

SIR KAY FROM CELTIC LORE TO ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

by

PAUL LEE CAVIN

(Under the Direction of Alexander Sager)

ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is to examine the transformation of Kay from his heyday in Celtic lore as a mighty warrior to his entry into Arthurian romance. A comparative analysis between the works of Chrétien de Troyes (the creator of Arthurian romance), and the later adaptations of the his tales by Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach will shed light on Kay's role (*agent-provocateur*, foil, court critic, etc.) throughout the various Arthurian romances in which he appears.

INDEX WORDS: Arthurian romance, medieval literature, Sir Kay, Celtic lore, Hartmann, Wolfram, Chrétien

SIR KAY FROM CELTIC LORE TO ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

by

PAUL CAVIN

A.B. German, The University of Georgia, 2003

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2005

© 2005

Paul Cavin

All Rights Reserved

SIR KAY FROM CELTIC LORE TO ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

by

PAUL CAVIN

Major Professor: Alexander Sager

Committee: Martin Kagel
Max Reinhart

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Alexander Sager for his enthusiasm and guidance throughout the course of my thesis. From start to finish his assistance was *vil guot*. I would also like to thank Dr. Martin Kagel and Dr. Max Reinhart for serving on my committee and helping make my thesis a success.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER	
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Kay in the Celtic Tradition	2
3 Chrétien de Troyes: the Transition	5
Arthurian Romance	5
Kay's Function	5
The Ministerials.....	5
Erec and Enite	7
The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot).....	9
The Knight with the Lion (Yvain).....	12
The Story of the Grail (Perceval).....	15
Conclusion.....	18
4 Hartmann von Aue.....	19
Erec.....	20
Iwein.....	24
Conclusion.....	30
5 Wolfram von Eschenbach.....	32
Parzival at Court.....	32
Kingrun and Clamide	37

Blood Drop Scene	39
Wolfram's Excursus on Kay	42
Kay and Gawain	44
Conclusion.....	47
REFERENCES	49

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the Arthurian tradition, Sir Kay, King Arthur's seneschal, appears at first glance to function in a limited role as either an ignoble foil to the courtly world surrounding him or mere bully at Arthur's court. If one digs deeper, however, Kay becomes a figure with far more significance than to merely provide contrast to the court.

The focus of this thesis will be the examination of the literary figure Kay as he develops from Celtic literature into Chrétien de Troye's world of Arthurian romance and into the adaptations of the later German authors, Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach (Arthurian romances of the late medieval period are outside the scope of this examination due to the derivative nature of the role that Kay plays in them). Kay's function in Chrétien's Erec and Enite, Yvain, and Perceval will be compared to his role in Hartmann's Erec and Iwein and Wolfram's Parzival. The manipulation of Chrétien's romances by the German authors will shed light on their intentions for Kay. Hartmann's adaptation of Chrétien's tales proves detrimental to Kay, reducing him to a mere contrast figure to the idealistic courtly world Hartmann so emphatically promotes. Wolfram, on the other hand, will zealously defend Kay, using him as a tool for social commentary aimed at improving the courtly society he sees around him. This society, as Wolfram sees it, is full of corruption, in which the courts are crawling with disgraceful figures, *smaehen*. Knights are no longer brave men but cowards hiding from a fight. Court society is losing respect, honor, dignity, and Wolfram's Kay will function as his vehicle for constructive criticism directed at the problems of courtly society.

CHAPTER 2

KAY IN THE CELTIC TRADITION

The literary figure Kay (spelled in a variety of ways depending on the tradition) first appears in a poem entitled “Pa Gur” in the Black Book of Carmarthen, which is believed to date from around 1000-1100. The poem extols Kay as a brave warrior who “when he came into battle / would slay enough for a hundred” (72-73). Beyond his status as mighty warrior, a glimpse into Kay’s character reveals that he is vengeful and quick to anger: “Heavy was his vengeance, / painful was his fury” (68-69). As we read further into the poem, it is revealed that Kay’s power is so tremendous that only divine intervention could vanquish this mighty warrior: “Unless it were God who accomplished it, / Cai’s death were unattainable” (74-75). Linda Gowans notes that as Kay battles his enemies he is “mocking, savage, and a terrifying opponent in battle – all of these things being ... qualities for admiration, not for disapproval, in their original setting” (8). As we shall see, Kay’s Celtic past will give rise to a very ambivalent literary character as the figure shifts into Arthurian romance.

Another key aspect of Kay in Celtic lore as well as Arthurian romance is his role as confidant to Arthur and gatekeeper to his court. The name “Cei” is said to derive from the older Welsh form “Cai” and ultimately from the Latin form *Caius*. It is closely related of the Irish word *cái*, which in the tenth century was semantically equivalent to *conair*, meaning ‘path’ or ‘way.’ Furthermore, there is the existence of a figure called Cai Cainbrethach, i.e. ‘Cai of Fair Judgement,” who appears in Irish literature as a law-giver and may well, as some scholars argue, bear some connection to Cei (Gowan 2). The function of Kay as gatekeeper and councilor will become especially important in his future position in Arthurian romance. Kay is a man who

obeys customs and rules without fail and expects those in his presence to reciprocate. In one representative scene from the Welsh poem Culhwch and Olwen (author unknown, ca. before 1100), Kay demonstrates a staunch obedience to law and a surly nature, qualities that foreshadow the gatekeeper/protector role of his literary personality in the texts of future Arthurian romances of Chrétien and the German courtly poets. At the court of Arthur a feast has begun. Culhwch is a stranger, still outside the castle, and asks for entry. He is told by the porter that “Knife has gone into food, drink into horns, and there is a thronging in the Hall of Arthur. None save the son of a rightful territorial king, or craftsman ... is allowed in” (124). Culhwch is told to find accommodation at a hostel but he threatens the porter: “If you open the door, fine, if not, I will satirize your lord and give you a bad name” (124). The porter tells Arthur of the stranger and describes him in glowing terms. Arthur, showing the charity that will characterize his nature in the Arthurian romances to come, grants the stranger entry: “Let some serve him from solid gold horns, others sizzling hot chops until he has plenty of food and drink. Tis a deplorable thing to leave such a man as you tell out in the wind and rain”(125). There is a sticking point, however. Kay disapproves of Arthur’s willingness to bend the rules and tells him: “if you took my advice you would not break the customs of court for him” (125). Arthur responds: “Not so, fair Cei. We are nobles as long as anyone seeks us out; the greater fame we bestow, the greater shall be our nobility, fame, and our honor” (125).

The conflict between Kay and Arthur in this scene is illuminating in that it intimates positions, personalities and ambitions that, as we shall see, Kay and Arthur will embody in later Arthurian romance. Kay represents the military type, a man bound to rules and regulations, whereas Arthur shows a considerable amount of flexibility in overriding established court customs, especially when there is political gain to be had. Already, one recognizes the rift

developing between the simple, rule-bound warrior and the emerging court politician. Gowan explains: “The portrayal of Kay is entirely straightforward. He is shown as a hero of the early type, with manners quite alien to the future world of knighthood, but fully compatible with the atmosphere of saga or epic poetry” (Gowans 5). Ironically, it will be Kay’s inability to fit into the courtly mold cast by Chrétien that will provide the impetus for his fellow knights to affirm the superiority of courtly values over the outmoded societal code he represents.

CHAPTER 3

CHRETIEN DE TROYES: THE TRANSITION

Arthurian Romance

As far as we know, Chrétien de Troyes invented the Arthurian romance. He was a learned man for the thirteenth-century, writing for royal courts in France during his productive years. Chrétien's romances include: Erec (ca. 1170), Cliges (1176), The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot) (ca. 1170), The Knight with the Lion (Yvain) (ca. 1170), and The Story of the Grail (Perceval) (ca. 1180). Arthurian romance interlaces heroic knightly conquest with a normative system of polished and refined behavior. In addition, there is always a romance between the protagonist and a noble woman. Often times the hero fails in one form or another and then undertakes an adventure in order to restore personal honor. Ultimately, the protagonist triumphs in his quest, reaffirming the virtues of courtly culture over the chaotic and violent world outside the court.

Kay's Function

Kay will serve three major functions in Chrétien's romances. He will act as *agent-provocateur* by instigating with his sharp tongue and his actions the quests and achievements of other knights. Second, he functions as a foil to the courtly knights surrounding him, who put the court loudmouth in his place, cementing the idea of courtly supremacy over ignobility. Finally, Kay will also assume the role of court critic, calling into question certain aspects of courtliness and the validity of the court in general.

The Ministerials

Chrétien represents Kay as a member of a particular social class, the ministerials. At the time Chrétien wrote his romances, ministerials in service to kings and princes were gaining

greater power and prestige at court. Ministerials were not originally of noble descent but men who primarily ascended from the lower strata of the *familia* a term used to designate the servants of the king collectively. It is important to note, however, that these unfree men held considerable power and responsibility under their lords, functioning as heads of central court administration in emerging territories, as protectors of their sovereigns' castles and as representatives of their lords (Bumke 34). Naturally, resentment arose from the nobility, who felt threatened by the ministerial class, whose status increasingly became indistinguishable from that of the freemen (Bumke 35). Noblemen felt threatened by this *de facto* free nobility. One prince complains about Henry IV's (d. 1106) policy towards ministerials, claiming that he "raised the lowest people without any noble ancestors to the highest honors, taking council with them day and night, and plotting to completely exterminate high nobility" (qtd. in Bumke 35).

Kay's role as Arthur's confidant in Celtic lore is problematic for Chrétien. How does he maintain their close relationship from the past? He accomplishes this by making Kay Arthur's seneschal. The seneschal was one of the most important court members, if not the most important. David Crouch elaborates: "[E]very matter is his concern excepting drink and provisioning the horses. . . . He is also in charge of overseeing feasts and greeting guests" (Whetter 352-353). Although Kay's status in the Celtic tradition is that of warrior-hero, his position at Arthur's court as a ministerial will function not only to limit his action on the field of battle and his opportunity to ride out seeking adventure and great fame, but also prove to be his downfall in the idealistic setting of courtly society, as Peter Noble points out:

[Kay] loses his prestige in part because of his office. It would have been his duty to prevent waste and corruption at the court and such people are never popular with those whose freedom of action they limit. As seneschal, he would be viewed no more favorably by the French writers as his judicial duties would not gain him popularity . . . and it is little wonder that he failed to maintain his original reputation and status. (58)

Another point to consider is the hierarchical relationship between Kay and Arthur. If Arthur is king and Kay his seneschal, the possibility of Kay attaining knightly status on the level of Gawain, the most idealized knight of the Round Table, would create severe structural problems. Arthur's status as king would appear ridiculous if he not only takes orders from a seneschal, but from a seneschal whose high honor and esteem would cause the king to appear impotent. This would serve little purpose, indeed it would compromise the hierarchical structure of the court.

