



# Game of Thrones – A View from the Humanities Vol. 1

Time, Space and Culture

*Edited by*  
Alfonso Álvarez-Ossorio  
Fernando Lozano  
Rosario Moreno Soldevila  
Cristina Rosillo-López

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## ABOUT THIS BOOK

The chapters in this book focus on G. R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the TV series *Game of Thrones*. To avoid confusion *Game of Thrones* in Roman type refers to the universe, *Game of Thrones* in italics alludes to the TV series, whereas *A Game of Thrones*, usually abbreviated as *GoT*, is reserved for the homonymous first novel of Martin's saga.

Titles in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (*ASOIAF*) are cited as follows:

*A Game of Thrones*. New York: Bantam, 1996 = *GoT*

*A Clash of Kings*. New York: Bantam, 1999 = *CoK*

*A Storm of Swords*. New York: Bantam, 2000 = *SoS*

*A Feast for Crows*. New York: Bantam, 2005 = *FfC*

*A Dance with Dragons*. New York: Bantam, 2011 = *DwD*

References to the novels are presented as follows: title of the novel + chapter number + the name of the character from whose point of view the chapter is written + the number of the chapter from that character's point of view. Example: *SoS* 23 Arya 4.

*Game of Thrones*, the television series, is shortened as *Thrones*. References to specific passages are presented as follows: *Thrones* + season number + episode number + episode title. Example: *Thrones* S1: Ep.1, "Winter is Coming".

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Reflections on Time, Space and Culture in Game of Thrones

*Alfonso Álvarez-Ossorio, Fernando Lozano,  
Rosario Moreno Soldevila, and Cristina Rosillo-López*

*We read fantasy to find the colors again, I think. To taste strong spices  
and hear the song the sirens sang. There is something old and true in  
fantasy that speaks to something deep within us, to the child who dreamt  
that one day he would hunt the forests of the night, and feast beneath  
the hollow hills, and find a love to last forever, somewhere south of Oz  
and north of Shangri-La. They can keep their heaven. When I die,  
I'd sooner go to Middle Earth.*

G. Martin, *The Faces of Fantasy* (1996)

Game of Thrones has already become a contemporary classic. This trans-media product has carved out a niche for itself among the cultural benchmarks of our world while overcoming the linguistic barriers and national

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borders that tend to fence in the classics. Needless to say that the *A Song of Ice and Fire* (hereinafter *ASOIAF*) saga has revolutionised the fantasy world, but the impact of George R. R. Martin's work and its TV adaptation has done much more than surpass the models of a literary subgenre. In a globalised world in which the European classics—that common Graeco-Roman baggage—are not always close to other cultures or states of other regions of the world, there are new cultural elements that contribute to a crucial sense of togetherness. The world of *ASOIAF* is undoubtedly one of them, for it allows for communication and rapprochement between people the world over.

Indeed, since the publication of the first novel in 1996, Martin's literary saga, *ASOIAF*, adapted for television as *Game of Thrones*, has become an authentic global phenomenon. So as to gauge correctly its impact and the manner in which it has been included in diverse cultures from all over the world, it is necessary to offer a brief summary of the magnitude of the saga's success. Furthermore, as the fans of this literary phenomenon might not have seen the HBO series and as many of the viewers of the series have not in all likelihood read the novels, there is a need to summarise the figures separately, but in a complementary fashion.

As to *ASOIAF*, it should be noted that it has already become the third bestselling literary fantasy saga. The more than 90 million copies<sup>1</sup> sold of the five novels published to date are only surpassed by the sales figures of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, with 150 million, and the unreachable Harry Potter saga, with 600 million, albeit including the seven novels published to date and aimed more at a young audience than at an adult one.

While the literary saga's fans eagerly awaited new books, each of the series' episodes broke records of audience and HBO subscriber numbers,

<sup>1</sup><https://lossietereinos.com/cancion-hielo-fuego-llega-90-millones-libros-vendidos-ya-la-tercera-saga-fantasia-mas-vendida-la-historia/> (accessed 1 October 2022).

