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Tradition and Innovation in Shona Literature

CHAKAIPA'S KARIKOGA GUMIREMISEVE

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Patrick Chakaipa's first novel, *Karikoga Gumiremiseve*, was published in 1958,¹ twenty-six years after his birth in Guvamombe, a village in the Mhondoro Tribal Trust Land. Like most African youths, he spent his early years looking after the family's livestock. First he looked after goats and sheep and kept close to the female world; this was a time for folk tales and riddles. Then later he looked after cattle and went with his father and other adult members of the community on hunting expeditions; this was a time for historical legends and proverbs. The first period is one of fantasy and the second is the period of reality; or, in other words, one is the period of the world of animals and of make-believe, and the other is the period of real human beings, their struggle for existence and their aspirations.

Karikoga Gumiremiseve stems directly from both worlds, the world of fantasy and the world of reality, and thus is a synthesis of romance and reality. We cannot understand or appreciate this novel unless we go back to the study of the folk tale (*rungano*; pl. *ngano*), for Chakaipa's work is clearly based upon one of the many stories in Zezuru folk-lore, which is called 'Karikoga':

Once upon a time a child was born and his mother died soon after giving birth. On hear-

ing about the death of his wife the father died of shock thus leaving the newly born baby without parents. These unfortunate circumstances earned him the name Karikoga, because he was the only child of his dead parents.² No relations volunteered to foster the child, but at last an old couple offered to look after him and bring him up. The foster parents did not look after the child as well as they could have done and so he grew up despised by the other boys of his age group. Because he was tormented, teased and despised by the members of his community, he developed special gifts, notably the gifts of speaking well, hunting, courage, determination and that of an indomitable will. Courage became part and parcel of his nature and he excelled in all that he tried to do.

There are two types of song which Karikoga is made to sing each time he is confronted by problems, which are basically of two sorts, human problems and those involving animals. Firstly, when confronted by human problems such as cruel treatment from fellow playmates or from his foster parents, Karikoga sings an elegiac song which is half-pathetic and half-comic in tone. It is expressive of the sudden and unexpected death of his parents:

*Dai ndina amai,
Zuva, Karingewe-e, ndosiya-siya.
Vaidya vachindipawo
Zuva, Karingewe-e, ndosiya-siya.
Pasi ndipo panoziva chete,
Zuva, Karingewe-e, ndosiya-siya.
Vaidya vachiti, 'Mwana'.**

The tone of the complaint is set by: 'If I had a mother (*Dai ndina amai*)'; and the response to this statement of sorrow is simply: 'She would feed me'. One is made keenly aware of the strange relationship between his past and present experience. One feels the built-up tension or emotion of Karikoga experienced through his identity with, and separation from, his past self. The old ideas of motherhood, the need for parental care, and his past experience

If I had a mother,
Oh Time, leave me alone.
She would offer me food when she ate herself,
Oh Time, leave me alone.
It's only the gods who know,
Oh Time, leave me alone.
She would say, 'Here you are my child'.

all lend themselves to the expression and communication of sincere emotion.

Secondly is the animal-hunting song, sung for the purpose of building up tensions which are meant to be released on solving the problem, in this case, on making a kill; hence the repetitious use of the verb 'shoot' in what is essentially an action song. 'The union between lyric and drama could hardly be closer':³

*De, de, de, ndopfura.
Pfura Karingewe-e
Ndopfura-pfura.*

Shoot, shoot, shoot, I shoot.
Shoot the lonely Karinge
I shoot everywhere.

It is by these sorts of songs that Karikoga's character is expressed; indeed in traditional verse, particular tunes or songs are always associated with particular persons or actions, and those who have had the opportunity of listening to these stories will recall the songs that go with them. This is also borne out by the fact that, more often than not, the characters of the stories are remembered more than the stories themselves, although the characters and the songs are inseparable.

FORM

Songs alone, however, are not sufficient to hold the story together. Zezuru traditional literature is a spoken art and its production and dissemination is in the hands of the community; and as it depends for its life and transmission on memory, it must have form if it is to live longer than the individual story-teller, *sarungano*.

