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secular images from the monarch's reign. In this case, and others, Jenkins' methodology consists of describing one of the miniature paintings and then elaborating on a theme or issue depicted therein, such as the use of royal regalia, organized violence, and warfare; or the king's skills as a warrior, hunter, judge, chess player, and reader. Jenkins' use of theory, the secondary literature, and accounts penned by European travelers to analyze the content of each image is certainly competent. Oddly, however, other than to describe themes in general, Jenkins does not comment on the textual content of her manuscripts, as if the surrounding words are irrelevant to the images that she is analyzing.

This approach requires explanation, especially since she relies heavily on European traveler accounts. Do these sources offer a more authentic portrayal of Ethiopian court life than Ethiopian documents do? Substantively, Jenkins' analyses add little knowledge about nineteenth-century Shāwan political culture, although she does make a convincing case that Ethiopian art from the modern period is just as worthy of serious study as older styles. Moreover, her argument that by the nineteenth century, Shāwan kings were influencing art styles and content as part of their efforts to legitimize their secular political authority is compelling.

Jenkins' epistemological considerations are novel and deserve closer consideration in the field of Ethiopian art history. Her analyses and arguments are informed, interesting, sometimes provocative, and often fun to read. Future studies in this vein should nevertheless include more rigorous discussion of the available evidence, greater elaboration on how examples are selected, and specific discussion of the surrounding Ethiopian language texts themselves.

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The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery. By Vincent Brown (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2008) 368 pp. \$35.00

Brown's highly original *The Reaper's Garden* disabuses readers once and for all of the cliché that death is the great social leveler. Locating his study in colonial Jamaica, Brown poses the question, "How have people made sense of death culturally and use of the dead politically (258)?" The answer is an innovative blend of political, social, and cultural analysis that reveals the cultural importance of death to struggles for power within an Atlantic slave society.

A methodological tour de force, *The Reaper's Garden* employs, in Brown's words, "a bundle of interpretive approaches" ranging from anthropology and medical history to literature, social history, art, and architecture (255). For example, Brown draws on Verdery's anthropologi-

cal work on the political reburial of state leaders in postsocialist Eastern Europe to show how slaveholders manipulated the mutilation and display of corpses as instruments of spiritual terror in repressing slave resistance.¹ Describing his approach as a “materialist history of the supernatural imagination,” Brown creates a conversation between an array of primary sources, including wills, sermons, visual arts, songs, planter journals, colonial reports, traveler accounts, and graveyard monuments (5). Putting well-known evidence, such as William Blake’s engravings of slave death and torture, in dialogue with accounts of African obeh practitioners and eighteenth-century British graveyard poetry deepens the meanings and significance of colonial mortality, which has been primarily viewed by scholars through the lens of demographic history.

Although such an eclectic use of both primary and secondary literature risks superficiality of analysis, Brown deftly sidesteps this hazard with careful contextualization and honest engagement with the ambiguity of the sources. Thus does he join other scholars of the early modern Atlantic whose reconstruction of the lives of enslaved Africans from scraps of colonial evidence rejects, as Brown puts it, the “authority of the omniscient narrator’s voice” and instead exposes the contingency of the archive (10).²

Furthermore, *The Reaper’s Garden* achieves a remarkable equivalence in its treatment of both European and African cosmologies. Existing historical sources often render Africans in anthropological and collective terms, while portraying Europeans in literary and individualistic terms. By structuring the book around political struggles, rather than static beliefs about death, Brown brings all of Jamaica’s inhabitants into a world where the dead actively shape the lives of the living. For example, African captives, arriving in Jamaica for the first time, saw the British state commit “human sacrifice” through the execution of several naval seamen (129). English ancestors “reach[ed] back from the grave” through their estates to shape the lives of their descendents (111). Freedpeople used “the rites of death” to celebrate emancipation by giving slavery a theatrical funeral (250). As the book progresses, Brown also demonstrates how processes of creolization gradually shifted the “mortality politics” of both British and African descendents in the British Caribbean.

The Reaper’s Garden uses the tools of multidisciplinary analysis to transform the seemingly well-known fact of Caribbean colonial mortality into a profound exploration of the cultural politics of Atlantic slavery.

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1 Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York, 1999).

2 See Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 2004).