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The Game of Power: A Study of Gender Norms, Traumatic Experiences and Characters' Motivations in the "Caraval" Trilogy

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Master's in Social and Organizational Psychology

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Department of Social and Organizational Psychology

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“Swords may cut and kill, but words will stab and stay, burying themselves in our bones to become corpses we carry into the future, all the time digging and failing to rip their skeletons from our flesh”, Tahereh Mafi

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Resumo

Esta tese estuda a influência de factores externos (i.e., normas de género, experiências traumáticas e expectativas sociais) nas motivações e ações das personagens selecionadas da trilogia "Caraval" de Stephanie Garber. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa e temática, a investigação centrou-se em quatro personagens: Scarlett e Donatella Dragna (as duas protagonistas cuja perspetiva é narrada), Jacks (o antagonista e interesse amoroso), e Paloma (uma personagem fantasma e secundária). Assim sendo, explora a forma como as expectativas patriarcais, o trauma familiar e os papéis sociais têm impacto nos seus comportamentos, motivações e reações emocionais. O desenvolvimento da Scarlett ilustra uma transição da adesão às normas tradicionais de género para uma posição de auto-determinação, enquanto Donatella contesta ativamente estas normas desde o início, particularmente no que diz respeito à sua autonomia e às expressões da sexualidade feminina. Jacks é uma representação da masculinidade hegemónica, caracterizada pelo distanciamento emocional e pela manipulação, enquanto navega por questões de poder e isolamento. Já Paloma, enquanto personagem fantasma, desafia os papéis maternais tradicionais através das suas decisões, realçando as formas complexas como as mulheres se movimentam em ambientes opressivos. Ao integrar as teorias da tomada de perspetiva e da performatividade do género, esta tese demonstra como as experiências de cada personagem realçam temas sociais mais amplos, como a dinâmica do poder e os papéis do género. Deste modo, a literatura de fantasia para jovens adultos pode refletir e desafiar expectativas de género e traumas, proporcionando uma compreensão mais profunda da capacitação e desenvolvimento das personagens.

Palavras-chave: Análise Literária, Normas de Género, Experiências Traumáticas, Desenvolvimento de Personagens, Motivações, Stephanie Garber.

Códigos de Classificação da APA PsychInfo:

2610 Literature & Fine Arts

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of external factors (i.e., gender norms, traumatic experiences, and societal expectations) on the motivations, actions and growth of the selected characters in the trilogy "Caraval" by Stephanie Garber. Using a qualitative, thematic approach, the study focused on four characters: Scarlett and Donatella Dragna (the two protagonists whose perspective is narrated), Jacks (the antagonist and love interest), and Paloma (a ghost and secondary character). It explores how patriarchal expectations, familial trauma, and societal roles impact their behaviours, motivations, and emotional reactions. Scarlett's character development illustrates a transition from adherence to conventional gender norms to a path of self-empowerment, whereas Donatella actively contests these norms from the beginning, particularly regarding her autonomy and expressions of female sexuality. Jacks is analysed as a representation of hegemonic masculinity, characterised by emotional detachment and manipulation, as he navigates issues of power and isolation. Paloma, as a ghost character, defies traditional maternal roles through her decisions, highlighting the complex ways in which women manoeuvre within oppressive structures. By integrating theories of perspective-taking and gender performativity, this thesis demonstrates how the experiences of each character emphasise broader societal themes, such as power dynamics and gender roles. In the end, this analysis enhances the discourse on how young adult fantasy literature can both reflect and challenge real-world gendered expectations and trauma, providing a more profound understanding of character empowerment and development.

Keywords: Literary Analysis, Gender Norms, Traumatic Experiences, Character Development, Motivations, Stephanie Garber.

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Introduction

Our research falls within the scope of literary analysis, focusing on how context influences the actions of certain characters in the trilogy “Caraval” by Stephanie Garber. It is an opportunity to analyse external factors (e.g., family environment, traumatic experiences, social pressures, and gender norms) and their influence on the characters' decision-making, emotions, attitudes and motivations, leading to a deeper understanding of the complexity of human beings and how people are shaped by context. As such, we hope to provide insights into the formation of characters in fantastic environments and the impact of these circumstances on the development of their subjectivity. Furthermore, it is pertinent to understand the role of fantasy in contemporary literature, exploring how these fantastic elements can influence the narrative and provide escapism or reflection on real-life problems.

CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Background

1.1. Encodification of Information

The process of constructing a message is called encoding, a system of coded meanings where the sender must comprehend how the audience perceives and understands the word. During this process, the sender (i.e., encoder) employs both verbal (e.g., images, words) and non-verbal (e.g., facial expressions, body language) symbols that they think the recipient (i.e., decoder) would comprehend. The encoding of a message is crucial and is influenced by its intention. On the other hand, decoding consists of how others understand and interpret a message, i.e., the process of deciphering and translating coded data into a comprehensive format by assigning meanings to symbols and interpreting messages. If the message is received and understood in the desired manner, effective communication is achieved. Nevertheless, the recipient of the message can still interpret it entirely differently than the encoder intended, creating distortions or misunderstandings from the lack of equivalency between the two parties (Hall, 1980).

People play an active role in understanding and interpreting the information transmitted, depending on their social context and their capacities to change and interpret messages. The essence of decoding is based on understanding people and considering the details provided in the message received. Regardless of the size of the audience, decoding is the act of gathering, processing, and occasionally applying the information given in verbal or non-verbal communication (e.g., body language) (Hall, 1980).

Hall (1980) criticises the traditional model (i.e., sender/message/receiver) for its linearity and proposes a four-stage model of communication – where each of these phases is both autonomous and interdependent – that considers the production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction of messages. While most researchers focus their work on decoding (i.e., receiving) information, our thesis concentrates on the process of encoding. Therefore, we will emphasise the first phase of the model proposed by Hall (1980), the production, since it is the message's encoding and construction. Given that the production process is defined by meaning and ideas, it has its own "discursive" element, where the message's author feeds off the society's prevailing ideologies by referencing its values and beliefs. This process involves the production structures of the television (i.e., institutional knowledge, professional ideologies, definitions and assumptions about the public), and socio-

cultural and political structure (i.e., events, images of the audience, treatments). Although this theory was created and applied to television, it can be adapted for books.

1.2. Perspective-Taking

Since the studied trilogy is told from the perspective of two sisters, we found the theory of perspective-taking necessary and relevant. Perspective-taking is defined as the active process of imagining the experiences, perspectives and feelings of others, reducing egocentrism in our judgements and consequently leading to more reflective thinking (Todd & Galinsky, 2014). By placing ourselves in the situation of others, we can understand their arguments (Habermas, 1981, as cited in Muradova, 2021), evoking feelings of empathy and concern, overcoming our egocentric reasoning. To accomplish this, we need to have information about other people's daily lives and, if this knowledge is biased (e.g., stereotypes), it can lead us to make incorrect inferences about other people's feelings and thoughts (Epley & Caruso, 2009, as cited in Muradova, 2021). By taking on different perspectives, we increase our mental representations of both ourselves and others (Todd & Galinsky, 2014). This phenomenon can be challenging for some people, who may find it easier to take the perspective of someone with whom they share characteristics (Muradova, 2021).

The transmission of different perspectives brings points of view together (Asch, 1952/1987, as cited in Sammut & Sartawi, 2012), allowing individuals to achieve a deeper understanding and enabling them to engage in social checks and correct errors they had previously made (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1978; Smithson, 1985, 1989, as cited in Sammut & Sartawi, 2012). Therefore, the greater the openness to perspective-taking, the fewer prejudices and the better the individual's social relationships (Detweiler, 1980, as cited in Sammut & Sartawi, 2012).

Differences in information and limited overlap in experiences make it difficult to take a perspective (Gillespie & Martin, 2014). As a result, both parties must make an effort to understand each other, avoiding conflicts and misunderstandings (Schegloff, 1992). As previously stated, perspective-taking has an egocentric level since we assume that the other person has our perspective, whereas, in reality, this phenomenon is subject to a series of adjustments (Epley et al., 2004), reducing the ability to correct additional biases in the other person's experience (Nickerson, 1998). Hence, we look for explanations that coincide with our expectations, giving up on discovering our limitations and causing misunderstandings to persist (Heasman & Gillespie, 2018).

As readers, we read a story from different perspectives, points of view and ideologies (Shweder, 1984, as cited in Howard, 1991), with each character presenting different concepts of reality that are strongly influenced by their society and culture (Triandis, 1972, as cited in Howard, 1991). Based on our characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, culture, race, gender), we are influenced in our identification with distinct characters, which might lead us to different conclusions (Brislin, 1988, as cited in Howard, 1991). The social categories of class, ethnicity, culture and race (Gardner, 1985, cited by Howard, 1991) play a role in shaping the inferences people make about themselves and others, as well as the assumptions about their behaviour (Brislin, 1988, as cited in Howard, 1991).

1.3. Psychology and Literature

Authors benefit from employing different psychological techniques in character construction and storytelling, evoking a range of emotions in readers (e.g., empathy, love, hatred). For example, strategies such as stream-of-consciousness or interior monologues are often used to facilitate or enhance processes of empathy and compassion in readers (Dar, 2022).

Both Psychology and Literature seek to comprehend human beings (e.g., feelings, reactions, worries, desires, conflicts). Psychology, in particular, provides authors with insights regarding their characters' thoughts, actions and motivations, offering a comprehensive understanding of their behaviour (Dar, 2022). Therefore, skilled writers are better observers of people's nature and portray it through their characters and narratives by indicating how individuals behave, think and interpret their experiences, offering engaging and thought-provoking entertainment. Whereas Psychology focuses on the causes of the behaviour, immersing readers in the psychological lives of people while examining biological, social and environmental influences, Literature illustrates human behaviour through fiction, bringing a different perspective on the subject, allowing and exploring a wide range of literary perspectives across various cultures and historical periods (Dar, 2022). As a result, Literary Psychology examines certain psychological processes that the main characters go through when reacting or testifying about themselves and their surroundings. A study that sees literary works as psychological activities is known as Psychology in Literature. Since the characters need to be given life and a soul that can be researched and psychologically explained, Psychology and Literature are not new but continuous (Harahap & Ningsih, 2022).

The trilogy "Caraval" by Stephanie Garber is primarily a work of young adult fantasy literature, with strong elements of magical realism and psychological fiction (i.e., a narrative

fiction that heavily emphasises character details and psychological lives), as Garber accentuates the inner characterisation and motivation that explores the characters' mental, emotional and spiritual lives, being an intensely character-driven genre. Stream-of-consciousness and interior monologues are highly used narrative techniques in these novels. Stream-of-consciousness is an objective-oriented and character-specific storytelling approach in which the narrator's or character's thoughts and emotions are articulated to make it easier for the reader to accompany the evolving emotional states of the characters. For this reason, it doesn't adhere to a fixed word order due to the natural deviation of thoughts, which often remain incomplete or interrupted by other thoughts. On the other hand, interior monologues (i.e., imagined dialogue, rationalisation, self-analysis and inner conflicts) can be direct – where the author yields control, allowing for the character's thoughts and their inner self to be expressed directly – or indirect – where the writer assumes the role of the selector, presenter, guide and commentator. Furthermore, stream-of-consciousness attempts to capture the disorganised and distracting nature of thought as it occurs in real time, whereas interior monologues are complete, coherent phrases simulating a conversation with themselves (Dar, 2022).

