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Living by Metaphor in the Haitian Declaration of Independence

Tigers and Cognitive Theory

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Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the first leader of a nation built on the ruins of colonial slavery, emblemizes the contrary cultural poles of violence and poetics. In 1804, Armand Levasseur, who had been a French military hostage in Dessalines's army camp, called him the “tiger-man” (l'homme tigre), and Antoine-Henri de Jomini further developed the animal/man chimera or the anthropomorphized beast metaphor in describing Dessalines as “the tiger with a human face” (le tigre à figure humaine). But was Dessalines, as insinuated by his European critics, more tiger than man, or was he what we recognize in the Western print cultural domain as a “man of letters,” and how should we engage with the implications of this question more globally?

Dessalines was acknowledged by contemporary observers, without exception, to be illiterate. He did not have the alphabetic magic that Stanislas Dehaene has characterized as the absorption of language through literacy. Yet Dessalines is the portal to much of the compelling symbolism by Haitians in the revolutionary and independence eras. Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin wrote that Dessalines was “completely illiterate, it’s true,” yet he saw him as the voice of the nation: “Dessalines . . . for us, as the offspring of those who suffered the humiliating martyrdom of slavery, . . . remains the first manifestation of the spirit of the equality of races, and the symbolic personification of that spirit in Haiti” (“Dessalines est, complètement illétré, il est vrai, mais. . . . Pour nous, fils de ceux qui ont souffert les humiliations et le martyre de l’esclavage, nous ne pouvons y voire que la première manifestation du sentiment de l’égalité des races, sentiment dont Dessalines est resté la personification symbolique en Haiti”). Dessalines not only personified symbolism but generated printed cultural texts through collaborative redactive processes with secretaries and other leaders. He was the producer of a body of important letters: five enduringly significant proclamations, the strikingly innovative 1805 Haitian national constitution, and a host of other documents. Furthermore, he stimulated or solicited early poetic activ-

ity around the new Haitian state, such as the poem by the soldier Gautarel, “You, O Great Emperor!,” which begins as follows, in Norman Shapiro’s expert translation:

You, O great Emperor! You, who laid low French power, restored abundance, let us know Peace’s delights once more; you, whose fair grace Floats you to noble heights to take your place With the immortals! Here, my halting verse Would sing your praise; you, who cast off the curse Of France; you, who alone in memory’s shrine Plout the vile Frenchman’s soul and fell design Ever to shake you! Ah, but in vain His base desire! For, midst the bale and bane, Mars, god of war, chose you his favorite son!

I have argued previously that formal education in Western alphabetic literacy and putting pen to paper were not the conditions for Dessalines’s authorial role, but rather the shared characteristics and ambitions of a corpus of work produced under his direction by secretaries and military colleagues and issued in his name. In this essay I explore Dessalines’s engagement with alphabetic and print culture in the Haitian Acte de l’Indépendance, or Declaration of Independence, as an example of how, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have postulated, we “live by” metaphor, and how embodied cognitive models can facilitate the counter-intuitive appreciation of “unlettered” authorial models.

My point of departure for Dessalines’s “life by metaphor” is his metaphoric framing of death and death’s agents, notably the colonist as “blood-thirsty tiger.” In the famous “I have avenged America” proclamation of late April 1804, he justifies violence against agents of colonialism as a parallel to reaction to the danger of a prowling tiger: “Who is that Haitian so vile, so unworthy of his regeneration, that he does not believe that he has fulfilled eternal precepts by exterminating these bloodthirsty tigers?” (“Quel est ce vil Hâitien, si peu digne de sa ré-generation, qui ne croit point avoir rempli les décrets éternels en exterminant ces tigres altérés de sang?”)

Dessalines had first used the metaphor of the tiger in the Acte de l’Indépendance to keep traumatic memories of violence fresh in his compatriots’ memories, and to steel resolve:

Native Citizens, men, women, girls and children, cast your gaze on every part of this Island, look for your wives, your husbands, your brothers, and
your sisters; what do I say, look for your children, your suckling babies? What has become of them . . . I shudder to say it . . . the prey of these vultures. Instead of these precious victims, your saddened eye only sees their assassins; these tigers still covered with their blood, and whose atrocious presence reproaches your insensitivity and your culpable slowness in avenging them. 8

In this dramatic re-creation of the moment of recognition of the loss of a beloved, such as the breastfeeding mother’s loss of her infant, the community unites in mourning. Dessalines presents to them the spectral vision of the tiger men still living in their midst, dripping with blood. The term dégoutants as a qualifier for bloodthirsty tigers, suggests the homophone gouttes, or “drips,” in dégoûtant, “disgusting”: the French tigers are both disgusting, and dripping, with blood. The sensory richness of the liquidity, the gouttes, reinforces the processing of disgust. Both spellings—dégoûtants with one “t” or two—can be found in contemporaneous documents. However, the specific symbolism of dripping blood adds precision to the conventional meaning of “disgusting” and suggests explicit wordplay.

