

LUANDINO VIEIRA'S SHORT FICTION: DECOLONIZATION IN THE THIRD REGISTER*

IRWIN STERN
Columbia University

Contemporary linguistic theory views language as a human artifact, that is, an utensil of man's existence which can be shaped according to his changing conditions and needs.¹ The languages-in-contact phenomenon readily attests to this attitude. We can speak of the influence of ancient Greek on Latin, of Arabic on Spanish, or of French on old English with the resultant linguistic modification or enrichment of Latin, Spanish, and English as some outstanding examples of this phenomenon at work. It has been only within the last quarter century that any serious critical consideration and attention has been given to the literary product of modern examples of languages-in-contact, or to what has been called «bilingual literature.»²

African literatures in the twentieth century offer an ample area for the study of the literary aspect of the languages-in-contact phenomenon. Indeed, some investigation has been carried out into the significance of this literature in Africa.³ Such has not been the case for Angolan literature. Because of the 1974 Portuguese revolution, Angolan independence, and the publication of the works of a major contemporary Angolan writer, such an evaluation can now be effected. That writer is José Luandino Vieira, pseudonym of José Vieira Mateus da Graça.

I

Luandino Vieira was born in Portugal in 1935. When he was

three years old, his parents settled in Luanda. He studied at a high school there, and began to work as a mechanic at the age of fifteen. His first political difficulties arose when he was twenty-four as a result of his association with the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (M.P.L.A.). After this one month imprisonment in 1959, he was jailed again between 1961 and 1964. He was transferred to the Tarrafal Concentration Camp of the Cape Verde Islands in 1964, where he remained until his release in 1972. His freedom was due to a slight political liberalization in Portugal following the death of the dictator Salazar.

Luandino Vieira's poetry first appeared in the Angolan literary magazine *Cultura* (II), which flourished between 1957 and 1961, and in other Angolan, Portuguese, and foreign cultural publications about Angola between 1957 and 1963. His short stories garnered greater attention, and they were awarded prizes in 1961, 1963, and 1964. It was the attribution in 1965 of the prize of the Portuguese Society of Writers to his collection of short stories entitled *Luuanda* (1963) which was to cause the closing of the Society and the banning of the volume.

In addition to *Luuanda*, Luandino Vieira has published several other volumes of short stories: *A cidade e a infância* (1960); *Vida novas* (written in 1962, published in 1975); *Velhas estórias* (written in 1964, published in 1974); and *No antigamente na vida* (written in 1964, published in 1974).⁴ All these writings were evidently carried out during his years of imprisonment in Angola and in the Tarrafal Concentration Camp. Some of his stories have appeared in French, Russian, and English translations.

The major theme of Luandino Vieira's short fiction is life in the *musseques*, slums, which surround the city of Luanda, Angola. The short stories invoke the *musseques* in every aspect of its «anthropological» existence—its inhabitants, its daily operation, its racial, social, and laboral caste systems, its folklore and oral traditions—through the narrator's childhood remembrances.⁵ The note of socio-political protest—the activities of the nationalist movements and the consequent repressive responses of the Portuguese colonial government through its policies and its PIDE (International Police for the Defense of the State)—are repeatedly alluded to.

It is not the purpose of this paper to study the socio-political content of Luandino Vieira's short fiction; rather, our intention is to investigate the technique he employs to «decolonize» the literary

language of Angolan fiction for both its positive and negative results.

II

The very selection of the *nom de plume* José Luandino Vieira is itself a possible indication of the author's awareness of the role that language *must* play in his writings. José is one of the most common Portuguese names. Luandino is a reference to the inhabitant of the city of Luanda. Vieira, yet another part of his real name, evokes the memory of the revered seventeenth century Portuguese Jesuit António Vieira, whose sermons and letters dealing with the Portuguese colonization of Brazil, were not only critical of the Portuguese policies, but were also written in a style considered to epitomize the effective use of the Portuguese language. Thus, through this pseudonym the author suggests a common Angolan-Portuguese writer of Luanda who will reveal his beliefs about his nation through his literary language.

Prior to the publication of Luandino's fiction, the language of Angolan fiction was indistinguishable from that of standard Portuguese fiction. The novels of Castro Soromenho (1910-1968) are perhaps the most notable of Afro-Portuguese writers of our century.⁶ They reflect a *castiço* (pure) Portuguese both semantically and syntactically. Rarely does his literary language truly reflect Angolan situations and characters. The few Angolan Africanisms serve only to «flavor» the text.

