



# Ayiti

*Roxane Gay*

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**Ayiti** Roxane Gay

The debut collection from the vibrant voice of Roxane Gay is a unique blend of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, all interwoven to represent the Haitian diaspora experience.

## Ayiti Details

Date : Published October 11th 2011 by Artistically Declined Press

ISBN : 9781450776714

Author : Roxane Gay

Format : Paperback 121 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Poetry, Feminism, Writing, Essays

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## From Reader Review *Ayiti* for online ebook

### Esil says

I am a big fan of Roxanne Gay's writing, and I really liked this one. *Ayiti* is a slim collection of short of stories, that appears to have been first published a few years ago. The stories are all focused on characters in Haiti or characters from Haiti, which is where Gay's own family comes from. There are a few longer stories, and many very short snippets. There is one story in particular that I really liked that I gather formed the basis for her novel *An Untamed State*. It would be hard to say that this is a loving portrait of Haiti. There is plenty of brutality. But Gay is clearly determined to make sure her readers understand that Haiti is more than the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and she succeeds. Strong writing and powerful characters make this one well worth reading. Thanks to Netgalley and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

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### Michael says

My full review, as well as my other thoughts on reading, can be found on my blog.

Stirring and fast moving, the stories of *Ayiti* portray the suffering and resilience of Haitian and Haitian-American women. The debut collection consists of four fleshed-out stories and eleven short sketches. Many of the pieces anticipate the themes of Gay's subsequent work, from gendered violence to collective memory to the experience of immigration. One of the longer stories, "Sweet on the Tongue," even anticipates the plot of her novel, *An Untamed State*. Gay's prose moves at a brisk pace, and her stories are full of keen observations. Several deal frankly with violence and pain, but hope recurs throughout the collection. Favorite stories included "In the Manner of Water or Light," "All Things Being Relative," and "Of Ghosts and Shadows."

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### Wendi Lee says

4.5 stars

I've read a lot of Gay's nonfiction, but this is my introduction to her fiction. This short story collection is cohesive in a way you don't often see, all immersed in the experience of being Haitian: leaving the island or attempting to leave, coming back for traumatic visits, or choosing not to go back, trying to acclimate into American society, and feeling the burden of the stereotypes of what it must be to be a Haitian. The protagonists are straight, queer, poor, well-off, but as diverse as this sounds, they all sing the experience of being an islander.

I felt this collection was even more timely with what's happening right now on America's borders. I don't usually write about politics in my reviews, but I couldn't help but think about the young couple in the final story, leaving everything and everyone they've ever known to embark on a boat, hoping to reach the shores of Miami and not die in the process. The pain and love they felt for Haiti palpable in every sentence.

Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for an electronic copy.

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## Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

\*4.5 stars\*

Ayiti was my first experience with Roxane Gay but it won't be my last. ***Ayiti* is a beautiful work of short story fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, and you won't be able to put it down.**

The stories all explore the Haitian diaspora experience and they all flow into one another, but none of the stories are particularly related in any other way. I've always struggled a great deal with short stories as it is a very hard medium to work in and absorb, but Roxane Gay handles them like a master.

I was really and truly transfixed by most of these stories. Some were more impactful than others, but it was a surprisingly captivating mix of tales that showed me a more personal side of what it means to be Haitian. I know next to nothing about the context of these stories, but I was immediately sucked in and awed.

I loved the mix of queer stories, family stories, and the personal take on the dichotomy of loving a country and hating that same country. I think with the current atmosphere towards immigrants and refugees, this collection of stories is particularly relevant.

I wish some of the stories were even longer, but as they were, everything was lyrical and poetic and nearly perfect. A must read for those who appreciate just plain old excellent writing.

\*Copy provided in exchange for an honest review\*

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## Diane S ? says

I have tried numerous times before to read this author. Each time I could not handle the in your face realism, brutality that her writing evokes. I saw this, a book of short stories, two new, the others rereleased and thought I'd try once again. Most of these stories are very short, chronicling segments of lives of those from Haiti. They cover alternate expressions of emotions, feeling, sadness next to joy, fear next to courage, brutality next to tenderness. Most stories contain one or more of these opposite feelings.

