representation reverberate in the process of writing history? As Smallwood observes, "The individual stories of saltwater slavery form the antithesis of historical narrative, for they feature not an evolving plot of change over time but rather a tale of endless repetition that allows no temporal progression" (201–2).

Given this observation, what forms of historical narration are suited to the herculean task of rendering the Middle Passage? The triumph of romance, the rogue adventures of the picaresque, or the enduring temporal entanglements of the tragic? Is the history of disaster best conveyed by an unfinished narrative that is vulnerable to the violence that it sets out to describe? Or by a robust and hallucinatory account that strives to compensate for archival gaps by producing the coherent narrative that the captives themselves either failed to craft or produced only under the duress of needing "counterfeit representations" or critical fictions of personhood that would satisfy the demand to prove their humanity? *Saltwater Slavery* does not supply definitive answers to such concerns; however, it does provide an important example of historical scholarship unafraid to engage the politics of representation.

The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery. By VINCENT BROWN. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008. 358 pages. $35.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Robert Olwell, *University of Texas, Austin*

Historians have long detailed the demographic facts of death in eighteenth-century Jamaica. Throughout this era neither the European nor the African populations of the island were able to grow (or even sustain themselves) through natural increase. In Kingston, through the middle half of the century, burials outnumbered baptisms among the white population by more than six to one. For Africans, the story was the same but on a far larger scale. From 1740 to 1807, Jamaica imported over a half million slaves. This huge influx, however, only increased the slave population of the island by about two hundred thousand.

Jamaica's demographic difficulty was likely due to several factors. The sexual imbalance common among immigrant populations reduced fertility rates. Among Europeans, a fair share of new arrivals were "sojourners" who left the island. But the principal cause of the gap between arrivals and survivals (or survivors' descendants) was death. The grim reaper's scythe struck down Europeans and Africans alike and in

nearly equal proportions. Slaves died from the brutal treatment and the harsh labor demands of the sugarcane fields. Both whites and blacks perished in the hostile disease environment of the tropics. But in numerical terms, Africans outnumbered Europeans among the dead (as they did among the living) by a factor of ten to one.

Previous scholars have used these statistics to note that the great majority of colonial Jamaica's population, white and black, was composed of people born outside the island. At any moment at least two-thirds of the island's inhabitants in the eighteenth century were native Africans. These facts inform investigations into the predominance of African influences in the island's slave culture. For Vincent Brown, however, the island's death rate is not a demographic detail but the main object of his study. *The Reaper's Garden* uses the ubiquity of death in early Jamaica as the basis for a fascinating cultural history, in which whites and blacks, the enslaved and the free, the living and the dead contend over the meaning of death (and life) in the "death trap" (13) that was early modern Jamaica.

Death and its rites make ideal subjects for cultural history. As Brown notes, quoting anthropologist Katherine Verdery, death raises "ultimate questions about what it means to be—and to stop being—human, about where we have come from and where we are going" (6). The cultural practices surrounding death and the treatment of the dead provide rich sources for examining a society's most central values and beliefs. Many previous speculations on the effects of high mortality on past cultures have tended to opt for one of two contradictory and equally simplistic explanations: either the experience (and expectation) of frequent death hardens hearts (of parents or spouses), or, conversely, grief is an inherent part of the human condition and thus lies beyond historical analysis.

Brown rejects both of these paths. Instead, by considering death as the predominant fact of life in colonial Jamaica, he reveals how profoundly it shaped the culture of the island. Funerals and burials far outnumbered weddings or births as occasions for community gathering. (In the first half of the eighteenth century, Jamaica parsons performed three burials for every baptism.) Both blacks and whites, Brown writes, necessarily "created new worlds of meaning in a politically charged 'space of death'" (58). All colonial cultures are constructed from the social, economic, spiritual, and political materials at hand. In Jamaica the soil in which any society would be rooted was filled with bones. Both Africans and Europeans "tilled the same haunted ground," Brown declares, "but they planted different seeds and reaped different harvests" (59).

