Humanity In Focus In The Medieval English Play Mankind: Translation And Analysis

Aguinaldo Pereira[1], Layra de Brito Roman[2] Mariana Calado Silva[3]

[1](PhD in Linguistics (UnB) – English and Portuguese teacher at IFRO campus Cacoal/ RO/ Brazil)
[2](Student in the Technologist in Agribusiness course (4º semester)
[3](Student of the integrated course in Agroecology (Last year of High School – 3/3))

Abstract: *The Main Objective Of This Article Is To Present Part Of The Translation Of The English Morality Play Mankind Into Portuguese, As Well As To Discuss Linguistic And Cultural Aspects Of This Genre Of Medieval English Literature. The Work Is Part Of A Theoretical-Methodological Perspective That Considered The Balance Between The Proposals Of The Theory Of Literal And Free Translation, Seeking Support In Works Such As Those By Olmi (2022)[1], Timoneda (2012)[2], Wolfenstein (2005)[3] And Zimbres (2015)[4]. In This Sense, We Sought Balance So That The Distance Between Time And Space Between The Source Work And The Target Text Could Offer A Text That, Even With Necessary Adaptations, Would Do Justice To The Original And Its Specificities. The Undertaking That Resulted In This Article Was Mainly Due To Serving As A Facilitator For Readers To Have Access To Such A Rich Work Of Medieval Literature In The Vernacular.*
Key Word*: Mankind; Medieval Plays; Translation; English Literature.*

I. Introduction

For some critics of medieval literature, such as Potter (1975)[5], Mankind[6] is arguably the most amusing and controversial morality play to survive from fifteenth-century England. It is a play from medieval English theater that presents, in an allegory form, the vulnerable situation in which most people find themselves. The plot is torn between common sense and the temptation to misbehave. Its theological message that God's mercy is available to even the most abysmal sinner until the moment of death is also thoroughly orthodox. For Garner (1987)[7], the predictable seriousness of the theme in the play is balanced and complicated by the antics of four disreputable characters (Mischief, New Guise, Today and Nought), who symbolize worldly temptation, and by the sensational tricks of the demonic Titivillus, that manages to seduce the character of humanity to sin. Against the pious rhetoric of good main character Mercy, the mundanes and Titivillus send out a barrage of playful humor, meaningless chatter, and outright lies that mislead humanity and simultaneously amuse the audience. The strong presence of popular dramatic modes has generated considerable scholarly debate, but Mankind is now widely accepted as the most theatrically effective English play.

According to Bevington (1962)[8], Mankind epitomizes the type of play in the repertoire of an itinerant troupe of actors and may represent the beginning of popular professional drama in England. Unlike another well-known 15th-century morality play such as the Castle of Perseverance (which has a huge cast and is designed for place staging and scaffolding), Mankind would only require six actors, limited costumes, and props. The author argues that an actor could play the roles of Mercy and Titivillus, who are never on stage at the same time – a "doubling" technique commonly used by troupes in the 16th century before the establishment of permanent theaters in London. The requested props are mundane and portable: a rosary, a flute, a shovel, a writing instrument and paper, a lasso, shackles, a plank, a bag of seeds, a scourge for Mercy, a big head mask, and a net for the devil, stolen goods, and several jackets of different lengths. Mankind also contains the first evidence of commercial support for the theater, a scene (lines 459-72) in which the Worldlings collect money from the public to bring in the main attraction, the devil Titivillus.

As there is no information about Mankind's actual productions, critics speculate about his staging based on details from the text itself. References to a hostler and tapester and the play's obscene language have led to the suggestion that the play could have been performed at an inn or on a stage set up in a shipyard for a rustic village audience. However, the presence of liturgical language and puns with Latin words indicate places where the public had literacy classes, such as a private hall of a rural manor house, a religious guild, or a college.

As Pettitt (1996)[9] argues, the references to "this house" (line 209), the exit in a "dore" (line 159) and the crowding of the audience around the performance area "suggest an internal performance, perhaps in the great hall

of a house or institutional residence". Mercy's speech to two classes of spectators – "ye soverens that sytt e ye brothern that stnde ryght uppe" (line 29), also suggests a diverse audience. Perhaps the most plausible conclusion is that Mankind is a play whose appeal cuts across class lines and social categories and therefore can be produced in a wide variety of settings.

