

# New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies

Volume 19 Number 2

December 2017



## MS HAN DIHOU: TEACHER, TRANSLATOR AND ESSAYIST

DUNCAN M. CAMPBELL  
*Victoria University of Wellington*

For the fifteen years between her appointment to the staff of the (then) Department of Asian Languages and Literatures of the University of Auckland as Lecturer in Chinese in 1970 and her retirement, at the age of 65 in 1985, Ms Han Dihou 韓迪厚 (26 May, 1920-15 November, 2007) BA (Yenching) MA (Hong Kong) taught a range of Chinese language (modern and classical) and literature (again, modern and classical) courses to that relatively select group of New Zealand and International students who had shown an interest in a language and culture that, sadly, remains to this day something of a minority interest. For various reasons, her teaching tended, increasingly over the course of her career at Auckland and especially once she had started to retreat into her memories, to concentrate on the upper stages of what then constituted New Zealand's only fully-fledged program in Chinese Studies. In my case for instance, having arrived at the Department in 1979 to undertake a two-year MA after several year's study in the People's Republic of China, I found myself that year enrolled (with a small group of others) in two papers with her, in traditional Chinese drama and the traditional Chinese novel respectively. Both papers involved close reading (*jingdu* 精讀, in Chinese pedagogic terms) of an original text, in the case of the first, of the Yuan dynasty opera *The Romance of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji* 西廂記), and in the second, of chapters from the Ming dynasty novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記). I well remember the wonderful hours we all spent together, first in a brick building on Wynyard Street, and later in the old two-storied wooden building that then stood on the corner of Symonds and Alfred Streets (rumored to have been one of Auckland's most infamous early bordellos), slowly making our way in time-honored manner through these two important masterpieces of late imperial Chinese literature.<sup>1</sup> Quite apart from whatever else one gained specifically from these classes together, they served to consolidate my life-long interest in this fascinating intermediary zone of Chinese literature that worked between the elite traditions of the scholar's study and the oral traditions of the marketplaces. More generally, by reason of the painful trajectory that had brought her to Auckland, Ms Han lent us all a sense in which, however far removed geographically we might have been then from both the object of our study and the overseas centres of Sinological endeavor elsewhere, nonetheless, through

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1 I was lucky enough to have as a classmate in these two papers Ng Bickleen Fong 吳碧倫 (1930-1998), the first New Zealand Chinese woman to graduate with an MA (in English and Education, from the University of Otago, in 1954), and the author of the first study of the New Zealand Chinese experience, *The Chinese in New Zealand: A Study in Assimilation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 1959), then embarked upon her second MA, in Chinese Studies.

her and vicariously, we felt connected to a long-standing network of scholarship and dialogue. Ms Han had been a student at Yenching University 燕京大學 in Peking of the great China-born American missionary and educator John Leighton Stuart (1876-1962), founding president of the university from 1919 onwards and later, from 1946, the US Ambassador to the Republic of China, a man denounced by Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893-1976) as “a loyal agent of American cultural aggression in China” (他一向是美國對華文化侵略的忠實執行者) in a footnote to his article “Farewell, Leighton Stuart” (“Beile, Situleideng!” 別了, 司徒雷登!). Much later, in 1976, soon after Mao’s death and once circumstances had changed to the extent to which Leighton Stuart was again a name that could be mentioned publically in China, Ms Han was to publish a biography of her teacher (“Situleideng zhuan” 司徒雷登傳) in the June/July/August issues of the Hong Kong journal *Nan Bei Ji* 南北極, in course of which she argues for Leighton Stuart’s enthusiastic support of the students involved in the May Fourth demonstrations, occasioned by the outcome of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.<sup>2</sup> Ms Han’s biographical study of this man continues to be much cited, and of course, in November 2008, a year after Ms Han’s own death in Auckland, Leighton Stuart’s ashes were taken from Washington to be reburied in Hangzhou, alongside those of his parents, his brother, and his wife, in accordance with his last wishes. At Yenching, Ms Han had known (had studied under, perhaps) the great Chinese historian Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893-1980), a man who spent the last years of his life reduced to punctuating the Zhonghua edition of Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 135-86 BCE) *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shi ji* 史記).<sup>3</sup> Whenever Ms Han had occasion to mention Gu Jiegang’s name, or that of Sun Kaide 孫楷第 (1898-1986), the noted bibliographer of the of popular Chinese literary traditions, whom she had also known, an air of great but ineffable sadness would come over her. Having somehow managed to complete her BA at this extraordinary institution during the unsettled years of the Second Sino Japanese War (1937-1945), Ms Han then spent some time working in Kunming, as the governmental and educational institutions of the Republic of China retreated in the face of Japanese encroachment. By the late 1940s, she had fetched up like so many other exiles from the mainland, in the British territory of Hong Kong where, for many years, she worked as an editor with the World Today Press (Jinri shijie chubanshe 今日世界出版社), an explicitly anti-communist, pro-American press established by the United States Information Agency that lasted for the twenty-eight years between 1952-1980. Ms Han’s duties with the press seemed largely to have revolved around translation, mainly of literary texts. She was, for instance, part of a team that produced the earliest translation of the American writer Mark Twain’s (Samuel Langhorne Clemens; 1835-1910) *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1963, published in Taipei (attributed to the

