



I AM LOVE (IO SONO L'AMORE)

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Review by Dave Calhoun, Time Out:

A work of masterly daring and skill, the new Italian film *I Am Love* plays out in the late 1990s within a



super-rich family called the Recchis. Their power base is a Milanese villa introduced to us by young director Luca Guadagnino as a gilded cage – a marble-and-stone palace too large and ornate to support intimate family life. In the film's early scenes Guadagnino laps up this mansion, exploring it with a swirling, fluid camera that turns its world into a character itself. The fictional Recchis recall the Agnellis, another troubled industrialist family which feathered its nest on the back of fascism, but they trade in textiles, not cars, and Guadagnino gives us a brief shot of their mechanised looms at work to stress how business is woven into the fabric of this family's soul.

We meet the Recchis on the cusp of change – and change is the film's main interest, along with the dangerous strength necessary for any woman to counter the forces of tradition and expectation in such a family. We begin by watching the elderly family head (Gabriele Ferzetti) at dinner as he nominates his successors in a scene of *King Lear*-like power and unnaturalness. But soon he is dead and our focus and heroine becomes Emma Recchi (Tilda Swinton), the dutiful Russian wife of Tancredi (Pippo Delbono), the family's new head, and mother to two grown-up sons and a daughter attempting her own flight from this patriarchal world. Emma's burgeoning friendship with her son's business partner, Antonio (Edoardo Gabbriellini), a rural chef, is the nudge that will bring this house of cards down in dramatic, tragic fashion.



The story is bold enough, but true daring is at play in the film's style. Guadagnino has the confidence to mix big, brash *Dallas*-style establishing shots of Milan and London and complicated scenes of busy parties with much more intimate, expressive moments. Dialogue becomes less important as the film progresses, and Guadagnino invites us to read the film rather than the characters' lips. He also manages to bring the film to an operatic crescendo without losing sight of emotional realities.

There are many reasons to recommend this sensual and good-looking film about personal and female liberation. The music is one; it is central to a work that demands that all the film's elements work together to create a total cinema. Guadagnino and his star and co-producer, Swinton, persuaded John Adams, the composer of operas such as 'Nixon in China' and 'Doctor Atomic', to allow his work to be used in a film for the first time and his crashing, arresting, impulsive music is gripping from the start.

It's a fitting collaboration. Adams has given modern opera a much-needed shot in the arm and that's what Swinton (who speaks Italian throughout) and Guadagnino are striving to achieve: *I Am Love* is a brazen blueprint for a cinema that straddles past and future while worrying little about trends of the present. It's a bold experiment rooted in tradition. It plays like smart opera and looks like a marriage of poetic documentary with classical European drama. Swinton and Guadagnino call it 'Visconti on acid' and that's as good a phrase as any to describe the film's intoxicating allure.