The *rungano* has a definite form which form has enabled it to be passed on from generation to generation; it begins with one of a number of phrases, which all have the sense of, 'Once upon a time' and always ends with 'Here is

where the story-teller died'. The beginning, the end, and, allowing for flexibility, the middle part of the story also, are prescribed by custom and tradition. As a stylistic device, some story-tellers begin their story with a song. All *ngano* require an audience, and although active participation is not an absolute necessity, there is a standard response '*Dzefunde*'.*

Obviously the middle part of the story is the most important. It is this part, the central part of the 'spindle', which allows the *sarungano* liberty and freedom to tell the story in as artistic and stylistic a way as possible. During his narration, the *sarungano* is allowed to divorce himself from the rest of the members of his group and to become, or to identify himself as, an individual creative artist. His role as *sarungano* allows him to use his imagination which the group, under other circumstances, usually frustrates. This, with the dance, pottery-making and iron-work, is one of the few occasions in traditional Shona society when originality goes unchallenged; otherwise a display of cleverness is generally resented, and talented people are often believed to be bewitched by jealous witches.

*The literal meaning is 'of sorghum', but there seems to be no meaningful translation in this context.

The characteristics of the narrative in Chakaipa's *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* involve the use of the following features, also characteristic of *ngano*:

- i. The *-aka-* form of the verb (the past tense);⁴
- ii. the *ndo-* form (the exclusive);⁵
- iii. the use of the verb *-ti* or its passive form *-nzi* to precede all forms of the ideophone:
 - (a) as particles, e.g., *potyo* (entering) *povo* (running away);⁶
 - (b) as derived from verb, e.g., *fambe* (walking a little), *tambe* (playing a little);
 - (c) as derived from other parts of speech, e.g., *tswimbo* (a stick; noun), and *iyó* (Cl. 9, that one; demonstrative);⁷
 - (d) as sentence constructions, e.g., *chit-soka ndibereke* (to run away) with the over-all pitch raised to bring it into line with the status of the ordinary ideophone.
- iv. the use of similes and metaphors;
- v. the use of the proverb for the purpose of strengthening an argument; and
- vi. the use of the song for the purpose of highlighting the situation and releasing tensions, as already described.

FANTASY AND REALITY

It is in this middle part that the two main elements, fantasy and reality, are developed. Stories told within their traditional framework of form and participating audience could be creations of literary genius. Although most stories were told for the ideas and values enshrined within them, for their interpretation of personal relationships in the world of reality performed within the world of fantasy, a few, like this one, were told just for the sake of telling a humorous story. *Karikoga* is therefore a story told by the *sarungano* for the purpose of developing children's imaginations and nothing more. *Karikoga* has an atmosphere similar to that of tales which deal with the world of animals, the world of make-believe and, indeed, the world of improbability. It therefore makes the story suitable only to be read by children between the ages of nine and thirteen.

In Chakaipa's version, written for the new medium of print, *Karikoga* is similarly born in unhappy and unfortunate circumstances. He has no parents and he struggles hard to gain recognition from both his friends and the community in general. He nevertheless distinguishes himself at hunting birds and at fighting just as the traditional *Karikoga* did. With his spear and bow and arrows, he performs remarkable feats of courage and endurance. He fights a lion single-handed and marries without *roora* just to show that things are possible where there is the will to succeed.

His daring journey to the chief to ask for soldiers to help him track down his wife who has been captured by the formidable army of the Ndebele, and his subsequent journey into the enemy country, are new applications of imagination and fantasy, but still within the literary conventions of the folktale. The events of the journey, though boring, also deserve to be mentioned. The youth with small stature, signified by the class 12 prefix *ka-*, preventing the huge fellow, signified by the class 21 prefix *zi-*, from eating *sadsa* makes humorous reading. This isolated incident also shows how powerful *Karikoga* was despite his small stature.

