

- 13 World Health Organization. *The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders: Diagnostic Criteria for Research*. WHO, 1993.
- 14 Frisher F, Crome I, Martino O, Croft P. Assessing the impact of cannabis use on trends in diagnosed schizophrenia in the United Kingdom from 1996 to 2005. *Schizophr Res* 2009; **113**: 123–8.
- 15 McManus S, Meltzer H, Brugha T, Bebbington P, Jenkins R. *Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England, 2007: Results of a Household Survey*. National Centre for Social Research, 2009.
- 16 Kirkbride JB, Croudace T, Brewin J, Donoghue K, Mason P, Glazebrook C, et al. Is the incidence of psychotic disorder in decline? Epidemiological evidence from two decades of research. *Int J Epidemiol* 2009; **38**: 1255–64.
- 17 Coid JW, Kirkbride JB, Barker D, Cowan F, Stamps R, Yang M, et al. Raised incidence rates of all psychoses among migrant groups: findings from the East London first episode psychosis study. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2008; **65**: 1250–8.
- 18 Mortensen P, Pedersen CB, Westergaard T, Wohlfahrt J, Ewald H, Mors O, et al. Effects of family history and place and season of birth on the risk of schizophrenia. *N Engl J Med* 1999; **340**: 603–8.
- 19 Appleby L, Shaw J, Amos T, McDonnell R, Harris C, McCann K, et al. *Safer Services: Report of the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness*. TSO (The Stationery Office), 1999.

psychiatry in the movies

The good psychiatrist in film: *Vincere* (dir. Marco Bellocchio)

Larry Culliford

This historical drama concerning the life of Mussolini's first wife, Ida Dalsler, the mother of his first-born son Benito, shows an early double example of the abuse of psychiatry. In this account, Dalsler loved passionately the young man who would become dictator. She sold her jewels, her house and her successful beautician business to enable him to found *Il Popolo d'Italia*, the newspaper that became his springboard to power. He became prime minister of Italy in 1922.

Mussolini married Ida in a church ceremony, and formally acknowledged his son. The relationship soured, but Ida rebelled at the estrangement. Nevertheless, her existence threatened his security and popularity. In 1926, fascist Blackshirts took her away to an asylum run by nuns. Her son was sent to a religious boarding school, never to see his mother again. The asylum scenes are touchingly played out, both the ensemble moments when Ida is among her fellow inmates, and when she is alone. The most lyrical scene has her climbing the high lattice preventing her escape, silently watching snow fall through the bars. It is Christmas. She is pining for her missing son.

Psychiatrists in film are usually portrayed as crazy or evil or both. It is refreshing to meet here someone with genuine compassion. Insisting on her claim to be the true wife of 'Il Duce', Ida struggles and rails against her incarceration at every opportunity; until the doctor takes her aside and counsels a different approach. Doctor Cappelletti reminds her that fascism will not last forever. His advice is to become an actress, put aside her anger and act normal, even pious. That way, he assures her, he will find a way to release her in time. Unfortunately, she is transferred to another hospital before he can restore her to freedom. Later, with the help of a young nun, she escapes, only to be returned to captivity once again.

As the credits roll, we are told that Ida Dalsler died of a brain haemorrhage in the psychiatric institution on the Venetian island of San Clemente in 1937. She was 57. Suspicions have been voiced that she was in fact murdered. A similar fate seems to have befallen her son. In the film, young Benito, apparently aping his father, goes realistically mad. According to published facts, he died in a psychiatric hospital near Milan in 1942 at the age of 27 after receiving excessive amounts of insulin coma therapy. Could this have been another murder? As history, the film is incomplete, fictional in parts, and highly conjectural. As cinema, however, it is blessed by a stunning performance from Giovanna Mezzogiorno as Ida, and some remarkable cinematography. As an example of film portraying such a kind and insightful psychiatrist, it may well be unique.

The British Journal of Psychiatry (2011)
198, 489. doi: 10.1192/bjp.198.6.489