Dessalines’s metaphor of the Haitians’ ethical imperative to exterminate the bloodthirsty tiger enraged European audiences. An 1804 poem in a British newspaper blamed the French Revolution for letting the cat out of the bag, unleashing Haitian tigers:

St. Domingo’s bloody journal
Tells of those who would be free,
Points to slaughter heaps diurnal.
That is French fraternity.

What has France for Europe, done, sir.
Set a savage tyger free,
Armed the father ‘gainst the son, sir,
That is—French equality. 9

Laure Junot d’Abrantès in her Mémoires used Dessalines’s own metaphor to claim that the man himself was a literal, not a metaphorical, bloodthirsty tiger; she identifies Dessalines as “the bloodthirsty tiger, and one can say that without any metaphor” (“ce tigre altéré de sang, et l’on peut le dire sans métaphore”). 10 Of course one cannot say that Dessalines was a bloodthirsty tiger without metaphor, anymore than Dessalines could say without metaphor that the French were bloodthirsty tigers. Abrantès simply reversed the directionality of the metaphor in her allusion, using it to characterize the subject of the metaphorical speech rather than the object of the subject’s speech (i.e., “We’re not tigers, you are the tiger”), and further legitimating the correctness of the tiger trope for synthesis of the colonial/anticolonial battle. The tiger is “no metaphor,” because it yields such a perfect mimetic representation of the referent, creating, in Roland Barthes’s terminology, a reality effect (effet de réel) in which the sign appears seamless rather than divided between signifier and signified. The tiger for Abrantès would be like the tree in some category of reality outside of human cognition and history, not the tree that is a contingent cultural product of the semiotic “sound image” (signifier) and the abstract concept (signified).

Linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson proposed in the 1980 Metaphors We Live By that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. 11 This has become known as conceptual metaphor theory. In conceptual metaphor theory, knowledge is constructed from metaphorical mappings derived from sensory experience and perceptual simulations. Metaphor may provide spatial or temporal orientation, as in “talking down” or “falling behind.” It undergirds analogy systems that in turn conventionalize or cue interpretations and behaviors, as in the general metaphor that argument is war. (Claims are “indefensible”; one “loses” or “wins” in debate; one “attacks” a position; one “duels” in rap.)

In many ways, the “cognitive” approach to language as action, exemplified by “argument as war,” is old news. In the classical era, battlefields, not literary salons, yielded many of the parabolic explanations of rhetorical structures. Quintilian, in Institutes of Oratory, says “Would not the orator whom I am trying to form, too, if he were engaged in the field of battle, and his soldiers required to be encouraged to be engaged, draw the materials for an exhortation from the most profound precepts of philosophy? For how else could all the terrors of toil, pain, and even death, be banished from their breasts . . . ?” 12 In this war-sensitive rhetorical tradition, the fear of death is the bar metaphorical persuasion must lift.

The secretaries and military colleagues with whom Dessalines worked would certainly have been cued to the age-old Western association of the warrior with rhetoric capable of helping soldiers to turn fight-or-flight reactions to advantage on the battlefield. But there is no reason to look only to the Western tradition, or only to literacy and textual traditions, for examples of priming soldiers to fight by using fighting words. Poetic rhetoric is not specific to privileged literary personne (such as “authors”), products (such as anthologies of poems), milieus (such as literary “schools” or “movements”), or technologies of preservation (such as print culture). The US military tradition of “calling cadence,” in which a call-and-response song unites drill leader and troops in a visceral rhythmic dynamic, relies on poetics for syn-
chronization of movement and morale-building, often across social boundaries of refined speech.\textsuperscript{13}

The motor, sensory, and perceptual viscerality of rhetoric has been associated since Aristotle with the tigerlike pounce of the soldier. Aristotle explains that when Homer described the soldier Achilles pouncing like a lion, he is using simile (or analogy); when the narrative says simply, "the lion pounced," removing the overtly comparative term, it becomes metaphor.\textsuperscript{14} The "pounce" of Achilles, one of the inaugural images of rhetorical study, invokes animal threat to focus the listener's keen attention on the character of the hero's valor.