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as well as making it on to the front pages of the press. Moreover, the episodes of the final season were the most downloaded in the history of the Internet. Only in the United States, 44 million people watched the series during the two months that the broadcasting of the last season lasted, with 19 million connections in the hours immediately after the last episode was released to the public.<sup>2</sup> And these figures are only for the United States during those two months. For during the previous seven seasons, up until 2017, 135 million people had seen an episode of the series at some time or other. The fact that it still ranks high in the HBO Max catalogue implies that, even now, the series' spectacular audience figures continue to increase. Moreover, it is also the TV series that has won the greatest number of awards in history, with 59 Emmys, an absolute record for a production of this type. In parallel to this shower of awards, the professional careers of some of actors playing the saga's main characters, including Peter Dinklage, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, Emilia Clarke and Kit Harington, to name just a few, have also taken off.

When the last episode of the HBO series was broadcast in May 2019, perhaps we might have been forgiven for thinking that the Game of Thrones phenomenon was now in decline or *passé*. On the contrary, the publication of the last two instalments of the *ASOIAF* saga is still pending, with *The Winds of Winter* being in all likelihood the most anticipated book in history, with millions of potential readers around the world waiting on tenterhooks for Martin to finish and publish it. In addition, in August 2022, HBO released *House of the Dragon*, a spin-off of the Game of Thrones universe which is sure to have impressive audience ratings.

On the other hand, the saga's global impact has surpassed the sphere of literary and TV entertainment to affect the tourism and economic exploitation of the places that were used as locations for filming the different episodes of the series, with a greater number of film and TV productions being made in them and tourists visiting them. For example, mention should go to the Reales Alcázares and other tourist attractions and monuments in the city of Seville and its surrounding, for the number of tourists visiting them every year has increased considerably, between 10 and 100 per cent, after being used as locations for filming the series. But perhaps the best example of this type of tourism product is the opening of the first theme and amusement park based on the series in Belfast, in whose studios it was filmed.

<sup>2</sup> *El País*, 21 May 2019. [https://elpais.com/cultura/2019/05/21/television/1558433195\\_240292.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2019/05/21/television/1558433195_240292.html) (accessed 1 October 2022).

This cultural impact can be seen just as clearly in the daily use of expressions like “winter is coming...” and “you win or you die...”, among others. The vast majority of people are acquainted with the Wall, the Dothraki and so forth. The phenomenon has also permeated daily life in aspects like first names. According to the Spanish National Institute of Statistics, there are now 942 Aryas, with an average age of 2.6, and 169 Daenerys, with an average age of 2.8. And something similar has occurred with the name Aria/Arya in the United Kingdom and the United States, where it currently occupies 26th place in the ranking of girls’ names, after having become increasingly more popular since 2012, precisely the year after the broadcasting of the first season of the TV series.<sup>3</sup> Global society’s fascination with the series has also influenced the academic community. As will be seen below, the scientific studies that have been performed on the Game of Thrones phenomenon are plentiful, interesting and thought-provoking.

In this reflection on the time, space and culture of the Game of Thrones universe, it warrants noting that one of the aspects to which the saga owes most of its success and impact is precisely the author’s own creative process, namely, the way in which he has designed, structured, developed and made plausible his fantasy world. As will be seen in the following pages, with Game of Thrones Martin has created a complex, eclectic and pulp-type universe—and, in this sense, it has a lot to do with the way in which other sagas, in this case, those belonging to the science fiction genre, such as Star Wars, have been crafted—which borrows from many historical periods, geographical areas and characters so as to build a credible world. Indeed, Martin is a highly skilled creator of plausible, but at the same time fantasy, worlds. To this end, he has resorted, perhaps more than many writers before him, to elements of other previous real-historical or fictional worlds—such as dragons and the living dead. The key to its success is that readers consider it to be possible. It is perhaps for this reason—owing to the author’s ability to create relevant cultures and nations, albeit in fantasy worlds—that the saga is so appealing and has had such a strong impact on

<sup>3</sup> As regards the statistics for Spain, <https://www.ine.es/widgets/nombApell/index.shtml> (accessed 30 March 2022), the United Kingdom, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/babynamesenglandandwales/2020#toc> (accessed 3 March 2022) and the United States, <https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/> (accessed 3 March 2022).

people from many different cultural backgrounds. In a seminal interview, Martin himself pondered on this aspect of his world-building:

I'm proud of my work, but I don't know if I'd ever claim it's enormously original. You look at Shakespeare, who borrowed all of his plots. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, I take stuff from the Wars of the Roses and other fantasy things, and all these things work around in my head and somehow they jell into what I hope is uniquely my own. (Interview in *Rolling Stone*, 8 May 2014)

For this reason, studies performed on the Game of Thrones phenomenon from only one discipline, however valuable they may often be, do not allow for contemplating it in its eclectic, complex but coherent diversity. This is the reason why the object of study has not been approached in this book from a single scientific or historical perspective but has been addressed in a multidisciplinary fashion by theme. As will be highlighted further on, by performing studies based on themes and not on traditional academic disciplines, the aim has been to offer readers a more appealing book that underscores the richness of both the novels and the TV series.

Martin's courageous and fecund eclecticism, that prolific mosaic of references, can be appreciated in the creation of both the settings and powerful and extremely engaging characters. The author's and the TV series' ability to create new, different, modern heroes, who go beyond the traditional archetype—masterfully systemised by Campbell in his *The Hero with the Thousand Faces* (1949)—is certainly one of the main reasons behind the success and conversion of the saga into a contemporary classic. The narrative of each chapter from the point of view of a different character, which is one of the highly original aspects of Martin's novels, manages to strengthen the personality of each one of them while increasing their prominence and their particular characterisation. In other words, the very way in which the events are recounted makes the characters more appealing to readers. This second aspect, that of heroes, is of such crucial importance that we decided to devote part of second volume to this matter.

The sources of inspiration from which Martin consciously drew include, of course, the European Middle Ages in general—in point of fact, one of the most evident sources, which he himself has singled out as a major forerunner of his work, is to be found in Maurice Druon's heptalogy *The Accursed Kings* (1955–1977), as well as the Wars of the Roses in England. But there are also references to Renaissance Italy, Rome at the end of the

Republic and at the beginning of the Empire, the Vikings and even the Far West—in fact, Martin has acknowledged that HBO’s *Deadwood* (three seasons from 2004 to 2006) is one of his favourite series of all time. An example of this form of conceivable accumulation through which Martin strings together references to past ages and cultures into which he breathes their own personality is the Dothraki, who, in his words, are modelled on a “number of steppe and plains cultures including Mongols and Huns, certainly, but also Alans, Sioux, Cheyenne, and various other Amerindian tribes ... seasoned with a dash of pure fantasy”.<sup>4</sup>

All in all, the wealth of arguments and evocations in the world of *Game of Thrones* are not only historical but have also been borrowed from other fiction genres, such as horror and ghost stories, vampires—on which Martin has already written in *Fevre Dream* (1982)—and the living dead. The author has also resorted to one of the central genres, namely, epic or high fantasy, clearly reflected in the appearance of one of the saga’s principal claims, dragons, its most bestial protagonists. Martin has also commented on the process that led him to make this choice in one of the most revealing quotes on the construction of time, space and culture in the saga: “I did consider at a very early stage—going all the way back to 1991—whether to include overt fantasy elements, and at one point thought of writing a *Wars of the Roses* novel” (interview in *Rolling Stone*, 8 May 2014).

Nowadays, it is possible to claim that, fortunately for all, the author did not write a historical novel, first and foremost because the unexpected twists and the originality of the plot continued to evolve. As Martin himself observed in the same interview, historical novels tend to be predictable: “The problem with straight historical fiction is you know what’s going to happen. If you know anything about the *Wars of the Roses*, you know that the princes in the tower aren’t going to escape”. But, more importantly, it is fortunate that he ultimately decided to include fantasy elements, because thanks to them there are many twists and turns and, above all, we got the dragons! (interview in *Rolling Stone*, 8 May 2014).

In any reflection on the construction of time, space and culture in the *Game of Thrones* universe, in which the thought-provoking and courageous eclecticism of Martin’s inspirations has already been underscored, it is also essential to note that this profusion of references has been

<sup>4</sup> Martin’s reply in Not a Blog, 5 February 2012: <https://grmm.livejournal.com/263800.html?thread=15365240#t15365240> (accessed 28 March 2022).

masterfully linked and framed in the same spatiotemporal and geographical context. This is doubtless another of the cornerstones of the creation of a realistic fantasy universe. In effect, in the saga there coexist very different societies from a political and economic viewpoint, which purely belong to highly diverse historical moments—the medieval world, the Renaissance, the Greek *poleis*, the hunter-gatherers, the nomadic herders of the steppes and so forth. However, in Martin’s alternative fantasy, but realistic, world, they all appear together at the same time. And this diversity of societies, whose historical references and inspirations range from prehistory to the Modern Age, is also geographically close, so that readers can almost travel in time on relatively short journeys on a geographical scale. These two constrictions give rise to a diverse, colourful, complex and highly appealing puzzle, whose pieces have an evident historical inspiration and which, to a great extent, are robust and credible.

