



STOP MOTION: CELEBRATING HANDMADE ANIMATION ON THE BIG SCREEN

# The Tale of the Fox

## THE MASCOT (FÉTICHE 33-12)

Director: Ladislav Starewicz  
Production Company: Gelmafilm  
Script: Ladislav Starewicz, Irina Starewicz  
Music: Edouard Flament  
France 1933  
37 mins  
Digital (restoration)

Copyright collection Martin-Starewicz

## THE TALE OF THE FOX (LE ROMAN DE RENARD)

Directors: Ladislav Starewicz, Irène Starewicz  
Production Company: Ladislav Starewicz  
Producer: Louis Nalpas, Roger Richebé  
Screenplay: Ladislav Starewicz, Irène Starewicz  
Adaptation: Roger Richebé  
Dialogue: Jean Nohain, Antoinette Nordmann  
Based on 'Die reineke Fuchs' by: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe  
Director of Photography: Ladislav Starewicz  
Animator: Ladislav Starewicz, Irène Starewicz  
Editor: Laura Séjourné  
Production Designer: Ladislav Starewicz  
Music: Vincent Scotto  
Music Director: Raymond Legrand  
Voice Cast:  
Claude Dauphin (Monkey)  
Romain Bouquet (Fox)  
Sylvain Itkine (Wolf)  
Léon Larive (Bear)  
Robert Seller (Cock)  
Edy Debray (Badger)  
Nicolas Amato (Cat)  
Suzy Dornac (Fox Cub)  
Raine (Lion)  
Pons (Donkey)  
Sylvia Bataille (Rabbit)  
France 1937  
63 mins  
Digital (restoration)

Copyright collection Martin-Starewicz

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Please note that the few sentences in French in the short film *The Mascot* are not subtitled, but you'll find a translation below.

A crafty fox that keeps tricking people becomes the source of much irritation for a town's populace. He is arrested but tries to outwit those who want to hold him accountable for his actions. Based on medieval fables, pioneering animator Ladislav Starewicz collaborated with his daughter Irène on this influential early work, which makes great use of his intricately designed puppets to tell a story rich in dark and dazzling leaps of the imagination.

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A legend among animation fans, the work of Wladyslaw Starewicz (or Starevitch in the French spelling) is more often heard of than seen. Although more material has wandered in from the archival wilderness lately, for the most part his reputation has been built on the slender but sturdy edifice of short films like *The Cameraman's Revenge* and *Frogland*. In the former, a traditional comic melodrama, similar to those made by Biograph in the 1910s, is enacted by a cast composed entirely of animated insects, while the latter concerns a political coup in an amphibian community.

Starewicz's career in animation grew out of his interests in photography and entomology. Along with technical precision and dark satirical humour, his films exhibit a scientist's passion for observing intricate details. This delight is especially evident in *The Tale of the Fox*, his only feature, where for all their anthropomorphic gestures, the naturalism of the animals' movements closely mimics that of their real counterparts. Starewicz puts one in mind of another entomologist whose own biography parallels his in many ways – Vladimir Nabokov, who once wrote, 'I discovered in nature the non-utilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception.'

Deception is very much at the heart of *The Tale of the Fox*. If the film were made today, its star, a confidence-fox who is rewarded for his deviousness, would raise an outcry for setting a bad example to children. So too would some of the film's saltier jokes, like a flirtatious hen being described in the subtitles as a 'cockteaser'. Compared with current animation techniques, the film might seem charming but a little primitive. In fact, considering that it is primarily the work of one man with a few assistants, it is an astounding example of cinematic prestidigitation. The battle scene is an achievement on the level of staging *Ben Hur* in a show box. As in *Frogland*, there seems to be subtle political allegory afoot about the ineffectuality of government, but the screenplay – by Starewicz and his daughter Irène touches on this only delicately.

Finally getting its British premiere 50 years after it was made, *The Tale of the Fox* is mandatory viewing for anyone interested in animation or early cinema, or simply looking for animal stories as different from Disney's recent *Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey* as a film could possibly be. It supports Charles Ford's 1958 claim that 'Wladyslaw Starewicz is one of those cinemagicians whose name deserves to stand in film history beside those of Méliès, Emile Cohl and Disney.'

Leslie Felperin Shaman, *Sight and Sound*, January 1994

Russian animation pioneer Starewicz was an entomologist who discovered an affinity for animation while goading into battle a pair of stag beetles overly soothed by the warm lights of his tabletop studio. After establishing his name with the delightfully buggy short *The Cameraman's Revenge* (1912), he experimented in live-action fantasy until his love for animals prevailed. Made a decade after the Russian revolution forced his relocation to France, *Le Roman de Renard* became the grand showcase for his uncanny ability to create fully articulated animal puppets distinguishable from taxidermy only by their abundance of character,

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## **STOP MOTION: CELEBRATING HANDMADE ANIMATION ON THE BIG SCREEN**