Mar and Oatley (2008) defended that fiction serves as a simulation of the social world because it provides insights into the character's inner thoughts, and access to their point of view as well as their private life, which enables a connection with their emotions and hardships (Leavy, 2020, as cited in Oliveira et al., 2023), helping readers grasp their complex social situations and relationships. Participating in these supervised social simulations can also improve one's comprehension of social dynamics in the real world (Mar & Oatley, 2008). Moreover, the narrative gaps give readers the possibility for interpretation and imagination, engaging in reflective reading, and developing self-knowledge and empathy for both the characters and the individuals they symbolise. Additionally, it contributes to a greater social awareness regarding the current state of the world and its potential transformations (Leavy, 2020, as cited in Oliveira et al., 2023). As a result, fiction can be exploited to assess our capability to understand other people's perspectives, frequently in an environment where uncertainty is reduced compared to the complexities of the actual world (Zunshine, 2006).

1.4. Character Psychology

Literary works can also be interpreted as the author's portrayals of life and views (i.e., where and how the author observes life). The authors attempt to convey their experiences and feelings about the highs and lows of life through their creative works (Nurhayati, 2012, as cited in

Harahap & Ningsih, 2022), and design and write their characters based on real-life individuals and/or stereotypes. For example, Manju Kapur is a well-known writer who uses her male characters as supportive characters to either enhance or have an impact on the journey of the female protagonists. Moreover, they portray a variety of chauvinistic aspects of society, without elevating or rendering any unique qualities in their characterisation (Sharma, 2022).

Characters in fiction serve as a window through which the reader may experience a multitude of worlds and events, i.e., for characters to elicit feelings and a sense of engagement, a relationship with the audience is necessary (Ballon, 2003). As the story unfolds, readers can connect with the characters through their psychological traits influenced by their environment and social life. These are shown in the characters' attitudes towards one another and their social surroundings, as well as in their thoughts, actions and feelings (Harahap & Ningsih, 2022). Furthermore, observation from a psychological perspective explores how someone behaves in social situations or social processes that are visible to the public both directly and indirectly. In particular, behaviour results from the environment's effect on an individual's attitude, actions and emotions, and can reveal a person's moral character and personal style. Every action has an impact on a person, whether directly or indirectly. As people go through various life stages, their personality, temperament, and genetic outcomes change, further influencing their behaviour. This highlights the significance of behaviour in literary analysis since it is a research subject for character traits (Palupi, 2022). According to Watson (2005, as cited in Palupi, 2022), thoughts, feelings and the environment contribute to behaviour, which subsequently shapes an individual's psychology, as well as experiences, emotions, mental health and personality. These factors – which are categorised as individual, environment and general social – might encourage someone to modify their behaviour.

Every action has a motivation – a motive (i.e., a need or a desire that propels someone to act) –, which can range from the simple act of fulfilling hunger to the more complex pursuit of altering one's fate (Ballon, 2003). According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), a person can only attend to the higher requirements once the lesser ones have been met. The physiological needs, or necessities for human living (e.g., food, air), are at the bottom of the hierarchy. The second, and first psychological imperative, is safety, which encompasses the need for a place to live and a sense of security in one's surroundings, whereas the third tier is the desire for love and belonging, or the urge to connect with others and experience affection and social connection. Then, people proceed to the esteem need, i.e., the desire to be recognised and valued by others, distinguishing oneself from the group. Finally, the need for self-actualisation is where individuals strive to reach their full potential and feel fulfilled. Although

this theory has faced criticism regarding its applicability across diverse populations, it may be a helpful place to start when considering the motive behind a character. It provides a framework for thinking about a character's motivation concerning their circumstances inside a novel (Nieminen, 2017).

There are two types of motivation for a character's actions: internal – where the drive stems from their sense of urgency, feelings and emotions, and the character believes is essential to achieving their goals – and external – the concrete means by which their inner desire will be met. A character cannot have an external need if they do not have an interior need (Ballon, 2003). Additionally, characters might become more complex due to motivation. For example, a villain who has behaved badly throughout the narrative is typically thought to be unlikeable. However, the audience's first emotions are bound to be mixed if the villain's motive is to save their loved ones. This gives the characters depth and makes them memorable since they have caused the reader to experience a wide range of emotions (Nieminen, 2017).

Every character possesses inherent flaws, detrimental tendencies, and internal struggles that drive them to evolve and grow. They require conflict as much as a motivation to begin on their path, considering conflict is the most powerful catalyst for character development. The character's development towards the conclusion of the narrative can be greatly impacted by the path taken to overcome a conflict. This will captivate readers and elicit sympathy and care for them (Ballon, 2003). Characters may engage in three types of conflicts: human against nature, human against human, and human against him/herself. The conflict between human and nature occurs when someone encounters a disaster that they did not initiate (e.g., a natural disaster). It can also arise from the characters' inability to adapt to the environment or from the interplay between human emotions and natural settings, where nature can serve as a *locus amoenus* (i.e., a pleasant, harmonious setting reflecting inner peace) or a *locus horrendous* (i.e., a hostile, threatening environment mirroring inner turmoil) (Bernstein, 2011). Whereas human against human can vary in intensity from rivalry between family members or friends to taking sides in a battle or the classic struggle between good and evil, human's fight with him/herself is a struggle a character undertakes against addiction, personal transformation, or the way society reacts to an external conflict (Ballon, 2003).

The way a character responds to crisis also portrays their inner world. The techniques that help people make sense of traumatic events can either be imposed upon them or learnt from prior experiences. For example, individuals may try to justify their mistakes with perfectionism, ignore events that have badly impacted them, blame others by projecting their negative

attributes onto them or attempt to make up for their faults by paying back what they have already spent (Nieminen, 2017).

Character's motivations, weaknesses, and behavioural patterns may be linked to their background story. The background story is a compilation of incidents that happened before the story's storyline and influences the characters as it develops. Human behaviour is shaped by prior experiences in both positive and negative ways. As a result of these prior experiences, people react to situations by significantly changing their behaviour. Nonetheless, a cause-and-effect relationship is required for a character's actions. When a character's trauma is revealed but their behaviour remains unchanged, the character tends to lose credibility to the readers (Nieminen, 2017). Additionally, past experiences might also influence a character unconsciously. Similar to real individuals, characters may not always see the underlying cause of their issues until they reflect on earlier instances. Therefore, understanding a character's behaviour requires delving into their background story (Ballon, 2003).

1.5. Traumatic Experiences in Characters

The young adult genre is a collection of literary works aimed at readers between the ages of twelve and eighteen, featuring protagonists who are young adults and themes that are pertinent to their coming-of-age journey. On the other hand, as they tackled forbidden themes and dealt with serious concerns, teenage literature began to shift in the 1960s towards a more realistic and relevant depiction that was unrestricted (Ellis, 1950, as cited in Selma & Halla, 2022). Accordingly, this genre has sparked criticism, while simultaneously providing a haven for many young people due to its wide range of topics and its audacious and accurate portrayal of teenagers' everyday hardships. Its works frequently blend the novel's subject and artistic elements to address the emotional transitions that teens go through as they cross the imperceptible boundary between childhood and maturity, which can be both an exhilarating and terrifying experience (Selma & Halla, 2022).

Popular young adult series have demonstrated how well-known characters handle trauma (further elaboration will be provided on page 35). Though the quality of their answers varies, all of them are insightful depictions in one way or another (Miller, 2019). Trauma means "wound" in Greek, and the Oxford English Dictionary (2000, as cited in Selma & Halla, 2022) states that the term was originally used in English, in 1693, as an external wound, a bodily injury. Thus, following several changes and advancements, the definition of trauma was expanded to include any psychological harm or long-term harm caused to people or

communities by traumatic occurrences or extreme discomfort. Following decades of research, the consensus on trauma came to define it as the body's reaction to extremely stressful situations that cause long-lasting psychological harm (Selma & Halla, 2022), or a disturbed psychological or behavioural condition brought on by extreme mental or emotional strain or bodily harm (Merriam-Webster, n.d., as cited in Miller, 2019). However, trauma is associated with the event or harm itself. A traumatic incident might lead one to observe or experience a variety of psychological disorders and, in some cases, the symptoms are so severe that a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) diagnosis is appropriate (Miller, 2019).

In addition to those events that served as the foundation for the notion, the definition of trauma has expanded to cover several upsetting incidents involving a person's psychic suffering. Such upsetting occurrences include, for example, the trauma that women and children experience daily, historical racial oppression and inequality, technological and natural disasters, acts of community violence, serious illnesses, and even international emergencies such as the pandemic and "lockdown trauma" (Davis et al., 2020, as cited in Selma & Halla, 2022). Because of this, the incident may occasionally appear normal to people who like to criticise victims and charge them with exaggeration. Nonetheless, each person's understanding of the traumatic event may be different (Selma & Halla, 2022).

McNally (2003, as cited in Selma & Halla, 2022) outlines three crucial components to the definition of trauma: an incident that can be objectively characterised, an individual's subjective assessment of its significance, and the individual's emotional response to it. Therefore, the individual's subjective interpretation of an event and the personal meaning they get from it determines whether an event is traumatic.

Trauma has been mentioned in young adult fiction throughout the years, but its aftermath was not frequently discussed. The characters would experience tense situations one after another without pausing for a chapter to gather their thoughts. Subsequently, young adult fiction has changed how it tackles difficult subjects and has become more detailed in illustrating trauma and its aftereffects, which has made the books heavier (Miller, 2019).

According to Rosenthal (2015, as cited in Miller, 2019), those who suffer from PTSD may keep relying on the instincts or behaviours that helped them get over their experience as if it never happened because it wasn't registered that the event had ended. Furthermore, survivors' bodies and brains respond appropriately in inappropriate circumstances (Rosenthal, 2015, as cited in Miller, 2019), i.e., hypervigilance, the feeling that one is constantly prepared for a fight (Miller, 2019). Triggers are anything that brings up unpleasant memories, such as noises, scents, individuals or places (Raja et al., 2018, as cited in Miller, 2019). Someone with PTSD may

suffer from a panic attack, flashback, or other unfavourable symptoms associated with their trauma when they come into contact with a trigger. It is well aware of the long-term and persistent effects of child abuse, and part of the healing process involves being able to correctly assign blame and contextualise the trauma (McCloskey & Bailey, 2000, as cited in Morris, 2013).

Indirect trauma can occur when someone witnesses painful occurrences. In addition to the challenge of turning their pain into evidence, witnesses may have to contend with the suppression of listeners who are unable to embrace their realities (Debling, 2004, as cited in Miller, 2019).

1.6. Archetypes

Character roles that are universally recognised in stories from many cultures are known as archetypes (Roesler, 2022; Tillman, 2011, as cited in Nieminen, 2017) and have grown to be a crucial framework for developing characters and tales (Tillman, 2011, as cited in Nieminen, 2017). Archetypes provide mental energy with a definite shape as structural components of the collective psyche. They address human actions and thoughts and serve as the foundation for all experiences, focusing on the core and universal experiences of life. Additionally, they control and shape people's interactions with their surroundings due to their priori modes of perception and structuring of people's world experiences (Roesler, 2022). For writers, archetypes are an easy way to create characters and produce a pattern in literature through this universe of representations and deductions of characters.