That such an alien fantasy universe is presented as a plausible and even realistic reality is thought-provoking, surprising and also very appealing to readers. As already observed, this undoubtedly has to do with the way in which Martin and the showrunners of the TV series have managed to weave familiar realities into a new tapestry of fascinating images and echoes. We also believe that two other fundamental aspects serve the same purpose. On the one hand, the construction of a realistic universe, much more credible and familiar than any other created in fantasy literature, is based on the fact that it does not attempt to idealise or extol the life of its inhabitants. Both the leading characters and all the others appearing in the saga are described in depth and, as with all humans, are far from being perfect; their lives are hard and tragic; they are condemned to die and, on many occasions, struggle to survive in deplorable conditions. On the other, the lie of the land is both rugged and inhospitable and welcoming and pleasant. In short, these lands are disturbingly realistic—even hyper-realistic—which ultimately brings them close to the hodiernal life of all and sundry. It should be stressed that it was a voluntary choice of Martin, which intentionally distanced him from another of the most renowned fantasy writers, Tolkien, for whom the author feels genuine admiration. In a quote that it would be unforgivable to abridge, he clearly explains this facet of his creativity which has affected in such a tangible way the Game of Thrones universe:

Ruling is hard. This was maybe my answer to Tolkien, whom, as much as I admire him, I do quibble with. *Lord of the Rings* had a very medieval phi-

losophy: that if the king was a good man, the land would prosper. We look at real history and it's not that simple. Tolkien can say that Aragorn became king and reigned for a hundred years, and he was wise and good. But Tolkien doesn't ask the question: What was Aragorn's tax policy? Did he maintain a standing army? What did he do in times of flood and famine? And what about all these orcs? By the end of the war, Sauron is gone but all of the orcs aren't gone—they're in the mountains. Did Aragorn pursue a policy of systematic genocide and kill them? Even the little baby orcs, in their little orc cradles? (interview in *Rolling Stone*, 8 May 2014)

Employing these keys, while masterfully leveraging the writer's craft as a narrator of stories, Martin has succeeded in creating an exotic, far-removed fantasy world, which is also familiar and realistic—a world in which, despite the dragons and other changes, readers, perhaps regrettably one might say, feel more at home than in Tolkien's bucolic and romantic universe.

In light of the foregoing, when conceiving these two volumes, as already noted, we have preferred to divide the different sections into major conceptual blocks, thus avoiding a more traditional layout. In effect, the elements binding together the different sections have nothing to do with chronology or disciplines or the separation between studies that have addressed the literary saga and the TV series. On the contrary, we have opted for an eclectic and transversal approach when organising the contributions, which revolve around thematic or conceptual themes, thus allowing readers to appreciate the richness of both creations through their analytical variety, while even establishing new links and connections.

Accordingly, this work distances itself from other previous studies which, all considered, will be summarised below because of their intrinsic value and the fact that they have served as inspiration for us and are also an additional testimony of the saga's impact which, as already observed, has not been limited to the public at large but has also had a notable effect on academic research. The following list is not meant to be exhaustive but is indeed intended to offer a brief overview of the studies that have been performed at universities and research centres the world over, with special attention being paid to those works published in English, but without overlooking the contributions in Spanish, French and other languages.

Since the publication of the first novel in 1996 and especially since the international release of HBO's series in 2011, Martin's oeuvre has become a global phenomenon that has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention.