I started her Untamed State, couldn't handle the violence in it, and one of the longest stories in this collection, Sweet on the Tongue, is a preview or shorter version of that book. The shorter page count definitely made these easier for me to read, and I have to admire her writing. She is both a vivid painter of words and fearless in their usage. One does get a broad picture of life in Haiti, their beliefs and yes the violence done to women. The pull of your home country against the fear of the same.

I actually feel a little accomplished that I actually managed to finally read through something this author has written. Maybe a little fearless myself. Lol

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## **Hannah says**

Surprising absolutely no-one, I loved this. I am a huge Roxane Gay fan and I love her short fiction nearly as much as her non-fiction. This collection of short stories showcases Gay's tremendous talent and her brilliant voice. While this cannot quite reach the highs of her second collection (very few things do), I still adored this.

Gay's stories center around pain. There is no way around that. These stories are grim and dark and very depressing. But she also, always, adds some hope, some light, and does so expertly and brilliantly.

There was not a single story in this collection that I didn't like, which is very rare for me when it comes to short story collections. I do admit to finding the collection overwhelming in parts because of the grim subject matter and had to take frequent breaks after particularly grueling stories – but never for long because Roxane Gay has a very distinct, very brilliant voice and I cannot imagine a world where I won't read every single thing she produces. Her observations are sharp and her thoughts on identity and pain and family and loyalty and living are important and necessary and so very very brilliant (I cannot help but speak in superlatives; after all Roxane Gay is one of my very favourite authors).

I received an arc of this book courtesy of NetGalley and Grove Atlantic in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Michelle says**

This was actually a republishing of her debut story collection that came out in 2011. Apparently there are two new stories in it although I am not sure which ones they are. Basically they all focus on the island of Haiti and the immigrant experience. From a young boy being bullied in school, to a young bride returning home, to a married couple setting sail for America Ayiti is trying to capture the essence of Haiti. In one respect Ayiti tries to dispel prejudicial assumptions towards Haiti and emphasize the richness of its people and culture. On the other hand, Gay includes heart wrenching subject matter like gang rape and bloodshed. All in all these stories could apply to anyone and that's what makes them so great. I have read a couple of Roxane Gay's other books and have enjoyed them all. But for me this is my highest rated as I think these stories were more relatable. Ayiti was such a short sweet precious gem. At this point I've simply decided that anytime I see Roxane Gay's name on something I'm just going to pick it up.

*Special thanks to NetGalley, Grove Press and Roxane Gay for an advanced reader's copy of this work in exchange for a fair and honest review.*

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## **Didi says**

Having read but one short collection this entire year, I'm ending 2014 with a really good one. I was gifted this signed copy by a friend and I am so grateful. Ayiti is Roxane Gay's debut novel of short stories. It confronts the reader with Haiti, the good and the bad. It consists of fifteen stories all carrying different themes about Haiti and Haitians.

Click the link to read the rest of the review. <https://didibooksenglish.wordpress.co...>

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## **Carol says**

Ayiti is Roxanne Gay's debut short story collection. The pages are few. The impact large. Each story flows into the next, although they are unrelated to one another with the exception of the overriding theme of Haiti, as a nation, a place of origin, a place with a complex history – one that grounds those who leave and often presents difficulties to those who stay. Gay's writing is simultaneously demanding and easy. Love. Tragedy. Death. Survival. Aging. Machetes. Struggle. Friendship. Yearning. American ignorance. Attraction. Sugar. More.

Thanks to the publisher and Edelweiss+ for a free ecopy.

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## **Ifeyinwa says**

2.5 stars

Ayiti is a slim collection of short stories, and is Roxane Gay's debut collection. Majority of these stories were scanty and felt like a tease, giving us a taste of Gay's imagination, but never reaching a climax or digging deep. Parts of the longest, and arguably the most realized, story in this collection is the main crux of her debut novel *An Untamed State*, which I have read. So it was a tad disappointing to read something familiar.

