Wisdom As Allegorical Morality In English Medieval Play: Translation And Socio-Cultural And Linguistic Analysis Of The Work

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Abstract:
The Present Article Is The Result Of A Research Project Carried Out With The Purpose Of Translating The Morality Play Wisdom Into Portuguese. The General Objective Here Is To Make A Critical Reading About The Main Characteristics Of This Work, As Well As To Present Some Important Points About The Translation Done. The Methodology For The Reading Is A Biographical Review, With The Intention Of Leading The Reader To Learn About This Genre Of English Literature, Mainly Due To The Lack Of Published Material About The Play. The Theoretical And Methodological Proposal For The Translation Is Based On A Critical Analysis Of The Main Aspects Of Translation Theory: Literal And Free, As Presented By Mounin (1975)[1] *Nida (1993)*[2]*, Paes (1990)*[3] *Among Others, To Offer A Balanced Translation Between The Two Languages And Two Considerably Distant Times That Separate The Original Work From The Proposed Translation Into Portuguese.*
Results*: The Final Translation Has Been Prepared To Be Publish In Its Full Version And It Will Be Spread In Free E-Book Next Semester.*
Key Word*: Wisdom; Medieval Play; Translation; English Literature; Portuguese Language.*

Date of Submission: 06-07-2023   Date of Acceptance: 16-07-2023

I. Introduction

The morality plays of medieval literature that have come down to us, or moral interludes as they were known in their time, comprise five major texts written between the late 14th and early 16th centuries: The Pride of Life, The Castle of Perseverance[4], Mankind, Wisdom, and Everyman.

The above-mentioned writings (plays) deal allegorically with the life of mankind and all his efforts against sin. The structure of the plays is based on the sequence of temptation, fall and redemption. Everyman, on the other hand, deals only with mankind's final journey towards death. As such, this grouping of plays is held together by their consistent use of allegorical figures, their use (in most cases) of a central representative human figure (variously called Mankind, Common Man, or Humanum Genus) and their personification of the forces of good and evil acting upon him.

Some of the plays (Mankind and Wisdom) require considerable theatrical resources and skills, enough to imply that they may have been intended for professional performance; The Castle of Perseverance, on the other hand, with its large cast of thirty-six directors, must have been written for non-professional directors or for a mixed group of professionals and non-professionals.

Except for Everyman, which survives only in printed sources, Wisdom (also known as Mind, Will and Understanding) is the only one of the moralities plays that has come down to us in more than one copy. A complete manuscript of the play is found in the Macro Manuscript, named after an 18th century owner, Rev. Cox Macro, and now in the Folger Library, Washington, DC.

Wisdom differs from the other moralities in its characters, its structure, and its theological content. The central human figure is represented here not by one character, but by nine - Anima, the human soul; its five auxiliary senses; and its three human faculties of Mind, Will, and Understanding. The play is structured around Anima's marriage to Wisdom, who is explicitly presented as a typification of Christ, and around Lucifer's efforts to destroy that marriage through the seduction of his human faculties. Within this overarching structure, the action of the play proceeds over four parts.

II. Background

After my first research work as a translator, in which I translated the morality play The Summoning of Everyman into Portuguese[5], it became clear to me the importance of English medieval theater morality plays for the Brazilian academic community, which, until then, did not have a translation of this important work of literature in the English language. Some universities started to use my text in their classes as a reference to this 15th century play.

Since then, I have been working on other works of this genre and period, to offer Portuguese translations of medieval English literature in my projects. In this sense, Wisdom, as one of the five morality plays, is part of my list of interests to offer the academic community, as well as readers of ancient texts, a version in our vernacular.

It is necessary to remember here about the process of translation in which this project is set. We know that there are many online tools these days that allow us to perform such a task. However, as Trindade (2003, p.182)[6] states: "Translating is to bridge two cultures; thus, every translation starts from a set of meanings expressed in words of a given language that must be fully transposed into a new language that also has its cultural and social characteristics. Therefore, no matter what kind of translation is done, the translator will always need to keep in mind that he/she is translating a set of meanings."