II. Justification

As we can see, much has already been explored about this genre of literature in some academic centers of excellence, but mainly in universities in England, the United States and Canada. However, as we still did not have a version of this text in Portuguese, which makes it difficult for non-English speakers to access works such as this important genre, which precedes the works of the genius William Shakespeare, for example, was one of the reasons which we undertook the work of translating the play Mankind, among others already translated or in the process of being translated[10,11].

Perhaps some would question the real justification for translating a religious play from the high Middle Ages in England to our days in Portuguese. I believe that an answer to this question can not only justify such an undertaking, but also offer possibilities for the development of this work.

The plays of medieval English theater had as their main feature the allegorical character. The best-known allegories we have in literature are The Myth of the Cave (Plato) and The Apologist (494 BC). We can also see in Homer allegorical characters (Athena = wisdom; Ares = foolishness)

Another author known for his allegories is Gil Vicente, known as the first great Portuguese playwright. Vincentian works are known as a reflection of the transition between two eras: the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. There is a very strong consensus among critics who point to the great influence of medieval English allegories in their works, such as Mankind, for example. In Gil Vicente's writings, what became known as auto (from the Latin actu = action, act) appears. This subgenre of dramaturgical literature first appears in Europe in the twelfth century. It has simple language and elements with moralizing intent. His characters symbolize human virtues and defects, or represent angels, demons, saints, and God. Gil Vicente wrote many books and among two main works we can mention his trilogy of satire: Auto da Barca do Inferno (1516)[12], Auto da Barca do Purgatório (1518)[13] and Auto da Barca da Glória (1519)[14]. In 1523, he wrote the Farsa de Inês Pereira[12].

It is also possible to notice the importance of allegory in consecrated works of Hispanic literature, such as in Jorge Luís Borges, with works that frequently present symbols and complex metaphors that explore philosophical and literary ideas; Miguel de Cervantes, who used allegories in his works, such as Don Quixote, to satirize the literary and social conventions of his time; Federico García Lorca, who brought in his works symbols and images that reflect Spanish culture and politics, among others.

In Brazil we also had the influence of this genre of literature, mainly with the Spanish Jesuit priest José de Anchieta, who had in his records the clear intention of converting the indigenous people in the colonial period. Among his works we can highlight the "Auto da Pregação Universal[15]", the "Auto de São Lourenço[16]" and the "Na Aldeia de Guararapim[15]". José de Anchieta was innovative in his works, and wrote his records in three languages: Tupi, Portuguese and Castilian; in addition to bringing together Catholic saints and local indigenous deities, in a form of religious syncretism. Finally, Ariano Suassuna (1927-2914) is the author of a very special auto: "O Auto da Compadecida[17]"; in addition to João Cabral de Melo Neto, with the work "Morte e Vida Severina[18]", classics of Brazilian literature.

Perhaps the correct question is, at this point: why let a few works of this important genre of universal literature not have their version in Portuguese? I believe that a missing link of this genre can hinder research that wants to deepen in allegorical genres of universal literature, especially for non-English readers, which I served from this research and translation as a mediator of a facilitating possibility.

Moreover, "taking" a work like this out of the trunk is to recall the history of our ancestors, which makes us better understand our own history. In this sense, the project offered possibilities for research and developments within human history, based on the study of literature.

III. Literature Review

According to Olmi (2022)[1], in an article in which he discusses literary translation, the author states that a "happy translation is one that, while maintaining inevitable differences with the original, preserves the energy of its imaginary, activating it in a specific historical context", overcoming time, ideological, epistemic, and cultural distance (...)".

Regarding the translation of the medieval English play Mankind into Brazilian Portuguese, it is necessary to point out some relevant theoretical problems for a work whose objective was a literary translation. Initially, we must emphasize the importance of the translator in not only translating, but in interpreting the original text, so that eventually a more satisfactory and profitable reading of the translated text can be made.

