

The Best Offer / La Migliore Offerta (2013) Tornatore

P Michell, 2020

Director

Giuseppe Tornatore

With

Geoffrey Rush, Jim Sturgess, Sylvia Hoeks, Donald Sutherland, Philip Jackson

Synopsis:

Antique art appraiser investigates old house contents, where the owner appears elusive. Becomes more and more intrigued / obsessed. Along the way he discovers parts of an automaton. Best Offer looks lovely and features a 'private' collection of famous painted women. Full of tantalizing scenes: Virgil's birthday in a restaurant, end scene in a Prague café are just two.

Good international ensemble cast, this time of many known actors.
Geoffrey Rush is perfectly cast as the lead role.

Creative Personnel:

Giuseppe Tornatore – script & direction (25 credits as director / 21 as writer)

Sicilian 'occasional' movie maker. Currently working on a doco on Ennio Morricone – *Ennio: The Maestro / Glance of Music*. His films are always interesting.

Breakout film was the immensely successful and hauntingly beautiful *Cinema Paradiso* (1988) about lost love and adolescence. Gorgeous simple score by Morricone. Other notable films inc *The Unknown Woman* (2006), *Malena* (2000), *Story of 1900* (1998). Co-wrote screenplay of *Everybody's Fine* (2009)

Biography by William Hope:

<https://www.amazon.com/Giuseppe-Tornatore-Emotion-Cognition-Cinema/dp/1847187706>

Fabio Zamarion – Cinematographer (54 credits)

Tornatore does not have a regular cinematographer.

Though first film in 1980 has been in constant demand since 1987 – filming at least two or three Italian films a year. Many awards. Was cameraman / assistant for the justly famous Vitorrio Storaro (*'painting with light'*) on a few films including Bertolucci's *Last Emperor*.

Ennio Morricone – composer – (nearly 400 film scores!)

About half of Tornatore's films are scored by him.

A classmate of director Sergio Leone with whom he would form one of the great director/composer partnerships (right up there with Eisenstein & Prokofiev, Hitchcock & Herrmann, Fellini & Rota), Ennio Morricone studied at Rome's Santa Cecilia Conservatory, where he specialized in trumpet.

It's been felt by some that he was deprived of a possible Academy Award when the U.S. distributor of Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984) failed to file the paperwork so the score could be considered for nomination. This score is still regarded as one of his best.

Despite his legendary reputation, and almost sixty year long film composing career, he only won one competitive Oscar, although he had been nominated for composing on five

previous films between 1979 and 2001, before his 2016 win for [The Hateful Eight](#) (2015).

In the years before his death, composer [Ennio Morricone](#) stated on several occasions that the only director he would consider coming out of retirement for would be Tornatore.

Geoffrey Rush – Virgil (64 credits)

Queenslander. Most recently famous for his role in the scandal re Sydney theatre Company. Part of the ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ franchise.

Much theatre work - duh. Famous for his role as David Helfgott – Shine (1996).

Notable roles – Quills (2000), Life and Death of Peter Sellars (2004), The Book Thief (2013).

Sylvia Hoeks - Claire (41 credits)

Dutch actress of stage and screen/TV. This film was her first international success. Later played in Blade Runner 2049 (2017), Girl in Spider’s Web (2018). Current in production biopic of Sylvia Kristel! Overspiel TV series (2011-2015)

Donald Sutherland - Billy (195 credits)

A small part as Rush’s ‘auction partner’. Canadian actor of many years. Started in horror films of mid 1960s. Makes good and bad films. Famous roles inc: Kelly’s Heroes (1970), Klute (1971) – which made Jane Fonda’s name, Bertolucci’s 1900 (1976), Ordinary People (1980). Film most suited his persona is probably Don’t Look Now (1973).

Jim Sturgess – Robert (42 credits)

Started work in mostly film, now mostly TV. Musician. Other Boleyn Girl (2008).

Breakthrough film One Day (2011).

Phillip Jackson (166 credits)

Played Inspector Japp in popular Poirot TV series with David Suchet for many years. An occasional film actor – alternates between theatre and TV. Small canon of films includes Brassed Off (1996) and My Week with Marilyn (2011). Despite a small role, he excels.

Trivia:

Box office hit in several European countries as Italy and Spain and is nominated for Best Film at the 2013 European Film Awards.

Filming began in [Trieste](#) on April 30, 2012. For Tornatore this meant a return to Trieste: it was here he shot [La Sconosciuta](#) in 2005, with [Xenia Rappoport](#). Filming took five to six weeks in the region of [Friuli-Venezia Giulia](#), [Vienna](#), [Prague](#), and [South Tyrol](#).

Reviews:

A fine portrait of art and obsession.

Peter Galvin – SBS.

