An Exploration of Swedishness:
A Mosiac of the Swedish Cultural Landscape
Through the Lens of Children's Film

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Abstract

This thesis aspires to discuss the role of Children's films in the dissemination of ideas, idylls, values, and norms associated with the vague cultural idea that is Swedishness. Sweden is a paradox, through its history of being transformed from an agrarian impoverished class-based society to the modern egalitarian utopian ideal that some may see as there lies a certain fallacy in calling Sweden a country of exceptionalism and devoid of national feeling. A country with a certain amount of national pride, coupled with a strong streak of individualism, it becomes apparent that it is a country working between two different but not wholly separate identities. In that vein, this thesis looks at two contrasting children's films that represent two sides of the same coin, Swedishness. In their role as children's films they both present versions of the citizen and the nation that adults see as key to the dissemination of what it is to be Swedish. Through various modes of film analyses this thesis sees that these two films and two separate frameworks of important national concepts, the landscape, and the individual, this thesis sheds light on how inherent Swedish idylls and ideals, blend through cultural productions and become perhaps not as distinct or idyllic as they may seem.

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Introduction

What is Swedishness? Swedishness or "svenskhet", is in essence a "ness". Grammatically, "ness", is used to transform adjectives into nouns, nouns that specifically refer to a quality or condition.[1] Just like "Americaness" or "manliness", "Swedishness", tries to allude to the characteristics or qualities of a group it represents, and acts as a shortcut to describe identity, and in the case of this study a cultural identity.

Following Stuart Hall's conception of cultural identity as one that shares certain historical experiences or shared cultural codes,[2] this paper will specifically be looking at the cultural dissemination of Swedishness through Swedish children's films.

Children's films tend to be educational by definition and take part in the construction of collective identities by setting and representing standard norms and values for those who are to grow up and be a part of the greater collective. In this sense, children's films can help in reproducing certain norms of the nation, but can also act as ways in which the adults who create them can establish an idealized version of the nation.

Within Sweden, and in broader Scandinavia there is a strong tradition to support films for both children and young people.[3] The Swedish Film Institution is an institution established in 1963 in

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[1] "Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus," May 31, 2023, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/.
[2] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (1989): 68–81.
[3] Ib Bondebjerg, "A Small Region in a Global World. Patterns in Scandinavian Film and Media Culture," *CEMES Working Papers, No. 1*, January 1, 2011.

negotiations between film producers and the state and is a state-financed institution that both funds and preserves Swedish film.[4] Its mission statement declares,

> The mission of the Swedish Film Institute is to support film across the board through the allocation of grants to different sectors such as production, distribution, screening, quality film experiences for children and young people, and the promotion of Swedish film internationally.[5]

This study will use two children's films, *Elvis! Elvis!* [Kay Pollack, 1977] and *Alla Vi Barn i Bullerbyn* [*The Children of the Noisy Village*, Lasse Hellstrom, 1986][6] within its analysis. The study aims to answer and explore the following questions:

1. How do notions of Swedishness and symbols of the nation manifest themselves within these films?
2. How do notions of the nation seep into cultural products which are not seen as overtly portraying aspects of national identity?

In answering that question the study aims to look at two different aspects of Sweden, the national landscape and individualism. In doing so the study will use semiotic analysis and historical and structural film analysis, to relate these films to broader aspects and notions of Swedishness.

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[4] Gunnar Iverson, Astrid Soderbergh Widding, and Tytti Soila, *Nordic National Cinemas* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2005).
[5] "Seek Funding," Swedish Film Institute, https://www.filminstitutet.se/en/funding/.
[6] Literally translated as, *All of us Children in the Noisy Village.*

The first chapter aims to explore what the notions of Swedishness are through the social, historical, cultural, and political development in the 20th century. The second chapter will then present an overview of Swedish children's films, their historical background, and the academic literature which has been written on them. The third chapter will then present and analyze these films within the context of the Swedish national landscape. First, analyze how *Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn* draws upon and presents a conventional imagined and idealized Swedish landscape and childhood, and then how *Elvis! Elvis!,* either falls into these conventions or plays with them. In the fourth chapter, I will then discuss individualism as a marker of Swedish identity and culture and will use Henrik Bergren and Lars Trägårdh concept of *statist individualism*[7] and a broader sense of Swedish individualism to discuss how it relates to *Elvis! Elvis!*.

Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn has been chosen as a film of interest for three reasons. Firstly, it is part of the both massive and dominant cultural force that is Astrid Lindgren and the adaptations of her work. Secondly, I see it as an archetypal example of a portrayal of a romanticized Sweden. Thirdly, Astrid Lindgren and her works, including *Bullerbyn*, are used in Swedish politics, with *Bullerbyn* being used as a cultural shortcut to describe an idyllic Sweden of old.[8]

Elvis Elvis! has been chosen as it is a film that has not been put within the discourse of nationalism, patriotism, or national romanticism. It is however a film still used today as a pedagogical tool within Swedish schools, part of an overall mission of the Swedish Film Institute to utilize fiction

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[7] *Note:* This thesis will draw fairly heavily from *The Swedish Theory of Love: Individualism and Social Trust in Modern Sweden,* a 2022 translation and update of the 2006 book, *Är svensken människa?* [Are the Swedes Human?], which discusses Swedish philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, literary criticism, and political science. It focuses primarily upon the Swedish "social contract" of embracing a strong state in the service of individual autonomy.

[8] See Appendix I

films as a moral educational tool.[9] The study is not so much concerned with how *Elvis Elvis!* is trying to deploy national imagery and themes in a way to appeal to children and the nation but is instead more interested in how certain values, norms, images, and notions associated with Sweden and Swedishness still finds itself within the film.

Methodological Framework

This study will analyze the films through a formal and semiotic analysis primarily through an illustration of separate scenes which are seen as relevant in their portrayal of or relation to various aspects of "Swedishness". The study will first provide an analysis of the films forms, more specifically of its stylistic elements (editing, color, camera angle, camera movement, color, etc), while separately providing both historical and cultural context, to relay the meaning and effect behind certain symbols and themes relating to "Swedishness". The analysis will then draw upon a Barthesian notion of semiotics with his concept of "myth".

Myth is primarily a "second-order semiological system", meaning it goes beyond the realm of *denotation* (the literal meaning of the sign), and instead focuses on the *connotative* (a secondary or extended meaning of a sign) such as the mythic implication.[10] Within this notion, it is assumed that an object is already rich in meaning, such as when looking at a red cottage, besides meaning home, carries an artistic, national history, and socio-political meaning. In this system of myth, these meanings are put at a distance, and replaced with a mythical concept consisting of "shapeless

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[9] See Appendix II
[10] Yoshiko Okuyama, *Japanese Mythology in Film: A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime [Paperback]*, 2015.

associations" [11]. For example, the "Swedish home" garners ideas of a particular kind of interior, summer, childhood, closeness to nature, and ultimately, ideas of "Swedishness".

Barthes's specific conception of semiotics is useful as it operates beyond denotation and instead can explore more vague concepts, such as "Swedishness". This formal and semiotic approach will couple with a broader historical and cultural context to act as a portrayal of "Swedishness".

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[11] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1957.

Chapter One: Swedish National Identity and Notions of Swedishness

The home's origin is in commonality and togetherness. The good home knows neither the privileged nor disadvantaged, neither guinea pigs nor stepchildren. There no one looks down upon the others. There no one searches for an advantage over the others, the strong do not plunder and oppress the weak, in the good home there is equality, compassion, cooperation, and helpfulness. Applied to the great people's and citizen's home (folkhemmet), this would mean the breaking down of all social and economic barriers, which now divide citizens into privileged and backward, into ruler and dependent, plunderer and plundered - Former Swedish Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson (January 18, 1928).

Notions of Modernity and the Concept of "Folkhemmet"

The concept of the *folkhem* (the people's home) originates from this speech by the former Swedish Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson. This conception of *folkhem* would be used to incite a transformation of Swedish society, from a highly unequal, class-based society, into what would be seen as a model welfare state. He and the rest of the Social Democrats took control of the Swedish Riksdag in the 1930s transforming Swedish society for the next half a century. Sweden would go from one of the poorest countries in all of Europe to one of the wealthiest.[12] This time would become known as the *folkhem* era.

[12] Erik Örjan Emilsson, "Recasting Swedish Historical Identity," (2009).

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Before the *folkhem* era, Sweden was a highly agrarian impoverished state. While today it is seen as a state of immigration, in the late 19th century it was instead a state of emigration. In the mid to late 19th century, hundreds of thousands of Swedes left for the United States.[13] Scholars of the early 20th century described Sweden as a place that missed the wave of nationalism of the 19th century.[14] Sweden differed from its Scandinavian counterparts, as much of the flag-waving and rampant fervor for national holidays was not present within the country. Writers of the time were filled with self-criticism, and the future of the country looked bleak, with the poor suffering more than ever.[15]

The majority of national feeling and patriotism that did exist at the time identified with the monarchy, aristocracy, military, and the church, looking back upon the glory days of Swedish imperialism, of "Storhetstiden" (Era of Greatness).[16] Sweden's imperial past cast Sweden as a global superpower, putting the elites and royalty up on a pedestal, completely ignoring the dire reality of the large Swedish peasantry. During the turn of the 20th century, the mass emigration, and the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905, there were no longer excuses to look upon the past and instead Swedes desired to look inwards.

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[13] "Swedish Immigration to the U.S./Svensk Invandring till USA | Minnesota Historical Society," https://www.mnhs.org/newspapers/swedishamerican-migration.
[14] Barton, H. Arnold. "From Warfare to Welfare State: Sweden's Search for a New Identity." *Scandinavian Studies* 77, no. 3 (2005): 315–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40920600.
[15] Berggren, Henrik, Lars Trägårdh, and Stephen Donovan. *The Swedish Theory of Love: Individualism and Social Trust in Modern Sweden*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022.
[16] Arnold, "From Warfare to Welfare State", 317.

A competing narrative, birthed from national romanticism, instead idealized Sweden's rich peasant history, instead of glorifying the elite. Like the romanticism that had swept across Europe during the 19th century, Sweden now began to recognize value within the lower classes. The peasantry became viewed as an essential part of liberalism and as the national backbone.[17] A desire for a wholly Swedish national culture came to the forefront, a desire for a Sweden that was no longer seen as riddled with class struggles, individualism, and self-criticism. This Sweden was to be instead bound by a singular national narrative, under a single national project, and this project would build what would be looked at as the future of the nation-state.

The concept of *folkhem* and the emerging Swedish national project would come at a time when Adolf Hitler would take control of Germany using the slogan "Volksgemeinschaft" (people's community). Though what differed between Sweden and much of the rest of Europe was the historical legacy available for those in charge of the national project.[18] Previous narratives of "Swedishness" actually stressed the sense of individualism and popular freedom. The abject poverty of the life of the peasantry was seen as a point of strength, in that it took a certain "type" of people to be able to live and thrive in the harsh Scandinavian climate. Peasants were seen as bearers of both the Enlightenment and modernization.[19] The lives of peasants became romanticized, with Scandinavia specifically being seen as a place in which the peasantry lived with more economic autonomy, although this was not the entire historical reality. This new Sweden, one that both stressed community and freedom would make the peasant the icon of the nation. Finally, the national sentiments of fellow Europeans had begun to spread within Sweden.

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[17] Bergren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, *The Swedish Theory of Love,* 115.
[18] Berggren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, "The Swedish Theory of Love", 213.
[19] Pauli Kettunen, "A Return to the Figure of the Free Nordic Peasant," ed. Bo Stråth and Øystein Sørensen, *Acta Sociologica* 42, no. 3 (1999): 259–69.

Per Albin Hansson, a child of the working class spearheaded this new version of Sweden and what it meant to be "Swedish". The Social Democrats' alliance with the agrarian Peasants Party (Bondeförbundet), helped to portray the party as a part of the historical struggle of the working class to free itself from the weight of the ruthless class-based society.[20] The Social Democrats had now positioned themselves as the party for the people, and it would remain this way throughout the 20th century. They would create their brand of a nation-state.

A combination of both socialism and Nationalism created a unique brand of Swedish ideology in which both individualism and collective action became equally pronounced. The Social Democrats of the 1930s were able to fuse the historical legacy of liberal nationalism with the increasingly interventionist state.[21] These two competing ideologies of both collectivism and individualism have both shown themselves as dominating not only in this period of transformation but as seen later within the study, as a prominent dialectic in the development of the Swedish state up until the present day. This unique combination of both freedom and strong state power began the transformation of Sweden from being portrayed as an impoverished agrarian society into a modern, utopian welfare state, in which the state itself empowered Swedes to have personal freedoms and autonomy.

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Through this transformation, the ideals and images of the past instead transformed into the images of the future. The rural peasant was now becoming the robust working class, the Swedish landscape was now seen as an idyllic home instead of a brutal burden upon the Swedish folk. As the 20th

[20] Bergren and Trädghhård, *The Swedish Theory of Love,* 200.
[21] Bergren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, *The Swedish Theory of Love,* 21.

century moved forward those notions of the past lost their historical connotations and instead became associated with the time and feelings surrounding the era of *folkhem*. The individualism of the past quickly became absorbed by the collectivized state of the now, and personal freedoms now became indistinguishable from the institutions of the state. As independent movements and institutions, from temperance movements to unemployment associations, became a part of the state.[22]

Competing Narratives of "Swedishness"

The 1930s are seen as the time where Swedish nationalism thrived the most. This new national consciousness was distinctively Swedish, one in which both liberal nationalist and Marxist ideas combined. The Fascists of Sweden saw difficulty in recruiting their nationalist counterparts, as fascism was seen as a foreign product.[23] The Swedish welfare state, *folkhem*, and the new political regime were seen as uniquely Swedish.

This new version of "Swedishness" would be highly influential throughout the period known as "the long 1950s", a time in which the welfare state was considered at its strongest from the mid-1940s to the late 1960s. This is where the narrative of Sweden as a utopian, modern state took hold, and in many ways is still present today. Its ideologies were seen to be more pragmatic than its European counterparts and Swedish modernity was a product of "national instinct and psyche",

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[22] Berggren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, "The Swedish Theory of Love", 232
[23] Nathaniël Kunkeler, "The Evolution of Swedish Fascism: Self-Identification and Ideology in Interwar Sweden," *Patterns of Prejudice* 50, no. 4–5 (October 19, 2016): 378–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2016.1237386.

a people seen as more prone to modernity.[24] This was one of two ways in which "Swedishness" can be described after the 1930s. The contradiction perhaps lies within the term *folkhem* itself. With *folk* meaning "a people" and *hem* meaning "home". *Folk* is in some regards indicative of the concept of *folkstaten*, "the people's state", which is a concept from the interwar period stressing, equality, democracy, and popular power.[25] While *hem* instead invokes a more nationalistic sense of home, family, and community; similar to the concept of *heimat* in Germany.

The notion of home and family is of extreme importance in the formation of nationalism. Often the iconography of the nation is closely related to that of the home and that of the family. The word "natio" means to "be born" and the image of the nation is one closely related to upbringing, gender, and the household.[26] When speaking on the development of a Swedish national consciousness, the duality of both the home and the individual becomes so important. Whereas a democracy stresses the importance of the individual and the individual's own contribution to the state. While the nation stresses the communal and homogenous identity of nation-states.