Thus, Luandino Vieira was confronted with a problem common to many African writers. How to aesthetically achieve a national literary language when faced with a dominant colonial language and a varied regional language?⁷ His earliest writings reveal an innovative attitude towards Quimbundo, the Bantu dialect of Luanda,⁸ and its relationship with standard Portuguese. The stories of *Vidas novas* (we were unable to locate a copy of his earlier work *A cidade e a infância*) already contain the linguistic seeds of what will flourish in his later writings. Although his Portuguese in *Vidas novas* is perfectly comprehensible, several Quimbundo words are part of his standard lexicon, and various novel and unusual linguistic features appear.

This modest number of innovations increases in *Luuanda* and attains its peak in *Velhas estórias* and *No antigamente na vida*. It is in these latter two volumes that clear patterns for Luandino Vieira's linguistic innovations based on the languages-in-contact phenomenon become evident.

III

Luandino Vieira's key consideration in his realization of a true Angolan literary language is language register.⁹ Portuguese is the well established, dominating language of the «colonial» figures—the Portuguese administrative officials, the shopkeepers in the *musseques*, the employers. The language of the people of the *musseques* in their conversations, their asides, and in their tales is Quimbundo. When these two social groups come into contact so do their languages and the result is yet a third register of communication which involves code-switching¹⁰ and other linguistic relationships between the two languages. The authorities acutely aware of the role of this third register, as well as the subtle effects achieved through code-switching by each group with regard to the other.¹¹ It is in this third register that Luandino Vieira will reveal a new «decolonized» Angolan literary language, one which borrows and adapts its lexicon and semantics, its morphology and syntax from its two heritages—the Portuguese and the Quimbundo languages.

The normal inclusion of a Quimbundo lexicon in his short fiction has been a double-edged sword for Luandino Vieira. The language does indeed bestow an unique authenticity and immediacy upon the stories and the reality of the situations described. Nonetheless, this leaves the non-Quimbundo speaker (the majority of his readers) in the dark with regard to a vast number of Quimbundo words referring to every day activities, unless, of course, through some Portuguese context or explanation the word, idea, or expression is clarified. Furthermore, there are a substantial number of popular proverbs in Quimbundo, which play an important role in the stories' symbolic significance. This «difficulty» has resulted in a somewhat valid charge of «incomprehensible» being lodged against Luandino Vieira's fiction. To assuage this criticism, the publisher of *No antigamente na vida* saw fit to include translations

into Portuguese of the many Quimbundo passages.¹²

The principal semantic innovation in the creation of this new Angolan literary language is the use of the verb *adiantar* as an auxiliary to suggest the idea of progressive action and movement (e.g., «adiantava explicar,»¹³; «adiantava descobrir» VE 199; or «adiantar receber»¹⁴).

In the lexico-semantic area we have numerous innovations which stand out due to their probable basis in that third register of Luanda speech, to their connotative originality, and to the poetic effect which is achieved. For example, the expression «cada vez» does not appear as two separate words, but mainly as one—«cadavez» (VE 19, 62, 75, etc.; NA 30, 45, 69, etc.) Similarly, «muitavez» (VE 159, etc.) «outravez» (NA 159). «Cada qual» becomes «cadaqual» (VE 144, etc.; NA 42, etc.). That Luandino Vieira's literary language is still in a state of flux is evident from the occasional use of these expression in their traditional two word forms.

The use of the process of reduplication, common to most African languages, to express the superlative concept «very» (e.g., «very old») is yet another original lexico-semantic feature of Luandino Vieira's short fiction. The common Portuguese expression «logo» (after, then) most often appears as «logo-logo» with the repetition through reduplication and the hyphenization providing the expression with a new connotative urgency (VE 18, 39, 141, etc.; NA 39, 45, 93, etc.). Similarly, we find other adjectival and adverbial expressions used in the same sort of way: e.g., «velhovelho» (VE 51, etc); «já-já» (VE 27, etc.)¹⁵; «pouco-pouco» (VE 11, 53, 152, etc.), and «sempre-sempre» (VE 22, etc.).