The Best Offer, the new English-language mystery/drama from veteran Italian director Giuseppe Tornatore (*Cinema Paradiso*), is baroque, unapologetically odd, and gorgeous to look at. Shot on locations in Italy, Venice and Prague, in grand houses and villas, the film’s

visual style is like Merchant Ivory crossed with a Christie's catalogue; it's all chocolate-y browns and the odd redeeming gold and silvery highlight.

The film's hero is a high-line auctioneer who is steeped in the smoky decayed beauty of the past. His name is Virgil Oldman (Geoffrey Rush) and he prides himself on knowing all there is to know about art: its authentic obscure masterpieces and especially its dazzling forgeries. When he stalks the villas here in order to price their riches, Tornatore has Oldman appear like he's some Dark Prince, curator of lost kingdoms, its many secrets known only to him. Still, this strange reclusive man, who looks more like a butler than any kind of player, who dyes his hair black – perhaps in order to match his suit and gloves – and refuses to use a mobile phone, knows, we quickly learn, nothing of life. Tornatore emphasises the sense that this guy is a man out of time by providing Oldman with an epigrammatic verbal style that is quaint, dated and falsely wise: "Talking to people is extremely perilous," he offers a client by way of advice, and later, fatally admits, "I prefer to remain in the shadows." Oldman, then, is a man who has lived a life of suspicion and neglect. But in purely material terms, he has something worth hiding. For years, he's been scamming auctions with an art buyer/artist called Billy, played by Donald Sutherland at his most sinisterly avuncular. Oldman deliberately conceals the real value of a piece; Billy always makes the best offer. The pair share the proceeds. Oldman keeps this booty in a concealed room in his luxe apartment. But there is something significant about this collection besides the monetary value: each is a famous portrait of a woman and they are indeed the only 'women' in Oldman's world. (When any female turns up, he can barely manage eye contact.)

Then along comes a new client who lives in a spooky villa. She is young, inexperienced and suffers from agoraphobia. Claire (Sylvia Hoeks) asks Oldman to value her inheritance, a deceased estate. It transpires that she is sitting on a fortune. The transaction is fraught. Aside from the fact that Oldman hates talking on the telephone, there's nothing about Claire that is encouraging: by turns naïve and 'overly emotional', she aggravates each negotiation in the process with her private admissions, her capriciousness and the fact that she will not meet Oldman in person. Before you can say 'sold', Oldman is hooked into this emotional push/pull. Of course, what arouses his curiosity is the fact that her every call seems to have a therapeutic effect that runs both ways: he gets off on the idea that someone seems to need him, and he's excited by his own new found feeling of vulnerability.

Tornatore is careful to mask *The Best Offer* from the hard logic of the 'real' world. The architecture screams 'Europe' but the actual setting is anonymous; all the better to ascribe a fable-like quality to this story which – with its gloomy mansions, secret chambers, stormy nights, tragic heroine, tortured hero, and 'rescue' plot – seems conceived as an update of a kind of 18th century gothic romantic fiction.

The action is structured as a chamber piece; a series of one-on-one dialogues where behind every revealing line lay yet another mystery. The cast of characters add to this hall of mirrors atmosphere; each one of them carries some quirk of personality and talent, like the Little Person (Kiruna Stamell) with a phenomenal memory who is on hand to provide some crucial clues when the plot gets tangled... Then there's Robert (Jim Sturgess), a prodigiously gifted

mechanic and 'lady killer' who builds an automaton from scraps that Oldman has gifted from Claire's villa. Worldly and bold, Robert offers Oldman sage advice on how best to woo the frightened Claire.

To offer too much more of the plot would get into spoiler territory, but let's just say that Geoffrey Rush is really terrific. Tornatore asks a lot of him here. How many actors could get away with a part that calls upon the performer to recite pages of dialogue into empty space where they end up talking to walls?

To put it kindly, *The Best Offer* is silly. If movies were censored for plausibility, it would be banned outright and it doesn't help that the plot grafts *Vertigo* to *Monsieur Hire* period Patrice Leconte. Still, the film, so full of intrigue and vivid details, has a charm that's beguiling. Like his fine thriller from 1995, *A Pure Formality*, *The Best Offer* is about building a hermetically sealed screen universe, where mood and the fevered obsessions of the characters take primacy over all other considerations. Part of what makes Tornatore's sensibility so seductive is precisely this lack of concern for the mundane. But I think what I like best about Tornatore is his tone; he adopts a soulful attitude to the characters and their self-made crises that's rather touching.

It's understood that Oldman is a virtual prisoner; there's a desire to see him breakout. Once he falls for Claire, he begins to strip away his affectations and what emerges is a rather kind man willing to take real risks but without learning the survivalists trick of cynicism. In a world of fakers and forgeries, this fraud of a man turns out to be the real thing, but like all genuine romantics, that means he's bound to get hurt. There's a real life force in all of that. And that is sweet and, funnily enough, true to life, whatever you might think that's worth.