Poetry of the battlefield recalls the visceral somatosensory effects and motor priming in the proclamations that Dessalines dictated to and edited with his secretarial teams. In the opening salvo of the Declaration of Independence, Dessalines prepares his countrymen to turn on the group he will de-anthropomorphize as bloodthirsty tigers by evoking enslaved existence as a state of hypnagogic torpor. The slaves must be roused from the stupor of captivity by means of a series of metaphors that strongly evoke stillness and contrasting movement. Where an "inhuman government that has for a long time kept us in the most humiliating torpor" ("gouvernement inhumain qui tient depuis longtemps nos esprits dans la torpeur la plus humiliante"), the Haitians must put an end (put on "un frein") to the French factions who have mocked the phantom of liberty which France exposed to our eyes ("jouaient tour-à-tour du fantôme de liberté que la France exposait à vos yeux"); they must seize from the French ("ravir") any hope of resubjection. In this passage, from a nearly zombified state of torpor, the Haitians reawaken, ready to hungrily—perhaps like a dulled tiger in a cage, teased by a specter of freedom, stirred into action by the identification of the captor as the bloodthirsty tiger, the visceral threat, the analogy to their own anger.

One Declaration, Many Voices

As new, contemporaneous copies of the Haitian Declaration of Independence come to light, evidence emerges of a collaborative verbal transmission and preservation process in which citizens worked with Dessalines to declare Haiti's independence as if it were a well-loved poem. Duke University's newly acquired copy of the Haitian Declaration of Independence is characterized by phonetic spellings—spellings as one might hear a name, for example, rather than how it would be conventionally written in French—and words that blend into one another in one long hybrid, rather than remaining separated by spaces.\textsuperscript{15} Punctuation is minimal and different than in the government-issued printed text found by Julia Gaffield, and French accents are rare and often wrongly applied. A sentence is missing, and another phrase is repeated. A concluding sentence is phrased slightly differently. Did this manuscript represent a Haitian regional scribe's transcription from memory of a public reading of the declaration? Such a possibility of a largely verbal dissemination of the text, transcribed from memory by locally educated people of letters, is supported by the existence of another contemporaneous manuscript copy with a different set of irregularities of spelling, spacing, and inclusion, which was certified as a copie conforme by French General Louis Ferrand from the other side of the island of Hispaniola and sent to Napoléon Bonaparte in 1804.\textsuperscript{16} A public process of declaring independence verbally, and copying it for the idiosyncratic literary birth of former slaves turned nation builders, presents a moving example of the use of poetics by the unschooled (or the less schooled) in dialogue with and contestation of the revolutionary discourses of Western Europe.

In the Duke University copy, the evocation of the mourning Haitians avenging the victims of the French bloodthirsty tigers documents a new national "coming to writing," so orthographically irregular that one can almost hear in it the hypnotic intonations of an impassioned public reading:

\textit{Citoyens indigènes, hommes, femmes, filles, enfants, portez vos regards sur toutes les parties de cette île, cherchez-vous, vos épouses, vos maris, vos pères, vos sœurs, quelle est la rancoeur que sont ils devenus? Je tremble de désir... la proie de ces vautours. aulce de ces victimes innocentes votre œil est témoin, que des assassins que des tigres déguisés encore de leurs sang et dans l'affreuse présence, vous reprochez votre insensibilité et votre coupable lenteur a les venger.}

The punctuation-free slide into the next image, of the bones of the ancestors repulsing any unworthy Haitians who would solicit their company in the crypt, serves as a reminder of the declaration's cultural alterity:

\textit{que attendez-vous pour apaiser leurs maux sonnés que vous avez voulus que vos restes reposent auprès de ceux de vos pères au nom sous les avoir vengés non leurs ossements repusserais-les vos terres.}

The warriors' cult of the ancestors, and the ancestors' ghostly agency, are among the literary figures in the declaration that recall the "African char-}
acter” of the Haitian Revolution, and Dessalines’s own rumored African origins. Declaring independence in Haiti involved, despite the American textual model, a distinctly African “American” stance.

Anti-Colonial Tigers

In the contest to control figurative identifications, to “brand” insurgencies against slavery as unredeemed violence, tigers were already circulating as critical, as well as colonial, motifs. William Blake’s 1794 poem on the tiger in *Songs of Experience* may make no direct allusion to the events in Saint-Domingue, but scholars have established that Blake in the 1790s was preoccupied by slavery. As Christine Gallant notes in “Blake’s Coded Designs of Slave Revolts,” “Blake’s familiarity with slavery in other colonies of the Americas underlies his 1791–92 engravings for John Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*.” Gallant asserts that Blake was “electrified” by the Haitian Revolution, and that complex allegories of plantation agriculture, slave torture, the Middle Passage, and even African Vodou, ran through his oeuvre. Although Gallant does not include “The Tyger” in the body of Blake’s “coded designs of slave revolts,” I will argue that the poem expresses the leap of thought, which Michel-Rolph Trouillot endurably yet provocatively cast as the unthinkable quality, of the Haitian Revolution.