In this market, I understand the urge to republish backlisted work given the fame Gay has now. However, this collection did not impress me. Most of the stories started off promising only to end unfulfilled. It's a rather slender book so if you are curious and have the time, you could read it for yourself. However, it's not a book I would recommend. Instead, I'd direct your attention to her debut novel, which is compelling although it centers a graphic account of sexual assault.

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## **BookOfCinz says**

I got this copy from Netgalley and I am so happy I requested it.

Ayiti by Roxane Gay is an exceptional collection of short stories that speaks to Haiti. I am amazed that this is a debut novel, but then again, why? Roxane Gay is a master author so I should expect her debut to be flawless.

We don't read a lot about Haiti and Haitians, and when we do it is hardly from someone who is intimate with the country's culture and practices. I am happy Gay chose this as her first collection this is required reading- especially if you are a Caribbean national. While the collection is short, every single story is well written and packed with powerful characters.

A strong debut novel.

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## Meike says

Now I get why people love Roxane Gay! This short story collection contains 15 texts of varying length that all deal with Haiti and its people. In the acknowledgements, the author states: *"I write about Haiti and the Haitian American experience from a place of great privilege but also a place of great pride"* - and this pride shows in the texts themselves. Gay's stories radiate love for the country, its culture and the Haitian people, and the emotional impact derives from the empathy the reader cannot help but feel when reading about the joy and pain the characters experience.

What struck me the most is how Gay writes about the attachment people feel to their home and the longing for a better life somewhere else (in these cases: The U.S.). How must it feel to live in a country that others declare to be defined by its poverty? In a text that was obviously written when for some time not Haiti, but Nicaragua was the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, Gay addresses Nicaraguans:

*"You will hear these words until you are sick to your stomach, until you no longer recognize su tierra, until you start to believe the news stories are true, that nothing else matters, that sie no puedes comprar cosas que no necesitas, tu no existes, tu no cuentas, tu no mereces respeto."*

(Currently, Haiti is again the poorest country in the Western hemisphere and has to deal with the destructive power of this label.) There are also wonderful texts about the Haitian immigrant experience, what it means to leave and how it feels to be perceived as a foreigner:

*"For many years, we didn't realize our parents had accents, that their voices sounded different to unkind American ears. All we heard was home. Then the world intruded. It always does."*

Full disclosure: I am generally not very knowledgeable about Haiti, but Gay gave me a sense of what this country is all about. I read the whole book in one setting and was basically glued to my kindle. So mission accomplished and thank you, Roxane Gay!

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## Elise (TheBookishActress) says

I've read one story from this, *Of Ghosts and Shadows*, and I would highly recommend! You can read it [here](#).

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## Kirsty says

I have heard nothing but praise for Roxane Gay, and this collection of tales set entirely in Haiti - 'a place run through with pain' - really appealed to me. *Ayiti* is accurately described in its blurb as 'a powerful collection exploring the Haitian diaspora experience'. Some of the stories included are little more than vignettes, or fragments of tales, examining one or two elements of the migrant experience, and covering just a couple of pages. Others are much longer, and have a lot of depth to them.

Gay's prose has a sensual vivacity to it. The second story, 'About My Father's Accent', for example, begins:

'He knows it's there. He knows it's thick, thicker even than my mother's. He's been on American soil for nearly thirty years, but his voice sounds like Port-au-Prince, the crowded streets, the blaring horns, the smell of grilled meat and roasting corn, the heat, thick and still.'

Many themes are touched upon and tackled here. Gay writes about racism, misconceptions about the Haitian culture, superstition, medicine, tradition, sex and sexuality, violence, crime, the changing face of Haiti over time, and the family unit. The stories in *Ayiti* are emotive and thought-provoking; every single story, no matter its length, is memorable, and there is a real power to the collection.

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## **Roxane says**

I wrote it and all but it's pretty good.

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