The story adopts a new tone as the action changes to Matabeleland. This is partly due to the fact that the author does not appear to understand the culture of the land. The description of the various escapes is wearisome and it would be pointless to ask how he receives the co-operation of the natives when he does not know their language. He is arrested, tried and sentenced; and, again, one would reveal a lack of understanding of the literary genre if one were to ask in what language the trial was conducted. Furthermore he successfully conceals his tribal identity. If all this is not the greatest weakness of the story, it must be its strongest link with the world of fantasy, the world of African folklore and make-believe. The impossible and the improbable happen in folklore. An army of five thousand strong fails to apprehend *Karikoga* and his wife who were hiding a few yards away. *Karikoga's* fight with the army at the Munyati river is another example of fantasy. Nevertheless the use of an historical people as part of the plot makes the use of these literary conventions which are acceptable in the world of make-believe, rather questionable.

CHARACTERIZATION

In this novel, therefore, characterization requires sympathetic understanding. Chakaipa is definitely in two worlds, the world of people and the world of animals. His genius, of course, is found in the way he blends the world of romance and fantasy with the world of reality. This explains why his characters have two types of action, those which are humanly possible and probable, and those which are improbable and belong only to the world of animals and fantasy.

The relationships of the characters in the novel are consequently not of one kind because they are realistic as well as fantastic. Karikoga's courage and determination to marry his wife are praiseworthy and credible but his ability to go deep into enemy territory, and his escape, is from the world of the folk tale. His fight with the lion and the snake is manly, but his fight with an army five thousand strong is fantastic. Karikoga's meals on sadza were traditional, but his eating hyena's meat which is obnoxious to most Shona peoples, is an attempt at humour which misfires.

Perhaps what is more interesting in this story is the fact that the Ndebele characters are real people and are well characterized, since this story stems from actual accounts of how the Ndebele came to pillage and plunder the Shona people. This is because the characters in the first part of the story come from the world of folklore and those in the second (the Ndebele) from the world of Shona tradition. In this ambiguity lies the essential difference between this novel and his four other novels.⁸

It is therefore wide of the mark to say, as one critic has, that 'the novel has the same dra-

matic qualities as *Garandichauya*'; it is, however, nearer the mark to say that 'the characters [in *Garandichauya*] are more polished and sophisticated',⁹ if by 'polished and sophisticated' he means they are well rounded. For there can be little resemblance in dramatic qualities between the characters who have two aspects both realistic and fantastic as in *Karikoga*, and characters who are rounded, as in *Garandichauya*. For example, all human beings at one time or another do indulge in self-pity and Karikoga indulges in it because he is truly human. On the other hand, his self-pity drives him to feats which are far beyond those of the ordinary boy. In *Karikoga* the characters have normal human courage, intelligence and feelings but have in addition supernatural powers which spur them on in their attempts to solve their problems. In other words, these characters are both rounded and flat.

Chakaipa's characterization has been enhanced by his traditional device of giving them names which throw light on and almost predetermine their role. There are four types of names in Shona culture, but all the names in the novel are of the type called *Mazita emadunhurirwa*. They are the nicknames which are given to people after observing their natural inclinations or idiosyncracies: Karikoga (the only child), Marunjeya (the follower), Gwara (the coward), Shambaropa (the expert hunter), Benyumundiro (the glutton).

LANGUAGE

As already pointed out Chakaipa's language stems directly from the world of the African folktale, the *rungano*, and the best way of demonstrating this point is to quote:

Before they sat down to rest, the lion burst open the door and came into the shelter. There was immediate pandemonium. Some ran to the entrance while others ran towards the lion. There was complete confusion. The lion pounced on Shambaropa and was on the point of devouring him. The others were already outside. Karikoga on seeing his danger, put all thought of death away and seized the lion by its neck. It let Shambaropa go and chased after him. It was all for biting him but he kept on clinging to its mane. He did not know how he had got on to the lion's back. All he knew was that he was there.

