

A pensive look at childhood

Review by Eric Peterson

Seen through the eyes of Alexander, the circumstances of life in a Swedish town are as pure and alarming as a fairy tale. *Fanny and Alexander*, three hours long and very rich, is Ingmar Bergman's most recent film. It shows at the Plaza 4 Theatres at 5:15 and 8:45 p.m. daily.

The most persistent images in the film, which recur with fitness and delight, are those of the theater and other illusions. The first shot we see is of elaborate and colorful paper houses which lift to reveal the listless eyes of a small boy, Alexander. There is a Christmas play near the start of the film — we might at first take the actors for cardboard figures — and Alexander's family are theater people.

Even God turns out to be a puppet towering among other puppets, with blazing painted eyes and fiercely-carved eyebrows. The heads of the house (there is a change when Oscar, Alexander's father, dies) make two sentimental speeches about theater which form part of the beginning and the end — Alexander's father is very near tears at the start when he speaks of how theater has meant everything to the Ekdahls, his family. "Sometimes the little world reflects the big one for a few moments, forgetting the harsh world outside. Our theater's a small world of orderliness, routine and love."

Home life for the Ekdahls is supposed to be the same, to fill the same need for orderliness, routine and love that art can. Christmas in their house is the fondest picture of childhood imaginable: splendid decorations fill the place, as do the warm and large family and circle of friends. Through the house the grandmother moves with grace and authority. Christmas is the only meal for which the servants join the family at the table; and there is a lovely view of people carrying torches to light their way to church (which in a surprising and significant shift turns out to be the theater during the middle of the miracle play).

There is in this continuing stress on theater and illusion a gentle acknowledgment that human living is an exercise of trying on masks — and an expression of the desire for aesthetic fulfillment even in the actions of daily life — and a realization that people often find their lives turning into plays or fairy tales.

The texture of the film and of Alexander's experience in it has very much the look and feel of a fairy tale, in fact. There is the idyllic and serene beginning, the entrance of the wicked stepfather, the moment of peril and despair, the sudden (and improbable)

Bergman's Last Film
Fanny and Alexander, directed by Ingmar Bergman; screenplay by Ingmar Bergman; produced by Jorn Donner. At the Plaza 4, 12th and P streets. Rated R.

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Alexander..... | Bertil Guve |
| Helena Ekdahl..... | Gunn Wallgren |
| Emile Ekdahl..... | Ewa Froling |
| Oscar Ekdahl..... | Allan Edwall |
| Fanny..... | Pernilla Allwin |

rescue when it's least expected, the happy ending complete in this case with radiant twin babies, Alexander's new siblings. And there are ghosts — his father's self-effacing and melancholy figure appears at crucial moments after his death, to watch his wife's remarriage, for example. Even in the midst of the happy ending happily ending, the wicked stepfather, a dead bishop, comes to knock the boy to the ground and snarl, "You can't escape me."

Alexander thinks of his mother's remarriage to the insufferable minister as a betrayal to his father, who in fact was acting the role of Hamlet's father when he collapsed on stage, and died soon after. "Don't act Hamlet, my son," Alexander's mother gently tells him. "I am not Gertrude, the bishop is not Claudius, and this place, though it is gloomy, is not Elsinore."

And so we naturally think of the bishop's house as Elsinore from that moment, with its gray stone walls and bars on the windows, and river which courses like a moat just in front of the house. The contrast between the warm and mysterious childhood home that Alexander's grandmother presides so beautifully over and this ascetic and cruel place gives us some of the strongest visual images in the film — the cheerless light and pain coarsened faces at Elsinore placed in the mind beside his grandmother Helena's face in its joy and sadness, and the splendid place she has made.

Bergman makes an extraordinary confrontation between the boy and the minister. In his love of dramatic expression, Alexander tells a story which might as well have been true, though everyone else called it lies — how the bishop's dead wife and children drowned while trying to escape Elsinore and its grim lord. The scene where the bishop beats the boy into admitting he told a lie is extraordinary and painful — the bishop always hiding his power lust and unloosed resentment behind pious lies of how his cruelty is kind.

"I think the bishop hates Alexander," the boy responds with an even and slow gaze, and his eyes in their reserve and detachment are the most haunting thing we see in the film.

Place a classified ad in the Daily Nebraskan today.

HORSEFEATHERS/W.C.'S
\$1.75 PITCHERS
EVERY WEDS. NITE

El Toro

Close to Campus
 13th & P St.
 Lower Level
 Douglas III Building

PRECISION CUTS

ROFFLER
 FAMILY HAIR CENTER

Appointments
 477-9555 or
 477-5221

Do it with Style

Compare our prices;
 Available also in kegs.

TO STEAMBOAT

The Nebraska (YOU'VE GOT STYLE) Ski Trip
 Absolute prime time skiing
 Feb. 29 - March 5

\$260.00 INCLUDES: 1. 4 Days lift tickets
 2. All lodging
 3. All transportation
 4. Various food & beverage discounts

Contact Larry at 474-1705 (days) or 475-0005 (Eve.)

BEER SPECIAL!

Little King welcomes all UNL students back with

25¢ DRAWS

(13th & "O" only)
 Mon.-Sat. 5 pm to close

LITTLE KING
 America's Greatest Hero.