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Giuseppe Tornatore: Emotion, Cognition, Cinema

William Hope

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The nature of the spectator s emotional and intellectual engagement with films has attracted increasing critical scrutiny over the past decade, and theoretical frameworks have been elaborated to analyse how and why viewers are moved by what they see on screen. Viewer responses are influenced by factors including genre expectations, involuntary physiological reactions to what is seen and heard, shifting attachments towards screen characters, and by specific devices within a film s mise-en-scène, such as lighting and colour. Giuseppe Tornatore: Emotion; Cognition; Cinema is a film-by-film analysis of the work of the Oscar-winning director, a study that examines the nature of the strong affective charge that characterizes his films, and which also explores the cognitive and intellectual appeal of Tornatore s cinema. The volume illustrates the ways in which an affective and intellectual synergy can develop between a film s aesthetics and its conceptual agenda, as instantiated by films such as the celebrated Cinema Paradiso. The affective power that characterizes Tornatore s work has long been acknowledged by critics, and while analysing the configurations of visual, aural, and narrative devices that generate such intensely poignant viewing experiences, the volume also elucidates the ways in which the director s stylistic approach intensifies the significance of a range of social and cultural questions affecting Western society, issues that lie at the heart of his films. Reviews of the Book: 'Giuseppe Tornatore is one of the few authentically original voices to emerge in the cinematic world over the past quarter century. He champions community values, solidly grounded in emotional engagement and interaction, over the brash, loud, self-proclaiming egocentricity that has increasingly dominated western societies since the nineteen-eighties and, paradoxically, isolated the individual ever more intensely within his own subjective world. Yet, viewed superficially, his narratives appear old-fashioned, flirting frequently and precariously with overt melodrama and sentimentalism while managing nevertheless to mount a powerful critique of what our societies have become and what they have sacrificed that makes them the poorer. Eschewing the alienating, ironical deconstructionism of most of his contemporaries, Tornatore subtly employs every technical device at his disposal to enforce the spectator s identification with the wistfulness of his protagonists, in their growing awareness of a sense of personal loss and nostalgia. Yet, this fulfils only part of his intention, for having snared us in a tangle of emotions, he then, in Pirandellian fashion, propels us towards the moment of intellectually-charged reflection, in which the film s apparently negative terminus ad quem is transformed into the forceful negation of those contemporary values that have brought about the protagonist s sense of moral and affective dislocation. William Hope s authoritative study carefully charts these processes as they unfold within individual films and across successive films, not neglecting, when appropriate, to comment on Tornatore s continual refinements and extensions of his conceptual framework and applications of his visual techniques. However, this book goes well beyond illustration of a thesis for it is also concerned with how we watch films and react to them and how, through carefully judged juxtapositions of his material, use of cameras, variations in intensity of music or silences, and so on, Tornatore is able to make use of this essentially psychological knowledge to manoeuvre his spectators towards a realisation of his own cinematic, which is to say, moral vision of the contemporary world.' Professor Doug Thompson, University of Hull 'William Hope's work gives to the cinema of Tornatore the degree of analytical thoroughne

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