Heteroglossia in G.H. Musengezi's *The Honourable MP* (1984)

Nyasha Mboti and Cuthbeth Tagwirei

Abstract

This article illustrates how heteroglossia functions in G.H. Musengezi's (1984) satirical play, *The Honourable MP*. Heteroglossia describes the coexistence, as well as the clashing, of distinct voices within a text. It can be shown that while the playwright has a distinct (and seemingly dominant) voice operating in the play – expressed mainly via the sets of characters he creates and the roles he creates for them, as well as through the play's general *mise en scène* – there are other voices in the play as well, operating *in spite* of the playwright's wishes. The 'other' voices specifically function through *exceeding* the playwright's, simultaneously confirming and contradicting the central message of the play. It is not what the writer says in the end that is important, but what is made out of what is left after the writer has had his/her say. Meaning finally resides in the surpluses of the text. Audiences ultimately hear what they hear, what they think they hear, and what they want to hear. The ear, rather than the voice, is finally transcendent.

Keywords: Bakhtin, carnival, G.H. Musengezi, heteroglossia, *The Honourable MP*

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Introduction

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears ...
– Act III Scene II, *Julius Caesar*, William Shakespeare

Lend me your ears and I'll sing you a song ...
The Beatles, 'With a Little Help from My Friends', *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967)

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to a specific lacuna in Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin's essay, 'Discourse in the novel' regarding heteroglossia. In the essay Bakhtin proposes two points about heteroglossality: 1) he asserts that heteroglossia, the condition of the multiplicity and prolificacy of voices in texts, is best understood through the modern novel. It is offered that other genres are second best to the novel in terms of allowing for a play of a multiplicity of voices. However, Bakhtinian scholars – including Bakhtin himself in subsequent writings – have since expanded the application of heteroglossia to genres other than the novel; 2) Bakhtin appears to continuously imply that heteroglossia is an utterance-based phenomenon. In other words, heteroglossia is something needing speakers and utterers in order for it to be. Heteroglossia is hence framed as a question of plurality, of moving from a singular unitary speaker to speakers, from monologue to dialogue, from monoglossia to polyglossia, from univocality to equivocality, and from monophony to polyphony. One voice is replaced with two or more. Many *different* speakers are substituted for one. Heteroglossia is then a question of increase, firmly anchored in the postulation of quantity. An increase of voices, speakers, and different voices and speakers, is assumed to guarantee heteroglossia.

This article is limited to a study of the second point. It is argued that the Bakhtinian formulation of heteroglossia in 'Discourse in the novel' is, in the final analysis, limited because it is quantitative. It is largely framed as a question of adding-to. More voices with more differences equals good; fewer voices with less difference equals bad. Hence, a crude algorithm can be drawn up to represent the oppositional dualities:

Monologia = not heteroglossia
Two or more voices = heteroglossia
Single unitary speaker = not heteroglossia
Multiplicity of speakers = heteroglossia

This view is obviously generally correct, and it is not the object of our present attempt to trouble normative wisdom about heteroglossia. Rather, we take issue with what they see as an obsession with the centrality of voice in texts. There is no discernible movement away from voice. Instead, all movement is towards voice, its metaphors

and its baggage – by ‘voice’ we understand not just physical voice, but the ontology of voice.

Bakhtin (1981: 324) defines heteroglossia as ‘another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way’. This is a compelling definition that, however, throws up more questions than answers. The first question, surely, ought to be: *Who* or *what* is behind the refracting of ‘another’s speech’ in ‘another’s language’? Who or what refracts ‘authorial intentions’? Voice certainly is important for *expressing* authorial and other intentions in a text. But can voice *express* and *refract* literally in the same breath and in the same way? The logic behind ‘back and forth’ is akin to that of a swinging pendulum, but, in the case of heteroglossia, can something move forward and backward in the same moment? How does it do this? That is, can something (in this case, voice) express and refract meaning equally well without suffering some life-threatening contradiction or fatally damaging itself in the process? In *Things fall apart* Chinua Achebe (1958: 35) recounts:

Even the village rain-maker no longer claimed to be able to intervene. He could not stop the rain now, just as he would not attempt to start it in the heart of the dry season, without serious danger to his own health.

The same principle of non-intervention may apply to the operation of heteroglossia. How does heteroglossia *intervene* to refract (start rain) what is expressed (in the heart of the dry season) without expressing a contradiction and without damaging its own health in the process? Can *voice* do all this, by itself? Anyhow, can we purposefully differentiate between what is expressed and what is refracted? Where and how does expression end and refraction begin? What does expression share and not share with refraction? What is the nature of the movement between expressing and refracting? How do we know when and if expression has succeeded and refraction has failed, and vice versa? To what does expression belong and not belong? To what does refraction belong and not belong?

The apparently untroubled adoption of *voice* as the originary site of heteroglossia is pre-empted in the suffix ‘-glossia’, which means ‘related to the tongue’. The term ‘heteroglossia’ hence refers, at the very least, to a reality of ‘many different tongues’. Bakhtin (1981: 354) defines heteroglossia through specifying that language is subject to ‘heteroglot development’, a process that reflects how ‘within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one’s own and another’s word is being waged’. Voice is hence the stable site onto which more voices, differences, nuances and tones are meant to be propagated. We, however, argue that the adding-to approach not only privileges voice unnecessarily, but also ultimately fails to oppose it. To achieve true heteroglossia, it seems, voice as *a priori* guarantor of meaning must be knocked off its perch, and the terms of the relation reversed.

The conventional Bakhtinian approach of replacing unitary voices with multiple voices is attended by interpretive problems, as it limits the issue to being one of *succession*: many voices succeed monologue. The *successive* nature of heteroglossia ultimately means that the aporias and contradictions of voice are retained in the new state of affairs. Replacing a single voice with many voices only shifts power relations between voices, but adds nothing to the multisensory dimension. To really change the power relation, the ontology of the voice must be altered and replaced by the ontology of the ear.