Thus, I believe that the merit of a research such as the one presented here is due not only to the technical translational issue, but also to the linguistic assumptions of meanings between the two languages and cultures undertaken throughout the project. In other words, it is up to the translator to adapt the changes between the source text (English) and the target text (Portuguese). Even so, it was necessary to keep as close to the original as possible, so as not to make the mistake of offering a re-reading of the work, rather than a translation of the original.

Finally, the proposal is also justified by offering in the project a translation that is not just the transfer of a text from one language to another, but rather the transfer of knowledge in a way that is possible to be understood by those who will read it.

III. Theoretical Background

Literary translation is the translation of prose and poetry into other languages. This includes the translation of literature from ancient languages and the translation of modern fiction so that it can reach a wider audience. This process happens all the time, especially among books that are published and sold commercially, i.e. the famous bestsellers. For example, the book "It ends with us" (Colleen Hoover), translated in Portuguese as "é assim que se acaba", is at the time of writing among the top ten bestselling books in the USA. There is not much to present as evidence of the importance of the translation process to give access to reading in the vernacular to thousands of readers around the world.

However, here I am focusing on another type of translation: the translation of "forgotten" literary works, of little or no commercial value. But the question remains: why is literary translation important?

Well, I could start by saying that it helps shape our understanding of the world around us in many ways. For example, reading Homer and Sophocles as part of a classical education in school helps us build an understanding of history, politics, philosophy and more. Similarly, reading contemporary translations provides fascinating insights into life in other cultures and in other countries. In a fast-paced world so full of misunderstanding and confusion, such efforts to share knowledge and experience across cultural boundaries are to be applauded.

For the undertaking designed here, it was necessary to ponder some questions about the translation process as seen by some theorists in the field, to offer a panoramic view of some discussions, as well as to affiliate the project in some of these, as a means of outlining our project.

As Souza (1998)[7] points out, when reflecting on the activity of translation, we still see totally radical and opposing positions. "The old tension between literal and free translation, for example, has not yet been satisfactorily resolved."

When the subject is translation and/or translation theory I always take a balanced position. I believe that there is no single theory that solves the problems that arise within this field of knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to say that I will present some theories of translation. In this way, the words of Nida (1993)[2] go straight to what I propose:

"there is yet no unified theory of translation in the technical sense of a coherent set of general propositions used as principles to explain a class of phenomena', but there are some 'theories' in the broad sense of 'a set of principles useful for understanding the nature of translation or for establishing criteria for evaluating a translated text" (Nida, 1993, p.155)[2]

The two major opposing translation theory streams are literal translation and free translation. Literal translation is associated with the idea of faithful, neutral, objective translation. The concept of free translation, on the other hand, is the idea of unfaithful, partial, subjective translation. This discussion is quite old. In the first century, for example, Cicero said he preferred free translation to literal translation. On the other hand, St. Jerome, known as the patron saint of translators, showed a preference for the translation of the meaning.

There are also those who claim that translation is not possible. Some philosophers, anthropologists, linguists, and poets will say that the impossibility of translating is due to the rigid system of the grammar of languages: "are grammatical systems impenetrable to each other?" (Meillet, *apud* Mounin, 1975, p.20)[1]

Arrojo (1986)[8] adds further arguments for the understanding of translation: "[...] translation would be theoretically and practically impossible if we expected from it a transfer of stable meanings; what is possible - what inevitably happens, at every moment and in every translation - is, as the French philosopher Jacques Derrida suggests, a transformation: a transformation from one language into another, from one text into another."

According to Humboldt's ideas, recognized as being the first European linguist to identify human language as a system governed by rules, and not simply as a collection of words and phrases accompanied by meanings, "each language constitutes a differentiated and unique worldview that can only be accessed through that language and no other" (Paes, 1990, p. 33)[3]. So how would it be possible to translate?