Indeed, several authors have published very interesting works analysing the saga from diverse perspectives, such as the connection between *Game of Thrones* and medieval history made by Carolyne Larrington in *Winter is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones* (2015) and in the much more recent *All Men Must Die: Power and Passion in Game of Thrones* (2021). As to the saga's connections with medieval history, there are the works of Błaszkiwicz, *George R. R. Martin's "A Song of Ice and Fire" and the Medieval Literary Tradition* (2014); Mondschein, *Game of Thrones and the Medieval Art of War* (2017); Jamison, "Reading Westeros: George R. R. Martin's Multi-Layered Medievalisms" (2017); and Carroll, *Medievalism in A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones* (2018), plus the book edited by Porrinas González, *Poniente Medieval. La Edad Media en la fantasía épica de Juego de Tronos* (2019).

Special mention should also go to *You Win or You Die. The Ancient World of Game of Thrones* (2017a), the study performed by Haimson Lushkov on *Game of Thrones* and the ancient world. Other studies focusing on elements of the past and classical culture which can be found in Martin's fantasy saga and its TV adaptation include Attali's "Rome à Westeros: Éléments d'historiographie des religions romaines dans *A Song of Ice and Fire* de George R. R. Martin" (2014) and Rolet's "L'Antiquité dans *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011–): une présence polysémique" (2018), both appearing in collective works on the impact of Antiquity on contemporary popular culture, in addition to the monograph by López Güeto, *De Poniente a Roma: La huella clásica en Juego de Tronos* (2020). Another interesting aspect is the analysis of the historical influences appearing in these works, performed, from a more general perspective, in the book edited by Pavlac, *Game of Thrones Versus History: Written in Blood* (2017), and that of Ripoll, *Juego de Tronos: Secretos del Trono de Hierro* (2012). Rolet's aforementioned study not only enquires into those historical influences but also into others relating to classical philology and *ASOIAF*, a field to which Weiner, "Classical Epic and the Poetics of Modern Fantasy", in Rogers and Stevens (eds.), *Classical Traditions in Modern Fantasy* (2017), and Haimson Lushkov (2017b), "Genre, Mimesis, and Intertext in Vergil and G.R.R. Martin", in the same book, have also made a contribution. In the same vein, the study performed by Prince, "The *Dux Femina* Ends Westeros' Golden Age: Cersei Lannister as Agrippina the Younger in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–)", in Safran (ed.), *Screening the Golden Ages of the Classical Tradition* (2019), is also highly enlightening.

These last two studies have been cited because of their specific object of study, namely, that of the influence of female characters appearing in ancient history and the classical literature, which brings to mind another facet of the humanities on which Martin's work has evidently had an impact: gender studies. Of the numerous studies in this field, mention should go to Frankel's *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance* (2014); the book edited by Gjelsvik and Schubart, *Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones, and Multiple Media Engagements* (2016); and the collective work coordinated by Rohr and Benz, *Queenship and the Women of Westeros: Female Agency and Advice in Game of Thrones and A Song of Ice and Fire* (2020). Other purely philological works include the *Special Issue: Game of Thrones* of the prestigious journal *Critical Quarterly* (Vol. 57, No. 1, 2015), as well as the book by Wilson, *Shakespeare and Game of Thrones* (2021). As to philosophy and political science, *Game of Thrones and Philosophy. Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords* (2012), a book devoted to philosophy in *ASOIAF* by Henry Jacoby and William Irwin, stands out. Equally interesting are the contributions of Emig, "Fantasy as Politics: George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*", in G. Sedlmayr and N. Waller (eds.), *Politics in Fantasy Media: Essays on Ideologies and Gender in Fiction, Television, and Games* (2014); Batts and Jonston (eds.), *Mastering The Game of Thrones: Essays on George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire* (2015); and Brady and Mantoan (eds.), *Vying for the Iron Throne: Essays on Power, Gender, Death and Performance in HBO's Game of Thrones* (2018). Even Pablo Iglesias, a well-known, former Spanish politician, has been seduced by the academic allure of the saga, editing *Ganar o morir: lecciones políticas en Juego de Tronos* (2014). As could not be otherwise, the field of law has also fallen under the saga's influence, as evidenced by Alenza García, *Derecho y justicia en Juego de Tronos* (2020).