Erec and Enite

In Chrétien's first romance the protagonist, Erec, accomplishes great deeds early in his career as courtly knight. Time passes and he loses sight of his courtly upbringing and eventually loses his honor and fame. To remedy this, he sets out with his wife, Enite, on adventure. They are pushed to the limit, encountering difficulties, battling opponents (Erec faces a number of different types – highwaymen, an Irish king, a wicked count, etc.), and enduring extreme hardships along the path to redemption. In the end, Erec triumphs over his fiercest opponent, a mighty knight, thus restoring his honor and achieving greater fame.

Kay plays a very limited role in Erec and Enite. He is found in a few scenes early on in which he performs duties assigned to a seneschal—informing the queen of pertinent information (announcing the arrival of the knight and his dwarf who struck the maiden whom Erec avenged) and escorting her to meet them.

There is one event, however, that the unfortunate seneschal has to endure in this as well as almost every other Arthurian Romance – defeat at the hands of a mightier knight. Kay takes Gawain's horse without permission and rides off, encountering Erec when the latter is in the middle of his adventures. Not recognizing him because of the lack of identifiable markings on

his armor, Kay charges forward and questions the strange knight: “I want to know who you are and where you’re from” (86). Erec refuses to tell him, whereupon Kay then tries to win him over with false concern: “I can clearly see that you are wounded and injured. . . . I shall see that you are richly treated, honoured and cared for” (86). His ploy is to no avail and the two knights joust, leading to Kay’s defeat. This incident is significant in that Kay represents the knight of old, the one who lacks courtesy and refinement. He contrasts sharply with Erec, the embodiment of the courtly knight, who uses the blunt end of his lance so as to not hurt his opponent, and thus demonstrates his courtliness, his *mâze* – the courtly virtue of conducting oneself at all times with measure and restraint. The encounter between Erec and Kay ushers in a kind of “changing of the guard” in the history of Kay as literary figure, depicting the courtly knight defeating the primitive *recke*. According to Jürgen Haupt, Kay’s treatment of Erec demonstrates his inability to either adapt to or understand the courtly world around him: “Sorgen und Wesen anderer bleiben ihm fremd” (14). The straightforward warrior of the original Celtic tradition is already in over his head in this complicated and refined society that does not “shoot first and ask questions later.”

What is especially interesting in the structure of Erec and Enite is the particular point at which Kay appears. Unlike the majority of the romances, the seneschal does not function as *agent-provocateur* in the opening sequence, forcing the hero to ride out on adventure to restore personal honor and reestablish order at court. In this case it is a dwarf who drives the action, blocking a maiden’s way as she inquires about the dwarf’s master: “You have no business here. Go back! It’s not right for you to talk to such a fine knight” (39). As the maiden tries to pass, the dwarf lashes out with his whip and strikes her. Here, the dwarf acts as gatekeeper, protecting his master at all cost and doing so in an aggressive manner which violates courtly etiquette. By

attacking the maiden, the dwarf shows that he is willing to go to the outer limits to fulfill his role as gatekeeper and lacks the ability to differentiate between a legitimate threat and a defenseless young woman. He simply lashes out because an outsider has tried to enter his lord's domain and, in his estimation, offended his lord. In subsequent romances, Kay will assume the role of *agent-provocateur* and, in a sense, become the "evil, baseborn dwarf" who creates the impetus for knightly adventure through various provocations.

The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)

Lancelot is a tale of adultery committed by Arthur's queen, Guinevere, and Lancelot, one of the mightiest knights of the Round Table. The queen is carried off early on by Meleagant, a nobleman, after he defeats Kay who tries to defend her. The queen is held at the castle of King Bademagu, who is the father of Meleagant. In the castle, Lancelot and Guinevere have a furtive affair, and Lancelot eventually kills Meleagant, freeing the queen.

Of all Chrétien's romances, Kay's depiction in Lancelot is the most flattering, taking a drastic departure from the figure of the troublesome seneschal in Erec and Enite. The tale starts out in typical Arthurian romance fashion with Kay playing a critical role early on. In the opening sequence, Meleagant, a knight holding many of Arthur's people captive, rides into King Arthur's court and challenges any of Arthur's men to a battle for their release. Kay, who is sitting with the servants, hears this challenge and immediately offers his resignation to Arthur. In the exchange that follows between Kay and Arthur, one senses Arthur's dependency and admiration for his seneschal. Arthur pleads with Kay: "Sir seneschal, remain at court as you have in the past, and be assured that there's nothing I have in all this world that I'd not give you at once to keep you here" (208). Kay refuses Arthur, who then uses the queen to convince Kay to remain at court. The queen like Arthur, very much cherishes Kay: "I'm most upset of what I've heard said of

you – I'll tell you straight out. I've been informed, and it saddens me, that you wish to leave the king's service. . . . Kay, I beg of you, stay!" (209).

The dependence Arthur demonstrates in his pleading with Kay, as well as the queen's begging, show the extent to which Arthur and the court rely upon Kay. Kay is very aware of the king's dependency and uses it to his advantage. In return for his vow to remain at court, Kay forces Arthur and the queen to grant in advance anything he desires. As usual, Arthur acquiesces and Kay is granted a "rash boon," (an agreement to grant a wish before it is known, a typical motif in Arthurian romances) which inevitably leads to trouble. Kay asks for permission to battle Meleagant, but instead of Arthur and the court showing their gratitude to Kay for his bravery, his actions are met with disapproval: "[Arthur's] anger and pain were clearly written on his face. The queen was also very upset, and all those in the household insisted that Kay's request was proud, rash, and foolhardy" (209). The reaction of the court is quite telling about the diminished position Kay holds as warrior at court. No longer is Kay the mighty warrior as in the Celtic tradition, but a man who has overstepped his limits. Surely enough, as the court suspects, he is defeated by Meleagant. Clearly, he has shed his glorious Celtic past, being reduced to one of Arthur's capable knights, but not the chosen one.

Kay appears again much later on in the text as captive in the castle of King Bademagu, the father of Meleagant, after having been defeated by Meleagant in an attempt to defend the queen from being carried off by the bold knight. Interestingly, the queen and Kay share the same room in the king's castle. Kay is injured and has a wound that bleeds; this complicates matters immensely when Lancelot enters the room to sleep with the queen (when Kay is sleeping, of course) and cuts himself, bleeding on the queen's sheets. The bloody sheets will be attributed to Kay. To note are the remarks made by the king's son the next morning, who has been kept away

from the queen and is growing angry at the sleeping arrangements: “the seneschal Kay has looked closely upon you this night, and has done all he pleased with you” (266). He then vents to his father: “By God, sir, don’t be surprised by my anger and complaint, for it’s most humiliating to me to be hated and despised by her, while Kay lies there every night at her side” (266). Note the reference to Kay’s position at court. It is not that just that Kay sleeps in the same room with the queen, who is assumed to have committed adultery with him, but also that Kay is a *seneschal*, which adds further insult to injury.

Countering the accusations leveled at her by Meleagant, the queen not only defends herself but Kay as well: “I believe the seneschal Kay is so courteous and loyal that it would be wrong to mistrust him” (267). Kay then defends his reputation: “Sir, now permit me to reply . . . and I shall acquit myself. May God never absolve my soul and I leave this world if ever I lay with my lady” (267). Instead of angrily attacking Meleagant with a sharp refutation, Kay demonstrates politeness and polish, and gives the king a measured response. Meleagant goes further in his accusations against Kay: “the demons and the living devils have betrayed you. . . . No lies can help you now” (267). Kay responds to these allegations, addressing the king: “I will defend my lady and myself against your son’s accusations. He causes me grief and torment, but is clearly in the wrong” (267). Again, there is no sign of the evil-tongued seneschal or a man not in control of his emotions. He demonstrates *mâze*, a quality foreign to him in the other romances.

A courtly Kay is problematic, however, when attempting to understand Chrétien’s intentions for the seneschal. Lancelot, in its flattering treatment of Kay, is the sticking point for some theorists regarding Kay’s role in Chrétien’s romances. Since it was not the first of the French author’s romances, the logical progression from Kay as the “loyal servant” to the “evil-tongued curmudgeon” found in Perceval is broken. According to William Kibler, “Many believe

that [Chrétien] abandoned 'The Knight of the Cart' because he was dissatisfied with the subject matter, which may have been imposed on him by his patroness, Marie de Champagne" (2-3). If this is the case, it is plausible that one of the secondary reasons for Chrétien's dissatisfaction with the subject matter in Lancelot was the about-face he had to do in his portrayal of Kay. At the very least, this is an intriguing possibility that could help reconcile the positive treatment of Kay and still place Chrétien in the camp of the Kay critics. The question remains as to what Chrétien's feelings and intentions are toward Kay. Haupt states: "Eine Kay-'Konzeption' Chretiens ist in seinem zweiten Artusroman noch nicht sichtbar" (19).

The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)

In this tale, Yvain, like Erec in Chrétien's first romance, will win fame and honor early on, but then neglect his responsibilities (a promise Yvain makes his wife, Laudine, to return home no later than one year after leaving on his adventure). After a period of crisis and alienation from society, Yvain, with his faithful lion companion, gradually restores his honor through great travails, risking life and limb to make amends for his failure to keep his promise.

