

Danielle Legros Georges, Boston's second poet laureate, a beacon in the Haitian writing community, dies at 60

By [Bryan Marquard](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 19, 2025, 12:12 p.m.



Danielle Legros Georges read a poem during the "Resilience and Resistance" event at the Cambridge Public Library. The event commemorated the 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

In her earliest years, [Danielle Legros Georges](#) was already navigating the currents of identity. Born in Haiti, she moved with her family to the Democratic Republic of the Congo before arriving in Boston as a young girl.

“We all engage in small and large acts of translation every day,” [she once said](#), reflecting on themes that filled her writing — “migration, immigration, how we know what we know, the negotiations of language.”

In words she found her home [as a poet, translator, and essayist](#). [“A Stateless Poem” includes the passage:](#)

*Who am I to call myself citizen, and
human and free? And who are you
to call yourself landed and grounded,
and free. And who is judge enough?
Who native? Who other?*

[Ms. Legros Georges](#), [who served as Boston’s second poet laureate](#) from 2015 to 2019, and who published four books and finished a fifth after being diagnosed with cancer in 2018, was 60 when [she died Feb. 11](#) in her home in the Uphams Corner part of Dorchester.

“She was the kind of poet who always responded to the moment,” [the writer Edwidge Danticat](#), who also was born in Haiti, said in an interview.

Danticat recalled that at one point while writing about Ms. Legros Georges’s books,

she “called her an oracle, and I thought of her that way. She was a poet who was always listening, who always had her ears to what was happening.”

After the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Ms. Legros Georges tired of hearing her homeland pigeonholed as poor in media reports, with no recognition of its intellectual history. [She wrote “Poem for the Poorest Country in the Western Hemisphere,”](#) which [Bill Moyers asked a colleague to read on his PBS program.](#)

The poem begins:

O poorest country, this is not your name.

You should be called beacon. You should

be called flame. Almond and bougainvillea,

garden and green mountain, villa and hut,

girl with red ribbons in her hair,

books under arm, charmed by the light

of morning ...

The rich imagery of poetry resonated equally in the prose Ms. Legros Georges wrote.

“I was born during a hurricane, I am told, in Gonaïves,” [Ms. Legros Georges wrote in an essay, published in The Boston Globe in 2021,](#) of beginning her life in Haiti.

“The weather in Gonaïves and Boston could not be more different,” she said of her family’s 1970s arrival in Mattapan “during a long climate event I will call ‘the hail of

stones and slurs.’ The Boston busing crisis, now chronicled as a case of school desegregation gone terribly wrong, was in full blaze. We were greeted by this phenomenon as well as Boston’s racism and de facto segregation.”

In her writings she drew from personal, family, and international history. Parts of letters she translated from French to English found their way into her work, as did details from a 1740 document about Violet, an enslaved 2-year-old whose name was crossed out and changed to Nancy on a bill of sale to a Concord woman.

A poem by Ms. Legros Georges restored and celebrated Violet’s real name. In the longest passage, “Violet” is repeated 115 times.

“That transformational quality of what she does is just astonishing,” said [Martha Collins, a poet, translator](#), and longtime friend who formerly taught at the University of Massachusetts Boston, where she founded the creative writing program. “To take this raw material and make gorgeous poetry out of it is really a fine art.”

Collins, who has known Ms. Legros Georges for about 30 years, praised the beauty of her language and noted that “in all of her books she’s also giving women a voice.”



Ms. Legros Georges served as poet laureate of Boston from 2015 to 2019. She was also a professor at Lesley University. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

Appointed Boston's second poet laureate in 2015, she succeeded [Sam Cornish, who died in 2018](#), and was followed by [Porsha Olayiwola, who currently holds the post](#).

Ms. Legros Georges was honored with numerous awards, including being named a Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by France's Ministry of Culture in 2024 for her extensive work as a translator, bringing French poetry to English-speaking readers.

Her poems were collected in books including "Three Leaves, Three Roots: Poems on the Haiti-Congo Story," which was published this year, ["The Dear Remote Nearness of You,"](#) and "Maroon."

Ms. Legros Georges's other books included coediting "Wheatley at 250," and translating the poetry collections "Blue Flare: Three Haitian Poets" and "Island Heart," by Ida Faubert.

A professor emerita at Lesley University, she retired in 2023 after teaching there for many years and formerly directing the master's in fine arts program in creative writing.

[The poet Afaa Weaver](#), who taught at Simmons College for about two decades, praised her role as a connector of writers, especially in Boston's Haitian community. Weaver said, "Her work helped redefine, in a sense, an aspect of what it means to be an African American poet."

Drawing inspiration and source material from the points of her personal compass and beyond — from Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the United States — Ms. Legros Georges wrote poems, translations, and essays in which borders often weren't what they seemed.

"When you're forced to move, you're forced to contend with the notion of what home means. You have to adapt to your new site of existence while revisiting the question of identity, which is so connected to place," [she told the Globe in January](#).

"I was born in Haiti, and I consider myself deeply a Bostonian," she said in the interview, and added: "When I was growing up, I never felt more American than when I was in Haiti. And I never felt more Haitian than when I was in the United States. Movement forces one to examine questions of home, identity, and community."

Born on Feb. 14, 1964, in Gonaïves, a commune in northern Haiti, Danielle Georges was a child when her parents escaped the dictatorship of François Duvalier and moved

to what was then the Republic of the Congo, where the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization had recruited them to help develop educational and scientific institutions.

Her father, Rodney Georges, was an engineer and an architect. Her mother, Edmonde Legros Georges, was a secondary school teacher who later worked at the Federal Reserve Bank in Boston for 18 years, and then returned to Haiti, where she was a diplomatic envoy for then-president René Prével.

Ms. Legros Georges was the second of four creative siblings. Gerard of Hyde Park [is an architect](#), Bernard of Seattle is best known as [the bass player for Throwing Muses](#), Stephan of Brooklyn, N.Y., is [an artist who has a clothing line](#).

Her own talents were not limited to writing.

Gerard recalled that she “was an amazing dancer when she was young,” participating in recitals and plays with a women’s support group in the Haitian community.

She also “kept us on our toes,” he added. “Danielle has always been the center of gravity — the smart one, the quick one, the talented one.”

Ms. Legros Georges studied communications at Emerson College, graduating with a bachelor’s degree, and was part of [Boston’s Dark Room Collective of Black poets](#). She also received a master’s in English and creative writing from New York University.

Along with teaching at Lesley, she was on the faculty of the [William Joiner Institute at UMass Boston](#).

Her marriage to Patrick Etienne, a structural engineer in Haiti, ended in divorce.

Neither could relocate full-time to the other's home in Haiti or Boston.

For the past year and a half, her partner has been Tom Laughlin of Framingham, an English professor who coordinates the creative writing program at Middlesex Community College. She leaves him along with her three brothers.

A funeral Mass was said Saturday morning in [Boston's Basilica, Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Mission Hill](#). Burial was in the Forest Hills Cemetery alongside her parents and grandmother Ilda St. Jean.

"She will be extraordinarily missed in our community," Danticat said in her interview.

And Ms. Legros George's poetry will continue to be published. The New Yorker Magazine confirmed by email Thursday "that her work will appear posthumously" in the magazine.

"She was not just a gifted writer and a brilliant creator, but also just a very generous spirit, and someone who was very connected to the community in Boston, and to the larger Haitian community overall," Danticat said. "We'll miss her very much, but we know she's now an ancestor."

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