The impact of a TV series like *Game of Thrones* has also necessarily been felt in the field of communication studies, as borne out by the book edited by Lozano Delmar et al., *Reyes, Espadas, Cuervos y Dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo Juego de Tronos* (2013); the interesting transversal study performed by Evans and Potter, "Sacrificial Shadows: Tragic Greek Heroines Reinvented for Television in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Game of Thrones*", in Apostol and Bakogianni (eds.), *Locating Classical Receptions on Screen: Masks, Echoes, Shadows* (2018); and the recent book edited by López Rodríguez et al., *Winter is over: (Re)analizando el Fenómeno Televisivo "Juego de Tronos"* (2020). As to the literary saga, the collective monograph edited by Lowder, *Beyond the Wall. Exploring George*

R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (2012), is especially relevant for the second volume of this book.

This brief overview of previous research conducted on the Game of Thrones universe goes all the way to show, as already noted, that the saga has and is still receiving an enviable amount of academic attention. By the same token, from this state of affairs can be deduced that most of the studies performed to date have analysed the phenomenon from a single scientific or historical perspective. For this reason, there was certainly room, to our mind, for a multidisciplinary study such as this one which, through the prism of the humanities, followed an approach ultimately aimed at highlighting the complexity, eclecticism and diversity characterising the saga.

The original project has been finally divided into two complementary volumes, which nonetheless can be read separately. In any case, both form part of a coherent whole that pursues the aforementioned objectives. This first volume is divided into three thematic sections dealing with the creation and reception of the Game of Thrones universe from different perspectives. The first, whose title is the motto of House Stark, "Winter is coming", focuses on space, the—urban and natural—physical environment, marvels and the interaction between human beings and their surroundings.

As in the introduction to the TV series, in which the different places where the plot is set, with their iconic features, appear on screen, the chapter by Ainhoa de Miguel Irureta and Juan Ramón Carbó García describes the Nine Wonders of the Game of Thrones universe, analysed in relation to the extant accounts of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and their reception throughout history. On the one hand, an enquiry is made into this literary tradition and its reflection in Martin's universe, to wit, in the achievements of Lomas Longstrider, including the Wall, the Titan of Braavos, the Long Bridge of Volantis, the Walls of Qarth, the Palace with a Thousand Rooms in Sarnath of the Tall Towers, the Valyrian Road and the Three Bells of Norvos, among others. On the other, the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World are related to those appearing in the literary saga and the TV series.

In his chapter, Jorge Rouco Collazo also follows a novel approach to the physical space and material culture of Game of Thrones, focusing on the fortifications of Westeros from an archaeological point of view. Firstly, the castles and their functions, framed in the feudal society reflected in the saga and in the TV series, are analysed. Then, modern geographical information system (GIS) technology is applied to the location and political

geography of the different fortifications. Lastly, the different construction stages of some of them are reviewed.

For his part, Alberto Marina Castillo takes an approach to paradoxography—describing marvels of the natural or human world—although not applied to human creations, as in the second chapter, but to the natural history of dragons and its reflection in the TV series. In a captivating fashion, the author analyses different texts—basically but not exclusively belonging to Antiquity—and other cultural expressions in order to contextualise these monstrous beings and their long tradition.

The relationship between human beings and nature is the topic of the last chapter in this section, which studies Martin’s saga as a narrative of environmental crisis and climate change from an eco-critical perspective. Its authoress, Katsiaryna Nahornava, examines the different attitudes adopted by humans towards environmental disasters. Versus the political plot focusing on the struggle for power, there is another more important battle for the inhabitants of the fiction world of ice and fire—as for human beings in the twenty-first century—namely, that for their own survival in balance with nature.

Under the title of “You win or you die”, the second section follows different and complementary approaches to the issue at hand from an aesthetic and cultural perspective. Ayelet Haimson Lushkov explores how the concept of the sublime is crucial for understanding not only the aesthetics of *Game of Thrones* (both the literary saga and the TV series) but also its plot structure, world-building and emotional tenor. An interpretation made through the prism of the aesthetics of the sublime, as expressed in epic poetry, poses a number of questions about our concept of heroism, masculinity and femininity, the aesthetics of combat and even about the practice of reading itself. This chapter also rounds off the previous section by taking a new approach to issues already broached there (the Wall, dragons and environmental issues) while offering a novel interpretation of the saga’s female characters, including Brienne of Tarth and Daenerys Targaryen, on the basis of the classics.