This is where the duality of Swedish national identity becomes both, a utopia steeped in modernity, individuality, and progress, while also stressing the importance of community, homogeneity, and harmony. In 1930s Sweden there was the emergence of both identities launching Sweden into the era of the *folkhem.* Slowly the lines between both the state and the home began to be blurred, as the welfare state expanded, the responsibility of the care of children, the elderly, and families

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[24] Jenny Andersson and Mary Hilson, "Images of Sweden and the Nordic Countries," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34, no. 3 (September 23, 2009): 219–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/03468750903134681.
[25] Berggren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, "The Swedish Theory of Love", 236
[26] Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family," *Feminist Review*, no. 44 (1993): 61–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/1395196.3): 61–80. https://doi.org/10.2307/1395196.

shifted away from individuals, from parents, and instead was entrusted to the state. A paradoxical shift occurred in which the individuality of the citizenry was something that only the state could encourage and provide, as the goals of the social democrats were to emancipate the citizenry from the conservative family structure, and for them to instead be adopted by their new family, the Swedish state and nation.[27]

In essence, the Swedish state had created a society in which individualism was encouraged, but only through the state apparatus. That the state and not the individual was the entity to emancipate. The goal of the state was to create a society of enlightened individuals, to free them from the clutches of the family apparatus, first being children, and later women. Under the banner of progress, liberalism, and modernity the social democrats were able to justify their welfare state project. Thus the tension between both liberal individuality and socialism's stress on equality.[28]

The (Un)importance of the Nuclear Family and Dissolving into Individuality

Similar to the rest of Western Europe Sweden saw a rapid rise in marriages in the 1950s and 1960s.[29] The image of the nuclear family became increasingly prevalent within Swedish society, strikingly similar to the "white picket fence" idealism of other Western societies. This was in contrast to the late 19th and early 20th centuries in which birth and marriage rates in Sweden were low to the point of concern for many Swedish elites. From the time of the 1930s and the initial

[27] Berggren and Trägårdh, "The Swedish Theory of Love", 235
[28] Berggren and Trägårdh, "The Swedish Theory of Love", 260
[29] David Popenoe, "Beyond the Nuclear Family: A Statistical Portrait of the Changing Family in Sweden," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 49, no. 1 (1987): 173–83, https://doi.org/10.2307/352681.

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transformation of Sweden into a welfare state, the state was solely concerned with the liberation of both men and the care of children, women had been seemingly ignored in the conversation. Although the image of the nuclear family was strong throughout this time period, it was combated with the individualism that remained so present within Swedish society. In the 1940s and 1950s, about a third of women were present in the workforce.[30] In the late 1960s, Sweden began to see a sharp decline in the marriage rate, and the decline in marriage rates has continued until this day.

This original stress on individuality within the Swedish state eventually extended across women, children, and men with massive reforms in the late 1960s and 1970s. In much of Europe a strong dependency on both the family and parental figures was present, while in Sweden the guarantee of health care, education, prohibiting violence towards children, and treating children and adolescents with rights of their own, the Swedish state had liberated individuals from both their parents and the family.[31]

The initial vision of the welfare state to lift up the working class and to care for children increasingly allowed women to enter the labor market. Access to good quality child care is crucial for women to enter the labor market.[32] This not only helped in the dissolution of the housewife ideal but led to child care slowly becoming more influenced by the state. *Folkhemmet* even with its labor opportunities for women before the 1960s was firmly grounded in gender difference, attitudes towards mothers' paid employment and public child care were negative.[33]

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[30] Berggren and Trägårdh, "The Swedish Theory of Love", 260
[31] Berggren and Trägårdh, "The Swedish Theory of Love", 300
[32] Ingela K. Naumann, "Child Care and Feminism in West Germany and Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of European Social Policy* 15, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 47–63, https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928705049162.
[33] Naumann, "Child care and feminism", 52.

This desire for individualism reached a breaking point in the late 1960s and led to massive political, social, and economic reforms from the 1970s to the 1990s. Instead of the traditional mutual obligations of the past, Swedes, and especially Swedish women were now seen as more independent than anywhere else in Europe. This caused a dissolution of the family ideals of the past, and of course, drew backlash as the life of a housewife and the nuclear family came under threat.

And though throughout this time Sweden was seen as the "Sweden for the Swedes", it is important to note how in a seemingly homogenous country, people were essentially *otherized* through methods carried out by the state. Although portrayed as "equal", the original vision for the *folkhem* was to free working-class men from their historical bounds. How people were separated can be seen clearly through the nation and the state's view on childcare and education.

Compulsory sterilization peaked in the 1940s and was a practice that almost exclusively targeted women. Influenced by the eugenics of the early 20th century, the practice targeted those seen as unfit to raise a child or those seen as having undesirable traits that should not be passed down. Over 60,000 people were sterilized from 1935 to 1975.[34] Those deemed antisocial or feebleminded, as well as those seen as physically disabled, insane, and ill, would be subjected to the practice.[35] The Swedish public of the 1930s and 40s saw no issue in the state controlling the reproductive abilities of particular citizens.

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[34] Maija Runcis, *Steriliseringar i Folkhemmet* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 1998).
[35] Amanda Cederholm, "Folkhemmets baksida - om 1934 och 1941 års steriliseringslagar," 2013, http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/3800701.

There is also the issue of Sweden not being an ethnically homogenous state. The indigenous Sami of Northern Sweden have been outsiders of not only Swedish but of the Norwegian and Finnish states. From the mid-19th century through the mid-20th century Sami children were sent to state-owned education institutions. Education for minorities in Sweden was created with "Swedishness" as the norm, ethnic minorities had an unquestioned subordinate status.[36] This education system was created to keep Sami in a position of subordination and at a particular social status.[37]

As the late 20th century approached and what is considered the era of the folkhem dissolved, there became a greater and greater desire to recapture what was. That particular era of Swedish history became a piece of nostalgia and became idealized. It was a time that is seen as an era of insularity, of community, a time when "Sverige åt svenskarna" (Sweden for the Swedes). But what mythologizing and fetishizing a time does is create a narrative that excludes, forgets, and disillusions.

A Desire for a Recent Past

The 1970s is considered a time where Swedish national feeling is perhaps at its lowest.[38] The country began to rapidly change in the late 1960s as Olof Palme was elected Prime Minister and

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[36] Svonni, Charlotta. "The Swedish Sámi Boarding School Reforms in the Era of Educational Democratisation, 1956 to 1969." *Paedagogica Historica,* 2021, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2021.1942935.
[37] Otso Kortekangas, "Useful Citizens, Useful Citizenship: Cultural Contexts of Sámi Education in Early Twentieth-Century Norway, Sweden, and Finland," *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 1–2 (March 4, 2017): 80–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2016.1276200.
[38] Anders Åberg, *Blågula barn i bild: Barnfilm och nationalism i Sverige*, Mediehistoriskt arkiv (Föreningen mediehistoriskt arkiv, 2023), https://doi.org/10.54292/7jkjmdzzp3.

the *Folkhem* began to change. Today the Sweden Democrats see this era before Olof Palme to be the Golden Age of Sweden, an ethnically homogenous state more akin to a community than a nation.[39] The 1970s is a time that was disinterested in the questions of the nation, distinctly critical with more of an interest in internationalism. The 1980s, similar to other countries in the West, was a time in which conservative politics experienced a resurgence, and economic deregulation started to dissolve the insular social-economic policies of the past.

The 1960s and 1970s brought change to what the Swedish Democrats would call the Golden Age of Sweden, that is the "long 1950s" that period from the 1940s to the mid-1960s. The 1980s and 1990s saw a national resurgence in the interest in what it meant to be "Swedish". It is fitting then that the Sweden Democrats were formed in 1988 as a successor to the Sweden Party, which was a merger between the Progress Party and the racist far-right Keep Sweden Swedish in 1986.[40] Originally not taken seriously, the Sweden Democrats were a party that was discontent with Swedish globalization, multiculturalism, and immigration policies.

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[39] Gabriella Elgenius and Jens Rydgren, "Frames of Nostalgia and Belonging: The Resurgence of Ethno-Nationalism in Sweden," *European Societies* 21, no. 4 (January 1, 2019): 583–602, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1494297.
[40] Elgenius and Rydgren ,"Frames of Nostalgia and Belonging", 589.

Left: Cover Page of SD Kuriren the Swedish Democrats' official newspaper from 1992. The bold lettering translates to "New Swedes? No Thanks!" *Middle:* Graphic from within the same edition, part of an article implying Yugoslavs as a violent people and questioning the legitimacy of their immigration to Sweden. Translates to "Yugoslavia Today, Sweden Tomorrow" *Figure 1.3: Right*: A poster from the SD in the 1990s. Translates to "A multicultural Sweden? No thanks!"[41]

Throughout the 1940s immigration was almost exclusively from neighboring Nordic countries. But through the 1950s labor immigration began to include Italians and Germans with the majority of Nordic immigrants coming from Finland. In the 1960s this expanded to include laborers from Turkey, Greece, and the former Yugoslavia. Although in 1972 that labor migration was ended, as the country stopped recruiting migrants due to the economy stagnating. Instead, immigrants throughout the rest of the century were primarily refugees escaping human rights violations and political persecution. Chileans, Kurds, Palestineans, Lebanese and Turkish Christians, and Balkan refugees flowed into the country.[42]

41 *Source:* http://www.sdarkivet.com/

42 Charles Westin, "Young People of Migrant Origin in Sweden," *The International Migration Review* 37, no. 4 (2003): 987–1010.

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The Swedish authorities were completely uninterested in the social consequences of migration until the mid-1960s and in 1975 adopted a seemingly radical integration policy in which migrants were seen as settling permanently into the country.[43] At the same time, new hands-on labor and social reforms were introduced. This all led to the major devaluation of the Swedish currency in 1982, resulting in overspending and debt accumulating. Export industries were now challenged by competitors elsewhere in the world and Sweden's dependency on foreign countries increased. This eventually sent the country into an economic recession in the 1990s.[44]

What marks the end of the *folkhem* era is debated. Would it be when the Social Democrats finally lost their power in parliament in 1976, or when Prime Minister Olof Palme was shot and killed in 1986, or even Sweden's interest in the emerging EU.[45] But what is a fact is the image of Sweden as a model for the rest of the world started to collapse. This stagnation and eventual decline of the Swedish economy and state led to Swedes reconciling what it meant to be Swedish. For so long the country had developed an identity surrounding modernity, this identity always surrounded a promise and an ideal. If the Swedes invested in the state then the state would give back, and identity became wrapped up in loyalty to the state and its vision. The Swedes of the time of the *folkhem* were able to abandon the ideals and images of the old and embrace the new, the country now in decline instead looked back upon a different tradition of Swedish identity, that being the idyllic "simpler times".

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[43] Westin, "Young People of Migrant Origin in Sweden.", 988.
[44] Iverson, Soderbergh Widding, and Soila, *Nordic National Cinemas,* 215.
[45] Åberg, Blågula barn i bild, 147.

A Romantic and Idyllic Sweden

The Sweden of the 1980s and 1990s, now disillusioned with the Sweden of the present created a new nostalgia, that for the *folkhem*. The time of the *folkhem* began a golden era in Sweden, many drew upon a desire for a "simpler time". Children became a symbol of that idealism, as well as many of the symbols of Swedish idealism that had been present in the past. This era included an emphasis on the old Swedish romanticization of the countryside, the summer, and the rural. The countryside and nature represent a closeness between people and an affinity with one's own origins and nature.[46] A love of nature was initially explored by writers and artists at the turn of the 20th century, being in search of a new national identity, one that departed from the patriotism of the time, concerning itself with a symbol transcendent of class, instead of the emphasis on past military and regal glory.[47]

Nature and the summer were symbols that were distinctively classless, similar to the ideals of the *folkhem* era. But what is distinctive about nature is it also houses certain ideals surrounding purity and simplicity. In that, the Swedes used to see nature as a national symbol representing class, but as time went go on, it became entangled with the idealism of *folkhemmet.* A romantic Sweden of the past, homogenous, pure, and isolated. One in which Swedes came together to achieve

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[46] Iverson, Soderbergh Widding, and Soila, *Nordic National Cinemas*, 228.
[47] Cas Wouters, "'Culture Builders' : A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life By Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren," *Theory Culture & Society - THEOR CULT SOC*, January 1, 1990, 166–69.

prosperity. Images of nature and the summer were typical highlights of a middle-class summer vacation in the fifties.[48]

This emphasis on the simple and idyllic created an obsession with children's literature and media in the 1970s, with many films in the 1980s featuring the theme of childhood. An obsession that may have to do with a lack of collective history of the past, as Swedish national idealism had been up to that point wrapped up in themes of modernity and the state project. A lack of collective history may explain the interest in children and the nostalgic past, in that instead of looking at the history of the collective instead, Swedes looked at their own individual histories.[49]

What is "Swedishness"?

It becomes difficult to try and properly categorize and define a national identity. Through the developments of the 20th century, it seems appropriate to categorize "Swedishness" into two related but distinctive categories,

1. The modern and progressive, socially responsible, disconnected from the Swedish imperial past. One in which Swedes experience a certain social responsibility, not only to those disadvantaged within Sweden but to those around the globe. Individualism is a priority but

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[48] Gudrun Dahl, "Wildflowers, Nationalism and the Swedish Law of Commons," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 2, no. 3 (1998): 281–302, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853598X00262.
[49] Iverson, Soderbergh Widding, and Soila, *Nordic National Cinemas*., 217.

only within the confines of what is given by the state. Where true Swedes are those who fit within certain parameters deemed appropriate by the society around them.

2. Romanticism of the past, with a distinctive interest in symbols of nature, the countryside, and community. A focus on the insular, with progressive ideals reserved for and preserved by their countrymen. A focus on the innocent, the simple, and the peaceful.

Both these versions of "Swedishness" and national identity are in a sense exclusive. Both present a Sweden which is perhaps idyllic, a Sweden that is presented as progressive, tolerant, and open-minded, but perhaps ignores the realities of Swedish life. One looks upon a future and a present in which Swedes are perhaps a role model for the world, while the other tries to reclaim the memories of a time that was lost, combined with individual memories, in a sense obsessed with what was.

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Chapter Two: Portrayals of Swedish Childhood

"I relate in some detail an early morning trip by car to the city of Uppsala. How, following a sudden impulse, I wanted to visit my grandmother's house at Trädgårdsgatan. How I had stood outside the kitchen door and, for a magical moment, experienced the possibility of plunging back into my childhood. That's a lie. The truth is that I am forever living in my childhood, wandering through darkening apartments, strolling through quiet Uppsala streets, standing in front of the summer cottage, and listening to the enormous double-trunk birch tree. I move with dizzying speed. Actually, I am living permanently in my dream, from which I make brief forays into reality." - Ingmar Bergman commenting on the inspiration for his film *Wild Strawberries.* From his autobiography, *Images: My Life in Film.*[50]

The 1980s: Children's Films that Look Back

The 1980s, as discussed in the previous chapter, was a time of a cultural crisis of transition. This can be attributed to the decline of the *folkhem* project and its ties to Swedish identity. As Fredrik Sunnemark writes,

> …the ideological and rhetorical legitimizations of the project [folkhem] were highly successful in creating a strong sense of national identification which meant that Sweden's

[50] Bergman, Ingmar. *Images: My Life in Film*. Translated by Marianne Ruuth. United States: Arcade Pub., 1994.

