

Film Review: “The Woman in Gold”

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The Woman in Gold by Gustav Klimt

Recently I viewed some coming attractions for a film entitled “The Woman in Gold.” Because it seemed to be one of those rare films that was concerned with the nation of Austria (not the place with the kangaroos) where my wife was born, I decided to take her on a date to view the film (actually going out to see a movie on Friday night was her idea). The movie stars Helen Mirren, the great actress who portrayed Margaret Thatcher in “The Iron Lady,” and Ryan Reynolds (the Proposal and the Green Lantern) as her idealistic young attorney. The film is a true story and deals with one woman’s attempt to retrieve a painting that was stolen from her Jewish Austrian household by the Nazis and was currently hanging in a

famous Austrian Museum of Art in Vienna.

The painting itself was created by the Austrian painter Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and the woman in the picture was the aunt of the woman trying to retrieve it. Being a Klimt, the picture was valued at about \$100 million dollars. The film is made by Jews (the Weinstein brothers) and I applaud them for not overwhelming us yet another time with the gory details of the Nazis’ mistreating the Viennese Jewish population. The critiques say that the film is overly sentimental, but that Mirren’s acting makes it all worthwhile. For me, being a student of History, the fact that it is a true story, makes all the difference in the world. The essence of the story is that after Maria’s (Mirren) older sister’s funeral, Maria finds a series of letters that her sister had written to the Austrian government attempting to reclaim the painting that the Nazis had literally taken down from the walls of her home in Vienna. Yet, the result of all this dialog proved meaningless as the Austrian government was not about to let the most famous painting in Austria be returned to its rightful owner. However, Maria’s best friends’ son is a young lawyer. He is also the grandson of the famous Jewish Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg. Together they overcome Maria’s fears of ever returning to Austria, the land she was forced to abandon in 1939. The scenes of Vienna are beautiful, with Maria constantly remembering and imagining her child and young adulthood before the Nazis took over. But the Austrian government is quite adamant about not allowing their crème de la crème painting to ever leave her homeland of Osterreich. There are a series of legal setbacks and in order to pursue their quest in the courts, they would have to put up 1.8 million dollars—something neither of them possesses.

However, after visiting the Viennese Holocaust Memorial, young Mr. Schoenberg has a life changing

experience imagining his ancestors. Even though Maria eventually grows tired and gives up her quest, Randy (Schoenberg) returns to Austria alone, to plead the case. In the grand finale, Maria amazingly returns to Austria just in time to witness the tribunal's 3 member panel's decision. I'm sure all would agree that our True Father is quite an amazing human being. I remember one day many years ago, when a member approached him and asked if he could be blessed to a certain sister. Father told him to bring the sister to him and if there was no overwhelming ancestral reason that they could not be blessed together then Father would agree to the blessing. However, Father also stated that no matter how good that blessing might be, there was no way that their blessing possibilities would compare to the potential of the blessing that Father would propose for them.

In this vein, my wife and I have had two such experiences. Once when listening to James Taylor in concert, he told a story of how he happened to be walking past Madison Square Garden on July 1, 1982, when 2075 couples came streaming out of their blessing in full wedding attire. I wanted to jump up and scream, "and we're still here!" I also wondered, how many other couples in America, married on that same day were still married? As we walked out of the theatre, my wife said to me, "I wonder just how many other Austrian-Jewish couples were in the audience tonight." And as we continued to discuss the film, we realized that all the while that she was looking at the movie from the Jewish point of view, I was doing exactly the opposite, thinking about how much my wife must be enjoying the scenes of Vienna, the Austrian characters and dialect of the movie and the celebration of a native Austrian, one of the world's greatest artists.