According to Jung (Frager & Fadiman, 2013), the five main archetypes are the ego, the persona, the shadow, the animus (or anima) and the self. The ego is the centre of consciousness and gives stability and direction to our conscious lives. It tends to reject anything that may jeopardise this delicate consistency of consciousness and works to persuade us that we should always intentionally prepare and reflect upon our experiences. The persona is the mask a person wears in various social contexts and, based on the environment, alters behaviour (e.g., societal norms, the clothes we wear, the unique ways we express ourselves). We need to participate in ways that define our roles to be able to operate in society. Even people who reject such adaptive devices always utilise alternative roles (i.e., roles that signal rejection).

Whereas the shadow is a metaphor for the aspects of our personalities that we lack confidence in and have chosen to ignore, as well as for our most profound desires and aggressive tendencies, a side conflicting with the persona and society has trained us to suppress

from consciousness since we adjust to their norms and expectations. When we suppress other aspects of ourselves more, the stronger our persona is and the more we identify with it. The shadow is most harmful when it goes unnoticed. Consequently, the person tends to unconsciously get controlled by the shadow or to project their undesirable traits onto other people. The shadow material's ability to dominate decreases as it becomes more conscious. However, the shadow is an essential component of who we are and will never completely vanish. A person who denies the combination of good and evil that is inescapably present in all of us is not a whole person; rather, they are a two-dimensional caricature. Additionally, once a person is consumed by the shadow, they will behave contrary to the law and under their dark, primal desires, becoming the villain (Frager & Fadiman, 2013).

The animus (feminine) and the anima (masculine) are the unconscious structure that enhances the persona, and one of the most powerful behaviour regulators. All psychological information that does not align with a person's conscious self-concept as either male or female is focused around this fundamental psychic framework. Similar to how the persona is orientated towards the outside, the animus/anima is largely focused on interior processes (Frager & Fadiman, 2013).

The most significant and challenging personality archetype to comprehend is the self since it is considered the central archetype representing psychological order and the whole of the personality, according to Jung. The balance and harmony of the several competing aspects of the psyche are embodied by the merger of the conscious and unconscious. The ego and consciousness might appear to be quite distinct from the self, which is a profound, inner, directing force (Frager & Fadiman, 2013).

1.7. Qualitative Methods

Both young adult fiction authors and qualitative researchers aim to create plausible representations of real or imagined worlds (Visweswaran, 1994, as cited in Leavy, 2016) and to accurately or authentically portray human experience. Authors get inspiration for their books from genuine human experience and actual life, whereas qualitative research is a method that seeks to create deep insight, uncover meanings, enlighten social processes, and illuminate human experiences, as well as values subjectivity, various meanings, and sensory knowledge (Leavy, 2016).

Historical fiction can explore inequality-related topics, delving into the experiences of women, people of colour, sexual minorities, or someone economically disadvantaged in a

particular period and location. This fiction genre not only educates its audience but also highlights the struggles of marginalised communities, fostering a deeper understanding of their challenges (Leavy, 2016). We could even consider the "Caraval" trilogy as belonging to the quasi-historical young adult novel genre (Paxson, 2017) due to its representation of the gender norms and societal expectations of women, both in the past and in certain contemporary societies.

Traditional research papers are written in academic language and published in specific journals that are only seen by other experts in the field, whereas fiction has a far higher likelihood of being read widely. Additionally, fiction aligns well with the three main objectives of social research: a) presenting the lived experience's complexity and the human experience; b) encouraging empathy and self-reflection; and c) upending dominant ideologies or stereotypes (Leavy, 2016). However, it is crucial to recognise that literature frequently functions to uphold the existing social order (i.e., status quo). It acts as a significant mechanism in the creation and propagation of heteronormativity, thereby aiding in the continuation of prevailing ideologies and stereotypes. For instance, although certain narratives (e.g., the "Caraval" trilogy) delve into themes of empowerment and autonomy, these themes may simultaneously exist alongside larger societal frameworks that reinforce conventional roles and expectations.

Fiction gives us access to the inner lives of characters through the use of first- or third-person narrative, often offering background or analysis to help us understand their psychological processes (Leavy, 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that not all fictional works engage in a profound examination of characters' psychological dimensions. Certain narratives may present flat characters who exhibit limited complexity, resulting in a lack of detailed investigation into their thoughts and feelings. These two different narration styles (i.e., first- and third-person) provide distinct perspectives within the story. On the one hand, in first-person narration, the narrator is a character in the tale (e.g., the main character), allowing readers to enter their mind and experience the story from their point of view. On the other hand, third-person narration employs a generic narrator's voice that has access to the characters' inner lives (Leavy, 2016). According to Caulley (2008), a first-person narrative should be viewed as a close-up and a third-person narrative as a broad, distant shot.

Narration in the third person introduces characters and places them in a historical, social, or cultural context. The narrator's voice may be employed to offer commentary on the events that are occurring or to create opportunities for readers to interact with the concepts that are woven throughout the story critically. Additionally, narrators possess the ability to depict the "big picture" and demonstrate how each character fits into it. Therefore, the utilization of a

third-person narrator can facilitate the exploration of macro-micro relationships within fictional representations, allowing the author to establish and illustrate various interconnections (Leavy, 2016).

1.8. Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Since the beginning of time, men have often been viewed as more aggressive and assigned traditional masculine tasks (e.g., hunting and fighting), whereas women have been given more feminine duties (e.g., taking care of the children and gardening). However, this narrative is not universally applicable and must be contextualized within particular cultural and historical frameworks. After all, archaeologists have proven it, or so we thought. In 2018, scientists found the remains of a hunter and identified the sex as female, which changed the constructive narrative that had been built over the years, and in 2020, it was determined that hunting was a gender-neutral responsibility. Researchers concluded that the idea that sexual division of labour is an inherent part of human biology has played a role in the structural inequalities in today's society, making these gender biases interpretations (Miller, 2023).

Gender roles refer to a collection of social and behavioural norms that are commonly accepted as suitable behaviour for men and women in social or interpersonal contexts (Larson, 2013, as cited in Arnold et al., 2015). Gender roles can be stereotypical, neutral, or counter-stereotypical to conventional gender norms (Durkin, 1985a, as cited in England et al., 2011) and are a common way to characterise men and women (Skorek & Schreier, 2009, as cited in Azmi et al., 2016), who are constantly portrayed differently. Due to the impact of cultural, social and psychological variables, these positions differ significantly (Larson, 2013, as cited in Arnold et al., 2015), making gender roles never universal. It is crucial to realise that learning how to conduct responsibly may be influenced by cultural and gender-specific socialisation as well as environmental factors (Burgess, 1994, as cited in Arnold et al., 2015). As mentioned beforehand, although the standards for behaviour vary depending on one's culture, it is often expected of men to be powerful, independent, aggressive, forceful, and competitive, and women to be feminine, elegant, submissive, perceptive and nurturing (Azmi et al., 2016; Burgess, 1994, as cited in Arnold et al., 2015).

Gender stereotypes are generalisations regarding various gender roles, according to social psychology research (Ellemers, 2018). These stereotypes frequently emerge due to inadequate cognitive resources, which might lead to an overestimation of differences between groups and an underestimation of diversity within them (Ellemers, 2018). Gender roles are rooted in labour

division (Basow, 1992, as cited in Xu et al., 2019) and extend to several aspects of society, such as education, employment, and wealth (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Parenting practices and workplace and educational norms that perpetuate gender inequality are important effects of gender stereotypes (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Eagly & Wood, 2013). As more women enter professional employment and increase their education, they are regarded to be more competent and defy gender stereotypes (Eagly et al., 2000, as cited in Xu et al., 2019).

1.9. Gender Norms

According to Judith Butler, particular bodies and gender expressions are read and accepted in society according to specific standards/norms. Butler (1990, as cited in Oliveira, 2017) defined gender in terms of performativity, which is the idea that gender is a social construction created by the repetition of specific gender-related behaviours that result in a range of outcomes that are seen as essential – something that is "done" as opposed to "being" (i.e., identity, which is an outcome of the normative ontology of gender). However, they are produced by this repetition and referenced by it as though they were unique, with each gender being a replica of the two separate models – the masculine and the feminine. This means that the social systems of gender production and representation will be what provides significance to this biological capacity, even despite the biological characteristics that may eventually produce a sexual distinction. Gender norms are expressions of the laws that define gender and control how it is recognised. They are, therefore, manifestations of power, and we may understand how power subjects us by explaining how we are subject to it (Oliveira, 2011, 2017).

On the other hand, gender norms suggest a binary view of the sexes as simply being male or female, with no other possibilities deemed healthy. Through gender manifestations that adhere to these standards and provide an apparent feeling of immutability, these norms ensure a subsequent preference for gender constancy. Therefore, the distinction rests on how gender norms are performed, as opposed to how individuals are discursively produced. In subversive acts like drag or queer performances, gender performances begin with these norms to materialise or re-signify them (Oliveira, 2011, 2017).

From a feminist perspective, the analysis of human intelligibility revolves around the issue of justice and the ability to live a sustainable existence. This topic is explored with a range of issues such as transsexuality, intersexuality and sexual and reproductive rights. According to these ideas, identifying someone as human entails acknowledging their basic being. Stated differently, an individual is considered human only if they fall within the category of humans

defined by the standards that govern humanity's intelligibility or this "way of being" (Amâncio, 1994, as cited in Oliveira, 2011).

1.10. Gender in Films

Throughout the years, Disney has been trying to break stereotypes and gender norms regarding its princesses. In the first generation (e.g., "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves", "Cinderella", "Sleeping Beauty"), the main female characters are presented as kind, quiet, obedient and stunning, without self-determination, lacking authority, and depend on the male characters to fulfil their ambitions. Whereas the second generation of princesses (e.g., "Beauty and the Beast", "Pocahontas", "Mulan") show some power and control, are more self-reliant and work towards accomplishing their goals. Nonetheless, the female characters continue to conform to gender stereotypes since they still require the assistance of the male characters to carry out the ultimate rescue (England et al., 2011). Lastly, unlike the earlier generations, the third one (e.g., "Tangled", "Brave", "Frozen") is shown to be highly autonomous, fighting for their dreams with little assistance from the male characters and not at all courteous or gentle (Azmi et al., 2016). They have a bold, daring, and independent spirit, striving to defy expectations and gender norms (Rome, 2010, as cited in Azmi et al., 2016). Society and culture's views regarding gender roles shaped the characters' evolution over the years and generations of Disney princesses (Azmi et al., 2016).

In the early Disney films, the princesses were more forceful than the princes, but generally, they were more assertive while dealing with animals and kids compared with other people. This implies a passive and constrained kind of assertiveness, as though they were only able to be aggressive while mothering other adults or those with less power, reflecting the society we were in as gender expectations were simpler. However, as feminism gained popularity in the 1970s and beyond, they have grown more complex. The early princesses (e.g., Snow White) serve as examples of how women used to take care of the home and the kids. Nonetheless, for women to flourish outside the house, they are now expected to retain these feminine attributes as well as add elements of "male" traits like assertiveness (Coltrane, 2004, as cited in England et al., 2011).

