

WOMB

A FILM BY BENEDEK FLIEGAUF



SYNOPSIS

Sitting alone on the deck of an isolated beach house, Rebecca recalls how life led to what she considers the “gift” in her enlarged belly...

As a little girl visiting her grandfather, shy Rebecca befriends ginger-haired Tommy. They quickly develop a profound friendship during their summer adventures in the remote coastal area. But their fairy-tale romance comes to an end when Rebecca must follow her mother to faraway Tokyo.

Twelve years later, young woman Rebecca returns to settle in her late grandfather’s house. She seeks out childhood friend Tommy, now a university student living on his own. Their reunion is marked by a strong mutual attraction. As they get to know one another better, Rebecca discovers that Tommy has harbored deep feelings for her too since their time together as children. But their passionate relationship is short-lived when Tommy is killed in a freak car accident.

Devastated, Rebecca feels that life cannot go on without Tommy. She turns to the controversial “Department of Genetic Replication” for an option. Although wary of the potential repercussions, Tommy’s parents reluctantly agree to supply Rebecca with the necessary DNA sample for her to bear a new Tommy in her womb.

Life with little Tommy is full of joy and wonder. Rebecca completely devotes herself to “just us two”, living isolated in the middle-of-nowhere shore community. But Rebecca cannot fully escape the complexities of her decision as the years pass. How long will she be able to hide the truth from new Tommy and nosy townsfolk? Can she protect him from prejudice against “copies”? When he grows to manhood in the exact image of her beloved, how will Rebecca explain away the confusing urges that new Tommy doesn’t understand?

Chilling answers unravel as Rebecca prepares for the bittersweet fruition of a lifelong dream.

*“Why did you do it?
Why did you do this thing?”*

A SENSE OF FLOATING

Our main shooting location was near Sankt Peter-Ording, Germany. It's situated on the North Sea coast, on the western tip of the Eiderstedt peninsula. Sankt Peter-Ording caught me immediately. It's an incredibly wide and flat seashore, which gives it a kind of timeless feeling. That's what I really loved about it. That's where we shot the scenes with Rebecca's new stilt house. The other main location was in nearby Sylt, a German island in the North Sea. It has silver sand beaches with extraordinary grassy dunes on it. It was the perfect place for the children's love story... We have a tendency to forget that we are all just floating around in the universe. Places like Sankt Peter-Ording and Sylt hopefully can remind us of that. A sense of floating is somehow at the core of WOMB. Since I always also had the feeling that water was important to the story, shooting this film at the seashore was a given.

WINTER SHOOT

I love seeing people at the seaside in winter. We all know the summer routine, like surfing, sunbathing, etc. But what happens after late autumn can be extraordinary. The sea, the wind, the temperature become rough and cold. The beaches are abandoned, and the whole landscape turns into a timeless ghostly place. Simple beach walkers with their dogs can appear like spooky ghosts on the horizon. The wind makes amazing forms in the sand. The winter mood makes the shore area both otherworldly and sensual. I find this irresistibly magnetic.



CINEMATOGRAPHY

Cinematographer Péter Szatmári and I agreed that the story was extreme enough, so we did not have to push the camerawork. We often repeated: "less is more" to the point where the crew was getting fed up. Our working process was Hungarian style, meaning the DOP is the closest collaborator to the director. Not just visually, but in script analysis, casting, production design. I cannot remember making any significant creative decision without Péter Szatmári.

A PURE AND UNIQUE SETTING

Tenderness, selfishness, altruism, past, future, morality, love – all these elements are swirling around in WOMB. For the production design, we wanted to give a pure and unique setting to the emotional complexity of this swirling story. I wanted a timeless, calm, but strong background to help us meditate on all these elements. Production designer Erwin Prib came on board late. We had already established the main locations and the visual concept, so I had difficulty letting go of this, since I am a production designer too. Erwin was very flexible and he has a fantastic sense of humor. He helped me toss aside my anxieties. Our creative streams synchronized deeply. He did an extraordinary job creating Rebecca's stilt house on the windy seashore. It was a complicated challenge on so many levels. Building a solid stilt house next to the stormy North Sea is also esthetically difficult, and Erwin made it in an original way.