The poem’s opening allusion to Prometheus (“What hand, dare seize the fire”) is contradicted by the location of the fire in the tiger’s own eyes. The tiger surges from the “forests of the night,” which have for centuries been the emblem of symbolic Africa. Although tigers themselves originated among the megafauna of Asia and are not recorded in human memory in Africa, a perceived relative of the tiger, the jaguar (chat-tigre), had been accidentally unleashed on the island of Hispaniola in the colonial era. In Blake’s opening stanza the arc of the tiger’s leap challenges the capacity of the immortal, who reigns in distant (Western metaphysical) skies, to invent it, putting to test the symmetrical locations of god and animal, the tropical wilds of the night and winged heaven, divine fire, and human grasping:

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?

On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

With almost adrenal impact, flashes of heat, distance undone, surprise, and vertical stripping combine in Blake’s poetic condensation of the leap as a movement that, like the Haitian Revolution, threatens to devour the reader: the shaking, paltry, white consumer of print messages in the Republic of Letters. The reader, having perceptually processed the winged spring, feels the adrenaline surge of the symmetry framing the tiger’s point of departure and the point to which it “aspires”: its prey. For Blake, the tiger is to the lamb as death is to birth, as infant sorrow is to infant joy, as, for the reader, appetite for vicarious violence is to being consumed. Jaws, fire, speed. The tiger represents sensorial, perceptual, and cognitive processing of the threatening glory of Africa’s vengeance of its travails in the New World.

In 1999, Lakoff and Johnson extended their concept of lived metaphors to the notion of embodied cognition, arguing that “abstract concepts are largely metaphorical,” and that “we need a body to reason”: “The same neural and cognitive systems that allow us to perceive and move around also create our conceptual systems and modes of reason. Thus, to understand reason we must understand the details of our visual system, our motor system, and the general mechanisms of neural binding.” Cognitive linguists’ research on metaphor has the advantage, for postcolonial or postslavery literary studies, of not tying poetic rhetoric to specific, privileged print culture personae (authors), products (books of poems), or milieus (literary schools); it ties rhetoric to cognition. This universalism issuing from cognitive studies is ripe for comparison with the humanistic universalism that was the banner under which both colonialism and anticolonialism unfurled, through Eurocentric framing of the human and pursuit of negatively rather than positively defined universals. The recent progress of brain science studies on understanding specific problems in figurative language brings us back to Jean-Paul Sartre’s refusal of any abstract humanism positing an “a priori” world, although whether this indicates bona fide potential for what Ralph James Savarée has called a “postcolonial neurology” anchored in challenges to “neurotypicality” remains to be seen. A number of subsequent behavioral studies have supported conceptual metaphor theory, notably through confirmation that rhetorical priming does indeed influence sensory perception. Metaphorical anger cues such as “hot-headed,” for example, can raise estimates of room temperature.

Lawrence Barsalou developed a transition from conceptual metaphor theory to grounded cognition theory in the early years of the new millennium, focusing on explanations for modal systems, as distinct from amodal sym-
bols, in the constitution and uses of knowledge. For Barsalou, simulation involving "the reenactment of perceptual, motor, and introspective states acquired during experience with the world, body, and mind" is a holistic structure in which "the brain captures states across the modalities and integrates them with a multimodal representation stored in memory." Barsalou argues that simulated embodiments and other forms of modal symbolism play causal roles in cognition; in other words, representations are not secondary and epiphenomenal, but primary and foundational to cognition. Barsalou's grounded cognition theory, which I will adapt in this essay to the notion of grounded rhetoric, implicitly situates mimesis—which Erich Auerbach famously defined as the "representation of reality"—not as an aesthetic product of specialized reflective modes, but as a fundamental mechanism of the brain's ability to synthesize and operationalize diverse sensory, perceptual, motor, and stored traces of the encounter with the world. More recent elaborations on grounded cognition as a basic alignment of observation and action execution in neuronal firing include Deborah Jenson and Marco Iacoboni's theory of "literary biomimesis," in which ontological representation in the brain models the engineering of literary and artistic representation.