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> self-identity became very much tied to this project. To be a Swede was to be a modern, mildly progressive member of the Folkhem and its welfare model [51]

That rhetoric and ideology are encapsulated within the literal meaning of *folkhemmet,* "the people's home". The nation had become a place of security and safety for the Swedish people, with its expansive welfare system. A country that was once rife with class inequalities and poverty had a political project steeped in ideology that they could finally grab onto, leaving the past behind, but when that insular project began to crumble in the face of changing political figures, economic stagnation, increasing debates on migration, and globalization, Swedes began to look back nostalgically at the "golden age" of the *folkhem.* Swedish film scholar Tytti Soila notes, as previously mentioned, that there was a growing interest in children's culture and tales of childhood from the 1970s onward.[52] The 1970s included several more aesthetically and morally challenging films, but the 1980s and 1990s produced children's films that tended to look back nostalgically, especially at the period between 1920 and 1965.[53]

In Soila's discussion of the history of Swedish cinema in *Nordic National Cinemas,* she writes,

> The idea of the folkhem (the Welfare State) has been the strongest metaphor that the social democratic rhetoric has presented to the Swedes. It was maintained that it was to be in the

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[51] Fredrik Sunnemark, "Who Are We Now Then? The Swedish Welfare State in Political Memory and Identity," *Культура/Culture*, no. 5 (2014): 7–16.
[52] Iverson, Soderbergh Widding, and Soila, *Nordic National Cinemas*., 228.
[53] Åberg, Anders. Nationalism in Swedish Children's Film and the Case of Astrid Lindgren. 2022; ANDERS WILHELM ÅBERG, "Remaking the National Past: The Uses of Nostalgia in the Astrid Lindgren Films of the 1980s and 1990s: Anders Wilhelm Åberg," in *Beyond Pippi Longstocking* (Routledge, 2011).

> future, but it was not realized when that future would arrive. On the contrary, the whole image collapsed. The extraordinary thing was that the metaphor of the folkhem could not be discarded, but was rather projected into the past. Both the childhood films and the Lindgren films create the concept of a Utopian past and is a Swedish version of heritage cinema whose occurrence became a pan-European phenomenon in the 1980s.[54]

These children's films of the 1980s and 1990s were specifically retro and nostalgically oriented. *Lotta på Bråkmakargatan* [*Lotta on Troublemaker Street,* Johanna Hald, 1992] has a distinct 1950s, *folkhem*-era, setting complete with period-specific costumes and objects. While *Rasmus på luffen* [*Rasmus and the Tramp,* Olle Hellblom, 1981] is set in the classic Swedish countryside in 1910. But perhaps the archetypal example of this phenomenon, and the children's film which most outwardly romanticizes the nation, is Lasse Hellström's 1986 film, *Alla vi Barn i Bullerbyn.*

A Desired Sweden and Bullerbyn Syndrome

Astrid Lindgren is a titan in the realm of not only Swedish children's culture but Swedish cultural production as a whole. Her books have sold over 150 million copies worldwide and have been translated into over a hundred languages.[55] Swedish film scholar Malena Janson writes, "It would be fair to say that no one person has had a more profound impact on the Swedish culture of the 20th century".[56] Her characters, have been able to bridge generations of Swedes, through books,

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[54] Iverson, Soderbergh Widding, and Soila, *Nordic National Cinemas,* 228.
[55] "Astrid Lindgren Official Website," https://www.astridlindgren.com/.
[56] Janson, Malena, and Tytti Soila. "Elvis! Elvis!" Essay. In *The Cinema of Scandinavia*. London: Wallflower, 2005.

as dolls, on videos, umbrellas, backpacks, and more, serving as tiny cultural attaches and diminutive ambassadors.[57]

Her books are frequently based upon her own childhood experiences, her upbringing being on a farm called "Näs", in the southern province of Småland, often describing it as a "very happy time". She remarked that the two things that made her childhood what it was were "security and freedom"[58], and her parents while caring and always there if needed, would let her and her sisters roam free in the areas surrounding her childhood home. She remarks that "we spent a blissful 'Noisy Village Life at Näs, not much different to the children in the *Bullerbyn* books.[59]

The *Bullerbyn* series was a collection of children's books written by Astrid Lindgren originally released in 1947. The books are based on Lindgren's childhood in the 1920s, with the setting and village of Bullerbyn based on her father's childhood home in a small village,[60] consisting of three farms lined up side by side, called Sevedstorp. The book features six children, Lisa, Anna, Britta, Olle, Lasse, and Bosse, as they explore and go on various adventures in their rural environment.

In 1960 the first film adaptation of the *Bullerbyn* series was released, *Alla vi Barn i Bullerbyn* [*The Children of the Noisy Village,* Olle Hellblom]. This adaptation, in contrast to the books, is set within a contemporary context, as opposed to literature's setting of the early 20th-century setting

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[57] Christine Holmlund, "Pippi and Her Pals," *Cinema Journal* 42, no. 2 (2003): 3–24.
[58] "Astrid Lindgren Official Website."
[59] "Astrid Lindgren Official Website."
[60] "Astrid Lindgren Official Website."

of the books. It is composed of three different acts, each acting as a separate episode. The film at the time received rave reviews[61] and featured a pristine Swedish summer countryside.

In 1986, *Alla vi Barn i Bullerbyn* would be released. Still centering around the same group of children, still featuring a rural landscape, and still featuring an episodic structure, this adaptation of *Bullerbyn* was something that was familiar. That being said the film made a few key digressions from the 1960 adaptation. First, it was not set in a contemporary setting, instead praised at the time for its accuracy of the late 1920s environment.[62] Featuring period-appropriate objects, costumes, and set pieces, the film would be located in this early period of the *Folkhem*. The episodes are structured around the children's small everyday adventures, as they go fishing, play in meadows, or celebrate Midsummer and dance around the maypole.

The film features a romanticized version of summer and appeals to powerful nostalgic sentiment focused around an imagined Swedish childhood and a romanticized landscape. The production

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[61] Malena Janson, "Bio för barnens bästa? : Svensk barnfilm som fostran och fritidsnöje under 60 år," 2007, https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-6998.
[62] "Alla vi Barn i Bullerbyn (1986)." SFdb. https://www.svenskfilmdatabas.se/sv/item/?type=film&itemid=16175.

company, Svensk Filmindustri, wrote in an application for financial support from the Svenska Filminstitutet (the Swedish Film Institute) that an important reason to make the film was that the Hellblom adaptations were out of circulation. They argued it existed,

> Only in our memory, but that is of no avail for today's kids. For them, the Swedish countryside (a long time ago) with cows and pigs, pranks in the hayloft, looking for the Neck [näcken, water spirit] late at night, cray fishing lambkins, going to a Christmas party by sleigh, etc, has become almost exotic. That is why we want to tell the story of the six children of the Noisy Village.[63]

For the film's producers, this was a moment in which they could recapture what was, and what they imagined an idealized Swedish childhood to be. Christine Holmlund describes *Alla vi Barn i Bullerbyn* as utopian, as a film proferring nostalgic fantasies to audiences whose welfare state bubbles were about to burst.[64] In many ways, the film is very nostalgic, and this is perhaps why the film is steeped so heavily in the lakes and meadows connected to Swedish romantic imagery associated with classic notions of Swedishness.

Anders Åberg, a Swedish film scholar at Linnaeus University, argues that the film and its sequel offer audiences a chance to peer into "the good life".[65] As it falls into the realm of the "modern pastoral", in which the Noisy Village lies within a secluded, idyll, one that shies away from modern

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[63] As quoted in Åberg, *Nationalism in Swedish Children's Film and the Case of Astrid Lindgren*, 463.
[64] Holmlund, "Pippi and Her Pals.", 9
[65] Åberg, *Remaking the National Past*. 83.

life, and in that they borrow from early 20th-century national romanticist art.[66] That this film, along with others of the era, works as an emotion-saturated history book, creating and disseminating collective memories in a certain national context.[67] That the films interpret pastoral imagery with national overtones and undertones, with cinematographer Jens Fischer maintaining a national romantic image through the beautiful compositions of meadows and forest glades.[68]

In many ways, the appeal to this nostalgic and romantic version of an idealized Sweden succeeded. On the date of release (December 6, 1986), *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's largest newspaper released a review of the film titled, *Bullerbyn i våra hjärten* [Bullerbyn (The Noisy Village) in our hearts]. In it, film critic Eva af Geijerstam gushes over the film noting that it presents a "dream image".[69]. She calls the world of *Bullerby,* "a paradise, one that resembles religious archetypes," as she fawns over the beautiful presentation of the countryside.[70]

Bernt Eklund of Expressen noted that "the Swedish summer is more beautiful than a postcard. And excitement lives both on the haystack and on the flooded cobbler's field." [71] Critic Margereta Norlin admitted that she and her child remained fascinated at its portrayal of a "lost paradise".[72] Meanwhile, Swedish film scholar, Per Oliv Qvist emphasizes the film's importance as a symbolic carrier of Swedishness, a lost rural Sweden, a national romanticism reminiscent of the turn of the

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[66] Åberg, *Nationalism in Swedish Children's Film and the Case of Astrid Lindgren*, 463.; Åberg, *Remaking the National Past*. 79.
[67] Åberg, *Nationalism in Swedish Children's Film and the Case of Astrid Lindgren*, 466.
[68] Åberg, Blågula barn i bild, 157-158.
[69] Geijerstam, Eva af, "Bullerbyn i våra hjärten", Dagens Nyheter, December 6, 1986.
[70] Dagens Nyheter, "Bullerbyn i våra hjärten".
[71] "Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn (1986) - SFdb," https://www.svenskfilmdatabas.se/sv/item/?type=film&itemid=16175.
[72] Holmlund, Christine. "Pippi and Her Pals.", 9.

century 1900[73], "If in our secularized time there is no heavenly paradise to look forward to, one can always recreate one on the screen, [...] a piece of bygone Sweden seen through the eyes of children [...]".[74]

Sweden had been captured through a romanticized lens featuring symbols of the nation but this film and the entire *Bullerbyn* series have been carried on as a symbol of idyllic versions of Sweden, even outside of Sweden. The term, "Bullerbynsyndrome" exists to describe how people within German-speaking countries idealize and fetishize Sweden, as a "dream-like" country to the north, filled with "cute red houses", lakes, and flowers.[75]

Bullerbyn is a place that is seen as almost a stereotype of Sweden, one of a romantically imagined community, it is in a sense for both Swedes and outsiders a carrier of a more blatant and stereotypical version of "Swedishness". The 1986 film, is the best example in its particularly strong base within romanticism and nostalgia, promoting an idyllic Sweden of the past, at a time when Swedes were becoming disillusioned with the national project, which had defined them for so long. And in contrast to the *Bullerbyn* film of the decade, *Mer om oss barn I Bullerbyn* [*More about the Children of the Noisy Village*, Lasse Hellstrom, 1987], this first film in 1986 takes place exclusively in the season most affiliated with a romanticized Sweden, the summer. In doing that the "Swedishness" and symbols of the nation are utilized in a way similar to a postcard or a tourist

[73] Janson, Bio för barnens bästa?, 64.
[74] As quoted in Janson, Bio för barnens bästa?, 64
[75] Berthold Franke, "Tyskarna har hittat sin Bullerbü | Berthold Franke," *Svenska Dagbladet*, December 9, 2007, sec. Kultur/Under strecket, https://www.svd.se/a/2b393b73-9ce0-3f37-af4b-9eb7470443ff/tyskarna-har-hittat-sin-bullerbu.; April Bernard, "A New Trip to Lindgren Land | April Bernard," The New York Review of Books, accessed June 7, 2023, https://www.nybooks.com/online/2015/06/23/seacrow-island-astrid-lindgren-new-trip/.

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catalog, shown as a place in which Swedish children, foreigners, and adults can find themselves in a version of Sweden which they want to visit and recapture.

So how does a film come to be a symbolic carrier of Swedishness? Within the next chapter, this will be shown primarily through the lens of a "love for nature" and the symbolism of the landscape.

Elvis! Elvis! and a Troubled Childhood

Elvis Elvis! contrasts in many ways to *Alla vi Barn i Bullerbyn*. It takes place within an urban environment, with the majority of the film set within cramped apartments and city streets. Instead of focusing on a group of children, it focuses on one, Elvis. The central conflict of the film takes place between Elvis and his mother. Elvis, who was named after his mother's favorite celebrity, is ignored, overlooked, and isolated, as he quarrels with her in their increasingly toxic household, as she struggles to understand her son, just wanting him to be an "ordinary boy". The home becomes both a place of discomfort and entrapment. It is outside of the home which he finds both people and places that allow him to express himself. *Elvis! Elvis!* is distinctly darker than *Hugo och Josefin*, toeing the line between what is and what is not considered appropriate for children, it features sex, nudity, suicidal imagery, and loneliness, as this seven-year-old boy tries to find his way within the world.

The film depicts Elvis within the first half of the film as powerless and lonely as he begins his schooling. Throughout the film, as he meets others, such as his friend, Anna Rosa, and her family, and starts to explore the world outside of his home, he begins to develop his sense of self.

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The film is not outwardly romantic in its representation of Sweden, does not use various national symbols and images in an explicitly idyllic way, and is not seen as a "symbolic carrier of Swedishness". It does not create a clear, joyous picture of childhood, and instead creates one which is both complicated and difficult. Many critics were appalled by the portrayal of the mother, and stated that the film was not appropriate for children, but was "a children's film for adults." [76]

Swedish film scholar Malena Janson argues that the film is appropriate for children, claiming that its non-narrative structure works in favor of the film functioning as a children's film, as it flows similarly to the unrealistic sense of time that children possess.[77] She places the film within her concept of "barnets realism", or child's realism, (literally translates as, "the child's realism"), which refers to a fundamentally realistic film that takes place in a recognizable time and environment and is based exclusively in a child's perspective. In this sense the boundaries between the external physical event and an internal mental event are nonexistent, because in a child's experience there are rarely such sharp distinctions. Imagination is a natural part of reality not something that stands in opposition to it.[78]

So how and why does this film relate to certain notions of "Swedishness"? First of all, even as a film that has not been discussed as overtly patriotic, it still lets certain notions and conventions of "Swedishness" seep into its content, first through its use of the landscape, secondly, through certain norms and values of "Swedishness" which it portrays, most notably individualism.

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[76] Janson, "Elvis! Elvis!", 173.
[77] Janson, "Elvis! Elvis!", 178.
[78] Janson, Bio för barnens bästa?, 114.

These norms and values are particularly relevant to the film as it is used as a pedagogical tool. It is part of the Swedish Film Institute's collection of film study guides, part of a collection of films that the Swedish Film Institute uses to teach children various values. The Swedish Film Insitute particularly marks *Elvis! Elvis!* As a film which teaches "basic values" and particularly their Swedish Film Institute notes that the film can be used to explore, "child-parent relationships", and the "importance of being yourself".[79] Malena Janson, in her article *Moulding the democratic citizen of the future: On the discourses and practices of film education in Sweden,* argues that these study guides, and film education in Sweden more generally, is used to try and mold children and youth into ideal democratic Swedish citizens, by asking questions and guiding classroom ideas that usually lead the students to a certain answer.[80]

In the case of the study guide of *Elvis Elvis!* questions like, "What should you get to decide?", "Do you have people you trust besides your parents?". If *Elvis! Elvis!* is acting as a pedagogical tool, one which molds the ideal Swedish democratic citizen, what Swedish norms and values is it portraying? One norm of Swedishness which it explores is that of individualism.n Although, first the study will look at how both these films fit within a particular part of Swedishness, the national landscape.

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[79] "Elvis! Elvis!," Svenska Filminstitutet, accessed June 8, 2023, https://www.filminstitutet.se/sv/fa-kunskap-om-film/filmpedagogik/filmhandledningar/elvis-elvis/., Svenska Filminstitutet

[80] Malena Janson, "Moulding the Democratic Citizen of the Future : On the Discourses and Practices of Film Education in Sweden," *Film Education Journal* 2, no. 2 (2019): 85–100.