Biologically speaking, the ear is a sound-conducting organ which functions to convert physical vibration into an encoded nervous impulse (Alton and Pohlmann 2009). The ear is what we hear with. To some extent, there is no sound without an ear to hear it. This is, however, not a reference to mere physical hearing or how the ear mechanically catches soundwave vibrations and transmits them in concentrated form. Rather, hearing goes beyond electrochemical transduction. Hearing is *filling with meaning* what is heard. This article deals with *hearing* and *hearing loss* in a text. In Musengezi's *The Honourable MP*, hearing and hearing loss are interpretive activities for facilitating what is heard, what is not heard, and what is meaningful in a text. More importantly, they structure and characterise interactive relations between audience and characters.

In this article we characterise hearing loss as occurring when a speaker's meaning is deliberately and/or unintentionally lost to the hearer, and replaced with a new hearing. The kind of 'hearing loss' being referred to cannot be treated by a hearing aid, cochlear implant or a speech-language pathologist. It cannot be diagnosed by a CAT scan or MRI either. This is because it is not a physical hearing loss, but rather, it is a simultaneously textual and social loss or erasure of meaning. Things that have been said do not reach the ear straight away – they reflect, refract and diffract within the world of the play, through props, costumes, stage directions, characterisation and so on. It is the ear – of the characters and the audiences – that recovers or attempts to recover meaning from the fragments of voice that reach it. What is heard is what the ear recovers. This meaning-recovering, voice-recovering activity is what, in our view, supports the assumption that the ear is as salient a feature as voice, if not more so.

Sound normally travels rectilinearly (Alton and Pohlmann 2009). However, diffraction causes sound to bend and travel in other directions. The term 'diffract' (to bend) derives from the Latin *diffingere*, which means to fragment or break into pieces. In this article we suggest that meanings necessarily encounter edges, gaps, apertures, walls and screens, causing diffraction, reflection and refraction. Importantly, the article argues that the site of diffraction, reflection and refraction is the ear. In physics, scattering is the study of collisions. As physicist Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695) stated: 'Every point of a wave front may be considered the

source of secondary wavelets that spread out in all directions.’¹ Hence, each point on a wave front becomes the source of a new spreading or scattering wave. An incident wave excites other waves which become the sources of new spreading waves. The Huygens principle hence denotes the reality of multiple and heterogeneous scatterings of phenomena.

We propose that the ear is the site of the collision, hence the scattering and dispersal of meanings. We argue that it is not the spoken voice itself that is at issue, but what it collides with and what disperses it. We see the ear as being the site of such meaningful dispersal, collision and superposition. While Musengezi attempts to privilege only a single scattering of meaning, we argue that, in fact, multiple scatterings of meaning take place within the context of the play as a whole. The appreciation of those scatterings, however, is not obvious if we adhere to the normal view of heteroglossia as a linguistically derived metaphor. In the final analysis, the playwright may not eat their heteroglot cake and still have it. That is, it is possible to argue that *either a text is heteroglot or it is not* – there may be no half-heteroglossia, only a full heteroglossia will do. We argue that seeing heteroglossia as unfolding within an isotropic field of meanings repays attention, as does the fact that it is, to some extent, an ear-derived metaphor.

MP Pfende, in *The Honourable MP*, hears the things he wants to hear. He is not able to read Choto’s lips. He misses many other meanings, however, because he lives a sheltered life far from the poverty and drought of the ordinary people who voted him into power. His hearing loss is due to the acoustic neuromas, interference and *noise* produced by his wealthy surroundings, which are filled with consumerist gadgetry and a corrupt lifestyle. The contribution of this article is to show that hearing loss also occurs in the other characters in the play, not just in the villains. Focusing on the ear allows us to posit that there is a kind of isotropy of space – all directions in space are equal – in texts such as *The Honourable MP*, and hence that any disturbance, created in the meanings reaching MP Pfende, also ripples and radiates across the text to affect the rest of the meanings preferred by the playwright. Those meanings created by obstructed meanings create other multiple obstructions in other meanings, and so on.

This article argues that the ear, which hears voice, is the principal and fundamental site of heteroglossia. The ear, as the portal of voice, is the interpretive seat that can choose to hear or not to hear. As Mark Antony acknowledges in Act III Scene II of *Julius Caesar* by beginning his famous speech with ‘Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears ...’, the *transitive lending* of the ear, though silent, is key to the success of the communicative act. Without an audience, voice is mere garble. Audiences, by lending their ears, are the true creators of meaning. The Beatles’ song ‘With a little help from my friends’, which is on the album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), has the lyrics ‘Lend me your ears and I’ll sing you a

song' The Beatles, like Mark Antony, are asking for a transitive lending of ears from their audience. Notice, however, that the transitive lending of ears *precedes* the singing. That is, the Beatles may sing, but the singing only becomes a song when ears are lent, as it were. It is futile – impossible even – to sing without some form of audience (ears). In the case of the Beatles' song, the song becomes a song only when it is heard (or misheard). The important principle is that audiences ultimately hear what they hear, what they think they hear, and what they want to hear.

Talking about the ear as the site of heteroglossia pays renewed attention in that it turns to the notion of *silence* as the true guarantor of a qualitative (as opposed to merely quantitative) multiplicity of meanings in texts. To illustrate the point, we suggest a short play from Zimbabwe that not only playfully multiplies voices just as well as any novel, but demonstrates that ultimately it is what the ear hears, rather than what the voice says, that is the source of the rich literariness and openness of texts. In Bakhtin's view, the novel has a significant advantage over poetry, drama and the epic because it lends itself to heteroglossia, the condition of being multi-voiced. The novel's generic others are seen to gravitate towards monologue. However, Musengezi's play demonstrates that monologue is not actually a problem of genre at all. Rather, monologue is a function of voice. As long as (the author's and the characters') voice is allowed to diminish what the ear hears, monologue happens. The ear is the site of meaningful overlap, superposition, diffraction and refraction, leading to an infinite chirality of meaning.