In the morphological area of Luandino Vieira's Angolan literary language Quimbundo vocabulary is developed through the use of Portuguese morphemes. This process includes verbs, their participles, adjectival forms, and nouns: e.g., *bungalar* (to shake) (VE 24, 168, 214); *bungulado* (VE 68); *bungulador* (VE 106); *bungulando* (VE 138); or *xacatar* (to blow) (VE 142, 200; NA 86); *xacateante* (VE 101); *xacateando* (VE 227). The most radical morphological innovations occur with the Quimbundo word *musseque* (occasionally written *muceque*). This noun is submitted to a series of morphological changes which provide the author with new adjectival possibilities: *mussecado* (NA 78); *mussecal* (NA 36); *musseco* (NA 89); *mussequeiro* (VE 121; NA 80); *mussequenha* (VE 158; NA 91); *mussequense* (NA 104) *mussequenta* (NA 17);

mussequial (VE 119); *mussequino* (NA 114); *mussequíssima* (NA 60); *mussequóides* (NA 51), and the creation of the collective form *mussecada* (NA 46).¹⁶

The syntax of Luandino Vieira's characters' speeches and his own narration and digression break with traditional Portuguese syntax. This is especially true with regard to the placement of object pronouns. Furthermore, certain verbs which normally require a preposition (e.g., *estar*, *gostar*) lack it: «gostava os rapazes» (VE 173); «nao gostava o mundo» (NA 73); «está viver» (VE 222); and «começaram cantar» (VE 194). Other verbs are used with non-standard prepositions—«conseguiu de chegar» (VE 225); «nunca chegou de me ensinar» (VE 251); «despedir-se com» (VE 58).

The major standard morpho-syntactic creations include the use of a third person singular subject pronoun with a second person verbal form—«Você falas» (VE 150); «Foste você, nao é» (VE, 235)—and the use of the collective noun «a gente» with first person plural forms—«A gente vimos» (NA 34); «a gente nem sabíamos» (NA 98).¹⁷

IV

Let us now summarize Luandino Vieira's approach to the creation of an Angolan literary language. Basing himself apparently on a third register of Luanda speech he refines this product for aesthetic purposes. The basic contribution of the Quimbundo language is with regard to the lexico-semantic area. Aside from a large number of Quimbundo vocabulary words, new shades of meaning are given to common Portuguese words through connotative innovations in their traditional meanings and usages, and through their recreation along African language principles. The major Portuguese linguistic contribution to the Angolan literary language is the former language's wealth of morphemes—principally suffixes—which are used by the author to enrich and enhance his Quimbundo vocabulary. The syntax of Luandino Vieira's short fiction is similarly recreated.

Are there any aesthetic values attributable to these linguistic innovations for Angolan fiction? Indeed, we have a mixed bag. Because of the languages-in-contact phenomenon, Luandino Vieira

has arrived at a literary language which reflects the past and present realities of life in Luanda as no previous nor other contemporary Angolan writer has done.¹⁸ At times, this creativity has led him to almost complete hermeticism, confusing and confounding his readers. An additional limiting aspect of this literary language is that it is basically valid for the western part of Angola—the area surrounding Luanda—because the other regions of Angola use other Bantu dialects. Nonetheless, Luandino Vieira recreates the language of a society and an epoch—as did Eça de Queiroz and Balzac. A positive socio-political purpose must also be attached to this literary language, if for no other reason than that an independent language and a literature are among the first affirmations of nationhood.

NOTES

*This paper was given at the 1978 meeting of the African Literature Association in Boone, North Carolina at Appalachian State University.

1. See the various theories on semiology in Ferdinand de Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 16, (first French edition in 1915); and Julia Kristeva, *Le texte du roman* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), *passim*.

2. For a summary of the studies on «bilingual literature,» see Gary D. Keller, «Toward a Stylistic Analysis of Bilingual Texts...» *The Analysis of Hispanic Texts: Current Trends in Methodology* (New York: Bilingual Press, 1976), pp. 139-149.

3. Among recent publications: Vladimir Klima, et. al. *Black Africa: Literature and Language* (Prague: Academie, 1976); and Edgar Wright, «The Bilingual/Bicultural African Writer,» in Alastair Niven, ed. *The Commonwealth Writer Overseas: Themes of Exile and Expatriation* (Brussels: Didier, 1976).

