

language with the creation, canoe migrations, major tribal and clan events, the relationship that ensued after the coming of the pakeha; the *kōrero pūrākau* (stories, myths and legends), the *kōrero pakiwaitara* (light-hearted stories), *whakatauki* (proverbs), *pepeha* (tribal sayings), *haka* (vigorous chants with actions), *pokeka* and *ngeri* (also forms of chants with actions), *whaka-ara-ara-pa* (chants by the guards of the watches of the night and day), the *tauparapara*, *karakia*, *patere*, *kai-ora-ora*, *mata*, *karanga*, *pōwhiri*, *poroporoaki*, *waiata tangi*, *waiata aroha*, *oriori*, *pao*, *waiata a ringa* and *waiata poi*. You may hear samples of these at different *hui* if you are lucky, but the understanding is not easy. The singing word, as Barry Mitcalfe characterised *waiata*, does not have the power to sing out across generations and the empty spaces as it once had. Yet, by far, the oral literature forms the basis for the underground movement which is the Maori people. Its voice may not be strong but it still survives despite the political and cultural imperialism of the majority in New Zealand.

The oral literature, up until the 1960s, was the means of cultural transmission and preservation. It was the voice of the Maori people, carrying their stories and conveying their great passion for living to their descendants so that we were able to understand what we had been and what we were. At the same time, there was also a small body of Maori people writing in English whose concerns were more with recording the traditional aspects of Maori culture. Sir Peter Buck, for instance, wrote about the coming of the Maori and classical Maori culture. Pei Te Hurinui Jones wrote on King Potatau. Professor Joan Metge rightly considers that both these writers 'deserve recognition for their masterly and evocative style, so entirely suited and subordinated to their purpose, so flowing and effortless that it goes unnoticed by the absorbed reader'. Later exponents of the written word continued to write with an educative intent—Merimeri Penfold on Maori education, Katerina Mataira, Harry Dansey and the wonderful Arapera Blank. It is to my mind regrettable that in so doing their gifts as imaginative writers were not and have still not been fully developed. But until the 1960s, the major writers of imaginative fiction on Maori people were pakehas. Of them all, Noel Hilliard in *Maori Girl*, which was serialised in the *Auckland Weekly News*, had the greatest impact amongst Maori people in identifying and foreseeing the political and social reality that lay ahead for them in New Zealand.

Political and social reality is a difficult matter to recognise, and we each come to it in different ways. In my case it happened when I was thirteen and I had seen that my birth certificate had my name as Witi Tame Ihimaera (Smiler). From my recollection I could not remember having heard that name Ihimaera before. My father and I