Chapter Three: A Swedish Sanctuary

The trait most deeply embedded in the temperament of the Swedish people, and which largely explains the nature of our people in general, is the strong love of nature. It is this warm devotion that has created our great naturalists, our inventors, and our explorers; it is also this which has given us our lyrical poets, our glorious folk melodies, and the Swedish song, and which has given the Swedish imagination its peculiar flight. - Gustaf Sundbärg [81]

The National Landscape and Swedishness

The Swedish national landscape has been mentioned throughout this study, but what exactly is it, or more accurately, what are common within the representations of it, and how is it imagined? Thomas Lekan writes, "One of the most powerful rhetorical means for grounding national identities in modern Europe is the assertion that there is an organic link between a people and its landscape".[82] As socio-historical and semiotic constructions, landscapes are often used as a visual trope to capture a nation's sense of itself. [83]

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[81] Sundbärg, Gustaf. *Den Svenska Folklynnet.* 1911.
[82] Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature* (Harvard University Press, 2004), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1q3z2q5.
[83] Helen Andersson and Angela Smith, "Flags and Fields: A Comparative Analysis of National Identity in Butter Packaging in Sweden and the UK," *Social Semiotics* 0, no. 0 (August 18, 2021): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2021.1968276.,

Sweden is a country that has both long winters and short summers. The landscape is characterized by tundra in the most northern parts, swathes of coniferous forests throughout most of Sweden, which then breaks into the more mild southern Sweden, with its vast countryside, dotted with farmhouses. The entire country is covered in lakes, rivers, and streams, and for the most part, is not very mountainous.

In Sweden, there is a particular love for nature. The Swedes' love and respect for nature is a strongly held value that has led to many laws that protect wildlife, parks, and waterways. The country has been termed a "green lung"—a place where you can breathe and enjoy the untouched countryside.[84] Summer, the forests, the lakes, and the agricultural landscape as well as wooden buildings painted in falu-red or mansion yellow became, and still are, important signifiers of the nation.[85] Swedes were environmentalists long before it became fashionable, probably because of their intense love of nature and the desire to preserve the way it was when families lived on the farm.[86] The forest and the land are places that have become places in which Swedes can embark on leisure time but also place in which Swedes can find independence and freedom.

As Henrik Bergren and Lars Träghård write,

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[84] Martin J. Gannon and Rajnandini Pillai, *Understanding Global Cultures: Metaphorical Journeys Through 29 Nations, Clusters of Nations, Continents, and Diversity* (SAGE, 2010)., 116

[85] Helen Andersson, "Nature, Nationalism and Neoliberalism on Food Packaging: The Case of Sweden," *Discourse, Context & Media* 34 (April 1, 2020): 100329, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2019.100329.

[86] Gannon and Pillai, *Understanding Global Cultures*, 116.

> It may be axiomatic in many parts of Europe that Stadtluft macht frei—city air makes you free—but in Sweden, individual freedom is symbolized by the countryside. Only among rustling trees and rushing waterfalls can Swedes find reassurance that they are their true selves." [87]

The conception of the Swedish landscape is rooted in late 19th-century and early 20th-century national romanticism. An artistic tradition that gave a particularly idyllic aesthetic to Swedish pastoral life which was then disseminated in posters, pamphlets, postcards, schoolbooks, and films.[88] Painters like Carl Larsson and Anders Zorn, writers, and poets like Erik Axel Karlfeld and Selma Lagerlöf came to distill what for both Swedes and outsiders seems to be the very essence of "Swedishness".[89] Their representations of the countryside include farmers, meadows, lakes, wildflowers. Carl Larsson and his wife for example, as designers and artists, created, as Anders Clarsen writes, "a permanent dream of Sweden and Swedishness, of a country idyll bathed in Nordic light."[90]

Romanticism in Swedish art originated in the urban bourgeoisie in the late 19th century that attempted to recreate and rescue Sweden's fading folk culture, old customs had fallen out of use,

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[87] Berggren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, "The Swedish Theory of Love", 21.
[88] Anders Åberg, "Seacrow Island : Mediating Arcadian Space in the Folkhem Era and Beyond" (National Library of Sweden, 2010), 125–40, https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-6005.
[89] H. Arnold Barton, "The Silver Age of Swedish National Romanticism, 1905-1920," *Scandinavian Studies* 74, no. 4 (2002): 505–20.
[90] As quoted in Mary Blume and International Herald Tribune, "Bathing Sweden in Nordic Light," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1997, sec. Style, https://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/20/style/IHT-bathing-sweden-in-nordic-light.html.

and Midsummer festivities, among others, were revitalized.[91] Within architecture, many private villas in affluent suburbs would reflect peasant vernaculars, above all from Dalarna.[92] Eventually, those symbols were embraced by Progressive Liberals in their appeasement to the simple, the genuine, and the natural, which eventually led to these symbols becoming classless and transitioning into national symbols.[93] Artists like Carl Larsson, were large supporters of "the good home" ideology, in that a "good home" would be the foundation for a better and more enlightened society.[94] Other artists, like Prince Eugen, dedicated their entire artistic lives to the painting of the landscape, of the beautiful summer environment. That style of the national romantic period never faded away.[95]

Within the realm of children's culture, there were various pieces of literature produced at the time that presented the idyllic version of Sweden in books like Anna Maria Roos's *Sörgården* or Selma Lagerlöf's *Nils holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige (The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson on His Journey Through Sweden).*[96] The latter became a staple within Swedish schools for the next 50 years and was translated into over 50 languages.[97]

The books of Astrid Lindgren depict similar idylls as the national romantics, with her books usually being set within small towns and pastoral environments, and it becomes apparent that Lindgren

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[91] Barton, *The Silver Age of Swedish National Romanticism,* 511.
[92] Barton, *The Silver Age of Swedish National Romanticism,* 507.
[93] Dahl, Gudrun. "Wildflowers, Nationalism and the Swedish Law of Commons.", 282.
[94] Åberg, Anders. Nationalism in Swedish Children's Film and the Case of Astrid Lindgren. 465.
[95] Barton, *The Silver Age of Swedish National Romanticism,* 516.
[96] Barton, *The Silver Age of Swedish National Romanticism,* 511.
[97] Kenneth R. Olwig, "Geese, Elves, and the Duplicitous, 'Diabolical' Landscaped Space and Wild Nature of Reactionary Modernism: Holgersson, Hägerstrand, and Lorenz," in *The Meanings of Landscape* (Routledge, 2019).

uses the patterns of pastoralism within her work.[98] This only gets reflected and exaggerated within the children's television and film adaptations of her work, which more often are embedded within the romantic portrayals of the Swedish countryside that can be traced back to the early 20th-century movement of National Romanticism, including that of *Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn*.

*Left***:** Frukost under stora björken **[**Breakfast under the Birch Tree, Carl Larsson, 1896]**[99]**, *Right:* Scene from Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn

Left: From Pippi Långstrump [Pippi Longstocking, 1969]
Right: Midnatt [Midnight, Anders Zorn, 1891][100]

[98] Åberg, Anders. Nationalism in Swedish Children's Film and the Case of Astrid Lindgren. 2022.
[99] *Source: Carl Larsson* by Klaus H. Carl (Digital Version)
[100] *Source:* https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Midnatt_av_Anders_Zorn_1891.jpg

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Alla vi Barn i Bullerbyn and a Romanticized Landscape

Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn takes place during the summer vacation of its six child protagonists. Summer vacation is a space within a child's mind that connotates freedom and adventure, away from the constraints of the school environment. The summer acts as excellent framing of an idealized childhood, as it already is placed in a place of importance within the brain of a child and of our conceptions of childhood. Though the summer also presents something particular to the Swedes, as a country with harsh, dark, and long winters, summer, and the summer landscape, it becomes an excellent setting in which connotates to both children and adults as a time of "release". The events of *Bullerbyn* then are situated essentially as the children's summer activities. One of the first scenes in *Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn* takes place at that key time right before this "release" as the children sing on the last day of their school year.

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The scene begins with long shots of the children in a natural environment of meadows, forests, and flower patches, juxtaposed with close-ups of various wildflowers. In the first shot is Lisa (the narrator) dressed in white standing within a group of white flowers.

Within the foreground on the right-hand side of the shot is a tree that obstructs the image of Lisa, and acts as a frame within the frame of the shot. Putting the camera behind the tree creates a sense of intrusion within the viewer as we are peering upon something that is both sacred and natural, as Lisa's white dress blends in with the white of the flowers, she becomes a part of the environment. The tree's role as a "frame", constructs the child and the environment around her as similar to a photo, acting as a reminder of the camera's presence, and in turn distancing the viewer from the image. That distance plays into a mythic presentation of a time and place that once was, of a sacred nature that has an inherent connection to the child. White connotes purity and tranquility, with the child and flowers being highlighted in contrast to the image around it, giving into an angelic nature that both nature and the child can present. That intrusion of the camera plays into heightening the importance of the image, showing that it is something of special significance, as the camera is

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entering a place which it should not be, it places importance on the image which it captures. The image plays within Western cultural constructs that relate the child with that of nature, one that has been suggested as especially strong within Scandinavia.[101] Disseminating a larger myth of inseparability between both our birth and our place, the earth and our person, the nation and the people, as a person's youth is closely related to their nature., it is "where they come from".

The scene moves away from the long shots of the children in the environment into the close-up shots of two different types of wildflowers, the yellow, smörblomma (buttercup), and purple, midsommarblomma (midsummer flower).

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[101] Halldén, Gunilla. *Barndomens Skogar: Om barn I natur och barns Natur*. Stockholm: Carlsson, 2011.; Sjögren, Hanna. "Identity Formations in Archived Childhood Memories of Nature in Sweden , 2023," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/09075682221143890.

The wildflowers are an extremely vibrant purple and blue and the close-up shot in juxtaposition to the long shots acts as a way that emphasizes the importance of the natural elements themselves, but the extreme vibrancy of the flowers in both this shot, and the shot featuring Lisa, makes them especially prominent in the shots. As they should be, as wildflowers, as Gudrun Dahl puts it, "stand as both symbols of nature and Swedishness".[102] Wildflowers feature prominently in the largest Swedish holiday, Midsummer, and are also used as logos of political parties in Sweden like the Sweden Democrats. They act essentially as signs of Swedishness and in particular of the Swedish summer, instantly telling the viewer both the place and the time. Beyond that the flowers connote delicacy and desire. They present a certain fragility to the dream.

In the first half of the scene, which takes place outdoors, the cuts have a cross-dissolve effect which softens the images, this editing style paired with saturated color palettes, soft lighting, and cheery non-diegetic music creates a euphoric and dreamlike atmosphere and a depiction of an (un)real natural world, that is also an approachable and inviting space.

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[102] Dahl, Gudrun. "Wildflowers, Nationalism and the Swedish Law of Commons.", 283.

In contrast, the indoor space uses normal cuts between shots of the different characters while also creating the realization that the music is diegetic. The indoor space becomes, in contrast to the dreamlike outdoors, a space of pragmatism, but also one in which there is a sense of community and cohesion, as both the children and the parents sing in unison, with the public employee, the teacher, leading this small village ensemble. Both spaces are appropriate for children, but one is presented as exclusive for children, while the other is inclusive of both adults and children, presenting a community.

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The song that the children are singing, *Den Blomstertid nu Kommer* (*The Flower Time Approaches).*[103] The song contains the following lyrics,

> The Flower Time comes with great joy and beauty:
> Thou art approaching, sweet summer, when grasses and crops grow,
> With benign and lively warmth to all that has been dead
> The rays of sun come closer: all is born again.
> The fair meadows, the noble grain crops of the fields,
> The rich beds of herbs, the green trees of the grove:
> They will remind us of the richness of God's blessing,
> That we may reflect on the Grace that lasts all the year around

This song, as seen in the film, is almost always sung on the final day of the school year. Originally a song speaking of the relationship between God and nature, it is instead more of a general part of the Swedish consciousness, through its usage in schools. As Gudrun Dahl writes,

> For Swedes of my generation, even a person coming from an atheist background like myself, the first four words of *Den blomstertid nu kommer* are enough to evoke strong feelings. They stir strong memories of relief and exhilaration and images of happy children. The song has a religious message, but its main reference is in practice to summer as such, to continuity in Nature and through its poetic and somewhat archaic language, and also to cultural continuity [104]

[103] Literally translates as, "The time of blossoming now comes"
[104] Dahl, Gudrun. "Wildflowers, Nationalism and the Swedish Law of Commons.", 288.

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This song breaks the wall between the diegetic and non-diegetic, acting as a simple way to connect images, to create a certain cohesion, between the different images of the scene. It is a song that is deeply rooted in Swedish childhood experiences, one that can invoke certain memories and images of the nation and childhood. The song connotes a certain cultural continuity, one in which the film finds itself deeply rooted. This allows the scene to cross-generational and ideological boundaries, able to create an affect of love for both the nation, the natural, and the past. It marks a precious time within the Swedish mind, connoting the beginning of summer, the end of the school year, operating as a mechanism that releases both the child into their summer vacation, but also viewers into their memories, that relate strongly to a broader Swedish culture, or Swedishness.

It is fitting then, that the scene acts as the starting point of the film, giving proper notions of just what kind of film this is, one meant to invoke certain emotions encased in nostalgia. As the song ends, the school bell rings, releasing the children from the community into their "natural" habitat,

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as well as releasing the viewer into the world that is *Bullerbyn,* there is a shot of the school as the children run through the frame, with the Swedish flag displayed prominently in the foreground.

The Red Cottage

Outside of the realm of nature, certain symbols of the countryside and of Swedishness have become parts of the popular discourse and vision of Sweden and are part of people's everyday lives. One place in which it can be seen is in the "old rural cottage". Maja Lagerqvist writes specifically on the media representation of the "torp" or old cottages and how they construct a national idyll. She writes, "As the cottages embody Sweden and its rural past, much value is embedded in them as well as in proper caretaking of them. The users become the guardians of this rural heritage and essence of Sweden".[105] These cottages as well as the style which they represent have come to be not only a Swedish emblem but also a Swedish ideal. Originally dwellings of poor tenants that belonged to larger farms that then became disowned and abandoned due to urbanization, they then began to be purchased by the urban population and turned into second homes.[106] Similar to the beginnings of national romanticism, this trend involving a fetishization of the countryside, originates within the urban sphere. The idealism of the countryside in the mid-20th century hints at perhaps the classical dichotomy of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, with a desire to both shed the bonds of modernity and instead "return" back to a form of community and tradition, which can be most firmly rooted in the countryside.

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[105] Maja Lagerqvist, "The Importance of an Old Rural Cottage: Media Representation and the Construction of a National Idyll in Post-War Sweden," *Journal of Rural Studies* 36 (October 2014): 33–41, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.06.006.
[106] Lagerqvist, *The importance of the old rural cottage,* 34.

The "torp" falls within the more general "red cottage" symbol characteristic of the Swedish countryside and of the nation itself. The red house is part of a larger folk tradition extending from Dalarna, where other iconic symbols of Sweden like the Dala horse, originate from. They are houses that are painted in the distinctive "falu red", which is what half of houses in Sweden are painted in, and originates in Dalsland.[107] Since the early 20th century, the picture of the red cottage in a rural setting became both "nationalized" and naturalized, emerging as an expression of "banal nationalism".[108] The red cottage within *Bullerbyn* is iconically represented in its classic row of three houses that make up the village.

Anna Blomster argues that the red cottage is a key symbol in the visual representation of Swedishness, and was transformed by its examples in advertising and politics into a Barthesian

[107] "Culture & Lifestyle," Visit Dalarna, https://www.visitdalarna.se/en/culture.
[108] Anna Jenny Katarina Blomster, "In a Red Little Cottage: Icons of Identity and Nation in Sweden" (UCLA, 2016), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0j25f2jn.