It is the translator's role to know the historical-cultural context in which the work in which one intends to translate was produced. This means that a previous survey on the context of the Middle Ages in England was

essential in the context of this research. In other words, as Timoneda (2012)[2] rightly pointed out, for the translator it is not enough just to "(...) consider not only the syntactic, phonetic, and idiomatic constructions of the original text, but also the culture of the society in which the original text was created. was originated."

Medieval English literature begins with Beowulf (7th century), which was undoubtedly a story known much earlier and passed down orally until it was written down. Poetry was the preferred medium of artistic expression through most of the Middle Ages, perhaps because its regular rhythm sat better in the mind than prose.

Initially, medieval writers were anonymous scribes relating stories they had heard. Originality in writing in the Middle Ages (as in the ancient world) was not high on the list of cultural values and early writers did not bother to sign their works. Mankind is an example of an unsigned work. The authorship of this work is unknown, even though the manuscript was signed by a monk named Hyngham. It is believed that it was only transcribed by him. Known or anonymous, however, these writers created some of the greatest works of literature in history.

Returning to the theoretical question of the translation process, a translation, like any act of communication, is something that happens between individuals and social groups, that is, it takes place between cultures, ideologies, and different worldviews. According to Wolfenstein (2005), in relation to the act of translation, the author states that there is an 'ethical mission', in the sense that it builds bridges between foreign, different and distant cultures, between peoples themselves, "because the poetic work is, more in general, literary works are the authentic expression of a people, never repressed even during turbulent periods" (WOLFENSTEIN, 2005, p. 465)[3].

Among the existing tension in discussions about the translation process in the academic world, I place myself here, as I did in previous works (PEREIRA, 2012, 2023)[10,11], in a balanced way between the current of literal translation and free translation. This balance, noted earlier, is necessary so that our work does not fall into the situation of other translations that suffer from this tension, as observed by Zimbres (2015, p. 23)[4], in which "poetic norms are codified, the literary work is theorized according to exhaustion, and the act of translating is transformed into linguistic reflection and unraveled in terms of standardized strategies and methods."

Translation, throughout its long history, gains new formats and discussions. There is a rupture at the beginning of the 20th century, and from the 1960s onwards, it enters the academy, claimed by Translation Studies as its own object of study.

Since then, the entire production of Translation Theory has been insisting on the autonomy of this field of study, trying to define it as an independent area, with its own statute and objects, emphasizing, mainly, that translation, finally, ceased to be an area of Comparative Literature, where it originated. Zimbres (2015, p. 22)[4]

After this affiliation (Translation Studies), Applied Linguistics takes over translation studies, whose scientistic intentions it appropriated almost automatically, "assuming a new systemic posture that came to permeate both academic research and translator training throughout the world". the world." (Zimbres, 2015)[4]

These changes took place to adapt to the scientific requirements of academic institutions, which require methodological rigor in the approach methods, that is, it was a necessary evil. However, this millennial "art", with humanist and literary roots, must always consider the practical nature of translation. For the work carried out in the translation of Mankind, we assert that issues such as fidelity, voice, form, tone, and agency sought to be overcome, based on the balance between literal translation and free translation, as will be presented below.

IV. Mankind yesterday, *Humanidade hoje*

The Mankind play is an example of the language used in Medieval English, which developed between the 5th and 15th centuries. There are some notable differences between Medieval English and Modern English, some of which I would highlight are spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Middle English spelling can be quite different from modern English spelling. For example, in the play Mankind, we can find words like 'mannys' (instead of 'many's'), 'tyll' (instead of 'till'), 'wold' (instead of 'would'), among other examples.

Middle English grammar is quite different from the grammar we study in that language. We find in the play a more complex verbal conjugation mentioned earlier. An example of this is the verb form 'wolde' which means 'would' but is only used with the third person singular. Another example is the use of grammatical cases for nouns. For example, instead of saying 'the man's hat', the play uses 'the hat of the man'.