TENDERNESS OVER THE TENSION

I'm aware of some kind of consistent tension throughout the film. It actually mostly happened unconsciously, probably coming from my fears. What I find interesting is the particularity of this tension in these complex emotional situations. When I saw the film for the first time, I felt some kind of bizarre void, which I strangely liked. I was surprised when my friends pointed out a kind of tenderness they saw over all the tension in the film. But isn't that how life is?





WORKING WITH CHILDREN

I have experience in working with children because of my grandmother's private nursery school. Personally, working with children on a film is a pleasure. They have a calming effect on the crew. I also enjoy seeing kids 'grow up' quickly to adult situations. And also how some situations can turn childish with them around! Tristan Christopher (as young Tommy) and Ruby O. Fee (as young Rebecca) worked with such focus, I can hardly remember any difficulties... Both children read the full script. Ruby was especially sensitive to the love story. She saw the story as a fairytale about the universal power of love. Tristan is a sci-fi enthusiastic, so he was excited about analyzing how a clone would act or feel. He accepted that the clones in WOMB are not artificial reproductions, but humans like us, pure living creatures.

CHILDBIRTH

We see that Rebecca is fascinated with childbirth when she caresses her belly as a young girl, but I would not say she knows yet exactly why. She just has a mysterious sensation, without knowing the details. I've noticed that sometimes I can have sensations in my body or in my soul, and I have no idea what they are. They just come, then go away. It can be a spooky feeling, sometimes funny, and even extremely scary. In time, I usually can understand why. I think when Rebecca is sitting on the balcony with her very pregnant belly, only at that moment does she understand what her feeling was about when she caressed her belly as a little girl.

AN EERIE JOURNEY OF LOVE

Rebecca and Tommy fall in love from the very start as children. It's that kind of spark, electricity, which can connect people to each other. It just 'happens' with them. Some unknown power grabs them, and takes them on this eerie journey of love, of life. Their 12-year separation? It doesn't matter. When they meet again as adults, they continue – or this power continues over them – from the point where they were separated as children. This otherworldly love story starts again. This time, beyond the past, beyond the future, even beyond life and death, beyond taboos and social rules. Rebecca and Tommy are more like puppets in the hands of an irresistible power. In these terms, WOMB is a love story.

A NEAR-FUTURISTIC FAIRYTALE

I wouldn't categorize WOMB as science fiction. It definitely can't be classified as a typical sci-fi film. Because of the moods and the structure of the storytelling, I would say WOMB is more of a fairytale than anything else. Or if I had to choose a cultural reference, then I would say this film is related to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, more than anything else... Making this film wasn't connected to any attraction to science fiction. I'm not a cloning fanatic, but I am very interested in biology. For me, the most interesting aspect of cloning is the link to genetic determination. Generally speaking, I would say the belief in the environmental effect on people is extremely exaggerated, as much as the power of genes is underrated. For those who want to know more about this issue, I would strongly recommend to google "identical twins research." For the lyrical side of this topic, simply watch WOMB.

BASICALLY AND HOPELESSLY CHEMICAL

I believe that love is basically and hopelessly chemical. Our whole biology, the entire universe, all is based on chemistry. In that respect, physical love itself is beautiful, but I also see the beauty in the romantic meaning that we create around it. In WOMB, Tommy speaks of a universal pattern which is permanently swirling around, inside and around us... For me, this universal pattern that he is talking about has a name: love. In those respects, don't we live in such an amazing universe?

AN EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY

Rebecca's decision to give birth to Tommy's clone is more about a feeling coming from the heart, rather than rational analysis. I do not believe that we always know why we do what we do. She sincerely believes that "life has given us this opportunity." She thinks that cloning is an extraordinary opportunity to give to somebody the most beautiful gift – the gift of life.

"What more could you want? You're here."

CLONING AS A PART OF OUR DAILY LIFE

WOMB presents cloning as a part of our daily life. A bit like plastic surgery or artificial insemination in today's world. These practices are not labeled as sick behavior, but they may not be wholly accepted in all circles for various reasons. So cloning is a half-taboo in WOMB, and how tolerant people are depends on the cases. If somebody loses their son, then cloning would be tolerated. But cloning an ex-lover would be considered selfish. Paradoxically enough, I think that what Rebecca does is much more near to pure altruism. At least in biological terms!

