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## Book Review

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Patrick Curry, *Art and Enchantment: How Wonder Works* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2023), 254 pp., \$35.96 (pbk), ISBN 9781032404677.

In this book, Patrick Curry considers how he believes imagination and beauty were lost on modern art, as well as how art might still produce a sense of wonder. By enchantment and wonder, Curry explicitly stated that he found enchantment ‘relational’ (p. 8–9.) and pointed to examples of it in being in love, religious ritual, and use of myth and metaphor. He finds it fundamentally ‘natural’ (p. 12), as well as concrete and embodied. He delineates this understanding in the first chapter of the book, presenting views he finds remove enchantment from art, then discussing disenchantment and modernism in art. He then looks at specific examples of enchantment in the work of visual artists in two chapters on painting, followed by two chapters on music, two chapters on fiction, and one chapter on poetry. His conclusion clarifies his purpose in writing, and is helpful in that he explains he is opposing ‘Apollonian’ rationalist intellectual views, and ‘Dionysian’ emotive views that use art for vulgar display and commercialism’ (p. 232). He closes by reaffirming the power of enchantment to help us recognize what causes wonder in relationship, and ties this to appreciation for the natural world.

Curry’s work is forthright, with a strong voice and view on his own experience and thought process. He is clear in his introduction that he deals with a Weberian concept of disenchantment in the modern world, and then very explicitly highlights how this filtered into the understanding of modernist conceptual art that has no reference to the physical world. He does not find all modern art problematic and provides many examples of it that he still deems enchanting. Problems arise when Curry becomes a bit cavalier in his assessments, and he makes some sweeping claims. For instance, he criticizes Walter Benjamin’s concept of art’s ‘aura’ (p. 20) and how it is lost through mechanical reproduction. Curry argues against this but provides no concrete examples. For instance, he could have suggested how reproductions of Renaissance paintings may cause gasps upon viewing them, because of rich vivid colors. But viewers of famous art works may have also seen so many reproductions that they were underwhelmed by observing originals at a museum. In short, viewing and reacting to art is a complex process. Curry acknowledges this complexity, then concurs with Benjamin on art and truth as ‘continually rediscovered’ (p. 23). Later, in his first chapter on Fiction, Curry argues that eBooks lead to disenchantment in reading, which again seems an overstatement, as for some they add a sense of play to the reading experience. Despite such slips, which occur in almost every chapter, Curry offers several examples that illustrate his point of both disenchanted and enchanted art.

With theory already present in the first chapter, the following chapters offer an amazing amount of detail on the works of well-known and lesser publicized artists. For paintings, the author includes Monet and Matisse, but also D. W. Wincott and Pierre Bonard, then considers photography and Chinese Landscape painting. He is very detailed, presenting a significant amount of information on how the artists included enchantment and wonder in their works. What helped decipher his approach was buried in this first chapter, where Curry offers criteria for techniques he thought produced enchantment in visual arts. If the criteria were placed first, then reading about each artist would be less cumbersome.

This correction is made for the chapters on music, where the qualities of enchantment are used for headings, rather than composer names. In the second chapter, he offers his analysis of composers he likes and finds problematic, including a lengthy section criticizing John Cage. While Curry is clear in that he looks for similar qualities in music as in other arts of narrative, metaphor, nature, and even silence, he seems once again to overstate his case with Cage, yet follows this with some brilliant analysis of Bob Dylan's music.

While these chapters are much more engaging than those on visual arts, Curry's presentation truly excels when he writes about fiction. The first chapter begins with a discussion on the qualities in narrative Curry finds important to encourage wonder. He mentions the work of writers known for using fantasy, magic, and fairytale-like stories. Those he examines include Edith Nesbit, Phillip Pullman, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien, while also skewering Richard Dawkins for not understanding the 'magic' of Harry Potter. The second chapter on fiction reverts to using author names for headings, but the authors presented are well known. Curry clearly describes how he finds these writers enchanting. It is noteworthy that he includes an extensive section on Tolkien, who he refers to several times throughout the book. The final chapter on poetry is very tangible, especially since Curry includes a poem to share his view.

In all, Curry should be commended for the amount of work comprised in this book. His critique of modern abstract art makes a keen point, even though he is a bit careless or sweeping in his assessments at times. His inclusion of enchanting modern art makes it clear that he is not presenting a narrow view of Weberian disenchantment and avoids a claim that all thinking and art were disenchanted in the modern industrial world. Like many other theorists, and following Bruno Latour, he calls for thinking that is inclusive of material reality and the natural world, and he applies this to how art is made and what value it has for society. While it would be helpful for Curry to be in dialog with more of the current scholarship on enchantment and recovering a pre-modern sense of wonder, his use of comments by artists, musicians, and writers is enjoyable. In this, Curry displays that wonder and appreciation for human connection to nature was never a lost idea, but was dismissed or simply avoided by post-modernist thought. While the flow of the book is a bit disjointed at times, it might be a good textbook for an art history course or a class on religion and the arts, if divide into units for assignments.

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