Chrétien's Yvain opens with a number of knights standing guard at the queen and king's chambers listening to Calogrenant, who is telling the others a tale "not of his honor but of disgrace" (295). The queen is listening in and moves toward the men to hear the story. Calogrenant spots the queen before the others and greets her, which invites an attack from Kay: "I see how gallant and sharp you are, and of course I'm delighted that you're the most courteous among us. And I'm sure you think you are – you're so lacking in good sense" (296). Not surprisingly, the queen scolds Kay and he returns fire: "My lady, if we are not better for having your company, make sure we are not worse for it" (296). Surprisingly, the queen does not retaliate and no one comes to her defense. It is quite remarkable that Kay is allowed to not only

insult the queen but is never reprimanded by Arthur, showing again the position of privilege and power he enjoys. Despite his aggressiveness, Kay's sharp words to Calogrenant and surly defense of his remarks to the queen are not without merit, according to K.S. Whetter:

As Calogrenant is the only one to see Guinevere approach, he must be looking in the opposite direction of everyone else, towards the king and queen's chamber and the direction from which the trouble would not be expected. As such, Kay's [sic] dressing-down is in a sense warranted . . . [Calogrenant's] wisdom and alertness are suspect. (357)

Also, in contrast to the courtliest knights, Calogrenant's response illustrates that he has allowed Kay to get the best of him and that he is far from the likes of Gawain, the archetypal courtly knight. He lashes out at Kay: "'The dungheap will always smell, wasps will always sting and hornets buzz, and a cad will always slander and vex others'" (296). There is a certain amount of venom in Calogrenant's remarks and, coupled with his failure as a knight at the magic fountain, one recognizes the parallels between the figures of Kay and Calogrenant. Roger Loomis points out the doubling technique used in this case: "[Calogrenant] is really Cai-lo-grenant, 'Kay the Grumbler'. . . . The fact that Calogrenant is quarreling with Kay is merely an illustration of the doubling of characters not uncommon in Arthurian Romance"(275). Although Kay and Calogrenant are in two important ways alike (both are argumentative and fail at knightly conquests), there is a difference: Kay's bravery is never in question, unlike Calogrenant's, who appears somewhat cowardly in his description of failed *adventure*: "'The storm was so terrible. . . . You can be sure that I was very frightened until the storm died down'" (300).

Seeing how his cousin's image has been tarnished, Yvain resolves restore Calogrenant's honor. This leads to another surly wisecrack from the seneschal: "'There are more words in a pitcherful of wine than in a hogshead of beer. They say the drunken cat makes merry. After dinner, without even stirring from his place, everyone goes forth to kill the Sultan Nureddin.

And you're off to avenge Forré!" (302). Although Kay's criticism of Calogrenant is justifiable, his remarks to Yvain reveal yet again his low regard for his fellow knights and, perhaps, a certain amount of paranoia that he will be surpassed by his contemporaries. Kay's position at court is at stake and, unlike his fellow warriors, he is confined to Arthur's court and his post as seneschal. This makes it nearly impossible for him to win honor and fame on the level of an "independent" knight such as Gawain or Perceval, making it all the more important for him to keep the adventure-seekers from winning greater honor if his court status is to be maintained. This becomes more apparent when Yvain finds out that Arthur is planning on riding to the spring where Calogrenant was defeated. Yvain realizes that if he does not act quickly enough and leave without Arthur, Kay will be awarded the battle with his cousin's conqueror: "he [Yvain] knew that my lord Kay would undoubtedly be granted battle rather than himself – if Kay were to request it, it would not be refused him" (303).

Acting on this knowledge, Yvain sets off for the fountain before the others. True to form, Kay assumes the worst of Yvain, who is nowhere to be found just as Arthur and his retinue are journeying to the fountain: "It's clear he spoke after the wine! . . . Overweening pride was the source of his boasts. . . . There's a big difference between the braggart and the brave" (323). Following a well-established pattern, it is Kay who begins the joust: "He always wanted to begin the melees and skirmishes, or else he would become very angry" (323). Naturally, he is knocked off his horse by Yvain, continuing the tradition of the ignoble warrior being surpassed by the courtly knight, affirming the superiority of courtly virtues over vulgarity: "die innere Unterlegenheit Keies wird in dieser aristokratischen, (immer noch) militanten Gesellschaft mit Hilfe der Waffen ausgedrückt und gebrandmarkt" (Haupt 22). In an ironic twist, it is ultimately

Kay's attempt to diminish the honor of his fellow knights that leads to their greater honor and fame. In terms of his literary history, Yvain marks a new low point for Kay.

The Story of the Grail (Perceval)

Chrétien's last romance is a story of a knight on a quest for the Grail. Perceval, the protagonist, achieves great fame and honor early on in his life as brave knight, but later fails to take possession of the Grail when the opportunity arises. Realizing his mistake, Perceval doggedly quests after the Grail for a chance at redemption. Chrétien died before the story could be completed.

Kay assumes a greater role in Perceval and receives a substantial amount of criticism for his efforts. He is chastised by the court and even by Arthur himself. A prime example of the king's willingness to attack Kay, not with force, but with his tongue, is seen early on in the romance. When Kay welcomes the young Perceval to fight the red knight, he assumes the young hayseed will get the worst of the battle. Arthur scolds his seneschal: "for the love of God, you are too eager to speak ill, and it does not matter to whom!" (393). The relationship between Kay and his king has taken on a different flavor than in Chrétien's other tales. Arthur is now a forceful king, a critic, a man who seems fit for his position instead of a timid figurehead pushed around by a retinue that exploits his generosity, as was especially the case in Lancelot.

Kay, like the dwarf in Erec, functions as *agent-provocateur* once again. After he sends Perceval out to battle, he slaps a young woman for her laughter as she spots Perceval (she vowed only to laugh when she saw the man who would become supreme lord among the knights) and then kicks a jester into the fire. One has to consider Kay's Celtic past in order to understand his treatment of Perceval, the maiden and the jester. He reacts not like a refined, courtly knight, but like a warrior, someone who puts people "in their place:"

Kay repräsentiert mit seiner primitiveren *êre*-Auffassung, mit dem schematischen Freund-Feind-Denken den Typ des ‚konservativen‘ Ritters der früh-höfischen Zeit, der gerade zur Zeit Chretiens durch eine nicht zuletzt literarisch geformte höfische Kultiviertheit allmählich von den Höfen verdrängt wird. (Haupt 28-29)

An intriguing passage occurs later on in the text in the Pentecost scene in which Kay's physical beauty is contrasted with his biting tongue, illustrating the conflicted nature of the seneschal: "Kay strode to the centre of the hall without his mantle . . . there was no more handsome knight in the entire world, but his beauty and prowess were spoiled by his evil tongue" (415). Here again we see Kay's Celtic past being dragged into the future. Kay's outward beauty as well as his aggressive nature and mocking tongue are preserved from the Celtic tradition, but in the idealistic world of courtly society these attributes no longer are held up to praise, but instead scorn. Here again, one is reminded of the dwarf-qualities in Kay, his "evil tongue," his ability to offend and behave in a base-born manner.

As in Erec and Yvain, Kay finds himself in battle in Perceval, this time after he mocks Sagremor's defeat in a battle with the main protagonist: "Fair sir, see how Sagremor is returning! He's got the knight by the bridle and is bringing him back against his will" (433). Arthur challenges Kay: "it is not good for you to mock gentlemen in this manner. Go yourself, so we can see how you would do better than he" (433). Kay, through his mocking of Sagremor, wins what is most dear to his heart – a chance to fight and gain fame. The seneschal shows yet again just how adept he is at manipulating the king and how incorrigible he is. Of course, Kay is unhorsed by Perceval and is seen in a "faint" and thought to be dead. Wasting little time after Kay's downfall, Gawain attempts to bring Perceval to court, but by different means. Gawain explains his plan of action to Arthur: "The knight was contemplating some loss he suffered. . . . I'll go watch how he behaves . . . I'll bid him come to you here" (434). Not deeming Gawain's actions manly enough, Kay, recovering from his fall, insults Gawain:

You'll lead the knight here by the reigns, whether he likes it or not. It's all fine and good if he'll let you, and you can get away without a fight. You've captured many knights this way! When the knight's worn out and has had enough of fighting, that's when the brave fighter asks permission to go after him! Gawain, a hundred curses upon my neck if you're not so sly that anyone can learn a lot from you! You know all kinds of flattering and polished words to use; you'll trick the king with deceitful and arrogant talk: a curse upon anyone who'd believe you, for you don't fool me! You could win this fight in a silken tunic: you won't even have to draw your sword or break a lance. (435)

Gawain, the paragon of courtliness, responds in a polite manner and brushes off Kay's criticism. As in Erec, the coarse and politically inept Kay lacks the refinement and fighting prowess of his friend, Gawain, who lures Perceval to court with cunning words. Kay's harsh criticism is a result of his inability to operate in world of finesse and polish, which to him are the antitheses of what knighthood signifies. The fact that Gawain achieves great fame and glory through words instead of force makes it all the more maddening for the seneschal. The courtly world is simply not straightforward enough for Kay.

Although Kay's criticism of Gawain appears extreme and unwarranted, there is some merit to what he has to say. Kay recognizes a fundamental aversion to battle in the courtly world that surrounds him. He is not impressed with the way in which those around him use words to solve conflicts. He spots real weakness within courtly society that gives in too easily and is not "manly" enough for his liking. Kay does not fit the courtly mold, but ironically, it is the worst in Kay that draws out the best in most others. In the seneschal's defeat at the hands of Perceval, for instance, courtly virtues are on full display: "all the ladies and lords began to mourn for him most deeply" (434). Not a base thought or remark from anyone. Reacting to Kay is a sort of litmus test, which some pass (Gawain) and some fail (Calogrenant). Arthur, who a moment earlier challenged Kay to battle Perceval, reaffirms the idealized image of the noble king by feeling sympathy for his imperfect knight.

Conclusion

In Chrétien's courtly world we see Kay in decline when compared to his status in the Celtic tradition. The French author assigns him the position of "seneschal," which in the twelfth century was a court position of enviable power, but drew much critical fire from contemporaries. Overall, Chrétien's depiction of Kay is negative, starting with a mildly troubling figure in Erec and culminating in a clear foil to the court in Yvain and Perceval. Lancelot represents the exception, but the depiction of Kay in Lancelot might not actually represent Chrétien's true intentions with regard to the figure. In his opening to Lancelot, Chrétien tells his audience that "the subject matter and meaning are furnished and given him by the countess, and he [Chrétien] strives carefully to add nothing but his effort and careful attention" (207). According to Noble, "Chrétien took the name of the character [Kay], a very few of the existing characteristics and then proceeded to adapt the character to his needs as and when he felt the situation called for Kay" (66). Regardless of what Chrétien's feelings towards Kay were, he set the mold for a character who would later be further debased by Hartmann von Aue and exalted by Wolfram von Eschenbach.

