Susanne Peters, Klaus Stierstorfer, Laurenz Volkmann (Eds.)

Guest Editor: Dirk Vanderbeke

# Film

## Part I

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# TEACHING
# CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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# Series Preface

The series *Teaching Contemporary Literature*, edited by Susanne Peters, Klaus Stierstorfer and Laurenz Volkmann, presents readings of major works of contemporary literature in English for schools and universities. At the same time, all contributions remain accessible in style and approach to a wider, interested readership. All those seeking an introduction to or further inspiration on specific texts and their authors, as well as those in need of a comprehensive, substantial survey of writings in English, will find the various perspectives on individual texts offered by specialists in the respective fields as informative and stimulating, always geared to engendering further readings and discussions. Obviously, the choice of some dozens of texts for each genre from a vast amount of available material is not only highly selective but also inevitably reflects the contributors' and editors' individual tastes and preferences. It is because of the involvement of our tastes and preferences that the choices of texts published in this series do not attempt to represent a fixed canon. The contributions are always arranged in alphabetical order. However, all volumes feature a special introductory section, "How to use this book". Here, optional tables of content provide suggestions for structuring and arranging the films and their readings according to selective themes, principles or interests, always in the hope of captivating teachers' and students' curiosity to find their own arrangements and cross-referencing.

# Contents

## Part II

# Introduction

## A. The Scope of the Volume

These new volumes in the series *Teaching Contemporary Literature and Culture* fulfil the promise of the series title and move from literature into the field of popular culture. And if the introduction to the first collection of essays on *Drama* was opened up with the concession that its subject was not, "at first sight, students' most favourite art form", chances are that the volumes on *Film* address issues that will raise more immediate enthusiasm in the seminar room. This, of course, will prove to be an asset for the teachers, but it also carries its own problems or dangers. Watching movies is fun and has been one of the most cherished entertainments ever since the first cinemas opened more than a century ago, but analyzing and discussing them is no less work than studying drama or the novel. It requires the use of an appropriate terminology, as well as some knowledge of media-specific issues like production, funding, artistic cooperation, technology, processing and distribution, to name only a few. If books are usually written by single authors and then published, which turns out to be complicated enough when looked at closely, films are far more complex products that involve not only the cooperation of substantial numbers of highly specialized professionals but also enormous amounts of money for their realization and thus necessarily commercial considerations and long term planning. Far more than the literature usually discussed in the classroom, films are highly conscious of, and geared to, their intended markets and audiences, and while the failure to meet expectations on the literary scene will hardly rock the publishers' boat too badly, even large studios can run into terminal problems when costly projects fail at the box office – Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* being probably the most striking example. Thus the product has to be seen in a different context and as subject to far stricter and unforgiving conditions and demands.

In addition, the very notion of entertainment and the new forms of access to movies pose a problem for the serious investigation in the classroom. Increasingly, films are watched no longer on the large screen but on TV, computer screens and even tablet PCs or smart phones, and quite frequently the technological conditions interfere with a productive reception and appropriate response. Watching a movie in the low resolution common on YouTube or similar platforms, which is rather usual for contemporary students, will render a considerable part of the film blurred or even invisible. Similarly, the high-paced editing that has become state of the art in recent blockbusters does not allow for any closer look at the background or visual details but forces the spectator to concentrate on the central action. In consequence, the audience is trained to disregard seemingly insignificant aspects like the construction of space and environment in favour of a strict focus on centre stage. Thus it will

be necessary to raise the awareness in the students that movies are not merely stories to be enjoyed or dismissed according to taste but complex artefacts that need to be understood on their own terms – and this requires the ability to watch them closely in all their facets and visual aspects. Every single item on the screen, every lens, every aspect of lighting and every cut is the result of decisions and thus contributes to the general artistic concept and vision. And thus it will be necessary to teach the students the basic art of seeing and of noticing visual elements even, or especially, if they seem peripheral and thus negligible.

