



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Proxima Competition

FOOLS

By Tomasz Wasilewski



SYNOPSIS

Marlena (62) and Tomasz (42), hidden away from the world in a small seaside town, have been in a happy relationship for many years. Their intricately woven everyday life slowly begins to crumble when, against Tomasz's will, Marlena allows her son to move in with them. As the past comes back to them in full force they will have to redefine their love, choices and life.



INTERVIEW WITH TOMASZ WASILEWSKI

By Marta Bałaga

Do you see your film as a story about motherhood?

My protagonist, Marlena, loves her children very much – this has always been obvious to me. I thought about this love and the conflict it creates, because at one point, she has to reject motherhood and family. On one hand, it's the most difficult moment in her life. On the other hand, it's necessary. Otherwise, she would have died. And instead, she has chosen to live.

Every time I talked to someone about a similar situation, about a mother who ultimately abandons her children, I heard: "She must be a bad mother." And here is the thing: I don't think Marlena is a bad mother at all. Leaving her kids was the hardest decision for her, harder than the decision to be with Tomasz. In the film, she becomes a mother again, after these long 20 years. Her children come back – it's an avalanche that cannot be stopped anymore.

There is a sense of disintegration and decay here. How did you create Marlena and Tomasz's world?

I was interested in a relationship on the edge. I show something that ends, that the viewer doesn't fully understand. It's something that eludes them. I wanted to show this strange isolation. There was this great love between them once, but they were also doomed to only be with each other. That's when love turns into a prison.

Perhaps it was due to the fact that I also found myself at a very particular moment in my life back then. When I turned 40, I started to question so many things. I was going through various changes, but also gaining certain awareness.

If you look at my characters, also in my other films, they are usually so vulnerable. Not because they are weak, but they are at the point when the world they have built for themselves so carefully, starts to crumble. This causes fear, obviously. They are revisiting thoughts that were previously ignored or pushed to the side.

When I think about my films, most of my characters are in crisis. It took me a long time to figure out why I'm interested in such moments in life. When people are vulnerable, I feel I can approach them – I guess it's that simple. Hopefully, the viewers will feel that as well.

You touch upon taboo topics in the film. Why did you want to take on such a challenge?

It wasn't some calculated decision on my part, reaching for a controversial subject like that. After *United States of Love* [for which Wasilewski won Silver Bear in Berlin for Best Screenplay] I felt this need to continue exploring the subject of love, to seek acceptance for it.

When I met a professor from the Polish Academy of Sciences, who actually explores the topic of incest, when I started reading about it, I realized that it is, and has always been, present in our lives. We are so afraid of this subject, we shudder at the very thought, but it really exists. We have suppressed it, pushed it to the margins and you can go to jail for having such relations.

I decided that this exclusion was a topic I wanted to address. However, I didn't want to approach it from the sociological side – I was more interested in the emotions. And on the assumption that for Tomasz and Marlena, it is the greatest love. Ultimately, I wanted to make a film about the most difficult love I could imagine. That's what attracted me in the first place. I wanted to try to defend that love.

Also, I would like to emphasize that I'm not talking about underage relationships or violence here. I show two adults who decide to do it as consciously as possible. It took me a long time to finish the script. I wanted to make friends with these characters, not to judge them.



You don't show the beginning of their relationship in the film. Why?

We talked about it with the actors, but we didn't want to include it. I've always been interested in the kind of love that's already disintegrating. I don't think about the beginning of a relationship here, which is always this spring outburst. I am thinking about the twilight.

Sure, I could have shown that beginning, but I don't think that's quite my language. In my films, I tend to enter my characters' lives and then I step out of them, without explaining too much. Also,

I didn't want to focus on just one thing. For me, it was more interesting to talk about love itself, about the decisions we make and their consequences, about motherhood, loneliness. Marlena is a mature woman, slowly ceasing to be a lover and a wife. As I said before, she becomes a mother again. But it's difficult to regain the life you once left behind.

This woman is going through a crisis, but she experiences it inwardly. Tell me about this character.

It's about the inability of letting go of certain emotions. For me, they live at the end of the world. In order to live with each other in marriage, they had to escape. That loneliness makes her vulnerable to her emotions.

These have always been her decisions. They have been difficult at times, but she is responsible for them. She built her life on lies, but not out of calculation. I believe she was happy with Tomasz. Even so, she never got rid of the guilt because she had to lose her other children in order to be with him.