CHAPTER 4

HARTMANN VON AUE

Hartmann von Aue was an educated ministerial who adapted Chrétien's Erec and Enite and Yvain. According to Gottfried von Strassburg, one of his contemporaries, Hartmann's writing deserves the highest praise: "How clear and transparent his crystal words are and ever must remain. . . . Those who esteem fine language with due sympathy and judgment will allow the man of Aue his garland and his laurels" (65). Although Hartmann is generally quite faithful to the plot and spirit of his French sources, in his Erec (ca. 1180-1190) and Iwein (ca. 1199-1205), the negative traits found in Chrétien's Kay will be amplified. The German author will abuse the seneschal and elaborate on his baseness, stripping from him any dignity the French author bestowed upon him. Hartmann will serve as the forerunner to the late medieval moralists in his portrayal of Kay as a one-sided miscreant, void of any redeeming qualities other than the admission that he is occasionally brave.

Throughout his texts, Hartmann will give the reader extended insight into the psyche of his characters, including Kay. True to Gottfried's opinion, Hartmann's words paint a very "clear and transparent" picture of Kay and the courtly world with little room for misinterpretation. In order to achieve his goals, Hartmann extends Chrétien's text to include a greater amount of "didactic elaboration and reflection," (Lawson 235) of which a considerable portion is aimed at Kay. Unlike Chrétien, Hartmann provides commentary about the motivating factors behind Kay's actions, digging deeper into the psychological dimension of the seneschal and exposing his deceitfulness. These traits help neutralize Kay's criticism of the court and typecast him as the lone rogue figure amongst Arthur's noble men.

Erec

Kay plays a fairly minor role in Hartmann's first Arthurian romance, but there are significant and striking differences between the portrayal of Kay by Chrétien and the German author. In most appearances of the seneschal in Hartmann's adaptations, one will note many alterations to details in the text in order to depict Kay in the most unflattering way. One aspect of Hartmann's writing that becomes immediately apparent is the greater amount of psychology with which he imbues his figures than Chrétien:

der herre Erec
engegen im geriten kam.
von verre er sîn war nam.
Als er in rehte gesach,
dô kôs er daz er ungemach
ûf dem wege hete erlitten
und verre hete geritten
und berunnen was mit bluote.
dô wart im ze muote
daz er engegen ime reit
und sprach in sîner valscheit:
,willkeommen, herre, in diz lant.'
an den zoum leite er sîn hant.
er entorste in anders niht bestân:
sus woldê er in gewinnen hân. (4629, 28-42)

(Sir Erec came riding toward him. Kei caught sight of him from far away. When he could see him clearly, he noticed that he had suffered hardships along the way and had ridden far and was covered with blood. He decided to ride toward him, and he spoke deceitfully, 'Welcome, my lord, to this land.' He took the reins in his hand. He did not dare to confront him in any other way.) [Vivian 106]

Hartmann takes great liberties with the original text, reshaping it to fit his image of Kay. Notice that it is Kay who recognizes Erec from afar, not the other way around, as in Chrétien's text:

"Erec recognized the seneschal and the arms and the horse, but Kay did not recognize him, for on his armor appeared no identifiable markings" (86). In Chrétien's Erec, Kay addresses Erec as

he would to any stranger in a formal, short, and businesslike tone, without any hint of deception:
“I want to know who you are and where you’re from” (86).

In contrast to Chrétien, Hartmann intensifies the figure’s negative traits. Kay is slipping further away from the honorable, straightforward warrior of Celtic tradition. Kay is now modern, employing deception and finesse in an attempt at greater fame:

alsus was im gedâht:
hete er in ze hove braht,
daz er danne wolde sagen,
er hete im die wunde geslagen
und er solde gefangen sîn.
dar an wart volleclîche schîn
daz diu werlt nie gewan
daheinen seltsæmern man. (4629, 56-57, 4630-4635)

(Kei was thinking thus: if he brought him to court he would say that he caused his wounds and captured him. From this it was perfectly apparent that the world had never seen a stranger man.)
[107]

There is a definite sense in Chrétien’s text of Kay’s motivations: “I can clearly see that you are wounded and injured. Take my lodgings this night! If you will come with me, I’ll see to it that you are richly treated, honoured, and cared for, for you have need of rest.” (86). In Hartmann’s adaptation of this scene, he transforms the depiction of Kay’s behavior after his defeat. The French author writes: “Kay took the horse and remounted; he came to the king’s tent and told him the truth, keeping nothing hidden” (87). Here, Kay is straightforward about his defeat, and humble. Hartmann’s Kay is more politically aware and cunning:

Keiîn hin ze hofe reit,
und twanc in des sîn wârheit
daz ers doch niht verdagete,
wan daz er rehte sagete
sîn schmelîchez mære,
wiez im ergangen wære,
und gap dem schaden solhen gelimph
daz man gar vür einen schimph
sîne schande vervie

und man sîn ungespottet lie. (4836-4845)

(Kei rode to court, and his honesty forced him not to keep quiet but to tell truthfully the shameful story of what had happened to him, and he told his misfortune in such a pleasing way that his disgrace was taken as a joke and he was not ridiculed.) [109]

Hartmann turns Kay into a skilled manipulator. He tells the story in such a way that he deflects criticism and humiliation, thus maintaining his image and position at Arthur's court. The political side of Kay reflects his concern for his own personal gain, not the court's. He is a seneschal who, like the knights who ride out on adventure, puts his own interests above those of the court.

Next, Hartmann takes the opportunity to elaborate on the seneschal's deficiencies, disparaging him yet again:

sîn herze was gevieret:
eteswenne gezieret
mit grôzen triuwen
und daz in begunde riuwen
allez daz er unz her ie
zunrechte begie,
alsô daz er vor valsche was
lûter sam ein spiegelglas
und daz er sich huote
mit werken und muote
daz er immer missetæte.
des was er unstæte,
wan ddar nach kam im der tac
daz er deheiner triuwen enphlac.
sô  nwold  in niht gen iegen,
swaz er valsches gev iegen
mit allem vlize kunde
mit werken und mit munde:
daz riet elli  s n ger.
dar zuo s  was er
k en  an etel chem tage,
dar n ch ein werltzage.
diz w ren zw ene twerhe site:
d  swachet  er sich mite,
daz er den liuten allen
muoste missevalen

und nieman was ze guotę erkant.
von sînem valsche er was genant
Kein der quâtspreche. (4635-4664)

(His heart was divided into four parts: sometimes adorned with very great loyalty so that he regretted all the unjust acts he had ever done. Thus he was freer of deceit than a mirror and took care in his deeds and thoughts never to commit a misdeed. But he was inconstant, for afterward the time came when he did not trouble himself with any kind of loyalty. Then he was not satisfied with whatever deceit he could very zealously commit with his actions or his words. Every desire aimed at this. In addition, on some days he was brave, on others the world's greatest coward. These were two sides lying at odds, and in this way he dishonored himself so that he displeased everyone, and no one considered him good. Because of his deceitfulness he was called Kei Bad Mouth.) [107]

In this excursus, Hartmann further reinforces the idea of the unredeemable, deceitful rogue at court. Although he defends Kay for a moment, calling him *küene*, it seems this is an attempt to stay within the boundaries set by Chrétien and also justify Kay's existence at court, which is already quite problematic, given the courtly world he inhabits. Primarily, Hartmann's digression intensifies the contrast between the ignoble Kay and the idealistic court, personified by Gawein.

Kay appears once more in arguably the most problematic scene in Erec, in which Gawein accomplishes with words what Kay could not with force – lure Erec to Arthur's court. What must be examined and what will help explain why Kay is treated so harshly is the way in which Erec is brought to court by Gawein. After hearing of Erec's prowess as a knight, Arthur asks Gawein and Kay to track him down and lead him to court. The two agree and in short order they catch up to him. Erec, however, resists riding to court, bringing out the deceitful side in Gawein that one would sooner expect from Kay. Gawein explains his plan to his companion:

“rîte drâte dînen wec
und sage daz Êrec
niht erwinden welle.
sus hân ich an im, geselle,
uns erdâht einen list
der doch nû der wægest ist.
sagę im, wellę er in gesehen,
daz müeze alsô geschehen

als ich dir wol gesagen kan.
hie� inz rûmen von dan
dâ er lît in dem walde,
und daz er sich balde
vür mache ûf den wec
dâ der ritter Êrec
jenhalp ûz rîten sol.” (4994-5008)

(“ride quickly on your way and report that Erec will not turn back. Therefore, my friend, I have thought of a scheme regarding him that is most advantageous for us. Tell the king that if he wants to see Erec things must happen as I tell you. Ask him to move from where he is in the forest and head out quickly to where the knight Erec will ride out on the other side of the forest.”) [110]

Gawein’s ploy succeeds and Erec, realizing he has been duped, complains: “You have not done right by me, Lord Gawein” (111). Gawein then uses his finesse and provides a rationale for his deception: “For if I have troubled you, I only did it with good intentions” (111). Instead of drawing scorn from Hartmann, Gawein’s offense is glossed over without comment. It appears that because of the manner in which Gawein achieves his ambitions, the actual deception itself is irrelevant. Telling Erec that his action was done *durch guot* is true insofar as Gawein and Arthur are concerned, but not Erec. It appears from Gawein’s words that it is the outwardness of a person and his behavior that holds currency in courtly society, not the inner self, which points to a certain shallow, hypocritical side of the court. This is the one serious sticking point in Hartmann’s text in which his words send a confusing message that do not support Gottfried’s opinion on the clarity of his writing.

Iwein

Hartmann radically reworks Chrétien’s Kay in his final Arthurian romance. As in Erec, the seneschal assumes a negative identity, but plays a more critical role by providing an impetus for Iwein’s adventure, functioning as court critic, as pointed out by Richard Lawson: “King Arthur’s court, as well as the king and queen themselves, are perceived, chiefly by Sir Kay, as

flawed emblems of perfection, as creatures of ritual rather than of effective human sympathy, and unworthy of emulation.”