Neuroscientific research on figurative language is certainly not the only discipline to lend itself to the study of analogical thought as a cognitive universal rather than a particular product of literary print culture. For example, anthropology, like its cousin ethnography, travel writing, and naturalist narrative, also studies meaningful utterances and their rhetorical impact outside of the Republic of Letters as they are mapped and coded in elite intellectual communities. And literary criticism at times has engaged with what the figure Srinivas Aravamudan has defined as the "tropicopolitan," who could be understood not only as an inhabitant of the tropical cosmopolis, but also as the troping persona/trajectory within that liminal environment—including the paradoxical careers in letters of the unlettered. Yet research on metaphor by neuroscientists allows a microscopic look, a close-up, a reading at the neuronal level, of how we live by metaphor, even when we die by the sword, not only in literary movements, but in movements against the deanthropomorphizing system of slavery, and even when illiterate, which was arguably the level on which it interested Dessalines.

Republcs of Letters, Hemispheres of Cognition

The sensory apprehension of the "dread hand" and "dread feet" in the slave insurgency takes a visceral rhetorical form in Haitian writer Ignace Nau's 1837 account of the alleged early revolutionary memories of an elderly mill operator, "Old Jerome" (le Vieux Jérôme). The short prose piece "Le Lambe" (The Conch Shell), published in the Haitian newspaper L'Union, features Jerome opening up to his bon bourgeois (good bourgeois) interlocutor on the startling acoustic poetics of the insurgency. After Léger-Félicité Sonthonax had conquered Port-au-Prince and chased away the colonist Borel and his black saltimbanques, when the country was trembling in every member, Jerome recounts that a man six feet tall, and with the girth of two men, appeared: Halaou. He divided his army into several sections, each with its own chief, most of whom were aligned with African communities or "nations."

One evening Halaou camped on the plantations Meilleur and Laserre. He had a caplata (capreleva), a figure in the non-Catholic priest corps, come to ordain, bless, and make the soldiers invulnerable to their enemies. The caplata gives a white cock for the troops to exhibit and caress, which would serve as a precious talisman and a banner, a coq merveilleux. All the soldiers of Halaou are instructed to run into battle whipping pigs' and horses' tails in the air. The enemy cannon fire would liquefy in response, and birds would flee from their shelters, terrifying the colonists. Then the caplata would give between seventy and eighty men asceptor drums, conch shells, and the debris of sugar cauldrons with which to perform a frightful serenade all around Halaou.

Halaou! tym, pan, dam!
Canon cé bambou: tym, pan, dam!
La poud cé dlau: tym, pan, dam!
(Halaou! tym, pan, dam!)
Canons become bamboo: tym, pan, dam!
Gunpowder becomes water: tym, pan, dam!)

Halaou walks back and forth among this sonorous army, ravished to ecstasy by this music. Then, to complete this scene, he orders the neighboring hut and buildings to be torched. Amid the roar of the flames, men dance to the beat of the music! The French sentinel of the Croix-des-Bouquets listens with disquiet: "Captain, put your ear to the ground!" The captain responds, "What a truly strange sound! The earth is churning a disturbing music deep in its entrails."

Or as William Blake would put it:

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!
Cauldron beats and talismanic birds, canons magically becoming bamboo through analogy to bamboo, gunpowder becoming water through analogy to water—these were “metaphors we live by,” to return to the lexicon of LaKoff and Johnson. This “disturbing music” represents a poetics of the slaves’ insurgency that was only much later, and much less directly, processed through literacy, in the form of Naui’s pursuit and transcription of an elder’s story in the 1830s. The Halacu story shows an environment in which chanted rhetoric was combined with musical rhythms using “instruments” available from the animal or industrial worlds, like horses’ tails or fragments of sugar cauldrons, to create a powerful incantatory trance effect. “Tym, pan, dam!” Rhetoric and musicality are so “grounded” that one can literally hear it by putting an ear to the ground.

Illiterate Poets of the Western/Left Hemisphere?

In modern Western history, poetry has been the provenance of the literate, the poet with quill or pen, connected to literary salons and schools and manifestoes. In neurobiological terms, there is no question but that alphabetic literacy—the capacity to read and write alphabetic texts—bears a left-brain signature. Left hemisphere lesions damage reading capacities; even the majority of left-handed people demonstrate left hemispheric dominance for reading (contradicting the physiological phenomenon of contralaterality). When the left hemisphere is isolated through the Wada test, or by a surgical procedure called a commissurotomy, used in the treatment of epilepsy, patients can still produce normal verbal intelligence scores on standardized tests; likewise, right hemisphere neurological damage often has little impact on syntax, phonology, and lexicon.

The left-brain correlation with alphabetic literacy in print cultures has also extended more broadly, since the late nineteenth century, to a certain understanding of language and logic. The French anthropologist and surgeon Paul Broca (1824–1880) articulated in his posthumously published 1888 Mémoires d’anthropologie that “just as we direct the movements of writing, drawing, embroidery, etc., from the left hemisphere, we speak with the left hemisphere; as verbal beings, we are ‘left-brained.’” In the same era, Karl Wernicke found another left temporal lobe region responsible for the reception rather than the production of language, now called Wernicke’s area. How would anticolonial insurgents like Dessalines, many of whom were kidnapped from Africa in their youth, who transitioned not only from oral to print systems of the preservation of knowledge (and from one set of languages to another), but also (in most cases) from freedom to enslavement, be sufficiently attuned to rhetoric to harness poetics effectively in a discourse of vengeance?