"Frozen"'s Elsa is a great example of gender roles and stereotypes present in today's movies. Her struggles with emotional regulation, particularly with fear and anger, highlight the dangers of combining feminine impulsivity with authority, proving the stereotype that women

are temperamental (Plant et al., 2000) and have overwhelming emotional outbursts (Foundas, 2013, as cited in Streiff & Dundes, 2017), qualities that are incompatible with ruling.

Male sexual prowess is celebrated; in fact, male rulers are frequently called "sire", a term whose verb form implies "to breed". Similarly, as it is acceptable and even encouraged for men to be pushy in their sexual relationships, suitors are inherently male and traditionally, a father's daughter's "hand" in marriage has been requested by suitors. Just as only women wear engagement rings on their hands to indicate that their "hand" in marriage (i.e., their virginity) has already been offered to a man, this is a ritual that is exclusive to men (Streiff & Dundes, 2017). In addition to highlighting the need for feminine empathy, "Frozen" glorifies female sacrifice, since women are expected to put the needs of others above their own – a notion also found in Disney's "Pocahontas" (Dundes, 2001) –, the audience would not have expected to see this theme emphasised for males. The idea that selflessness is a prerequisite for real love indicates that this quality is still promoted as a crucial virtue for women and encourages feminine subjugation (Rowe, 1979, as cited in Streiff & Dundes, 2017).

According to Towbin et al. (2004), one of the primary societal standards that are commonly depicted for women in Disney movies is that they should be domestic and will probably marry or that marriage is a must for their happiness. Also, women are expected to be many things, not just beautiful, including delicate (Arnold et al., 2015).

1.11. Research Question and Objectives

With the development of this thesis, we intend to identify patterns and trends, with a special focus on gender norms, traumatic experiences in characters and their motivations, through the exploration of the context and interactions between the characters since these discoveries can contribute to their construction and the specific contextual effects of this world. Thus, our research question is "How do the fantastic context (e.g., the game's environment and illusions) and external factors (i.e., gender norms, traumatic experiences) of the "Caraval" trilogy influence the actions and motivations of the selected characters throughout the narrative?".

Since our study uses a qualitative, exploratory and thematic approach, we don't have hypotheses but rather objectives: a) describe the mentality of the characters, their social dilemmas, actions, motivations and beliefs; b) characterise the characters, their actions and relationships with other characters; c) identify significant changes in the characters throughout the narrative; d) identify gender norms and social pressures; e) identify whether the characters

behave according to society's gender norms; f) identify their traumatic experiences and how it has affected them and have overcome it.

CHAPTER 2

Methodological Strategy

The methodological strategy chapter describes the study design and analytical methodologies used in this research, which investigates how external factors (i.e., gender norms and traumatic experiences) influence the formation of characters in the trilogy "Caraval", by Stephanie Garber. Given the interpretative nature of our qualitative study, an exploratory approach was used to consider how these norms influence the actions and subjectivity of the four selected characters. We also used a thematic analysis method to find and analyse gender-related patterns in the text. Furthermore, this chapter details the study design, analytical procedures and corpus analysis, character selection and scope of analysis, corpus, and ethical considerations.

2.1. Study Design

As mentioned beforehand, our study uses a qualitative, exploratory and thematic approach to identify patterns and trends by exploring the context and the interactions between the selected characters since these discoveries can contribute to their construction and the specific contextual effects of this world.

A qualitative method was chosen to provide a better understanding of the subjective experiences, insights, and interpretations associated with the influence of gender norms and traumatic experiences in constructing characters in literature. Therefore, we used a thematic analysis to study the textual content of the three books, extracting meaning and themes, using the Braun and Clarke (2006) outline guide on the six different phases. Our approach is also exploratory given that our study doesn't have a specific research question but rather aims to investigate the environment's influence (i.e., gender norms and traumatic experiences) on the actions, motivations and subjectivity of the characters.

2.2. Analytical Procedures and Corpus Analysis

The methodical selection of a book series appropriate for our research marked the beginning of the analytical procedure. We decided on the trilogy "Caraval" by Stephanie Garber based on several key criteria: a) a completed series was necessary to ensure that our study was updated and finalised for a future publication of the findings; and b) given the limited time frame of my master's program (i.e., one year), a trilogy has the most appropriate length.

A thematic analysis approach was used for the data analysis according to Braun and Clarke's guide (2006). Therefore, there are six different phases of thematic analysis: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. We started by reading the entire trilogy to become fully immersed and familiar with the story and the characters, and we selected and identified four characters – Scarlett and Donatella Dragna, Jacks, and Paloma – whose growth and actions were especially pertinent to our study's focus on gender norms, traumatic experiences and motivations. After the first phase, we reread the three books with different visions and objectives to generate initial codes. The created codes were typical actions (ways of insertion in the narrative), romantic desires, logical background story and trauma, powers (for only two of the four selected characters, Scarlett and Jacks), and relationships with other characters relevant to their growth and trauma.

Once the first codes were established, we started searching for broader themes, i.e., meaningful patterns that highlight an important aspect of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The broader themes we created were gender norms, traumatic experiences in characters, and motivations for their actions. Within each of these themes, we identified and added relevant sub-themes to further clarify the analysis: relationships (i.e., how the main theme influences personal relationships), powers (for only two characters, Scarlett and Jacks), and views of love. These sub-themes provide a thorough examination of the subtle ways in which gender norms, traumatic experiences in characters and motivations influence the characters' actions as well as how they interact with others. Following the identification of these themes, we read the trilogy a third time to refine and clarify them, to verify consistency and coherence. At this point, it is critical to make sure that the themes are separate but related to provide a thorough overview of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The final phase consists of the combination of the improved ideas into a cohesive thematic narrative through the identified themes and sub-themes with comprehensive textual evidence, demonstrating how the context (i.e., gender norms and traumatic experiences) influences the characters' actions, motivations and subjectivity. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the necessity of providing a rich, detailed explanation of the data, which was accomplished by presenting the theme analysis in a manner that underlines the complexity and depth of the characters' experiences.

Throughout the analysis, reflexivity was upheld to recognise the subjective nature of the interpretation and the possibility that this process was influenced by our personal experiences. By following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis offers a

methodical and comprehensive exploration of the construction of gender norms in the trilogy "Caraval".

2.3. Character Selection and Scope of Analysis

The narrative is told from the perspective of two sisters, Scarlett and Donatella Dragna, the protagonists. As the story unfolds and we switch perspectives, the antagonists change with each book. In the first book, "Caraval", the sisters' father, Marcello Dragna, and Legend are the main and second antagonists, respectively (Garber, 2016). Whereas in "Legendary", Jacks, The Prince of Hearts, and the rest of the Fates (i.e., god-like evil characters who ruled the world a long time ago) take on this role (Garber, 2018) and, finally, in "Finale", Scarlett's real father Gavriel, The Fallen Star (and one of the Fates), is the antagonist (Garber, 2019).

The trilogy has a third-person view and subjective narrator, i.e., the person detailing the story conveys the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of the two main characters, the Dragna sisters. Therefore, this perspective is limited and portrays the story through their understanding, worldview and knowledge.

We selected four characters from the trilogy "Caraval" by Stephanie Garber, two protagonists (i.e., Scarlett and Donatella Dragna, the two sisters whose perspective is narrated) – and, as a result, round characters since their emotions and actions are moulded throughout the story (Forster, 1927) – and two secondary characters (i.e., Jacks, The Prince of Hearts, and Paloma Dragna, Paradise the Lost), with Jacks also being a round character, and the main antagonist of the second book, and Paloma a flat character (i.e., she has simple emotions, motivations and personality). In their most basic form, flat characters are built around a single concept or attribute and have the tremendous benefit of being instantly recognisable to the reader, as well as effortlessly recalling them later on. They continue to exist in the reader's memory as unchangeable since they were unaltered by situations (Forster, 1927). This selection allows for a more in-depth analysis of the different types of characters (i.e., protagonist and secondary, protagonist and antagonist) and the extent of their role in the narrative, according to the context (e.g., social, historical and cultural environment) that determines their behaviour and development, helping readers to connect and engage with them, providing a more complex view.

Scarlett Dragna's character provides an excellent opportunity to examine the depths of the books' traditional gender norms and stereotypes, which are based on the reality of an account of a past with traditional gender norms. These norms include the expectations for women to be

self-sacrificing, protective, and nurturing by putting everyone before themselves (e.g., marrying the count, the man her father chose, to save herself and her sister from his abuse). Due to these societal expectations, her actions are driven and motivated by a sense of responsibility dictated, making her a great character for exploring the internal tension between her wishes and perceived obligations. Whereas Donatella's persona differs and, in a way, complements Scarlett's in her approach to gender norms, which she frequently challenges or subverts (e.g., being intimate with different men). Her actions can be analysed according to her acceptance or rejection of traditional feminine roles and, consequently, how these choices affect her autonomy and subjectivity. The two sisters can be described as both sides of a coin, where Donatella's assertiveness and independence serve as a counterpoint to Scarlett's more traditional role, allowing for a comparative examination of how differing gendered expectations impact their conduct.

It's possible to analyse how traditional masculinity affects Jacks's interactions with other characters, especially with female ones like Donatella, his romantic interest. His persona allows us to examine how typical masculine traits (e.g., manipulating others, being emotionally detached, pursuing power) appear in his actions and relationships.

Despite being mainly a ghost character and missing for the majority of Scarlett and Donatella's lives, the anguish and trauma that Paloma inflicted on her children has been profound. Her past actions – or lack thereof – heavily influence both sisters' views of themselves and their duties, and her absence's lasting repercussions show how trauma may be transmitted and impact future generations.

Within a magical setting, the selected characters provide a variety of points of view on how the context (i.e., gender norms and traumatic experiences) shapes people. For example, through the examination of Scarlett, Donatella, Jacks and Paloma's actions, motivations and inner conflicts, we can investigate how much traditional and non-traditional gender norms are influenced by it. Thus, a complex knowledge of how gender norms are created, contested or upheld in these books can be gained by contrasting characters such as Scarlett and Donatella, and analysing male characters (i.e., Jacks).

2.4. Corpus

The first book of the studied trilogy, "Caraval", was published in 2016 and has around 407 pages, divided into 42 chapters. While "Legendary" was released two years later, in 2018, with 451 pages and 43 chapters, "Finale" was published in 2019 with 478 pages, divided into 59

chapters[1]. Overall, our analysis encompassed 1336 pages and 144 chapters. This is Stephanie Garber's first published work, its literary genre is young adult fantasy and was in second place on the New York Times bestseller list for fifteen weeks (Eggertsen, 2024). The series gained even more popularity with the rise of *BookTok* and the promotion of enthusiastic readers, who praise the trilogy for its themes of love, sacrifice and the limits of reality and fiction (Eggertsen, 2024). Both "Legendary" and "Finale" were nominated for Goodreads' Choice Awards in 2018 and 2019, respectively, for "Best Young Adult Fantasy & Science Fiction" (Goodreads, 2018, 2019). "Caraval" has been translated into over thirty languages (The Bent Agency, 2021), and 20th Century Fox picked its movie credits in 2015, with Pouya Shahbazian, the producer of the movie "Divergent", being responsible for this project (McNary, 2015), although there's no news about its development.

