him back.

Starting out as one of the best knights, albeit somewhat untactful when it comes to manners, in *Erec*, Kay's character takes a turn for the worse in *Perceval*, in which he acts unknighly towards the maiden and the fool. In all four the romances, Kay fails when he has to joust with the hero, but while this is intended to be humorous (except in *Lancelot*, in which the joust is not described, only the result of it), both scholars and post-Chrétien authors have focused on Kay's failings rather than on the hero's victory. The negative spiral in which Kay's character lands in Chrétien and post-Chrétien works has its roots in *Erec*, until Kay turns violent in *Perceval*. However, while we can see this 'escalation' when looking at Chrétien's works chronologically, Peter Noble points out that Chrétien's depiction of Kay is adapted to every individual story, and not a coherent and developed character as a whole.²²¹

²²¹ Peter Noble, "Kay the Seneschal in Chrétien de Troyes and his Predecessors", *Reading Medieval Studies* 1 (1975), 66

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