But scholars, including Savarese and Julie Kane, have recently argued that neurotypicality, including left-brain language processing dominance, is partly determined by the privileging of writing and alphabetic literacy, not a precondition for it. People are left-brained, at least once they are acculturated to writing and the texts of the rationalist philosophical and scientific traditions. Nicolas Boileau’s seventeenth-century didactic poem, “On the Poetic Arts” (1674) creates a kind of epigrammatic loop between rational thought and its inscription in writing:

Avant donc d’écrire, apprenez à penser
Ce que l’on conçoit bien s’énonce clairement,
Et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément.

(Before starting to write, learn to think—Whatever is well conceived is clearly said, And the words to say it flow with ease.)

Kane claims that poetry and poetics differ from the “referential” or “technical” speech associated with the left hemisphere, and that “the absence of left-hemispheric dominance for language in the brains of preliterate and illiterate persons may explain why those populations exhibit so-called ‘magical’ thinking rich in right-hemispheric features.” As Savarese summarizes:

Kane proposes that we think of poetry in precisely this way: as a stubborn holdover from oral culture, a holdover now practiced and consumed in private written form. “To view inanimate objects, plants, and animals as endowed with conscious agency and will,” she explains, “to grasp abstract ideas in the form of concrete images which embody them, is to inhabit the mythic world of the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, Native Americans, and countless other cultures prior to the introduction of phonetic alphabetic print literacy.” Investigating the role of the non-dominant right hemisphere in the production of poetic language, Kane links poets (who, she believes, partially inhibit the left hemisphere when they write), young children (who have not yet fully lateralized to the left), and pre-literate peoples.

Poetry is becoming a crucial portal for the identification and cultural valorization of neurodiverse cognitive styles. Recent brain research inspired by the challenge of conceptual metaphor theory and grounded cognition have
focused precisely on the recruitment of sensory and motor areas of the brain, and the interhemispheric activation suggested by their bilateral distribution, to account for complex metaphorical mappings and simulations in poetry. In 2012, Emory neuroscientists Simon Lacey, Randall Still, and Krish Sathian published a study on the neural basis of metaphor processing to better understand why lexicalized metaphors are not limited to classical language areas. Is knowledge “represented in abstract codes, distinct from the sensory modalities through which the knowledge was acquired,” or is it “represented in modal systems derived from perception,” with cognition depending on “perceptual simulations”? Metaphor has become a crucial arena for brain science research to determine how knowledge is constituted, stabilized, and communicated.

Lacey et al. sought to localize the sensory properties of metaphor by testing texture-based metaphors and their recruitment of domain-specific activity in the sensory cortex. When we speak of having a “rough” day, does the brain react to associations with abrasive texture as well as the notion of unpleasantness? Is a “slimy” person likewise processed as unpleasant to the touch as well as morally questionable? The sensory cortex refers not only to the bilateral postcentral gyrus that is the home for the primary somatosen-sory cortex, and to the primary and secondary cortices of the senses in the left and the right hemisphere, but also to the somatosensory association cortex, which integrates sensory information such that the object being sensed and perceived is an object being understood. Texture is perceived haptically— involving the recognition of objects through touch—and visually.

Using rapid event-related fMRI to compare the processing of familiar textural metaphors with the processing of literal sentences conveying similar meanings, Lacey and his colleagues gathered “preliminary evidence for the hypothesis that processing textural metaphors activates texture-selective somatosensory areas.” This allowed the researchers to described limited evidence for the perceptual comprehension of metaphors, indirectly supporting the culturally embedded philosophy of cognition hypothesis that “knowledge is structured around metaphorical mappings derived from physical experience.” Anyone with a body can be a poet. Emblems of lettered vocations, from the quill to poetic languor, are historically contingent and socially supplementary to the place of rhetoric in embodied cognition.

