Boze mengelo wel among leges as lewes av 4 trowe can name There & East Constito and and

A Variety of Tongues

These manuscripts show the use of three different languages in England in the later medieval period - Middle English, Anglo-Norman, and Latin. They illustrate the choices made by authors and how English vernacular emerged as the standard literary medium.

The author of the Speculum Vitae (The Mirror of Life), writing late in the fourteenth century, chose to use English. He commonly uses the letters 'yogh' ('3') for 'y' and 'thorn' ('b') for 'th'; see the words 'you' (line 1) and 'that' (line 4) in this extract (far left). He says here that everybody, both the educated and unschooled, can understand English: "Bot lered and lewed olde and yonge / Alle understonden englysch tonge". Latin and French were, by comparison, used by particular communities and for specific purposes.

thic The Gower of Inglit of mailsa gallica Aque Togrua fuerit: exulat a l'uninfite de tonte le monde Johan Goiver ceste balad ennois et si 100 nap de francois la faconde pames mon ge 100 de 100 foz filoie qe fin englois si giner par nele voie Gare orange mais moins mile on die

In englysch tonge I schal you telle Yif ye so longe with me wil dwelle

Ne latyn wil I speke ne waste Bot englisch that men usen maste

For that is youre kynde langage That ye have most here of usage

That kan eche man understonde

For that langage is most schewed As wel among lered as lewed Latyn as I trowe can nane

Bot thoo that have it at scole tane Somme kan frensch and no latyn

And somme kan of latyn a party That kan frensch ful febelly

And somme understonden englysch That kan nouther latyn ne frensch Bot lered and lewed olde and yonge Alle understonden englysch tonge ..

That used have court and dwelled therin

Extract from Speculum Vitae, a devotional poem in English for lay readers (WLC/LM/9 ff.1v-2).

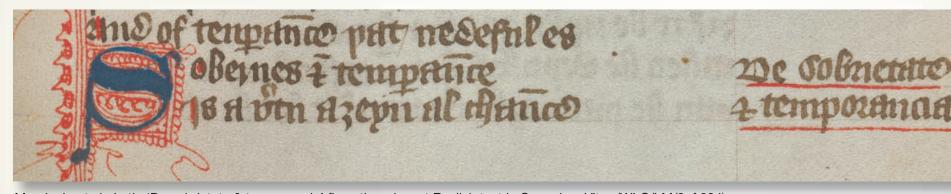
That is boren in engelonde

John Gower, a contemporary and friend of Geoffrey Chaucer, wrote in all three languages. His ballades include the poem Traitié pour essampler les amantz marietz, promoting the virtues of married love. He modestly apologises for any mistakes in his French. The use of Latin to introduce the passage followed a familiar convention of bilingual presentation. Gower's great English work was known by its Latin title Confessio Amantis and included Latin running titles and section headings.

Although French remained familiar to Gower's contemporaries at court and in educated or wealthy circles, the great days of Anglo-Norman as a literary medium were over. It had emerged as a distinct dialect of French after the Norman Conquest established a French-speaking aristocracy. It was still dominant when Robert de Gretham in the mid-thirteenth century wrote his advice on moral conduct, the Mirur.

he est co muite grant whe. la parler launerie. il senaremet de fol mester: inent lai note laun parlen ar la langue dut est appl. il

Latin was still the preferred language for many purposes, particularly by the church and in the administration of law and government. With its fixed grammar and spelling, it was easy to abbreviate without misunderstanding. It remained the medium for international scholarship until the seventeenth century.



Marginal note in Latin 'De sobrietate & temporancia' flags the relevant English text in Speculum Vitae (WLC/LM/9 f.224)