

IS RUBY SPARKS A GREAT WORK OF ART?

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Recently I went to see the film *Ruby Sparks*, the story of a genius novelist who falls in love with his female protagonist, and unwittingly wills her into existence.

It's a great premise, and for most of the time the screenwriter, Zoe Kazan and its directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, succeed in aiding and abetting our suspension of disbelief.

The story's most poignant moment comes when the novelist in his desperation to 'keep' the love of his life types words on the page to create what he wants and needs to keep her, only to realise that in these acts of intervention, he strangles the life out of the very one he loves. It is when he risks giving her freedom that she is able to find her true self. The ending while not altogether unexpected, is nevertheless beautifully realized: the author, ever more successful, wins the ultimate prize as he chronicles the twists and turns of the story which we have just witnessed, and then, one sunny afternoon, after the novel's launch, encounters that same love of his life. She is completely unaware of his identity, and when she discovers that he is the author of the book she is reading, it is love at 'first' sight, only this time it unfolds as an authentic relationship shaped and fashioned by mutual feelings that spring from real choices. Rather than an unequal relationship in which she is the marionette, and he holds the strings.

Thus, in a curious way, the deceptively lightweight *Ruby Sparks*, draws a thumbnail sketch of an issue I continue to explore: whether or not, in the act of creation God actually bestows upon it a freedom and liveliness that defines it as a truly great work of art.

In his Clark Lectures of 2005, which became the publication *Grace and Necessity, Reflections on Art and Love*, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, reflecting on 'God and the Artist', establishes the following criteria for determining the greatness of a work of art:

that the life in it that is bestowed by the artist is a real selfhood, a solid reality, not the exercise of an arbitrary will, nor one subject seeking to control another;

that this life emerges from the artist's connection with a God who also bestows such freedom, because this "is the particular way in which (any) finite freedom comes to perfection".

Drawing on the thinking of Jacques Maritain, Archbishop Williams argues that a work is 'Christian' because 'love is alive in it' where the artist in bestowing life on self and world, uncovers a generative love that lies at the centre of 'holiness'.

The great work of art, thus, eschews the notion of a romantic creative genius looming in the background. This is not to deny the unseen presence of the author. But it is an unobtrusive one, which actively generates difference, and self-questioning in the perceiving subject, and one that weaves an intricate web of dialogue: with ourselves, with the object, with the artist and with what the artist is responding to.

By Reverend **Nikolai Blaskow**