When the subject is a literary text, such as the play that has been translated here, the discussion becomes even more skeptical as to the possibility of a translation. For the linguist Jakobson, "poetry, by definition, is untranslatable." (Jakobson, 1971, p. 72)[9]. In addition to Jakobson's statement, we have another important argument. According to Paz (1971)[10], the process of translation should be seen as follows: "I am not saying that literal translation is impossible, but that it is not a translation. It is a device, usually composed of a string of words, to help us read the text in its original language. Something closer to a dictionary than to a translation, which is always a literary operation."

Paz's (1971)[10] approach to the process of translation is widely accepted by many theorists, which I believe does justice to the process, especially when it comes to literary translation.

According to Paes, when speaking about the poet Manuel Bandeira, he states that although he translated poetry practically throughout his life, he did not hesitate to affirm, more than once, that it was essentially untranslatable" (Paes, p. 35)[3].

Well, here we must ponder over the situation presented so far. Even with all the divergences and opinions about the inefficiency of translation, we have been blessed with translations of the most diverse texts for over two thousand years. A world without translation is practically unthinkable. I am not saying that translation is something simple and that in its process the versions of a poem, for example, are equally equivalent (original and translation). However, the same thing can be said of spoken language. Since most people in the world are bilingual, most people already know that taking a message from one language (A) to the receiving language (B) does not always have this "equal" relationship, but something equivalent.

Still on linguistics, Jakobson (1971, p. 64)[9] states that: "(...) the meaning of a linguistic sign is nothing more than its translation into another sign that can be substituted for it, especially a sign 'in which it is more fully developed', as Peirce, the most profound investigator of the essence of signs, insistently stated (...) We distinguish three ways of interpreting a verbal sign: it can be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into another system of non-verbal symbols."

In short, between languages there is no perfect equivalence at the level of form, but in their communicative content. In this sense, each language is something unique, with forms and rules that serve only for itself and at the same time is a system of communication, which in turn allows it to be translated into another language. According to Bell (1991, p. 6-7)[11], "every language is a formal structure - a code - consisting of elements that can be combined to convey semantic 'meaning' and, at the same time, a system of communication that employs the forms of the code to refer to entities (in the real or imaginary world) and creates signs that have communicative 'value'."

Thus, the translation proposal made here sought to deal in a balanced way with the translation to the target text, starting with the initial analysis of the merely literal text (level 1 translation) and the interpretation of this with the possibilities within our context (level 2 translation).

IV. Methodology

The first treatment of the text (level 1 translation) happened through the electronic translation (online translator and dictionaries). For this task, the scholarship students made a document with 3 columns, reserving the first column for the original text, the second column for the level 1 translation (product of the instant translation and dictionaries), and the third column for the possibility of adaptation to the current context (level 2 translation), as shown in the following excerpt from the work.

Original – Middle English
[ANIMA] "Hanc amavi et exquisivi" —
Fro my yougthe thys have I soute,
To have to my spouse most specyally
For a lover of your schappe am I wroute.
Above all hele and bewty that ever was sought,
I have lovyde Wysdom as for my lyght,

For alle goodnes wyth hym ys broughte.
In wysdom I was made all bewty bryghte!

Translation level 1
[ANIMA] "Hanc amavi et exquisivi" —
Dos meus jovens, os teus eu sou,
Ter a minha esposa mais especificamente
Para um amante de seu fio de seda estou escrito.
Acima de tudo o que sempre foi procurado,
Eu amo Sabedoria como minha luz,
Pois toda bondade com ela é trazida.
Em Sabedoria eu fui feito toda beleza resplandecente!

Translation level 2
[ANIMA] "Hanc amavi et exquisivi" —
Por minha juventude, a que tenho,
E por minha esposa
A amante que escrevo em fio de ouro,
Acima de toda beleza já procurada,
Eu amo Sabedoria como minha luz,
Pois toda bondade com ela é trazida.
Em sabedoria fui feito de beleza resplandecente!