How did you decide to tell the story of a mother and son?

I was interested in the female point of view. Later, it turned out that my intuition was right. When we talk about incest, we usually think about relationships between fathers and daughters, sisters and brothers. The professor I met introduced a completely different statistic. It turned out that

incestuous relationships are most common between mothers and sons. Our perception of this subject is completely different.

There are religious symbols here. Have you always thought of this couple as Poles who grew up in a very specific culture?

Yes, they are Polish, and so am I. I was making this film from my perspective. Tomasz wears a cross around his neck. With Łukasz, we decided that he believes in God. He was brought up in the Catholic faith, like most Poles, and this faith is still in him somewhere. I wanted to provide my characters with this spiritual space. I think they still have a right to it.

In *Fools*, just like in most classic melodramas, your heroine cannot talk about certain things. Nature does it for her, for example through the rough sea.

Nature has always been Marlena's emotion for me – that's how I have been creating it. It reflects what she is experiencing. I wanted to confront a certain truth about a person with this place at the end of the world. There is nothing behind it.

This entire universe was always supposed to reflect their emotional state. Again, I use my favorite cold interiors, the labyrinth-like corridors where these people walk as if in the dark. It's beautiful there, but also so terrifyingly lonely – the air doesn't even stir. Despite the vastness of the space, you are suffocating anyway.



How did you want to show bodies here, physical love?

I wanted to show sexual acts from the emotional side. Compared to my previous films, this one is quite delicate in this respect. Nevertheless, I think that physicality is very important in this story. I didn't want to embellish anything. I didn't want to absolve these people and help them out by creating beautiful scenes. I wanted to be objective towards them and towards this subject. But I wanted to show the closeness between them, even when physical intimacy comes at the time that's emotionally difficult.

Showing the sexual act of a mature woman was a challenge for us; Dorota and I talked about it for a long time. Dorota has experienced a lot with me already, as I really tested her in the *United States of Love*. But I have also gained her trust. We became friends and I love talking to her. She knew I wouldn't hurt her, even though I had to convince her for three years to take on that role. Three times she turned me down.

She said she couldn't act in the film because she didn't understand the subject. She changed her mind when she saw the way I wanted to tell the story, that I was really interested in the emotional relationship, the love between Marlena and Tomasz, and not in some cheap scandal. She stopped being afraid, although the erotic scenes were still difficult for her. She told me, and she was about sixty years old at the time, that this was the first erotic scene of her career.

You often collaborate with the same actors. What does that give you?

I trust them, they are wonderful people, and those kinds of human encounters are very important to me. I made this film before I was forty. It was a time of many important and difficult changes in my life. I felt huge changes in myself, which I didn't yet know how to name. I wanted to experience it with people like Dorota, like my producer Ewa Puszczynska. Both ladies are the same age. I talked to them a lot and I looked forward to these conversations, because when we talked about the film, we would end up talking about life. I was eager to have these conversations and meetings. I still am. Also, I generally love to talk to smart people.

I always develop a friendly relationship with my actors. Making a film with someone I don't understand, someone I don't trust, is a torment for me. In such situations, I prefer to split up and start looking all over again. My crew has also been with me since my very first film *In a Bedroom* – for example Monika Kaleta, who is responsible for the costumes. I reach for difficult subjects, so making films is always a personal experience for me. As long as it allows us to grow, as long as we enjoy each other, I can't wait to meet them again.

You are also working with acclaimed producer Ewa Puszczyńska, behind Oscar-winning *Ida*. How did this partnership begin?

I wanted to work with Ewa for a very long time. After showing *United States of Love* in Berlin, I had the impression that she didn't like the film. Then I called her and it turned out I misunderstood everything. I told her about this story.

Our conversation was a bit like my conversation with Dorota. They are both Marlena's age, they are both mothers, both in happy relationships. She needed time to understand this character and we ended up talking about fate. No matter what she does, Marlena will be punished. Ewa also saw that this is a film about love, motherhood, loneliness. About trying to fight for yourself against the whole world.

There were moments when we disagreed, but she provided me with a great sense of safety and I hope I was able to do the same for her. In the end, we became real-life friends. We spent many hours talking about our projects, but also about life. Ewa will always tell you the truth, no matter how difficult it is, and it's the best thing for any filmmaker. We are hoping to collaborate again after *Fools*.



While working on the script, did you think about meeting people who actually live in such relationships?