The author was born on the 8th of July 1987 and took six years of writing and editing to have the final version of "Caraval" published. Throughout her academic journey, Stephanie Garber worked different jobs (e.g., waitress, bartender, salesgirl), and she's a former blogger at the Pub(lishing) Crawl (Caraval Wiki, n.d.). Today, she is a #1 New York Times and international bestselling author (The Bent Agency, 2021) of two trilogies (i.e., "Caraval" and "Once Upon a Broken Heart", a spinoff series centred on Jacks, The Prince of Hearts) and a creative writing teacher at William Jessup University in California (McNary, 2015).

The first book of Stephanie Garber's trilogy, "Caraval", follows an older sister, Scarlett Dragna, who escapes her abusive father to join the magical and enigmatic Caraval, a once-a-year immersive game in which the audience participates. Scarlett is excited to be invited by the mysterious game's master, Legend, but her joy quickly turns to despair when her sister Donatella is taken hostage and used as the game's focus. With only five days to find her sister and win the game, Scarlett finds herself lost in a place of deceit, illusion and temptation, where not everything is as it seems. In "Legendary", after mastering the game, saving her sister from an arranged marriage and escaping her father, Donatella should be celebrating but she still has a bargain to fulfil with the mysterious criminal Jacks, The Prince of Hearts, and deliver Legend's true name. To achieve this goal, Donatella needs to win Caraval, and, along the journey, she discovers sinister details about the Fates, ancient beings that could endanger the world. She finds herself in a place where she needs to make difficult decisions, an impossible

[1] Stephanie Garber has announced a new illustrated novella titled "Spectacular" with 224 pages after the events of "Finale". It's a short story that follows our main characters – the Dragna sisters, Julian and Legend – looking for the "perfect" presents for their loved ones during the Great Holiday Eve (i.e., Christmas) (Lawson, 2024). It comes out this year on October 22nd and is not included in our analysis.

choice, that jeopardises the people she loves most, and maybe even herself. As the title suggests, "Finale" brings an end to the trilogy and the story of the two sisters. The Fates are unleashed, and they must face their pasts to save the future and protect the people they love. Scarlett finds herself divided between two men: Julian, the endearing performer, and Nicolas d'Arcy, her ex-fiancée and a nobleman who provides security. On the other hand, Donatella must make difficult choices between power and love: Jacks, The Prince of Hearts, and Legend, whose actual identity and intentions are exposed. Both sisters must challenge love, betrayal and sacrifice as they struggle to defeat the Fates and learn that the biggest battle lies within themselves as they choose who they want to be and what they are ready to give up for their future. Caraval has ended, but the greatest game of all has just started, where there are only two types of people involved: the victor and the vanquished.

The nature of the game Caraval acts as a primary thematic element in the trilogy, testing readers' and characters' ability to explore a world where illusion and reality are ever-changing. In the first book, both characters and readers are cautioned against getting too caught up in the game since "everything is a lie", bringing doubt and making it harder to distinguish between truth and deception. We're introduced to a new world with magic and real-life consequences to our choices (e.g., giving away a day of your life as payment for a dress), but participants are warned not to take the game too seriously, emphasising how deceptive its nature is. However, in the second book, it happens exactly the opposite. At this point, the characters are advised to take caution and to believe that "everything is real", as there are actual risks and consequences in the game. The characters and readers are compelled to reevaluate how they see reality because of this shift in perspective from "everything is a lie" to "everything is real" which represents a more in-depth examination of perception, trust and consequences. Nevertheless, in both games, there is one important thing that always stays the same: every choice the characters make has tangible, real-life outcomes.

Caraval takes place during the night because people often act irrationally when they believe no one is watching. The game's illusion is further enhanced by the nighttime setting, which leads players to feel as though there are no repercussions for their choices. Even if they want to go back to their regular lives, their actions and choices remain with them, regardless of their longing to undo them. This emphasises how their choices have an ongoing impact on them even after the game is over, making it harder to distinguish between illusion and reality. Furthermore, the performers within the game also give a deeper level to the illusion idea. Despite the fact that Caraval is planned throughout and each performer is given instructions to follow, their actions are not entirely anticipated – they still have some free will –, which allows a touch of reality to

creep into the game. Additionally, the fact that the performers who "die" during the game feel all the anguish and suffering of death while bound by Legend's power – but they are not permanently dead, rather they are brought back to life after the game is officially over – serves as more evidence of this. This highlights the difficulty of maintaining a clear distinction between illusion and reality, even for those who have lived their whole lives in the world of Caraval.

Ultimately, Caraval is about the sacrifices one is ready to make, not only about solving riddles and finding clues. Therefore, the game is more about the emotional and personal consequences of the choices made along the way than about academic performance. This supports the main idea that decisions made in the real world or an imaginary one have long-lasting effects that go much beyond the boundaries of the game.

The corpus used will be the trilogy above, through the documentation and study of the actions, dialogues and descriptions of the four selected characters, in which both their actions, motivations and subjectivity reflect the society they live in, and can portray relevant social dilemmas. Thus, it is possible to observe their development over time, identifying significant changes in their actions, motivations and beliefs, as well as understanding how these changes are influenced by the context/environment. A comparison was then made of their actions, changes and behaviour, according to the chronological order of events and the narrative, making it possible to recognise patterns and trends.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Although we're not conducting a study with human participants, there are still ethical considerations to be mindful of to ensure our research is carried out responsibly and respectfully. It is essential to respect the author's work and artistic vision and, while critical analysis is necessary, it should be conducted respectfully, considering Stephanie Garber's creative rights. We also acknowledge that our interpretation is just one of many alternative readings of the text and is, therefore, subjective and influenced by our specific theoretical framework and research interests. As a result, the text is approached with reflexivity and the awareness of personal experiences that can impact our interpretation.

Additionally, we have to strive for a balanced interpretation that takes note of all characteristics of the characters, avoiding one-dimensional readings that may reduce their complexity. This is especially relevant when discussing topics like hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity. It is important to remember that we mustn't generalise our findings to all

literature or gender depictions. Our analysis is limited to the “Caraval” trilogy and its characters, and it should not be interpreted as a general statement on gender standards in literary works.

CHAPTER 3

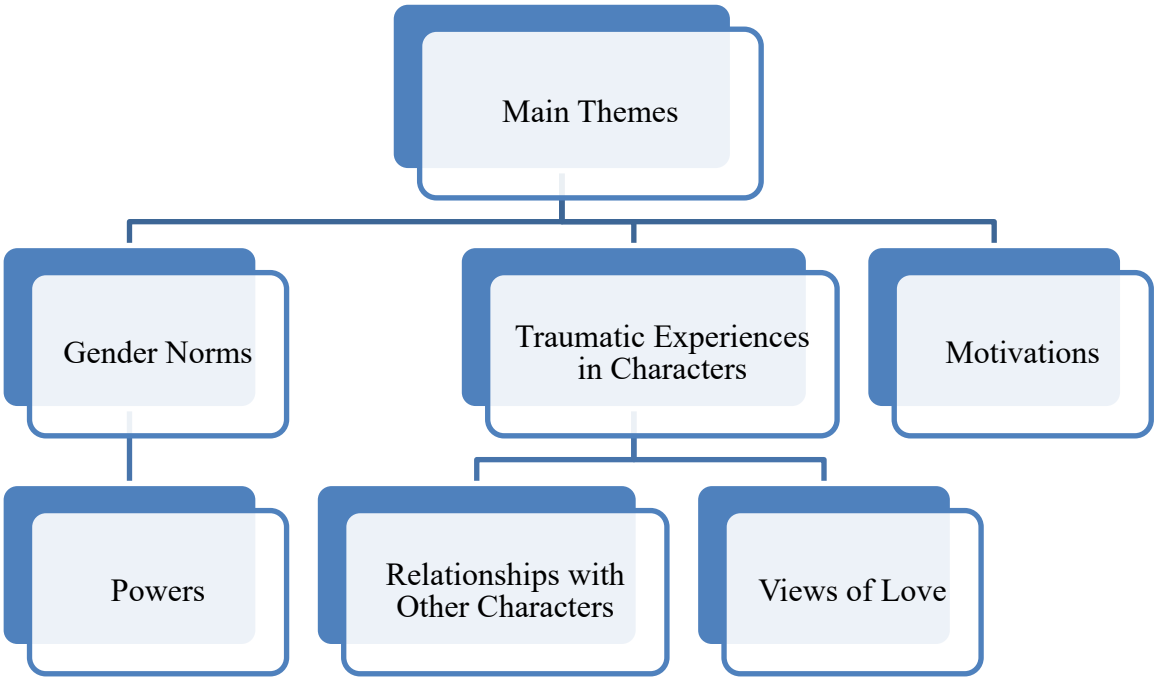
Analyses

The analysis of characters and themes in this trilogy emphasises how societal norms, gender norms, traumatic experiences, and power dynamics impact the characters' actions and development. This chapter investigates how the fictional society mirrors historical and patriarchal structures found in the real world and delves into gender norms, relationships, romantic desires, and trauma effects to reveal the characters' driving motivations and their world navigation. Therefore, the studied themes are not mutually exclusive, and we selected the following: Gender Norms (with Powers as a subtheme), Traumatic Experiences in Characters (with Relationships with Other Characters and Views of Love as subthemes) and Motivations (see Figure 1).

Since the "Caraval" trilogy belongs to the young adult literary genre, certain themes, especially those related to sexuality, are not explored with the same depth and complexity that one could find in new adult literature. These subjects are frequently presented in a more indirect or muted way, which makes them more approachable for younger readers. For example, Donatella's openness to indulge in casual relationships (e.g., kissing different boys without commitment) could have been explored in greater detail if the book had been set in the new adult genre. This genre frequently approaches these themes in deeper ways and provides more explicit depictions of relationships, sexuality, and emotional depth. While we can still analyse Donatella's actions through a psychological and thematic perspective, the young adult genre limits the opportunity for a more sophisticated and nuanced portrayal of her romantic relationships.

Figure 1.

Thematic Map of the Analysis



3.1. The Era and Society's Mentality

This trilogy begins in the Year 57 of the Elantine Dynasty, indicating a more historical period marked by a monarchy, where they write letters to each other and use oil lamps and lanterns. Throughout the narrative, the social class dynamics are evident. For example, since our main characters are from a higher social class, certain caregiving tasks, and even emotional ones, are passed on to servants (e.g., putting the children to bed). Additionally, men in positions of power (e.g., a count, a noble, an aristocrat) have gentler hands, implying a life of privilege in which hard labour is beneath them. Despite their elevated status, these men are not able to stay honest and usually get involved in criminal activities (e.g., embezzlement), highlighting the corruptive influence of power and privilege.

Within this society, arranged marriages are typical and "in fashion", normally between a minor or younger woman and older men, due to the payment that is made to the parents or, in this case, the father. Consequently, women are frequently appreciated more for their potential to marry than for who they are as individuals. Moreover, young girls who attempt to create their path, by trying to work respectable jobs, end up sold into brothels or workhouses with horrible conditions. Social norms further reinforce this objectification, as it is improper for a lady to be seen and touched sexually when she's committed to someone and consummate before the wedding. Traditions and beliefs, such as the groom should not see the bride before the wedding, perpetuate the idea that women are possessions or objects to be disclosed when the moment is appropriate. It is clear from Scarlett's discomfort with sexual desire and her uneasiness with

intimacy-related themes that sex is a taboo subject in her society, and the societal expectation for women to stay virgins until marriage is reflected in this unease. However, as mentioned above, the trilogy is marketed as a young adult series, and these themes are not explored with the same depth that might be expected in literature aimed at a more mature audience.