Vocabulary is also something we noticed difference between the original and modern English versions. Words like 'knyght' (knight), 'kyndenesse' (kindness), 'lyfflode' (livelihood), among other words that are no longer common in modern English.

Lastly, there is also a noticeable difference in pronunciation from Middle English to Modern English, and this has also affected the spelling of words. For example, in the play Mankind, we find the word 'doughter' (daughter), which was pronounced with an 'ou' sound like the 'ou' sound in 'house'. Next, as a means of illustrating these differences, follows an excerpt from the translation, shown from the original, its modern version and the version translated into Portuguese:

Middle English

MERCY: The very fownder and begynner of owr fyrst creacyon
Amonge us synfull wrechys He oweth to be magnyfyde,
That for owr dysobedyenc He hade non indygnacyon
To sende Hys own son to be torn and crucyfyede.
Owr obsequyouse servyce to Hym shulde be aplyede,
Where He was Lorde of all and made all thynge of nought,
For the synfull synnere to hade hym revyvyde
And for hys redempcyon sett Hys own son at nought

Modern English

MERCY: The founder and creator of our first creation,
Among us sinful wretches, He deserves to be magnified,
For despite our disobedience, He did not have indignation.
To send His own son to be torn and crucified.
Our obedient service to Him should be applied,
Where He was Lord of all and made everything from nothing,
So that the sinful sinner could be revived.
And for his redemption, He gave up His own son.

Portuguese translation

MERCY: O fundador e iniciador de nossa primeira criação
Deve ser adorado por nós, miseráveis pecadores,
Pois mesmo com nossa desobediência, Ele não se indignou
Em enviar Seu próprio filho para ser ferido e crucificado.
Nossa obediência servil a Ele deve ser aplicada,
Ele que é Senhor de tudo e fez tudo do nada,
Para que o pecador pudesse ser ressuscitado
E para a sua redenção, Ele entregou Seu próprio filho.

Medieval English literature can present some challenges for understanding, due to linguistic and cultural differences from modern English. We can verify this in the excerpt presented above, between the original version of the Mankind play and its version in modern English. Some words and expressions are no longer used, which can make understanding difficult. Medieval English literature was written in a time very different from our own, with values, beliefs and customs that may be strange or difficult to understand.

Medieval English literature features a wide variety of genres and literary forms that may be unfamiliar to the contemporary reader, such as epic poetry, chivalric romance, and morals.

A translation of a work as old as this one, from medieval English to modern English can be a challenge, as it is necessary to find linguistic and cultural equivalents that can convey the original meaning of the text. However, this was a fundamental part of the work, since it was from this version that we sought to understand the best way to leave the text in the Portuguese language.

Middle English

MISCHIEF: I beseche yow hertyly, leve yowr calcacyon.
Leve yowr chaffe, leve yowr corn, leve yowr dalyacyon.
Yowr wytt ys lytyll, yowr hede ys mekyll, ye are full of predycacyon.
But, ser, I prey this questyon to claryfye:
Mysse-masche, dryff-draff,
Sume was corn and sume was chaffe,
My dame seyde my name was Raffe;
Onschett yowr lokke and take an halpenye.

Modern English

MISCHIEF: I beseech you heartily, leave your calculation.

Leave your chaff, leave your corn, leave your dalliance.
Your wit is little, your head is big, you are full of preaching.
But, sir, I pray this question to clarify:
Mis-mash, drive-draff,
Some was corn and some was chaff,
My dame said my name was Raffe;
Unlock your lock and take a halfpenny.

Portuguese translation

MALÍCIA: Eu lhe imploro, deixe sua contagem de lado.
Deixe a palha, deixe o milho, deixe o flerte.
Você é pouco inteligente, tem a cabeça grande, e está cheio de sermões.
Mas, senhor, eu oro para esclarecer esta questão:
Mistura confusa, grãos inferiores,
Alguns eram milho e outros eram palha,
A minha senhora disse que meu nome era Raffe;
Destrave seu cadeado e pegue uma moedinha.

