A FILM BY
MARCO BELLOCCHIO

OFFSIDE, RAI CINEMA & CELLULOID DREAMS
PRESENT

VINCIERE

GIOVANNA MEZZOGIORNO
FILIPPO TIMI
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Italy - Drama - 2009 - 128 min - Colour - Italian

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INTERNATIONAL PRESS

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ITALY - DRAMA - 2009 - 128 MIN - COLOUR - ITALIAN
SYNOPSIS

There is a secret in the life of Mussolini: a wife and a son, Benito Albino, who was born, acknowledged and then denied. The secret bears a name: Ida Dalser. It is a dark page in history, one ignored in the official biography of the Duce.

When Ida meets Mussolini in Milan, he is the editor of Avanti! and an ardent Socialist who intends to guide the masses towards an anti-clerical, anti-monarchical, socially emancipated future. Ida already had a fleeting encounter with him in Trento and remained thunderstruck.

Ida truly believes in him and his ideas. In order to finance Il Popolo d’Italia, a newspaper he has founded and the nucleus of the forthcoming Fascist Party, Ida sells everything she has.

When the First World War erupts, Benito Mussolini enrolls in the Army and disappears. When Ida finds him again in a military hospital, he is tended to by Rachele whom he has just married. Ida lashes out at her rival furiously, demanding her rights as Mussolini’s true wife and the mother of his first-born son. She is led away by force.

For more than eleven years, she is locked away in an insane asylum (and her son in an institute) where she is put under physical restraint and tortured, never to see her son again. But Ida will not give up without a fight...
Ida Dalser was born in Sopramonte, near Trento, in 1880 and was, therefore, a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (for this reason, she was also known as “the Austrian”). She was a beautiful, affluent young woman from a good family. Her father was the mayor of their village. Ida was also an enterprising girl: when she was just over twenty, she moved to Milan to open a “French style” beauty salon; in fact, with this project in mind, she had studied in Paris where she got a diploma in aesthetic medicine, a rare example of female entrepreneurship for that time.

Then came her encounter with Mussolini. It was the start of an overwhelming passion. When Benito was fired from his job with the newspaper Avanti! and expelled from the Socialist Party because of his interventionism – also influenced by Futurism – Ida stood up for him. She sold everything she had for him, her apartment and her beauty salon, to finance Mussolini’s newspaper: Il Popolo d’Italia which was to become the official organ of the National Fascist Party. Though there are no documents to prove it, rumour has it that the couple were joined in a religious marriage ceremony in September 1914.

One thing that is sure, however, is that on 11th November 1915 she gave birth to a baby boy: Benito Albino Mussolini. The son of the Duce who did, in fact, recognise him, only to have his date of birth and personal data altered some years later.

While Mussolini was having his affair with Ida, he was already the lover of Rachele Guidi and the father of Edda, his daughter born in 1910. On 17th December 1915, one year after the non-recorded marriage to Ida, Mussolini re-married, in a civil ceremony held in the Treviglio (Bergamo) hospital where he was a patient. Edda, was therefore illegitimate according to the laws of the time. Indeed, she had been registered as the daughter of Mussolini but to an unknown mother.

As Mussolini’s power grew, he distanced himself further from Ida. Her reaction to his increasing lack of concern however was one of pride, stubborness and aggression. As his first wife and mother of his first born son, she claimed the rights due to her and her child. It was when faced with this, the growing demands and the scenes caused by Ida that Mussolini reacted by having her certified as mad.

In 1926, Ida was arrested and committed to the lunatic asylum in Pergine, near Trento and later, to San Clemente, an island opposite Venice. Her attempts to contact Mussolini and the highest authorities asking for help were all in vain. Ida wrote numerous, desperate appeals and letters, even to the Pope, that were never delivered as they were intercepted and destroyed (though traces of some of them remain). The medical director of the San Clemente asylum did not diagnose any mental illness or physical defect in her. Despite this, she was forced to undergo the worst forms of torture and ended her days semi-paralyzed. There, on 3rd December 1937, Ida died from a brain haemorrhage after having been locked away for 11 years, without ever having seeing her son again.
Benito Albino Mussolini (Milan, 11th November 1915 – Milan, 26th August 1942)

Benito Albino Mussolini (Milan, 11th November 1915 – Milan, 26th August 1942)

Despite having been recognized by the Duce, his son, Benito Albino was also arrested and, in 1936, committed to the Mombello lunatic asylum in Limbiate (Milan). Both Ida’s and her son’s clinical records were destroyed, just as the pages of the parish register presumably recording Mussolini and Ida’s church wedding were torn out. Their son, Benito Albino, born 11th November 1915, was registered under his mother’s surname. A few weeks later, on 11th January 1916, the future Duce officially recognized him in the office of a notary, Angelo Buffoni, in Monza. A recognition that would remain binding until 1932 when, by royal decree, the boy was deprived of the name Mussolini and given that of sig. Bernardi, a commissioner in the Prefecture of Trento, chosen to be his guardian.

