

An analysis of intertextual entanglements in Shimmer Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools*

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Abstract

This article examines intertextuality in Shimmer Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2005), focusing on the novel's entanglement with earlier texts and its extra-literary context. It argues that the text exhibits generic, stylistic, and thematic entanglements with its precursor texts, particularly Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988) and Dambudzo Marechera's *Mindblast, or, the Definitive Buddy* (Harare: College Press, 1984), and with the post-2000 Zimbabwean context, in ways that enrich and extend current and earlier understandings of these texts. It establishes that, besides generic and stylistic entanglements, *Chairman of Fools* dialogues with these precursor texts in the representation of the figure of the non-conformist artist, discourses of gender, and discourses of mental breakdown. It also engages with discourses of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis, inclusive of the "crisis of masculinity". The symbiosis of this intertextuality makes visible the non-hierarchical relationships that exist amongst these related texts, both literary and non-literary, and brings into focus the instability and permeability of the boundaries often used to order and create demarcations within and between these texts. The intertextuality also points at some of the literary continuities and discontinuities in the Zimbabwean literary canon—and hence its evolution—together with social and ideological shifts in Zimbabwean society.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Zimbabwean literature, Generic, Stylistic, Thematic, Gender, Artist, Mental breakdown