To carry out the stages of the project, a monthly task was sent to the research fellows (blocks) with part of the play to be translated. The verification and discussion about the work developed was done in periodic meetings, with the purpose of analyzing the quality of the translations, suggesting, and discussing necessary changes, and correcting the possibility of linguistic mistakes by the participants (research team).

Along with the development of the translations, we read and searched for works (articles, books) that dealt with Wisdom, such as criticism of medieval English literature and other theoretical works that helped to add knowledge on the subject, to collaborate with the writing of the article that is read here.

V. Data analysis

The play Wydsom, in its medieval version, begins with the character Wisdom, as per the first lines below:

Original – Middle English
WYDSOM: Yff ye wyll wet the propyrté
Ande the resun of my nayme imperyall,
I am clepyde of hem that in erthe be
Everlastynge Wysdom, to my noble egalle,
Wyche name accordyt best in especyall,
And most to me ys convenyent.
Allethow eche persone of the Trinyté be wysdom eternall,
And all thre on everlastynge wysdome togedyr present,

Modern-English version
Wisdom: If you will know the essence
And the reason of my imperial name,
I am called by those who are on earth.
Everlasting Wisdom, equal to my noble self,
Which name best suits me in particular,
And is most convenient for me.
Although each person of the Trinity is eternal wisdom,
And all three together present eternal wisdom.

One can notice, at the outset, that the language used in the original in relation to its modern version, which we have translated, reveals some notable differences between medieval and modern English.

Regarding vocabulary, for example, it features words that may seem archaic to modern speakers, or even more distant to non-native English readers. For example, "wyll" (will) means "desire", "propyrté" (property)

means "essence", and "nayme" (name) means "name". These words are less common in modern English, which has more familiar equivalents.

As for spelling and pronunciation, Medieval English also differed from Modern English. For example, "ys" (is) would be pronounced as "is" in Modern English, but with a distinct pronunciation in Medieval English. Also, the use of "y" instead of "I" in the word "wyll" (will) was common at that time.

About the syntax and linguistic structure in medieval English, we can also find differences to modern English. For example, "Ande the resun of my nayme imperyall" would be translated as "And the reason of my imperial name" in modern English, while the word order has changed to fit the current syntax.

Another notable noticeable difference in the play, regarding the language used, is related to the use of pronouns and verb conjugations. For example, "hem" was used as a third person pronoun for "they", while in modern English we use "They". Similarly, "be" was used as a verb form for "be", while today we use "am", "is", "are" (present tense), among others.

These are just some of the notable linguistic differences between medieval and modern English, seen from the Wisdom play. Over the centuries, the English language has undergone significant changes in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. From our point of view, it is fascinating to observe these transformations when comparing ancient texts with contemporary English.

Original – Middle English
[ANIMA]   "Hanc amavi et exquisivi" —
Fro my yougthe thys have I soute,
To have to my spouse most specyally
For a lover of your schappe am I wroute.
Above all hele and bewty that ever was sought,
I have lovyde Wysdom as for my lyght,
For alle goodnes wyth hym ys broughte.
In wysdom I was made all bewty bryghte!

Modern-English version
[ANIMA]
Her have I loved and sought
From my youth, I have pursued this,
To have her as my most special companion
For I am designed as a lover of your nature.
Above all health and beauty that was ever sought,
I have loved Wisdom as my guiding light,
For all goodness is brought with him.
In wisdom, I was made radiant with beauty!

Portuguese (translation)
(ALMA) "Hanc amavi et exquisivi"
Desde minha juventude, tenho buscado isso,
Tê-la como minha companheira mais especial
Pois fui designado como amante da sua natureza.
Acima de toda saúde e beleza já buscada,
Tenho amado a Sabedoria como minha luz orientadora,
Pois toda bondade é trazida com ela.
Em sabedoria, fui feita radiante com beleza!

