



## ROOTS, RITUALS AND PHANTASMAGORIA

# Little Otík (Otesánek)

### Little Otík (Otesánek)

Director: Jan Svankmajer

©/Production Company: Athanor

©/In association with: Barrandov Biografia, FilmFour

In co-production with: Illuminations Films

With financial contributions from:

State Fund of the Czech Republic,

Czech Literary Fund Foundation,

Ren Corporation Ltd, Cesky K Ltd

Producer: Jaromír Kallista

Co-production: Keith Griffiths

Production Assistant: Miroslav Cerna

Production Manager: Vera Ferdová

UK Production Manager: Pinky Ghundale

Studio Manager: Tomáš Kalous

Production Assistant: Miroslav Jirkovsky

Assistant Directors: Martin Kublák, Tijn Po

Script Supervisor: Shimon Shemtov

Screenplay and Story: Jan Svankmajer

Director of Photography: Juraj Galvánek

Additional Photography: Jan Ruzicka

Assistant Cameraman: Peter Necas

Grips: Joseph Cernusak, Miroslav Zika

Chief Lighting Technician: Jirí Curin

Lighting Technicians: Ladislav Marek,

Zdenek Cermak, Zdenek Vodvářka

Stills Photography: Boris Baromykin

Computer Special Effects: Martin Stejskal

Animation: Bedřich Glaser, Martin Kublák

Animated Film/Costumes: Eva Svankmajerová

Animation Storyboard Artist: Vaclav Svankmajer

Animation Colourists: Eliska Schmidtová,

Joseph Cahill

Puppets/Props: Joseph Cahill, Martin Kublák,

Shimon Shemtov, Daniel Bird

Film Editing: Marie Zemanová

Assistant Editors: Daniel Bird, Jitka Frimlová,

Adela Spaljová

Artistic Direction: Eva Svankmajerová,

Jan Svankmajer

Assistant Art Director: Vaclav Svankmajer

Set Dresser: Karel Vanásek

Propmen: Karel Jilek, Karel Cihlar

Set Construction Foreman: Tomáš Kalous

Set Construction: Roman Dergam, Jirí Placata,

Jan Skala, Martin Fiser

Costumes/Props/Set Design: Jan Svankmajer

Costumes: Katerina Rudova, Miroslava Gailová,

Katerina Stejskalová

Latex Casts: Jirí Sram

Wardrobe: Katerina Rudova

Make-up: Alena Sedova, Bozena Doslá

Image Colour Correction: Vladimír Altman

Optical Effects: Pavel Kryml, Ivan Haták

Sound: Ivo Spalj

Sound Assistants: Robert Dufek,

Matej Kratochvíl, Igor Pokorný, Radovan Horak

Additional Sound Services: Jaroslav Sodomka,

Alena Durlinová, Vaclav Hanousek

Sound Mix: Ivo Spalj, Pavel Spatny

Sound Mix Assistant: Pavel Stverák

Sound Effects: Jitka Zvirócká, Olga Cechová,

Zdenek Dusek, Maria Novotná,

Karel Süßmilch

Animal Training: Fauna Film Praha, Ota Bares,

David Schmidt

Cast:

Veronika Zilková (Bozena Horáková)

Jan Hartl (Karel Horák)

Jaroslava Kretschmerová (Mrs Stádlерová)

Pavel Novy (Frantisek Stádlер)

Kristina Adamcová (Alzbeta)

+ intro by musician and Starve Acre composer Matthew Herbert (Wednesday 4 September only)

### Jan Svankmajer on 'Little Otík'

*Little Otík is based on a folk tale best known from the version by K.J. Erben. What attracted you to the subject?*

In the early '70s Eva [Svankmajerová] was looking for a 'drastic' fairytale that she could make into an animated short film. *Otesánek* was her final choice; she had illustrated the story earlier for a children's book. She asked me to help her with the script, and suddenly I realised what a great subject I was handling. That it was, in effect, a topical version of the Faust myth: a rebellion against nature and the tragic dimension of that rebellion. In short, I stole the story from Eva and subsequently integrated her original idea into the final shape of my script.

*You say the name Otesánek is untranslatable, but there's a lot of play in the dialogue about the baby's real name (Otík) and the character in the folk tale (Otesánek). What is the significance of this?*

The word *Otesánek* is a blend of the word to hew and the diminutive noun ending 'ánek', used mostly for words characterising children. Figuratively the word *Otesánek* is used in Czech to characterise a person who devours and digests everything, not only food.

*Most of your features combine puppets with live actors, and the central characters exist as both puppets and real people. But in Little Otík none of the characters change their status. Is this a new departure?*

*Little Otík* differs from my previous films mainly by being a version of a traditionally constructed story with normal dialogue. That's not the case with *Alice* or *Faust*, and certainly not with *Conspirators of Pleasure*. In this sense *Little Otík* is the most conventional of my films. In its subject matter, though, it's quite close to *Faust* and, in showing the omnipotence of desire, to *Conspirators of Pleasure*. This is only another angle on the subjects that obsess me, not a new departure in my work.

*In many folk tales a child is threatened by an ogre or wild beast. In Little Otík, by contrast, the child has become an ogre. What was the intention behind this reversal?*

I do not work with intentions. Pursuing intentions leads to making films as theses. That has nothing to do with freedom of the imagination. It's common knowledge that the subconscious components of our mind are just as meaningful as the conscious. So my preference is for *post facto* interpretation rather than intention. In *Little Otík* the child devours its 'parents'. Otík is the product of their desire, their rebellion against nature. This is not a child in the real sense of the word, but the materialisation of desire, of rebellion. That's the tragic dimension of the human destiny – it's impossible to live without rebelling against the human lot.