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"myth", where all possible meanings of the red cottage have been condensed to "The Swedish Home".[109] In effect, the red cottages, especially in their close alignment, come to represent a miniature version of a national, *gemeinschaft*. In which the community of *Bullerbyn* can act as a role model, for an idealized community of a larger Sweden, in which all houses look the same, all people live in harmony, where they all sing together, children and adults, inequality, but in its dreamlike depiction of Sweden, it becomes more or less a "postcard" for that ideal.

Film tourism researchers have theorized that audience members often develop an affective positive bond between themselves and filmed locations by forming contextualized symbolic and embedded meanings behind the screen and that viewing media programming can be a trigger for film tourists' motivation.[110] It makes sense then that Astrid Lindgren herself received letters from children who had read the books from different parts of Europe, asking if they could come and live in the town of *Bullerbyn,* asking if the town exists and if so they should move there.[111]

It is essentially a place of tourism, or holiday/vacation. That emphasis, on nature, as well as specifically summer, is also attached to "the child" and "childhood". As Gudrun Dahl writes, "There is in Sweden a linkage between the concepts of Nature, Summer, and Childhood, relating to the idealized summer vacation".[112] The environment and landscape are a place of escape and freedom for the child but are presented as almost a theme park that they explore, a playground that

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[109] Blomster., 40.
[110] Seongseop (Sam) Kim, Sangkyun (Sean) Kim, and James F. Petrick, "The Effect of Film Nostalgia on Involvement, Familiarity, and Behavioral Intentions," *Journal of Travel Research* 58, no. 2 (February 2019): 283–97, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287517746015.
[111] "Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn (1960) - SFdb," accessed May 27, 2023, https://www.svenskfilmdatabas.se/sv/item/?type=film&itemid=4623. (1960)." SFdb.
[112] Dahl, Gudrun. "Wildflowers, Nationalism and the Swedish Law of Commons.", 290.

they can experience, without any consequences or challenges, but also has a strong sense of community. The children are part of a wider Swedish gemeinschaft, one which they can explore and interact with, and is symbolically expressed through moments, like when both child, parent, and teacher sing together, but also

What is created is a dream not only of the nation, but of childhood, in which childhood is a place of freedom, safety, and security, in line with the sentiments of "safety and security" that Astrid Lindgren herself expressed. That same Swedish myth can be seen throughout Swedish film history and is one that is played with and exemplified, even within a time seen as least characterized by a pronounced nationalism or passion for Swedishness, within a film seen as breaking the conventions of Swedish children's films.[113]

Elvis! Elvis! and a Child's Sanctuary

In contrast to *Alla Vi Barn I Bullerbyn,* the journey of Elvis takes place in a contemporary, setting. It takes place in an urban environment, Elvis and his parents live in an apartment, more indicative of the normative childhoods of the time. The apartment is where most of the film's central conflict between Elvis and his mother takes place. It becomes a claustrophobic environment, a place where the modern Swede cannot enjoy his primordial desire to be within nature.

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[113] Åberg, Blågula Barn i Bild, 130.

From *Elvis! Elvis!* A scene in which Elvis' mother yells at his father while he seemingly ignores her. Contrasted to the images of the table, and of breakfast, with that of Carl Larsson and *Bullerbyn*. Here it is not a place of gathering, but rather a pit stop for the father, and a place of conflict. Crowded kitchen tables and cramped kitchenware contrast with the open and free spaces of breakfast within Carl Larsson. It is not a venerable meeting point within a broader oasis, but instead, a place in which anger meets apathy.

It is within other spaces that Elvis can express himself freely, and explore, one of those places being in the countryside. It is there where he can interact with the mythic undertones of nature, in its ability to provide a sense of autonomy and freedom, as a place in which Swedes can find their true selves.

Where that setting first is portrayed within the film when Elvis and his family go "ut på landet" or "out to the country" to their stuga (cabin). Notably in this scene, the misery of the household follows the family, as when they go out to the country, they only experience rain, as they stand inside their own "torp". The wide open spaces and picturesque pastorals that are seen within *Alla vi Barn i Bullerbyn,* are instead obscured by rain.

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Notably, however, when Elvis goes out “på landet” on his own, that is where the audience sees that space become a “sanctuary”.In it, he visits his grandfather, a drunk, but nice man, who listens to Elvis as he can talk and question freely. This is a place in which he can “find” himself, as he explores the area surrounding his grandparents' house, finding it to be a place in which he can express himself. It is there where his grandfather tells him to stick for himself, and in many ways, Elvis’ grandparents’ house becomes an outlet for him, a place for him to escape the claustrophobic apartment with his overbearing mother.

The home is for Elvis something presented as a place of discontent, while the outside world, including that of the Swedish landscape and nature is presented as a place of freedom. Talking quite frankly to his grandfather about his difficulties with his parents, in contrast to his home life where he talks infrequently, the only times being with his mother (in primary arguments). Sanfrid

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Neander-Nilsson a Swedish archeologist and writer, especially prominent in the early decades of the *folkhem,* would insist that the Swedish people had a natural closeness to the forest, and when forced to live in cities were tormented with feelings of despondency, and would write, "It is the very relationship to blood and nature, the very sense of blood ties and origins, all that great complex accompanying people's purely physical, natural mode of reproduction which has been subjected to a crisis on a mass scale in modern, industrialized Sweden." [114] He declared Swedes as an unhappy people longing to return to nature, to the protection and security of family bonds.[115]

Upon arrival at his Grandfather's house Elvis and his Grandfather swim. Elvis' grandfather, a mentor guiding him into new territories and new places. He is the first person to talk to Elvis freely, and allows Elvis to question the world around him, and to make his own decisions. Similar in nature to our conceptions of baptism, it is from this point forth that Elvis becomes a new person, and starts to explore self-expression.

The natural landscape, as Neander-Nilsson declared, has always been presented as a place of sanctuary, of having a natural bond with the Swedes and their people. Although in relation to the child, it is deeply rooted within Nordic societies that nature is a "good" place for children.[116] This

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[114] Sanfrid Neander-Nilsson, as quoted in *The Swedish Theory of Love,* 21.
[115] Bergren and Trädghhård, *The Swedish Theory of Love,* 21.
[116] Harju, A., Balldin, J., Ekman Ladru, D., & Gustafson, K. (2021). Children's education in 'good' nature: Perceptions of activities in nature spaces in mobile preschools. *Global Studies of Childhood, 11*(3), 242–251. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610619900519

finds itself rooted in Western European myths surrounding "nature in the child". Our modern conceptions of the child, associate the innocence of the child with something pure and basic to human nature before socialization.[117] According to Taylor, the essential and idealized conceptualization of (singular) nature, associated with authentic, pure, and coherent entities, is often correlated with the idea of the pure, vulnerable, and innocent child.[118] Nature, or perhaps more accurately, the concept of nature, is associated with the pure, the natural, and the innocent. Human nature, our natural world, are things perceived as the base form of an object's character, and in many ways are prescribed within the child as well. This image of nature then exists within Swedish education, in which there exists a romantic view of nature, as a place in which childhood can be "lived out".[119]

In this sense, the film's presentation of nature can be read in this way, in which nature itself is a place in which childhood can essentially be "lived out". Like *Bullerbyn* the moments of this film within the national landscape do coincide with the moments of Elvis having autonomy, curiosity, and the ability to learn on his terms. In many ways, it is the seminal moment in the film, where Elvis "fights back" against his mother, and forms to be more of an individual. The film however presents many other untraditional spaces of "play" and of freedom, like old train yards, or other places in which Elvis continues to express and discover his own desires, such as the house of his friend. These spaces in a sense also become sanctuaries outside of the domestic household, one in which the myth of the nuclear family is failing, and we instead see unconventional spaces of play.

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[117] *The Children's Culture Reader* (NYU Press, 1998), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfn8r.
[118] Kitty Wiking et al., "Family Identity and Deviations from the Master Narrative in Sweden," *Identity. An International Journal of Theory and Research* 23, no. 2 (2023): 137–54.
[119] Harju, A., Balldin, J., Ekman Ladru, D., & Gustafson, *Children's education in 'good' nature: Perceptions of activities in nature spaces in mobile preschools*, 248.

Thus while nature still connotes mythic tones of safety, security, and freedom, it is not the only place that holds that mythic distinction. It is instead any place outside of Elvis' apartment and home which becomes a place of refuge, a place of sanctuary, thus connoting the home as a place of imprisonment, one that needs to be escaped, but it is not that simple, as seen within the beginning of the text, even as Elvis goes to a place of sanctuary, the "torp" in the countryside, there is still rain and misery that keep him inside with his family, and then magically the weather clears up when he goes to meet his grandfather. This connotes that within his nuclear family, his autonomy and freedom are impeded, while outside of this nuclear family structure, is where he can experience the world as an individual.

His own identity and individuality, similar to that of the children at school, becomes released as he leaves the home and the family, into his own spaces of sanctuary, in particular a space which Swedes hold so dear in mind, nature.

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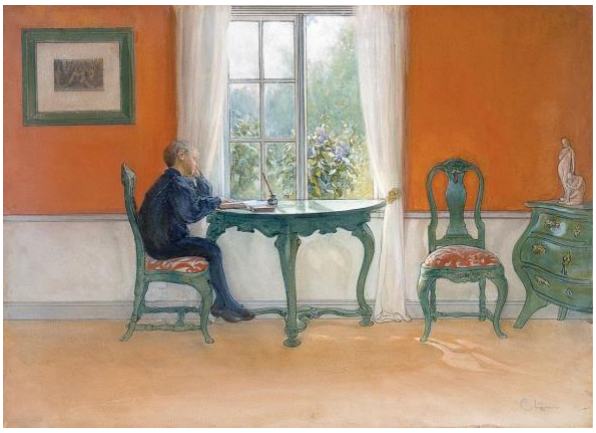
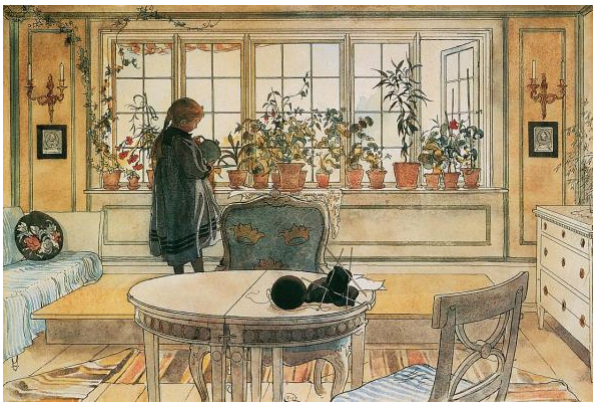
Chapter Four: Individualism and Consequences





Left from Top to Bottom: Nödvändig läsning **[**Required Reading] 1900, Skamvrån [In the Corner] 1895
Right from Top to Bottom: Lisbeth metar [Lisbeth Angling] 1898, Blömsterfönstret [Flowers on the Windowsill] 1894
All were painted by Carl Larsson. Source: *Carl Larsson* by Klaus H. Carl (Digital Version)

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Swedish Individualism in the Cultural and Political

On the outside, Sweden may be seen by some as a country that is not individualistic. As an American, there is always talk on how the country promotes freedom and democracy, that one can do whatever they please, free from the constraints of socialism, instead able to fully enjoy the world as you like. Sweden, on the other hand, is a country of homogenous blondes, willing to blindly follow the crowd. This is quite the contrary. The collective, while important, is opposed by the strong individualism that runs deep within the Swedish people. This manifests in both cultural and political ways.

Politically this manifests itself in Henrik Bergren and Lars Träghård term *statist individualism.* Rooted in the development of the welfare state, statist individualism combines high levels of social trust and faith in collective institutions with an affirmation of individual autonomy.[120] They write

> The Swedish or Scandinavian model is based on the individual standing in direct relation to the state, both in terms of obligations and rights. A safety net is there, regardless of the individual's relation to his family, his employer, or more or less benevolent charities. The immediate dependence on family, relatives, neighbors, employers, and civil society has been minimized[121]

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[120] Bergren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, *The Swedish Theory of Love*, 16.
[121] As quoted in Anders Marklund, "No Country for Old Men: Utopian Stories of Welfare Society's Shortcomings in A Man Called Ove and The 100-Year-Old Man," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 10, no. 2 (April 2, 2018): 1438732, https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2018.1438732., 50.

In this version of individualism, and of political "Swedishness", there is a stress on the individual's ability to be empowered, because of the security which the state provides, that when entities like the family fail you, the state will be there. Fundamental to the ideology behind the development of the welfare state and in turn modern Sweden, was that it had a particular responsibility to the young, children who had previously been seen as property of their parents, they were seen as both a resource and individuals in their own right who needed special protection and care from their potentially negligent parents.[122]

Culturally, there exist terms like "ensamhet" (loneliness/solitude) which suggests inner peace or eternal strength.[123] Ester Barinaga writes,

> It is a virtue already taught in the early years of life. In the well-known Astrid Lindgren's children's books of Pippi Långstrump, it is frequent to hear her saying "Jag kan själv" or "Jag klarar mig själv" (I can do it by myself). Children are early encouraged to become independent, since, for the Swedish mentality, independence is equal to maturity.[124]

Martin J. Gannon notes that individualism motivates an urge for self-development within Swedes and that they tend to put individual interests over that of the collective.[125] He also writes that Swedish individualism,

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[122] Bergren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, *The Swedish Theory of Love*, 234.
[123] Ester Barinaga, "Swedishness through Lagom Can Words Tell Us Anything about a Culture?," n.d.
[124] Barinaga, "Swedishness through Lagom", 5.
[125] Gannon and Pillai, *Understanding Global Cultures*, 117.

is further supported by an insistence on individual rights, which seems to extend even to trivial

> levels. When it rains, pedestrians who are splashed by a passing car have recourse to the rules. They take the license number, go to the police station, and file a complaint, indicating that their clothes were damaged. If the court finds that the driver did not take appropriate precautions, he or she is ordered to pay damages (in this case to have the clothes cleaned).[126]

Åke Daun, a prominent Swedish ethnologist, in his book, *The Swedish Mentality,* noted that within the Swedish people, there is a particular stress on social autonomy, not being dependent on others, whether it be neighbors, relatives, employers, or others, while also stressing conformity and sameness, destressing the differences between themselves.[127] He also claims that the importance that Swedes place on autonomy is particularly apparent in child-rearing and pedagogy. He notes that Swedish parents expect self-sufficiency and see the defiance of children as positive. He claims in places like Southern Europe it is both natural and desirable for the individual to be dependent on the small surrounding group, while in Swedish culture there is an underlying idea that the child will gradually take his or her place within the collective.[128]

Interestingly enough, during the 1960s and 1970s, children's rights in Sweden were transformed from emphasizing children's rights as within a separate sphere to emphasizing children as

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[126] Gannon and Pillai., *Understanding Global Cultures*, 117.
[127] Åke Daun and Jan Teeland, *Swedish Mentality* (Penn State University Press, 1989), https://doi.org/10.5325/j.ctv14gpgdt., 40.
[128] Åke Daun, Swedish Mentality, 57.

possessing the same fundamental individual rights as adults.[129] A large expansion of state-subsidized childcare and a ban on corporal punishment only further reveals the time's emphasis on the protection of children.[130]

Digressions aside, how does *Elvis Elvis!* present individualism and autonomy in the child and in particular these Swedish versions of it.