As in Chrétien, Hartmann begins his tale at King Arthur’s court with a celebration. In his description of the court, however, one recognizes a significant departure from Chrétien’s text in the polarization between a blissful, idyllic courtly world and the base seneschal:

mänlich im die vreude nam
der in dô aller beste gezam.
dise sprâchen wider diu wîp,
dise banecten den lîp,
dise tanzten, dise sungen,
.....
Gâwein ahte umbe wâfen,
Keiî legte sich slâfen
ûf den sal under in:
ze gemache ân êre stuont sîn sin. (63-67, 73-76)

(each person did what appealed to him most. Some conversed with women, some took walks, some danced, others sang. . . . Gawein saw to his weapons, while Kei, who looked to his own comfort more than to honor, lay down to sleep among the people in the hall.) [Lawson 238]

In just a few lines, Hartmann manages to do several things to strip from Kay any credibility as critic, warrior or seneschal. As Arthur’s seneschal, one of Kay’s primary duties is to protect the king and queen. By portraying him as a loafing, self-centered deadbeat, Hartmann reduces Kay from the ignoble but diligent, almost obsessed servant one recognizes in other Arthurian romances to the status of being a “hanger-on” who feeds off Arthur’s generosity. To further debase Kay, he describes him as sleeping “among the people in the hall,” implying that he belongs among the commoners. Hartmann goes even further to emphasize Kay’s position in Arthur’s world as an outsider by his intentional placement of Kay away from the “inner circle”: “Four knights had sat down outside the wattle wall: Dodines, and Gawein, Segremors and Iwein. The ill-bred Kay was also lying nearby” (236). Chrétien’s version reads: “At the entrance to his chamber were Dodinel and Sagremor, and Kay and my lord Gawain”(295). Hartmann’s Kay is a

marginalized outsider and turned into a foil for the likes of Gawein and other “honorable” knights.

Once Hartmann concludes his survey of the court, the action opens with Kalogrenant acknowledging the queen. A similar spat between Kay and Kalogrenant occurs as in Chrétien’s text, but Hartmann decides to put the seneschal in his place by developing the queen into a much stronger figure and Kay into a man who cow-tows when push comes to shove. The queen reacts to Kay’s outburst at Kalogrenant, preaching at him and showing spite toward her subject:

“Keiû, daz ist dîn site,
und entschadest miemen mê dâ mite
danne dû dir selbem tuost,
daz du den iemer hazzen muost
dem dehein êre geschihet.
.....
Dune hetest diz gesprochen,
dû waerest benamen zebrochen;
und waere daz, weiz got, vil wol,“ (137-141, 153-156)

(“Kei, that is just like you. You harm no one more than yourself when you always feel obliged to be jealous of someone who is being honored in one way or another. . . . If you had not spoken as you just did, you would have actually burst – which God knows, would be a very good thing.”) [238-239]

Instead of brushing her criticism to the side as in Chrétien (“My lady, if we are not better for your company, make sure we are no worse for it”) (296), Hartmann’s Kay at first grumbles at the queen (“Lady, that is enough. In fact you have said too much”) (239) and then humbles himself before her (“I willingly accept, as I should, your dominion and your discipline. . . . If I was wrong I am ready to submit to Kalogrenant’s pardon”) (238). Hartmann then adds extended insight into Kay’s nature via a sharp reply from Kalogrenant, a passage one does not find in Chrétien’s text (“no one’s mouth speaks other than his heart desires, for whomever your tongue dishonors, your heart is responsible. . . . No matter who tries to teach you, it is a wasted effort, because you will not change your habits for anyone”) (239). Kay responds in an unfamiliar

manner: “My lady should not excuse you from telling your story, because it wouldn’t be right for all of them to be punished along with me” (239). This exchange between Kay, the queen and Kalogrenant is significant for our understanding of Hartmann’s view of the court. There is not a chance he will allow Kay to push the queen around. In fact, Hartmann makes sure Kay buckles under to the queen, which creates a sense of hierarchically-imposed harmony at court, in which the court servant ultimately scrapes before the nobility, ensuring that everyone occupies his proper place.

The humility Kay demonstrates, however, lasts only so long and, once Kalogrenant finishes his tale of misfortune, Iwein promises to avenge his cousin, evoking a sardonic response from Kay, which prompts more dispute and bickering. What is important to note about Hartmann’s Iwein as he sets off to restore Kalogrenant’s honor is the amount of angst he feels in the face of Kay’s mockery if he fails. Chrétien only slightly alludes to the mockery Iwein fears: “if he left he would be shamed, for Kay and the other knights would never believe that he had accomplished what he had”(313-314). The German author, in contrast, illustrates the extent to which Kay weighs upon Iwein’s conscious:

Do gedâht her Îwein, ob er in
niht erslüege od vienge,
daz ez im danne ergienge
als im her Keiû gehiez,
der niemens ungespottet liez:
.....
so spraecher im an sîn êre. (1062-1066, 1071)

(Sir Iwein thought that if he didn’t kill or capture him, it would turn out as Kei predicted, who spared no one his mockery. . . . Kei would deny him his honors) [248]

Later, after Iwein slays the knight and is inside the dead knight’s castle, he again is tormented by thoughts of Kay:

doch gedâht er an einen schaden,

daz er niht überwunde
den spot den er vunde,
sô er sînen gelingen
mit deheinen schînlichen dingen
ze hove erziugen möhte,
.....
Er vohrte eine schalkheit:
er weste wol daz Keiû
in niemer gelieze vrî
vor spotte und vor leide. (1521-27, 1530-33)

(He was still mindful of one disadvantage he was laboring under: namely, that he could not overcome the mockery he would find at court when he couldn't produce any plausible proof of success. . . . Kei would never stop mocking him and harming him, he feared being the victim of a trick.) [253]

Although Hartmann distances Kay from the court in his portrayal of the seneschal as outsider ([Kei] lay down to sleep among the people in the hall) and underling to the queen, Iwein's intense worry about Kay shows that this marginalization is not total and that Kay does exert some influence at court.

The next substantial alteration of Chrétien's text follows shortly after Gawein's disapproving speech, as Arthur and his retinue reach the fountain where they are to undertake their adventure. Kay battles Iwein, who earlier defeated the knight of the fountain and has now assumed his post. As is customary, Kay is defeated. Chrétien's text offers some support for Kay after his defeat: "Some among them were pleased by this, and many others were keen to say: Ha! Ha!, Look at how you, a man who mocks others, are lying there now! Yet it is only right you should be pardoned this time, because it's never happened to you before" (323). Hartmann paints an entirely different picture, stripping Kay of any redeeming value save his fearlessness:

Noch lac der herre Keiû dort
gar ze spotte in allen:
wander was gevallen
ûf den lîp vil sêre.
Und waere ein selch unêre
an einem biderben gesehen

der im vil manigiu was geschehen,
 der sich lasters kunde schamen,
 der haete benamen
 die liute gevlohen iemer mê.
 Ez tete im an dem lîbe wê,
 ez was im anders sam ein bast:
 wandez hete der schanden last
 sînen rücke überladen.
 Ez enkund im niht geschaden
 an sînen vreuden alsô
 daz er iender unvrô
 gegen einem hâre wurde dervon:
 wan er was lasters wol gewon.
 Sus hete der strîte ende
 mit sîner missewende
 und mit lasterlîchem schalle. (2624-2642)

(Sir Kei, having taken a very hard fall, was still lying there, to everyone's amusement. If such a disgrace had been visited – as it often had on Kei – on a proper man, with any real sense of shame, the man would have fled forever. Kei's body hurt, but everything was nothing to him, for the weight of disgrace had already burdened his back. But because he was used to disgrace, he wasn't the least bit unhappy about his plight. So the conflict ended with his misfortune, and loud laughter and disgrace.) [265]

Kay's last appearance in Iwein occurs midway through the text, just after the queen is carried off by an unknown knight who dupes Arthur into agreeing to grant him anything he wishes -- in this case the queen. Kay and the court set off to win back the queen and he immediately proves himself to be a pompous loudmouth:

“Weizgot, wester mich hie,
 ern waere her ze hove nie
 ûf sus getâne rede komen:

 Ich getrûw im wol gestrîten:
 ich eine bin im ein her.

 Ir muget wol alle hie bestân.” (4647-49, 4656-57, 4661)

(“By God, had he known I was here, he would never have come to court with a request like that. . . . I'm sure I can beat him, for I alone will seem to him like an army. . . . You [the court] can all just stay here.”)[286]

Not surprisingly, Kay battles the knight and loses, affording Hartmann the opportunity to savor the seneschal's defeat like never before. This is Hartmann's parting shot at Kay, which represents an addition to Chrétien's text:

mit grôzen kreften stach er in
enbor ûz dem satel hin,
daz im ein ast den helm gevienc
und bî der gurgeln gehienc.
und wan daz in sîn geverte
der übele tiuvel nerte,
sô waer er dâ benamen tôt:
doch leit er hangende nôt.
er wart doch leider ledec sît:
doch hanc er da unz and die zît
daz er vor in allen leit
laster und arbeit.
Der naechste was Kâlogrenant
der in dâ hangende vant
niht anders wans als einen diep. (4673-4686)

("[the knight] thrust Kay up out of his saddle so that his helmet got stuck on a branch, while he himself was hanging by his neck. He would have died there, except his friend, the devil, saved him. He did suffer a lot, though, hanging there. Although he was later unfortunately freed, he hung there long enough for all to see him in misery and distress. The next was Kalogrenant, who found him hanging there like a common thief.") [286]

Conclusion

Based on his treatment of Kay, it is obvious that Hartmann attempts to polarize and create a black and white figure in an attempt to create order and deliver clear cut messages to the reader. Kay is a target, a whipping post for the honorable, a villain who ultimately gets what he deserves. Hartmann consistently manipulates Chrétien's text in order to reduce Kay to a rogue, someone who has little place at court and little honor. He becomes the outsider and foil to the idyllic, courtly society that Hartmann actively promotes. It is also worth noting that Hartmann's world is much more punitive than Chrétien's. It is not enough that Kay falls; he must be dragged through the mud. His loss is to be savored. There is a certain sense of "an eye for an eye, a tooth

for a tooth” in Hartmann’s writing. It is suggested by Robert Lewis that the final scene in which Kay is hanging from a tree is based on the biblical figure Absalom (II Samuel 18:9-15) who suffers a similar fate (61). Hartmann’s portrayal of Kay is just another example of his intent on delivering a coherent, moralistic message to his audience. Hartmann needed a clear foil for courtly society and he found it in Kay.

CHAPTER 5

WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH

Wolfram von Eschenbach, writing a generation after Hartmann, takes the opportunity to radically rework the figure Kay in his version of Parzival (an adaptation and completion of Chrétien's Perceval). In contrast to Hartmann's clear depiction of Kay as an incorrigible trouble maker, Wolfram will seize upon the opportunity to take Arthur's problematic seneschal and turn his negative traits into positives. As in Chrétien's Perceval, Kay will function as *agent-provocateur*, court critic, and custodian of the court honor. Instead of following Hartmann and taking a seemingly unredeemable person and using him as a mere foil to the nobility, however, Wolfram decides to turn Kay into a useful aid who battles against corruption and "hangers-on" at a court gone out of control. It is Kay who will try to correct the problems at court in Wolfram's adaptation. In order to accomplish this, Wolfram will add to and delete a healthy amount of detail from Chrétien's poem and provide Kay with a rationale for his actions. This rationale will furnish some justification for his more troubling actions and expose the flaws of the courtly society around him.

