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## **Book Earns EIU Professor Praise From National Book Critics Circle**

*Jan-27-2012*

Readers of Roxane Gay's book, "Ayiti," shouldn't expect to read about the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

"I'm sure I'll write something about it in the future," she says. "Once I know what it means. I haven't yet figured it out."

Instead, "Ayiti" (the Haitian Creole name for Haiti) examines "what it means to be Haitian" through a collection of short stories and essays. Some of the selections date back nearly a decade, says Gay, whose parents are Haitian by birth. In "Ayiti," she writes about people who "are still in Haiti, those who have left and some who tried to return."

The book is a very personal collection of work, which made it particularly meaningful to the author when "Ayiti" was named one of the National Book Critic Circle's "Small Press Highlights of 2011" (<http://bookcritics.org/blog/archive/small-press-highlights-of-2011>).

"It meant a lot, both personally and professionally," Gay said. "It's given the book a level of attention that it wouldn't have otherwise received."

That attention came through a succession of personal contacts.

"Ayiti" was published in October 2010 by Artistically Declined Press. The publisher – a personal acquaintance of hers – likes Gay's writing. "He approached me and I sent them the 'Ayiti' manuscript which they liked and accepted," Gay said.

Another friend, who had bought a copy of the published work, liked it so much that she shared it with Rigoberto Gonzalez, who serves on the executive board of directors of the National Book Critics Circle. In mid-December 2011, he included "Ayiti" as one of only 12 books on his annual "Small Press Highlights" list.

In introducing "Ayiti" on his list, Gonzalez wrote, "In this brief but powerful collection of stories (most no longer than three pages), Haitians navigate their beleaguered homeland or their adopted country (the U.S.) as immigrants, refugees, and undocumented border crossers pining for their loved ones left 'kneeling in a bed of sand and bones' in one of the world's poorest nations. Gay doesn't shy away from critique, showing how Haiti's misfortunes appeal to the exploitative foreign media and well-meaning though condescending outsiders: 'Then the world intruded. It always does.'"

Gay, an assistant professor of English at Eastern Illinois University, is accustomed to having her work published. She regularly has work seen in such periodicals as American Short Fiction, Indiana Review, Cream City Review, Black Warrior Review, Noon, Salon and The Rumpus, and has recently been published in two anthologies -- "News Stories From the Midwest 2011" and "Best Sex Writing 2012."

"Ayiti," however, is her first published book. She's currently working on a novel based on a short work of fiction – Things I Know of Fairy Tales – found in that book.