In the sentence "Leave your chaff, leave your corn, leave your dalliance", the verb "leave" means "to abandon" or "to leave", and "chaff" and "corn" are agricultural products that are being used metaphorically. "Chaff" refers to the husks or outer coverings of grain that are separated during threshing and are generally considered of little value. In this context, it can be interpreted as abandoning meaningless or unimportant things. "Corn" refers to the most valuable and desirable part of the grain and can be interpreted as giving up material possessions or responsibilities. "Dalliance" means frivolous or idle activity, and in this context, it can be interpreted as abandoning activities that waste time or are unproductive. Therefore, the phrase can be interpreted as a call to give up unimportant things or distractions to focus on something more important or serious.

The expressions "Mis-mash, drive-draff" are archaic English expressions that are not commonly used in modern English. "Mis-mash" is an alternate spelling of "mishmash", which means a jumbled mix of things that are unrelated or don't belong together. "Drive-draff" is an expression used to refer to inferior or worthless grains that are separated from good grains during threshing.

In the context of the play, it appears that these expressions are being used to emphasize the idea of confusion and worthlessness, possibly in reference to the speaker's identity or situation. The following lines suggest that the speaker's name is Raffe, but it's not clear if this is his real name or if it's just a nickname given to him by someone else. The last line, "Unlock your lock and take a halfpenny", is also a bit obscure, but could be interpreted as a request for payment or a suggestion that the listener should give the speaker a small amount.

Here is another excerpt from the translation in three versions:

Middle English

MANKYNDE: Of the erth and of the cley we have owr propagacyon.
By the provydens of Gode thus be we deryvatt,
To whos mercy I recomende this holl congrygacyon:
I hope onto hys blysse ye be all predestynatt.
Every man for hys degré I trust shall be partycypatt,
Yf we wyll mortyfye owr carnall condycyon
Ande owr voluntarye dysyres, that ever be pervercyonatt,
To renunce them and yelde us under Godys provycyon.

Modern English

MANKIND: From the earth and from the clay, we have our propagation.
By the providence of God, thus we are derived,
To whose mercy I commend this whole congregation:
I hope that you are all predestined to his bliss.

Every man for his degree, I trust, shall be participative,
If we will mortify our carnal condition
And our voluntary desires, that ever are perverted,

To renounce them and yield ourselves under God's provision.

Portuguese translation

Humanidade: Da terra e do barro tivemos nossa propagação.
Pela providência de Deus, assim fomos derivados,
A cuja misericórdia eu confio toda esta congregação:
Espero que todos estejam predestinados para a felicidade eterna.

Cada homem segundo o seu grau, eu confio, deve ser participativo,
Se nós mortificarmos nossa condição carnal
E nossos desejos voluntários, que são sempre pervertidos,
Para renunciá-los e nos submetermos à provisão de Deus.

The excerpt presented begins with a reflection on the origin of humanity, highlighting that the propagation of the species takes place through earth and clay. From there, the play discusses man's relationship with God, showing that divine providence is the source of his existence.

The translation into Brazilian Portuguese of this part of the play maintains the structure of the archaic language, which proves to be challenging for contemporary understanding. However, the translation allows understanding of the meaning and underlying message of the text, which focuses on man's relationship with God and the need to renounce worldly desires to achieve salvation.

The importance of translating medieval literature into Brazilian Portuguese is significant, as it allows the preservation of ancient literary works and the dissemination of their message to new audiences. In addition, translation allows understanding of the roots of the English language and medieval culture that influenced contemporary literature and society.

V. Conclusion

The historical-cultural context of the morality play is essential to understand the work for an adequate translation, as we have pointed out. In this sense, it was necessary to understand the English medieval period, the society of that time, customs, religion, and other elements that influenced the text.

Medieval English literature features many archaisms and words that are no longer used, as mentioned. It was important to decide how to approach these elements in the translation. The expressions in Latin, for example, we decided to keep without translating them into Portuguese and insert footnotes with the translation and explanation. As for the rest of the text, we chose not to use archaic Portuguese words, which would be justified, if that were the decision, since the original has an archaic vocabulary. However, the decision to modernize the text was made to make it more accessible to a contemporary audience.

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