its readers to better understand the complex feelings that accompany the acknowledgment of the Anthropocene. The authors succeed in using the long-existing category as a key to understanding our current predicament, making the volume compelling and important reading, essential for anyone interested in social and cultural effects of the emergence of the Anthropocene.

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Kristin Waters, *Maria Stewart and the Roots of Black Political Thought* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021, $35.00 paperback, $110.00 hardback). Pp. 338. ISBN 978 1 4968 3675 5, 978 1 4968 3674 8.

Kristin Waters's *Maria Stewart and the Roots of Black Political Thought* is the latest monograph dedicated to the severely understudied life and work of Maria Stewart. The work joins only two previous book-length discussions of Stewart: Marilyn Richardson's seminal *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (1987) and Valerie C. Cooper's *Word, Like Fire* (2012). Waters's welcome intervention includes a new, meticulously researched, biography of Stewart's early years, which features imaginative microhistorical reconstructions of key moments in her life. That biography is firmly situated within a cultural history of African American life, with a particular focus upon community events and celebrations, and is combined with a close analysis of a selection of Stewart's texts and Black radical political and social philosophy. The book is complemented by Waters's engagement with an impressive array of secondary material from the rich, yet inchoate, field of Stewart studies, much of which was published after Richardson and Cooper's monographs. That far-reaching engagement establishes Waters's work as a vital update to those earlier books, and places it as a waypoint in the current landscape of research on Stewart for those new to the subject, though it does not displace Richardson's text as the essential introduction to Stewart's life and work.

Like anyone researching Stewart, Waters was clearly faced with the combined difficulties of the paucity of primary sources relating to her life and the deep complexity of her writing and speeches; for the biographer, there is very little to work with; for the analyst, there is almost too much. Waters's diligent archival research sees her partially overcome the former difficulty and uncover some new and fascinating details – some certain and some still speculative – about Stewart's early life and parentage. Those archival successes are augmented by the aforementioned discussions of nineteenth-century African American cultural history, which can be divided into two main strands. The first strand is the analysis of Black community events that Stewart would probably have participated in, such as Election Day and Training Day in Hartford, Connecticut and Bunker Hill Day and African Day in Boston, Massachusetts. The second strand is the examination of Stewart's biographical, political, and philosophical predecessors and contemporaries in the Black community and their connections with her. In the case of her contemporaries, it will be no surprise for students of Stewart that David Walker is given substantial room, but Waters also discusses Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper as she establishes Stewart's place in the Black radical tradition. The discussions of the Black culture that surrounded Stewart are joined by Waters's imaginative microhistorical reconstructions.

It is those reconstructions where the text is likely to draw criticism from some quarters, as Waters balances the need to accurately tell Stewart's story with the limited archival evidence available to her, and it will be a matter of personal taste whether that balance is achieved. What can be said for certain is that Waters only employs imagination where the archive falls silent, and she very clearly signposts that she will be taking that imaginative approach in order to complete the biography (15).

Independent scholar KIEFER LAMBERT

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Stuart Burrows, *Henry James and the Promise of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024, £85.00). Pp. 217. ISBN 978 1 0094 1968 0.

In *The Other House* (1896), based on a scenario originally written by Henry James in 1893 entitled "The Promise," Tony Bream has promised his dying wife that he will not marry again in the lifetime of his daughter. For James, this witnessed promissory act becomes a tragic prophecy; its unfolding suspends Tony's future: "his life had effectually suppressed any thoroughfare, making this expanse so pathless that, had he been looking for a philosophic rather than a satiric term, he might have compared it to a desert" (170). This metaphoric imprisonment, an abandonment of narrative time and space, is, for James, a philosophic positioning of critical importance. Tony has no way out. Stuart Burrows asserts in his compelling book that "the promise functions as a governing trope of [the author's] work" (12). Temporal expanse, ethical implications for action, and determining responsibility for his protagonists' emplotment, self-realization, and intersubjective understanding render the promise vital to James's complication of narrative form (12). Burrows interrogates and extends the moral and, critically, the temporal aspects of this intentional speech act, and by (re)locating its affect in a wide range of Jamesian criticism, offers powerful (re)readings of James's fiction. In this frame, the promise is a powerful creative instrument which, for James, writes his fiction and characters in mutually self-reflexive realization. Promises are uniquely powerful; they "make or break worlds, ensure the continuity of self, destroy fictions, and create them" (3).

A promise is an essentially human and imaginative speech act – a pledge to future action which assumes or assigns a conceived but uncertain ethical responsibility to our future selves. Self-reflexive and anchoring, it creates the self to come; as an intersubjective force, it commits us to our promisee; it is both public and private in the sense that it is performed by and for us, the intended other party, and for the witnesses of the promise. It is a test of moral courage, self-constitution, and fulfilment: we cannot know what will happen in the duration of the promise which we must fulfil *come what may*. For Burrows, the implications for temporal subject formation are profoundly Jamesian; his protagonists make a promise and the promise makes them. These commitments have ontological power. Burrows argues that promises inscribe James's fiction; his characters come into being and knowledge through the formative experience of their pledges. This underpins the writer's particular narrative temporality – the promise is subjunctive in its modality; it is made for a world that does not yet exist, for a subject that ought to be, and for the self that one hopes to become. Providing continuity across "privatized" fragmented time, the promise is vital to "the person [the protagonist] wanted to be by giving their word" (12, 15).