



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE  
COMPÉTITION

OFFSIDE, RAI CINEMA & CELLULOID DREAMS  
PRESENT

A FILM BY  
MARCO BELLOCCHIO

# VINCERE

GIOVANNA MEZZOGIORNO  
FILIPPO TIMI

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## INTERNATIONAL PRESS

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the directors label



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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 Dalsler. 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 AND BENITO ALBINO MUSSOLINI

**Ida Irene Dalser (Sopramonte, 1880 – Venice, 11th December 1937)**

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, stubbornness 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)**

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

## BENITO MUSSOLINI WRITES TO IDA DAIER

My little Ida.

I have just arrived after twelve endless hours on a train that left me completely covered in soot. I washed it off as best as I could and my first thought, even before going to dinner, is you. Are you pleased? Will you say, once again, that you alone love me, while I don't love you? I love you too, my dear Ida, even though I haven't been able to prove it to you. During my journey, I thought of you a lot. Every time young married couples or sweethearts came into my compartment, I thought about our trip, the trip we have planned. How happy I would have been to have you with me, today, while the train was racing along under a cloudless sky, through a countryside displaying all of autumn's melancholic seduction, towards this beautiful Rome which appeared before me just as the sunset was setting ablaze the horizon of the seven hills of the Eternal City.

This evening, we would have been together, whereas... Tomorrow, I'll send you some picture postcards. I'll certainly be in Milan on Tuesday or Wednesday evening. Be good, my little friend and think of me often. I embrace you with all the passion of our moments of intimacy and love. I remain your wild friend and lover. Benito.

## IDA DALSER WRITES TO BENITO

What I'm asking you for amounts to very little: my son and an immediate release from this truly putrid lunatic asylum, from this hospital for tuberculosis patients, where you have no right to bury me [...] my possessions [...] my furniture and all the personalized furnishings from my apartment in Milan which are to be handed down to my son... Stop having your son's mother insulted, at least to appease your conscience, and the gloomy phantom that will come to visit you each night [...].

Benito, listen to my heart-felt cry, we loved each other, we adored each other passionately, we had a child together, and because of you, I'm struggling in a world full of woes, you've killed off my lovely, healthy youthfulness.

*Lastly, references to her alleged mental illness:*

Don't you dare pretend! You know full well that my mental faculties are functioning perfectly just as they always did... My God, how right they were when they told me to leave you, as they suspected everything about you. But you managed to silence me with your explanations [...] You've suffered, I know, you've cried, but then you've come up with some new subterfuge [...] you mustn't build your will to fight on lies, not all men are stupid [...] and who knows whether one day, you yourself will end up more distraught than your victims. May Heaven save you from the shameful bartering that we two innocents have been subjected to [...] Oh, to die without being able to embrace my son once gain [...] Believe me, Duce, you're just a poor wretch.

## IDA DALSER 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?

## IDA DALSER 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 adored me, he promised to make me the most envied of women. I asked him nothing more than to make me the most loved...

## IDA DALSER 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**





# MARCO BELLOCCHIO ON VINCERE

## 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.





# MARCO BELLOCCHIO

2009 Vincere  
2006 Sorelle  
2006 The Wedding Director  
2004 Good Morning Night  
2002 My Mother's Smile  
1999 The Nanny  
1996 The Prince of Homburg II  
1994 The Butterfly's Dream  
1990 The Conviction  
1988 The Sabbath  
1986 Devil in the Flesh  
1984 Henry IV  
1982 The Eyes, the Mouth  
1980 Leap into the Void  
1980 Vacation in Val Trebbia (docu-fiction)  
1977 The Seagull  
1976 Victory March  
1974 Fit to be Untied  
    directed with Silvano Agosti, Sandro Petraglia & Stefano Rulli  
1972 Slap the Monster on Page One  
1971 In the Name of the Father  
1969 Viva il primo maggio rosso  
1969 Paola Paola  
1967 Discutiamo, discutiamo (episode of Love and Anger)  
    Discutiamo, discutiamo (episode of Evangile 70)  
1967 China is Near  
1965 Fists in His Pocket