Vasati vambogara ikati yauya imwe ikagovikorova musasa ndokubva vapinda makati. Vanhu rikati rave bararamhanya. Vanotizira kumusuo, vanotizira kwakare kwairi, akati ava manyama amire nerongo. Yakasvikoti VaShambaropa dzvi, ikati zvino yava kuda kuvadya, varume vose vakatenge vave panze. Kuzoti Karikoga aviona haana kuzombofunga zvorufu, akasvikoibata mutsipa ikabva yaregedza VaShambaropa, ikagoti nayo tande. Akati zvino ava pamusana payo. Idoti imurume akabva aramba akaiti zenze dzvi. Haana kuziva kuti akaitasva sei akatongoona ava pamusana peshumba. Chakamunetsa kuburuka. Akafunga kuti

aburuke akatya kudyiwa, kudaro akaramba angobata. Shumba yakatiza naye, asi isati yamhanya chinhambiwe chikuru yakarovera pamuti ikabva yafa. Ndizvo zvakatoponesa Karikoga. Pashure pezvi akaenda kwawe nevamwe vake.

Achangosvika akawana varume vose ari manyama amire nehari. VaShambaropa vakanga vagere ropa richingoerera. Varume vakanga vachichema. Munhu mumwe chete waasina kuona pavanhu ava ndaVaGwara. Akazoti tarirei mumusasa akavawana vaoma. Akavikotarira kuti aone chavauraya akashaya; vakanga vasina neronda rose. Akafunga kuti zvimwe varumwa nenyoka asi haana kuona nenyoka yose.

Pakasvika Karikoga pamusasa hapana akamuona nokuti vakanga vachifunga kuti adyiwa. Kunyangwe paakapinda mumusasa hapana akazviva. Paakazobrunza kuti VaGwara vafa sei, vanhu ndipo pavakatoziva kuti ndiKarikoga. Vakatora mvura ndokunodira VaGwara, vakabva vatanga kubwaira.

Here is a narrative description of an adventure which is 'more thrilling than credible'.¹¹ The bond between reality and fantasy in mutual interaction is created before our eyes and action both realistic and fantastic is the final result. The whole passage pictures a man with the desire and steadfast will to achieve not only his own survival but also the survival of his companions who were in the grip of terror, *manyama amire nehari*. Tension is built in right from the beginning and reaches its climax when Karikoga is on the back of the lion holding fast onto its mane. Karikoga's embarrassment is given and we all wonder how he is going to escape or who is going to save him from impending disaster. As in traditional folklore, we know that something will happen to save the hero from death. The lion crashes into a tree and dies, thus releasing the tension which has been built up over a period. This does not help people struggling with incredulity.

His problem was to get down. He feared that, if he jumped off, he would be eaten up, so he kept on holding on. The lion ran off with him on its back, but before it had gone far, it collided with a tree, and died. This is what saved Karikoga. After this he went to join his companions.

On his arrival he found all the men in a state of confusion. Shambaropa sat there, bleeding. The men were crying. The only person whom he missed was Gwara (the coward). He looked into the shelter and found him there unconscious. He went up close to see what had killed him but could find nothing. He did not have a single scratch. He thought maybe he had been bitten by a snake but there was no snake to be seen within the vicinity.

Nobody saw Karikoga when he arrived at the shelter. They all thought he had been eaten up by the lion. Even when he came inside, nobody noticed it. It was only when he enquired about Gwara's death that people realised that it was Karikoga. They fetched water and poured it over Gwara and he came to life again.¹⁰

It does not give an answer to questions of how or why. The only answer possible lies in the conventions of folklore.

There is nothing here corresponding to magical aids which figure in so many folk tales. What is related is frankly implausible and unacceptable precisely because the author has made his tale so realistic. The author takes refuge here in humour in order to deflect attention from the difficulties into which the two-sided nature of the story and his over-emphasis of the realistic at this point have led him. The clauses within the sentences are short and choppy, each clause conveying an action. Note the third sentence in particular. Ideophones have been used to make the action vivid and graphic. It will also be noticed that as the action is directly perceptible indirect allusions are avoided, and there are very few similes or metaphors.

Description of a Fight with Sticks.

