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DOREEN D'CRUZ – ANNOTATION

In this absorbing article, Doreen D'Cruz considers New Zealand author Fiona Kidman's 1987 novel, *The Book of Secrets*, from a feminist, dialogist and historiographical viewpoint, with reference to Kristeva, Bakhtin, Said, Friedman and Irigaray. *The Book of Secrets* is an historical novel based on the true story of a Scottish minister, Norman McCleod, who, in 1817, led a group of displaced Highland crofters across the Atlantic to start a new life in Nova Scotia. In 1851, some of the original settlers made their way to Australia, from where a community was eventually established in Waipu, New Zealand in 1854. Kidman's novel traces these journeys through the lives of three fictional female characters from the same family: Isabella, one of the original Nova Scotia settlers, her daughter Annie McClure, and granddaughter Maria McClure. The latter has lived in seclusion in Waipu for fifty years and at the time of the story – 1953 – is finally uncovering the secrets of her female ancestors through their hidden letters and journals; Kidman thus produces a female-gendered narrator and viewpoint throughout her narrative. For D'Cruz, the perceived patriarchal notion of linear time is ignored in this novel and in its forward and retrospective trajectory, 'disrupts and alters the received figurations of objective time' (p.64), thereby removing itself from a classically patriarchal mimetic narrative, as discussed by Said in his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975). A central theme running through the novel concerns patriarchal control over female sexuality. Isabella is gang-raped in Nova Scotia, symbolising the violent patriarchal power inherent in the novel; her daughter Annie is sexually subjugated, and her daughter Maria in turn has unmarried sex as a young girl, leading to her forced incarceration in the house at Waipu. For D'Cruz, this exile, both forced and eventually self-imposed, suggests female removal from patriarchal historical representation. The Bakhtinian understanding of dialogism leads her to conclude that this novel may allow patriarchal history to be superseded by a more balanced cross-gendered discourse. Utilising a theory posited by Irigaray, D'Cruz argues that 'it is through place that maternal and female identities are constituted in this novel' (p. 76).