

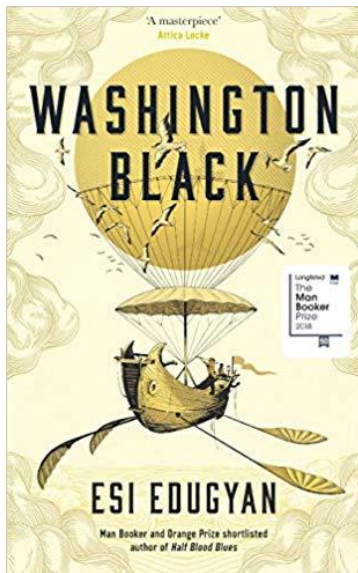
## Book Review on Esi Edugyan's *Washington Black*

Ms. Jyotsna Jadhav

*Research Scholar*

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ESI EDUGYAN is author of the novel, born in Calgary; Canada in 1978. Edugyan studied creative writing at the University of Victoria.



Edugyan authored *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* in the year 2004 and was shortlisted for the **Hurston-Wright Legacy Award** in 2005, *Dreaming of Elsewhere: Observations on Home* in 2014 and *Half-Blood Blues* in 2011, which won the Scotiabank Giller Prize, was a finalist for the Man Booker Prize of 2011, the Governor General's Literary Award, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, and

the Orange Prize. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia. Edugyan the Canadian author's *Washington Black* is a third

novel and a historical fiction by Edugyan. The novel is published in 2018 by Knopf Publishers in US and Serpent's Tail; in London. The novel is appreciated by critics and is one of the shortlisted novels for the 2018 Man Bookers Prize.

The novel is in liners and first person in narration. The writing is lucid and simple to understand. *Washington Black* is the story of boy born in the slavery. His name is given by his earlier master in the mockery as George Washington Black. He is owned by a very harsh white man Erasmus Wilde but is given to his brother for assisting Christopher's aeronautic invention and scientific studies. George Washington Black, or "Wash," as he is came to be known on the plantation is an eleven-year-old field slave on a Barbados sugar plantation; owned by Erasmus Wilde. Wash is terrified of his master Erasmus, "He owned me, as he owned all those along, not only our lives but also our deaths, and that pleased him too much" (5). James was the first of the slave killings; then other killings followed like sick slaves were whipped or hanged above the fields or shot. Then slaves started to commit suicide. Brutality of the slave master is visible in the announcement of Erasmus as, "What you see here, this nagger, killed himself," Erasmus Wild said. "He was my slave, and he has killed himself. He has therefore stolen from me. He is a thief (11)." To set example Erasmus orders the overseer to cut off the head of the slave; William who killed himself and stuck it on the post in the plantation to show the if the head is separated no dead slave can reborn in their mother land and be free.

All his childhood Wash has no one, but only Big Kit whom he loved and feared her as well. When Wash is five he is punished by other slaves of the Faith Plantation that time Big Kit saved him and from that time on Washington keeps following her everywhere for safety of his life. Wash is chosen and taken by his master's brother Christopher Wilde or as called Titch for being his manservant and separated from Big Kit at age of eleven. Wash is still owned by Erasmus in legal papers and is sent to work for Christopher Wilde. Titch is an unmarried. He is a scientist, naturalist, explorer and an inventor. Soon Wash is introduced to a world of a flying machine by Titch to his 'Cloud Cutter' the flying ship; that can carry men across the sky, in the times of slavery where a boy born in slavery can lead a life of dignity, where Titch; the brother of slave owner and the slave Wash, separated by racial norms set by the colonial society, can see each other equal as human beings. Christopher Wilde is not like his brother but is loving and caring in nature. After bringing Wash to his place Titch himself cooks for both and calls Wash to eat with him on the same table. Titch notices that Wash is a talented artist; who makes beautiful sketches." Cassius blue," Titch said quietly. "But did you, really draw this, Washington? God alive. Rarely have I seen nature so faithfully rendered." Christopher peered down at Wash, looking almost stricken. He admired wash and announced, that "you are a prodigy, truly." Titch puts Wash as his assistant and begins to train him as scientific illustrator. On one of the flight in an accident of the hot balloon of

hydrogen blast Wash is severely burnt and disfigured for life.

Wilde family cosine Philip comes from England to stay with Erasmus and Christopher on the Faith plantation. He is disliked by Erasmus so in exchange of some men to work on the Cloud Cutter project Titch welcomes Philip in his home. Phillip is foodie, lazy and good at hunting, according to Philip as, "good London shot". He despises Wash and does not like the fact of being the illustrator for Titch and high lights the flaws of not good at cooking. Almost after a month Philip reviles the purpose of his visit as the letter from Erasmus mother from London to tell them about death of their father. This brings huge rage of the Wilde brothers against cosine Philip. Christopher is devastated by hearing of his Fathers' death; he is uneasy and keeps writing days and nights without taking any rest. Erasmus is not willing to leave the plantation in the care of his younger brother; Titch who knows nothing of the works of the Faith Plantation. Both Wilde brothers dislike Philip and avoid him in general.

One day Philip takes Washington on hunting though Wash tell that is going to rain and not appropriate season for hunting. Philip kills himself by leaving Wash as the only witness. Bounty is announced on Wash, notified as the runaway slave and the killer of white man Philip. Titch knows that Wash is innocent, so plans the escape with Wash on his 'Cloud Cutter' as he disliked living in such condition and plans his book to be published with the announcement of Washington Black an illustrator; which

will be helpful to prove the talent of Wash, set him free and abolish slavery. Titch and Wash escape on the Cloud Cutter flying low in the stormy night and are hit by another ship on the river, the captain of the ship helps by taking them to abolitionist Edger Farrow; who is Titch's friend.

Christopher has seen the talent of bonded slave namely Wash and wants to genuinely see him to be a free man and Washington is a scientific illustrator and hates his slave master but wants to be working for Christopher as an assistant, so they keep running for the freedom and in search of the dignified living in the world of brutality. Christopher or Titch wanted his father to see his invention, he wants to abolish slavery. Wash wishes to be free along with his mother like Big Kit, Wash has seen all the inhumane killings and brutality of slavery. They are on the run get separated and so they do not know what the future holds for them. This historical fiction is depicting picture of Era of the slavery, struggle of the bonded slaves and their inhumane treatments by the monstrous slave masters gives the picture of hell in the real world created by the colonizer. The struggles of the person born in slavery wants to feel the freedom in world of colonizer and the abolitionist with scientific mindset wants to test the limits of freedom of human world by flying like a free bird and he works for abolishing the slavery is narrated in adventurous and action packed story by the Canadian author Edugyan.

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Title: Washington Black

Author: Esi Edugyan

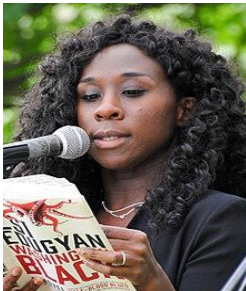
Publisher: Serpent's Tail (London)

Available: [Amazon](#)

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### About the Author



**Esi Edugyan** was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta; her parents **were immigrants from Ghana**. She studied creative writing at the University of Victoria, where she was mentored by Jack Hodgins. She also earned a master's degree from Johns **Hopkins Writing Seminars**.

Her debut novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, written at the age of 24, was published in 2004 and was shortlisted for the Hurston-Wright **Legacy Award in 2005**.  
(Wikipedia)

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### About the Reviewer

**Ms. Jyotsna Jadhav** is a Researcher Scholar at PDEA, Prof. Ramkrishna More College, Pune, India.

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