

# Elling | Elling

**Director:** Petter Næss

**Country:** Norway

**Year:** 2001

**IMDB:** [link](#)

**Film homepage:** n/a

**Trailer:** [link](#)

**Available on:** Amazon, for purchase on Google Play

## **Introduction:**

*Elling* is a film about two men, Elling and Kjell Bjarne, who have just been released from a transitional institution into social housing in an upper-class neighborhood of Oslo, where they get a chance to find out if they can live independently. With the help of their tough-talking social worker, Frank, Elling and Kjell Bjarne overcome everyday challenges like making phone calls, going to restaurants and cultural events, and establishing new relationships. These challenges test their friendship as they learn to navigate society and manage their own feelings. This coming-of-age film depicts the value of friendship and loyalty, while also giving a personalized and gently ironic view of the Norwegian welfare state.

## **Discussion questions:**

How are Elling and Kjell Bjarne different? What differences do you notice in how they talk or behave? What social factors might explain those differences?

How would you describe Frank Åsli's demeanor and approach as Elling and Kjell Bjarne's social worker? Do his methods seem effective? Why or why not?

What psychological challenges do Elling and Kjell Bjarne have to overcome in order to function in society? How do they assist each other in facing these challenges?

What is the significance of the gifts that Elling and Kjell Bjarne give to each other? What does it suggest about their personalities? How does it suggest their friendship is developing?

Why is Elling so uncomfortable with Kjell Bjarne's relationship with Reidun?

Why do you think Reidun's character is included in the film? How does she relate to Elling and Kjell Bjarne's previous experiences with women? How does she relate to social ideals about motherhood?

What is the role of the poet Alfons Jørgensen in the film? How does he help Elling and Kjell Bjarne, and how do they help him?

There are many references to Gro Harlem Brundtland and to the Labor party. Keep your eyes out for these. Some of the references are very subtle (a picture or a rose in the background), others are much more obvious. What is the reason for this inclusion? What do Gro and the Labor party have to do with the plot?

What is the significance of Elling's debut as a poet? Why does he choose to hide his poems in sauerkraut packets?

How do the supports that the Norwegian welfare system offers adults with psychological and social challenges differ from the system in the United States? Does the film depict the Norwegian system as effective? Why or why not?

How does the film portray family and the state's role in the Norwegian family?

The theme of an outsider is common of NorWave films. How is the "outsider" theme developed in the plot and through filmmaking techniques?

If you understand Norwegian, listen to the last song a few times. What does it mean? How does it relate to the film's ending? You can also find the song on YouTube: "[Se på meg](#)" by Lars Lillo-Stenberg

### **About the director:**

Petter Næss is a Norwegian film and theater director and actor. Næss debuted as an actor in 1985. Since 1996 he has worked as a director and project leader at Oslo Nye Teater. He directed his first feature film, *Absolutt Blåmandag*, in 1999. *Elling* was nominated for an Oscar for best foreign language film in 2002. The success of *Elling* landed Næss work in Hollywood, directing the English-language film *Mozart and the Whale*, starring Josh Hartnett, among others. In 2007 he directed another filmic adaptation of a comic novel with *Tatt av kvinnen*, based on the novel by Erlend Loe. Most recently he directed *Into the White* (2012), a film about events during the invasion of Norway in 1940. (adapted from Wikipedia)

Interview with Petter Næss: [link](#)

### **Suggestions for further reading/ viewing:**

*Elling* is based on *Brødre i blodet* (1996, Blood brothers), the third novel in a series of four novels about Elling by the author Ingvar Ambjørnsen. The other books in the "Elling" series include *Utsikt til paradiset* (1993), *Fugledansen* (1995), and *Elsk meg i morgen* (1999). Ambjørnsen was born in 1956 in Larvik. According to the *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon*, Ambjørnsen "is an eloquent and productive author who has made his mark especially through depictions of people who are outsiders to established society. He has published crime fiction, short stories, and novels for both children and adults, and is among the bestselling and most popular authors of the 1980's and 90's" ([https://snl.no/Ingvar\\_Ambj%C3%B8rnsen](https://snl.no/Ingvar_Ambj%C3%B8rnsen)).

Ambjørnsen received the Brage prize in 1995 for *Fugledansen*, as well as *Riksmålsforbundets litteraturpris* in 1999 for *Elsk meg i morgen*. In 2009 he won *Det Norske Akademis pris*.

Information on Ambjørnsen in Norwegian from Cappelen Damm's website: [link](#)

### **Information on Gro Harlem Brundtland**

*Madam Prime Minister: A Life in Politics* by Gro Harlem Brundtland (2002)

Short biography of Brundtland: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gro-Harlem-Brundtland>

### **Information on Norwegian cabin culture**

*Cabins in Modern Norwegian Literature: Negotiating Place and Identity* by Ellen Rees (2014)

"Norwegians and Nature" by Norwegian social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, <http://hyllanderiksen.net/Nature.html>

"Norway's changing cabin culture: My cabin is my castle" by Siv Haugen and Else Li, [https://www.forskningsradet.no/en/Newsarticle/My\\_cabin\\_is\\_my\\_castle/1253954827308](https://www.forskningsradet.no/en/Newsarticle/My_cabin_is_my_castle/1253954827308)

### **Articles on *Elling* (film)**

Åhlund, J. (2002). Overcoming society: Peter naess's *elling* (2001). *Kinoeye*, 2(14)

Retrieved from

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.stolaf.edu/docview/54069405?accountid=351>

### **Articles on NorWave**

Rees, Ellen.(2010) Norwave: Norwegian Cinema 1997-2006 Scandinavian-Canadian Studies Vol. 19 pp.88-110. Retrieved from [http://scancan.net/rees\\_1\\_19.htm](http://scancan.net/rees_1_19.htm)

### **Books**

*Elling* by Ingvar Ambjørnsen, translated by Don Bartlett and Kari Dickson (2007, ISBN-13 978-1596922563)

*A Man Called Ove* by Fredrick Backman

### **Films**

*Kitchen Stories*, *O'Horten*, *A Man Called Ove*, *Troubled Water*, *Hawaii*, *Oslo*, *Tatt av kvinnen*, *Into the White*

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