Parzival at Court

Kay first appears when Parzival arrives at the court of King Arthur. Still an unknown, Parzival strides up to Arthur and immediately asks to be granted knighthood:

“wolte et got, wan waer daz wâr!
der wîle dunket mich ein jâr,
daz ich niht ritter wesen sol:
daz tuot mir wîrs denne wol.
nune s û met mich niht mêre,
pflêgt mîn nâch ritters êre“ (149, 11-16)

(“God grant that that is really so! The time seems to me a year since I was supposed to become a knight, and that is more bad than good. Now do not make me wait any longer, grant me the honor of knighthood!”) [Mustard and Passage 83]

Arthur promises Parzival that he shall be granted knighthood, but not until the next morning so that Parzival be properly fitted for the ceremony:

“Du bist wol sô gehiure,
rîch an koste stiure
wirt dir mîn gâbe undertân.
dêswâr ich solz ungerne lân.“ (149, 19-23)

(“You are so pleasing that my gift to you will be of precious worth. Indeed I will not fail to do it.”) [83]

After Parzival refuses Arthur’s generosity, telling him that he wants the armor of the red knight, the same knight who is holding the court hostage and who claims Arthur’s kingdom as his own, Kay springs into action, giving Arthur this advice:

“ir wært ein künec unmilte,
ob iuch sölher gâbe bevilte.
gebtz im dar, sprach Keye sân,
und lât in zuo zim ûf den plân.
sol iemen bringen uns den kopf,
hie helt diu geisel, dort der topf:
lâtz kint in umbe trîben:
sô lobt manz vor den wîben.
ez muoz noch dicke bâgen
und sölhe schanze wâgen.
Ine sorge umb ir deweders lebn:
man sol hunde umb ebers houbet gebn.“ (150, 11-23)

(“A generous king *you* would be, if a gift like that were too great for you!” said Keie then. “Let him have it, and let him go out there and face him on the meadow! As long as someone has to bring us the goblet, here is a string and there is a top: let the boy do the spinning. He will be praised for it among the women. He will often have to risk quarrels and take such chances, and I don’t care about either of their lives. You have to lose a dog or two to get a boars head”) [84]

The first words out of Kay’s mouth reflect the mentality of a politically motivated ministerial, someone who can manipulate: “Die Funktion der Keie-Figur dient hier nur der Demonstration praktischer, politisch-gesellschaftlicher Kritik Wolframs, hinter der

geschichtliche Wirklichkeit sichtbar wird” (Haupt 53-54). Kay views Parzival as a means to an end, a way of averting a potentially disastrous situation – the chance that the red knight may actually take possession of Arthur’s kingdom. The seneschal uses his position as advisor and his relationship to Arthur to his advantage, thereby putting his king in a tough position. Just as he forces Arthur’s hand early on at court in Lancelot, he again manipulates his king. Arthur Groos explains: “Kay turns his anticipated mockery on the king, daring him to refuse and risk being considered ungenerous” (76). Kay’s advice, however ethically questionable it may be, is not entirely unjustified or callous nor is his reaction to be condemned. Firstly, Parzival is a newcomer to the court, still a *gast* in Kay’s view. He is young, poorly dressed, and his understanding of courtly customs is lacking, which is evidenced by his demands to be knighted within a moment of arriving at court. Haupt describes Parzival’s entry into court as “seltsam” and his effect on courtly society as a threat to the “Würde und den zeremoniellen Ernst des Hofes”(24). In light of this, Kay’s position as court seneschal and Parzival’s *gast* status, it is possible to acquit Kay of any wrongdoing and actually cast doubt upon the legitimacy of the court. Not only has Kay exposed Arthur as a pushover, but the court itself as a collection of cowards who would rather someone else do their fighting than risk life and limb in battle. Contemporary behavior of this kind is attested by Peter of Blois (d. 1204): “They have war scenes and knightly battles painted on their saddles and shields, so that through these imaginary visions they might enjoy the battles they do not dare engage in or watch in real life” (qtd. in Bumke 312). In addition, given the ease with which Parzival is promised knighthood, the legitimacy of the institution is called into question. Clearly, political expediency and self-preservation come before courtly virtues in Arthur’s court and Kay, as administrator to a battle-

shy court, recognizes an excellent opportunity to resolve Arthur's problems by using an unknown who has violated the dignity of the court.

Kay's advice is heeded (fulfilling his structural significance to many Arthurian romances as *agent-provocateur*) and, as Parzival rides out to battle the red knight, Cunneware, a maiden of the court, keeps her promise to laugh out loud when she gazes upon the man who will achieve the highest honor and fame among all knights. Kay, showing a decided lack of *mâze*, slaps her to the ground and scolds her for her outburst:

“iwerd werdem prîse
ist gegeben ein smæhiu letze:
ich pin sîn vângec netze,
ich soln wider in iuch smiden
daz irs enpfîndet ûf den liden.
ez ist dem künge Artûs
ûf sînen hof unt in sîn hûs
sô manec werder man geriten,
durch den ir lachen hât vermiten,
und lachet nu durch einen man
der niht mit ritters fuore kann. “ (152, 2-12)

(“Your noble reputation is brought to a disgraceful end, but I am the net that catches it, and I'm going to pound it back into you till you feel it in every limb. To King Arthur's court and household has come riding so many a worthy man for whom you failed to laugh, and now you laugh for a man who has no knightly breeding at all.”) [85]

Damage is done to the seneschal's reputation through his attack on Cunneware, which Wolfram adopts from his source. But the German poet adds to the depiction of this scene a rationale for Kay's action in order to mitigate the damage caused by the abuse and allow logical, honest criticism of the court. Kay begins his defense by pointing to the fact that Cunneware has shown the young, unproven and awkward Parzival such high esteem instead of one of the many seasoned, battle-hardened knights who has been in Cunneware's presence before. In Kay's view, her laughter (tantamount to praise) is insulting to him and all other knights and violates the sanctity of the court. In Kay's mind, what Cunneware demonstrates in her outburst of laughter is

not only poor judgment, but also a lack of *mâze*, an extremely important attribute in courtly society, especially for women: “Noble *mâze* ennobles a person and his reputation. Nothing that the sun ever shone upon is as blessed as the woman who devotes herself and her life to *mâze*” (qtd. in Bumke 303). As problematic as Kay’s slap is the fact that no one comes to Cunneware’s defense and actually challenges Kay. This lack of action reinforces the notion that the court is full of hangers-on and idlers led by a weak king and also sheds light on Kay’s powerful position at court. As Albrecht Classen notes: “Keie demonstriert allerdings in dieser Szene eine erstaunliche politische Machtposition, die es ihm erlaubt, eine so hochgestellte Fürstin in aller Öffentlichkeit und ohne, daß ihm jemand in die Arme fallen würde, körperlich zu bestrafen” (388).

After his rough handling of Cunneware, Kay moves on to Antanor, the court jester, who comes to the maiden’s defense:

“got weiz, hêr scheneschlant,
daz Cunnewâre de Lâlant
durch den knappen ist zerbert,
iwer freude es wirt verzert
noch von sîner hende,
ern sî nie sô ellende.” (153, 1-6)

(“God knows, Sir Seneschal, that Cunneware de Lalant is being thrashed because of that lad, but by his hand your own joy will yet be destroyed, however far he may go.”) [85]

Predictably, Kay responds to Antanor with anger and assaults him, but instead of simply attacking the fool, Kay preempts the assault by again providing justification for his action:

“sit iuwer erste rede mir drout,
ich waene irs wenic iuch gevrouet.
sin brat wart galunet,
mit slegen vil grunet
dem witzhaften toren
mit viusten in sin oren:
daz tet Kaye sunder twal.” (153, 7-13)

(“Since your first words are a threat to me, I think they will bring you little joy yourself!’ Then his hide got tanned, and fists whispered a lot of things into that clever fool’s ears: this is what Kay did with no delay.’”) [85]

By furnishing a sound argument for his behavior, Wolfram not only deflects some of the criticism away from his seneschal, he also is able to mitigate the image of Kay as a bully who picks fights with the harmless and innocent. The bully image is certainly what one is left with when examining Kay’s abusive behavior towards Cunneware and the court jester in Chrétien’s Perceval: “After slapping the maiden he turned back and saw a court jester standing beside a fireplace; he kicked him into the roaring fire” (394).

One important question to ask is: what does Kay hope to accomplish with his beating of both Cunneware and Antanor? Beyond the personal insult he must have felt, having been snubbed by Cunneware in favor of a young and green Parzival, Kay’s response to both the maiden and the court jester are central in understanding what drives the seneschal more than anything else: his doggedness in carrying out the duties of seneschal and trying, as best he can, to maintain *order* at court. Arthur’s court is his world, his livelihood and he will not allow anyone, even the defenseless Cunneware, to debase the court with what he deems false praise.

Kingrun and Clamide

In Kay’s next appearance, he demonstrates considerable courtliness and proves himself a reliable and dutiful seneschal as he addresses Kingrun, whom Parzival has recently defeated and sent to Arthur’s court. Wolfram takes the opportunity to present Kay in his element, doing what he does best, overseeing the court:

“âvoy wie mangel Bertûn
hât enschumpfieret dîn hant,
du Clâmidês scheneschlant!
wirt mir dîn meister nimmer holt,
dîns amts du doch geniezen solt:
Der kezzel ist uns undertân,

mir hie unt dir ze Brandigân.
hilf mir durch dîne werdekeit
Cunnewâren hulde umb krapfen breit.“ (V.206, 24 - 207, 2)

(“Alas! how many a Briton your hand has conquered, you, Clamide’s steward! Your captor may never favor me, but you shall enjoy your office all the same, for the stew kettle is subject to us, to me here and to you in Brandigan. Help me win the valor to win Cunneware’s favor with good large donuts!”) [112]

Instead of lashing out at Kingrun, Kay uses him to help cool down the fires raging at court. This is yet another opportunity for Wolfram to present Kay as a dutiful servant, always aware of the political ramifications of his actions. Again, Wolfram reduces the amount of negativity in Kay by providing explanation for the seneschal’s questionable behavior toward Cunneware and showing an honorable side of Kay in his suggestions to Cunneware about Clamide:

“ frouwe, dirre man,
swaz der hât gein iu getân,
des ist er vaste underzogen.
doch wæne ich des, erst ûf gelogen.
ich tetz durch hoflîchen site
und wolt iuch hân gebezzert mite:
dar umbe hân ich iwern haz.
iedoch wil ich iu râten daz,
heizt entwâpen disen gevangen:
in mac hie stêns erlangen.“ (218, 21-30)

(“Lady, whatever this man has done in your presence, he was downright forced to it. But I think he has been misled. What I did, I did for the sake of courtly usage, and hoped to improve you thereby. I earned your hatred from it. But I would suggest you have this captor’s armor removed. He may find this standing here a bit tedious.”) [118]

Kay’s lecture softens the hard blows he gave the maiden by portraying a dignified knight who wants to “better” those around him. Wolfram dampens the problematic aspects of the seneschal’s abusive behavior by justifying his brutality or, at the very least, deflecting the guilt away from Kay and onto his victims. Kay’s lecture also illustrates, once again, the preoccupation that he has with maintaining order at court. He slapped Cunneware to restore his view of the ideal court.

