

Thoughts on William Sibley

Dear all,

I'm struggling to find the words to express what I suspect is only imperfectly expressible in this kind of short message—to somehow share with all of you in an adequate manner something of the ways in which my life and work has been touched by Bill Sibley's teaching, his translations, his mentoring, and his friendship.

So rather than mention a specific incident or event, perhaps I might speak of Bill's extraordinary language sensitivity and precision, something that I am reminded of each time I look at the *Text and the City* compilation of Maeda Ai essays and compare Bill's masterful work with any of the otherwise fine translations. Bill shared that skill with us during those many Rapid Readings class sessions, and (in my case) during our discussions in preparations for qualifying exams. Or rather, I should say that he demonstrated that special precision of reading in a way that encouraged his students to redouble their efforts, and begin to grasp what they were missing in the texts. With his level of skill, it would have been simple for Bill to simply have modeled an unattainable ideal, but instead, with infinite patience, Bill encouraged and pushed us to see, and to hear, and to continually improve. With his breadth of knowledge, he also led us into focused contextual readings that—almost paradoxically—expanded our view of the texts well beyond the expectations we brought to them. We learned to follow arguments and references expansively, stepping over the bounds of genre, of labels, and into a place where the texts could surprise us. I am certain that my own ability to “read” texts was profoundly shaped by Bill Sibley. And I'm certain, too, that I'm far from alone in this experience.

All my best,

Bill Marotti
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