



HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
Department of English Language & Literature

DEPARTMENT SEMINAR
<http://buenglish.wordpress.com>

Date: Monday, 23 March 2015
Time: 4:30 p.m.
Venue: OEM1008, OEN Hall Building,
Ho Sin Hang Campus

EXILE HAS MANY WAYS

Professor Erich Wolfgang Skwara

The very notion of Exile most often carries an undertone of political and human violence, bitterness, and defeat. There seems to be some

heavy baggage attached to Exile, a burden measured in regret, loneliness, broken roots, new beginnings blessed or doomed. We live, increasingly so, in a world where countless people are forced into abandoning their homelands and their cultures by political upheavals rooted in fanaticism and ideological or religious intolerance of all kinds. These catastrophes could be experienced as quickly forgotten news items in the media, or as a personal challenge demanding response.

When confronted with such facts, it may seem presumptuous to speak of “voluntary” exile, which in essence this seminar intends to address. One might ask: Where is the pain, where is the life threatening outward reality of “voluntary” exile? Does it even exist? My life, but above all my literary work have led me to believe that Exile indeed has many faces, and that what is often termed as “Inner Exile” must be accorded equal weight and consideration as any Exile imposed by outward powers. Exile in Living, and Exile in Writing, as in all the manifestations of our creative mind, is both reality and necessity. At times I even wonder whether writing - and any other creative activity - without self-imposed Exile is even possible? My activities for International P.E.N., the worldwide writers Organization, most of my efforts in published fiction, but above all my entire adult life spent consistently outside my native country and native language – voluntary or not? painful or not? – attest to my constant pre-occupation with these issues. Our common understanding of Exile should be expanded and lose some of its preconceived negativity. This might be a good preparation for a future all of us must face.

Erich Wolfgang Skwara is an Austrian poet and novelist of German language, as well as a literary critic, scholar and educator. He studied in France and Italy and later earned his doctoral degree with a study on German Exile Literature at the State University of New York at Albany. He has published numerous volumes of poetry as well as prose works, and eight major novels (four of which are translated into the English language thus far) since the mid-1970s. He also enjoys wide reputation as a literary translator of mainly classical texts from the American and French into his native German. He was awarded many prizes and honors, among them the 1972 Prize for Young Poetry of the City of Karlsruhe, Germany, and the prestigious 2002 Hermann Lenz Prize. He taught at a number of U.S. and European universities, and travelled worldwide to give readings and lectures for more than thirty years. He taught at San Diego State University in California, USA, as professor of Humanities, Comparative Literature and German for 29 years. He was an invited author at HKBU's International Writers' Workshop in 2011. Now an emeritus professor, Skwara divides his time between Florence, Italy, San Diego, USA, and Salzburg, Austria. Currently he is working on a new novel set to explore the cultural boundaries between East and West.