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**'I'M NOT A WOMAN WRITER, BUT ...':
GENDER MATTERS IN NEW ZEALAND WOMEN'S
SHORT FICTION 1975-1995**

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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Abstract

From the late 1970s, New Zealand women short story writers increasingly worked their way into the literary mainstream. In the wake of the early, feminist-motivated years of the decade their gender, which had previously been the root of their marginalized position, began to work *for* them. However, rather than embracing womanhood, this growth in gender recognition led to many writers rejecting overt identification of their sex. To be labeled a *woman writer* was considered patronising, a mark of inferiority. These women wanted to be known as *writers* only, some even expressing a hope for literature to reach a point of androgyny.

Their work, however, did not convey an androgynous perspective. Just as the fact of their gender could not be avoided, so the influence their sex had on their creativity cannot be denied. Gender does matter and New Zealand women's short fiction published in the 1975-1995 period illustrates its significance. From the early trend for adopting fiction as a site for social commentary and political treatise against patriarchy's one-dimensional image of woman, these stories show a gradually increasing awareness of fictional possibilities, allowing for celebration of the multiplicity of female experience and capturing a process of redefinition rather than rejection of 'women's work'. Though in the later 1990s it may no longer have been politically 'necessary' to promote women's work on the grounds of gender, on a personal level the 'difference of view' of the woman writer remained both visible and vital. An increasing sense of woman-to-woman communication based on shared experience emerges: women are writing *as* women, *about* women, *for* women.

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