"Thus seyden sadde folk": Chaucer’s Oxford Clerk on theological controversy in the 14th century

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“Thus Seyden Sadde Folk”
Chaucer’s Oxford Clerk on Theological Controversies in the 14th Century

Molly Kluever ‘20
Thursday Forum – 17 October 2019
The Clerk’s Tale

OR, THE WORST CINDERELLA STORY EVER
“O stormy peple! Unsad and evere untrew!  
Ay undiscreet and chaungynge as a fane!  
Delitynge evere in rumbul that is newe,  
For lyk the moone ay wexe ye and wane!  
Ay ful of clappynge, deere ynogh a jane!  
Youre doom is fals, youre constance yvele preeveth;  
A ful greet fool is he that on yow leeveth.”

Thus seyden sadde folk in that citee,  
Whan that the peple gazed up and doun,  
For they were glad, right for the noveltee,  
To han a newe lady of hir toun.  
Namoore of this make I now menciou,  
But to Grisilde again wol I me dresse,  
And telle hir constance and hir busyness.

(IV.995-1008)
Thesis

Chaucer gave the Griselda story to the Oxford Clerk in order to engage with the theological controversies of the late 14th century, specifically Wycliffism/early Lollardy and the realist-nominalist debate.
John Wyclif, Wycliffism, and Early Lollardy

- Anticlericalism/Antifraternality
- Lay Conduct and Values
- Use of Vernacular

Rise of Wycliffism 1370s
Blackfriar Council 1382
Rise of “Lollardy” 1387
Reclamation of “Lollardy” mid-1390s
Lollard Language?

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(IV.995-1008)
Anticlericalism and “Poor Priests”

The Parson

“...a povre person of a toun,
But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk.
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;
His parisshens devoutly wolde he teche.”

(I.478-82)

“This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,
That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.”

(I.496-7)

Winifred Sandys
Anticlericalism and “Poor Priests”

The Oxford Clerk

He “looked holwe,” his clothes appeared “[f]ul thredbare,” and he spent his money “[o]n books and on lernynge.”

“I.289,290,300

“he hadde geten hym yet no benefice, Ne was so worldly for to have office.”

“I.291-2

“And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.”

“I.308

Winifred Sandys
The Virtue of the Laity

- Poverty
- Discipleship
- Patient suffering
- Meekness
Was Chaucer a Lollard?
What did Chaucer know?

How did he know it?
Chaucer’s Access to Wycliffism/Lollardy

John of Gaunt

Sir Thomas Woodstock

The Wycliffite Bible

Richard Godfrey

Encyclopaedia Britannica

Public Domain

GreatSite.com
The Realist-Nominalist Debate

- Realism (Augustine)
- Moderate Realism (Aquinas)
- Nominalism (Ockham)
The Debate, The Dissent, and the Clerks

- Realism (Augustine)
- Moderate Realism (Aquinas)
- Nominalism (Ockham)
- Dissent (Bradwardine)

Oxford Clerk

Oxford Clerk
Wyclif and Realist-Nominalist Debate at Oxford

Council of Constance
1414-1418
Why the Oxford Clerk?