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2 For a brief, recent, and highly readable account of this significant moment in the history of modern China, see Paul French, *Betrayal in Paris: How the Treaty of Versailles Led to China’s Long Revolution* (Penguin Specials, 2014).

3 On Gu Jiegang, see Laurence Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China’s New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); for an obituary, see Ursula Richter, “Obituary: Gu Jiegang (1893-1980)”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 41.2 (1982): 441-442.

pseudonym Li Yuhan 黎裕漢, comprising a homophone character for the surnames of the three translators involved, Li Rutong 李如桐, Yu Yelu 余也魯, and Han Dihou) under the title *Wantong liulangji* 頑童流浪記. In part inspired by these duties, one assumes, during her years in Hong Kong, she also completed (in 1966) an MA with the University of Hong Kong, entitled “A Critical Survey of Chinese Translations from the English by Yen Fu, Lin Shu, and Fu Tung-hua” 嚴復林紓傅東華翻譯檢討. Expanding on her thesis, Ms Han published, in 1969 (with a second edition a decade later) perhaps her most important scholarly publication, the much cited *A Short History of Modern Translation* (Jindai fanyi shihua 近代翻譯史話).

As well as reflecting on the history of translation in China, Ms Han continued to engage in the labour of the craft. In 1984, for instance, at the urgings of the eminent Hong Kong man-of-letters Stephen Soong 宋淇 (1919-1996; aka Lin Yiliang 林以亮), she produced a translation of T.S. Eliot’s “Burnt Norton”, the first section of his *Four Quartets*.<sup>4</sup> In a “Preface” to her translation, having discussed Eliot’s poetic sequence and something of the process and inherent difficulties of her own task as translator, Ms Han concluded: “Reading the *Four Quartets* often served to remind me of those famous lines of the poem entitled “Climbing Youzhou Tower—A Song” (“Deng Youzhou tai ge” 登幽州臺歌) by the Tang dynasty poet Chen Ziang 陳子昂 (661-702) that go: ‘Looking back we cannot see the people of the past;/ Ahead of us we cannot see those who are yet to come./ I muse on heaven and earth, immense and enduring,/ And lonely, engulfed by sorrow, my tears fall.’ I trust that this Chinese translation of mine might be able to induce similar resonances in the minds of readers”.<sup>5</sup> I suppose, as translators, it is the appropriate resonances for the work of literature we have seen fit to work on that is what we are always searching to establish in the minds of our readers, what Walter Benjamin called “the echo of the original” in his essay “The Task of the Translator”. A decade earlier, in 1973 shortly after her arrival in New Zealand, she had published (from her Pomegranate Studio (Liuzhai 榴齋), as she styled her study in Auckland) translated extracts from a number of poems by Hone Tuwhare (1922-2008) in the course of an article entitled “Māori—A People with Poetic Qualities” (“Shiqing haofang de maoli ren” 詩情豪放的毛里人; this essay was later republished in both *Dayangzhou wenxue congshu: Juliusuo li de tushuguan* 大洋洲文學叢書: 拘留所里的圖書館 [Oceanic Literature: The Library of Locks], (Hefei), 1983 (1): 346-49; and, in a slightly revised version under the title “New Zealand’s Indigenous Peoples” (“Xinxilan tuzhu” 新西蘭土著) in *Discourses of a Wild Fox: A Collection of Essays (Ye hu tan: sanwen ji* 野狐談: 散文集), pp. 53-59), this being Ms Han’s first essay on the literature of her new home.

