

Io sono l'amore (I Am Love) (15)

14th May 2012

Director: **Luca Guadagnino**
Italy 2009

Running time : 120 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Tilda Swinton** (Emma Recchi), **Flavio Parenti** (Edoardo Recchi Jr.), **Edoardo Gabbriellini** (Antonio Biscaglia), **Alba Rohrwacher** ('Betta' Recchi), **Pippo Delbono** (Tancredi Recchi).

SCRIPT: **Luca Guadagnino, Barbara Alberti, Ivan Cotroneo & Walter Fasano** from a story by **Luca Guadagnino**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Yorick Le Saux**. EDITING: **Walter Fasano**. MUSIC: **John Adams**.

I Am Love is nothing if not ravishingly beautiful to look at. Its director hails from the world of *haute couture*, and indeed clothing has its role here, whether as a symbol of status – the exquisitely tailored suits of the Recchi family who dominate the action like some latter day Julio-Flavians – or the workmanlike clothes worn by Antonio. But quite apart from the selection of costumes and properties, the choice of locations or the selection of music cues from the works of John Adams, the piece oozes taste and discernment in its sense of framing, editing and the poise of its performances.

It is unsurprising to find Tilda Swinton associated with such a venture (she also co-produced): remember her work with Derek Jarman, or *Orlando*, or indeed *Michael Clayton*. The lady quite simply has impeccable judgement when it comes to her choice of projects, and to each she brings that Olympian aura of glacial beauty and a gaze that penetrates the soul.

So it is that in *I Am Love* (the title itself has something Greek mythological about it) she personifies a Pandora of sorts, a Russian *émigrée* in Milanese high society, married into the wealthy industrialist family of the Recchis. She has a daughter, who is on the verge of coming out, and two sons. At the start of the film the issue is which of them will take the reins of the company from grandfather Recchi, together with the father Tancredi, not a little controversially – a scene of almost 'I, Claudian' proportions. The meal that forms the stage of this curious familial transferral of power is interrupted by Antonio, a chef friend of the more sensitive of the two sons, who will prepare an equally symbolic feast at the film's conclusion. Gradually an attraction grows between Emma and this modest man, an artist who works with prime materials of an altogether more seductive tenor than those of the Recchi family. (Tellingly

in one scene he guides Emma's hand with his as she applies the finishing touch to a dish with a kitchen-size blow torch.)

The scene is set, then, for a love affair that will at the very least have shattering consequences for a proud family. Quite how things turn out a lot more tragically than that, I shall not dream of disclosing here. Simply to say, the closing minutes of the film with their operatic movement of figures through architectural spaces, accompanied by the *crescendo* trumpet fanfares of Adams's *Harmonielehre Part III*, are incandescent.

You may feel that Guadagnino has merely dressed up a very old story in chic new clothing, an exercise in style with little substance to justify the length. For me there is artistry and precision at work here that provide pleasure for its own sake, yes, but the characters are not cyphers but living, breathing and ever so frail human beings.

There are references to be found to delight film buffs, too. You may be forgiven for thinking of Diane Keaton's chill marriage of *The Godfather Part Two* as you watch Emma and Tancredi going through the motions. And in the sequence where Emma sees Antonio after driving to Sanremo she sports a bun hairstyle previously worn by Madeleine/Carlotta in *Vertigo*. Douglas Sirk's wonderful melodramas, like *Written on the Wind* and *All that Heaven Allows*, may also come to mind, in action as well as setting. (All of which suddenly makes one think of Todd Haynes's *Far from Heaven* and Almodóvar's *All About my Mother*, films equally in love with Sirk.) No matter; Guadagnino mixes in enough varied ingredients – early Antonioni here, some Visconti there (the *Boccaccio '70* segment, for example) – to make this a unique cinematic feast.

David Clare