However, the new technologies also provide new possibilities, and if previous generations had to memorize films because repeated viewings of the whole product or selected scenes were impossible, we can now analyze single sequences or stills at pleasure or ad nauseam. Projectors allow us to view movies in the classroom on a larger scale than merely the usual TV format, and thus we have the opportunity to assess the films more closely than it was previously possible. The contributions to this volume include suggestions for close viewing in analogy to close reading and also stills that can be used to demonstrate specific aspects which might otherwise be lost in the usual stream of 24 frames per second.

Similar to the previous volumes of this series, this collection of essays aims at global inclusiveness, spanning in its scope all continents and offering films from a multitude of Anglophone cultures and nations. In this field, however, the very attempt at balance may ultimately lead to an imbalance, as the output in movies is certainly not equal between countries and regions. America has been dominant ever since the early 20th century, and Europe has for a long time maintained its second position until new production centres and markets recently shifted the balance towards the exploding (pun!) film industries of Bollywood and Nollywood. These new locations are, however, dominated by a steady flow of mass produced genre flics, and it would be equally inappropriate to mirror the numerical output of the respective film industries in this volume as to present a similar number of movies for each Anglophone country. In consequence, American movies are once more taking the lead (13), followed by Great Britain (6), Asia/Anglo-Asia (5), Australia/New Zealand (3), Canada (3), Africa (5) and the Caribbean (1). Except for one movie they were all originally produced in English – the editors felt that *Atanarjuat*, filmed entirely in Inuktitut by the Inuit director Zacharias Kunuk had to be included in this collection.

Of course it would be impossible to claim that our selection – or any other similar collection – could ever be representative of all the developments that took place over the last decades and to offer a complete survey of the most important motion pictures. But we tried to cover major trends and interests in contemporary cinema, to choose films that are accessible for students, even if not all of them are suitable for use in school, and to offer a wide range of interpretations and approaches. Most of the movies have been very successful at

the box office, collected numerous awards, won critical acclaim and promise to become classics in their respective genres; many of them, however, have also been discussed controversially, and, as the contributions emphasize, require critical assessment rather than mere agreement. The commercial interests mentioned above almost necessarily require some nods towards mainstream tastes and the ideological demands of the cultural environment. These need to be explored and discussed, and quite often an improved awareness of problematic elements and issues in a cherished movie does not lead to a dismissal but to an increase in our interest and the pleasure in watching it.

## B. The Contributions at a Glance

The broad variety of films for the two present volumes is fittingly met by a wide spectrum of interpretive engagement. In the first contribution on Sam Mendes's hugely popular *American Beauty* (1999), **Sabine N. Meyer** and **Peter Schneck** carefully organise their interpretation of the film around its controversial core issues of American middle class ideals, suburban conformity and consumerist attitudes, normative gender roles and troubled sexual desire. They assure us that *American Beauty* offers a complex perspective on the tension between social norms and individual desire, clad in a combination of scathing satire, highly polished formal aesthetics and the elusive ambivalence of its moral message.

In our second contribution on Zacharias Kunuk's arctic culture film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), the first Inuit film to receive international attention and one of Canada's most celebrated movies of recent times, **Kerstin Knopf** explains that, to a Canadian native audience, the film unfolds as much cultural potential as a Grimm fairy tale might do if put on the screen in Germany. The story is a fascinating electronic myth-telling of a shaman putting on a curse on a small Inuit community, infesting it with evil and upsetting its spiritual balance and convivial solidarity. Knopf discusses ethnographic traits and motifs such as seasonal migratory movements, colours and communal activities, with an emphasis on the most striking difference to Western narrative film. Specifically, *Atanarjuat's* very slow pace is highlighted here and its corresponding technique of a hand-held camera and mobile framing.

*Babel*, directed by Mexican-American filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu (2006), is extraordinarily suitable for the EFL classroom, according to **Martina Wolff**. Elaborating on the film's themes of globalization, generational conflict, family communication, nationality, transnationality and identity, this contribution also reveals the film's mirroring structure and its disrupted chronology. *Babel's* denial to grant viewers a conventionally well-structured and omniscient view of the events offers a notable starting point for stimulating discussions.