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4 “Feiyuan” 廢園, *Suye wenxue* 素葉文學, No. 23 (1984): 11-17.

5 “‘Ailute ‘Sibuzushi’ zhongyi’ yi xu” 艾略特四部組詩中譯序, *Discourses of a Wild Fox: A Collection of Essays (Ye hu tan: sanwen ji* 野狐談: 散文集), p. 132. The translation of the Chen Ziang poem I give here is from Peter Harris, trans. & ed., *Three Hundred Tang Poems* (New York, London, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).

Over time, and particularly after I had started teaching in the Department and had become, thus, in some sense her colleague (although this was certainly never quite how I thought of her), I became more aware of Ms Han's remarkable (and, in the way of so many twentieth century Chinese family stories, remarkably sad) more personal backstory. In her essay "Belatedness" ("Chi" 遲), a translated version of which I offer below, Ms Han tells us some of this story, and of her troubled and ultimately unresolved relationship with her father. I have also a copy of the poem that she handed me once, clipped from a journal (the typography suggests that it might have been published in the pages of the noted Hong Kong journal *Ming Pao* 明報, a frequent outlet for her various writings), that for many years I had pinned to the noticeboard in my office. The poem's authorship is attributed to the pseudonym Hui Jie 慧碣 ("Wise Tablet"); the copy she handed me is annotated in her neat and painstaking hand, (Dihou 迪厚), establishing her authorship. The poem has an obvious connection with the essay I offer below, and so I have translated it as well. It reads:

"Longing" ("Huainian" 懷念)

As the autumn draws on,  
The chestnuts harvested along the banks of the Unnamed Lake,  
Taste sweeter for your touch.  
During night rains on Mount Ba,<sup>6</sup>  
How many demons have fled at the sound of your laughter?  
The flowers in the marketplace at the Sun Proximate Tower,  
Seem even more vivid in my memory.  
—is the hair on your temples now hidden under your octagonal scholar's cap?

These few things that I take along with me,  
I've never known if they belong to you or belong to me.  
The markets of today are full of splendid treasures,  
But I always know, at first glance, what it is that you would love  
And yet, what use to me is this knowledge?

As I grew up,  
We created our own self-images together.  
And once I'd matured,  
We parted company.  
But every now and then I discover your shadow,  
Cast upon the manner of my behaviour;  
These days of exile seem so very long, so very bitter.

13th November, 1954

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6 An allusion, surely, to Li Shangyin's 李商隱 (812?-858) poem "Night Rains: To My Wife up North" (夜雨寄北) which, in A.C. Graham's translation, goes: "You ask how long before I come. Still no date is set./ The night rains on Mount Pa swell the autumn pool./ When shall we, side by side, trim a candle at the West window./ And talk back to the time of the night rains on Mount Pa?" (君問歸期未有期 / 巴山夜雨漲秋池 / 何當共剪西窗燭 / 卻話巴山夜雨時), for which, see *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Penguin, 1977), p. 159.