4. These were all published in Portugal. The only publications of his short stories in Angola, to our knowledge, include: the original edition of *Luuanda* (1963), and *Duas estórias*, which was volume 24 of the «Cadernos Capricórnio,» published in Lobito in 1974, which consists of two stories from *Vidas novas*. *Vidas novas* was also published in French. Luandino Vieira has two important novels: *A verdadeira*

vida de Domingos Xavier (French version, 1961; Portuguese version, 1974), which is the basis for Sarah Maldoror's film «Sambizanga.» His other novel is *Nós, os do Makuluso* (1974), which is studied in Russell Hamilton's article, see *infra*. Other studies on Luandino's fiction and language include: José Martins Garcia, «Luandino Vieira: o anti-apartheid.» *Colóquio/Letras* (Nov., 1974), pp. 43-50; Alexandre Pinheiro Torres, *O neo-realismo português*. Lisboa: Moraes Editores, 1977, pp. 214-221; and José Cardoso Pires. *E Agora, José?* Lisboa, Moraes Editores, 1977, pp. 121-128.

5. Childhood remembrances as a source for fiction are common to African literature. See Nicol Davidson. *Africa: A Subjective View* (London, 1964), p. 77. Angolan literature's relationship to the rest of African literature is touched on by Hamilton, see *infra*.

6. A general perspective on the language problem of African writers in general and Angolan writers specifically is presented by Russell Hamilton in «Black from White and White from Black: Contradictions of Language in the Angolan Novel.» *Ideologies and Literature* I, i (Jan, 1977), pp. 25-57. He also speaks about Castro Soromenho, pp. 39-41. On Castro Soromenho, see also Gerald Moser, «Castro Soromenho, an Angolan Realist.» *Essays on Afro-Portuguese Literature* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969).

7. In addition to Hamilton, *supra*, see the series of essays edited by Per Wästberg, *The Writer in Modern Africa*. (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968). Some specific comments are offered by Mbella Sonne Dusoko.

8. I claim no knowledge of Quimbundo. In my effort to determine the modification of the Quimbundo dialect, I consulted Malcolm Guthrie, *Comparative Bantu* (Farnborough, Eng.: Gregg International Publishers, Ltd., 1971) 4 vols, and for specific vocabulary, Harry H. Johnston, *A Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), I, 366-377. Johnston calls «Kimbundo» of Luanda «a classical Bantu tongue» (II, 104).

9. «Register» is defined as a «variety in language used for a specific purpose.» G. Hartmann. *Dictionary of Languages and Linguistics* (New York; John Wiley, 1972), p. 194.

10. Code-switching is defined as «the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction. The switch may be for only one word or for several minutes of speech.» C.M. Scotton and W. Ury. «Bilingual Strategies: The Social Functions of Code-Switching.» *International Journal of Sociology of Language*.¹³ (1977), p. 5.

11. Excellent examples of code-switching appear throughout the story «Maudilé Gil, o Sobral e o Barril» in *Velhas estórias* (Lisbon: Poliedro, 1974), pp. 11-45. Luandino Vieira is also concerned with phonological code-switching; he makes frequent references to the «português assotacado» (VE 17, etc.) of the Blacks and to the «quimbundo estragado» (Ibid.) of the White Angolans.

12. (Lisbon: Edições 70, 1974), pp. 219-220. Without doubt Luandino Vieira's audience is a Portuguese one principally, and only tangentially an African or non-Portuguese one.
13. *Velhas estórias*, p. 3. Further references will be in text with the abbreviation *VE*, and the page number.
14. *No antigamente na vida*, p. 26. Further references will be in the text with the abbreviation *NA*, and the page number.
15. «Já, já» is a common standard Portuguese expression. The use of the hyphen to link the words does give it a new connotative appearance.
16. There are also some innovations in the use of diminutives.
17. Once again this usage is found in Portuguese fiction as typifying a social class. It is not accepted as normal usage by Portuguese writers. Luandino Vieira does standardize this usage in his fiction.
18. Another contemporary Angolan short fiction writer, Manuel Rui, follows the linguistic footsteps of Castro Soromenho. See, Manuel Rui, *Regresso Adiado* (Lisbon: Plátano Editora, 1974).