Hair, the Child, and the School

A key symbol within the film, which is representative of Elvis' autonomy, is his hair. Constantly throughout the film, he is told it "looks like a brush", with his mother insisting on cutting it. Eventually, she does, after Elvis screams and shouts, she sits him down and cuts his hair. Within the very next scene Elvis, in the mirror, watches himself as he clips his hair off.

[129] Sandin, "Recognizing Children's Rights."
[130] Bengt Sandin, "Recognizing Children's Rights: From Child Protection to Children's Human Rights—The 1979 Swedish Ban on Corporal Punishment in Perspective," in *The Politics of Children's Rights and Representation*, ed. Bengt Sandin et al., Studies in Childhood and Youth (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 31–57, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04480-9_2.

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Throughout the rest of the film, the audience consistently sees *Elvis* with a hat on, as his mother, enraged by the haircut tries to drag him to a psychologist for his behavior, berating him, asking why he cannot be an "ordinary" boy.

The school on the other hand is a place first presented towards the beginning of the film, as Elvis and his mother go there for his first day of school. While there the teacher takes attendance, only for Elvis to urinate in his pants in the entire class. His mother, embarrassed and enraged, rushes over to Elvis, asking him what he did, apologizing to the teacher, as she wipes the floor frantically, rushing Elvis out of the room. It is Elvis' teacher who asks him "if he is okay", clambering over the desks as she tries to catch up to his mother, both trying to grab and care for Elvis. Within this scene she of course contrasts the mother, someone who only ignores Elvis, misunderstanding him, and being embarrassed by him. The teacher by contrast shows Elvis, love, care, and affection.

Elvis' hair becomes a symbol of a power struggle (reminiscent of biblical thoughts surrounding hair, ie: Samson, among others), as his mother beckons to cut it. Her cutting the hair enacts her power over him, while when the film sees Elvis cut his hair it becomes an act of independence, his defiance, a positive image within the greater Swedish context, (reminiscent of characters like Pippi Longstocking). It is here where Elvis' autonomy becomes embodied. His hair is an act of self, an act of independence, one that he frequently tries to hide.

That brings us to the seminal moment of the film, in which Elvis transitions from struggling to be fully independent, ashamed of his creation, his hair, a symbol of his power of himself, this scene

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is when he returns to school, after not being back since the incident within the first third of the film.

Before this scene, the audience sees him and his friend, Anna-Rosa, attempting to cover his hair in a wig, only to give up.

Where then his friend Anna Rosa asks him if he will go to school. Following this scene, the audience sees Elvis, timid and afraid, approach his teacher in the school hallway. She runs inside the classroom telling everyone Elvis is back and excitedly comes out to greet Elvis. She grabs and embraces Elvis glad that he has returned, and within the scene is on eye level with Elvis, connotes that she is understanding, or at least attempting to, bringing herself on his level, seeing him eye to eye. She asks him to take his hat off and come inside, which he does without question, seemingly without thinking, only to reveal the wig on his head. He backs up timid and afraid of what she will

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do or say, as he claims it looks “like a dunce cap”. She then embraces Elvis, kissing him, as she takes him back inside the classroom. Here we see Elvis happy and smiling, as he is surrounded by the other children, back in a place which we see as if he should be in school.

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Within this scene Elvis's own both independence and autonomy become fully realized, forever hidden under wigs and hats, finally, his hair is revealed. At this moment, it is the teacher who embraces and accepts him. Her smiling face and caressing hands connotate a certain care and affection within her, that places her in the place of a mother. It is here, in her home, the school, in which Elvis becomes a boy who has fully taken hold of his independence and autonomy. The teacher, a worker of the state, and the school, a public institution, serve, in a sense, as representatives of the caring and loving state. It is here where Elvis embodies a "statist individual", as he becomes empowered in and accepted by the space of the state, his teacher replacing his mother, and his school replacing his home.

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His journey to realize his independence takes him through different spaces, like the landscape, but it is the space of the state which acts as his "safety net" when his family failed him. He then realizes his own self, while becoming part of the collective, the school, fully integrating and in turn becoming a fully autonomous individual. It is after this point that Elvis goes home, defiant and controlling of his mother, fully standing up for himself and taking control of his own life. It is through his action as a statist individual, that he becomes a Swedish individual, one in which as part of a collective, he can fully be himself. Further playing upon the myth of "the people's home" as a place in which the public institution replaces the normative home.

Within the Swedish Film Institute's film guide on *Elvis Elvis!*, they propose the questions,

> "It's not always easy to make decisions about yourself when you're a child. Elvis' mom wants to decide everything, even when Elvis gets his hair cut and what kind of hairstyle he should have. Why doesn't he want a haircut? Grandma says that God decides everything, even over mom. But Grandpa tells Elvis that you should decide for yourself. Do you think, like Grandpa, that this is important? Which things do you get to help decide, for example at home? Which things would you like to have more control over?"[131]

Only further to solidify the importance of his hair, and its symbol as a pedagogical tool, to teach the child about themselves as an individual, showing them how they can decide for themselves. Displaying an example of what a democratic citizen of the nation could and should be and the struggles that may take them there.

[131] See Appendix

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Consequences of Individualism and the Housewife

Certain conventions have been created during the era of the *folkhem,* one of the most important being the nuclear family. The nuclear family in the Swedish context refers to the structure of two married adults with biological children. Single-parent households, or especially large families are considered unusual within the narrative of the nuclear family.[132] It became an ideal in the early 20th century among the bourgeoisie and the middle class, but also the working class, where it was used as the model of a family by the overwhelming majority.[133] Marriage rates within Sweden peaked in the 1950s and early 1960s and are perhaps seen as the time most defined by the conventional nuclear family.[134] Although, in the mid-1960s marriage rates started to decline and the number of divorces started to increase.[135]

Elvis! Elvis! depicts what would be considered a nuclear family, but within it, there are obvious struggles between the overbearing mother, the absent father, and the invisible child. An interesting portrayal of the struggles within the nuclear family structure comes in the first scene of the film.

The film begins with an establishing shot of a Swedish town, a distinctively more urban space than the popular Lindgren adaptations. There is then a cut to a glass breaking upon the ground as the music abruptly stops. The camera then cuts to Elvis, who stands on top of the counter as his mother rushes in, worrying over the broken crystal. Elvis begins to say his father can fix it or he can buy a new one, to which his mother only dismisses him complaining about the situation. He then

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[132] Wiking et al., "Family Identity and Deviations from the Master Narrative in Sweden."
[133] Bergren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, *The Swedish Theory of Love*, 243-244.
[134] Popenoe, "Beyond the Nuclear Family."
[135] Norberg-Schönfeldt, "The Phase-Out of the Nuclear Family?"

fetches his piggy bank and dumps the coins upon the table, presumably to pay for the crystal glass, to which his mother responds quite erratically. She grabs Elvis and locks him in his room.

He then begins to bang upon the door, screaming "jag hatar dig!" (I hate you)[136], as the camera cuts back to his mother. There is a shot of his mother in the kitchen through the doorway. She begins to light and smoke a cigarette but as Elvis continues to scream, she rushes to the door. She then asks him if he will apologize to his mother, with no response. The camera cuts to Elvis and follows him as he walks over to the window beginning to bang his head against it. The camera then cuts to a full-body shot of his mother, smoking a cigarette, sitting distressed in her living room. Elvis then climbs outside of his room and stands on the window sill of his second-story room as he looks down at a man. The camera cuts back and forth between the man and Elvis as the audience waits for him to jump.

This scene reflects of course their relationship during the rest of the film. The conflict between mother and child, while his father disengages in their fights, always defaulting to "listen to your mother" when confronted with the issues at hand.

At the time of release, many saw Elvis' mother, among other characters, as crude and simplistic, a caricature of a mother's role.[137] Malena Janson argues, however, that it is the subjective child's perspective that colors the portrayal of the mother, that makes her so occasionally unreasonable, blindly ignorant of her son's actions and needs.[138] In interviews with children between the ages of

[136] The verb "hatar" (to hate) has a much stronger connotation within Swedish compared to English, and carries much more effective weight, being used more sparingly.
[137] Janson, Bio för barnens bästa?, 114.
[138] Janson, Bio för barnens bästa?, 115.

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8 and 16 by Dagens Nyheter at the time of release, the newspaper asked the children what they thought of the portrayal of the mother. The overall consensus was that she was "typical", with some children calling her "selfish" or "exaggerated".[139] The image of the mother while perhaps exaggerated may only be reflecting the sense that a child has when viewing authority figures, something quite overwhelming. These scenes which portray the struggle between mother and child, are in many ways somewhat trivial. The struggle over Elvis' haircut, for an adult may be something that is much more trivial, but in a child's eyes is much larger. The caricature of the mother in many ways reflects the eyes of a child.

When taking that lens off, the position of the mother in the film becomes quite tragic. Although portrayed as immature and unreasonable, the film also portrays the life of the mother, and by proxy, the life of the housewife, as defeated. Although the home and the family are a place of restriction for Elvis, as he escapes to various sanctuaries, the home and the family are a place in which the mother clearly feels trapped and is left behind.

Very few times does she leave the house in the film, and every time she does it is only to do something for her family or child. Such as when she buys Elvis a gift or takes him to school. As this film becomes a story of a boy's empowerment, one in which he escapes the home, and finds himself, it dually becomes a film in which a woman becomes disempowered, loses touch with her son, and struggles in feeling that she conforms with the society around her, constantly worried about what others think of her and her son.

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[139] *Måste Man bli Snäll för att bli älskad?,* Dagens Nyheter, March 19, 1977.

The *folkhem* was originally a project that was created to liberate men from class restrictions. It then came to represent a "family" and portrayed the nation as one large family. A distrust of conventional familial institutions developed, seeing the traditional family as an undemocratic structure, filled with nepotism and corruption. The state set out to establish itself as the primary caretaker of children, seeing itself as the protector of children from negligent parents. Liberating children would become a central theme in Swedish social democracy.[140]

The era of the housewife in Sweden, as determined by Rodney and Therese Edvinsson, is between 1930 and 1970.[141] The housewife of the nuclear family had become the reality for many women during this era. That role directly came into conflict with that of the working woman, a modern construct, in which the woman was also seen to have the right and ability to work and become economically independent. The normative nuclear family was a barrier for women within a modern democracy. This desire for the independence of women immediately called for a larger state apparatus to care for children.[142] By the 1960s and 1970s demands for women's autonomy and rights came to a head in not only Sweden but throughout much of the Western world. The housewife came to represent a "dying race" in Sweden, while the care of children outside the home was celebrated.[143]

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[140] Bergren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, *The Swedish Theory of Love*, 241.
[141] Rodney Edvinsson and Therese Edvinsson, "Explaining the Swedish 'Housewife Era' of 1930–1970: Joint Utility Maximisation or Renewed Patriarchy?," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 65 (May 4, 2017): 1930–1970, https://doi.org/10.1080/03585522.2017.1323671.
[142] Bergren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, *The Swedish Theory of Love*, 250.
[143] E Kay Tisdall, "Children, Family and the State," *Contemporary Political Theory - CONTEMP POLIT THEORY* 3 (August 1, 2004): 231–33, https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300128.

A large expansion of state-subsidized childcare, encouragement for women to seek work, and expansion of parental leave, among others, were ways in which the Swedish public gained greater control over their lives.[144] It decreased the power of men, while also freeing them from the responsibility of being the breadwinner, it gave women the ability to work, while also protecting the child.

Bergren and Trägårdh in their chapter "Just a housewife", write that for some the *folkhem's* goal of realizing individual autonomy and its radical family policies of an expansion of preschools, separate taxation between men and women, among others, came at the expense of the family as a community. During the time of transition of the 1960s and 1970s, many women felt both helpless and frustrated in their transition to a new way of living, with their old habits. Within a decade (the 1960s) the housewife ideal of the past had been replaced by the social experiment concerned with the individual.[145]

In this scene, as Elvis is locked in his room, he walks over to his window beginning to bang his head against it. The camera cuts to his mother sitting in the living room, sprawled on the armchair, running her fingers through her hair, smoking a cigarette.

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[144] Tisdall, Children, Family, and the State in Sweden, 232; Naumann, "Child Care and Feminism in West Germany and Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s."
[145] Bergren, Trägårdh, and Donovan, *The Swedish Theory of Love*, 307-308.

Left: Picture of housewife in 1970.[146] *Right:* Advertisement for floor cleaner from the early 1960s.[147]

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[146] Source: https://popularhistoria.se/sveriges-historia/1900-tal/hemmafruns-sista-suck
[147] Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lvh-8pwTJVY&t=266s

Literally, the image is just a woman sitting on a chair, but her slumping posture, and the fingers running through her hair, connote that she is in distress. Beyond that, she represents a dying image, that of the housewife. A previous reality for many women, that became even idyllic for many, but came into conflict with the emancipatory desires. In the foreground of the shot is the vacuum, signifying the household duties. While her foot under the carpet, as well as the vacuum in a disheveled state, creates a sense of the scene as unfinished. It shows a woman caught between her traditional roles, with a desire to see and experience the world outside her own.

Frequently within the film Elvis' mother is shown encapsulated by the star and celebrity of Elvis, so much so that she even names her son after him. She frequently shows Elvis music, to which he has almost no reaction. It is here where her desires, wishes, and wants to become prescribed upon Elvis, as her desires overshadow that of her son. Often, we find her trying to be approved and affirmed by others, trying to fit in within the world, and live a normal life, but constantly insecure, about her son, and in turn herself.

As the child's lullaby passes over this image it juxtaposes the conflict of the mother vs the child. Presenting a lost ideal in which the housewife is both overwhelmed and distressed, in the midst of her traditional environment and duties. The son meanwhile, locked in the room, chooses to take hold of his own life, escaping out the window, while the mother remains inside the home. In front of her, the vacuum, a machine crude and robust, whose only purpose is that of a pragmatic kind. There is nothing fantastical, nothing about it which will whisk her away into another world, it only connotates her responsibility. In a world of modernity, one in which, the woman is supposed to be

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freed, it is the vacuum, a modern invention, which comes to symbolize an obstacle to her autonomy. The vacuum obstructs her autonomy, emblematic of the responsibilities and everyday tediums which she must engage in, as she becomes a caricature of the advertisements and constructs which have portrayed her as being so happy within this position.

As Elvis' mother becomes demonized within the film, she is presented as the enemy of a child's autonomy, but she is the victim of a larger contradiction, the traditional vs the modern. In a state that is meant to grant autonomy to its people, it is the woman who is last in line, the mother who becomes both the enemy and burdened between her traditional and modern roles. In the importance of the individual, of liberating the child and the worker, it is in this case the mother that gets left behind.

Consequences of Swedishness

In the first chapter of this thesis two separate notions of Swedishness were presented through a discussion of the historical development of modern Sweden, into the project of the welfare state, basically, what makes Sweden what it is today. It is here where the individualism that is so prominent in Sweden was politically and socially enabled, but it is also the place in which the nation became prominent, a "people's home", a place of comfort, a place of protection. In this way, the collective society becomes a space for the individual, in that it is one in which he is protected and granted autonomy through the framework of the societal safety net that the welfare state provides. Throughout both these films there is a common thread, the sanctuary of the space outside of the home, outside of the family. Throughout, *Alla vi barn i Bullerbyn*, the familial home is a space often overlooked, a pit stop as the children go upon their adventures. The times in which

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the family is shown, such as singing at school, they are not shown within the context of a familial backbone to the child's development, but rather part of a harmonious collective, of the broader society. While Elvis in his attempts to realize his own self, finds his own sanctuaries in the outside world which only comes into conflict with the family. The mother becomes a caricature a selfish and petty woman, insecure and domineering. However, at the end of the film, Elvis tells his father to buy a ring for his mother and on Christmas day upon receiving the gift his mother is elated as they embrace. As they hug in the mirror, a motif used often in the film as Elvis peers upon himself in moments of self-reflection and, in this moment his back is towards the mirror, as he hugs his mother, in not a cramped and crowded house, but one of warmth.[148]

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[148] Barinaga, "Swedishness through Lagom", 5.