OUR ABILITY TO CONTROL LIFE

I doubt that most scientists or doctors would take WOMB seriously, but I did have a strange experience before shooting the film. One day I was chatting with my neighbor, a radiology researcher, about similarities between science and culture. He said it's really common that artists inspire scientific researchers. I was surprised because I had always thought of it the other way around. He looked at me straight in the eyes and said, "Believe me, it is more common than you think." There was this creepy silence, and then he asked me what my new film was about... The truth is that we are actually not far at all from cloning human beings. I did not make up terms like "human replication" and "artificial incest." I think that our globalized consumer-oriented world will probably eventually harness the altering of life and death. It's probably just a question of the profit possibilities. But I'm very skeptical about our ability to actually control life. Seriously, we are flying in space on a glowing ball with a filmy shell around it!

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CLONING

I consulted experts about the likely psychological effects of cloning. I asked them what kind of subversive effects could manifest if someone was told that he or she was actually a clone. My contacts were really creative, but their theories were mostly pessimistic. Then I thought about what it is to realize that you are the creation of your parents, as opposed to being an authentic entity! Personally, being a clone doesn't seem like such a big deal to me. However, the big deal is how you are judged by others for what you are... So I opted for no weird behavior from a clone. No physical or emotional difficulties related to biology. That's how I imagined the situation to be the most realistic.

NO PLACE FOR ETHICS

The cloning issue has often been associated with religious issues, but I don't think that it's limited to that. Just because someone is not religious, that does not mean it's any easier to change that person's way of thinking. All of us are full of old taboos, dogmas, and sometimes unnecessarily obsolete moralistic patterns. I believe that it's rooted in the unconscious. When our beliefs must face something new and seemingly irrational, our principals tend to fail. Sometimes principals can imprison us. This can be seen when Tommy's mother Judith meets her son again. On her face, there is a complex mixture of shame, pity, grief, pain and realization. Her principals collapse in that moment, and her real face shows. But Rebecca never resists the temptation as Tommy's parents try to. She thinks there is no place for ethics when you have an opportunity to look again in your deceased soulmate's eyes.

UNDERSTANDING REBECCA

The key to understanding Rebecca's drives is to understand that unconsciously she goes beyond the social puppet show. The decision that she takes leads her into the unknown. She will begin a new life too. Somewhere beyond good and evil. Somewhere one's social status is totally disconnected... Another key to understanding Rebecca is what she tells new Tommy when he discovers that he is a clone: "You're here. What more could you want?" But I don't think there is any way to really know if Rebecca sees clone Tommy completely as her son or not. It's probably more accurate to question the role clone Tommy ultimately plays in Rebecca's life. Her world became unbalanced when original Tommy suddenly died. Tommy's "gift" will balance Rebecca's world again in the end. Such a happy ending!

HIDING THE TRUTH FROM TOMMY

I do not believe in telling the truth at all costs. That can actually be really cruel sometimes. I also think that's a selfish attitude, because it's more about personal ethics than the other person's feelings. This is an age-old ethical dilemma, and my point of view is clear in WOMB. It might be presented more like a question than a statement, but it's there. In my eyes, Rebecca does the right thing to hide the truth from new Tommy about his identity. Rebecca chooses not to play with fire. To keep the truth from Tommy, she even sacrifices her social life. I think that she's a beautiful person for going that far to protect him.

"We accept what life gives us.

And also what it takes away."



JUST US TWO

At first, everything is truly beautiful with new Tommy. For Rebecca, it's heaven. "Just us two." Everything that she ever wished for. Can you imagine that? When I fell deeply in love, I dreamed of knowing her also as a baby. I wanted to sing her a lullaby when she was two years old. I wanted to see her taking her first steps... Rebecca gets the opportunity to enjoy this amazing experience. This dreamy, desperate wish of mine was the first flash that led to the creation of WOMB.

WHATEVER I WANT WITH YOU

The wide territory of interpretation is behind the scene in which Rebecca and new little Tommy wrestle in the sand. Is it just an ordinary Oedipus complex? Are feelings arising from their previous love history? Or is it both? I think their previous magnetic affinity hits the jackpot on new little Tommy's Oedipus complex. "Now I can do whatever I want with you," Tommy says. Every 10-year-old boy's unconscious desire... I love the wide shot at the end of this scene, with Rebecca lying on the sand, staring up at the cloudy sky. The swing and the stilt house are like mute witnesses to her loneliness... Similar urges will haunt Rebecca and new Tommy later when he is a young man. When his girlfriend Monica moves in, the living situation becomes a very claustrophobic situation. Their home turns into one net with two spiders. Poor Tommy has no idea what is going on inside him, but the tension grows and grows. And the inner urges become no longer controllable. The turning point is when Tommy runs into his original mother. That meeting turns Tommy mad.

