

# Fellini and Bergman's Searches for a New Beginning

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### Introduction

In *8 ½*, Federico Fellini presents the main character Guido, who mirrors Fellini very closely, as a director searching for a new beginning to avoid stagnation in his works. In this search, we see that Guido and Fellini are looking for a way to probe the mystery of artistic creation and avoid creative stagnation. Through Guido, Fellini delves into the struggles involved in the creative process, and he explores the possibility of finding true happiness despite living a chaotic, fragmented life.

Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* also explores the idea of a new beginning for both the director and Isak Borg, the film's protagonist. However, Bergman approaches this search very differently from Fellini in that he uses reflection on Isak's – and his own – past to reevaluate previous life choices and confront his own truths. Bergman uses Isak's difficult past to grapple with old guilt, unhappiness, and the search for reconciliation and redemption in his relationships and self-truths.

In this essay, I will compare various aspects of the new beginnings explored in *8 ½* and *Wild Strawberries*, including their roots, results, and public dimensions, and I argue that both Fellini and Bergman find the new beginnings they searched for although they approached them very differently. I also conclude that *8 ½* carries much more weight in the public dimension than *Wild Strawberries*.

**Roots of the Pursuit**

Guido's search for a new beginning begins with his struggle to develop a new, original work considering his loss of inspiration and difficult personal life. It is here that Fellini presents his personal conflict: the fear of creating something he has done before. Fellini felt that "a director's artistic life lasted ten years, after which one ended up repeating oneself" (Kezich). He felt that 8 1/2's script was stagnating and that he lacked the ability to create the film. However, it was in this struggle that he realized the flaw in his initial script – he had chosen for Guido to be a writer rather than a director, which inhibited him from thoroughly understanding his protagonist's emotions and inner thinking (Kezich). Once he realized this resolution, the film became more obviously autobiographical, and it allowed him to recount the impossibility of making a movie while exploring "conditions of creativity, [the] struggle waged between individual and world" and how to "[make] sense out of life and art" (Affron).

Isak's pursuit for a new beginning, unlike Guido's, takes the form of delving into his past as a means of achieving self-forgiveness and redemption in the present. Bergman wrote the scenario over a two-month period in the early spring of 1957, while recovering in the hospital from a breakdown brought on by overwork (Fanu). During this time, he was also experiencing conflict with his wife and parents, and he uses Isak's character to reflect on himself, his relationship to his parents and wife, and his battles with guilt and regret.

We see here that both directors began their creative processes by using their main characters to reflect on distress and conflict in their personal lives. Both Fellini and Bergman encountered chaos and fragmentation near the start of their films' development and were searching for ways to make sense of their conflicts and reconcile with their fears. In the following sections, I will compare the results of these initial pursuits and define the public dimensions each confronts.

### **The Results**

As I briefly mentioned in the previous section, Fellini was able to reflect on the impossibility to make a film under great public pressure while also dealing with personal conflict. His film "[became] a celebration of film as pure spectacle." Through Guido, Fellini achieved clarity and a new beginning in that he was able to confront his fear of stagnation and creative barrenness and discuss the possibility of "a world where the opposition of desire and the law would be suddenly abolished" (Gieri). Fellini used Guido to reflect on himself as a director within his creative process, which allowed him to further delve into the social pressures that inhibit creativity and innovation in film authorship.

The results of Bergman's pursuit of a new beginning results in him finding clarity and forgiveness through Isak. At the film's conclusion, Isak arrives at his destination and appears to have found peace, closure, and reconciliation with important people in his life. Thus, we see that

Bergman also found a sense of closure in his strained relationships and that he was able to break through his loneliness and guilt towards his own existence (“Wild Strawberries”).

Both Fellini and Bergman discovered a sense of inner peace through their protagonists in these films, allowing them to reflect on and overcome inner turmoil. However, it is important to note the religious aspects of both films’ searches for a new beginning, which I will discuss along with their public dimensions.

### **Public Aspect**

Fellini’s pursuit of clarity and happiness has religious undertones that reveal another inner search for clarity of religious belief. In *Guido*, he reveals an obsession with sin and a rejection of Catholicism that eventually results in finding it again. In reflecting himself onto his character, Fellini creates a theme of discovering “universal reconciliation” in *8 1/2* (Affron). This is where he brings in the public dimension of his work. By engaging in the conversation of reconciliation with oneself and one’s religiosity, Fellini was able to discuss “problems of human relations,” especially those with women. In this conversation, we see that Fellini challenges “conventions of time, place, and mode of experience that had prevailed in cinema for decades” (Sesonske). This liberated the field of film authorship from rules that limited creativity, thus having a huge impact on the public space.

Bergman’s search for self-forgiveness and reconciliation in his relationships exudes religious underpinnings that create a more private than public dimension. In *Wild Strawberries*,

young Isak searches for an earthly father, who to him would be of divine status, which coincides with the older Isak's search for a heavenly, forgiving God ("Where"). This informs how we understand Bergman's search for a new beginning in that it creates another level of meaning in which the search is not only about finding reconciliation with himself, but with God as well. In terms of the public dimension of Bergman's pursuit, his examination of guilt and conflict between generational selves allowed for reflection on the meaning of self-truth versus objective truth. Through examining the "phenomenon of old age wherein childhood memories return with ever-increasing clarity while great stretches of the prime of life vanish into obscurity," Bergman created the opportunity for expressing internal conflict as a struggle between past and present selves (Cowie).

Both filmmakers encountered a struggle with religious belief, conception of self, and personal conflict, which they reflected on and came to terms with through their main characters. We see that these internal searches for clarity revealed a social aspect in that they challenged and explored the concepts of guilt and sin through self-reflection.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, both Fellini and Bergman's pursuits of a new beginning were kickstarted by internal conflict and the want for happiness despite a conflicted, chaotic, fragmented life, which resulted in the two filmmakers finding closure through reflecting on their inner turmoil using the protagonists of their films.

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