

Introduction

For the Friends of the Turnbull Library and their supporters the year 1981 saw a new venture well and truly launched. Its purpose was twofold: to add something tangible to the cultural life of the city, linked to the Library and its collections, and to draw from that very rich stream of lunch-time citizens new and intellectually potent (perhaps even politically wise) champions for the ever growing interests of the Turnbull Library.

The idea which started with Colin Davis, a member of the committee of the Friends, was an excellent one and did not seem to present too many difficulties. The Library has collections that have bearing on most aspects of our national life and development. It was only a matter of finding a sufficiently attractive, inaugural topic, dividing that topic into, say, four separate aspects that could be loosely linked under the umbrella of the general title, and matching speakers to those four.

There was, of course, that ever present curse of money. A small subcommittee held to its purpose by Dr Reg Tye was determined that everything should be done in an exemplary way. Speakers should not only be given a fee worthy of the occasion and of their own professionalism, but should not have any out-of-pocket expenses. Fortunately the Minister of Internal Affairs recognised the merit in our proposal and we were able to benefit from lottery funds, by an inaugural grant that made it possible to keep admission fees to a reasonable level.

The general topic seemed to suggest itself, or perhaps the Library collections in their totality suggested it for us: 'New Zealand through the arts, past and future'. In an election year with partisan feeling running high, it was entirely appropriate to our purpose that we should stand on politically neutral ground. We quickly settled that the arts should be represented by painting, music, poetry and something historically of longer term significance, the Maori attitude to literature from the perspective of an established oral tradition. In our enthusiasm we may have asked ourselves if this was to be the occasion of the resolution of the apophthegm contained in the last lines of that yet to be excelled evaluation of New Zealand letters and art by E. H. McCormick:

'between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born'.

For speakers we invited four who were pre-eminent in their respective fields, men who by their own achievements commanded