Rimwe zuva Karikoga abva kunodzora mbudzi, achangotanga kuundura shiri dzake, mumwe mukomana mukuru kwazvo wakabvuta shiri dzake. Mukomana uyu, wakabvuta shiri dzaKarikoga, wakanga ane nhumbu inenge yataguta-padare. Man'a mumakumbo waiti ihamba, maziso ainge ezizi, nzeve zvichinge zwigwaku. Kuzoti kumakumbo hapana chatingataure, raifamba richingoti peya peya. Asi waiti ukariti mukurwa wairiona ratsvukisa meso seragarwa nengozi. Hapana waimboti bufu kwariri; ndiro raive zimambo rekumbudzi. Parakaona Karikoga aine shiri rakatanga kuvharadzwa meso. Rakangobvuta shiri dzaKarikoga risina kumbotaura naye.

"Ko, mukoma uri kutorerei shiri dzangu? Hauzive here kuti ndidzo dzandinopona nadzo?"

Asati apedza muromo uyu wakabva ainzi tsvimbo nepakati pemusoro iyo. Ropa raKarikoga rikati raviruka, akagodziti dzake kacha, iro ropa richingocerera ndokubva zvatarirana. Nechinguwa chisina kufanira kakuruwa kakati komona, tsvimbo dzikati dzorira. Karikoga kaiti kakatema kopfugama, kakatema komira. Benyumundiro raiti rikatema rozunza musoro seriri kurwa nemunhu mukuru. Karikoga kakati huya tiende.

Vamwe vakomana vakati vangobata, miromo havana kugona kurandutsira. Vakatyia kuti vangazare ropa nokuti musi iwoyo Karikoga akanga aipirwa. Fungai mikweshwa yevakomana hapana wakati ndonorandutsira, vose vakamirira kure kumyangwe avo vaichimbomurova. Vakatyia kuti vangazare ropa. Pakarwiwa musi iwoyo zvokuti dai paive nevakadzi mpururu waidai wakarira kana vaidai vakachema.

Kuzoti zvino nzombe mbiri dzanetsana dzakatarisana sehandira mbiri dzemombe. Karikoga waiti akaritarira iro Benyumundiro meso aibva azara ropa. Benyumundiro akati akateme, Karikoga kakabva kati virikiti, kakabva kamuti nepano pabvi ga akabva ati pasi

One day when Karikoga had come from returning his goats, a very big boy snatched from him the bird which he was plucking. The boy who snatched Karikoga's bird had an enormous stomach which looked like that of a soft-bodied cricket (*tagutapadare*; literally 'we have had sufficient food at the dare'). From the chaps all over his feet you would have thought he was a tortoise, he had huge eyes like an owl and ears like a ladle. The less we say about his legs the better because they were bandy. But when it came to fighting he fought like the devil. No one dared to pick a quarrel with him. He was the herd boys' king. When he saw Karikoga with his birds he assumed a threatening look. He snatched Karikoga's bird without saying a word to him.

'Tell me, brother, why do you take my birds? Don't you know that they are what I live on?'

Before he had finished saying this, a stick descended on his head. Boiling with anger and bleeding profusely, he grabbed his sticks and challenged the big boy to a fight. Within a short space of time the dust swirled up as a fight with sticks ensued. Karikoga would deliver his blows and kneel; then deliver another and stand. Benyumundiro would deliver a blow and shake his head as if he were fighting with a grown man. Karikoga welcomed this engagement.

The other boys who were unable to stop the fight stood there in amazement. They were afraid of being themselves covered with blood seeing that Karikoga was taking no nonsense that day. Just think, the huge fellows were unable to stop the fight. They stood afar off, including those who used to beat him in the past. They were afraid to be covered with blood. There was such a fight on that day that, if women had been present, they would have applauded or would have wept.

