

## Is There God after Prince? Dispatches from an Age of Last Things

**Peter Coviello**

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Peter Coviello reflects on myriad opportunities for connection through critical engagement with the arts in his intriguing essay collection *Is There God after Prince?*

The collection is separated into five sections. The first, “Sounds,” reflects on music’s power to spark memory, creativity, and conversation. Music remains a primary touchstone throughout the collection. In the second section, “Ceremonies,” the rites, rituals, and core experiences that signal coming of age, including graduations and first concerts, are used as the basis for exploring intricate intimate relationships. “Kids” focuses on the nontraditional parental bond between Coviello and his ex-wife’s daughters, whom he helped raise. In “Sentences,” the central artistic expression shifts; the written word becomes the lens through which experiences are filtered. And the last section concerns endings and new beginnings.

Though its tone is conversational, the prose is verbose. It often switches between informal colloquialisms and more formal, academic speech. In “Love in the Ruins,” Coviello calls this the “disciplinary idiolect,” a way of using language that developed through rigorous academic pursuit in artistic criticism. Using the arts as a springboard, the book engages in the critical examination of personal, professional, and society-wide relationships, tying these to broad themes including love, fulfillment, and grief. This solidifies Coviello’s thesis—that “one thing criticism might do—or try to do—is chart the ways certain cherished things (songs, poems, movies, etc.) fold ... worlds together and, for a blazing instant or two, make them sensible to one another.”

A thought-provoking essay collection, *Is There Life after Prince?* elevates the idea that emotional attachment to the arts can be a catalyst for reflection, memory formation, and relationship building.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (September / October 2023)

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