**Oliver Golembowski's** comprehensive appreciation of Stephen Daldry's unpretentious *Billy Elliot* (2000) makes the success of this film in EFL contexts

quite visible to us. *Billy Elliot* is a profoundly enjoyable, upbeat movie, driven by a peppy soundtrack that portrays the worries of an adolescent boy who develops a passion for ballet dance instead of "ordinary" boyish pursuits such as boxing and fighting. Obstacles such as these, Golembowski writes, help develop the themes of *Billy Elliot*: class strife, gender trouble and coming of age, all of which specially invite readings against the grain.

**Nancy Grimm** asks us to teach Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) with caution. The film's indebtedness in the muckraking tradition of investigative journalism has earned Moore applause for recklessly unveiling the truth behind the lies of multinational corporations, celebrities and politicians. But it is exactly for that reason that the film, taking on a large variety of issues such as corporate power, government-controlled media, aggressive American foreign politics, institutionalized racism and gun violence should not be taken as a factual account of US-American realities. Instead, selected sequences of Moore's documentaries lend themselves to furthering media literacy in the EFL classroom by taking a close look at how cinematic techniques are employed to convey rather subjective messages or, in some instances, even to deceive the viewer.

**Oliver Lindner** describes Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) as an internationally acclaimed vibrant romantic comedy that familiarises a global audience with some prominent aspects of Bollywood cinema. As an adaptation of Jane Austen's classic novel, the film translates Austen's story of love and marriage into early 21st century India and America. Amongst the topics investigated in this contribution are the role of love and marriage, the relation of Bollywood to Hollywood and the issue of adaptation, all of which present rewarding opportunities in EFL contexts.

In his interpretation of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), **Carsten Albers** covers Ang Lee's topic of a forbidden gay relationship not only from the perspective of the two protagonists, but also shows how the men's secrecy affects their wives and families, involving homophobia, violence and the impossibility of mourning. Within the context of the Western movie genre, *Brokeback Mountain* seeks to render an accurate portrayal of American society in the Midwest from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, shattering the ideal of normative heterosexuality and notions of traditional masculinity, revolving around the dynamics of a love relationship that is denied its right to exist.

In her discussions of Tim Burton's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), **Doreen Triebel** pays detailed attention to a selection of technical aspects such as mise-en-scène, gothic imagery and richly visualized fantastic elements before turning to the film's focus on the hero as a lonely, misunderstood outcast. She demonstrates how the film offers the viewer remarkable insights into the principle workings of a factory as microeconomic system in operation within a macroeconomic capitalist market place.

According to **Stefanie Schäfer**, Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2004) is concerned with human relations in a contemporary megalopolis. As such, it can be ana-

lysed as a disquieting parable of race relations. She discusses the intricately interrelated personal encounters that lead to psychological as well as physical crashes on the freeways and in the homes of the characters. These crashes are visually and auditorily supported by the alternation between silence and noise, stillness and movement, establishing the juxtaposition of peace and chaos as the movie's most prominent stylistic device. In EFL contexts, it is argued, both instructors and students would need to pay attention not only to the film's realistic and symbolic levels, but also to its more comprehensive allusions to issues of multiculturalism.

**Dietmar Böhnke's** critical appreciation of Neil Jordan's "Troubles" film *The Crying Game* (1992) not only identifies its several central strands, including the film's interest in precarious states of identity. It also deals amply with its emphasis on performance, its complex narrative structure involving unexpected twists and reversals – and its generic hybridity. Elaborating on the historical implications of the ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland – the towering background to the movie – this contribution stresses its important potential for EFL contexts both at university and secondary school levels.