I did think about it. But I talked to a couple of psychologists and every one of them told me the exact same thing: these people are too afraid.

I just wanted to be with them for a while, no matter how stupid it sounds. To look at them, to be with another human being. I am sure we are no different from each other. I am sure I have met such people in my life, I just don't know it. It's interesting, because when love isn't hurtful, when it's all about grown-up people making conscious decisions, can we really say that it's wrong? As a society, we don't have the tools to talk about it.

And we see these people as titular *Fools*?

They are not stupid – they just believed that their love would conquer the world. It's life that has proven them wrong.

It's sad, because if Marlena and Tomasz could live in a different – ideal – environment, they wouldn't have to give up other relationships. They wouldn't have to give up anything. They could live happily with each other, because after all, it is the outside world that destroys their love. Otherwise, they could have survived because, after all, they are not hurting anyone. From the beginning, their love was marked by fate. Marlena seems to intuit that fate will catch up with her one day, that it will exact its revenge. Their decisions, within certain dogmas, are seen as wrong. If the dogmas were changed, their lives could look very different.

This topic has opened my mind. I accept the possibility that some people will dismiss this movie just because of its topic or that they will be curious about it, but I won't judge their reactions. I just hope that this film will start some discussions.

DIRECTOR – TOMASZ WASILEWSKI



Tomasz Wasilewski

Polish scriptwriter and director. His full-length feature debut ***In a Bedroom*** (W sypialni) had its World Premiere in Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2012 and was one of the most frequently presented Polish films at the international film festivals. His 2nd feature film ***Floating Skyscrapers*** (Płynące Wieżowce) had its World Premiere at Tribeca Film Festival in New York in 2013. American film critics of IndieWire chose *Floating Skyscrapers* the Best Movie presented at Tribeca; the film went on to win East of the West Competition of the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2013, the Best Directing Award at Transilvania International Film Festival in 2014, the Audience Award at the International Competition New Horizons in Wrocław, the Best New Directing Talent and the Grand Prix of Juth Jury at Gdynia Film Festival, Poland. In 2016 Variety Magazine picked Tomasz Wasilewski one of “10 Europeans to Watch”. His 3rd film ***United States of Love*** (Zjednoczone Stany Miłości) had its World Premiere in Competition of 66th Berlin International Film Festival (2016) and won Silver Bear for Best Script as well Tomasz Wasilewski was nominated as Best European Scriptwriter at 29th European Film Awards. For Best Director he received awards at Valletta FF and Gdynia FF. ***Fools*** is his 4th feature film.

CAST

Dorota Kolak

Graduated from Polish Theatre School in Cracow. She performed in several theaters in Poland and since 1982 she is one of the leading actresses of Wybrzeże theater in Gdańsk where she played over 70 main roles. Kolak also plays in TV dramas, films, TV series and thanks to them she became recognized by the wider audience. In 1996 she was honored with the Silver Cross of Merit by Wybrzeże Theater in Gdansk. She was also awarded several prestigious theater awards in Poland. Kolak is known for great film performances in *Life Feels Good* by Maciej Pieprzyc, *Carte Blanche* by Jacek Lusiński and *United States of Love* by Tomasz Wasilewski.

Łukasz Simlat

An award-winning and extremely versatile actor. He has appeared in over 150 films, series and theater plays. The most famous films with his participation are: *Corpus Christi* by Jan Komasa, nominated for Best International Feature at the 92nd Academy Awards, *The Butler* by Filip Bajon, *7 Emotions* by Marek Kotowski. In 2020 he was awarded the Polish Film Award (The Eagle) for the best supporting role in *Corpus Christi*. He was twice honored with the Złoty Szczęniak award for the Best Supporting role for *The Fugue* by Agnieszka Smoczyńska and *The Iron Bridge* by Monika Jordan-Młodzianowska. He was also twice honored with the Best Supporting Role award at the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia for *United States of Love* by Tomasz Wasilewski and *Amok* by Kasia Adamik.

In 2020 he played one of the main characters in *Never Gonna Snow Again* by Michał Englert and Małgorzata Szumowska, which was a Polish candidate for the Academy Award in 2021. He was also nominated in 2021 for the Polish Film Award for this movie.

In 2021 he starred in a movie/TV-series *Furioza* by Cyprian T. Olencki.

In 2021 he has also played one of the main characters in a movie *Sonata* by Bartosz Blaschke for which he was nominated in 2022 to The Polish Film Award.