Bakhtin does concede that other genres can be heteroglot, but insists that it is in the novel that heteroglossia is undoubtedly achieved, even in cases where an author attempts to silence other voices. Drama, in particular, is regarded as 'objectivized speech' (Pechey 2007: 112). That is, drama is seen as lacking dialogic potential, containing as it does 'the impulse towards unification' (ibid: 113). However, we argue that as important as this theoretical observation is, it is nevertheless limited. Heteroglossia is never silenced by the attempted act of silencing voices, since voices cannot really be silenced. As Bakhtin's oeuvre shows, texts are productively haunted by *unfinalisability*. To talk about the silencing of voices as equaling 'no heteroglossia', on the one hand, and opening up of voices as 'heteroglossia', on the other hand, is to obsess about voices when – in fact – voices do nothing in texts by themselves. A more productive move would be to regard the silencing of the ear as the source of 'no heteroglossia' while the close study of the multiple transitivity created by the ear *in* the text is the province of heteroglossia. An examination of Musengezi's satirical play, *The Honourable MP*, will demonstrate the limits of the dictatorship of the ontology of voice. It will be seen that the play troubles and unsettles the Bakhtinian characterisation. This unsettling is important as it suggests the expansion of the formal limits of heteroglossia, giving the notion added theoretical inclusivity.

Theorising about the function of the ear is not meant to replace the voice. Rather, it is meant to achieve a refiguring of the voice by broadening not only its scope but also its discursive relevance. Here, the ear represents a discursive activity for telling the voice what to say. Again, audiences are regarded as hearing what they want to hear. In its original formulation, heteroglossia gives precedence to voice/speech. Speech, as it turns out, is 'personified' (Bakhtin 1995: 326). Using GH Musengezi's *The Honourable MP* (1984) as a particular example, we propose that heteroglossia legitimately exists as long as there is sufficient allowance for the *silent* play of meanings between the speaking tongue and the hearing-interpreting ear. The overemphasis of utterance suppresses silence. *That which is said* needs to be *heard*. How a thing is heard is critical to understanding what is said. In fact, it can be argued that it is the ear which generates the multiplicity of, and gives materiality to, voices. That is, a voice is only a voice at the specific point of being heard. This article argues for the centrality of *reception*, suggesting that other multi-sensory activities – beyond the speech-making abilities of the tongue – are critical to hybrid speech because they open the text to other possibilities which would be otherwise absent if one were to focus only on personified voices. We intend to draw attention to the silences of heteroglossia. The narrative mode of Musengezi's play is – to postulate a paradox – dramatic in the sense that it is frequently performed via the ears – as well as *seen* – rather than merely *said*. It is not what the writer says in the end that is important, but what is made out of what is left after the writer has had his/her say. Meaning resides in the surpluses of the text.

Bakhtin sees language as carrying many sets of voices, dialects and jargons, and proposes that all languages represent a distinct point of view on the world, characterised by its own meaning and values. In this view, language is 'shot through with intentions and accents' (Bakhtin 1981: 293). There are, thus, no neutral words or neutral points of view. Even the most unremarkable statement possesses a source or an inflection, whether of a profession, a political party, a generation, a place or a time. Basically, Bakhtin is saying that all 'speech' is ideologically inflected; it is never sender-less or agenda-less. Significantly, he proposes that words do not exist until they are spoken. It is at that very moment of being spoken, however, that they are irrecoverably imprinted with the ideology of the speaker. We may add, emphatically, that words do not exist until they are *heard*, i.e., it is at the moment of being heard that words exist as words.

The Honourable MP

The Honourable MP is a very short (two-act) play by Gonzo Musengezi, written in 1984, which satirises an Honourable Member of Parliament, Shakespeare Pfende, who – it turns out – has little or nothing that is actually *honourable* about him. Pfende's sins, as catalogued in the play, are many: he has cheated on his wife,

Immaculate, and is thus an adulterer; he impregnates, publicly disgraces and cruelly dumps his sugar-girl, Isabella, after lying to her that he is a divorcé looking forward to marrying her; he operates an emerald-and-gold smuggling ring with his wife; he has not visited his constituency at all despite a severe drought; he uses public money to finance an expensive and ostentatious lifestyle that includes several expensive cars and three plush mansions; and he sits on various boards of exploitive foreign-owned 'local' multinational companies. Pfende is also an inveterate liar² who habitually manipulates the *povo* (masses) for his own selfish gain, and threatens all his real and imagined opponents with violence, and so forth. Such a catalogue of moral and political indiscretions galvanises the long-suffering people of Pfende's constituency to organise themselves into sending a delegation – headed by the young school teacher, Choto (ironically Pfende's former student) – to the city to ask the government for a new leader since, in their words, they are facing a 'leadership drought' (p. 12).

When he hears about the delegation, MP Pfende is outraged. He promptly decides to pay his constituency a visit and hold a rally for purposes of more sloganeering as well as to warn his enemies. Unfortunately for him, the *povo* at the rally refuse to buy his rhetoric and false promises. Instead, they denounce him and effect a citizen's arrest on him. This sudden turn of events is too much for the deposed MP, who falls into a swoon. His wife flees the scene. The *povo* thereafter pledge to govern themselves through popular congresses. The play ends with jubilant, defiant singing.