The influence of Latin in the morality plays is noticeable. Probably due to the religious character. In the first line of the highlighted stanza, posted above, we can see the use in the original of a Latin reference from the Vulgate Bible. The passage is a reference to a passage from the book Wisdom of Solomon, one of the "deuterocanonical" books of the Bible, which differ from the "canonical" books because they do not occur in the Hebrew Bible. The character Alma (Anima) quotes the first line of the passage in Latin, but her speech continues translating the text: "Hanc amavi et exquisivi a iuventute mea, et quaesivi sponsam mihi adsumere et amator factus sum formae illius" . [From my youth I desired her to take her as wife and became a lover of her beauty]. One can see that the writer of the play is not concerned with relating Anima (Alma), a female character, to a biblical figure, treating her as a lover, this comparison made in the stanza presented.

Another situation that deserves clarification, from the excerpt of the play presented above, refers to the allegorical character Anima. The term "anima" could be translated as "soul" or "spirit". These translations would

capture the essence of the concept that "anima" represents, which is the inner essence or life force of a person. Both "soul" and "spirit" are commonly used in English translations of medieval texts to convey the spiritual and metaphysical aspects associated with "anima."

"Anima" is a Latin term that can have various meanings depending on the context. It can refer to the soul or inner self, the life force, or the animating principle of living things. In philosophical and psychological contexts, "anima" can represent the feminine aspect or the unconscious aspects of a person's psyche. In the specific context of the play, "Anima" was translated as Alma, because it seems more appropriate for Portuguese.

ANIMA: In a soule watt thyngys be,
By wyche he hathe his very knowynge?
WYSDOM: Tweyn partyes. The on, sensualyté,
Wyche ys clepyde the flechly felynge.
The fyve outewarde wyttys to hym be servynge;
Wan they be not reulyde ordynatly,
The sensualyté than, wythoute lesynge,
Ys made the ymage of synne then of his foly.

ANIMA: In a soul, what things are there,
By which it has its true understanding?
WISDOM: Two parts. The first, sensuality,
Which is called the bodily sensation.
The five outward senses serve it well;
When they are not ruled properly,
Then sensuality, without a doubt,
Becomes the image of sin and its foolishness.

Alma: Na alma, quais coisas existem,
Por meio das quais ela tem sua verdadeira compreensão?
Sabedoria: Duas partes. A primeira, sensualidade,
Que é chamada de sensação corporal.
Os cinco sentidos externos a servem bem;
Quando não são governados adequadamente,
Então a sensualidade, sem dúvida,
Torna-se a imagem do pecado e de sua tolice.

According to Klausner (2008)[12], the character Anima, even though they are clearly feminine and allude to the bride of Wisdom/Christ, (especially those in Latin) are ambiguous regarding the gender of Alma, as male pronouns occasionally appear in the text, especially when Alma is presented in her regal capacity. It should be noted, however, that "He" designates both masculine and feminine.

By alluding the character Alma with the bride of Christ, as symbolism suggested in books of the Bible such as Ephesians, Corinthians, and Revelation, which present the idea that the Church (body of believers) is the bride of Christ, we can maintain the idea of a female character, despite the few mentions in the play as male.

Despite the strong religious appeal throughout the play, it can be said that there is, throughout the entire course of the narrative, the search to understand the human being from his existential afflictions, treated from the mystical understanding that existed in everyday life. In theory, the concept - what it means to be human - is represented on stage by a central dramatic figure or a series of allegorical figures.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the play, like most medieval English literature, is strongly related to Christianity of the time. A significant number of biblical references can be found throughout the play, which makes it easier, in part, to understand the plot by reading its quotations from the Christian holy book. By using Latin, as pointed out in the examples above, and referring to the Vulgate, "Wisdom" seeks not only to increase the emotional impact of the play, but also to evoke a sense of authenticity and religious authority.

In line 27 of the play there is the phrase "Sapiencia specialior est sole", which is a reference to verse 29 of chapter 7 of Wisdom, which says: "It is, indeed, more beautiful than the sun and surpasses all the stars". Here we can see the intention to exalt wisdom, comparing it to the sun, which in turn is the most beautiful of the stars.