Society places many expectations on how women should behave, particularly focusing on the idea of a "proper young lady", who should not, for example, entertain certain sexual thoughts or desires. As a result, it creates an internal conflict in our female main character, Scarlett, between her natural curiosity and the rigid norms imposed on her. This also opens judgment between other women for their different choices, reinforcing the restrictive gender norms in their world. Furthermore, Donatella finds that women are particularly severe when it comes to social judgement, criticising each other's choices and appearance. The general response to Donatella and Jacks' public display of affection serves as more evidence of how controversy is used by society to control women's behaviour while males are frequently exempt from the same scrutiny.

Scarlett's anxiety about her father finding her in an intimate moment reflects the stifling control over women's bodies and desires. The degree to which women's liberty is constrained by patriarchal power is demonstrated by the prospect of harsh punishment for participating in a consenting but socially unacceptable contact. Moreover, the objectification and discrimination women experience when implicated that they may have a sexual relationship highlights the tendency to control women's sexuality, demonstrating the double standards in which they are both objectified and condemned, desired and disgusted, for the same actions. However, once the protagonists arrive in the capital, a different take on gender roles emerges. Women sailors are shown as having greater autonomy and freedom, and they are boldly dressed in leather skirts and thigh-high boots, suggesting that there are places in this world where gender norms may be less rigid.

The world described in the trilogy "Caraval" by Stephanie Garber displays a society with social and cultural variables that influence and shape the characters' actions and ideologies. Although the narrative does not explicitly address racism or discrimination against people of colour, some characters reflect diverse cultural backgrounds, providing a degree of representation. For example, Julian is described with golden-brown skin, and his transformation from being a mere sailor to being revealed as Legend's brother – a powerful and important figure – reflects the nuanced portrayal of characters from a variety of backgrounds. Similarly, the Isles, despite having been a part of the Empire for a long time, are still perceived negatively, with people considering them as ignorant and uncultured peasants, just as they had been when

they had first been invaded. The enduring effects of colonialism and ingrained social structures are reflected in this persistent prejudice, suggesting that societal views and attitudes are resistant to change and that the repercussions of subordination persist beyond generations.

3.2. Gender Norms

Gender norms significantly influence the actions and character development within the trilogy "Caraval". As mentioned beforehand, these norms, which are deeply rooted in the patriarchal framework of society, dictate specific behaviours and roles for women. For example, Scarlett Dragna's narrative illustrates the constraining expectations imposed on women, highlighting qualities such as obedience, nurturing, and self-sacrifice. Consequently, her growth is profoundly affected by the societal perception of women as objects to be exchanged and dominated. This exploration of gender norms is essential for understanding how characters (e.g., Scarlett and Donatella) navigate their environment, with Scarlett, the older sister, conforming to conventional feminine roles, while Donatella, the younger sister, actively resists these limitations by challenging social expectations surrounding female sexuality and autonomy. By examining these gender norms, we reveal the mechanisms by which patriarchal authority maintains control over women's bodies, desires, and independence, as well as the impact of these expectations on their emotional and psychological well-being.

Marcello Dragna, Scarlett and Donatella's father, is a prime example of how women are treated like commodities in the patriarchal society of "Caraval". His actions, especially the way he arranged Scarlett's marriage with Count Nicolas d'Arcy (a man twice her age) and sold her virginity, are indicative of a culture that views women as nothing more than properties to be consumed by men. This transactional perspective of women is further demonstrated by his encouragement to reward Scarlett's rape. The idea that Scarlett's father would exchange her virginity for monetary or social benefit illustrates how much she is viewed as merchandise. Additionally, her compliance, particularly in agreeing to the arranged marriage, demonstrates her internalised subjugation and conviction that following these norms will safeguard her, acting as a means of surviving in this oppressive environment. Her willingness to follow social norms, despite the personal expense, reflects the internalised gender norms that govern women's responsibilities in this patriarchal. The transactional nature of Scarlett's arranged marriage and society's disdain for her independence demonstrate how dehumanised she has been, supporting the notion that her society is overtly patriarchal. Scarlett carefully considers her choices, opting to face danger, not because she must but because she is driven to do what is

best for herself and those near her. This demonstrates her refusal to conform to traditional female roles, as she transforms into a woman who seizes control of her own story. As a result, Scarlett transforms from a submissive character, limited by societal expectations, into someone who confidently asserts her independence. Her increasing defiance towards these roles and her choice to seek a relationship built on mutual love rather than on transactional benefits defy the conventional gender norms that were placed on her.

Throughout the trilogy, Scarlett continues to wear the enchanted dress gifted by Legend despite the fact that it reflects her emotions, and she doesn't trust or like the master. Her desire for control and protection in a world where she feels powerless may be one reason she decided to wear this dress. The dress serves as a shield and a way of expressing herself, enabling her to stay honest in a world full of deceit and manipulation. By wearing the magical gown, she acquires a fresh method to deal with her emotions, potentially granting her a feeling of liberation in expressing feelings she has concealed for a long time due to her father's oppressive control. Simultaneously, the dress can act as a trigger that, despite the suffering she went through, she continues to feel a variety of emotions, which empower her rather than weaken her. In the narrative, Scarlett evolves from a character driven by fear and duty to one who makes her own choices. The dress could symbolise the journey, embodying her inner feelings and enabling her to face and comprehend her emotions more openly. In conclusion, the dress indicates to the reader that Scarlett is connected to her emotions and is relying on them to make choices. In a society that views emotions as a symbol of weakness, Scarlett's decision to wear the dress could indicate her defiance of societal norms and her increasing readiness to embrace her emotions for strength.

Scarlett's character aligns with the archetype of the Warrior (i.e., the main character who rises to meet a challenge and saves the day and can be viewed as overconfident and arrogant) or the Caregiver (i.e., a character who provides protection and makes sacrifices on the behalf of others and can be viewed as having lack of personal ambition or leadership) (Pearson, 1991). However, Scarlett is not a typical heroine that is typically found in young adult fantasy literature, where traits such as rebellion and defiance against authority are often glorified. Rather, Scarlett exemplifies a more intricate form of heroism that frequently goes unrecognised due to its divergence from the bold, overt expressions of independence commonly associated with traditional protagonists. Her heroism is characterised by a thoughtful deliberation of her choices, a profound sense of responsibility, and an unwavering commitment to safeguarding her loved ones, particularly her sister, Donatella. Scarlett's narrative illustrates that heroism

manifests in diverse ways, affirming that there is no singular definition of a strong, empowered woman.

The archetype that Donatella aligns with is a combination of two: the Seeker (i.e., driven by the goal of seeking a better life, and fears conformity, viewing it as a cage to be fled from) and the Lover (i.e., guided by their heart, and can be viewed as naive and irrational) (Pearson, 1991), in other words, the Emotional Seeker, blending Donatella's yearning for freedom and her profoundly emotional approach to decision-making.

In contrast, Donatella's character challenges conventional gender roles by opposing social norms through her relationships and behaviours, whereas Scarlett internalises the ideals of feminine obedience and purity. Her rejection of the restrictions that define women's responsibilities in her patriarchal society and her disobedience of social norms regarding women's sexual behaviour establish her as a revolutionary character. Donatella's defiance of conventional feminine roles (e.g., chastity, passivity) illustrates her intentional rejection of these social standards, opting instead to take control of her own decisions and assert her independence, even when dealing with powerful men such as Jacks and Legend. These stereotypes are challenged by her character, who emphasises the flexibility of gender roles and the possibility of women exercising agency even in the face of repressive systems. Hence, Donatella redefines patriarchal norms in her choice to pursue romantic relationships on her own terms and her refusal to rely on a man to rescue her.

In the "Caraval" trilogy, Jacks, The Prince of Hearts, embodies hegemonic masculinity, which is marked by deception, emotional detachment, and a need for dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). His interactions with female characters – Donatella, in particular – are influenced by gender norms that prioritise masculine authority and female submission. Jacks reflects the traditional norm that males should dominate women in romantic and social settings by controlling their emotions and behaviour. His manipulative actions and emotional detachment contribute to the archaic gender stereotype of the emotionally unavailable, powerful man who abuses his position of authority to manipulate others to promote his objectives. Jacks is a complex character marked by contradictions; he upholds traditional masculine values while simultaneously grappling with the effects of his trauma. As a personification of fatal flaws, moral ambiguity, power, emotional detachment and a desire for redemption, his character fits the mould of the Cursed Anti-Hero. It is important to recognise that archetypes are not universal but rather culturally specific; they embody the values, beliefs, and narrative traditions of the societies that produce and interpret them.

Paloma Dragna, often referred to as Paradise the Lost, is an important character in Donatella and Scarlett's growth. As a ghost character, she is characterised by the effects of her absence on other characters. With her disappearance, we only have access to partial reconstructions of her role as a mother through the different visions and memories of each sister, which consequently produces effects on the narrative. Furthermore, in the last book, "Finale", Paloma portrays a role of sacrificial motherhood by trying to kill her former lover and Scarlett's real father, the Fallen Star, to save her daughters and ensure they live in a better world, ending up being murdered, and therefore taking the archetype of the Caregiver (i.e., a character who provides protection and makes sacrifices on behalf of others and can be viewed as lacking personal ambition or leadership) (Pearson, 1991).

Paloma challenges gender norms that are traditionally associated with women, especially when it comes to parenthood, by being a well-known criminal, Paradise the Lost. Her career choice, which is normally associated with masculine strength and rebellion, is in defiance of social norms, demonstrating the possibility of women functioning outside of patriarchal restrictions. Deciding to leave her daughters to protect them challenges the typical motherly role, demonstrating that a mother's affection can be expressed in ways that go against cultural norms. Paloma's actions show a more nuanced view of parenting, one that puts her children's safety above her presence in their lives, as opposed to fitting the mould of the altruistic mother.

3.2.1. Powers

This subtheme is intricately linked to the examination of gender norms in the trilogy, as the characters' magical abilities mirror broader societal expectations concerning gender roles. For example, Scarlett's powers emerge directly from traditional feminine stereotypes; she possesses the ability to empathise, perceiving emotions as colours (e.g., anger is red). This capacity to sense and interpret emotions not only underscores her sensitivity but also aligns with the societal belief that women are inherently more nurturing and emotionally perceptive: "Everyone's feelings were everywhere. They came in too many colors for Scarlett to keep track of or ignore" (Garber, 2019, p. 225).

Even though she downplays these abilities at first, they represent her journey towards empowerment, transitioning from a passive character constrained by patriarchal standards to an active participant who asserts control over her destiny. Unlike the traditional male representation of strength or physical dominance, Scarlett's powers embody an internal fortitude grounded in empathy and emotional intelligence – qualities frequently linked to femininity. Consequently, this subtheme not only enriches the discourse on gender norms but

also acts as a metaphor for the influence of these norms on female agency, particularly in a context where emotional sensitivity is perceived as both a vulnerability and a source of strength.