Quite plainly, *The Honourable MP* is an unapologetic critique of the new black elite that ascends to power after the formal end of colonialism. While the immediate drama is about a corrupt and inept MP who is rejected by 'his' people, the larger issue is really the rejection of the breed of leaders – spawned by African 'independence' – that is alleged to 'advocate socialism during the day and champion capitalism at night' (p. 43). The play's verdict is clear: contemporary African leaders can go hang. Subsequently, a new reality also seems to be at hand: the *povo* can run its own show and manage its own affairs. The play is indeed an unambiguous endorsement of the collective power of 'the people'. Indeed, the word 'people' is used 60 times in the play, including 17 times where it is cited as an actual character.³ Of the 60 uses, 58⁴ refer directly or indirectly to the people of Pfende's constituency or to the workers and peasants in general – the so-called masses. *The Honourable MP* may be read, therefore, as an important text in post-independence Zimbabwean literature for the way it courageously tackles a nearly sacred topic: bankrupt leadership that obstinately hangs onto power long after being rejected by the majorities it purports to represent. The text thus shares the same honour accorded to such classics of protest in African literature as Armah's *The beautiful [sic] ones are not yet born* and Achebe's *A man of the people*.

Musengezi's subject is the postcolony. His text is Fanonian in its politics, acerbic, questioning and committed to revolutionary change. It is easy to agree and sympathise with much of the playwright's discourse. He has, for instance, written on a subject for which one would have been ostracised – in those heady years following independence – for being 'counter-revolutionary'. The play, written only four years after the coming of 'independence', goes against the grain of populist liberation war sentiment about *gutsaruzhinji* ('satisfying the masses', or socialism). Musengezi, like Fanon, Achebe, Ngugi and Armah, writes *against* the yes-men mentality. Importantly, his message not only gets through, but he comes across as prophetic as well. The trope of the self-serving hypocritical politician fits an uncannily familiar template in the discourse of the African postcolony. But all this reflects what we regard as the straightforward element in Musengezi's play. What remains unexamined is the way *The Honourable MP* fails, or almost fails, as a play where allowing for the play of multiple voices that question authority in its many guises is concerned. The article will examine how the play's ideological unity (Pfende bad/Choto good; governing elites bad/people good) is achieved at the expense of 'mutual addressivity', dialogic exchange and openness. The argument will be that Musengezi's attempt to make meanings unitary and stable through his authorial voice has resulted in the suppression of heteroglossia, or the play of a variety of languages in the same text. Only the opposition of voice and ear recovers some of the heteroglot wealth of meanings.

The exchange of issues through an 'other-language' is what most fully defines heteroglossia. An author, in the interests of seeking to have the final word, is often 'defeated' by heteroglossia working in combination with carnival, polyphony and polyglossia. Carnival arises as a response to monologic discourse, or the repression of heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1981; 1984a & b) defines 'carnival' as that which creates 'threshold' situations where regular conventions are broken or reversed and genuine dialogue becomes possible. Thus carnival expresses itself in the sub-textual tension that exists between language that is permitted and language that is not, and in the contextualisation of socio-ideological contradictions. Scott McLemee has observed that '[c]arnival is the reminder that the Pope's shit stinks too'.⁵ Polyglossia and polyphony, on the other hand, refer to the hybrid, simultaneous and many-voiced nature of language. We argue that Musengezi's play, in as far as it is a 'straightforward', finished play, is essentially a non-carnival play. It is 'autotelic' in as far as it is presented as 'truthful' and self-sufficient in its methods and meanings. To succeed as a true satire, however, *The Honourable MP* needs to be 'carnivalised' and its heteroglossic potential freed not just through re-admitting the play of 'doubly-orientated' speech, but also 'ear-orientated' speech.

Figure 1: Front cover of *The Honourable MP*

Hearing and hearing loss in *The Honourable MP*

The Honourable MP is mainly characterised by a stream of hearing and hearing loss running through the centre of the play. The dissonant exchange of hearing and hearing loss happens at the level of characterisation and is expressed through dialogue, gesture, performance, costume and props. Musengezi constructs characters in such a way that they stand for certain ideals or a lack of them. Pfende stands for corrupted, dishonoured, selfish leadership, while Choto stands for incorruptibility, courage and selflessness. Hearing/loss happens when Pfende, Choto and several other characters do and say more or less than Musengezi allows for at a textual level. The heteroglossia of *The Honourable MP* is carnival in the true Bakhtinian sense, due to this hearing/loss.

Carnival ensues only because of the conflict between what the playwright is saying about the characters and society, and what the characters are saying for and about themselves and society. It is in this sense that a distinction will be made here between what Bakhtin (1981: 304) calls the 'semantic and axiological intentions

of the author' on the one hand, and utterances that apparently *exceed* the author's intentions on the other. The objective of such an analysis is to prove that the text has the power to recover and assert its textuality and to reconstitute itself in spite of the best/worst intentions of the author. The ear is the principal site of this recovery. While the playwright's intentions may continue to deafen the 'voices' in the text, rendering them null and leaving his own unitary voice dominating certain sections of the play (such as Act 2, Scene 1 where, in the writers' view, the carnival of voices is more or less muted, nullified and blocked), the ear opens back doors and trapdoors of meaning that exceed Musengezi's prescriptions.

The analysis of *The Honourable MP* focuses on two characters, MP Pfende and Teacher Choto. Both have been sent out as messengers and representatives into the world by a third and equally important character, 'the people'. The 'people', comprising workers, peasants, singers and dancers, are the originators of the 'quest' (socialist development) of the play, while Pfende and Choto respectively are the villain and hero figures who actualise the quest. Musengezi's authorial voice constructs Pfende and Choto along a non-overlapping capitalist/socialist duality, where capitalism is corrupting and bad, and socialism is purifying and good. Basically, the playwright is saying that Pfende is a bad, faithless messenger while Choto is a good, faithful one. At least, one supposes that this is what the audiences of the play are supposed to hear.