I have a particularly vivid personal memory of Ms Han. In 1981, I happened to be at Peking University for the year, engaged in research in the Rare Books Room of the university's extraordinary library. Ms Han came visiting. Was it her first visit back to what once had been the campus of Yenching University, I wonder, after an absence of more than forty years? I have the impression that it was. The night before we had met up to go together to have dinner (a wonderful hotpot meal) with her old friend Wu Xiaoling 吳曉鈴 (1915-1995), a Senior Researcher with the Institute of Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and expert on, particularly, the operatic traditions of China, a man described by David Johnson in his obituary of him as "a scholar's scholar", someone who appeared to have "met everybody, read everything, and forgotten nothing".<sup>7</sup> It was a cold but clear late autumn day as we walked around the campus the next day. A patch of vacant land opposite the Dipper Garden (Shaoyuan 勺園) Foreign Students dormitory, planted in grain during the Cultural Revolution, had recently been transformed into a number of tennis courts. Pointing them out to her, thinking that she might read them as I did, as unmistakable signs of the political transformations of those years, her response was immediate and to the effect that there had been tennis courts there when she had been an undergraduate. A little further along in the same direction (we were headed for a walk around the Unnamed Lake 未名湖, mentioned in her poem), she drew to a halt outside the main administration block and pointed to a rusting old bicycle rack; "That had been there in my day," she said. As was always the case with interactions her, one was led towards a more nuanced understanding of the play of change and continuity in the trajectory of Chinese history. This is true, too, I believe of the essay I translate below. To Ms Han's original, I have added the occasional footnote.

"Belatedness"<sup>8</sup>

Although my father died last winter, it was only this spring that my mother finally wrote to tell me of his death. Until now, she told me, she had been unable fully to believe that he *was* no longer, even though she had of course herself overseen his cremation. Thus, the explanation for her delay in writing to her faraway daughter with the news; to have written earlier would have run the risk, it seemed, of a precipitate announcement of his death which might have foreclosed on any possibility of a last gasp revival on his part. To lose a father when one is oneself in middle age is, to my mind, not at all an unexpected occurrence; and in my case, my father had proved to be very far from being what is commonly accepted as a model father. And yet, gradually over the years the way I think about things has changed somewhat and I now find myself better able to escape from received opinions and to judge the right from wrong of things on their own merits. So it was then that as I

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7 David Johnson, "Remembering Wu Xiaoling", *Chinoperl: Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature*, 18. 1 (1995): v-viii.

8 *Discourses of a Wild Fox: A Collection of Essays (Ye hu tan: sanwen ji 野狐談: 散文集)* (Taipei: Xingdao chubanshe, 1985), pp. 22-26.

became fully aware of the fact that I would never be seeing my father again I felt myself overwhelmed by an ill-defined sense of sadness. Was it possible that, like passers-by in the street, he had taken his leave of us? Who, now, would hear my confession?

When my father was born, our family lived a life in the capital typical of a family of our aristocratic station, with all the privilege and delinquency that implies. Like other young gentlemen of his class, my grandfather, having bought his way into office, promptly then resigned his post. He was an honest man who had spent his life dutifully studying dead books, proving entirely practically-minded in all his views, except in the matter of love. My grandmother could both paint and compose poetry; sadly, she died altogether too young. My father had been raised by my great-grandparents who had indulged his every whim. When my father was ten, his father took another wife, and my father's stepmother proved to have all the wiles and lascivious inclinations of the Tang dynasty empress Wu Zetian. So it was that once my great-grandparents had passed away, my father became something by way of a titled but insignificant princeling.

My father was in the first class to graduate from the Shuntian Middle School,<sup>9</sup> from where he proceeded to Hosei University.<sup>10</sup> Before he could graduate from this university, however, he had become completely dissolute. He married for the first time whilst my grandfather was serving in Shanxi as an Expectant Appointee. That "mother", having given birth to my elder brother, promptly died. Five years later my father took as a bride my mother, and I was born the following year. It was said that my father's sole criteria in picking my mother as his second wife was that she would be a good mother to my brother, so he sought out someone of strong moral character from a poor family. As things transpired, this in fact was exactly what he got with my mother. From a very early age onwards, I, for my part, accompanied my grand-father as he shifted from post to post, only eventually meeting my father for the first time when I was in my seventh year, and then only after my mother had made a number of urgent telephone calls to him on the pretext of ill health to persuade him to return home.