Brown insightfully inverts the preconception that the high mortality rates in colonial Jamaica were the result of inadvertence or callous indifference. Instead, he asserts, from West Africa, through the Middle Passage, to the sugarcane fields of Jamaica, death was a deliberate and expected part of the process. Brown argues that eighteenth-century Jamaica should be seen as "one of history's greatest episodes of creative destruction" (57). The wheels of the island's sugar mills ground human lives as inexorably and almost as literally as they did cane. In colonial Jamaica, Brown writes, "death and wealth and power were inextricably entangled" (13). The fact that by 1774 Jamaica had become both the richest and the deadliest colony in the entire British Empire was no coincidence.

Following the introduction, the first half of the book examines the cultural practices and beliefs surrounding burial, the last wishes and testaments of the dying, and the symbolic and spiritual meaning given the dead. Each chapter compares and contrasts European and African customs. Brown's examination of African ceremonies and customs is limited by his reliance on descriptions written by whites, who, when they commented on slaves' activities at all, were apt to depict them as "wild," "frantic," and "ludicrous" (74–75). Brown strives to overcome the limitations of his sources by comparing these descriptions with West African funeral rites and positing what the events may have meant to slave participants. But he also suggests that whites' propensity to ridicule slaves' spiritual beliefs and customs reveals their own disquiet and feelings of cultural vulnerability. Thus death was another field on which masters and slaves contended.

The second half of the book moves beyond Jamaica itself to suggest how death had an impact upon the fate of slavery in the British Atlantic world and is necessarily more speculative. As Brown notes, the cult of sensibility that rose to prominence through the eighteenth century saw death, and graveyards, as a golden opportunity for the "man of feeling" to demonstrate his capacity for empathy. But tears shed for dead slaves need not indicate or result in antipathy toward slavery. Even cultivated slaveholders could shed inky tears, as Bryan Edwards's lachrymose "Ode, on Seeing a Negro Funeral" (ca. 1773) demonstrates. Eighteenth-century abolitionists usually devoted far more attention to the bodies and souls of living slaves than to the fate of the dead. Here Brown sheds new light on the *Zong* case, the infamous 1781 cause célèbre in which officers on a slaver bound for Jamaica killed 132 ailing Africans by throwing them overboard so the ship's owners could claim insurance on their lost property. If the Africans had died after their arrival in Kingston, the owners would have had no recourse. The incident was seized upon by British abolitionists because it exposed slavery as a mortal conflict between the profit principle and the golden rule. Weighed in the scales of the mar-

ket, the sickly captives on the *Zong* were worth more dead than alive. Thus, the ship owners' lawyers argued, the act was less murder than fiscal prudence. On reading of the case, Brown argues, Britons were forced to confront how they had become "implicated in the intentional killing of human beings for financial gain" (173).

In colonial Jamaica, Brown concludes, the dead were too plentiful, too powerful, and too useful to ever rest in peace.

Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History. By IAN BAUCOM. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005. 398 pages. $89.95 (cloth), $24.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Christopher Leslie Brown, *Columbia University*

In the fall of 1781, the crew of the slave ship *Zong* tossed 133 captive Africans into the sea (one person, incredibly, climbed back aboard). The ship's captain hoped to acquire through an insurance claim what he feared he would not gain in the marketplace. Luke Collingwood's decision and the brief controversy that ensued have made the voyage of the *Zong* perhaps the most notorious in the history of the British slave trade. If it first came to the courts as a case of suspected insurance fraud, it soon became for the emerging abolitionist movement an example of the slave trade's special horrors, an instance of the inhumanity that it licensed, and further grounds for a call to action. Almost every history of the British slave trade and its abolition makes reference to the case, but few do much more than report it. This is because the *Zong* was not really a progenitor of the abolitionist movement that would make it infamous. And the peculiar features of the case that give it value as a brief anecdote also limit its utility for those works that seek to describe the typical slave voyage. So it has been artists, poets, and novelists instead who have worked most fully with the incident, especially during the last two decades. Liberated from the obligation to contextualize the moment, as historians often are inclined if not obligated to do, they have ruminated instead on what to make of it and what to do with it.

This is the task that Ian Baucom also sets for himself in *Specters of the Atlantic*, a subtle, demanding, vigorous, unsettling, and sometimes bewildering meditation on what (and whom) the *Zong* left in its wake. At once an exercise in cultural theory, historical sociology, intellectual history, literary criticism, and the philosophy of history, *Specters of the Atlantic* is unlike anything else in the abundant scholarship on the