Jumping from the Graeco-Roman classics to contemporary culture, Carlo Daffonchio approaches Martin’s fantasy saga and its TV adaptation from the duality between mainstream culture and counterculture. For this author, they cannot be understood without the background of counterculture, particularly in relation to fantasy and science fiction authors writing in the 1950s and 1960s and to the political rock culture of the 1960s and 1970s, decisive for Martin’s universe in terms of both content and

narrative structure. Secondly, the author poses some questions about the series' success in the United States, analysing what this has meant for the cultural history of our time and how it has blurred the sharp duality between mainstream culture and counterculture.

Following these complementary studies of aesthetics and culture, Ana Carolina Pais offers a close-up or analysis of a specific sequence of an episode, that of the wedding between Tyrion Lannister and Sansa Stark. In her “verbivocovisual” analysis, there is evidence of the importance of Bakhtinian carnivalesque and grotesque realism, thus supplementing the vision of how the series has drawn from medieval and Renaissance culture.

The last section of this volume, “One voice may speak you false, but in many there is always truth to be found”, addresses the linguistic and translation implications of the Game of Thrones universe, as well as its didactic uses. The first three chapters basically focus on the TV series from the perspective of translation studies.

Elisa Calvo and Marián Morón perform a qualitative analysis on the reception of the Spanish translation of the *Game of Thrones* TV series, focusing on two very specific incidents that had an overwhelming and unprecedented response from Spanish viewers. These two examples serve to illustrate the “translation problems” and “translation errors” categories, as well as highlighting both audience perceptions of the work of audio-visual translators and their precarious working conditions.

Robert Szymyślik also approaches the TV series from the perspective of translation studies, but performing a broader analysis on the linguistic and conceptual implications of the creation of imaginary worlds and how these are transferred from the original to the target language, in this case Spanish, through translation.

For their part, Alice Stender and Christiane Limbach enquire into the character of Missandei in her facet as an interpreter, analysing how the reality of the interpreter's job is represented in *Game of Thrones* and in other audio-visual productions. As in different chapters of the previous sections, the application of a contemporary methodology (in this case, the assessment of the quality of the interpretation) sheds new light on the object of study and allows for analysing not only the work but also how this reflects our cultural assumptions.

Bringing this section and the volume to a close, Víctor Sánchez proposes bridging the didactic gap between Westeros and the West for the purpose of teaching history. In this case, the object of study is the Game of Thrones universe as a transmedia reality which encompasses not only

the literary saga and its TV adaptation but also other derivatives including role games. After analysing this transmedia universe and its potential, the author puts forwards a specific and detailed gamification proposal for teaching history at university.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND A BIT OF HISTORY

As with many other good ideas, the germ of this book emerged in a lively discussion in the cafeteria of the Faculty of Geography and History of the University of Seville (hereinafter US). We, the editors, who are also friends, had met to talk about several pending matters. Rosario Moreno Soldevila and Cristina Rosillo-López were organising a new edition of the Permanent Seminar for the Exchange of Ideas of Pablo de Olavide University (hereinafter UPO) which they wanted to devote to the study of the Game of Thrones universe. That day, Alfonso Álvarez-Ossorio and Fernando Lozano received an invitation from them to participate in the seminar. All the editors had published and organised courses and activities in the field of Reception Studies. The most recent of these works was in the process of being published, ultimately seeing the light of day under the title of *The Present of Antiquity*.<sup>5</sup>

The Game of Thrones seminar, held at the UPO in 2017, was a public and academic success, for it served to establish a fruitful dialogue between researchers and fans. For us, the main result, however, was the fact that it prompted us to take further steps in this direction. Shortly afterwards, we began to organise an international congress on the Game of Thrones universe. Our objective was to focus on the keys of this transmedia product from the perspective of the humanities, an approach that, at least to our knowledge, had not been taken before. Until then, a number of good studies had attempted to establish the relationship between some or other specific academic discipline and the literary saga.

The call for papers obtained surprising results. We received many requests to participate from all over the world. Finally, we could only accept some of them, but such a positive reaction encouraged us to forge ahead with renewed energy. Our intention was that the results of the congress, which was held at the UPO and the US on the days before the broadcasting of the series' last episode in May 2019, should be published in an original, appealing book, both up to a high intellectual standard and

<sup>5</sup> Lozano et al. (2019).