Scarlett is the only female character in "Caraval" with magical powers, indicating that Stephanie Garber meant for her to be empowered in a way that other female characters are not. Her powers give her an advantage in situations where she might otherwise feel powerless, and their emergence coincides with her journey toward self-empowerment. Her capacity to recognise emotions as colours symbolizes her developing self-awareness and capacity to make choices based on her feelings rather than society's expectations. This ability highlights how Scarlett overcame her past confinement by becoming an active agent in her own life and reclaiming her destiny from the patriarchal constraints that had held her back.

As a Greater Fate and The Prince of Hearts, Jacks' magical power both defines and limits his involvement in the story. His lethal kiss is a physical and figurative curse as it kills everyone he kisses unless they are his one true love. The kiss symbolises his incapacity to create enduring love relationships as well as the emotional separation he needs to keep to prevent hurting other people. Additionally, the fact that his heart is no longer beating represents his emotional distance and conviction that he is unworthy of love. As a result, the curse starts to represent his inner conflicts about closeness and vulnerability rather well. Furthermore, Jacks can also control and manipulate the feelings of others, influencing them to feel affection towards him and behave in the manner that he wants. This adds another layer to his character by highlighting the moral consequences of using that power. Although he is able to gain love and compliance from others, the shallow quality of these relationships sharply differs from the authentic emotional connections he desires to form. Therefore, the challenges Jacks faces with his magical powers symbolise larger concepts of dominance, isolation, and the human longing for genuine relationships.

3.3. Traumatic Experiences in Characters

Trauma significantly influences the characters' behaviour and interactions throughout the story. It is possible to interpret Scarlett's strict adherence to social norms and expectations as a coping mechanism she adopted in response to the years of abuse, both physical and psychological, her father perpetrated that instilled a profound fear of punishment which resulted in hypervigilance, a desire to control her surroundings and obey regulations (Miller, 2019). Therefore, Scarlett being a symbol of the perfect "rule-follower" is a psychological strategy that gives her a sense of control in an otherwise harsh and unpredictable environment. Hypervigilance is one of the

main symptoms of her trauma, and it's especially noticeable in her fear of turning her back on doors and her increased sensitivity to specific stimuli (e.g., the colour purple or the scent of plumes, which serve as triggers for memories of her father's abuse). Her emotional distress mainly comes from her father's abusive behaviour, leading to a profound fear of intimate relationships and a preoccupation with safety. This instinct to protect herself and her sister has consistently shaped her life decisions, compelling her to act out of fear of re-experiencing past violence.

Following the mysterious disappearance of her mother, Paloma Dragna, Scarlett experienced profound emotional abandonment, which intensified her anguish. Additionally, Scarlett took up the role of Donatella's caretaker, a responsibility that heightened her anxiety and fostered a dependence on control. This duty increased her concerns and strengthened her belief that strict adherence to rules was the only means of ensuring the safety of both herself and her sister. The absence of Paloma creates an emotional void that intensifies Scarlett's sensitivity, significantly influencing her behaviour and relationships throughout the narrative. Scarlett's trauma warps her capacity to trust others, especially men, as she navigates relationships characterised by caution and dread.

As the plot unfolds, Scarlett grows to confront her past traumas, especially when presented with tough decisions that challenge her deeply rooted anxieties and fears. This transformation showcases her growing resilience, as she decides to demonstrate her control in circumstances that may have previously overwhelmed her.

Both sisters experienced severe trauma as a result of their father's abuse, and each handled it in quite different ways psychologically. In an attempt to find the love their father had denied her, Donatella pursued relationships with unsuitable partners, whereas Scarlett chose to distance herself from men altogether. This contrast allows for an interpretation of Donatella's hyper-romantic inclinations as a coping mechanism for the emotional void created by her father's abuse. She reflects on the internal conflict common among trauma survivors who seek love in the wrong places, often relying on romantic connections to bridge the emotional gaps left by their childhood trauma (Raja et al., 2018, as cited in Miller, 2019). On the other hand, Donatella reacts to trauma by searching for independence and authority and desires to escape all types of limitations, physical or emotional, after feeling confined by her father's regulations for most of her life. This is evident in her defiance against her father and the men trying to dominate her, including Jacks. The trauma she has faced motivates her to steer clear of decisions based on fear and to choose to assert her power, even if such choices involve risk. Donatella has faced both direct suffering from their father's actions as well as indirect trauma from witnessing their

mother, Paloma Dragna, being murdered. Nevertheless, she doesn't allow herself to be consumed by sadness; instead, she channels her sorrow into strength, using it to drive her determination to pursue her desired life.

These divergent reactions to their shared traumas create tension between the sisters. Scarlett loves Donatella more than everything, yet she often feels like a second choice, which contributes to her profound emotional pain. Therefore, there is a rift between them: Donatella wants independence and to overcome all perceived limitations, while Scarlett seeks protection, the safety she never had.

As The Prince of Hearts, Jacks is cursed to an eternal life marked by the death of every person he kisses, a destiny that keeps him from deep and meaningful connections. Due to this curse and the tragedy of his heart stopping, Jacks has become emotionally detached and defensive. Thus, his cold and cunning behaviour can be interpreted as a coping strategy to shield himself from more emotional suffering (McNally, 2003, as cited in Selma & Halla, 2022). The metaphorical significance of Jacks' card – unrequited love and irreversible mistakes – complicates his suffering. His curse reinforces the belief that he is incapable of love or seeking redemption by depriving him of both love and consigning him to a life of harming others. Additionally, his tendency to wield his power and influence to dominate those around him rather than forming real emotional connections, exacerbates his psychological load, resulting in his emotional detachment and manipulative tendencies (McNally, 2003, as cited in Selma & Halla, 2022).

3.3.1. Relationships with Other Characters

The development of the characters, their traumatic experiences and their navigation of cultural gender norms is significantly shaped by their interpersonal relationships. Scarlett's need for security and protection greatly influences her connections with others, and her relationship with Julian represents a crucial turning point in her journey towards self-empowerment, as she chooses to pursue love on her own terms, liberating herself from the societal boundaries that have hindered her progress.

In contrast, Donatella's desire for independence is evident in her relationships. She rejects being characterised by the men in her life, whether it's Jacks, Legend, or even her father. Despite Jacks' manipulative behaviour, Donatella discovers how to liberate herself from his influence, eventually understanding that she doesn't require a man to rescue her or determine her fate. This sense of autonomy mirrors her mother's attitudes as Paloma made difficult

decisions to protect her daughters, illustrating the idea that familial relationships often require significant personal compromises.

On the other hand, Jack perceives relationships as a means to exert power, by manipulating and controlling others, especially in his pursuit of Donatella. He uses his abilities to control her emotions, viewing her as a conquest rather than a partner with whom he can emotionally connect. His inability to experience love in a human manner leads him to see relationships as transactional, based on power and desire instead of authentic emotional ties. His interactions with Donatella are characterised by manipulation and obsession, showcasing the darker aspects of relationships involving control and power dynamics.

> But while she could believe he was upset that she hated him again, she doubted he truly regretted what he'd done. Tella had no doubts that Jacks wanted her, but wanting someone wasn't the same as loving them, and yesterday he'd proved that he wanted his power even more than he wanted her.
> (Garber, 2019, p. 514)

3.3.2. Views of Love

Scarlett's experiences of trauma and the societal expectations placed on her are closely related to her romantic desires. Due to her father's abuse, she has a fear of and distrust for males, especially those in positions of power. As a result, Scarlett's romantic desires are characterised by an internal conflict between her aversion to intimacy and her need for safety. Her willingness to enter an arranged marriage with Count d'Arcy is more a reflection of her need for security than of love. However, as Scarlett and Julian's relationship blossoms, her perspective on love begins to change, with her initial belief that love must be sacrificed for safety leading her to desire a relationship built on mutual trust and affection. Scarlett's evolving conception of love is a reflection of her increasing autonomy. Her decision to pursue a relationship with Julian, despite social expectations, is a remarkable moment in her character development. The fear and social expectations that formerly restrained her romantic desires eventually give way to a more genuine expression of her emotional needs. This change is representative of the series' empowerment theme, in which Scarlett progressively regains her independence and starts making decisions based on her preferences rather than following social norms.

Donatella's conceptualisation of love plays a major role in her character development and represents her deeper yearning for independence. She embraces love connections as a means of self-expression and independence, with her attraction driven by her need for personal autonomy. By engaging with partners such as Jacks, Donatella defies stereotypes that women

should be docile or subservient in relationships. Nevertheless, she frequently finds herself in dangerous and manipulative relationships, especially with Jacks, with his hegemonic masculinity and emotional detachment. However, Donatella's search for affection may also be seen as an attempt to reclaim the love she was denied as a child. Therefore, her extreme romanticism may serve both as a coping mechanism for her trauma (Raja et al., 2018, as cited in Miller, 2019) as well as an expression of her liberation from social norms that aim to limit female sexuality.

Love is a complex emotion that Jacks struggles to fully embrace because of his curse. His interactions with Donatella showcase his uncertainty regarding love, oscillating between obsession and emotional distance. Jacks's understanding of love is characterised by possessiveness, rooted in his desire for dominance rather than genuine affection. His curse, which results in the death of anyone he kisses unless they are his soulmate, symbolises his struggle to establish authentic emotional bonds. Although he is intrigued by the idea of love, his behaviour indicates that he values dominance and authority more than genuine emotional closeness.

> I know what I did was wrong. But if you're looking for a sad story where I justify what I've done, you're not going to find it. I'm the villain, even in my own story. But you were supposed to play a different role. (…) You were supposed to be my true love. You were supposed to want me, not him. You were supposed to be as obsessed with me as I am with you.
>
> (Garber, 2019, p. 574)

Paloma's views on love are shaped by her role as a mother and her desire to protect her daughters. Her decision to depart from their lives stemmed from a place of love, as she believed that her presence would only put them in greater danger. For Paloma, love involves the notion of sacrifice; she is willing to endure the pain of separation from her daughters to ensure their safety. Her actions demonstrate that love can manifest in ways that are not always immediately understood by others but are driven by a deep sense of responsibility and protection.

3.4. Motivations

The motivations of every character are closely linked to their individual experiences of trauma and their responses to societal pressures. Throughout the series, keeping her sister safe from their abusive father is Scarlett's main driving force. Almost every action is motivated by her desire to protect Donatella, often at the expense of her own interests. This protective instinct is

fundamental to Scarlett's persona and is a reflection of the selfless role she has played since her childhood; her unshakeable dedication to her sister is an example of this complex dynamic.

Scarlett is motivated by her desire for love and security, but she struggles with finding a balance between achieving these objectives and maintaining her identity. Her drive to take action, even if it poses risks, is rooted in her need to safeguard the ones she loves, such as her sister and Julian, her lover. As the narrative unfolds, Scarlett's motivations transition from fear and survival to empowerment, and she starts to make choices based on her wants, rather than merely conforming to the expectations of others, showing her shift from a scared girl to a self-assured woman who takes control of her life.

On the other hand, Donatella is motivated by her need for emotional fulfilment, which she pursues through her relationships with men, as opposed to Scarlett, who prioritises security and protection. The abuse inflicted by her father deprived her of the affection and stability that a parent would normally supply, resulting in significant emotional neglect. One could argue that her search for love – even in risky or inappropriate relationships – is an attempt to satisfy her unfulfilled emotional demands. Donatella develops into a character who strives to shape her own life independently, resisting the influence of men who attempt to dominate her. Her past experiences make her more independent and cautious in romantic relationships, as she strives to hold on to power and remains wary of others. She seeks connections with powerful men such as Jacks and Legend to showcase her autonomy and retain power over her own life. The tension between her emotional desires and her aspiration for independence is crucial to her character development.