Going back to Malena Janson's concept of "child's realism" it is shown that perhaps the mother is not all she seems, that she is a caricature in the blending of Elvis' imaginary, but as he comes to realize his own independence, it is then when he can appreciate his own mother. As Baringa noted, "Children are early encouraged to become independent, since, for the Swedish mentality, independence is equal to maturity".

That distinctive blend between the real and imaginary, between the exaggerated and the grounded is what makes children's film so distinctive and important, in that our perceptions of our childhoods, and by proxy children, is that of importance, a seminal time in our lives. Childhood and children are imagined as a space oof innocence, spaces in which the fantasy is exaggerated, a space which we think is pivotal in the formations of our own perceptions of the world. Those cultural norms and values which we associate with our own birth become of a certain importance for us to pass down, to what we believe is a fragile and amorphous being, waiting to be shaped.

It is here that the cultural dissemination through children's literature is so important in the conceptions of what it is to be a part of a society. While in Sweden, the attitude on childhood, may be one of "give the child autonomy", but that is still very much so an ideology, one which we wish to form an ideal child.

This reflects that paradoxical nature of Swedishness. A place which lies between tradition and modernity, between the individual and the collective, and between the state and the family. In both films, they portray these certain binaries, with *Bullerbyn* showing the idyll, and *Elvis* showing the real. Although through the films it becomes apparent that these are both ideals, ones which have

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certain consequences in disseminating their ideas, whether it be creating a romantic image of the nation, or becoming part of forming what is seen as the proper ideals for a national citizen, two ideas which are in many ways one in the same.

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Conclusion

Throughout these films, we see a collection of binaries. Traditional vs modern, urban vs rural, the individual vs the collective, etc. However, the structure of these binaries does not do the relationship between the concepts justice. The "vs" connotes that there is some sort of equality between the two, but in reality, we see these binaries quite differently. One will always be seen as "better", or "worse" to us, as our bias perceives them as such.

Children's films are a medium that may be seen as abundantly clear in their goals and their messages, but, just like any other piece of culture, we see separate notions bleed through.

Both these films have their use today. *Bullerbyn* as a franchise is used in both political posters and conservative rhetoric as a representative of a "better Sweden", a "past Sweden". While *Elvis Elvis!* is used as a pedagogical tool to teach children the norms and values of an ideal democratic Swedish citizen. Both films act as heuristic components of a complex and ultimately undefinable cultural makeup, Swedishness.

While it is tempting to see our different ideologies, cultures, and beliefs as wholly separated, it is important to remember that may not be as distant as they seem.

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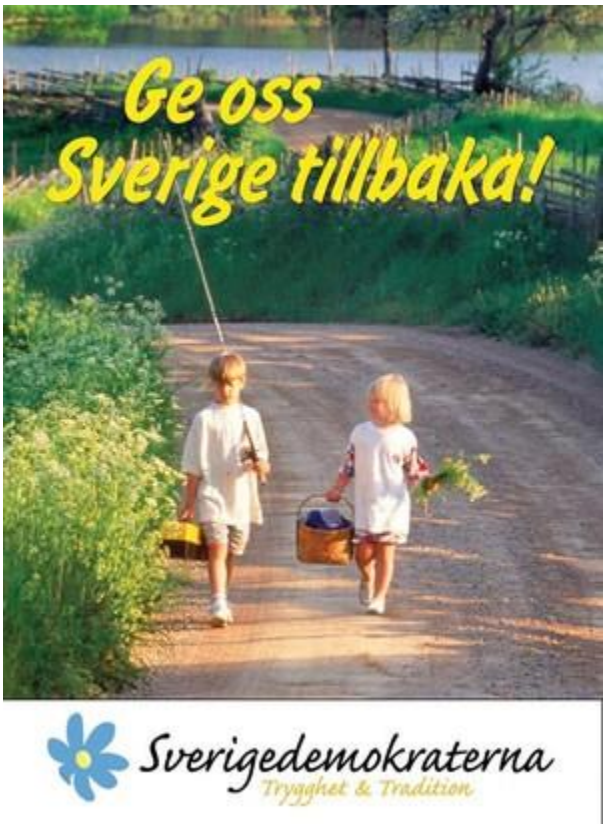
Appendix

Appendix I



Translates to: “Give us Sweden back!” “Sweden Democrats. Safety and Tradition.” Iconographically the poster emulates the compositional elements of the 1986 *Bullerbyn* film, and provides an example of the right-wing Sweden Democrats' use of nostalgic aesthetics and also the object of children, to appeal to Swedes who believe there is a need to recapture what was. This comparison was used by Anders Åberg in his essay, “Remaking the National Past: The Uses of Nostalgia in the Astrid Lindgren Films of the 1980s and 1990s.”

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Translates to: “It is sometimes claimed that gang rape is something new. I, who read a lot of old newspapers, am puzzled by this myth. Yes, there is reason to be concerned about violence and exclusion today, but no, Sweden was not an idyllic "Noisy Village" (Bullerbyn) in the past. The conservative scaremongering right is wrong as usual!” From a man who claims himself to be a political influencer. *Bullerbyn* becomes shorthand by the right wing, and Sweden more generally, to describe either ironically or unironically a lost “golden age”.

Source: https://twitter.com/Jerlerup/status/1664999424890744833

https://bulletin.nu/skogkar-alla-vi-socialdemokrater-i-bullerbyn: An article by the Conservative, *Bulletin*, news website. The title translates as “All of us social democrats in Bullerbyn”. Comments on Magdalena Andersson’s attempts to “keep Sweden Swedish” in her election campaign for Prime Minister.

Translates to: “The Flinstones vs farmhand Alfred in Lönneberga? You can understand why Sweden is called the Noise Village.” Written by liberal-conservative, who campaigned for EU parliament. Here he uses *Bullerbyn* ironically, coupled with references to other children’s media, to comment on an article that reports various families fighting after a student celebration. Source: https://twitter.com/StaffanG_son/status/1667299381580627968

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Appendix II

Elvis Elvis!

En filmhandledning från Svenska Filminstitutet

Bild: Filminstitutets bildarkiv

Rek för åk 1 - 3
Sjuåriga Elvis känner att de flesta vuxna vill att han ska vara någon annan. Mamma vill att han ska vara som hennes idol, sångaren Elvis Presley. Pappa vill att han ska spela fotboll. Farmor vill att han ska vara en ersättare för pappas bror Johan som dog som liten. Tur att farfar finns, och klasskamraten Anna-Rosa – de tycker att Elvis ska vara precis som han är.

Svenska Filminstitutet

EN FILMHANDLEDNING UTGIVEN AV FILMINSTITUTET

Om filmhandledningen
Film är ett svåröverträffat pedagogiskt verktyg. Våra filmhandledningar är till för att lotsa dig som lärare i användandet av detta verktyg. Filmhandledningens åldersrekommendation bör ses just som en rekommendation. Du som lärare känner dina elever bäst! Anpassa ditt användande av filmhandledningen efter tid och behov. Det finns många ingångar att välja bland.

Filmen och läroplanen
Den här filmen knyter an till kunskapsinhämtning om olika värdegrundsfrågor och normer, exempelvis alla individers värde och barns rättigheter, samt till kunskap i historia och samhällsvetenskap, då den skildrar livet för barn för flera decennier sedan. Därmed inbegriper den även en utgångspunkt för att öka elevernas kunskap i att "granska olika valmöjligheter och ta ställning till frågor som rör den egna framtiden". Övningarna nedan är utformade för att tillvarata läroplanens mål att elever ska "använda och ta del av många olika uttrycksformer såsom språk, bild, musik, drama och dans", och syftar till att bidra till att eleverna övar sig i att "omsätta idéer i handling på ett kreativt sätt".

Handling
Elvis är ensambarn och ska snart börja skolan. Han lever ett fritt och eget liv, eftersom mamma bara bråkar hemma och pappa mest glider undan. De tycks inte vara nöjda med Elvis alls, och han är inte så nöjd med dem heller – de förstår honom inte alls. Hemma blir det bara bråk hela tiden. Istället har Elvis andra vuxna vänner – mannen som lastar gods på järnvägsstationen och farfar till exempel. Så ofta Elvis kan åker han ut till farmor och farfar på landet. Det gillar inte mamma, eftersom farmor helst vill låtsas som att Elvis är Johan, sonen hon förlorade när han bara var sju år, och eftersom farfar är frikostig med spriten. Men farfar är Elvis bästa vän och den enda som tycker om honom precis som han är, upplever Elvis, och som försvarar honom när mamma bara kritiserar.

Elvis leker sina egna magiska ensamlekar i stan. Han gräver upp blommor där de står för tätt och flyttar dem till platser där de bättre behövs. Han går till järnvägsstationen och umgås med godslastaren där, som även han dricker lite för mycket men som alltid välkomnar Elvis och behandlar honom som en jämbördig kamrat. När det blir dags att börja skolan är Elvis inte alls säker på att han vill vara där. Men han får en ny vän i klasskamraten Anna-Rosa, och i sällskap med henne utforskar Elvis nya marker, både i skolan och ute i staden där alla ställen kan bli spännande lekplatser.

Barn och vuxna – två olika världar?
Barn och vuxna lever i samma värld, och ingår tillsammans i en eller flera familjer, men samtidigt finns det saker som begränsar barns verklighet gentemot de vuxnas (och tvärtom). Därför kan också barn och vuxna se olika på saker och ting, och en händelse genererar kanske inte samma upplevelse för en vuxen som för ett barn. Barns och vuxnas vägar kan korsas såväl som skilja sig åt, både på familjearenan och på andra områden. Barn har ännu inte varit vuxna och kan därför inte helt införliva ett vuxenperspektiv på olika företeelser, men många vuxna har också glömt hur det var att vara barn – och var dessutom barn i en helt annan tid som därmed innebär en helt annan barndom. Att mötas över dessa gränser och förstå varandras världar är inte alltid friktionsfritt.

• Prata i helklass om familjebegreppet. Hur kan en familj se ut? Räknas husdjur till familjen? Är vuxna utan barn en familj? Vem bestämmer vad som får räknas som en familj? Är mor- och farföräldrar en del av familjen? Vad är det för skillnad på släkt och familj? Har man två familjer om man har skilda föräldrar? Vilka kan vara föräldrar? Rita ditt eget släkt- eller familjeträd och berätta för dina klasskompisar!

• Prata om hur det är i Elvis familj, och hur det är i Anna-Rosas familj. Vilka skillnader finns det? Är det något som är likt? Vad tror ni att Elvis mamma menar när hon säger att "de är dåligt folk"? Hur känner Anna-Rosa för att hon inte får ha så mycket kontakt som hon vill med sin pappa? Hur tror ni det känns att inte veta vem som är ens mamma eller pappa? (om det finns adopterade barn i klassen kan du som lärare vara extra finkänslig med hur denna fråga tas upp).

• Prata lite om hur Elvis mamma och pappa är. Är de bra föräldrar? Varför/varför inte? Skriv på en hemlig lapp tre saker som du tycker att en bra förälder ska ha. Ni kan lämna in lapparna anonymt till läraren, gör sen en lista på alla egenskaper som ni fått ihop och gör en omröstning i klassen så att ni får fram en topp tre-lista.

• Elvis mamma är ofta arg och stressad. När kan era föräldrar bli arga och stressade? Vad gör de då? Berätta bara om du känner att du vill!

• En gång är Elvis mamma ledsen och gråter. Vad gör Elvis då? Hur känns det när vuxna är ledsna? Kan man trösta vuxna på samma sätt som barn? Varför/varför inte? Tror ni att barn är ledsna oftare än vuxna, eller tvärtom?

• Hur är Elvis farfar? Varför tycker Elvis så mycket om honom? Har ni själva någon mor- eller farförälder som ni tycker mycket om? Vad brukar ni göra när ni träffar dem? Varför gillar mamma inte Elvis farmor och farfar, tror ni? Har Elvis det bra när han är där? Rita en bild av något som Elvis och farfar gör tillsammans, antingen något ni minns från filmen eller något som ni själva hittar på.

• I Elvis familj är det bäst stämning när de samlas tillsammans framför tv:n. På den tiden som Elvis-filmen utspelar sig så fanns det bara två tv-kanaler, inget internet, inget Netflix och att se på tv var lite av en högtidsstund. Tittar ni också på tv eller film tillsammans i era familjer? Vad ser ni då som alla i familjen gillar? Vilka andra saker gör ni tillsammans allihop? Berätta för varandra eller rita en bild där du och din familj gör något tillsammans.

Bild: Filminstitutets bildarkiv

EN FILMHANDLEDNING UTGIVEN AV FILMINSTITUTET

Bild: Filminstitutets bildarkiv

Nu och då – filmen som tidsmaskin
Elvis! Elvis! utspelar sig på 1970-talet och är inspelad 1977. På den tiden var det mycket som var annorlunda, både i allmänhet och vad gäller hur barndomen såg ut. Exempelvis var det vanligt att vuxna rökte, även inomhus, att de hade fest när barnen var hemma och att barnen inte hade bilbälte. Sådana saker har nästan helt försvunnit. Idag kan den dominerande barndomsdiskursen sägas vara "det ömtåliga barnet" – vi ser visserligen på barn som människor med egen personlighet, vilja och kompetens, men samtidigt som mycket mer sköra och skyddslösa jämfört med den barnsyn som rådde på 1970-talet. I många fall, som t ex vad gäller rökning och trafik, är det förstås bra att vi tar större hänsyn till barn och deras säkerhet. Men det finns också en problematik i att ständigt överbeskydda och "curla" barn – i våra försök att skona dem från ondska, problem och verklighetens komplexitet, försvagar vi deras förmåga att stå starka i och begripa just hur irrationellt och smärtsamt livet kan vara ibland. Forskning visar att barn mår dåligt av att misstänka och grubbla över problem som de vuxna försöker undanhålla dem. Att vara öppen mot och prata med barn om hela verkligheten – på ett sätt som de kan förstå – är en väldigt viktig del för att stärka dem i att kunna möta denna verklighet.

• Prata i klassen om vilka saker som händer i filmen som ni tycker är konstiga – sånt som era föräldrar aldrig skulle göra eller annat som ni inte riktigt känner igen. Verkar det vara roligare eller tråkigare att vara barn när Elvis var liten?

• Gör en intervju med en eller båda dina föräldrar. Vilken tid var de i din egen ålder? Hur var det då? Vilka saker skiljer sig från när de var små mot hur du har det? Finns det något de saknar från sin barndom som inte riktigt finns nu – saker eller upplevelser, lekar eller hur man såg på saker eller något annat? Du kan även intervjua en far- eller morförälder om du vill med samma frågor. När var de barn? Hur var det då?

• Hur ser ni i filmen att den är "gammal"? Vilka grejer eller händelser tycker ni var gammaldags? Dela in er i grupper och ta hjälp av iPad eller liknande och googla på t ex kläder från ett visst årtionde, ta reda på någon musik som var populär, saker som hände i världen o s v. Gör ett kollage med bilder – varje grupp gör ett decennium från 1950-talet och framåt. Spela upp en hitlåt och visa kollagen för varandra.