Benito Albino, who was never allowed to see his mother again, was educated in a boarding school run by Barnabite monks before enlisting in the Navy, always, it would appear, under the close surveillance of the secret police. After being sent on a mission to China, the young sailor, who looked incredibly like his father, was brought home with the false news of his mother’s death and sent away to end up just like her. Committed to the psychiatric hospital in Milan, he died on 26th August 1942 at the age of 26. For years, like his mother, he had undergone torture passed off as therapy and was left to die. His death certificate said “from malnutrition.”

Ida Dalser and Benito Albino Mussolini don’t even have a burial place of their own. Their bodies were thrown into mass graves.
THE LETTERS

IDALDASLER WRITES TO THE PREFECT OF TRENTO

Gr. Uff. Piomarta Prefect of Trento
Your Excellency,

With this letter, may my desperate cry reach you. One can kill a woman, but not insult her beyond a certain limit. Nero and Caligula would never have dared to take their cynicism so far. For four years, Dr. Baroni and his colleagues have been making fun of me. I cannot even envisage dragging on through such a miserable existence without one single ray of sunshine.

From what these scoundrels are saying, it would appear that the Mussolini brothers have sold me off for good, and that they themselves are responsible for all the suffering inflicted on me. The situation is so complicated that it requires an intervention on the part of Your Excellency to whom I have already written six letters to no avail. I have been gagged, drugged, beaten on the teeth, chained up in an airless cell, never being allowed out and injected with poison in my left arm to subjugate me to their will. I am a poor dead woman lying in her shroud under a heavy stone, waiting for my grave to open so that I may embrace, once more, the blessed, divine creature whom I adore. Come [...] come soon, immediately [...] Anyone who does not know maternal suffering does not know what pain is! Ah! Where is my ill-fated creature buried? Has he, perhaps, disappeared from this world following atrocious forms of torture? And does that man not feel he is a father? I can die [...] but not him, my son did not ask to be brought into this world and no one can or must make him suffer the same ordeal as his unfortunate mother. And does he not understand that we represent the political and moral force of those who will drag him into the abyss?

IDALDASLER WRITES TO THE POPE

The man I adored, defended, took care of when he was ill, followed like a shadow to rallies and demonstrations, when he was violently attacked in the squares in Milan and by Giolitti’s guards; praying and begging for an end to the duels, giving him an adorable son who looks exactly like him. Why did I do all this? Certainly not for his wealth! If he had been engulfed in flames or under a hail of bullets, I would have rushed to his aid. [...] At that time, he was not an unjust man, but a real angel [...] an abandoned genius, I took him into my home against everybody’s advice, I adored him, he promised to make me the most envied of women. I asked him nothing more than to make me the most loved...

IDALDASLER WRITES TO ALBERTINI, EDITOR OF CORRIERE DELLA SERA

For the son of Benito Mussolini editor and owner of Il Popolo d’Italia. Reduced to abject poverty after having been exploited and then abandoned by my son’s father Benito Mussolini, editor and owner of Il Popolo d’Italia, I am appealing to the generosity of the newspaper, Corriere della Sera, so that it will launch an appeal to collect funds for Mussolini’s son, since I can no longer provide for the son of the man who exploited me and the coward who has left me in dire straits along with my child, when all the while, he is rolling in money together with his famous “henchmen” and administrators Clerici and Morgagni.

The mother of little Benitino Mussolini.

From “The Duce’s Secret Son” by Alfredo Pieroni. Milan, Garzanti, 2006
How did you first discover the story of Ida Dalser?

