

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

DRESSING FOR DINNER: RENÉE'S LITERARY EXPLORATIONS OF THE CHANGING ROLES AVAILABLE TO STRONG WOMEN IN NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree

of Master of Arts

in English at

Massey University

Susan Lillian Williams

1999

Massey University Library New Zealand & Pacific Collection

ABSTRACT

Renée has defined herself as a "lesbian feminist with socialist working class ideals." Throughout her oeuvre she has explored the changing roles open to strong women who assume a leadership position in New Zealand society. Among these possibilities is the development of strong bonding between women which can lead to the formation of non-traditional family units. Accordingly, the study of her accessible plays and prose, organised in chronological order of the times in which the fictional events were set, may follow that exploration in terms of a series of key motifs.

March 1999

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for funding for this thesis from the Massey University Graduate Research Fund. Playmarket has been helpful by making scripts and other materials available to me during the two years that the work has been in preparation. Dr John Ross, my supervisor, has proven himself to be at all times a most meticulous and dedicated scholar. Ainslie Hewton has spent many hours helping me to bring these ideas to the printed page. Most of all my thanks extend to Renée, who has been ever kind, generous of her time, and unstinting in her efforts to assist me.

| Table of Contents | Page |
|--|------|
| A. Introduction: The Development of Renée's Oeuvre | 5 |
| 1. The Early Years | 5 |
| 2. Marriage and Explorations | 22 |
| 3. The Emergence of a Full Time Writer | 27 |
| B. The Approaches of this Thesis in Relation to Renée's | |
| Oeuvre | 56 |
| | |
| Chapter 1: The 1870s to the 1930s | 59 |
| Jeannie and Iris: The Unfinished Dress, the Table and the | |
| Hammer | |
| The Unfinished Dress | 61 |
| The Table | 75 |
| The Hammer | 83 |
| Music as a Reflection of Theme | 92 |
| Granna's Riddle: The Link with the Past and the Aspiration | |
| for the Future | 107 |
| | |
| Chapter 2: The 1950s to the 1980s | 115 |
| Young Jeannie, Sheila and Belle: The Debating Table | |
| The Unfinished Dress | 116 |
| The Table | 128 |
| The Hammer | 143 |
| Music as a Reflection of Theme | 152 |

| Granna's Riddle: The Link with the Past and the Aspiration | |
|--|-----|
| for the Future | 159 |
| | |
| Chapter 3: The 1990s | 169 |
| Sonja, Daisy, Flora and Gertrude: Guess Who's Coming to | |
| Dinner? | |
| The Finished Dress? | 170 |
| The Table | 172 |
| The Hammer | 180 |
| Music as a Reflection of Theme | 189 |
| Granna's Riddle: The Link with the Past and the Aspiration | |
| for the Future | 196 |
| | |
| Bibliography | 203 |
| A. Primary Sources | 203 |
| B. Secondary Sources | 206 |