**Laurenz Volkmann's** choice of Steve Jacobs's *Disgrace* (2008), based on Coetzee's South African novel of the same title, is perhaps the most challenging in this collection. The film is void of sympathetic characters, void of a plot we could appreciate, it features gruesome scenes of violence and cruelty, yet it offers a strikingly complex treatment of frictions between black and white both on the level of human (and human-animal) encounter and, symbolically, in terms of the country's political future. It is at this point where we might begin to find it rewarding in EFL contexts. Tracing juxtapositions of hope and destruction, of farm and metropolitan settings, metaphorical treatments of light and darkness, this contribution focuses on the story of a deeply flawed man who starts to come to terms with the reality of the evolving world he is living in. On a socio-political level, the contribution also discusses the film as a parable of race-relations of the New South Africa, of the shift of power and the ongoing systemic violence.

Neill Blomkamp's 2009 science-fiction film *District 9* also has South Africa as its setting. **Jochen Schmidt** discusses the story of a gigantic alien spaceship that arrives over Johannesburg in 1982, carrying an emaciated and deeply distressed alien people. Blomkamp's *melange* of documentary and feature film strategies is concerned with racial stereotyping, ethnic absolutism, dehumanization and alterity, yet at the same time it maintains a clear ironical tone. This contribution elaborates on the film's potential for creative disorientation and deconstruction while it still exemplifies the ideological, social and political manifestations of oppression and exploitation – all of which highly recommend this film for EFL contexts.

In Damien O'Donnell's 1999 film *East Is East* and its 2010 sequel *West Is West*, British national identity is being rewritten, **Silke Stroh** argues in her appreciation of the merits of these productions. They encompass the continuing

importance of issues such as migration, diaspora, multi- and transculturality and enable us to understand the continuing debates about "culture clashes" between "East" and "West", and about Islam vs. Christianity and/or secularism, arranged and forced marriages, cultural hybridity and generational differences in diasporic and transcultural families.

**Sonja Fielitz** also discusses a set of two films, namely Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* (1998) and its sequel, *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007). The earlier film is a perfect blend of historical film, conspiracy thriller and romance, and as such appeals to a large variety of viewer interests. From an aesthetic point of view, it is notable for its expressive visuality and baroque mise-en-scène. The sequel revisits the major topics of religion, power, and love, again emphasising times of political strife and religious uncertainty in the early years of her reign. It is significant and should be addressed in EFL contexts, Fielitz argues, that both films focus on Elizabeth's younger rather than on her later years of empire-building and cultural achievements.

In their contribution on Chris Monger's 1995 production *The Englishman who Went Up a Hill But Came Down a Mountain* **Annika Merk** and **Klaus Stierstorfer** contextualize the film within a number of genre specifications, among them regional comedy typical of British Cinema in the 1990s and "devolved" British heritage films of its time, before analysing the topicality of space and mapmaking. Monger's *Englishman* is not a film that immediately recommends itself to pedagogics – too much does it subordinate to the demands of mainstream Hollywood cinema. However, it might be exactly this light-hearted disguise of a highly complex material that could successfully introduce students to the affairs of a nation.

Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* (1997), **Rüdiger Heinze** informs us, is one of the most influential movies about biotechnology and genetic engineering. What makes the film special in EFL classes is the fact that its deceptively simple story and subdued form and style with little action, few special effects, sepia colours and minimalist mise-en-scène, at a closer look reveal a highly complex, ambivalent and multifaceted artwork that can be discussed from a number of different perspectives. This contribution discusses the important observation that the crucial difference to other films about genetic engineering lies in the fact that in this fictional world the eugenics is depicted as a "free choice", not as enforced.

**Dirk Vanderbeke** argues that Clint Eastwood's 2008 production *Gran Torino* is best understood as a commentary on, and reworking of, topics that first shaped the image of Clint Eastwood as an iconic actor. The approach to this movie acknowledges the continuities and discontinuities, the generic traditions that inform the story and its cinematographic realization. The film, as Vanderbeke demonstrates, both confirms and undercuts the viewer's expectations, and it is riddled with quotations from, and allusions to, previous Eastwood movies. *Gran Torino*'s inherent dialectic of anticipation and realization

finds its equivalent on the larger level of genre and its internal logic and requirements.