I wasn’t aware of the story until I learned about it from a documentary I saw on TV a few years ago: Il Segreto di Mussolini (Mussolini's Secret) by Fabrizio Laurenti and Gianfranco Norelli. I immediately got the impression that Ida Dalser, who had a child with Mussolini, was an extraordinary woman. A woman who refused to remain quiet about the truth, right to the bitter end, despite the fact that the regime made every attempt to destroy all traces of it. Mussolini’s wife and son were a scandal that had to be kept hidden, to the point of erasing their very existence, and not only physically. In fact, they were both locked away in lunatic asylums till the end of their days.

But if you go to the place where Ida Dalser grew up, in Trentino, it is amazing how clearly people still clearly remember this tragedy which was left out of the official version of history. Luckily, there have been two books published full of documents and witness statements: Mussolini’s Wife by Marco Zeni and The Duce’s Secret Son by Alfredo Pieroni. This material includes, for example, the huge number of letters that Ida Dalser wrote to the highest authorities, including the Pope (and, naturally, Mussolini himself), begging to be recognized as Mussolini’s lawfully wedded wife and the mother of his first born son. There are also some of the Duce’s replies.

What, in particular, drew you to this story: the chance to raise the curtain on history or the story of the people involved?

I wasn’t interested in highlighting and exposing the vileness of the Fascist regime. However, I was greatly struck by this woman and her absolute refusal to accept any kind of compromise. After all, she could have easily agreed to go back into the shadows and perhaps, may have been generously rewarded, which happened with so many other mistresses of Mussolini’s.

But she wouldn’t accept that. She wanted to lay claim to an identity of her own. She couldn’t bring herself to accept the betrayal of this man, one whom, as she wrote in her letters, she had loved deeply and to whom she had given everything including all her assets. But once he became the Duce, Mussolini had to put an end to that old love story, not least to avoid jeopardizing his relationship with the Church because the regime was working towards signing the Lateran Pacts in 1929. Indeed, so successful was this political move that the Pope subsequently referred to him as “a godsend”. Both mother and child were to disappear along with the papers recording the marriage and the birth of the son whose name would be changed. They were to no longer exist.
What’s your impression of Ida Dalser?

She was not one to make a choice based on mediocrity: at heart, she shared the political ideas of the young Mussolini, a certain kind of heroic stance that was interventionist, anti-union, individualistic and futuristic. She fell head over heels in love with that young man when he was still a nobody. She loved him when no one else did. She defended him when he was flat broke, attacked and insulted…

Later, the relationship was reversed: when everyone loved the Duce, she was left out and everyone turned against her. Motivated by this reckless love, incapable of realizing who had the upper hand, she went against the whole of Italy, which was then embracing Fascist doctrine and siding with Mussolini.

The behaviour of Ida Dalser, with her courage in standing up to the Duce and her refusal to give in - a rebel to the end - reminds me of certain tragic heroines, Antigone, comes to mind but also the heroines you find in Italian melodramas like Aida, for example. And in this sense, the film is also a melodrama about the invincibility of one little Italian woman who would not be reduced by any power and, in a way, it is actually she who wins.

Why was Ida Dalser a danger for Mussolini?

There was a certain point where Ida would never see Mussolini again in person. She would only see him at the cinema, in the newsreels, amazed at the image of this man who loomed so large on the screen like an actor, a star. And through her expressions, we follow the transformation of this man. As soon as he stepped into the media spotlight, he became another person in her eyes. From Mussolini to Duce. She was unwittingly witnessing a change in the world of politics that was to last for ever.

Mussolini was the first to establish a regime based on images and from that point on, politics entered the world of images and people’s imagination. A point of no return in history. Today, some of his posturing seems ridiculous, almost clownish, but adopting this style allowed him to conquer the masses. His precious image could not be put at risk. And so it was to be this very man, so loved by the media who would hound Ida Dalser, since she could have pressed charges against him, caused a public scandal and objectively jeopardized his image.

Did you use the archive footage to add a greater sense of truth or was it a question of style?

