

Alisa Freedman (alisaf@uoregon.edu)

Assistant Professor of Japanese Literature and Film

### **Translating Tokyo with Bill Sibley: Encountering Scarlet Gangs in Wieboldt Hall**

The following Power Points are an illustrated outline of a ten-minute talk I gave as part of the literary translation panel at the William F. Sibley Memorial Event. Bill inspired my interest in Tokyo literature and my desire to translate it. I took a full-year independent reading class on Tokyo modernism with Bill. Once a week in Bill's office, we poured over Kawabata Yasunari's prewar fiction. These meetings were a highlight of my University of Chicago education. Bill was one of the best translators of our times, with the remarkable ability to render, even on site, elusive Japanese modernist prose into elegant English. He had a wonderful way with words. As I was leaving to research my dissertation at Waseda University, Bill gave me a copy of Kawabata's 1930 novel *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* (*Asakusa kurenaidan*) as a present. This well-worn book (pictured in the Power Points) is one of my prized possessions and changed the trajectory of my career. I published a translation of *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* in 2005. I have followed this work with a translation of Kawabata's little-known 1929 crime novella *The Corpse Introducer* (*Shitai shōkainin*), which uses similar techniques.

Unsure of what kind of remarks to give at the memorial event, I decided to discuss the practice of translating Japanese modernism through the example of *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*. As seen through the Power Points, I briefly explain this modernist story and why Bill introduced it to me. Then I share a few stylistic decisions I faced and how I sought solutions. I do not advance a unified theory of translation but hope that my experiences will be helpful for both translators and readers of Japanese modernism. This is in the spirit of Bill's advanced Japanese readings classes and our independent study. I will always be grateful to Bill for teaching me the beauty of translation and the intimate engagement with the text that it provides.