That is the essence of freedom. The Marquis de Sade invoked nature in his early texts, but in later works he condemned it, calling it a whore and a murderess, rebelling against it. But between de Sade and the present there's a

Dagmar Stríbrná (*Mrs Správcová, the caretaker*)  
 Zdenek Kozák (*Mr Zlábek*)  
 Gustav Vondráček (*Mládek, the postman*)  
 Arnost Goldflam (*gynaecologist*)  
 Jitka Smutná (*Bulánková, the social worker*)  
 Jirí Lábus (*policeman at station*)  
 Radek Holub (*young postman*)  
 Jan Jirán (*Karlův, co-worker in office*)  
 Zdenek Palusga (*uniformed policeman*)  
 Frantisek Polata (*plainclothes policeman 1*)  
 Vaclav Jezek (*plainclothes policeman 2*)  
 Mikes (*the cat*)  
 Josef Cahill  
 Marie Maresová  
 Anna Wetlinská  
 Vojtech Bernatsky  
 Olga Cechová  
 Jirí Macháček  
 Tomáš Hanák  
 Josef Chodora  
 Barbora Cejnarová  
 Hana Krehaková  
 Kamila Simberska  
 Tomas Vott  
 Miroslav Soban  
 Milena Podhajska  
 Karel Vidimsky  
 Denisa Kucabová  
 Karolina Sebestová  
 Zuzana Zahradková  
 Patricie Kasiková  
 Tomas Cejnar  
 Matej Sturm  
 Matyas Kohlicek  
 Lukas Chadima  
 Vincent Navratil  
 Jan Durkac  
 Marie Brozovská  
 Karolina  
 Czech Republic/UK/Japan 2000©  
 131 mins  
 35mm

## ROOTS, RITUALS AND PHANTASMAGORIA

**Against the Crowd: Murrain + intro by novelist Andrew Michael Hurley + Omnibus: Whistle and I'll Come to You** Sat 7 Sep 18:20  
**Play for Today: Robin Redbreast** Mon 9 Sep 18:30  
**Don't Look Now** Tue 10 Sep 20:45; Thu 26 Sep 20:50; Sun 29 Sep 18:10  
**A Ghost Story for Christmas: A Warning to the Curious + Beasts: Baby** Fri 13 Sep 18:15  
**Eraserhead** Fri 13 Sep 20:45; Tue 1 Oct 21:00; Mon 7 Oct 18:10  
**Dead of Night + A Winter's Dale** Sat 14 Sep 12:30  
**Screenplay: White Lady + intro by filmmaker and season curator Daniel Kokotajlo + Children of the Stones (episode 1)** Mon 16 Sep 20:40  
**The Shout + Lonely Water (aka The Spirit of Dark and Lonely Water)** Wed 18 Sep 18:10 + Q&A with filmmakers Daniel Kokotajlo and Mark Jenkin; Sat 21 Sep 15:00; Wed 2 Oct 20:50  
**The Hunger** Thu 19 Sep 20:35; Sun 6 Oct 18:10  
**Little Otik** Otesánek Sat 21 Sep 17:45

## BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

history of shocking experiences in human civilisation. Without that terrible ambivalence we are unable to face anything, certainly not nature. That's why we end our rebellions on our knees.

*Little Otik is much longer than your other features and its narrative progression is more orthodox. Was this a matter of being faithful to the original story?*

Storytelling, whatever the story, has its own laws. It differs from recounting a dream (as in *Alice*). Similarly, when you start using conventional dialogue, you've got to realise the film will be longer. A film told through dialogue (without a narrator) always works in a roundabout way, which requires time; figurative speech – the language of pictures and symbols – is more direct and consequently shorter. *Little Otik* is long because I made a wrong estimate of the roundabout way. In other words, it involved a rather different way of working than I have used so far.

*The telling of Erben's original tale takes the form of two-dimensional animation. What is its function within the film?*

Erben's tale read by Alzbetka is an independent animated short that has an important role in the film, in that it gives the spectator a clear picture of the original myth, unadulterated by the deformations of present-day society. It is this that provides the source of Alzbetka's 'knowledge' and her 'counter activity'. Thus animated, the Erben tale could stand on its own (with minor alterations) as an independent short film. It's a film within a film.

*The surrealist group you belong to has participated in various exhibitions in Prague since the fall of communism. Does this newfound recognition pose a threat?*

The fact that since November 1989 the group has arranged a number of public events, including the issuing of the review *Analogon*, and has tried to acquaint the broader public with its activities doesn't mean it has become integrated into Czech culture. Surrealism has always been a minority affair, even in the '30s. In so far as it was perceived at all it was considered to be an abscess on the body of Czech culture. Today the rabid attacks of the fascist establishment and Stalinist lackeys have been replaced by indifference and ignorance. For art historians surrealism has long been dead, which is why they are only interested in historical surrealism and ignore the present movement. I do not think we are in any danger of 'recognition'.

*You once described Walt Disney as one of the leading destroyers of European culture. What is being destroyed and how can this be resisted?*

Disney is among the greatest makers of 'art for children'. I have always held that no special art for children simply exists, and what passes for it embodies either the birch (discipline) or lucre (profit). 'Art for children' is dangerous in that it participates either in the taming of the child's soul or the bringing up of consumers of mass culture. I am afraid a child reared on current Disney produce will find it difficult to get used to more sophisticated kinds of art and will assume his/her place in the ranks of viewers of idiotic television serials. That doesn't mean that works with imaginative value may not occasionally crop up in consumer culture – for instance, *King Kong*. But I fear their number is dwindling.

Peter Hames, *Sight and Sound*, October 2001