

Marie Seton, World Film News, London, october 1936.

Extract from
World Film News
LONDON
OCT. 1936

Trick Film Makers

STAREVITCH ★ REINIGER ★ BARTOSCH
By MARIE SETON

THE MODERN ÆSOP

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS ago Starevitch left the National History Museum at Kovno in order to go to Moscow and direct films. Since 1911 he has made over forty pictures ranging in length from 375 metres to 2,500 metres. He directed the first Russian film, *La Cigale et la Fourmi*, to be shown abroad. It was presented in 1913 at the Gaumont Palace in Paris. This film was followed by a series of pictures based on the Russian classics in which most of the leading Russian actors appeared. But the longer Starevitch worked in the cinema, the less he liked directing actors, for they never did what he wanted them to do. This led him to experiment with marionettes.

It was not until he went to Paris after the 1917 Revolution that Starevitch finally resolved to specialise in puppet films. Several times since then he has endeavoured to combine actors and puppets in the same picture, as, for example, in *The Dragon's Eyes* and *Queen of the Butterflies*. But generally the actors have been children who fitted into Starevitch's fantastic world of animals and insects like Alice into Carroll's Wonderland. In some of his early films, Starevitch also mixed the real world with the artificial, using real flowers and living birds in scenes with doll figures. He has also made a certain use of tricks

borrowed from the American cinema. Because of his studies in natural history and ethnology, Starevitch is continually giving his stories a scientific background. He has made many semi-scientific pictures of animal life, as well as a number of films in which he has adapted the customs of primitive peoples and utilised their decorative work. Underlying all his work is a scientific element.

Every one of Starevitch's marionettes has been made by himself, and he is his own scenic de-



"Le Lion"

signer as well as cameraman. He uses the most varied material for his puppets. The more important ones have chamois leather faces, but their bodies may be made from all kinds of odd bits and pieces, twigs, wire, straw or cork. The change of expression is achieved by moving the stuffed features, particularly the leather around the eyes.

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IGOR STAREVITCH

film abroad is *The Voice of the Nightingale*, which was awarded the Hugo Riesenfeld medal in America for being the most novel short film of the year of 1925. But probably his most important picture is his early sound film, *Renard the Fox*, made in 1930 and shown at the Sorbonne. In this film Starevitch makes a brilliant satiric use of animals.

Whether he is doing so consciously or not, Starevitch is in the nature of a twentieth century Æsop who is using the cinema in order to relate fables which are designed for a grown-up audience. Judging from Disney's success, urban life has not destroyed people's love of the fantastic when it is visualised, even if they say they no longer believe in fairy-tales. Because animals in themselves are like preliminary sketches of man who are subject to none of the inhibitions which chafe mankind, animal puppets or drawn figures convey human eccentricities much more freely than any human representation.

Starevitch's work is on the whole too curious and bizarre in style ever to become generally popular; and judging from the subject of his most recent film, *The Creation of the World*, it is only likely to appeal to a special audience. The designs for this picture are extremely interesting. It will be divided into eight episodes. (1) The firmament which whirls in space. (2) The Light in which hazy forms appear. (3) Earth separating from water; clouds presided over by a figure representing Force and which is seen in perspective. (4) The Sun, The Moon and the Stars. (5) Birds and fish. (6) Primal animals emerging from hillocks. (7) Man formed of spiritual and material elements and emerging from a tornado between the sky and the earth in a spiral movement. (8) Man in Eden, a little figure in a vast universe.



"La Reine des Papillons"



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NB : Starevitch se prénomme réellement LADISLAS et non Igor. Les photographies « Le Lion » viennent du film *Le Lion devenu vieux*, 1932.

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