

# The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011)

Rated R. Our Ratings: V -7; L -5; S/N -6. Running time: 2 hours 38 min.

*They stoop, they crouch, and the helpless fall by their might.*

*They think in their heart, "God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it." ..... Psalm 10:10-11*

*And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.*

*..... John 3:19-29*

Screenwriter Steven Zaillian's *Lizbeth and Mikael* go over adaptation of the Swedish novel *plans for their investigation* by Stieg Larsson is just as satisfying as the original © 2011 Columbia Pictures Swedish version, a rarity for such ventures (anyone recall German filmmaker Wim Wender's wonderfully spiritual *Wings of Desire* from which all the magic was squeezed out in the American-produced *City of Angels*?). Investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist has lost a libel suit to a corrupt industrialist named Wennerstrom whose nefarious dealings he had exposed in an article in *The*

*Millennium* , the journal at which he works alongside his editor and sometime lover Erika ( Robin Wright ). Unknown to him, he had been carefully set up with phony evidence.

At the summons of the country's leading industrialist Henrik Vanger ( Christopher Plummer ) Mikael travels to Sweden's frozen north where Henrik offers to pay him handsomely to investigate a forty year-old mystery, the disappearance of his beloved 16-year-old niece Harriet. Nearing the end of his life, the old man wants to find out whether the girl was murdered or whether she ran away. He is to work under the cloak of pretending to be ghost writing the businessman's autobiography. The clan lives in a number of separate mansions on a large island, but for many reasons they do not mingle with or even speak to one another. They were divided by politics and ideology all the way back to the Second World War, two of the men being fervent Nazis.

Studying old photographs taken of a celebration on the island, and interviewing detectives and witnesses, Mikael brings a few new facts to light—and, of course, in accordance with the mystery genre, someone fires a rifle at him, grazing his head—perhaps a warning that he his probing of the family's sordid affairs is coming too close to home.

In the meantime we follow Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara), perhaps the ultimate female outsider, wearing her spiked hair and dark clothes in Goth style, her nose and ears pierced. Her mode of transportation is a sleek motorcycle, on which she streaks through city streets and country lanes at breakneck speed. A skilled computer hacker working for an investigative agency, she had looked up facts on Mikael for Vanger. It is he who eventually brings the two together when the journalist asks for a special investigator to help him run down a number of clues.

A subplot chronicles Lisbeth's tortured relationship with the slimy guardian Nils Bjurman (Yorick van Wageningen) because she is a ward of the state. The girl has been and out of mental institutions ever since she set fire to her abusive father when she was a little girl. Before Bjurman will hand over her monthly allowance he makes her indulge in degrading sex with him. His downfall is due to his under estimating the slender, slight girl. The audience delighted in the way she turns the tables on him. Given the brutality of her vengeance, this acceptance of violence was disturbing to me. Her retaliation is too much the mirror image of Bjurman's for her own well-being. However, the episode helps us understand why she is hostile to most people and at times aggressively reaches out for what she wants. We come to admire her because she refuses the role of passive victim.

Mikael and Lizbeth do not meet until almost half way into the long film, but when they do they uncover corruption and possible family involvement in a series of horrendous unsolved murders of young women. They have a series of Scripture verses as clues, all of them exhibiting a negative attitude toward erring women as deserving harsh punishment (one example, Lev. 18:23).

According to an interview aired over NPR novelist Stieg Larsson was deeply concerned about the widespread abuse of women in his native Sweden. In this story his concern comes packaged with exciting, violent, and steamy trappings, and a somewhat different ending from the original that most viewers will find satisfying. Given that the film has so many graphic scenes of rape and torture, this is not for everyone. Parents, even if their child is a teenager, should see the film first before taking them to see it. It was not so long ago that this film would have received an X rating.

The December release of *David Fincher*'s film so different from the usual feel-good Christmas fare might seem odd to people of faith, and yet the very darkness of its theme or

subject underscores the necessity or reason for the Incarnation. Despite all the horror in the story, the film reflects, however so slightly the truth that the author of the Gospel of John affirmed, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

**Note:** Discussion questions are available with this review for those subscribing to the Visual Parables journal. The journal also includes many extras—book reviews, the use of films for church seasons, a lectionary related column, and more. Hundreds of old reviews are also available in the subscribers; section. Check out the [sample issue](#).