Tomasz Tyndyk

Tomasz Tyndyk - one of the most interesting movie and theater actors. He created outstanding appearances in films *In a Bedroom* by Tomasz Wasilewski, *The Secret* by Przemysław Wojcieszek, *Satan Said Dance* by Katarzyna Rosłaniec and *Little Pigs* by Robert Gliński.

The latest productions featuring Tomasz Tyndyk are a series *Open Your Eyes* directed by Anna Jadowska, films *The Forest* by Joanna Zastżona, *The Saint* by Sebastian Butny as well as the international production *Irena's Vow* directed by Louise Archambault. Since 2005 he has been an actor at The TR Warszawa Theatre where he was a part of a cast in plays of such directors as

Rene Pollesch, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Krystian Lupa, Grzegorz Jarzyna and Michał Borczuch. For the role in *Holzwege*, a play directed by Katarzyna Kalwat, he was awarded with the prize for an outstanding stage performance in 22. Nationwide Competition for Staging Polish Contemporary Dramas.

His great passion is photography. He is a graduate of the Institute for Creative Photography in Opava. His works have been presented at exhibitions in Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic. In 2008 his author's photo book *Tomasz Tyndyk - The Theatre* was published.

Katarzyna Herman

Katarzyna Herman is a theater and film actress. She graduated from the National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw.

She is known for her parts in films such as: *Love and Dance* by Bruce Parramore, *All That I Love* by Jacek Borcuch, *Deceived* by Marcin Solarz, *Clergy* by Wojtek Smarzowski, *Back Home* by Magdalena Łazarkiewicz and TV Series such as *Ultraviolet*. She cooperated also with directors who won awards at international film festivals: Agnieszka Holland, Agnieszka Smoczyńska, Tomasz Wasilewski.

For her role in *In a Bedroom* she was awarded Best Actress award at the Debut Film Festival in Koszalin, Ekran Toronto Polish Film Festival and National Film Festival "Prowincjonalia" in Września. Her last film *Doppelganger* is set to premiere soon.

Marta Nieradkiewicz

Marta Nieradkiewicz is a Polish actress who graduated from Łódź Film School.

She is best known for her parts in movies such as: *Wild Roses* by Anna Jadowska, *Floating Skyscrapers* by Tomasz Wasilewski, *Solid Gold* by Jacek Bromski or *United States of Love* by Tomasz Wasilewski. She played in TV Series such as: *The Pact*, *Open Your Eyes* or *Ultraviolet*.

In 2018 she won Best Actress award at OFF Camera Festival for her role in *Wild Roses*. She received the Zbyszek Cybulski Award twice - for her parts in movies such as: *United States of Love* and *Kamper*. She was also awarded at the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia for her role in *Floating Skyscrapers*.

PRODUCERS

Ewa Puszczynska / Extreme Emotions

Ewa Puszczynska is an experienced Polish film producer.

Since 1996, for over 20 years she has been working exclusively for Opus Film, starting with producing TV commercials and later successfully leading international co-productions and executing projects for international companies like Sony, producing and co-producing films with international cast including Jim Carrey, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Marton Csokas, Stellan Skarsgard, Cedric Kahn, Jeanne Balibar and others. She was the Polish line producer for David Lynch's *Inland Empire*.

In 2016 she established her own company **Extreme Emotions** to develop and produce projects with Polish and international talents and crews.

She produced *Ida* by Pawel Pawlikowski, awarded with an Oscar® for Best Foreign Language Film, five European Film Awards (Best Film, Best Director, Best Script, Best Cinematography, People Choice Award) and BAFTA. She also produced Pawlikowski's *Cold War*, which got Best Director award in Cannes 2018, five EFA awards (Best Film, Best Director, Best Script, Best Editing, Best Actress), was nominated for BAFTA and received 3 Oscar® Nominations (Best Foreign Language Film, Best Director, Best Cinematography).

Recently she produced Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interests*. The film which was shot in Poland, currently being post produced in London, was financed by A24, Film4 and Access with Polish cash rebate, regional funds and TV pre-sales.

Her other recent titles are *Kill It and Leave this Town* by Mariusz Wilczyński – premiered at Berlinale 2020, *Fools* by Tomasz Wasilewski, Jake Paltrow's *The Oven*. Ewa was also an executive producer of Jasmila Zbanic's *Quo Vadis, Aida?* (Oscar® nominated for Best International Film) and a co-producer of *Silent Twins* by Agnieszka Smoczyńska, premiered in UCR Cannes in 2022.