"I don't know who you are. Or who I am."





BENEDEK FLIEGAUF – WRITER-DIRECTOR

WOMB is Benedek Fliegauf's fourth feature film. With his three previous features, Benedek became one of Hungary's most internationally-recognized young directors.

Benedek's 2007 feature MILKY WAY won Locarno's Golden Leopard for Filmmakers of the Present and Barcelona (L'Alternativa) Independent Film Festival's Feature Film Prize. DEALER won the Berliner Zeitung Audience Award at the 2004 Berlin Film Festival, as well as several Best Director prizes (Mar Del Plata, Wiesbaden, Lecce). Benedek's debut feature FOREST won the Wolfgang Staudte Prize and Gene Moskowitz Critics Prize at the 2003 Berlin Film Festival.

Born in 1974 in Budapest, Benedek never attended film school. He worked as an assistant director for television and continued on the path toward directing, screenwriting, set design and sound engineering. Father of one son, he lives between Budapest and Berlin.

FEATURE FILMOGRAPHY

2007 MILKY WAY (Tejút), 2004 DEALER, 2003 FOREST (Rengeteg)



COMMENTS FROM EVA GREEN

A SIGNIFICANT LOVE AFFAIR

When we first meet Rebecca, she's a shy and withdrawn child. The only person who "gets," and in many ways releases her, is Tommy. Their friendship is exclusive, and grows into an innocent but significant love affair. After studying, Rebecca returns to the same seaside village of her childhood. She meets, and falls in love again with Tommy, who as an adult, still has the ability to understand and challenge her.

PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES

After his accidental death in a car crash, Rebecca is faced with both the opportunity, and dilemma of replicating her dead lover through the process of cloning. Eventually, against strong opposition from Tommy's family, and society in general, she effectively gives birth to her dead lover. As Rebecca ages, and Tommy grows into man, this decision has profound consequences not only on the emotional and psychological lives of both Rebecca and Tommy, but also on everyone around them.

WHAT IF?

As with any part, I had to get to know Rebecca; to ask myself why and how she had become so withdrawn, and to truly understand her attraction to, and need for, Tommy. A deep and passionate love for another human being, whether it be a family member or a lover, is something that most of us have felt in our lives. The grief in losing such a loved one is always difficult to cope with, but if we were given the opportunity of having that person with us again, wouldn't many of us at least consider it, if not act upon it? As an actor, I am always asking myself "what if"? And, in playing Rebecca, this question brought with it not only emotional and psychological demands, but also ethical ones.

NOT AN EASY ANSWER

I think it's fair to say that all of us working on *WOMB* at some time had to consider the ethics behind the possibility of cloning another human being. In the end, I believe an audience will ask themselves, "what if I were in this situation"? The answer, as with all ethical matters, is never an easy one...

*"He could be here with us again.
Life has given us this opportunity..."*



EVA GREEN AS REBECCA

Eva Green received the BAFTA Rising Star Award for her role of Bond girl Vesper Lynd in *CASINO ROYALE*. Audiences and critics alike praised her femme fatale performance for its combination of intellect and sex appeal.

Eva made her screen debut at age 22 in Bernardo Bertolucci's controversial 2003 film *THE DREAMERS*, which won her a Best Actress nomination at the European Film Awards. Eva's other film credits include Ridley Scott's *KINGDOM OF HEAVEN*, Chris Weitz's *THE GOLDEN COMPASS*, Gerald McMorrow's *FRANKLYN*, Jordan Scott's *CRACKS* and Jean-Paul Salome's French language *ARSENE LUPIN*.

Eva was born and raised in Paris, the daughter of French actress Marlene Jobert and Swedish dentist Walter Green. At 17, she started studying acting in Paris and later in London and New York. She began her career on the Parisian stage, winning her a nomination for the prestigious Moliere Award for Best Newcomer in 2002 for the play "Jalousie en Trois Fax."

Eva will next be seen opposite Ewan McGregor in David Mackenzie's *PERFECT SENSE*.



