

who served his people at the turn of the century and I can say, 'Yes, there is where the link began.' I can look to Sir Apirana Ngata, to Sir Charles Bennett, New Zealand's High Commissioner in Malaysia, who spent some time with my grand-uncle, Rongowhakaata Halbert; to Peter Gordon, my uncle, who was in Bangkok. Further afield, I can look academically to my uncles Winiata Smiler and Hani Smiler, both of whom obtained bachelor of arts degrees. I can look to these and more, like Frank Corner, Ken Piddington and Neil Plimmer, who set my feet firmly on this path. I can remember the first, second and third interviews I ever had with Frank Corner about joining Foreign Affairs. I was distrustful and suspicious. But I finally joined Foreign Affairs in 1976. I am pleased that the Ministry considers its Maori members are an asset to its presentation of New Zealand policy internationally. The lesson it still has to learn, however, is that we are highly motivated. We are articulate. For all our disabilities as traditional representatives of the people we are committed to programming Maori concerns into Foreign Affairs policy. Jane and I took our two children to Canberra, Australia, in 1978. We have just returned. We have bought David Matthews's and Greta Firth's house in Newtown.

This is the personal context against which this discussion of Maori life and literature must be placed. It draws a genealogy and pattern if you like, to the here and now, to this gathering of you and me in Alexander Turnbull's library. It is important to make these links between us. On my part, speaking here in this, the former home of a national *whare wananga* containing Maori material, is a task to approach with considerable respect.

* * *

In the Maori body of literature there is a proverb which, when translated into English, asks: 'What is the greatest thing in life?' And the answer is: '*He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.*' It is man, it is man, it is man. It should be apparent that I have therefore been sometimes a writer, something more of a Maori, but that I have inherited a time and space greater than both. If there has ever been a problem for practitioners of Maori literature, it has been in the attempt to make the connection between Maori experience and the art of literature and then to extend the linkages, set and fix them tight, across the empty spaces which we all inhabit. My way has been to endeavour to convey an emotional landscape for the Maori people and this I have attempted to impose across the wastelands where we now live—Otara, Porirua, Newtown. The landscape I wrote about had its roots in the earth. Writing about it was, until 1975, my way of responding to the charge 'You must work for the Maori people.'