Hearing Pfende and Choto

Pfende is constructed as a character who should be honourable but is not. The title of the play, *The Honourable MP*, is therefore meant to draw salience and satiric power from the irony generated by dishonoured honour. Pfende is adulterous, hypocritical, delusional, arrogant, thieving and thuggish. In short, he is totally and completely bad, both as a human being and a leader. All this evil is meant to reflect Pfende's failure to be the people's 'eye and ear' (p. 42). The people 'sent him to the city' only to realise that they had 'sent a fly into a pot of milk. It got drowned in the feast' (p. 43). The metaphor of Pfende hearing on behalf of the people, in particular, is crucial to evaluating the exchange of meanings between hearing and hearing loss in the text. What are the people accusing Pfende of *not* hearing? What did Pfende *not* hear? How does a character *not* hear? Notably, Pfende's defence in the face of the people's accusations is 'Pamberi nekunzwisisa' (p. 42), which literally translates to 'Forward with understanding'. 'Kunzwisisa' (understanding) is an expansion of 'kunzwa', which means 'to hear'. Pfende thinks the people lack understanding because they cannot hear him as he wants them to hear him.

Pfende the adulterer maintains a mistress, Isabella, in clear violation of his marriage vows. He also boasts of his ability to 'cut like a razor' (p. 11), referring to his use of his wealth and power to attract young females ('small birds') from the local university. Adultery functions to show the operation of a diseased morality,

from which flow both lies (p. 14) and venereal disease (p. 22). More importantly, however, Pfende is unfaithful to 'the people'. His adulterous relationships parallel his infidelity to the constituency which elected him to be its 'eyes and ears'. The people's accusation that the MP enriched himself instead of doing what they sent him to the city for, is akin to being accused of adultery. The marriage between people and power broke down because of power's adultery and faithlessness. Pfende, however, blames the breakdown of the marriage on 'sowers of division' (p. 15). The true adultery, in his view, is the failure of the masses to show obedience.

Pfende the hypocrite shouts slogans such as 'Pamberi negwara regutsaruzhinji resocialism!' (Forward with socialism) and 'Pasi nevanodya varere!' (Down with greedy, lazy people) (p. 41) while living a life in complete contrast to these ideals. When 'arrested' by the people and confronted about this hypocrisy, Pfende defends himself by saying 'I will become a socialist when I want' (p. 43) and that 'the song has now changed the beat and one has to change the dance style' (p. 13). On the surface, this response indicates arrogance. Below the surface, however, Pfende is exposing the problem with slogans. When Choto accuses Pfende of not being a 'true socialist' (p. 43), Pfende's response that he will become a socialist when he feels like it appears to indicate that no one is a 'true socialist' in private.

The arrogant and delusional Pfende says things such as: 'I know the people in my constituency. They are an obedient flock. When I shout they all answer in unison and when I talk no one coughs' (p. 13). Such arrogance and delusion are the source both of his tragic (comedic?) flaw and fall. Pfende is possessive, speaking in proprietary terms that indicate his belief that 'his' people in 'his' constituency are his to do with as he deems fit. He is also has a delusional sense of power, illustrated in the boast that no one coughs when he talks. Hence he demands to know:

Who is this fool who is plotting against me? How can foolish, unschooled tribesmen
shit in my face like that? And who is this idiot who welcomes a delegation of confused
tribesmen into a Minister's office? Tribesmen with bare feet in a Minister's office ...
There is nothing you will not hear these days. (p. 14)

Clearly, Pfende is contemptuous of 'the people'. His lack of empathy is illustrated by his expression of incredulity at hearing that 'confused tribesmen ... with bare feet' had entered a minister's office. Pfende's paranoia makes him *hear* only a plot against him, not the poverty or the 'foolish, unschooled tribesmen' searching for answers. Interestingly, however, there indeed was something amounting to a plot against him, if one considers that Choto was sent to the city on a 'secret mission' (p. 38) to petition the government about the absentee MP.

Pfende the thieving MP smuggles gold and emeralds to Kenya and is the director of several foreign-owned multi-national corporations. The thug in the MP is a woman-beater (p. 36) who whips out a pistol at the rally (p. 43) and threatens to

shoot the attendees. All these characteristics are meant, it appears, to portray Pfende in a negative light. Even his name, 'Pfende', is rather unflattering – it denotes a dirty person and is connotative of the habits of pigs. So, generally, Pfende's character is delineated as pig-headed, immoral and hypocritical. He is positioned as someone we ought to laugh at and ridicule, or for whom we feel a strong loathing, and even a lurking fear on account of the threat of violence he poses.

The foil to Pfende is the teacher, Mr. Choto. While Pfende dresses in a 'ritzzy, black suit' (p. 8), Choto wears faded jeans, a khaki shirt and carries a canvas bag (p. 7). This sort of wardrobe distinguishes him from ostentatious and corrupting types such as Pfende, and puts him on a moral high ground as a struggling vanguard. The teacher has been sent by the 'people' to petition government for a new leader and to find help to alleviate the drought and famine. As such, Choto is constructed as the hero of the play, especially as he leads the operation to unmask the MP. As part of the action he karate kicks the pistol from the MP's hand, and leads the 'new' revolutionary song of the people. Pfende is a caricature, while Choto is meant to be credible.

Musengezi's 'semantic and axiological belief system' (Bakhtin 1981: 304), or simply his ideology or worldview, is what provides the Pfende/Choto opposition. The author imposes a reading that is critical of the corrupt and morally bankrupt new black intelligentsia. His view is that the country has been bankrupted by the likes of Pfende since independence, therefore the people are reinscribing and redescribing the revolution for themselves, by starting an 'authentic' government by the people, for the people. The message is that 'fake' socialists such as Pfende must be flushed out and must make way for genuine socialism led by true vanguards such as Choto and true proletariats such as the workers and peasants. This message is clearly delivered through a burst of song (p. 45). Musengezi has structured the story, characterisation, dialogue, costume and performative aspects of the play so that they bring out this preferred reading, which appears to fit in well with what Bakhtin argues about the novel, namely that it should question authority. But is it enough to (appear to) question authority? The problem is that this questioning does not appear to come fitted with a facility to question what authorises the novel to question authority, how well the novel questions authority, and whether the novel's questioning of authority is actually contrary to authority's very needs. That is, it needs to be established that the novel's authority to question authority is not a ploy on the part of authority to recover itself in the text. That which authorises Musengezi to question authority should be subjected to questioning. An ear for heteroglossia would ensure that the play's meanings refract and exceed the constraints of Musengezi's authorial voice.

