



Ellen Lamm and Mats G Bengtsson in The Laundry.

THE LAUNDRY

The Laundry is a stylised film saga in which comedy is mixed with seriousness.

Doctor Blom wakes up hot and anguished, puts his socks in to soak and takes a pill to help get through the day. He works for the local authorities, his job being to abduct children from “neglectful” parents and put them in approved, well-run homes. Today he will be working on the case of Lisa who helps her mother, Mona, in a big bubbling laundry. This laundry is a technological miracle of steam, thermostats and lathery foam that tire Mona out. Dr. Blom has chosen an elegant singer Miss Blüchner as a suitable mother for Lisa.

Caught up in the drama, when they occupy a public lavatory outside the laundry, are two happy-go-lucky vagabonds, Bill and Sture. Lisa is homesick for the laundry, Blom longs to marry Miss Blüchner, Bill and Sture hanker for the free life and Mona wants to have her daughter back. Many tears are shed and plenty of soap-suds flow before these dreams come true.

The tramp Bill and Dr. Blom are played by the same actor. This and more—a tall man takes the part of Miss Blüchner—contribute to the special tone of the film.

A tone of quiet madness.

When Pippi Long-Stocking stands on her head in a cream-cake at the coffee party given by Tommy’s and Annika’s mother, adult critics of children’s cinema rejoice. “Childish high spirits” they say, showing a well-balanced diverting anar-

chy that doesn’t strain too hard against the secure play-pen of childhood. When, in the Swedish film *The Big Children’s Party*, seven-year-olds, bursting from a repressed desire to defy all the rites and rules of children’s parties, slide under the tablecloth and squirt each other with juice and cake-crumbs in a sensual collective explosion, then it’s not funny any more. “Smutty! Children don’t go on like that!!” snorted some adults in the ensuing discussion, eager to ‘protect’ children from the reality they themselves don’t want to know about. “This is surely not supposed to be a film for children?”

When the tramp Sture contentedly scratches his ear after a good heavy dinner and then pushes the plates full of dried-up left-overs into a tiny bowl of scummy water ... that is really overstepping the limit! This scene comes from *The Laundry*, a new film by Håkan Alexandersson and Carl-Johan De Geer. At the preview I saw, children in the audience shrieked with laughter when Sture put the sticky plates into the bowl. The same kind of reaction provoked by the squirting cake-crumbs orgy under the table-cloth in *The Big Children’s Party* A laughter of relief.

At a somewhat peculiar press conference after the show, it was however against just such scenes the assembled critics were most vociferous in their objections.

“What do you mean by cramming so much mess and smut and left-over food and torn underpants into your films?”

“Do you think all this gives children a true picture of reality?”



Ellen Lamm in *The Laundry*.

"In this film we have a very serious theme—what do you mean by treating it as farce?"

"Isn't it likely to cause dangerous bewilderment among children...?"

This article is not a review of *The Laundry*. But I can't help saying how delighted I was with its cheeky sensuality, its calm funniness and its deep seriousness. What impressed me most perhaps was the precision and closely observed scenography where every rag and gadget in the laundry, every square millimetre of Miss Blüchner's cramped apartment were chosen with exquisite care!

It is also to express quiet surprise at grown-ups who ring me up to define what really is a good or bad film for children. Why is it that solicitude for children's souls is so often circumscribed and—prudish?

For me *The Laundry* was an eye-opener in that it breaks with the solidly established conventions of children's films because it's not faithful to the genre.

It is about children taken into care *without* being realistic or bitter against 'society'. It lets a little girl scream with fright at being parted from her mother *without* fussily glossing over her distress. It lets a tall stately man play the elegant childless Miss Blüchner *without* making her silly or pathetic. And society's tool, the pill-chewing Dr. Blom who puts 'ill-treated' children into new clean homes is no villain but just a tired bureaucrat longing for a wife. The film makes children fall about laughing and it makes them cry.

To judge by the reviews and discussion after the press-showing, this disrespect of the usual genre created some confusion among adults. "Is it a farce? With such a loaded and delicate subject? And why all the slush and smut? What will *children* think?"

Films about forcing children into care ought to be made only in a boring educational fashion and shot in some unknown troublesome suburb, not in a stylised, absurd studio atmosphere.

If you break this rule and then have the nerve to say it describes reality—not only for children but for everyone—you break the uneasy pre-determined order of the critics of children's films.

Which in itself is a relief!

Elisabet Edlund

Credits

<i>Original Title:</i>	Tvätten
<i>Production Company:</i>	Alexandersson & De Geer Bildproduktion, Swedish Television/SVT 2
<i>Executive Producer:</i>	Håkan Alexandersson, Carl Johan De Geer
<i>Direction:</i>	Håkan Alexandersson
<i>Screenplay:</i>	Håkan Alexandersson
<i>Cinematography:</i>	Carl Johan De Geer
<i>Sound:</i>	Ulf Darin
<i>Make up/Costumes:</i>	Kristina Elander
<i>Music:</i>	Krister Broberg
<i>Mixing:</i>	Torbjörn Valham
<i>Light:</i>	Christer Strandell
<i>Other Collaborators:</i>	Leif Högström, Carina Ehn, Amanda Golert, Peter Kruse, Lovisa Lamm, Anders Olsson, Thomas Täng, Gunilla Welin
<i>Laboratory:</i>	Swedish Television
<i>Running Time:</i>	72 min/16 mm
<i>Colour:</i>	Colour
<i>Distribution Company:</i>	Folkets Bio/Swedish Film Institute
<i>Sales Information:</i>	Swedish Film Institute P.O. Box 27 126, S-102 52 Stockholm, Sweden, Phone Int.: +468 65 11 00, Telex 133 26 FILMINSS, Telefax +468 61 18 20
<i>Cast:</i>	Mats G Bengtsson <i>Blom/Bill</i> , Krister Broberg <i>Sture</i> , Thomas Lundquist <i>Velma Blüchner</i> , Ellen Lamm <i>Lisa</i> , Julia Hede <i>Mona</i>