Kay's preoccupation with order and is witnessed again when Cunneware's brother, Orilus, is served at Arthur's court:

Kei bat Kingrûnen
Orilus dienn an sîner stat.
er kundez wol, den ers dâ bat:
wander hetes vil getân
vor Clâmidê ze Brandigân.
Kay durch daz sîn dienst liez:
unsælde ins fürsten swester hiez
ze sêre âlûnn mit eime stabe:
durch zuht entweich er diens abe.
ouch was diu schulde niht verkorn
von der meide wol geborn.
doch schuof er spîse dar genuoc:
Kingrûnz für Orilusen truoc. (278, 28-30, 2791-10)

(Kei asked Kingrun to serve Orilus in his stead. Kingrun could easily do it, for he had often done such service for Clamide in Brandigan. Kay gave up his office because his evil star had caused him to thrash the duke's sister too roundly with his staff. So for courtesy's sake he withdrew. Besides, the high-born maiden had not forgiven him this offense. But he prepared food in abundance and Kingrun served it to Orilus.) [151]

Wolfram again illustrates Kay's preoccupation with maintaining court order. Kay realizes what might happen if Cunneware's brother spots him, therefore he sends Kingrun in his place, thus heading off a possible confrontation that would disturb the court.

Blood Drop Scene

In perhaps the most significant scene for Kay, Wolfram revises Chrétien's text yet again to dampen Kay's aggressive nature and, in an attempt to gloss over the defeat Kay suffers at the hands of Parzival, Wolfram, in a long excursus on Kay, turns the foremost moment of humiliation and loss of honor and status in the seneschal's existence into a moment of celebration. The scene begins with the exiled Parzival lost in contemplation at drops of blood he sees in the snow, which remind him of his wife and home. He has defeated Sagremor's (one of Arthur's knights) a moment before. This precipitates Kay's attempt at restoring honor to Arthur's

court, which fails. A critical difference to note between Chrétien's and Wolfram's versions is Kay's mocking commentary about Sagremor's defeat in which he is knocked off his horse by Parzival: "Fair sir, see how Sagremor is returning! He's got the knight by the bridle and is bringing him back against his will" (Chrétien 433). In contrast to Chrétien, Wolfram presents a noble, dutiful knight acting as informant: "The brave Keie straightaway brought this news to the King, how Segramors had been unhorsed" (157). Because of the dignified manner in which Kay handles the matter, Wolfram can now avoid Arthur's reproach to Kay found in Chrétien's text: "it is not good for you to mock gentlemen in this manner. Go yourself, so we can see how you would do better than he" (433). Wolfram turns the scene around entirely, portraying Kay as the brave one striving to uphold the honor of the court, pleading his case for a chance to battle and maintaining the harmonious relationship that Kay and Arthur enjoy:

"mir tuot immer wê,
 sol ers genozzen scheiden hin.
 ob ich iu sô wirdec pin,
 lât mich versuochen wes er ger,
 sît er mit ûf gerihtem sper
 dort habt vor iwerm wîbe.
 nimmer ich belîbe
 in iwerem dienste mêre:
 tavelrunder hât unêre,
 ob manz im niht bezîte wert.
 ûf unsern prîs sîn ellen zert.
 nu gebt mir strîtes urloup.
 wær wir alle blint oder toup,
 ir soltz im weren: des wære zît." (290, 8-21)

("I shall always regret it if he gets away without being punished. If you think me worthy, let me attempt what he wants, since there he waits with spear erect, and that in the presence of your wife. I can remain no longer in your service, and the round table will be dishonored if he is not checked in time. His challenge is a threat to our fame. Give me leave to fight. If we were all blind and deaf, you would have to defy him yourself—and that very soon.") [157]

Kay continues with his courtliness and addresses Parzival in an appropriate manner:

"hêrre, sît iu sus geschach,

Daz ir den künec gelastert hât,
welt ir mir volgen, so ist mîn rât
unt dunct mich iwer bestez heil,
nemt iuch selben an ein brackenseil
unt lât iuch für in ziehen.
iren megt mir niht enpflihen,
ich bringe iuch doch betwungen dar:
sô nimt man iwer unsanfte war.“ (293, 29 - 294, 1-8)

(“Sir since it has so happened that you have insulted the King, if you will take my advice, I think your best course is to put a hound’s leash about your neck and let yourself be led like that before him. You cannot escape me, I shall take you there by force in any case, and then they will deal with you in a rather unpleasant fashion.”) [159]

In this exchange, one recognizes again the conscious attempt by Wolfram at making Kay into a courtlier knight. Gone is the quick-tempered, battle-hungry seneschal who addresses Parzival in such curt terms in the Chrétien’s romance: “Vassal, vassal, come to the king! You’ll come, upon my word, or you’ll pay for it dearly” (434). When Parzival ignores Kay, Kay changes register, addressing him with *du*, and his quick temper starts coming out, showing that the seneschal has a limited amount of *mâze* compared to a knight like Gawain who never angers. Kay smacks Parzival on the helmet, trying to draw him into a joust, illustrating the desire for Kay to prove his mettle and win honor. Of course, he is defeated by Parzival:

“du muost wachen.
âne lînlachen
wirt dir dîn slâfen hie benant:
ez zilt al anders hie mîn hant:
ûf den snê du wirst geleit.
der den sac von der mûle treit,
wolt man in sô bliuwen,
in möhte lazheit riuwen.” (294, 13-20).

(“Wake up! You shall sleep, but not between sheets. I am aiming at something quite different—on the snow you shall find your bed. Even the beast that carries the sack from the mill would rue his indolence if he got such a beating as I have given you now.”)[159]

Wolfram's Excursus on Kay

Kay's defeat, in both Chrétien and Hartmann, represents a moment of courtliness triumphing over ignobility. After editing out a considerable amount of damaging material and supporting Kay up to this point, Wolfram defends *his* (Wolfram shows his defensive nature regarding Parzival in his challenge to Hartmann (143, 21-144, 4). One gets the sense that Wolfram has decided to take Keie under his wing. His excursus appears to be a response to Hartmann's in Erec, in which Hartmann rips into Keie) seneschal at a moment when all seems lost and Kay has nowhere to go but down:

küene liute solten Keien nôt
klagen: sîn manheit im gebôt
genendeclîche an manegen strît.
man saget in manegen landen wît
daz Keie Artûs scheneschalt
mit siten wære ein ribbalt:
des sagent in mîniu mære blôz:
er was der werdekeit genôz.
swie kleine ich des die volge hân,
getriwe und ellenthaft ein man
was Keie: des giht mîn munt.
ich tuon ouch mære von im kunt.
Artûses hof was ein zil,
dar kom vremder liute vil,
die werden unt die smæhen,
mit siten die wæhen,
Swelher partierens pflac,
der selbe Keien ringe wac:
an swem diu kurtôsîe
unt diu werde cumpânie
lac, den kunder êren,
sîn dienst gein im kêren.
ich gihe von im der mære,
er was ein merkære.
er tet vil rûhes willen schîn
ze scherme dem hêren sîn:
partierre und valsche diet,
von den werden er die schiet:
er was ir fuore ein strenger hagel,
noch scherpfer dan der bîn ir zagel.

seht, die verkêrten Keien prîs.
 der was manlîcher triwen wîs:
 vil hazzes er von in gewan.
 von Dûrgen fûrste Herman,
 etslîch dîn ingesinde ich maz,
 daz ûzgesinde hieze baz.
 dir wære och eines Keien nôt,
 sît wâriu milte dir gebôt
 sô manecvalten anehanc,
 etswâ smæhlîch gedranc
 unt etswâ werdez dringen.
 des muoz hêr Walther singen
 «guoten tac, bœs unde guot.»
 swâ man solhen sanc nu tuot,
 des sint die valschen gêret.
 Kei hets in niht gelêret,
 noch hêr Heinrich von Rîspach. (296, 13-30, 297, 1-30)

(Courageous men should lament Kay's misfortune. His manly spirit sent him bravely into many a fight. Far and wide it is said that Arthur's seneschal Kay was a rogue. My tale acquits him of this charge and calls him honor's companion. Though few may agree with me—Kay was a brave and loyal man—this I do maintain. I will tell you more about him. Many strangers came to Arthur's court, seeking it as their goal, worthy and worthless alike. By those dapper manners who practiced trickery Kay was not impressed. But the man of courtesy who was an honest friend, him Kay could respect and was always ready to serve. I grant you, he was a carper. Yet the harshness which he displayed was for the protection of his lord. Tricksters and hypocrites he separated from the noble folk, and on them he descended like harsh hail, sharper than the sting of a bee's tail. You see, these are the ones who defamed Kay's name. He always practiced manly loyalty, yet from them he got only hate. Hermann prince of Thuringia, some of those I have seen residing in your house should better be residing out. You too could use a Kay, for your true generosity has brought you a motley following, in part a mean and worthless band, in part a noble throng. This is why Sir Walter sings, 'I greet you one and all, the base and the good.' Where such a song is sung, there false men are too highly honored. Kay would not have allowed this, nor Sir Heinrich of Rispach either.) [160-161]

In order to turn Kay's defeat into a cause for celebration, Wolfram realizes he must point out the flaws at court. He thus abruptly refocuses attention away from Kay's defeat and toward the problems that he encounters in his duties as seneschal, which lend credence to his actions and help diminish his character flaws. Not only does Wolfram save Kay's reputation by doing this, but this also affords him the opportunity to expose the problems he recognizes at court and wants to do something about. At the heart of the criticism is a statement about the type of men

who could be found at Arthur's court, the *werden* and the *smaehen*. Wolfram acknowledges that Arthur's court is far from perfect. There are lowlifes as well as courtly men and women in the mix, which necessitates the need for a man like Kay to maintain some sense of order and dignity at court. One obvious question that arises is, how is it that these *smaehen* find their way to court in the first place? Wolfram answers this in his assessment of prince Hermann of Thuringia's (his patron's) court, referencing the *milte* the good prince shows to virtually anyone who comes to court. This implies that Arthur is an overly generous king who is too easily taken advantage of. This comparison works again as a way of justifying and even promoting Kay's behavior in an imperfect court filled with far too many hangers-on.