Musengezi's symbolic Cartesian splitting of Choto (good) and Pfende (bad) is not as unambiguous as it may appear. A 'pfende' is a thoroughly dirty, unclean person. The suggestion seems to be that the MP soils everything he comes into contact

with. Ironically, this might include not only 'innocents' such as Isabella, but also the teacher (his former student) as well as the people in his constituency (who voted him into power and 'sent him' to the city to represent them). As pointed out in the introduction to this article, Pfende holds the title of 'Honourable' even though there is nothing honourable about him. Interestingly, the heteroglossia that inverts his title and empties it of its 'honour' should also work on the title of the teacher, by destabilising it. In other words, if the clash of voices shows up Pfende as really dishonourable, rather than honourable, the same heteroglossia will, like a slow acid, erode the ideological certainty surrounding the character of the teacher.

An ear for heteroglossia will show that Pfende is Musengezi's most reliable and most carnivalesque character, while Choto is his weakest. In other words, without Pfende and his Pfende-ness, the play would lose its literariness and fall flat. It is like *Hamlet* without a fratricidal Claudius, or Okonkwo in *Things fall apart* without his destructive pride. This loss of dramatic literariness may be demonstrated by making Pfende 'cleaner' and morally upright – 'cleaning' up his language and his idiotic ways. Then there would be no movement in the play. In fact, most of Pfende's dialogue, as well as that of his wife, Immaculate, contains movement because it is full of questions – 31 questions in only the first scene of the first act. The questions might be intended to be 'idiotic', but they are questions nevertheless. Choto's dialogue, by contrast, consists of *assertions* which can be described as dry and flat. Besides, Choto appears necessary to the play not as Pfende's other, but as vanguard of 'the people'. Yet 'the people' exist in spite of Choto. 'The people' are aware that Pfende is corrupt and, in fact, have already decided to get rid of him without the teacher's input. This makes Choto redundant. The voice of 'the people' mocks his, making him a liability to the play, despite the author's elevation of him. By contrast, Pfende not only holds the play together but also effectively saves it from excessive didacticism through his representation of an 'other-languagedness' not exactly approved by the author-playwright. In fact, if it were not for Pfende's peculiar language, *The Honourable MP* would perhaps merely be a platitude-filled propaganda tract.

Because of the operation of a variety of voices, Pfende is one character whose response to the others is one we perhaps almost always expect and want to hear, however 'wrong' it is. For instance, in response to Peasant 1's impassioned denunciation of police action in bulldozing them out of Bharamani's farm, Pfende says: 'Pamberi nokunzwisisa (Forward with understanding). The area in which you had settled is set aside for wild animals. It is a game reserve' (p. 42). His reply is important because it not only calls for yet another counter-response, but galvanises the action of the play, firing the people's anger and leading to his eventual citizen's arrest. If Pfende had not made that ridiculous remark, there would not have been sufficient motive or justification for his arrest. In other words, it is Pfende's 'speech', however ridiculous, that helps the action and the dialogical movement of the play,

not, as we would be led to imagine, that of the teacher or of 'the people' who seem merely to react to Pfende's outrage. Pfende seldom reacts to anyone; he initiates the drama in which he participates. The whole drama would be inconceivable without him. Indeed, the carnival in the play issues from the complex layering of Pfende's character, as well as, in part, Immaculate's. For instance, Pfende initiates the complex play-within-the-play (pp. 15–21) when Immaculate enters unexpectedly on her way back from Arusha. He creates the elaborate ruse that Isabella and the teacher are husband and wife, and actually plays along, making himself a willing fool in the process. Arguably, only a complex character would be able to watch him/herself, at a distance, perform in a play of his/her own making.

Pfende manages (perhaps without meaning to do so) to always undermine himself – he is his own best/worst enemy. The same cannot be said about the saintly teacher, Choto. At the rally, for instance, Pfende shouts 'Pasi nevanodya varere!' (Down with the lazy, greedy ones) (p. 41). Pfende's audience knows he is, in fact, denouncing and mocking himself, despite wearing a straight face and pretending to denounce an abstract, anti-povo enemy. In spite of this knowledge, the people still briefly join the 'carnival' of Pfende's play-in-the-play by fervently responding to his slogan with 'Pasi!' (Down!). In other words, although they recognise his hypocrisy, and actually already have well-laid plans to apprehend and beat him up, the people play along with Pfende in his elaborately stylised and self-induced deceptive parody, punning-game and ironical display. In one sense, Pfende the profane idiot brings carnival to the play – for idiocy and profanity very much belong to the carnivalesque. Choto, ever emotionally censored and tied to an over-provision of sentimentalism, remains Choto throughout the play. Pfende, however, moves from one unstable world to another, from MP to idiot to prisoner to nonentity. It thus does not take much guessing which character catalyses and gives the play its dramatic movement.

What is interesting about Pfende's character is the ambiguity which is built into it. His lies and deceptions, for instance, evoke and invite commentary. It is never clear whether the MP knows he is lying and deceiving people, or whether there are instances where he actually believes his own deceptions. When he is arrested by the povo, it is not even clear whether he recognises his 'sins' at all. On being told 'You are under arrest, a people's servant, under arrest', he replies, almost scornfully, 'What arrest?' (p. 43). When asked when he would become a 'true socialist', he is contemptuous: 'I will become a socialist when I want!' (p. 43). Indeed, it seems to be the teacher who finally loses his characteristic composure and shouts at Pfende to shut up. Pfende's last carnival act in the play is to 'collapse' in a stinking heap – and even here it is ultimately unclear whether or not the MP is merely faking a faint. The carnival is confirmed when the people laugh at him, rather than carrying out the promised beating. The ideological 'seriousness' of the teacher is undercut by the spectacle of Pfende who, after fainting, is unclothed, and is described by

Peasant 2 as stinking 'like a pile of rotten bones' (p. 44). The carnival of the play ends here, with the people's laughter. The teacher's exhortatory slogans and the people's singing seem merely to represent a contrived resolution to a play that has already concluded. Even Immaculate has kept the carnival alive by fleeing. The story remains open. Pfende's discourse extends far beyond the discursive limits imposed by the playwright, while Choto is a victim of a pigeon-holed characterisation.