My grand-father's second wife was the family's woman of the moment, and the destinies of every single one of us was determined by her, this being most the case with my father and I. My mother's practical way of doing things had by then settled into a particular pattern, whereas my brother,

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9 The Shuntian Middle School (順天中學堂) was established in 1907 by the municipal government. After the 1911 Revolution, its name was changed to Capital Public No. 4 Secondary School (京師公立第四中學), and after 1949 it became (as it remains today) Beijing No. 4 High School (北京市第四中學). It continues to be one of the most prestigious secondary schools in the People's Republic of China.

10 Hosei University (法政大學), an important and long-established private institution in Tokyo, was established in 1889 with the merger of the Tokyo School of Law and the Tokyo French School.

for his part, was quick-witted and didn't look to her for anything. Only my father and I were ever prone to her suasions. She had been born into a noted family, related, on her maternal side, to the Opium Kings of Tianjin (the King here is a surname, rather than implying that they were opium barons). She was certainly not pretty of appearance, and yet there was seductiveness to her manner uncommon amongst the aristocracy, and so, whether from partiality or an excess of generosity, my grandfather awarded her the epithet "Little Consort". For their part, my grandfather's brothers all called her "the Concubine". To her credit, she really was a rather progressively-minded woman maintaining, as long as half a century ago, quite a regular stable of boyfriends, the next appearing as soon as the current one departed. One shouldn't misunderstand that there was anything necessarily romantic about these relationships, as she was, after all, entirely illiterate. And yet, nonetheless, as things transpired, she colluded with the local gentry to cheat my grandfather out of his money, and to have him cashiered and stripped of his black magistrate's cap.

My grandfather spent his days with his opium pipe in hand and his Buddhist sutras at his elbow. He paid the "the Concubine's" behaviour not the slightest attention, never once giving consideration to the possibility of divorce, as if just to have nominal possession of such a temptress as a wife was satisfaction in itself. They say that whilst adjudicating cases in his capacity as a magistrate he never once approved of a divorce. These circumstances taught me a very early lesson that the moral basis for the relationship between a man and a woman, rather than being a matter of the status of husband and wife, ought to be based on sentiment. My father, well and truly steeped in Confucian education as he was, reacted in an entirely different manner. He rather resembled Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet, and the contradiction between an innate cowardice and traditional concepts of family relationships served to destroy his life. Perhaps his sufferings proved even more intense than those experienced by Hamlet as, after all, he had a living father who paid him no heed whatsoever. Were he really to have murdered "the Concubine", my grandfather would have been plunged into absolute despair.

In any case, once my father had married my mother, it was as if he felt that having done right by my brother, he could now cast us aside and take off. Although certainly not the sort of behaviour expected of a responsible and upright man, nonetheless this is exactly what he proceeded to do, at the expense of both my mother and her two children. Knowing full well the cause of my father's resentment, "the Concubine" immediately imposed upon us vengeful economic sanctions, both external and internal: externally, my father was staved of any financial help, whilst, internally, the perquisites of the three of us were reduced to the level of the household servants. Furthermore, "the Concubine" delighted in the frequent retelling, in exhaustive and dissolute detail, of whatever bad news of my father's down and out circumstances happened to come her way. She insisted that I refer to him as "Rotten Father",



this word “rotten” serving to colour my impressions of my father even before I ever met him. The maternal virtues of my mother were such that she resigned herself to whatever circumstances she found herself in, and, psychologically, I very soon felt myself to be of an equivalent age as her, taking on an equal portion of our sufferings, this being one explanation for my lifetime’s loss of innocence. It wasn’t that my mother and I were completely without hopes for the future; it was just that the saviour upon whose shoulders those hopes rested was my brother rather than my “Rotten Father”.

The lonely days of my father’s itinerant life were indeed spent in a wine-and-women soaked atmosphere of debauchery which, according to his later explanation, represented his desperate attempt to escape from his ever more unpleasant and impecunious circumstances. He was a playboy through and through and his life was lived in an altogether slapdash manner; slovenly of appearance, he would neglect to shave or bathe after a drinking bout unless his friends entreated him to do so. One or other of the newspapers of Tianjin at the time would occasionally carry an article of his, his range of topics and genres encompassing editorials, fiction, riddles and so on.

