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## “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 14<sup>th</sup> Century

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Molly Kluever ‘20

Thursday Forum – 17 October 2019

# *The Clerk's Tale*

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OR, THE WORST CINDERELLA STORY EVER



Mary Eliza Haweis, *Chaucer for Children* (1882)



Mary Eliza Haweis, *Chaucer for Children* (1882)

“O stormy peple! Unsad and evere untrewe!  
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 clappyng, 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 mencion,  
But to Grisilde again wol I me dresse,  
And telle hir constance and hir busyness.

(IV.995-1008)

# Thesis

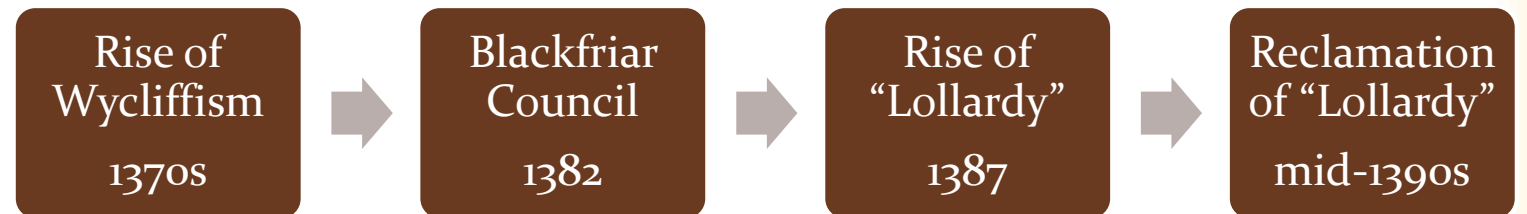
Chaucer gave the Griselda story to the Oxford Clerk in order to engage with the theological controversies of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, specifically Wycliffism/early Lollardy and the realist-nominalist debate.

# John Wyclif, Wycliffism, and Early Lollardy



*Encyclopaedia Britannica*

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



# Lollard Language?

“O stormy peple! **Unsad** and evere **untrewe**!  
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 clappyng, 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 down,  
For they were glad, right for the noveltee,  
To han a newe lady of hir toun.  
Namoore of this make I now mencioun,  
But to Grisilde again wol I me dresse,  
And telle hir constance and hir busyness.

(IV.995-1008)

“trewe”

“trewe  
preachoures”

“trewe men”

“sad”

“prechen it  
sadly and  
trewly”

“false men ...  
not sadly &  
trewely”



# Anticlericalism and “Poor Priests”



*Winifred Sandys*

## 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 parisspens 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)

# Anticlericalism and “Poor Priests”



*Winifred Sandys*

## 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)



*Gordon Frederick Browne*

# The Virtue of the Laity

- Poverty
- Discipleship
- Patient suffering
- Meekness

*Was Chaucer a Lollard?*





# Chaucer's Access to Wycliffism/Lollardy



John of Gaunt

*Encyclopaedia  
Britannica*



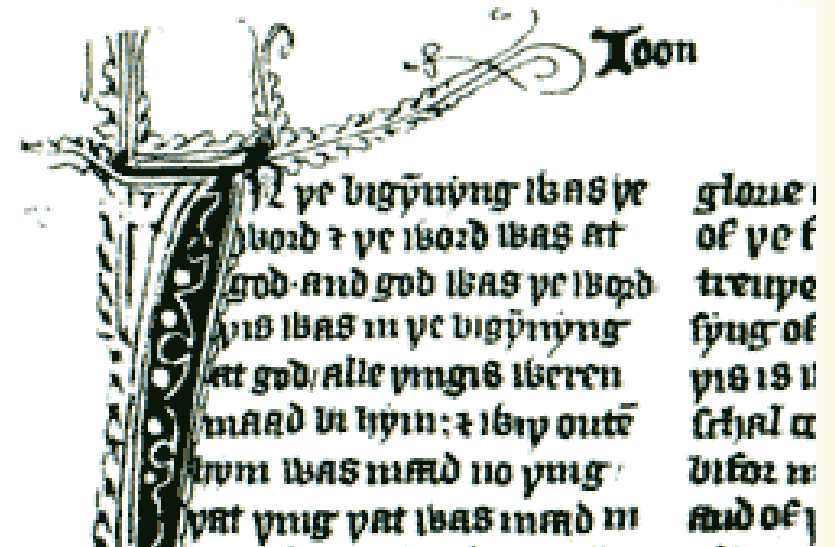
Sir Thomas  
Woodstock

*Richard Godfrey*



*Public Domain*

The Wycliffite Bible



*GreatSite.com*

# The Realist-Nominalist Debate

Realism  
(Augustine)

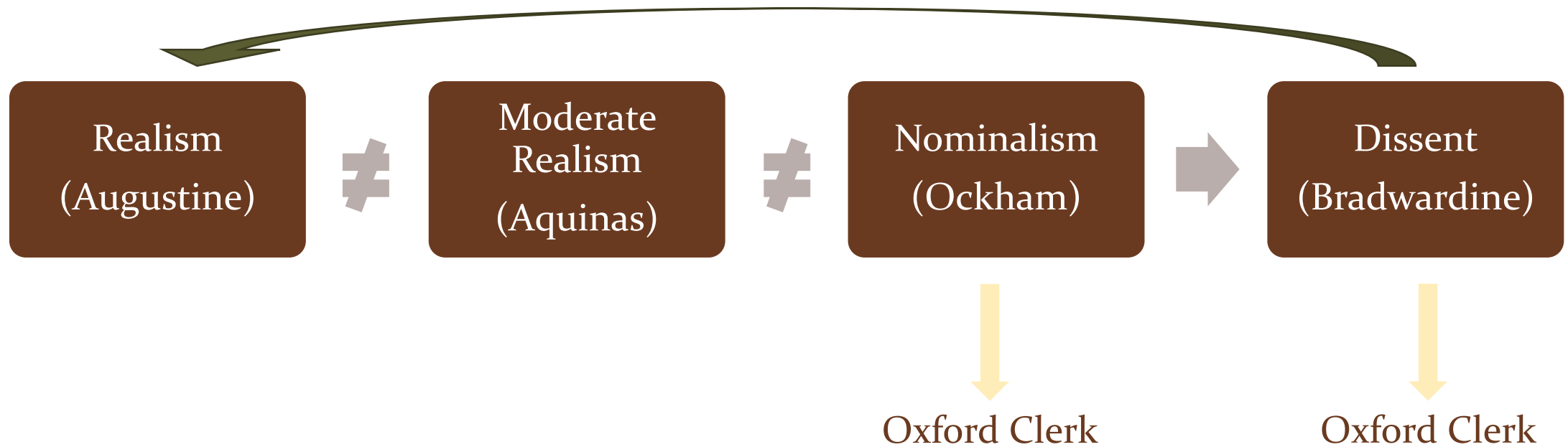


Moderate  
Realism  
(Aquinas)



Nominalism  
(Ockham)

# The Debate, The Dissent, and the Clerks





# Wyclif and Realist-Nominalist Debate at Oxford



*Encyclopaedia Britannica*



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Council of Constance  
1414-1418

# *Why the Oxford Clerk?*



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