• Filmen om Elvis är ganska annorlunda mot t ex Disney-filmer eller Lasse-Maja-filmer på flera sätt. Den har inte en rak historia med tydlig början och tydligt slut, eller lösningen på ett problem eller en gåta. Den är mer som att titta i ett fotoalbum från ett år i Elvis liv. Rita en egen fotoalbumssida från ditt eget liv. Gör 4 eller 6 rutor på ett papper och rita ett "foto"/en ögonblicksbild från något du varit med om som du kommer ihåg extra väl.

• Rita en bild var ur minnet från filmen om Elvis. Är det en ljus eller mörk bild? Hur känner sig Elvis i din bild? Visa för varandra och prata om hur det var med ljuset i filmen – kommer ni ihåg några scener som var extra mörka i färgen? Vilka var det och vad hände då? Minns ni några ljusa bilder? Vad gjorde Elvis i de bilderna? Diskutera hur stämning skapas med hjälp av ljud och ljus – både i film och i verkligheten. Hur gör man "mysbelysning"? Hur känner ni er när det finns levande ljus, när det finns färgade lampor, ljusslingor o s v? Vilka ljud och vilken sorts musik förknippar ni med olika stämningar? Välj en bit från en låt som du spelar upp för klassen och berätta hur du känner dig när du lyssnar på den.

Att få vara sig själv
Elvis är en liten kille med stark personlighet. Trots att mamma kritiserar honom, och trots att farmor behandlar honom som om han var någon annan, så står Elvis på sig. Han är den han är och han tänker inte ändra sig. Han odlar sina egna intressen, hittar sina egna platser i staden och skaffar sig vänner utan att bry sig om ifall mamma gillar dem eller inte.

• Prata efter filmen om hur Elvis är. Vilka egenskaper har han? Är han glad, modig, självständig? Vad kan ordet stark betyda i olika sammanhang, och tycker ni att Elvis är det? Skriv sedan en hemlig lapp med tre bra egenskaper som du tycker att du har och en sak som du skulle vilja var annorlunda med dig själv. Du behöver inte visa lappen för någon om du inte vill, inte ens läraren!

• Hur känns det för Elvis när mamma kritiserar honom? Tror ni att han blir ledsen fast han inte visar det? Hur känner han när hon pratar skit om honom med sina väninnor i telefon? Får en förälder göra så? Vad får en förälder aldrig göra mot sitt barn, tycker ni? Är Elvis modig och har rätt som blir arg på mamma, eller är han "bara besvärlig" som hon säger? Hur känns det när man tror att andra inte är nöjda med en? Skriv en kort berättelse om någon situation där du själv tycker att du behöver säga ifrån och stå på dig, gentemot föräldrar eller kompisar.

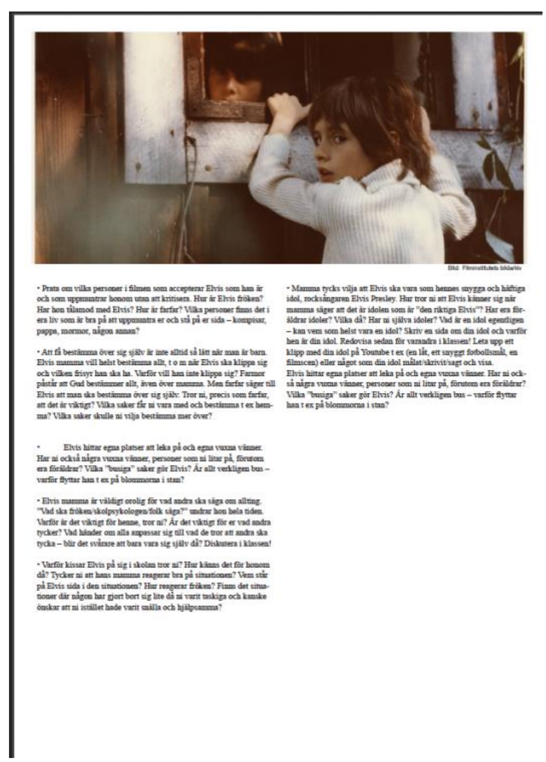

Bild: Filminstitutets bildarkiv

• Prata om vilka personer i filmen som accepterar Elvis som han är och som uppmuntrar honom utan att kritisera. Hur är Elvis fröken? Har hon tålamod med Elvis? Hur är farfar? Vilka personer finns det i era liv som är bra på att uppmuntra er och stå på er sida – kompisar, pappa, mormor, någon annan?

• Att få bestämma över sig själv är inte alltid så lätt när man är barn. Elvis mamma vill helst bestämma allt, t o m när Elvis ska klippa sig och vilken frisyr han ska ha. Varför vill han inte klippa sig? Farmor påstår att Gud bestämmer allt, även över mamma. Men farfar säger till Elvis att man ska bestämma över sig själv. Tror ni, precis som farfar, att det är viktigt? Vilka saker får ni vara med och bestämma t ex hemma? Vilka saker skulle ni vilja bestämma mer över?

• Elvis hittar egna platser att leka på och egna vuxna vänner. Har ni också några vuxna vänner, personer som ni litar på, förutom era föräldrar? Vilka "busiga" saker gör Elvis? Är allt verkligen bus – varför flyttar han t ex på blommorna i stan?

• Elvis mamma är väldigt orolig för vad andra ska säga om allting. "Vad ska fröken/skolpsykologen/folk säga?" undrar hon hela tiden. Varför är det viktigt för henne, tror ni? Är det viktigt för er vad andra tycker? Vad händer om alla anpassar sig till vad de tror att andra ska tycka – blir det svårare att bara vara sig själv då? Diskutera i klassen!

• Varför kissar Elvis på sig i skolan tror ni? Hur känns det för honom då? Tycker ni att hans mamma reagerar bra på situationen? Vem står på Elvis sida i den situationen? Hur reagerar fröken? Finns det situationer där någon har gjort bort sig lite då ni varit taskiga och kanske önskar att ni istället hade varit snälla och hjälpsamma?

• Mamma tycks vilja att Elvis ska vara som hennes snygga och häftiga idol, rocksångaren Elvis Presley. Hur tror ni att Elvis känner sig när mamma säger att det är idolen som är "den riktiga Elvis"? Har era föräldrar idoler? Vilka då? Har ni själva idoler? Vad är en idol egentligen – kan vem som helst vara en idol? Skriv en sida om din idol och varför hen är din idol. Redovisa sedan för varandra i klassen! Leta upp ett klipp med din idol på Youtube t ex (en låt, ett snyggt fotbollsmål, en filmscen) eller något som din idol målat/skrivit/sagt och visa.
Elvis hittar egna platser att leka på och egna vuxna vänner. Har ni också några vuxna vänner, personer som ni litar på, förutom era föräldrar? Vilka "busiga" saker gör Elvis? Är allt verkligen bus – varför flyttar han t ex på blommorna i stan?

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Film study guide from the Swedish Film Institute. Part of their larger film pedagogy directive is to put certain films within school curriculums. They are as an institution closely connected to the state, and fully financed by it.

Source: https://www.filminstitutet.se/sv/fa-kunskap-om-film/filmpedagogik/filmhandledningar/elvis-elvis/

Translation:

Elvis Elvis!

A Film Guide from the Swedish Film Institute

Rec for grades 1-3

Seven-year-old Elvis feels that most adults want him to be someone else. Mom wants him to be like her idol, singer Elvis Presley. Dad wants him to play soccer. Grandma wants him to be a replacement for Dad's brother Johan who died when he was young. Fortunately, Grandpa is there, and his classmate Anna-Rosa - thinks Elvis should be just as he is.

About the film guide

The film is an unparalleled educational tool. Our film guides are there to guide you as a teacher in the use of this tool. The film guide's age recommendation should be seen as a recommendation. You as a teacher know your students best! Adapt your use of the film guide according to time and need. There are many entry points to choose from.

The film and the curriculum

This film connects to learning about various values and norms, such as the value of all individuals and the rights of children, as well as to history and social science knowledge, as it depicts the lives of children decades ago. Thus, it also includes a starting point for enhancing students' skills in 'examining options and considering issues related to their future'. The exercises below are designed to address the curriculum objective that students should "use and participate in a variety of forms of expression, such as language, art, music, drama, and dance", and aim to help students practice "putting ideas into action in a creative way".

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Storyline

Elvis is an only child about to start school. He lives a free and independent life, as his mother only fights at home and his father mostly slips away. They don't seem happy with Elvis at all, and he isn't happy with them either - they don't understand him at all. At home, it's all fights all the time. Instead, Elvis has other adult friends - the man who loads goods at the train station and his grandfather, for example. As often as Elvis can, he goes to visit Grandma and Grandpa in the country. Mom doesn't like this because Grandma likes to pretend that Elvis is Johan, the son she lost when he was only seven, and because Grandpa is generous with the booze. But Grandpa is Elvis's best friend and the only one who likes him just the way he is, Elvis feels, and who defends him when Mom only criticizes. Elvis plays his magical solitary games in town. He digs up flowers where they are too dense and moves them to places where they are better needed. He goes to the train station and hangs out with the freight loader there, who also drinks a little too much but always welcomes Elvis and treats him as an equal. When the time comes to start school, Elvis is not at all sure he wants to be there. But he makes a new friend in his classmate Anna-Rosa, and together with her, Elvis explores new territories, both at school and in the city, where any place can become an exciting playground.

Children and adults - two different worlds?

Children and adults live in the same world and are part of one or more families together, but at the same time, there are things that limit the reality of children to that of adults (and vice versa). Therefore, children and adults may also see things differently, and an event may not generate the same experience for an adult as for a child. Children's and adults' paths may cross as well as diverge, both in the family arena and in other areas. Children have not yet been adults and therefore cannot fully incorporate an adult perspective on various phenomena, but many adults have also forgotten what it was like to be a child - and were also children in a completely
different time, which means a completely different childhood. Meeting across these boundaries and understanding each other's worlds is not always frictionless

- Talk in a whole class about the concept of family. What can a family look like? Are pets part of the family? Are adults without children a family? Who decides what counts as a family? Are grandparents part of the family? What is the difference between relatives and family? Do you have two families if you have divorced parents? Who can be parents? Draw your own family tree and tell your classmates!

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Now and then - the movie as a time machine

Elvis! Elvis! is set in the 1970s and was filmed in 1977. At that time, many things were different, both in general and in terms of what childhood was like. For example, it was common for adults to smoke, even indoors, for them to have parties when the children were at home and for the children not to wear seat belts. Such things have almost completely disappeared. Today, the dominant discourse of childhood can be said to be "the fragile child" - we see children as people with their own personality, will and competence, but at the same time as much more fragile and unprotected compared to the view of children that prevailed in the 1970s. In many cases, such as smoking and traffic, it is of course good that we take greater account of children and their safety. But there is also a problem with constantly overprotecting and "curling" children - in our attempts to spare them from evil, problems and the complexity of reality, we weaken their ability to stand strong and understand just how irrational and painful life can be at times. Research shows that children suffer from suspicion and rumination about problems that adults try to hide from them. Being open and talking to children about the whole reality - in a way they can understand - is a very important part of empowering them to face this reality.

- Talk in class about what things happen in the movie that you think are strange - things your parents would never do or other things you don't really recognize. Does it seem more fun or more boring to be a child when Elvis was young?

- Conduct an interview with one or both of your parents. What time were they your age? What was it like then? What things are different from when they were little to how you are? Is there anything they miss from their childhood that isn't really there now - things or experiences, games or ways of looking at things or anything else? You can also interview a grandparent if you like with the same questions. When were they children? What was it like then?

- How do you see in the movie that it is "old"? What things or events do you think were old-fashioned? Divide into groups and using an iPad or similar device, Google clothes from a particular decade, find out about music that was popular, things that happened in the world, etc. Make a collage of pictures - each group does a decade from the 1950s onwards. Play a hit song and show the collage to each other.

- The movie about Elvis is quite different from Disney movies or Lasse-Maja movies in several ways. It doesn't have a straightforward story with a clear beginning and end, or the solution to a problem or puzzle. It is more like looking at a photo album from a year in the life of Elvis. Draw your own photo album page from your own life. Make 4 or 6 squares on a piece of paper and draw a "photo"/snapshot of something you experienced that you remember particularly well. Is it a light or dark picture? How does Elvis feel in your picture? Show each other and talk about the lighting in the movie - do you remember any scenes that were extra dark in color? What were they and

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what happened? Do you remember any bright shots? What was Elvis doing in those shots? Discuss how mood is created by sound and light - both in movies and in real life. How do you make "cozy lighting"? How do you feel when there are candles, when there are colored lights, fairy lights, etc? What sounds and music do you associate with different moods? Choose a piece of a song to play to the class and tell them how you feel when you listen to it.

Being yourself

Elvis is a little boy with a strong personality. Even though his mother criticizes him and his grandmother treats him as if he were someone else, Elvis stands up for himself. He is who he is and he is not going to change. He cultivates his own interests, finds his own places in the city and makes friends without caring whether his mother likes them or not.

- After the movie, talk about what Elvis is like. What qualities does he have? Is he happy, brave, independent? What can the word strong mean in different contexts, and do you think Elvis is strong? Then write a secret note with three good qualities you think you have and one thing you would like to be different about yourself. You don't have to show the note to anyone if you don't want to, not even the teacher

- How does Elvis feel when his mother criticizes him? Do you think he gets sad even though he doesn't show it? How does he feel when she talks shit about him to her friends on the phone? Can a parent do that? What do you think a parent should never do to their child? Is Elvis brave and right to get angry with mom, or is he "just being difficult" as she says? How do you feel when you think others are not happy with you? Write a short story about a situation where you feel you need to speak up and stand up for yourself, with your parents or friends.

- Talk about which people in the film accept Elvis as he is and encourage him without criticizing. What is Elvis' friend like? Is she patient with Elvis? What is the grandfather like? Who are the people in your life who are good at encouraging you and being on your side - friends, dad, grandma, someone else?

- It's not always easy to make decisions about yourself when you're a child. Elvis' mom wants to decide everything, even when Elvis gets his hair cut and what kind of hairstyle he should have. Why doesn't he want a haircut? Grandma says that God decides everything, even over mom. But Grandpa tells Elvis that you should decide for yourself. Do you think, like Grandpa, that this is important? Which things do you get to help decide, for example at home? Which things would you like to have more control over?

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- Elvis finds his own places to play and his own adult friends. Do you also have any adult friends, people you trust, apart from your parents? What "mischievous" things does Elvis do? Is everything really mischievous - for example, why does he move the flowers in town?

- Elvis' mother is very worried about what others will say about everything. "What will the teacher/school psychologist/people say?" she asks all the time. Why do you think this is important to her? Is it important to you what others think? What happens if everyone adapts to what they think others should think - will it be harder to just be yourself? Discuss in class

- Why do you think Elvis wets himself at school? How does that make him feel? Do you think his mother reacts well to the situation? Who is on Elvis' side in this situation? How does the teacher react? Are there situations where someone has made a mistake when you have been mean and perhaps wish you had been kind and helpful instead?

- Mom seems to want Elvis to be like her handsome and cool idol, rock singer Elvis Presley. How do you think Elvis feels when mom says that the idol is the "real Elvis"? Do your parents have idols? Which ones? Do you have idols yourself? What exactly is an idol - can anyone be an idol? Write a page about your idol and why they are your idol. Then report to each other in class! Find a clip of your idol on YouTube, for example (a song, a nice soccer goal, a movie scene) or something your idol has painted/written/said and show it.Elvis finds his own places to play and his own adult friends. Do you also have any adult friends, people you trust, besides your parents? What "mischievous" things does Elvis do? Is everything really mischievous - for example, why does he move the flowers in town?

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