She is a member of Polish Film Academy, European Film Academy and AMPAS and has been listed in Variety 500, an index of the 500 most influential business leaders.

microFILM

Helmed by a collective of producers (Ada Solomon, Carla Fotea, Diana Caravia and Alexandru Solomon), microFILM is a Romanian production company created to develop and produce socially relevant films which constantly challenge the cinematic language. Our aim is to nurture fresh talents and help acclaimed directors break new boundaries. We are united by the belief that films should ask questions which are not always comfortable and show perspectives which are not always visible.

Recent titles include *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* by Radu Jude, winner of the 2021 Berlinale Golden Bear; *Ivana the Terrible* by Ivana Mladenovic, Special Jury Prize in Locarno 2020; the feature documentary *House of Dolls* by Tudor Platon, Sarajevo IFF 2019; the minority

co-productions: *Fools* by Polish director Tomasz Wasilewski, Karlovy Vary 2022, and *Simple Women* by Italian director Chiara Malta, Toronto IFF 2019. In 2022, microFILM was named among the 75 best European independent production companies by Screen Daily.

Achtung Panda!

Achtung Panda! Media GmbH was launched in 2015 by Danny Krausz, Oliver Damian and Helge Albers. In May 2019, Jamila Wenske and Melanie Blocksdorf were appointed to head the company.

We continue to produce successful documentary films while building on our substantial experience and broad industry networks to expand the company portfolio and develop the slate to encompass international feature film co-productions.

Achtung Panda! was named among the 75 leading European independent production companies by Screen International 2022.

Jamila Wenske's successes as an international co-producer include feature films such as Juho Kuosmanen's *Compartment No 6* and *The Happiest Day in The Life of Olli Mäki*, *The Woodcutter Story* by Mikko Myllylahti, which premiered in Cannes 2022 at Semaine de la Critique, Isabel Coixet's *The Bookshop* starring Emily Mortimer, Patricia Clarkson and Bill Nighy (Berlinale Special Premiere 2018, 3-times GOYA-Winner 2018), and Vadim Perelman's *Persian Lessons* with Lars Eidinger and Nahuel Biscayart in the leading roles, based on the motifs of the novel *Invention of a Language* by German renowned novelist Wolfgang Kohlhaase (Berlinale Special Premiere 2020).

FESTIVALS

World Premiere: Karlovy Vary IFF 2022 - Proxima Competition

FILM INFORMATION

Original Title: Głupcy

English Title: Fools

Genre: Drama

Country: Poland, Romania, Germany

Language: Polish

Year: 2022

Duration: 106 min.

Picture: Color

Aspect Ratio: 3.10 : 1

Sound: 5.1

Available Format: DCP

CAST:

Dorota Kolak as Marlena

Łukasz Simlat as Tomasz

Tomasz Tyndyk as Mateusz

Katarzyna Herman as Magda

Marta Nieradkiewicz as Iza

CREW:

Director: Tomasz Wasilewski

Screenplay: Tomasz Wasilewski

Cinematography: Oleg Mutu

Editing: Beata Walentowska

Production Design: Katarzyna Sobańska, Marcel Sławiński

Sound Design: Maciej Pawłowski, Ilja Koster

Production company: Extreme Emotions

Co-production companies: microFILM, Achtung Panda!

Co-production companies: TVN, EC1 ŁÓDŹ – CITY OF CULTURE, THE MAZOVIA AND
WARSAW FILM FUND, OPUS FILM, DI FACTORY

With financial support of: Polish Film Institute, Eurimages, Centrul National al Cinematografiei,
Medienboard Berlin Brandenburg, Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung

Producers: Ewa Puszczyńska

Co-producers: Ada Solomon, Jamila Wanske

PRODUCER'S CONTACT:

Extreme Emotions
Batalionów Chłopskich 14/82
94-058 Łódź

Ewa Puszczyńska
ewa@extreme-emotions.pl

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Jan Naszewski

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jan@neweuropefilmsales.com

Katarzyna Siniarska

+48 698 900 936

kat@neweuropefilmsales.com

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ALIBI COMMUNICATIONS

Brigitta Portier

brigittaportier@alibicomcommunications.be

+32477982584

Gary Walsh

garywalsh@alibicomcommunications.be

+32 495773882