Rutvik Desai et al. in “The Neural Career of Sensory-Motor Metaphors” have shown that neural responses to literal action, like “The daughter grasped the flowers,” and to metaphorical action, like “The public grasped the idea,” both activated the left anterior parietal lobule involved in action planning, but that the metaphorical action additionally recruited from right hemispheric sensory-motor systems. Michele Diaz and Larson Hogstrom have further demonstrated that figurative language engages the right inferior frontal gyrus and that the degree of novelty in metaphor especially influences recruitment of the right hemisphere.42

Dessalines’s lack of alphabetic literacy, like Toussaint Louverture’s partial or idiosyncratic alphabetic literacy, must be considered in the context of military culture in Saint-Domingue and its fostering of collective speech acts among groups with varied educational training. Should we theorize a vicarious or cooperative alphabetization, rather than the absence of alphabetization? Should we consider borrowing the neuroscience metaphor of the “recruitment” of different structures and areas of the brain to describe Dessalines’s—and other Haitian leaders’—“recruitment” of the highly developed alphabetic and printed cultural language centers of their more socioeconomically elite, Euro-educated, mixed-race confraternity, to complement their particular verbal strengths? Beyond the obvious practical outsourcing of the writing of texts, Dessalines had to have had a rhetorical education very different from that of a purely verbal rhetor, or speaker, in that specifically lettered interlocutors were trained and employed in the editing of his thinking, at his behest. Vittorio Gallese’s critique of the solipsistic brain model of an ultimately interpersonal and intermental approach to theory of mind and mind reading, suggests the naiveté of establishing impermeable walls between alphabetized and nonalphabetized cognition in our social lives.43

Even when we raise the issue of brain hemispheres to deconstruct models of literacy-related left-brain dominance, are the notions of right hemisphere and left hemisphere in the brain the latest allegories of torrid zones and Western metropolitan centers? Do we assign biased relegations of magical thinking to non-Western spheres and of rationalism to the West? Should we be considering brain and global hemispheres (currently “North” and “South”) as analogical pairs—left hemisphere is to rationality as right hemisphere is to magical thinking? Are the hegemonic racial divides of the “West and the rest,” or the northern hemisphere and the “Global South,” analogical to the politics of hemispheres in the brain in a world of biased and binaristic associations? Should we be ready to contest literacy and literary achievement as a “scarce symmetry” of colonial thought?

Intriguingly, the anthropological relationship to hemispheres is at the very origins of what we now know as neuroscience. Broca, the “discoverer” of Broca’s area, was a physical anthropologist who did some of his pioneering neuroanatomical surgical research in the context of his exploration of presumed racial differences. The nineteenth-century Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin, along with his Haitian colleagues Louis Joseph Janvier and J. B. Dehoux, shared the neuro-anthropological milieu of Broca in Paris, including the Société d’anthropologie founded by Broca in 1859. Firmin refers
to Broca dozens of times in *De l'égalité des races humaines*, sometimes positively, but also in terms of the weighing of ethnic brains and other painful reminders of the racially egalitarian state of many nineteenth-century scientific fields. Of the eight or more references to Broca in Firmin's work, many contest classificatory systems: "What should we deduce from this new foundation for classification?" Debates over the anatomy of the nervous system in geographically far-flung ethnicities are a fundamental preoccupation of Firmin's book. Firmin affirmed that Broca "was not always deaf to truth" and suggests that Broca only later, regrettably, found himself pulled into debates on monogenesis and polygenesis after studying the *mâlessé* offspring of a rabbit and hare; nevertheless, he is part of a key scientific obstacle to Firmin's goal of the equality of the races.

Animals and A Prioris

The Sartrean ideal of a humanism without a priori contrasts starkly with the comparative evolutionary anthropological epistemologies that attended the genesis of neuroscience as we know it. It was in the context of this nineteenth-century culture of naturalism that the anonymous author of *De la gérontocratie en Haïti* critiqued the proliferation of animal analogies in the characterization of Haitian leaders. This anonymous author complained that in the work of French writer Gustave d'Alaux, "Affinities abound between negroes and wild beasts: Toussaint is fox-like, Dessalines is like a lion, Christophe is like a tiger, Riché is like a bull; the collection would be incomplete if Soulouque were not charged with representing the gorilla." ("Entre les nègres et les bêtes féroces, les affinités abondent: il y a du renard dans Tous- saint, du lion dans Dessalines, du tigre dans Christophe, du taureau dans Riché. La collection ne serait pas complète si Soulouque n'était pas chargé de représenter le gorille.") Not just Dessalines, but all the early Haitian leaders were tigerlike in their threat to a Eurocentric cerebral map of abstract, rational man. François-Richard de Tussac in *Crie des colons* likewise separately describes not only Dessalines but also Louverture and Rigaud as tiger men: "[A] tiger unleashed by an imprudent hand will obey nature's irresistible penchant." Even the *friends* of blacks were considered tigerlike, as in this reference to the Amis des noirs in a parliamentary speech by the Earl of Westminster, in which he accused the abolitionist group of fomenting revolution in order to take over trade interests: "But is it reasonable to suppose, that whenever peace shall come, and this country shall have engrossed every other trade, those tygers in human frame shall not seize a lucrative trade which we should have relinquished?" Further-

more, Henry Christophe himself used the figure of speech to discredit Dessalines after his death.