One way to raise students' interest and help them develop a deeper understanding not only of inner-African conflict, but also of European complicity in African politics is the movie *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), **Martina Mittag** argues. Whether the film about the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which almost one million people were killed perpetuates an essentialist stance has to be asked both in aesthetic and political terms. While the war context of *Hotel Rwanda* is one defining framework, the lack of international support is another. A complex understanding of how "realities" are (re)produced through a variety of media is an essential issue with this film which needs to be addressed in EFL contexts.

A prominent theme in Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* (2007) is indeed wilderness, especially the romanticist notion of a counter-space to civilization where the individual can regenerate and find individual freedom, **Caroline Rosenthal** writes. Penn's film is a coming-of-age story about the identity quest of a young man, rendering this search in the fashion of an episodic road movie in which Alaska as the final destination becomes symbolically charged as the last frontier. *Into the Wild* markedly deviates from Hollywood conventions and almost bears the signature of an auteur movie, employing a stark contrast between nature and the city and a semiotization of these spaces in many different ways.

**Barbara Korte's** interpretation of Ken Loach's *It's a Free World...* (2007) underlines that the film reflects its director's political commitment to the Left and gives a face and a voice to those who are not normally represented in British society or in British film. Thus, *It's a Free World...* offers a tale with a moral message, while Loach achieves the naturalism of his films through an ensemble of techniques for which he has become famous. Choosing authentic locations and working with hardly known actors, Loach also goes for non-patronising, unobtrusive camera work. This contribution delineates how, for example, the final episode exemplifies the mixture of naturalism and melodrama characteristic of Loach's approach. An important part of our appreciation of this film is that we, as an audience, have our own ethical standards challenged or even destabilised.

**Anne Hegerfeldt** also deals with a film that unbalances its viewers by making it necessary to continuously revise one's initial opinions of the characters and the situations depicted in it. Jason Reitman's *Juno* is a comedy about unintended pregnancy, in this case teenage pregnancy. Since its release in 2007, the film has attracted attention not only from critics and the public, but increasingly from academic quarters as well. Reitman manages to avoid the moralizing which so often attends the topic of teenage pregnancy, while upholding a "standard" American backdrop as the foil against which the film's characters are developed from stereotypes into individuals. It is an engaging film, offering a variety of starting points for analysis and lively debate.

**Birgit Neumann** and **Jan Rupp** argue that Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan* (2001) derives much of its allure from an innovative combination of Western and Indian cinematic traditions, a strategy which places the film in the dual framework of the local and the global. As a Hindi film, *Lagaan* clearly draws on the tradition of Bollywood cinema, which builds on convoluted and melodramatic plots with unexpected thrills, but it also draws on Western filmic traditions, particularly with its allusions to *Once Upon a Time in the West,* which stake out the claim of presenting a specifically Indian version of legitimate order in the era of decolonization and globalization. The translation of the game of cricket into the Indian colonial context produces cultural differences that challenge notions of origin and substitute binarisms for hybrid mixing.

John Sayles's film *Lone Star* (1996) works in a realist vein focussing on character and the relations between the individual and society, while it engages in a critical dialogue with the genre of the Western in order to challenge its ideological implications and, more importantly, to take a stand against conservative and right-wing attempts at creating anxieties about the demise of European traditions in American culture. In her contribution, **Jutta Zimmermann** states that Sayles presents the border as the spatial embodiment of cultural contact, fusion and hybridity. *Lone Star* foregrounds the way in which spatial metaphors – and specifically the border – in recent decades have been used to illustrate that culture is neither static nor homogeneous.

**Jens Martin Gurr** discusses Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003) as an example of what has come to be known as "Indiewood" film-making. As the title *Lost in Translation* suggests, the issue of intercultural communication or rather mis-communication is a central theme. With its representation of two jet-lagged global travellers, failed intercultural communication, hypermodern cityscapes and sleek, anonymous hotels, this is also a film about the psychological effects of globalization. As far as the negotiation of genre is concerned, the film not only undercuts genre expectations by not providing a clear happy ending but also by being rather more loosely plotted than one would conventionally expect. Gurr argues that although the film engages with a number of key issues in contemporary culture – globalization, intercultural encounters, mediatisation, anonymity, urban life – it is not a programmatic or overtly "political" film.