# GIOVANNA MEZZOGIORNO

- 2009 **VINCERE** by Marco Bellocchio
- 2008 **SONO VIVA** by Dino Gentili
- PALERMO SHOOTING** by Wim Wenders
- L'AMORE NON BASTA** by Stefano Chiantini
- 2007 **LES MURS PORTEURS** by Cyril Gelblat
- LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA** by Gabriel García Márquez.
- NOTTURNO BUS** by Davide Marengo
- FLYING LESSONS** by Francesca Archibugi
- 2006 **AD PROJECT** by Eros Puglielli
- 2005 **THE BEAST IN THE HEART** by Cristina Comencini
- 2004 **LAST CHANCE SALOON** by Marie-Anne Chazel
- STAI CON ME** by Livia Giampalmo
- LOVE RETURNS** by Sergio Rubini
- 2003 **FACING WINDOW** by Ferzan Özpetek
- 2002 **THE CRUELEST DAY** by Ferdinando Vicentini Orgnani
- 2001 **MALEFEMMENE** by Fabio Conversi
- NOBEL** by Fabio Carpi
- ALL THERE IS TO KNOW** by Eros Puglielli
- THE LAST KISS** by Gabriele Muccino
- 1999 **ASINI** by Antonio Luigi Grimaldi
- UN UOMO PERBENE** by Maurizio Zaccaro
- 1998 **DEL PERDUTO AMORE** by Michele Placido
- 1997 **THE BRIDE'S JOURNEY** by Sergio Rubini



## FILIPPO TIMI

- 2009 **VINCERE** by Marco Bellocchio
- 2008 **AS GOD COMMANDS** by Gabriele Salvatores  
**SIGNORINA EFFE** 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

## CAST

Ida Dalser  
Benito Mussolini  
Riccardo Paicher  
Rachele Mussolini  
Pietro Fedele  
Doctor Cappelletti  
Giulio Bernardi  
The Judge  
Adelina  
Mother Superior  
Merciful nun  
The German  
The Singer  
Red shoes  
Tears  
The young Benito Albino

GIOVANNA MEZZOGIORNO  
FILIPPO TIMI  
FAUSTO RUSSO ALES  
MICHELA CESCO  
PIER GIORGIO BELLOCCHIO  
CORRADO INVERNIZZI  
PAOLO PIEROBON  
BRUNO CARIELLO  
FRANCESCA PICOZZA  
SIMONA NOBILI  
VANESSA SCALERA  
GIOVANNA MORI  
PATRIZIA BETTINI  
SILVIA FERRETTI  
CORINNE CASTELLI  
FABRIZIO COSTELLA

## CREW

Director  
Story idea  
Screenplay  
Photography  
Music  
Editor  
Production designer  
Costumes  
Sound engineer

Producer

Co-producers

Executive Producer

Production

In co-production with

With the support of

In collaboration with  
International Sales

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MARCO BELLOCCHIO & DANIELA CESELLI  
DANIELE CIPRI  
CARLO CRIVELLI  
FRANCESCA CALVELLI  
MARCO DENTICI  
SERGIO BALLO  
GAETANO CARITO

MARIO GIANANI

HENGAMEH PANAHI  
CHRISTIAN BAUTE

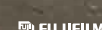
OLIVIA SLEITER

OFFSIDE  
RAI CINEMA

CELLULOID DREAMS

MINISTERO PER I BENI E LE ATTIVITÀ CULTURALI  
EURIMAGES  
PROVINCIA AUTONOMA DI TRENTO  
TRENTINO SPA  
FILM COMMISSION TORINO PIEMONTE  
SOFICA SOFICINEMA 4

ISTITUTO LUCE  
CELLULOID DREAMS





the directors label

