

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if only we take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

- ▶ What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?
- ▶ Which incidents made you think or feel most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?
- ▶ What issues did the film raise for you?
- ▶ What character(s) do you most identify with and why?
- ▶ Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

Some facts about the film

- ▶ *Ruby Sparks* was written by Zoe Kazan. Fascinated by the Greek Pygmalion myth, and inspired by her own experiences in past relationships, she began to write a screenplay which she shared with Paul Dano, her real-life boyfriend, at an early stage. He suggested the two of them could play Ruby and Calvin and that directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, with whom he had worked previously, might be suited to the material.
- ▶ Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris are best known for their Oscar-winning film *Little Miss Sunshine* in which Paul Dano stars as the brother Dwayne.
- ▶ As told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion was a sculptor who fell in love with one of his own statues. When making an offering on the altar of Aphrodite, he quietly wished for a bride who would be "the living likeness of my ivory girl". When he returned home, he kissed his ivory statue, and found that its lips felt warm and, before his eyes, his statue came to life. They married and had a son, Paphos. The story has been re-presented in many ways through the centuries, including in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, the story of *Pinocchio*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, where the lower-class flower-girl Eliza is metaphorically "brought to life" by a phonetics professor who teaches her to refine her accent and conduct herself with upper-class manners.

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**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

1st Jun	Gravity
6th Jul	<u>Ruby Sparks</u>
3rd Aug	Hedd Wyn
7th Sep	12 Years A Slave
5th Oct	Jimmy's Hall
2nd Nov	The Railway Man

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
Islip**

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Ruby Sparks

Calvin is a young author whose precocious first novel won him huge acclaim as a teenager. Ten years later, he is now an insecure mess living off past glories. Unable to write, he spends his days taking care of his dog Scotty, and dreaming about meeting someone who really understands him. These dreams are so potent that when his therapist sets him a writing exercise, he invents Ruby Sparks, a quirky girl who's his idea of a perfect partner.

As he obsesses over her, Ruby becomes increasingly real to him. But it's still a shock when she appears in his house one day, eating breakfast cereal, and completely oblivious to the fact that she's a fictional construct. To his astonishment, Calvin discovers that, not only can other people see and interact with Ruby too, but that he can change her personality and behaviour simply by writing about it. It's an impossibly perfect scenario. He has conjured his dream girl out of thin air.

Imperfection

Ruby is Calvin's "ideal girl". What is wrong about being in love with an ideal? There is a Turkish proverb that says: "A man who seeks a perfect friend will remain friendless." What role does "imperfection" play in a relationship?

Manipulation and the space to grow

Calvin finds that he can manipulate Ruby simply by writing about her. How else do people in real-life situations manipulate each other? We love to be in control, yet love is so often about letting go. As Ruby says: "There has to be space in a relationship, otherwise it's like we're the same person." On Easter morning, Jesus in the garden tells Mary not to cling to him. How often do we stifle those things we love the most by controlling them too tightly?

Long-term commitment

Calvin asks Ruby: "What if you get sick of me?" Ruby replies: "I won't. I promise." Is it really possible to make such a promise? What does the question tell us about Calvin's own insecurities? What things help people stick together as a couple?

Authenticity

Zoe Kazan, the writer, was inspired to write the screenplay based on her own experience of relationships. "In relationships, I've often had the feeling there's this person called Zoe Kazan, and the person I'm with loves her, but that person is not me. It's sort of five shades off from me." Why is authenticity in relationships so difficult? What does it actually mean to be "loved for who we really are"?

The Manic Pixie Dream Girl

The film has been hailed as the definitive deconstruction of the "Manic Pixie Dream Girl", a phrase coined by critic Nathan Rabin to describe a particular kind of stock female character: "that bubbly, shallow cinematic creature that exists solely in the fevered imaginations of writers and directors." Or, as Harry puts it: "Quirky, messy women whose problems only make them endearing aren't real." What, if anything, is wrong with portraying women in this way. How does Ruby Sparks use the stereotype to make its point?

Reflections based on material from the Damaris Trust by Sophie Lister

Memorable Quotes

Calvin: This is the true and impossible story of my very great love. In the hope that she will not read this and reproach me, I have withheld many telling details: her name, the particulars of her birth and upbringing, and any identifying scars or birth marks. All the same, I cannot help but write this for her, to tell her "I'm sorry for every word I wrote to change you, I'm sorry for so many things. I couldn't see you when you were here and, now that you're gone, I see you everywhere." One may read this and think it's magic, but falling in love is an act of magic, so is writing. It was once said of *Catcher In The Rye*, "That rare miracle of fiction has again come to pass: a human being has been created out of ink, paper and the imagination." I am no J.D. Salinger, but I have witnessed a rare miracle. Any writer can attest: in the luckiest, happiest state, the words are not coming from you, but through you. She came to me wholly herself, I was just lucky enough to be there to catch her.

Calvin: Ruby Sparks. Twenty-six years old. Raised in Dayton, Ohio.

Dr Rosenthal: Why Dayton?

Calvin: Sounds romantic. Ruby's first crushes were Humphrey Bogart and John Lennon. She cried the day she found out they were already dead. Ruby got kicked out of high school for sleeping with her art teacher... or maybe her Spanish teacher. I haven't decided yet. Ruby can't drive. She doesn't own a computer. She hates her middle name, which is Tiffany. She always, always roots for the underdog. She's complicated. That's what I like best about her. Ruby's not so good at life sometimes. She forgets to open bills or cash checks and... Her last boyfriend was 49. The one before that was an alcoholic. She can feel a change coming.

Ruby: Were you disappointed when you got to know me?

Calvin: How can you ask that?

Ruby: I'm such a mess.

Calvin: I love your mess.

Calvin: She's a person.

Harry: You haven't written a person, okay? You've written a girl.

Harry: Quirky, messy women, whose problems only make them endearing, are not real.

Calvin: I have you. I don't need anyone else.

Ruby: That's a lot of pressure.

Calvin: She wasn't happy. So I made her happy ... and now she's like this all the time.

Ruby: You don't get to decide what I do?

Calvin: Wanna bet?

Calvin: I'm not writing about you. I wrote you.