Heteroglossia in *The Honourable MP*

Heteroglossia denotes the existence of many 'speeches' in a single text. As a literary phenomenon, it generates a multivocal plurality of meanings that is often riotous and cacophonous, as opposed to a uni-accentual singleness of meaning. This riot is an expression of the carnival nature – or carnivalesque nature – of the text. In Musengezi's play, the operation of heteroglossia – climaxing in the carnivalesque – may be observed specifically in the lines spoken by the corrupt 'honourable' MP Shakespeare Pfende and his wife Immaculate. The lines themselves express authorial intention, but Pfende and his wife refract authorial intention through mishearing (hearing loss) and even not-hearing the author and his set of chosen 'good' characters. Carnival begins where Musengezi loses control over the utterances of Pfende in particular.

Pfende, whom we want to hate because he is characterised as odious, not only makes us laugh but single-handedly holds the play together. We also laugh because we decide not to lend a transitive ear to Musengezi's moralising. Rather, we lend a transitive ear to Pfende the character. Even as Musengezi suggests that Pfende is a buffoon, we still manage to see the complex, 'unfinalisable' shades of his character. For example, Pfende is able to play the fool twice over – he is the play's fool who manages to dupe his wife through creating a fool's play in which he is forced to play along foolishly, so as to keep up the deception.⁶ However, Musengezi seems to deliberately try to silence the dialogic interaction that Pfende initiates. His relationship with Choto is not based on dialogical exchange at all – perhaps because in Musengezi's ideological horizon villains cannot be seen to be sharing dialogically with the people's 'heroes'. Always, the playwright's preferred choice of hero must be seen to be the moral hub of the story. A dialogical interaction between Pfende and Choto would, perhaps, have destabilised Musengezi's meaning because, to interact dialogically, characters not only have to be imbued with equal status in the text, but also have to be fully constituted as subjects.

This postulation of the place of the ear in structuring messages means the dominant ideology can be seen as targeting not the text per se, but its expressive and communicative modes. In *The Honourable MP* such modes are to be read in the 'dramatic' repertoire of the play – a repertoire that includes performance, dialogue, costume and props, as well as the temporal and spatial structuring of the play –

filtered through Pfende's character. In Musengezi's play, the 'ear' is as important as the voice in completing the textual carnival that is required for a text to succeed. Bakhtin identifies the act of speaking, or of writing, as a literary-verbal performance requiring speakers or authors to have a standpoint of some sort, even if only by choosing the dialect in which they will speak. Separate languages are often identified with separate circumstances. Bakhtin gives the example of an illiterate peasant who speaks Church Slavonic to God, speaks to his family in their own peculiar dialect, sings songs in yet a third, and attempts to emulate an officious high-class dialect when he dictates petitions to the local government. The prose writer, Bakhtin argues, must welcome and incorporate these many languages into his work.

The incorporation of other genres is, however, not a peculiarity of the novel. *The Honourable MP*, for instance, is replete with incorporated genres which include song, speech, poetry, narrative prose and a letter. Importantly, these genres are used by Pfende to refract Musengezi's ideological expression. Bakhtin (1981: 163, 342) identifies 'authoritative discourse', or monoglossia, as a textual discourse which demands 'unconditional allegiance' rather than fluid interpretation. Hence, the role of the novel is to draw authority into question, and to allow that which was once considered certain to become conflicted and open to interpretation. Texts are seen to fail if they fail the test of heteroglossia. However, as we have tried to argue, it is not easy for the voice to question the authority from which it draws its expressive/refracting powers. Something else outside the voice's ontological limits needs to recover the refracted meanings.

Ultimately, Bakhtin implies that no dominant ideology will totally succeed in any given text since there is a multiplicity of voices in the text which will keep defeating this dominance. We argue, however, that this is looking in the wrong place. Extending Bakhtin at this level means drawing attention to the argument that the intention of the dominant ideology was never, in fact, to silence the polyphony of texts. That is, the dominant discourse rarely, if ever, targets polyphony. Polyphony is always already guaranteed in the 'unfinalisable' nature of human languages, words and texts. We do not think that 'authoritative discourse' gains anything from trying to block different voices. Rather, in our view, the dominant ideology tries to block, not other voices at all – it already knows it cannot succeed – but the 'ear'. In this regard, the dominant ideology has another unique strategy: asking audiences to lend it a listening, receptive ear for its preferred readings. Lending ears to the dominant ideology guarantees that no ears will be lent to other voices in the text. In other words, the authoritative discourse will simply monopolise *hearing*, making it impossible for the reader to 'hear' other voices. Thus the voices will be present in the text – as they always will be – but in muted, unheard form. Or, put another way, polyphonic voices will always be there all the time, but we cannot hear them. Only hearing loss will

unsettle the prescription and refract the voices into varieties of meaning that exceed authorial intention.