Roger Ebert Reviews – Jan, 2014

By Sheila O'Malley. She received a BFA in Theatre from the University of Rhode Island and a Master's in Acting from the Actors Studio MFA Program.

Giuseppe Tornatore's "The Best Offer" features the downfall of an uptight main character, played by [Geoffrey Rush](#), led through a symbolic fairy tale forest to his own ruin. There's even a princess locked up in a tower, and the bread crumbs through the forest take the form of little mysterious rusty gears, which when put together create an 18th century automaton that threatens to take on a life of its own. The magic here is ominous and seductive, and Virgil Oldman (Rush) can't seem to stop himself from getting deeper and deeper into the forest. It's all a bit overheated, and while there is certainly nothing wrong with melodrama, the problem arises when the script (also by Tornatore) keeps insisting on explaining its own symbolism and subtext, to make sure we get how deep the thing is. The script here is a 5-page term paper with too many footnotes, filled with lines like "Human emotions are like art. They can be forged." Get it? There's altogether too much of that going on: what's the point of having a symbol if you don't explain it to death?

Geoffrey Rush plays Virgil Oldman, an auctioneer who runs a high-end valuation business, poring through the antiques of others and putting together auction catalogs. He specializes in spotting forgeries from the actual article. He is a pained and isolated man, who eats alone in a plush restaurant, where the wait staff hover around him anxiously. He lives in lonely splendor

in a penthouse apartment filled with statues and artwork, complete with a secret room filled with his favorite paintings (all of women, giving Virgil creepy shades of Bluebeard). He always wears gloves. He has no friends. Well, except for a brilliant young mechanic named Robert ([Jim Sturgess](#)), who fixes ancient equipment in a gigantic storefront in a posh section of town, making you wonder how the hell he can afford rent on such a joint. Robert never rises above his role as a blatant plot device, a phony "listening ear" to Virgil so that we can know what Virgil is thinking.

Early in the film, as we see Virgil doing his business, some of it upfront, and some of it shady (with a partner-in-crime named Billy Whistler, played by [Donald Sutherland](#)), he gets a mysterious phone call from a woman named Claire ([Sylvia Hoeks](#)). Claire's parents just died unexpectedly and she needs someone to come to her manor and take a look at all of their stuff. Virgil is a cagey individual, but there is something compelling about Claire's voice over the phone. She doesn't show up for their first meeting, enraging Virgil, and then she calls back later with a half-baked story about a car accident and an emergency room visit. This happens again. And again. By this point, a huge team of assessors have taken over Claire's mansion, and Virgil has bonded with the caretaker, who has worked in the manor for years but admits that he has never seen Claire in the flesh.

Virgil becomes obsessed with the unseen Claire, in a manner reminiscent of the hard-bitten Dana Andrews falling in love with the painting of Gene Tierney in Otto Preminger's "[Laura](#)". Claire's phone calls get more panicked and tearful, and finally, in one tense scene, Virgil hides behind a statue after hours at the mansion so he can get a look at her, she who only comes out of her room (which is hidden behind a trompe l'oeil mural) when everyone is gone. Claire is young and pale, wandering around freely, chatting on the phone with someone she calls "Director", all as Virgil, drenched in sweat, looks on.

There's so much going on it's hard to keep track of it, but the script keeps reminding you of its primary symbols. There's the forgery theme, there's the automaton theme and its questions of life and identity, all of which were handled better in "[Certified Copy](#)" and "[Hugo](#)", not to mention dystopian noir melodramas like "[Blade Runner](#)". There is no reason for Virgil and Jim to be friends, and for Virgil to start to confide in Jim about his obsession with Claire strains belief. Since we don't see Claire for the majority of the film, when she does appear we are as curious about her as Virgil is. She's an agoraphobic who has never been outside the house since she was a teenager. Unfortunately, the film gives her a veritable makeover scene, straight out of the "[Pretty Woman](#)" playback, albeit a more creepy version. We are even treated to a graphic sex scene between Virgil and Claire, and while we are clearly not meant to think that this is a healthy pairing, it's still skeezy. Isn't there a more interesting way to handle an imprisoned princess than this tired cliché?

The film looks amazing, thanks to the lush and detailed cinematography of [Fabio Zamarion](#). Claire's mansion is a masterpiece of production design and art design (Maurizio Sabatini and Andrea Di Palma, respectively). The house looks both earthy and magical at the same time, a place where one could conceivably hide forever.

Early in the film, Virgil says to his shady sidekick, Billy, who is also an aspiring artist, "The love of art and knowing how to hold a brush doesn't make an artist." What makes art, according to Virgil, is an "inner mystery". With good performances and a gorgeously moody look and feel, "The Best Offer", nevertheless, is missing entirely that "inner mystery."