The phrase "Nigra sum sed formosa, filia Jerusalem" is also in Latin, and is a reference to the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) in the Old Testament of the Bible. In Portuguese, it means "Eu estou morena e formosa, ó filhas de Jerusalém". This passage is used to express an inner beauty, a virtuous quality that transcends physical appearance.

In line 276 there is the expression "Et qui creavit me requievit in tabernaculo meo". In Portuguese we can translate it as "Aquele que me criou descansou em minha tenda". This reference may be related to the idea that divine wisdom or wisdom personified finds a place of rest or dwelling in its own dwelling. Probably this mention in the play is related to the book of Ecclesiasticus 24:11-12: "Likewise in the beloved city he gave me rest, and in Jerusalem was my power. And I took root in an honourable people, even in the portion of the Lord's inheritance."

Finally, we highlight the passage "Vt quid hic statis tota die ociosi?" This Latin phrase can be translated into Portuguese as "Por que vocês estão aqui parados ociosos o dia todo?" It is a rhetorical questioning, suggesting that people should not be idle, but should be occupied with productive or virtuous activities. Perhaps it is a reference to Matthew 20:6, when Jesus, in explaining the parable of the worker, asks the question, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?"

These references are examples of how English morality plays made use of biblical quotations and Latin expressions to reinforce their moral and religious message, as well as provide a cultural and religious context for the audience of the time.

VI. Conclusion

The English morality play Wisdom is a fascinating example of medieval literature that offers valuable insight into the linguistic evolution of the English language over time and the religious influences prevalent at the time. By analyzing the text, we can observe the differences between Middle English and Modern English, highlighting both linguistic changes and the persistence of some features that have shaped the language to the present day.

By comparing Middle English and Modern English, we can identify several linguistic transformations that have occurred over the centuries. Vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation have undergone significant changes, reflecting the influence of different historical and cultural contexts. By studying literary pieces such as Wisdom, we can establish a dialogue between these two phases of language, enriching our understanding of the linguistic and social changes that have occurred over time.

In addition, Wisdom features numerous passages that reference the Bible, always in Latin. These references demonstrate the importance of religion and Christian tradition in medieval society. The use of Latin, the liturgical language of the Catholic Church at the time, highlights the relevance of the Bible as a source of teachings and moral values for the Christian community. The presence of these Latin passages in Wisdom not only enriches the cultural context of the play, but also highlights the religious influence on medieval literature and its intrinsic connection to the Christian faith.

As a final consideration, it is necessary to point out that literary translation of works from medieval English into Portuguese, such as the research project that resulted in this article, plays a crucial role in the preservation and dissemination of this rich literary legacy. These translations not only make the works accessible to a wider audience, but also promote the understanding and study of medieval culture and language.

With this undertaking, the possibility of overcoming linguistic and temporal barriers is greatly increased. Many of the medieval works written in English, such as the chivalric romances or morality plays, were written in a form of the language that may seem foreign or unintelligible to the contemporary reader, as presented here. Translation allows these works to be adapted into modern Portuguese, making them more accessible and understandable to today's readers.

In addition, literary translation is also fundamental to the preservation of these works overtime. Many medieval texts have survived to the present day thanks to translations and adaptations over the centuries. By translating medieval works from English into Portuguese, we ensure that these literary treasures are safeguarded and passed on to future generations, thus preserving our cultural heritage.

Translation also plays an important role in spreading knowledge and promoting the study of medieval culture. By making Medieval English works available in Portuguese, translations facilitate access to these texts for students, researchers, and literature enthusiasts. This creates opportunities to explore and analyze aspects such as language, theme, structure, and the historical and cultural contexts of medieval works, thus enriching the field of literary and historical studies.

Finally, it allows for a cross-cultural dialogue between the literary traditions of different countries and historical periods. This promotes a broader and deeper understanding of literature as an expression of the human condition in different times and cultures.

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