Undoubtedly, a question of style, but also for practical reasons. We couldn’t reproduce everything. We had to blend the archive material with our footage to create a particular style; starting from the images of the young Mussolini, played by an actor, to authentic images of the dictator, suggesting the historical process. From 1922 onwards, the actor disappears, and on the screen, only the real Mussolini is seen.
2009  VINCERE by Marco Bellocchio
2008  SONO VIVA by Dino Gentili
2008  PALERMO SHOOTING by Wim Wenders
2007  L’AMORE NON BASTA by Stefano Chiantini
2007  LES MURS PORTEURS by Cyril Gelblat
2007  LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA by Gabriel García Márquez.
2006  NOTTURNO BUS by Davide Marengo
2005  FLYING LESSONS by Francesca Archibugi
2005  AD PROJECT by Eros Puglielli
2004  THE BEAST IN THE HEART by Cristina Comencini
2004  LAST CHANCE SALOON by Marie-Anne Chazel
2004  STAI CON ME by Livia Giampalmo
2004  LOVE RETURNS by Sergio Rubini
2003  FACING WINDOW by Ferzan Ozpetek
2002  THE CRUELEST DAY by Ferdinando Vicentini Orgnani
2001  MALEFEMMENE by Fabio Conversi
2001  NOBEL by Fabio Carpi
2001  ALL THERE IS TO KNOW by Eros Puglielli
1999  THE LAST KISS by Gabriele Muccino
1999  ASINI by Antonio Luigi Grimaldi
1998  UN UOMO PERBENE by Maurizio Zaccaro
1997  DEL PERDUTO AMORE by Michele Placido
1997  THE BRIDE’S JOURNEY by Sergio Rubini
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2009  VINCERE by Marco Bellocchio
2008  AS GOD COMMANDS by Gabriele Salvatores
       SIGNORINA EFEE by Wilma Labate
2007  SATURN IN OPPOSITION by Ferzan Ozpetek
       IN MEMORY OF MYSELF by Saverio Costanzo
2006  HOMO HOMINI LUPUS (short) by Matteo Rovere
       ONDE by Francesco Fei
2005  TRANCE by Teresa Villaverde
2004  MARLENE DE SOUSA by Tonino De Bernardi
2002  LA STRADA NEL BOSCO by Tonino De Bernardi
2001  FARE LA VITA by Tonino De Bernardi
       500 by G. Robbiano, L. Vignolo & M. Zingirian
2000  ROSATIGRE by Tonino De Bernardi
       OPEN MY HEART by Giada Colagrande
1999  APPASSIONATE by Tonino De Bernardi
       IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS UNDERWEAR by Anna Negri
CREW

Director
MARCO BELLOCCHIO

Story idea
MARCO BELLOCCHIO

Screenplay
MARCO BELLOCCHIO & DANIELA CESELLI

Photography
DANIELE CIPRÌ

Music
CARLO CRIVELLI

Editor
FRANCESCA CALVELLI

Production designer
MARCO DENTICI

Costumes
SERGIO BALLO

Sound engineer
GAETANO CARITO

Producer
MARIO GIANANI

Co-producers
HENGAMEH PANahi
CHRISTIAN BAUTE

Executive Producer
OLIVIA SLEITER

Production
OFFSIDE
RAI CINEMA

In co-production with
CELLULOID DREAMS

With the support of
MINISTERO PER I BENI E LE ATTIVITÀ CULTURALI
EURIMAGES
PROVINCIA AUTONOMA DI TRENTO
TRENTINO SPA
FILM COMMISSION TORINO PIEMONTE
SOFICA SOFCINEMA 4

In collaboration with
ISTITUTO LUCE
CELLULOID DREAMS

CAST

Ida Dalser
GIOVANNA MEZZOGIORNO
FILIPPO TIMI
FAUSTO RUSSO ALESI
MICHELA CESCON
PIER GIORGIO BELLOCCHIO
CORRADO INVERNIZZI
PAOLO PIEROBON
BRUNO CARIELLO
FRANCESCA PICOZZA
SIMONA NOBILI
VANESSA SCALERÀ
GIOVANNA MORI
PATRIZIA BETTINI
SILVIA FERRETTI
CORINNE CASTELLI
FABRIZIO COSTELLA

Benito Mussolini
FILIPPO TIMI

Riccardo Paicher
FAUSTO RUSSO ALESI

Rachele Mussolini
MICHELA CESCON

Pietro Fedele
PIER GIORGIO BELLOCCHIO

Doctor Cappelletti
CORRADO INVERNIZZI

Giulio Bernardi
PAOLO PIEROBON

The Judge
BRUNO CARIELLO

Adelina
FRANCESCA PICOZZA

Mother Superior
SIMONA NOBILI

Merciful nun
VANESSA SCALERÀ

The German
GIOVANNA MORI

The Singer
PATRIZIA BETTINI

Red shoes
SILVIA FERRETTI

Tears
CORINNE CASTELLI

The young Benito Albino
FABRIZIO COSTELLA

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