Conclusion

The Honourable MP presents the audience with discourse about 'the people' organising themselves and taking over power from a thieving elite. This discourse is 'voiced' through the ideological prescriptions of the author-playwright. Musengezi attempts to contain the text's carnival so as to stamp a single, final meaning on the play and to privilege a specific ideological throughput. However, as we have noted, language saturated with the ideology of the author is never quite the guarantor of heteroglossia. Rather, it is the ear, which recovers refracted and diffracted voices, which ultimately guarantees the dispersal of meanings from character to character to audience. In extending Bakhtin thus, the argument made here is that the 'ear', rather than the voice, should be regarded as the principal feature of heteroglossia – at least in certain types of texts. Without the ear we cannot hear *any* of the many voices. For the text to succeed, readers must have a peculiar ear for textuality, or textual voices. Without such an ear, Bakhtin's carnival of voices remains cancelled and, therefore, a non-feature. The text, therefore, does not create voices so much as it creates ears that will hear the discourse of the text. A 'typical double-accented, double-styled hybrid construction' only emerges if the ear to hear it, or the discourse for hearing it, exists. As such there is, in a text, a diversity of modes and points of view that are in excess of 'voice'.

Notes

1. See http://www.biosono.com/UltrPhys/UltrPhys.php?id=BmFrm_BF
2. For instance, he tells the people at the rally: 'For the past two years I have been travelling all over the world begging for money to help develop my constituency' (p. 41). In truth, Pfende has been doing nothing of the sort.
3. It seems quite clear that the 'people' are supposed to be a character: in the last scene of the play they are referred to as 'PEOPLE' or 'ALL' when responding to the Teacher, the Peasant, the Drunk and the MP. It is also 'the people' who burst into song at the end of the play. The key question, however, ought to be: Who are the people? In the play's preferred definition, it seems that the people are archetypal of the 'poor' and the 'wretched of the earth'. For instance, in what is supposed to be the great 'gathering' of the 'army' of 'the people' in Act 2 Scene 2, there is present 'a crowd of peasants and workers'. It is this presence, it appears, that Musengezi is satisfied to call the people. Indeed, the use of lines from Okot p'Bitek's 'Song of Lawino' to preface the play offers proof that the people are the poor and the victimised:

And while the pythons of sickness
Swallow the children
And the buffalos of poverty
Knock the people down
And ignorance stands there
Like an elephant,

The war leaders
Are tightly locked in bloody feuds,
Eating each other's liver...

In this scheme of things, the people stand on one side, while politicians ('the war leaders') are on the other side.

Unfortunately, the so-called people still stand as a vague, amorphous undifferentiated mass. Indeed, they are still an abstraction in spite of the author-playwright's attempt to show that among the people are peasants, workers, women and children (p. 37). For instance, the Peasant says 'the people' as if, by speaking individually at all, he has stepped out from the people. When he shouts 'Pasi naPfende!' (p. 40), the people chorus back 'Pasi!' Indeed, when Peasant 1 hears 'the people' ululate and clap after Pfende's promise to bring 'fresh, clean water... electricity in your huts...(and) a bigger and better secondary school' (p. 41), he jumps up, alarmed, and shouts 'Don't be cheated. Don't be cheated. We have heard that for many years now' (p. 42). Yet, initially, when the same Peasant stands up to speak, he uses the pronoun 'we' and 'our' as if he is *also* one of the people. Even the Teacher repeatedly says 'the people agreed' (p. 38), further throwing the term into more confusion. How do 'the people' *agree*, for instance? Is it possible for 'the people' to agree at all? Is the Teacher not deliberately presuming 'agreement' where there can never be any? The Teacher also says that 'the people' are the ones who sent him to petition the government. If he is also part of 'the people', how can he be sent by 'the people'? In other words, is the set of all sets now a member of itself? In claiming to speak for 'the people', both the Teacher and the Peasant seem no different from Pfende who designates himself 'the people's servant' (p. 13) and who boasts 'I very well know that I am your eyes and ears ...I speak for you, and hear for you' (p. 15).

The difficulty of pinning down who exactly 'the people' are, is apparent in Pfende's 'speech' to the teacher and Isabella: 'But let me warn you, my people. He who goes about inciting people to rebel against me will very soon start regretting why he was ever born. Down with sowers of division' (p. 15, repeated on p. 41). Pfende is here speaking to 'his' people about someone who might be going about 'inciting people' to rebel against the MP. In other words, though he is actually addressing his people, there is still an amorphous 'people' out there being incited! Indeed, Pfende's progressive paranoia (pp. 13–15) leads him to finger almost everyone as the enemy inciting 'the people' – from teachers, university students, traders, ex-combatants to 'foolish tribesmen' – leaving one wondering: If all those mentioned in this broad list are inciting Pfende's people, and are not the people themselves, who then are the

people? It all begs the question: who is left to be the 'people'? Perhaps, indeed, there are no people at all!

4. One use of the word 'people' is made in reference to 'the customs people' who had asked Pfende for an Import Licence (p. 9). The other use is by Immaculate when she says to Pfende 'you are the people involved (with sugar girls)' (p. 20).

5. Scott McLemee 'Bakhtin', <http://www.mclemeec.com/id91.html>

6. Pfende is able to come out of the play-within-a-play that he has created ('So how was your journey?' [p. 18]) and then immediately back in again ('By the way, Immaculate was a member of a high-powered delegation...'). When he is caught in the insoluble tension between keeping on playing and coming out of the play (tension caused by Immaculate's inadvertent joining of Pfende's equally inadvertent play through asking the 'Chotos' to retire to their bedroom and Pfende to come with her), Pfende has problems terminating a carnival which is about to explode under the weight of excess and contradiction. In fact, Immaculate mocks Pfende by what seems, by now, to be a deliberate not-knowing. Initially, it is the audience that mocks Immaculate for not knowing that her husband is fooling with her. Yet, she is not as duped as one might be led to believe. She begins to deliberately mock the audience for mocking her by initiating her own carnival when she talks on and on about young couples and infidelity. In this way she tests the knowledge of the three characters who are in the know, as well as that of the audience. Immaculate appears to know, even as we know that there is no way she could possibly know. In the end, neither Pfende and his cast nor Mrs. Pfende, nor even the audience, are really in total control of their carnival. Only the beginning of Scene 2 terminates the carnival before it blows up in everyone's faces.

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Music

The Beatles. 1967. 'With a little help from my friends', from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.