In his discussion of Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg* (2007), **Stefan Brandt** asks how the idea of romantic enchantment that Maddin so willingly took up for his film goes together with the tenets of the documentary genre. Watching *My Winnipeg*, he stresses, is an unusual and intensely visceral experience. It is the subtle blending of fact and fiction, of documented reality and fantasy that earns *My Winnipeg* its place among the cinematic masterpieces of the post-millennium era. Moreover, *My Winnipeg* makes wide use of intertextual elements, extended by a decisively parodistic dimension. Without a doubt, this contribution explains, Maddin's cinematic Winnipeg is more phantasmagoric

than "factual" (in the traditional sense). It is conceptualized as a city of dreams and nightmares by which we feel at once attracted and strangely deterred.

Writing on Lee Tamahori's internationally successful *Once Were Warriors* (1994), **Renate Brosch** discusses the problematic issue of a local identity as it is reconstructed for an audience outside. The film, she tells us, shocked many viewers and caused many Maori spokespeople to condemn it as racist. It unfolds a comprehensive aesthetics for its representation of the Maori as underprivileged, lavishing visual attention on their appearance, houses and surroundings. Dilapidated parts of the city become inappropriately romantic where colourfully dressed young people play music and dance in the streets. She asks us to evaluate this deviation from its initial promise of social realism, and to focus our discussion in class on the film's generic eclecticism and its representational functions.

**Martin Holtz** argues that from a didactic perspective, John Hillcoat's *The Proposition* (2005) invites a number of stimulating approaches: it provides a realistic insight into a distinct cultural and historical environment. The film is concerned with the country's legacy of colonization, its unique interaction of ethnic groups and its formation of an embattled cultural identity marred by coercion, repression, and racism. Stylistically, it resists the dominant plot-oriented style of mainstream cinema and uses an associative, occasionally mystifying visual language instead. Thus, *The Proposition* stands in the tradition of Australian art movies, meaningfully appropriated in the uncolonized land as the space where causality, coherence and linearity – all rationalist concepts of western civilization – are severely disturbed.

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) has come to be regarded as emblematic of Australia's "Stolen Generation", **Anja Müller** tells us. Phillip Noyce's film deals with the indigenous Australian population suffering from child abductions by the government until the 1970s. The film lends itself to a variety of uses in the classroom: Its child protagonists present heroes to identify with, while the focus on a crucial episode in Australian social and cultural history renders the film suitable in a unit or course on Australian history and culture, while the implied universal agenda of the movie suggests its employment in a comparative study of the rigid oppression of cultural communities. In her reading of gender representations, Anja Müller highlights the film's strong emotional appeal, convincing us that *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is certainly a movie that offers itself to classroom instruction.

**Dirk Wiemann**, in his contribution on Mira Nair's 1988 production *Salaam Bombay!,* informs us that it will be unsettling for European students to learn that the vast majority of Indian viewers and critics question not only the merits of the film itself but also the very legitimacy of well-meaning western responses. Even though the diegesis is plotted around the story of Krishna, script, editing and mise-en-scène collaborate to discourage a reading that would focus too much on the individual and his story. The conspicuous looseness of the plot is further highlighted by the editing technique, as most se-

quences are structured by a fast-paced rhythm, while the slow fade-ins and fade-outs that demarcate sequences leave the viewer with manifold narrative gaps. For any engagement with *Salaam Bombay!* in the classroom, the divided reception between Western and Indian critics is at least as important as the film itself.

**Norbert Schaffeld**, discussing John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) in terms of a "Hollywoodization", offers an intricate interpretation of the film. Contrary to a strictly biographical reading of *Shakespeare in Love*, which raises serious questions that have to be addressed in class, the film's other focus on the Elizabethan theatre and its London setting seems less problematic. Indeed, the aspects of financing, licensing and staging a play within the framework of a specific architecture should be given pride of place in any classroom context. Schaffeld explains that within the film, the Puritan critique of the theatre becomes part of a complex thematic pattern that intertwines aspects of art, entertainment and business with the forces of regal and religious power, the impact of a gender-specific stage practice, and the harmful effect of patriarchal conventions. As a consequence, our reading of the film should be aware of the different modes by which the specific film language provides a corresponding or additional "text".