Once the war broke out, my grandfather and “the Concubine” returned to the capital, deserting my mother and the two of us children on the frontline. Only once things had settled down somewhat, when Fu Zuoyi was under siege in Zhuozhou 涿州,<sup>11</sup> did my mother trick my father into turning up, again on the pretext of ill health. She then attempted to inspire in him some sense of self-reliance, and finally our small family set off towards the eye of the storm. The only resource we had to hand was my mother’s determination. Later on, my father obtained a teaching post at a missionary school in eastern Tianjin, and there he embarked upon an eighteen-year-long career as a teacher. In such straitened circumstances did my brother and I grow up. My father had become almost monk-like; as if always in deep meditation, he concerned himself with nothing other than his teaching duties, soon enough becoming incapable even of distinguishing one banknote from another. Frequently he would compose new lyrics for the songs that his students would be required to sing, assisting with the plays that they would perform. His vernacular prose style was certainly not at all simply a translation from the classical, nor were his New Poems just an assemblage of slogans. His students adored him. And yet, on the domestic front, as a result of his prior form, he could never quite establish the respect that perhaps he deserved, this fact never however seeming to distress him at all. So deeply embedded in my mind now was the idea that he was a “Rotten

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11 The general Fu Zuoyi 傅作義 (1895-1974) began his military career with the Shanxi Army of the warlord Yan Xishan 閻錫山 (1883-1960). He later served with considerable distinction during the Northern Expedition and Second Anti-Japanese War. In January 1949, he was responsible for the (relatively peaceful) surrender of the city of Beijing to the Communist Party of China. After 1949, he was rewarded with a variety of senior government posts.

Father”, I would invariably and unconsciously believe that the opposite of whatever purposes he had in life to be the correct ones. This was the case even to the extent to which I would not even condescend to learn from him those skills that I knew him to be master of, only learning to compose a line or two of classical verse, for instance, once I was in my fourth year at university and need to make up some study points. My father was the soul of tolerance towards his rebellious daughter, never seeming to resent being unable to turn me into something that I wasn’t, always allowing me to develop in my own manner. All fathers have the desire to pass on to their daughters something of themselves, but perhaps my father didn’t even have this sense of self-confidence, or maybe he just had lost all belief in the idea of what it meant to make something of oneself.

I for my part was convinced that my own purposes in life were admirable ones: from an early age, I had come to the view that ethics bore no relationship in life to issues of good or evil. The fact that I had a “Rotten Father” meant that there was no way he could be made to be “Sweet” just simply by virtue of being my father. Just respecting the everyday niceties of behaviour was enough for me. Such was my way of thinking in the years before I turned thirty, but in fact this belief is only half-true. I was twenty-eight when I last saw my father. And it has only been in recent years that I have realised that my father, too, was human, and that being my father was only one small part of his various social relations and that because he proved a failure as a father, that did not serve to erase everything else that he was. Even were my father to have been a model father, sooner or later I would nonetheless have learnt that the human lot is a bitter one, and so there is no real cause for regret or resentment. Furthermore, his lack of any sense of responsibility was not at all motivated by selfishness; he neglected himself as much as he neglected others. Can you blame him? His character traits appear frequently amongst my friends and acquaintances; why can’t I just think of him as an old friend rather than never being able to forget that he was also my father? Once I had arrived at this understanding of him I longed for the opportunity to discuss it all with him. Then, first, the Iron Curtain intervened; and now we are separated forever by death.

1957

### **Biographical Note**

Duncan M. Campbell has taught (Chinese language, modern and classical; Chinese literature, modern and classical; and aspects of Chinese history and civilisation) at the University of Auckland, Victoria University of Wellington, and the Australian National University in Canberra. In 2015, he was the June & Simon K.C. Li Director of the Center for East Asian Garden Studies and Curator of the Chinese Garden with the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, USA. Presently, he is an Adjunct Teaching Fellow with the School of Languages and Cultures, Victoria University of Wellington, and engaged in a number of projects of literary translation.

