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**FIONA KIDMAN, WRITER:
A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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in
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ABSTRACT

Two perspectives are pervasive in Fiona Kidman's writing: the reconstruction of historical female voices, through fictional narrative; the recording of contemporary female voices, through autobiographical commentary and through fictional characterisations. This thesis engages with examples of Kidman's work which show Kidman's literary project to be the shaping of a New Zealand Pakeha cultural identity from a feminist perspective. In other words, Kidman constructs a patriarchal plot in order to demonstrate and expose the historical and contemporary inequalities of women's position within New Zealand society.

Their fictionalisations are influenced significantly by relationship intimacy, but their intention lies deeper. For those who wish to explore below the emotional surface of Kidman's stories, there lies a social metanarrative, a journey of discovery for the reader. Each characterisation is part of an arranged message which Kidman challenges us to decipher. Kidman's constructed narrative is manipulative and manipulated; put together in order to explore and explain the workings of the female psyche under stress; how the female psyche responds to the pressures of living within a patriarchal society; those ways in which the female psyche acts and reacts when seeking to buck the prevailing system, and how the system responds to this. Although not apparent when read piecemeal, Kidman's body of work has an identifiable sense of unity, amounting to a social critique of an epoch.

Keywords

Fiona Kidman, author; historical; feminist; metanarrative

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother who introduced me to the joys of literature.

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