**Mita Banerjee's** contribution focuses on the fact that more than any other recent representation of India, Danny Boyle's award-winning film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) seems to have struck a chord with Western audiences. Reading it as a representation of India on a global market, it seems worthwhile to examine the film's differences to the standard Bollywood format. Employing Said's seminal argument of the West constructing the Orient and then mistaking that construction for real, this essay also discusses the politics of casting lay actors.

The first major feature film in North America to be written, directed and co-produced by indigenous professionals that won national and international acclaim, Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* works with the genre of the road movie, as **Kerstin Knopf** writes. As much as *Thelma & Louise* feminized it, *Smoke Signals* indigenizes the genre and undercuts its macho-aura by the "uncool" and "non-macho" means of transportation, turning it into a universal story filled with indigenous characters countering the romanticized Indian images that fill Hollywood filmographies.

**Frank Mattern** then makes us read *Thelma & Louise* (1991) as an extremely rich cinematic text that repays repeated viewings and close analysis with a wealth of observations. He argues that the process of the protagonists' liberating transformation is triggered by, and channelled through, acts of violence in a series of picaresque adventures along the road. As the women's pleasure outing turns into a crime spree, the emancipatory crossing of boundaries is linked to, and indeed figuratively coded as, criminal transgression. Gender politics, violence and audience manipulation have indeed proved to be closely intertwined key issues in the film's reception, as shown in the film's use of

classic catharsis, but a second, more fundamental and indeed fascinating factor is the film's attempt to "mainstream" its agenda.

The American dark cop movies of the 1970s are the background genre to Chris Browne's *Third World Cop* (1999), **Göran Nieragden** argues. This disillusioned movie is a straightforwardly narrated stereotypical police story not without clichés and structural weaknesses, yet it comes to performative-creative life during the action sequences, skilfully choreographed chase sequences and shootouts. The monumental tragedy at the centre of *Third World Cop* is the one that posits best friend against best friend with a girl in the middle – a well-known formula for popular narratives in- and outside the cinema. The plot is simple, fast and straightforward, the movie is populated with stock characters, and yet the allusion to a deprived, backward, forgotten and underdeveloped world in the movie's title is indeed intensely visualized through the settings.

**Gerd Bayer** shows us that Darrel James Roodt's *Yesterday* (2004) offers a stark portrayal of the impact that AIDS has on the lives of South Africans living in rural communities. The film takes much of its tension from a nexus that links bodily desire, a deadly illness and the unwillingness of some rural residents to accept the scientific reality of viruses and medication. In doing so, the film is committed to the project of modernity, with all the pitfalls implied by this move. In this context, *Yesterday* in fact carries various layers of political and ideological meanings, inviting critical viewers to think about the film along the lines set out by the debate about the allegorical nature of postcolonial art.

# How to use this Book

In keeping with the transnational concept of the volume, we abandoned traditional compartmentalizations and structurings along geographical demarcations and present the contributions in mere alphabetical order. Where, for example, would Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* be positioned? Doubtless, this is a film that fits into a variety of categories such as the representation of India, while the huge success is was granted was mainly on the global market. And where, for example, would we have to put Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation*, a film about the pitfalls of intercultural understanding? Many of the films included here defy such facile compartmentalization. To the editors, it seems much more appropriate to group the films according to a variety of dominant and recurring themes explored in them. A film dealing with political involvement may also tackle generation conflicts, an *auteur* movie can be analysed according to its aesthetic features, but it may also raise important questions regarding indigenous cultures. A film dealing with the gender matrix will also raise issues of identity formation. Hence, it seems appropriate to suggest clusters broad enough to cover – yet not exhaustively – the range of topics dealt with in the 35 films in this collection.