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## Editor's Notebook

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“When I left this country 18 years ago,” Englishman, literary critic and Harvard professor James Wood wrote in a moving piece in the *London Review of Books* in 2014, “I didn’t know how strangely departure would obliterate return... I made a large choice a long time ago that did not resemble a large choice at the time [and] it has taken years for me to see this.” Wood was born near, raised and educated in Durham, a cathedral town in northeast England, before schooling at University of Cambridge and work in America wrested him away from the familiarities of his boyhood home. His long essay, “On Not Going Home,” is beautifully written and strewn through (in the online version) with hyperlinks to music, sounds and images that evoked for him the memory of home. In an effort to make sense of his journey, Wood turns to a selection of scholarly

writings, including those by Edward Said, Georg Lukács and Sigmund Freud on exile, “homeless,” transcendental homelessness and other concepts.

Wood is careful to point out that his loss is not tragic, not in the way it is for *real* exiles or refugees torn from their homes by war, persecution or violence. But he stipulates that his loss constitutes something more than base nostalgia for mundane by-gones: local accents, smells, flora, or particular brands of chocolate. Leaving, for him, has created a sort of retrospective trauma. Even though none of Wood’s family resides in Durham anymore, to “think about home and the departure from home, about not going home and no longer feeling able to go home, is to be filled with a remarkable sense of ‘afterwardness.’”

I was given Wood’s piece last summer by a buddy, a fellow Canadian ex-pat from Toronto who, for the past 16 years, has taught Literature in English at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. This piece wrought for him, I suspect, that weirdly attractive melancholic feeling that comes with setting down roots abroad and, at the same time, a plausible and rational way to explain it. Wood’s essay is an intensely personal one, but it had a broader purpose, too. It aimed to connect his own life with dominant themes in world literature today. It was also probably meant to resonate with others who have struggled to articulate their own changing conceptions of “home.” That’s why it resonated with me.

But I am sure I’m not alone. What Wood does not acknowledge (and may not have realized) is just how ubiquitous the experience of departure and loss is among modern academics like him.

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been so for some time: massive collections of talented people “from away.” Indeed, part of the appeal of elite higher education has been the exposure that students can gain to a world of experts, assembled in and imported to their own communities. The situation has been

that each have less in common with southeastern Massachusetts, one might argue, than Wood’s elite Durham circle did with the leafier parts of Cambridge, Mass.). And I would guess that most other departments at BSU have undergone similar transformations. In the

as a collectivity, bring a wonderful variety of experiences, learning, world-views and pedagogical styles to our classrooms and to one another in the time we have and the time we make for interaction. BSU is the better for it. But on another level, it must also mean that most of us have experience in leaving, losing, and remaking “home,” sometimes more than once. That we’ve sacrificed something we never anticipated. We inhabit strange spaces between our here homes and our homes of old—those places where our siblings still live and childhood friends retire, where parents move house, age too quickly and then pass away. The places that are different every time we return, and not *ours* anymore.

To make the point is not to bemoan the situation but merely to observe a condition. It may be, as *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen once observed (“In Search of Home,” 3 April 2014), that a principal feature of our *modern* existence is displacement anguish. Modern academics are, to borrow another one of Wood’s terms, “homeloose.” It’s a part of the changing complexity of the people who make up the community of scholars at places like Bridgewater State.

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less true at the many public, teaching-oriented colleges and universities like ours, or at least until fairly recently. When I arrived at Bridgewater State College in the fall of 1996, only about half of the members of my department (History) were from out of state (and two of them were from nearby New York). Twenty-one years later, we are almost all “leavers” who hail from such far-flung places as Arkansas and western New York, Chicago and Colorado, Los Angeles and Baltimore, Hong Kong and southern Ontario (places

past two decades, a glutted job market and the university’s wish to fill its faculty openings through national and international searches has produced this demographic shift. Today, our BSU faculty—one colleague who was in a position to know estimates as much as 80 percent—is a motley collection of transplants, some from very far away.

What does this mean? It’s hard to measure, but there are very positive institutional effects from this change. As we are fond of saying these days, diversity means richness. Today, we,



Andy Holman