Now, after the two trek-oxen had worn each other out, they faced each other like two bulls. Each time Karikoga looked at Benyumundiro, his eyes would turn red with anger. Benyumundiro tried to deliver a blow whereupon Karikoga dodged and landed a blow on Benyumundiro's knee and he fell to the ground. Karikoga delivered a

bi. *Kakagomuti iyo iri mumusoro ropa rikabva raerera semvura. Kakagomupamhidza, kakagomupamhidza akabva ati tasa. Vamwe vakafunga kuti wafa.*

Kuzoti vamwe vazviona vakati tsvimbo kacha vakagoti naye memete. Kakomana kakati hendei narwo. Kakomana kakagoti mhanye mhanye apo mbi sekambada. Vanhu vakati voita semanhanga kupunzika. Vongoti auya ari pasi, auya ari pasi; vakati vose vakwana nadzo mbonje. Kukati zvino kwazvira mumwe chete, paye pooti Karikoga amuteme gomana rikabva rati virikiti, rikagomuti gumi rakadya paviri. Ridoti rimurovere pasi, Karikoga akati kunyepa ndokubva zvaita mawiramombe. Zvikagokweshana aripo pasi, gomana rikati radura. "Chindiregera, mukuru wangu, handichazovuita. Handichazofa ndakarwa newe narinhi wose, wandikurira." Karikoga ndokubva amurega.

This description naturally falls into two parts. The first part begins in traditional style, 'Rimwe zuva (one day)', thus giving the reader the right feeling. Karikoga's stature is contrasted with Benyumundiro's huge body. One immediately thinks the small boy is going to have the worst of it from the huge and greedy Benyumundiro. But one finds oneself wrong on reading the actual account. The quarrel has been picked and our imagination is aroused.

The second part of the passage is the actual bout. We see and hear the sound made by the fighting sticks. We see the marks and blood flowing from the wounds. The small boy is fighting beyond expectation: 'He would deliver his blows as he knelt and deliver another and stand'. There is nothing else but motion which is described by the use of special words, the ideophones. The sentences though long are full of clauses each describing an action: 'Vongoti auya ari pasi, auya ari pasi; — vose vakawana mbonje'.

blow on Benyumundiro's head and his blood flowed down like water. He delivered a second blow and then another and Benyumundiro was knocked flat on the ground. Some thought that he was dead.

As the onlookers saw this, they grabbed their sticks and went for Karikoga. He was prepared for them. The little Karikoga ran hither and thither and stood in a challenging manner like a leopard. The others began to fall down like pumpkins. Each one who advanced towards him was knocked down and all were covered with bruises.

At last only one boy remained. Karikoga tried to strike him but he dodged the blow and started to wrestle with him. The boy struggled hard to throw Karikoga onto the ground but Karikoga resisted and they both fell down together. They struggled hard and the boy conceded defeat, saying, 'Please let me go, you have defeated me. I will never fight you again, you have beaten me.' Karikoga then let him go.¹²

The picture thus drawn before us is one of a mingling of joy and sorrow and from this is born an emotion which brings one into the world of folklore fantasy, at once sharper and even more intense than in the first part. The rhythm produced by the sticks as they fall on their targets, seems to rise and fall like the flails at the threshing floor. Sometimes the rhythm is strong and flaming with hate. At last a time comes for peace and the best must come to an end; in all, a fine piece of writing.

CONCLUSION

Thus it can be seen that Chakaipa's real achievement and contribution to nascent Shona literature is that he is the first writer to use the plot of an old *rungano* and so to give it a new form and dimension. His genius lies in an ability to synthesise reality with fantasy: the reality of a world of historical legends of the Ndebele raids into Mashonoland, the fantasy of traditional folk-tale characters. The result of this fusion is a new *rungano*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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2. There is another version of the story known as 'Pimbirimano' in which the boy was not born normally but through his mother's shin-bone *mu-pimbiri*; *pimbiri* could also be an ideophone which means 'sudden appearance'. Also, he was born with a horn in his hand which enabled him to devise plans (*mano*) on the spur of the moment. The mother in this version survived, but did not like the child and sought to dispose of him. The significant difference of the two versions is that *Karikoga* symbolises the way in which man can acquire qualities in response to his environment whilst *Pimbirimano* stands for gifts which are inborn.
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