Kay and Gawan

Kay demonstrates throughout Parzival that he is a brave, straightforward, though not especially refined (i.e. courtly) knight and servant to Arthur. As mentioned previously, part of Kay's behavior is a response to those around him who are not courtly and therefore do not deserve to be treated with *mâze*. It is in the relationship between Kay and Gawan that the two worlds both men represent are seen most clearly and provides an opportunity for more criticism directed at the courtly world. Kay's primary function in respect to Gawan is to criticize and call into question all that Gawan represents, thus providing a foil for the ideal knight.

The conflict between the two men begins after Kay is knocked off his horse by Parzival and Gawan decides not to avenge Kay in battle, but to approach Parzival and lead him to Arthur in a courteous manner. Kay disparages Gawan for not avenging him, claiming that Gawan is far too "well-born" to avenge him. Kay needles Gawan about the amount of courtliness (i.e. cowardice) that Gawan possesses, referring to his friend as being the son of Arthur's sister and

reminding him that had it been the other way around, there is no question that he would have battled for Gawain's honor:

“ir sît mîns hêrren swester suon:
möht ich iu dienst nu getuon,
als iwer wille gerte
dô mich got der lide werte!
sone hât mîn hant daz niht vermiten,
sine habe vil durch iuch gestriten:
ich tæte ouch noch, unt solt ez sîn.
nune klagt nimêr, lât mir den pîn.
iwer œheim, der künec hêr,
gewinnet nimmer sölhen Kayn mêr.
ir sît mir râch ze wol geborn:
het ab ir ein vinger dort verlorn,
dâ wâgte ich gegen mîn houbet.
seht ob ir mirz geloubet. “ (298, 15-28)

(“You are the son of my lord's sister. Would that I could still serve you as you wished! When by God's grace my limbs were whole, my hand never shirked from fighting often for you. I would do so if I still could. Now lament no longer and leave the pain to me. Your uncle, the noble King, will never find such a Kay again. You are too highly born to take revenge for me. But if you had lost even a finger there I would risk my head to avenge it.”) [162]

In Kay's “Celtic” view, the refinement and manners exhibited by Gawain come across as false and shallow tools used by those wanting honor and fame in a manner unbecoming to a knight.

The lack of willingness to fight in courtly society is reflected by Peter of Blois: “They carry beautifully gilded shields with them and are more intent on the booty of the enemy than on fighting him; the shields they bring back, so to speak, in a maidenly and untouched condition” (qtd. in Bumke 312). To Kay, a knight is fighter, someone willing to risk all in order to uphold the traditional principles of knighthood. Gawain is simply too averse to battle and too adept at maneuvering and playing the smooth-talking politician to be worthy of such fame.

Next, Kay antagonizes Gawain, telling him that if he goes out to fight Parzival, he will be defeated. Once again, Kay remarks about Gawain and his qualities being from his mother's side are made, suggesting that Gawain is too soft to battle the likes of Parzival:

“Och enist hie ninder frouwen hâr
weder sô mürwe noch sô clâr,
ez enwære doch ein veste bant
ze wern strîtes iwer hant.
swelch man tuot solhe diemuot schîn,
der êret ouch die muoter sîn:
vaterhalb solter ellen hân.
kêrt muoterhalp, hêr Gâwân:
sô wert ir swertes blicke bleich
und manlîcher herte weich.” (299, 3-13)

(“As for you, a single hair of a woman, be it ever so thin and fine, would be a chain strong enough to stay your hand from a fight. A man of such gentle demeanor is an honor to his mother indeed; bravery comes from the father’s side. Follow your mother, Sir Gawan, then you will turn pale at the flash of a sword and your manly strength will become soft.”) [162]

The aversion Kay demonstrates to these new ways reflects the ancient warrior mentality still latent in the seneschal. He is a knight who is out of place in this new and softened world. Arthur Groos maintains: “Kay seems especially uncomfortable with the new idealizing roles of women in courtly society and Arthur’s court in particular. Its most obvious manifestation is a hostility to the discourse of courtly love” (83). This observation rings especially true when we reflect on the Celtic tradition in Culhwch and Olwen in which Kay’s father remarks: “if there is any of me in your son, woman, his heart shall ever be cold; nor shall there be any warmth in his hands” (128-129).

Fittingly, in Kay’s final appearance in Parzival, he finds himself observing Gawan in all his glory, murmuring to himself about Gawan’s splendid entourage, doing his best to derogate the courtly knight and preserve the prestige of Arthur’s court, to which his fortunes are tied:

mîns hêrren swâger Lôt,
von dem was uns dehein nôt
ebenhîuz noch sunderrînges. (675, 7-9)

(“Lot, my lord’s brother-in-law, never tried to shame us, vying with us and setting up camp of his own.”) [353]

Here again, Kay functions as critic. Although he is clearly jealous of Gawain, Kay's "observations, however malicious, are not without a grain of truth. . . . Gawain is motivated to display his power over people and resources in a way which leads Kay at least to suspect a wish to compete with Arthur and thus alter his relationship with his lord and uncle." (Jones 67-68). Kay's commentary is a sad but fitting close to his literary life in the high medieval period. Just as the seneschal is defeated by Parzival with force and Gawain is able to lure Parzival to court with etiquette, Kay recognizes that he has been surpassed and left behind, holding onto what remains of his existence, never able to overcome his past and assume the skills requisite in courtly society to thrive. Cei is too ingrained in Kay.

Conclusion

Wolfram reshapes Chrétien's text and restores much of the dignity lost in the figure of Kay since his transition into Arthurian romance. As much as Hartmann intends Kay to fulfill the role of court rogue and act as a foil to courtly society, Wolfram staunchly defends Kay, holding him up to be the one man at court who is willing to stand up to the *smaehen* who have taken advantage of Arthur's *milte* and turned the court upside down. Kay is used by Wolfram to criticize the court in an attempt to change the court for the better. Haupt clarifies:

Dichtung will Realität verändern, bessern. Weil – zu Wolframs Zeit – die Schwäche der „höfischen“ Konzeption bereits offen zu Tage tritt, benutzt Wolfram die ‚Gelegenheit‘ der Kay-Figur zu einem Ansatz von Gesellschaftskritik. Das Truchseß-Amt Kays wird dabei idealisiert, weil es als Korrektiv fungieren soll in einer kritisch-realistisch gesehenen Gesellschaft. (92)

Kay still functions as *agent-provocateur*, but even in his most questionable actions (slapping of Cunneware) Wolfram limits the damage to his seneschal and casts doubt and blame on others (the court). Haupt uses the term *verbilligen* to describe how Wolfram reacts to Kay's offenses. Even in Kay's darkest hour, after his defeat at the hands of Parzival, Wolfram finds a way to

redeem the seneschal and bring back some of the glory Kay has lost in his transition from Celtic lore to Arthurian romance.

REFERENCES

Primary sources:

Chrétien De Troyes. "Erec and Enide." Trans. Carrelton W. Carroll. Arthurian Romances.
London: Penguin Books, 1991.

---. "The Knight of the Cart." Trans. William W. Kibler. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

---. "The Knight with the Lion." Trans. William W. Kibler. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

---. "The Story of the Grail." Trans. William W. Kibler. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

Gottfried von Strassburg. Tristan and Isolde. Trans. A.T. Hatto. Ed. Francis G. Gentry.
New York: Continuum, 1988.

Hartmann von Aue. Erec. (Middle High German and Modern Standard German) Trans. Thomas
Cramer. Frankfurt: Fischer, 2002.

---. "Erec." Trans. Kim Vivian. Arthurian Romances, Tales, and Lyric Poetry: The Complete
Works of Hartmann von Aue." University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2001.

---. "Iwein." Trans. Richard H. Lawson. Arthurian Romances, Tales, and Lyric Poetry: The
Complete Works of Hartmann von Aue." University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP,
2001.

---. Iwein. (Middle High German and Modern Standard English) Ed. and Trans. Partrick M.
McConneghy. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984.

"Pa Gur." Trans. Patrick Sims-Williams. Ed. Rachel Bromwith, A.O.H. Jarman and Brynley F.
Roberts. The Arthur of Welsh. Cardiff: University of Wales P, 1991.

Wolfram von Eschenbach. Parzival. Trans. Wolfgang Spiewok. 2 Vols. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000.

---. Parzival. Trans. Helen M. Mustard and Charles E. Passage. New York: Vintage Books, 1961.

Secondary sources:

Bumke, Joachim. Courtly Culture. Trans. Thomas Dunlap. Berkeley: Berkeley UP, 1991.

Classen, Albrecht. "Kay in Wolframs von Eschenbach Parzival: 'Agent Provocateur' oder Angeber?" Journal of English and Germanic Philology 87.3 (1988): 382-405.

Gowans, Linda. Cei and the Arthurian Legend. Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1988.

Groos, Arthur. Romancing the Grail. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.

Haupt, Jürgen. Der Truchseß Kay im Artusroman. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1971.

Jones, Martin. "The Significance of the Gawan Story in *Parzival*." A Companion to Wolfram's Parzival. Ed. Will Hasty. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999.

Kibler, William. Introduction. Arthurian Romances. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

Lawson, Richard H. Introduction. Arthurian Romances, Tales, and Lyric Poetry: The Complete Works of Hartmann von Aue. University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2001.

Lewis, Robert E. Symbolism in Hartmann's 'Iwein'. Göppingen: Alfred Kummerle, 1975.

Loomis, Roger. Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes. New York: Columbia UP, 1949.

Noble, Peter. "Kay the Seneschal in Chrétien de Troyes and his Predecessors." Reading Medieval Studies 1 (1975): 55-67.

Whetter, K.S. "Reassessing Kay and the Romance Seneschal." Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society 51 (1999): 343-63.