MATT SMITH AS THOMAS

WOMB is English actor Matt Smith's first feature film. He is currently starring as The Doctor in the famous British series *DOCTOR WHO*. At 27, Matt is the youngest actor to incarnate the famous character.

Matt's other television credits include the dramatic series "Party Animals," the mini-series "Moses Jones," and appearances in the series "The Street," and telefilms "The Shadow in the North" and "The Ruby in the Smoke."

Matt studied drama and creative writing at the University of East Anglia and his earliest roles were at London's National Youth Theatre. His first professional role was in "Fresh Kills" (London's Royal Court Theatre), "On the Shore of the Wide World" (London's National Theatre) and "The History Boys" (National Theatre). Smith's other London stage performances include "Swimming with Sharks," alongside Christian Slater, and "That Face," which he was nominated for the Evening Standard's Best Newcomer Award.

Matt will next be seen as Christopher Isherwood in Geoffrey Sax's BBC telefilm *CHRISTOPHER AND HIS KIND*.





MAIN CAST

Rebecca: EVA GREEN
Thomas: MATT SMITH
Ralph (Thomas' Father): PETER WIGHT
Henry: ISTVÁN LÉNÁRT
Monica (Girlfriend): HANNAH MURRAY
Rebecca (9 years): RUBY O. FEE
Thomas (10 years): TRISTAN CHRISTOPHER
Thomas (5 years): JESSE HOFFMANN
Rose (One-Night Stand): NATALIA TENA
Molly: ELLA SMITH
Erica: WUNMI MOSAKU
Marc: ALEXANDER GOELLER
Eric: ADRIAN J. WAHLEN
Dima: GINA ALICE STIEBITZ
and Judith (Thomas' Mother): LESLEY MANVILLE

2010, Germany / Hungary / France, 107 min,
35mm, color, Cinemascope, Dolby Digital, in English

MAIN CREW

Writer-Director: BENEDEK FLIEGAUF
Producers: ROMAN PAUL (Razor Film, Germany)
GERHARD MEIXNER (Razor Film, Germany)
ANDRAS MUHI (Inforg Studio, Hungary)
Co-Producers: CEDOMIR KOLAR (A.S.A.P. Films, France)
MARC BASCHET (A.S.A.P. Films, France)
Director of Photography: PÉTER SZATMÁRI (HSC)
Editor: XAVIER BOX
Composer: MAX RICHTER
Sound Mixer: ARNO WILMS
Sound Design, Additional Music: BENEDEK FLIEGAUF
TAMÁS BEKE
Production Designer: ERWIN PRIB
Costume Designer: MARIANO TUFANO
Make-up Artist: SABINE SCHUMANN
Line Producer: PETER HERMANN
Line Producer – Hungary: ISTVAN MAJOR
Casting Director: SHAHEEN BAIG
Casting Director (Children): JAQUELINE RIETZ

RAZOR FILM in Co-Production with INFORG STÚDIÓ, A.S.A.P. FILMS, BOJE BUCK PRODUKTION, ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA and ZDF in Cooperation with ARTE Present EVA GREEN, MATT SMITH, HANNAH MURRAY, TRISTAN CHRISTOPHER, RUBY O. FEE, PETER WIGHT, ISTVÁN LÉNÁRT, NATALIA TENA, ELLA SMITH, WUNMI MOSAKU and LESLEY MANVILLE, "WOMB" Casting Director SHAHEEN BAIG Casting Director Children JACQUELINE RIETZ Sound Mixer ARNO WILMS Make-up Artist SABINE SCHUMANN Costume Designer MARIANO TUFANO Production Designer ERWIN PRIB Composer MAX RICHTER Additional Music and Sound Design BENEDEK FLIEGAUF, TAMÁS BEKE Editor XAVIER BOX Director of Photography PÉTER SZATMÁRI (HSC) Line Producers PETER HERMANN, ISTVÁN MAJOR Co-Producers CEDOMIR KOLAR, MARC BASCHET Producers ROMAN PAUL, GERHARD MEIXNER, ANDRÁS MUHI Written and Directed by BENEDEK FLIEGAUF © 2010 Razor Film, Inforg Stúdió, A.S.A.P. Films, Boje Buck Produktion, Arte France Cinéma, ZDF / Arte



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