

Movie discussion resource

The Best Offer (2013)

Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.

Genre: Drama, romance, mystery

Rating: M (*adult themes, sexual content*)

Length: 2 hours 4 minutes

Starring: Geoffrey Rush, Jim Sturgess, Sylvia Hoeks, Donald Sutherland

Writer-Director: Giuseppe Tornatore

Music: Ennio Morricone (and the Czech National Symphony Orchestra)

(This film has a long list of art works identified in the credits!)



Brief synopsis

This synopsis needs to be spacious in description so as not to disclose too much! The film is set in Europe's high-end art world. There is no specific city named in which the story takes place, a pointer perhaps to the mysteries that will unfold in the film. It is a beautifully crafted tale of art, beauty, love, truth and falsity. A master auctioneer, Virgil Oldman (Geoffrey Rush) - a solitary, cultured, obsessive man - is contacted by a mysterious young woman Claire Ibbotson (Sylvia Hoeks) who is identified as the heiress of her late parents' property. She convinces him to evaluate the paintings and antiques in the villa, which has now fallen into disrepair. He learns she has an illness that prevents her from meeting him face to face, and he becomes obsessed with seeing her, and in the process discovers he has a heart and a capacity to care. The film has surprising twists and turns. There'll be lots of intriguing questions and connecting the dots after the film concludes, and some questions that may be unanswered! The discussion questions that follow in this resource seek not to disclose the twists and turns, but to provide some framing for discussion.

Questions for discussion

Some general questions might provide enough framework to get started:

- ❖ What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- ❖ What themes are explored?
- ❖ What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- ❖ What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- ❖ Are there aspects of the story that resonated with your own experience or with the experience of others in a similar situation?
- ❖ Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

Oldman

The main character 'Oldman' (a well chosen name) is solitary, lonely, difficult, demanding. He has his share of phobias. He doesn't own a mobile phone – since his world is not populated by people with whom he holds significant relationships. He knows nothing of the life of his long serving and faithful secretary who he probably relates to more than anyone else on a daily basis. There is nothing hidden that prevents him learning about his colleague; it's just that Oldman has no interest in the lives of others. He maintains that 'talking to people is perilous'. He is intelligent but emotionally dead. It is intriguing that such a flawed character holds the attention of the audience. Certainly kudos to Rush's acting ability. What did you find compelling about Oldman?

Automon

The 18th century automon is re-constructed from the rusted and broken cogs and wheels largely 'stolen' by Oldman from the villa. Yet, there is trickery in the ways the cogs and wheels are placed and 'found' in the villa, piece by piece, perhaps mirroring the trickery behind the constructing of Oldman's emotional life, step by step. Discuss.

Secret rooms

Both Oldman and Claire have their secret rooms. His is much like Sarah Jessica Parker's shelves accommodating her shoe fetish in *Sex and the City*. It contains his lifetime's collection of precious art. Hers is the world she makes away from the company of people, hidden behind an ornate mural in the villa. Hidden lives. Secrets. Perhaps everyone has a 'hidden room' in their lives? Discuss.

Authenticity and fakery

Billy: 'Emotions are like works of art. They can be forged. They seem just like the original but they are forgery'. Virgil: 'Forgery'. Billy: 'Everything can be fake Virgil: joy, pain, hate, illness, recovery....even love'.

Movie bi-line: 'Some forgeries are worth the ultimate price'.

Oldman prides himself on his capacity to spot a fake artwork, and also to declare fake what is actually genuine for his own purposes. His willing accomplice Billy Whistler (Donald Sutherland) then buys the discounted artwork at auction so Oldman can add to his collection. It is beauty rather than greed that motivates him, but it is a massive betrayal of trust and lack of integrity. Claire says she is disgusted that Oldman dyes his hair, that somehow there dying hair is an act of dishonesty. But she hides dark secrets of her own. What are other examples of the rhythm between authenticity and forgery in the film? Can anyone be trusted – even friends, colleagues, confidantes, lovers?

The mysterious woman in the café

The mysterious mathematically gifted woman in the café known as Claire (Sydney-born Kurina Stamell) knows all the comings and goings at the villa. She holds vital clues. In the rhythm of truth and trickery in the film, what is her character's role in the plot?

Women and relationships

Virgil: 'What's it like living with a woman?' Lambert: 'Like taking part in an auction sale. You never know if yours will be the best offer'.

Oldman claims he 'admires but fears women'. He has not had an adult relationship with a woman in his life. Instead, Oldman has invested his emotional life into paintings of women who have eyes only for him. Looking but not touching. They bring him reassurance and calm. What then attracts him to Claire, especially when he can't see her and she has brought him great irritation?

The girl on the motorbike

The scene where Robert's girlfriend goes to Oldman's work to speak with him about personal matters seemed odd. But it invites more discussion about who's been part of the fabrication and manipulation, and who's been 'clean' and honest. Are any of the characters who they seem to be? Who can be trusted?

'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses....'

(Hebrews 12.1)

The scenes in Oldman's his secret room is a visual delight, with all the faces that project love, comfort, understanding, and which give courage, purpose and the will to go forward. For people of faith, how do the 'clouds of witnesses' provide the courage and purpose to go forward?

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