Many of Donatella's riskier behaviours, such as involving with Jacks, a character with a reputation for his manipulative tendencies, are motivated by her internal motivation (i.e., her need for affection and approval). Her desire for independence and self-determination drives her to defy the constraints imposed by both Scarlett and society. This internal conflict draws attention to Donatella's nuanced personality and her continuous battle to strike a balance between her demand for autonomy and her emotional needs.

The majority of Jacks' behaviour is driven by his external motivations, particularly his need for control and power, whereas his internal motivations are rooted in unfulfilled emotional needs. His quest for his one true love fuels his external drive, as they are the only ones who can break his curse and restore his capacity for love. However, Jacks' hegemonic masculinity and manipulative characteristics keep him from making real emotional connections, ultimately obstructing the fulfilment of his desires. His deceitful behaviour and emotional detachment act

as defence mechanisms, preventing vulnerability and showing how his internal needs for emotional connection are frequently subordinated to external goals (e.g., power).

Jacks' curse and its restrictions on his capacity to build lasting connections have a significant impact on his motives. Until he meets his true love, every person he kisses will die from his lethal kiss. This curse reinforces his reluctance to connect deeply by acting as both a real barrier to love and a metaphor for the emotional distance he keeps between himself and other people. The pursuit of his one true love is what drives him externally to pursue Donatella. Meanwhile, his internal motivation is significantly more complex. Even though Jacks longs for emotional intimacy, he has a strong mistrust of love, stemming from this inability to genuinely experience it. This scepticism is based on the physical evidence of his emotional detachment – his heart stopped beating. The friction between his internal and external motivations is highlighted by his internal struggle between his need for love and his conviction that it is unachievable.

In contrast to the other characters, Paloma's motivations are mainly focused on the theme of protection. Her decision to depart from her daughters was driven by love and the need to ensure their safety, even at the cost of inflicting emotional pain upon them. This self-sacrificing nature aspect of her character shows her strong maternal instincts: however, rather than engaging in typical maternal actions, she decides to distance herself to protect her loved ones from her past dangers.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

In this thesis, we research the impact of gender norms, traumatic experiences, and societal pressures on the characters' behaviours and motivations in the trilogy "Caraval" by Stephanie Garber. The analysis explores how character development is influenced by external factors like gender norms and personal trauma through integrating theoretical frameworks such as perspective-taking, gender performativity, and psychological realism. By thoroughly examining the selected characters, the study illustrates how they navigate the restrictive societal expectations forced upon them, offering a new angle to research gender norms in young adult fantasy literature.

A core concept is the theory of perspective-taking (Todd & Galinsky, 2014), which provides an understanding of how readers can empathise with the characters' challenges by seeing the narrative from the perspective of two sisters. Scarlett and Donatella Dragna view challenges differently due to their individual experiences with trauma and societal expectations, offering a unique dual perspective for analysis. This approach underscores the significance of examining the context in character growth, as the reaction of each sister to these factors mirrors their internal beliefs. Scarlett's heightened awareness and adherence to rules stem from her past traumas, whereas Donatella's rebelliousness acts as a way to resist these expectations.

Unlike typical young adult characters who embody rebellion, Scarlett stands out by initially presenting as obedient and scared, making her a more intricately developed character (Paxton, 2017). There is a distinct elegance in Scarlett's decisions to conform to societal norms (e.g., consenting to an arranged marriage to ensure the safety of herself and her sister), unveiling a different manifestation of strength – one rooted in resilience and selflessness. Although she possesses agency, her decisions embody a subtler, yet equally formidable, form of resistance. This idea resonates with a broader theme within the narrative: the beauty of femininity and the autonomy to pursue a path, whether it is more traditional or rebellious. Her character encourages readers to reevaluate the notion that defiance is the sole avenue to empowerment, illustrating that the deliberate choice to embrace societal roles can be as potent as outright rejection. Both Scarlett and Donatella exemplify these contrasting responses to societal pressures, each holding equal legitimacy. There is value in choosing to stay home, opting to embrace care and stability, just as there is value in challenging conventions, as Donatella does, through acts of defiance

and self-sufficiency. While certain paths may appear more thrilling or audacious from a particular perspective, it is crucial to acknowledge that every woman's choice, whether it aligns with traditional values or embraces innovation, embodies its own form of empowerment, and both stances deserve recognition and respect for the strength they signify.

Oliveira (2017) notes that gender norms are strongly reflected in the systems that control women's bodies and choices, and Scarlett's initial resistance to challenge these standards is a sign of her internalised oppression. Her willingness to enter an arranged marriage with Count d'Arcy is more a reflection of her need for security than of love. Therefore, she belongs to the bottom levels of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, where her main concerns are to survive and escape from her father. However, as she takes charge of her own life, she achieves the self-actualisation need, where individuals strive to reach their full potential and feel fulfilled.

On the other hand, Donatella actively challenges traditional gender roles through her assertiveness and refusal to be controlled by men such as Jacks and Legend, thereby defying patriarchal norms. Butler (1990, as cited in Oliveira, 2017) argues that gender is performative, and Donatella's defiance of conventional feminine roles (e.g., chastity, passivity) illustrates her intentional rejection of these social standards. Her daring romantic relationships, as explained by Raja et al. (2018, as cited in Miller, 2019), similarly correspond to theories about how people, especially adolescents, manage trauma by partaking in risky behaviours. In Donatella's case, this translates into a search for independence and power, both in her interpersonal relationships and within society.

The idea that powerful women cannot have a weaker male equivalent due to concerns of emasculation, which makes them unappealing (Streiff & Dundes, 2017), is challenged by the dynamic between Scarlett and her partner, Julain, where she is more powerful (i.e., has magical powers). Moreover, Streff and Dundes (2017) concluded that a male character with the same power diminishes the allure of the female character as an autonomous decision-maker (Streiff & Dundes, 2017), a pattern that is not observed in the relationship between Donatella and Jacks. Even though Jacks exhibits hegemonic masculinity through emotional detachment and manipulation, his attempts to control Donatella's independence and choices are ultimately unsuccessful, as she stands firm in maintaining her autonomy.

Although formal diagnoses for fictional characters are unavailable (Miller, 2019), Scarlett exhibits symptoms that closely match those of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), such as hypervigilance, avoidance, and increased emotional sensitivity, which are typical reactions to prolonged abuse. Her avoidance of closeness and fixation on obeying regulations are coping mechanisms she adopted to endure her father's mistreatment. Her process of healing and

empowerment aligns with her increasing acceptance of her emotions and autonomy, particularly in her connection with Julian, enabling her to embrace love on her own terms rather than conforming to societal norms.

Jacks explores the themes of male trauma and emotional disconnect in a compelling manner. The curse he carries causes death to those he kisses unless they are his one true love, illustrating his struggle to establish real emotional connections. This detachment may be associated with McNally's (2003, as cited in Selma & Halla, 2022) concept of trauma-related emotional numbness, adding complexity to Jacks's relationships with women, especially with Donatella. His desire for dominance and control in relationships supports traditional gender norms; however, his lack of emotional closeness ultimately diminishes his influence by preventing him from creating significant bonds.

The quote, "Every story has four parts: the beginning, the middle, the almost-ending, and the true ending" (Garber, 2019, p. 7), resonates with the challenges faced by Scarlett and Donatella as they heal and grow through obstacles posed by their trauma, gender norms established by their society, and personal desires. Both sisters experience difficult moments that could have led to their surrender, yet their ability to overcome these obstacles and persist is essential to their development and self-empowerment. As the quote implies, they find their "true ending", which symbolises their development as autonomous beings with the ability to choose and follow their own paths, thanks to their capacity to persevere through the "almost-ending", a time when all hope seems lost.

4.1. Innovations

The concept of women's self-determination is very relevant in today's conversation, and we have a great example in the books with Scarlett's journey towards female emancipation by making her own choices (e.g., refusing to marry the count) and interfering in the decisions of others (e.g., her father, who wanted to force her hand in marriage with the count to receive money). With the support of her sister, Scarlett challenges gender norms that traditionally grant men greater physical and decision-making power. Through the lens of the young adult fantasy genre, Stephanie Garber prepares our society for this new reality by endowing Scarlett with extraordinary powers, thereby preparing society for this new reality and transformative understanding of gender norms, turning something strange (i.e., that we are not accommodated) into acquainted. However, this perspective might be debunked with the character Legend, a male figure imbued with ancient magic and is described somewhat as a god.

In contrast to the typical portrayal of women as passive characters, in literature, the active roles of female characters in this narrative convey a message of empowerment and independence as they assert their desires, make autonomous decisions, and influence the unfolding events within the story.

4.2. Limitations

Given that our approach is interpretative, it is necessarily subjective. As a result, our perspectives, personal experiences, and identities can influence our interpretation of the text and the themes we identify. Although reflexivity helps to lessen this impact, it does not completely eradicate this subjective dimension. Therefore, the exploratory nature of the study indicates that our affiliations may shape the path of the research, perhaps leading to a selective interpretation of the text.

By focusing on four characters (i.e., Scarlett and Donatella Dragna, Jacks, and Paloma), the analysis may neglect other important characters or features of the text that could provide additional insights regarding gender norms and traumatic experiences. Nonetheless, given the limited time frame of our master's thesis (i.e., one year) and the importance of the selected characters (i.e., the two main female protagonists, an antagonist, and a secondary character), a more thorough interpretation of the other characters was not possible. Furthermore, thematic analysis is based on recognising patterns within the text, which can result in the simplification of complicated characters or events and, due to concentrating on broader themes (i.e., gender norms, traumatic experience and characters' motivations), subtle details or contradictions in the characters' behaviour might be overlooked.

Another limitation of this research is the selection of the trilogy "Caraval" by Stephanie Garber as a main text for our analysis. While "Caraval" provides an insightful analysis of the studied themes (i.e., gender norms, traumatic experiences, motivations), choosing a different book, with a stronger focus on these themes, might have offered a more comprehensive exploration of these topics. Additionally, considering that this thesis is intended for publication in a scientific journal, selecting a literary work by a Portuguese author could have enhanced the visibility and appreciation of national literature.

4.3. Future Studies

For future studies, we could focus on and analyse other characters relevant to the trilogy as well as explore other social constructs (e.g., race, socioeconomic class) that influence gender norms,

traumatic experiences and characters' motivations. Moreover, it would be interesting to extend this type of methodology and character analysis to a broader range of literary works. Finally, as a follow-up study, we could focus on the reception of the information, i.e., how the studied themes such as gender norms, trauma in characters, and motivation, influence readers' perceptions and interpretations.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis emphasises the influence of societal gender norms, traumatic experiences, characters' motivations and psychological growth on characters in the "Caraval" trilogy, demonstrating how these elements impact personal behaviours in complex ways. By analysing the contrasting responses of Scarlett and Donatella Dragna to patriarchal expectations, this study enhances our comprehension of the impact trauma has on behaviour, actions, and self-discovery. Furthermore, this research broadens the discussion surrounding gender norms and trauma in modern literature by examining the contextual influences on character behaviours and actions, thereby providing important perspectives for literary analysis and gender studies.

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