

# **Atwood, Pinter, Schlöndorff: *The Handmaid's Tale* – Intermedial.**

## **Eine kognitiv-hermeneutische Untersuchung der filmischen Literaturadaption**

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### **Abstract:**

This study of *The Handmaid's Tale* examines both Margaret Atwood's novel (1985) and the film adaptation by Harold Pinter (screenwriter) and Volker Schlöndorff (director) which premiered on the 40th annual Berlin International Film Festival in 1990. Part I gives a brief introduction to cognitive hermeneutics and describes how its concept of explanatory interpretation can be effectively applied to films, especially to films adapted from literature. In part II Atwood's novel is interpreted against the historical background of religious fundamentalism in the United States. The conception of the text is traced back to the author's political and artistic views, particularly with regard to the subversion of the common dystopian pattern of rebellion. Part III provides a systematic interpretation of the film version of *The Handmaid's Tale*. This involves a book-to-film-comparison, and a full analysis of the unpublished materials related to *The Handmaid's Tale* included in the Margaret Atwood Papers (Toronto), the Harold Pinter Archive (London), and the Collection Volker Schlöndorff (Frankfurt am Main). The analysis of various draft scripts, handwritten annotations, and the correspondence between novelist, screenwriter, and director offers important insights into the entire filmmaking process. In this way, the study reconstructs the development of Pinter's original screenplay, Schlöndorff's revisions and his collaboration with Margaret Atwood, it discusses the controversial question of authorship, and specifies the film authors' strategies of adaptation, transformation, and artistic compromise that led to the filmic end product. The concept of the finished film is attributed to the ideological and artistic beliefs of screenwriter and director, and it is explained why the cinematic version differs significantly from its literary source – without judging it from a fidelity position.

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