



Dreaming of Elsewhere: Observations on Home

Esi Edugyan

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This superbly imagined work of essays packs insights of home, nationality, and belonging into a profound conclusion.

“Home is the first exile. To belong in one place is to not belong in another.” With a distinctive voice, Esi Edugyan presents reflective essays that span questions of rootedness, origins, citizenship, unease, arrival, and departure. *Dreaming of Elsewhere: Observations on Home* adroitly weaves the story of a 16th-century Ghanaian, Amos, with the fate of Afro-Germans in Nazi Germany. It is partly the author’s recollections from writing residencies in Europe and her journey to Ghana, and partly Edugyan’s response to Canada’s reaction to her second novel, *Half-Blood Blues*.

Born to Ghanaian immigrants, the Calgary native faced questions about her background. Being asked where she was from led to being asked where she “really” hails from—a query fraught with racial subtext. In Edugyan’s astute forays, home becomes more than an ancestral link, the place of one’s birth, a current domicile, or an easily defined nostalgia. Home is also an abstraction informed by perspective, intriguingly illustrated by the story of Amos (presumably a slave, though specifics remain unknown), who was taken to Germany and whose education complicated his return to Ghana. As Edugyan wonders whether letting go of Amos’s adopted life meant a “return” to his first home or a “leavetaking” from his new home, thoughtful, unanswered questions arise about the shifting nature of home. The author’s trip to Ghana further highlights the complications of “home” through her relatives’ reactions. Rather than regarding her as a Canadian, they asked Edugyan when she would return home (to Ghana), suggesting, perhaps, that home has little relationship to everyday reality and is instead an immutable force in one’s blood.

Edugyan’s award-winning novel, *Half-Blood Blues*, raised questions in the Canadian media about a person’s nationality and the definition of “Canadian” literature. Edugyan responds to the issue with eloquent observations: “All our stories are about home. It is our beginning and our ending. ... I believe stories set abroad and stories set in one’s own home serve much the same purpose: to explore what it means to be alive in the present moment, that is, in the current.”

In all its brevity, *Dreaming of Elsewhere* is a crisp, multi-faceted undertaking—a writer’s inquiries that shed light on an emotional word.

KAREN RIGBY (Summer 2014)

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