### **Fantastic Mr Fox**

Fri 2 Aug 20:30; Sun 25 Aug 16:15

### **Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas**

Sat 3 Aug 14:00; Thu 29 Aug 20:50

### **Tim Burton's Corpse Bride**

Sat 3 Aug 15:50; Sun 25 Aug 14:30 BFI IMAX; Fri 30 Aug 18:20

### **Frankenweenie**

Sat 3 Aug 18:00; Sun 11 Aug 14:30 BFI IMAX; Fri 30 Aug 20:30

### **Jason and the Argonauts**

Sun 4 Aug 12:10 (+ intro by Alan Friswell, conservator and restorer of Ray Harryhausen's models); Wed 14 Aug 18:00

### **The Golden Voyage of Sinbad**

Sun 4 Aug 14:50 (+ intro by Alan Friswell, conservator and restorer of Ray Harryhausen's models); Wed 14 Aug 20:30

### **Chicken Run**

Sun 4 Aug 13:00; Sat 24 Aug 11:40

### **The Emperor's Nightingale** Císaruv slavík

Sun 4 Aug 20:30; Tue 13 Aug 18:20

### **ParaNorman**

Mon 5 Aug 12:20; Thu 15 Aug 12:10; Wed 28 Aug 12:20

### **The Boxtrolls**

Tue 6 Aug 12:20; Mon 12 Aug 14:10; Sat 17 Aug 12:00

### **Journey to the Beginning of Time** Cesta do praveku

Tue 6 Aug 20:30; Thu 22 Aug 18:30

### **Isle of Dogs**

Wed 7 Aug 12:10; Sat 10 Aug 20:30; Sun 25 Aug 18:30

### **Kubo and the Two Strings**

Thu 8 Aug 12:20; Sat 10 Aug 18:15 (+ Q&A with Travis Knight, director and President & CEO of LAIKA); Fri 30 Aug 12:20

### **Missing Link**

Fri 9 Aug 12:30; Mon 26 Aug 15:20

### **Coraline**

Fri 16 Aug 12:30; Sat 17 Aug 15:30; Wed 21 Aug 12:15; Thu 22 Aug 14:20

### **Stop-Motion Shorts Scene – BFI Backed + Q&A**

Fri 16 Aug 18:10

### **Funday: Stop-Motion Children's Favourites**

Sun 18 Aug 12:20

### **Stopmotion + Q&A with director Robert Morgan**

Wed 21 Aug 20:40

### **Aardman Shorts**

Sat 24 Aug 14:30

### **Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio**

Tue 27 Aug 20:40

### **LAIKA: Frame x Frame**

Embark on a journey behind the scenes of LAIKA, one of the world's foremost pioneers in stop-motion animation. This immersive new exhibition will transport you into the boundary-pushing art and science behind every one of the nearly one million meticulously constructed frames that bring each of LAIKA's five groundbreaking feature films to life. Opens Mon 12 Aug

Thanks to Jez Stewart, BFI National Archive

pathos and vitality. Based on a Goethe fable, the film chronicles the comic revenge strategies of the wily fox whose food-stealing pranks are thwarted by the Lion King's ruling that all his subjects must adjust to a vegetarian diet because 'love [between the animals] must prevail.' Featuring a hundred or so mischievous, weirdly grizzled, wildly unDisneylike characters – whose naturalistic breathing and convincingly blurred movement are decades ahead of any other technique in this field until the advent of CGI – the entire 63-minute film was animated by Starewicz and his daughter Irène over an 18-month period. It was intended to be the first animated feature produced with sound, but difficulties with the soundtrack held up its release for nearly a decade. The work of an outstanding artist, yes, but also a film that could only have been made by a great scientist and naturalist.

Tim Lucas, *Sight and Sound*, August 2007

## **The Mascot**

### From the rolling credits

In 1933 Ladislav and Irène Starewicz produced and directed a film of approximately 1000 meters initially entitled *L. S. 18*.

Under pressure from the distributors the length was greatly reduced, the film became *Fétiche Mascotte*, approximately 600 meters, distributed from 1934, first episode of a series.

In 1954 L. Starewicz designed *Gueule de bois* using footage from *L.S. 18* not retained in *Fétiche Mascotte*.

Recently we undertook the reconstruction of the original film based on the several copies of *Fétiche Mascotte* distributed in the UK and USA, the negative of *Gueule de bois* and the outtakes preserved in the archives of L. and I. Starewicz.

In 2012 *L.S. 18* regained its length and its 1933 editing, hence the title of *Fétiche 33-12* presented for the first time to the public in the version initially designed by Ladislav and Irène Starewicz.

### Translation of the missing subtitles

Musical, singing and spoken.

Living actors and puppets.

Story simply human and sentimental

With some mysterious visions,

Those that can be created by the feverish fantasy of a sick child.

Ladislav Starewicz, 1933

Mummy, I am thirsty

It's too much, I am suffocating

Mum, is an orange very good?

Yes my darling.

I want one.

When I grow up I'll buy an orange for you and for me...

...and for Fétiche too.

Buy my beautiful oranges, see these beautiful blood oranges, guaranteed no seeds!

Buy my beautiful oranges for 25 cents. Strength and health for 25 cents!

How many do you want my little lady?

Little scraps, come here to present yourself to your Majesty...

Abandon all hope, ye who enter!