

The dynamics of a transmedia storyworld on the example of *The Handmaid's Tale* vast narrative

mgr Katarzyna Machala

ABSTRACT

Transmedia storytelling is a fairly new phenomenon, still not fully understood by researchers, yet extremely popular among audiences around the world. The dynamic development of the streaming services made audiences want to consume more of the story in a short time, whereas the rise of the digital technologies made them wish to participate in it, expand it, change it, and retell it anew. As users have gained the power to shape the story, narratives became too vast to grasp. They spread over various media and offer multiple versions of events, contributed by different authors. This dissertation focuses on *The Handmaid's Tale* vast narrative, which consists in a dialogue of multiple texts extended in time over three decades and shifting from a simple adaptation to a much bigger construct.

The main aim of the research is to study *The Handmaid's Tale* as an example of a transmedia vast narrative, with a special focus on the main directions of its expansion, and the internal power play of its constituent elements, in order to contribute to the understanding of an important trend in popular culture in the 21st century, likely to dominate the way in which stories are told. The following components are considered in the analysis: *The Handmaid's Tale* (the novel) by Margaret Atwood (1985), seasons 1-4 of the MGM/Hulu serial by Bruce Miller (2017-2021), *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood (2019), the graphic novel by Renée Nault (2019), as well as the official Hulu website, the fan fiction websites, and a cross section of social media profiles and groups on Facebook. During the research, the following questions have been addressed: (1) How does a transmedia narrative emerge? (2) How does it expand online? (3) What is the function of the fixed ending of a vast narrative? The prevalent research method used is the content analysis, called “potentially one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences” by Krippendorff (2004), allowing the researcher to analyze texts in the contexts of their uses.

The dissertation consists of the theoretical and the empirical parts. The research starts with a critical literature review that helps set the background for the interdisciplinary study. It

encompasses various fields that are indispensable for the analysis of the transmedia universe, such as the theory of literature/the critical response to *The Handmaid's Tale* (chapter 1); the theory of the serial and TV storytelling (chapter 2), the theory of the graphic novel (chapter 3), and the main premises and the development of adaptation studies and transmedia studies (chapters 4 and 5). The research questions are addressed in the next three chapters, devoted to the emergence (chapter 6), the online expansion (chapter 7), and the closure (chapter 8) of the vast narrative. They will show the formation of the vast narrative and the dynamics within, while also trying to answer the question of what conditions are required for the narrative to form and what is the predominant force giving momentum to the whole. The emphasis is placed on the dynamics of these processes and the impact of the media on each other.