Thus when William Blake asked if the same force could have made both the tiger and the lamb, he indirectly evoked the symmetrical, Manichean typologies of racial species speculations:

> When the stars threw down their spears
> And water'd heaven with their tears:
> Did he smile his work to see?
> Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

"Novel" Metaphors

Kane argues that "though the brain's left hemisphere is commonly believed to be the 'seat of language,' the right hemisphere possesses a number of subtle linguistic functions," most of them linked to a kind of cognitive synesthesia through the sensory apprehension and perceptual recognition of evoked material properties, as in the analysis by Lacey et al. of the textural properties of the metaphor of a "rough" day. Some processing of the motoric valences of action-related words also occurs in the right brain. And there is evidence, according to Michael Trimbie, that "the links from the limbic structures to the right hemisphere . . . developed to a greater degree than those in the left hemisphere," suggesting that "language precedes reason." But Iain McGilchrist suggests that the right hemisphere is above all suited to nonfocal activations of related meanings and to novel figuration—unusual or innovative linguistic usages. These all add up to a series of functions that are, according to Kane, "virtually synonymous with 'poetry' or 'poetic' speech." There is a caveat, however: completely conventional or clichéd figures of speech are still processed in the left hemisphere.

Rigid localization of cognitive function in a given part of the brain is not the point of recent neurobiological research on poetics. Epistemologies mapped according to hemispheric localization hold increasingly little credi-

bility in neuroscience. Modulation of hemispheric cognitive specialities by the corpus callosum, which coordinates activity in one hemisphere by inhibiting the activity of the other hemisphere, makes the double negative of disinhibition and inhibition more persuasive than cerebral geographies of thought. Recent neuroscience on right hemispheric poetic activation tells us that poetry is absolutely not the prerogative of the educated. It also reveals that poetry stimulates limbic function, which processes responses related to survival such as fear and pain. The unlettered Dessalines's rhetorical deployment of the pouncing tiger serves as an iconic reminder that poetics are
in part a mastering of visceral sensorperceptual experience, as important to former slaves in their military strategies as to the colonists trying to keep African “tiger men” taboo.

Notes


5. Among Dessalinis’s legacy are: the November 29, 1803, preliminary proclamation of Haitian liberty, signed by Dessalinis, Clerveaux, and Christophe, and published in the United States in the first days of January 1804; the January 1804 Declaration of Independence, first published in Haiti in the third week of January and in the US, not as a complete text but in parts, in March 1804; the April 28 “I have avenged America” proclamation, first published in the US in June 1804; the May 8 proclamation to the inhabitants of the Spanish part of Hispaniola; and Dessalinis’s late August acceptance of his imperial nomination, first published in the US in October 1804. As examples, see the apparently pre-independence poem that Julia Gaffield uncovered in The National Archives of the United Kingdom: “Hymne Haytiène”; and the poem signed by one of Dessalinis’s “grenadiers,” Gautier, on the occasion of Emperor Dessalinis’s feast day, published August 1, 1805, in the Gazette politique et commerciale d’Hayti. This poem appears in Poetry of Haitian Independence, ed. Doris Kadish and Deborah Jenson, trans. Norman Shapiro (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).


7. The translations of the Declaration of Independence match the appendix in this volume; all other translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Jean-Jacques Dessalinis, Aux Habitants d’Hayti, [Commonly known by the phrase “I have avenged America”] April 28, 1804.

8. All references to the Haitian Acte de l’Indépendance or Declaration of Independence are to The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA) version unless otherwise noted, Colonial Office (CO) 357/1.1/.


20. The closest thing to a tiger on the island of Hispaniola was the imported jaguar, the chat-tigre. See George Louis Leclerc de Buffon, Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière (Paris: de l’Imprimerie royale, 1760), 9:202.


22. “If my relation with the Other is a priori, it thereby exhausts all possibility of relation with others,” Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (1943; repr. London: Routledge, 2003), 273; see Ralph James Savarese, Toward a Postcolonial Neurol-
33. Whether alphabets should be conceptually framed as historically contingent epistemologies and technologies or as a single crucial step in human cognitive evolution and in individual cognitive development, as argued by Stanislas Dehaene in *The Reading Brain*, is a vexed question. I have argued elsewhere that Dessalines was not only unalphabeticized but unconditioned by the discipline (in a Foucauldian sense) of colonial educational systems.
35. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 418.
39. Ibid., 417.