Commensality and Connection: How Shared Food Experiences Connect Characters in Philip Pullmans His Dark Materials, The Book of Dust and ‘Lyra’ Stories

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Commensality and Connection
How Shared Food Experiences Connect Characters in Philip Pullmans
His Dark Materials, The Book of Dust and ‘Lyra’ Stories.

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May 2020

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for M.A. in Gastronomy and Food Studies; Technological University Dublin, School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology.

Supervisor: Anke Klitzing
Declaration

I hereby certify that the material submitted in this thesis towards the award of the MA in Gastronomy and Food Studies is entirely my own work and all sources have been acknowledged. This work has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

Signed: _________________________

Date: _________________________
Acknowledgments

I am so grateful to all the wonderful teachers who I have been fortunate enough to have had throughout my life. In particular, I would like to acknowledge two exceptional talents: my secondary school English teacher Mr Patrick Hunt and the late Mr Diarmuid Murphy of TU Dublin. From you both I learned to read extensively and to try new things. I am honoured to have sat in your classes.

For the passion and dedication exhibited by all the faculty involved in the Gastronomy and Food Studies Programme at TU Dublin. In particular to my supervisor Anke Klitzing, thank you for your patience and support and the knowledge you have shared with me throughout this journey.

And finally, to Philip Pullman and the wonderful worlds which he has created. Your works continue to inspire me in new ways twenty years after first opening Northern Lights.

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“We shouldn’t be afraid of the obvious, because stories are about life, and life is full of obvious things like food and sleep and love and courage which you don’t stop needing just because you’re a good reader.” ~ Philip Pullman, 2017.
Abstract

Commensality is an inherently social activity that shapes society and enacts social dynamics. Consequently, these shared exchanges can reveal much about the society and the individuals who engage in the act. This thesis explores commensality in Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials trilogy, The Book of Dust Series and companion texts to the novels. The research investigates how commensal exchanges create and maintain connections between characters across the collection. In doing so, it considers how literary characters differ from real-life humans and how the existing body of knowledge on commensality can be applied to literary figures. A qualitative approach was chosen as the research focused on characters social relationship with food. A thorough thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarkes framework was conducted, a method often employed in the fields of social science and, also, to investigate food in literature.

Philip Pullman has repeatedly said that, as an author, he is primarily concerned with the experience of being human and the relationships and behaviours that we as individuals engage in. In this context, the thesis argues that Pullman is also an author who understands and applies the significance and power of commensality in connecting characters. Shared eating and drinking experiences are abundant throughout Pullman’s novels. Commensality aids in creating and maintaining friendships, forging alliances, and strengthening familial ties. Commensal exchanges often reveal divisions in social class as well as group hierarchies. In addition, sharing similar food and drink shapes the social identity and behaviours of the characters in much the same way as may be observed in the real world. Through examining commensality in these literary works, it is evident that Pullman uses shared eating and drinking experiences to integrate the constellations of characters, creating and developing connections between them. In addition, Pullman effectively reveals much about the culture and societies in which these characters exist through these commensal acts. The approach taken in this research project may be applied to further investigations of food in literature. In particular this research provides a basis for exploring how current literature on commensality in the real world can be applied to fictional characters and how sharing these commensal experiences aids in connecting character constellations.
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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate what shared food and drink experiences can reveal about character connection in Philip Pullman’s *Lyra Collection*. This research was conducted in partial fulfilment of the award of Masters in Gastronomy and Food Studies at Technological University Dublin. Food studies is a burgeoning, interdisciplinary field of study which focuses on the ties between food and culture. In particular, food studies is interested in human relationships with food. For this reason, much work within the discipline is approached from the perspectives of social science and the humanities (Miller and Deutsch, 2009).

This chapter aims to provide a framework for the study by presenting a background to the author and to the works included in the study, as well as providing context for ‘food in literature’ as a field of study within food studies. Justification for the research is also presented along with the research aims, objectives and limitations of the study, as well as, a brief outline of the chapters in the thesis.

1.1 Philip Pullman and The Lyra Collection

1.1.1 An Introduction to Philip Pullman

Sir Philip Pullman is regarded as one of the leading authors writing today (Fields, 2019) and his work has garnered considerable praise from both critics and academics (Dirda, 1997; Gooderham, 2003; Thompson, 2004; Moruzi, 2005; Freitas and King, 2007; Lenz, 2008; Gruner, 2011; Feldt, 2016; Cottrell Boyce, 2017; Craig, 2019; Swank, 2019; Wagner, 2019).

Pullman was born in 1946 in Norwich, England and describes his childhood as “rich and varied” (in Yentob, 2018). He spent much of his younger years living abroad in Zimbabwe and Australia as his father and later his stepfather served in the RAF (Yentob, 2018). Pullman’s father died when he was seven, after which he lived with his grandparents for a
short time. His grandfather was a clergyman, and it was through his sermons that Pullman developed “a sense that the world was full of stories” (in Yentob, 2018). His grandfather was also influential in igniting Pullman's imagination through his stories about the landscape around them (Miller, 2005).

After school, Pullman studied English at Exeter College Oxford. Upon graduating, he worked for twelve years as a middle school teacher but also began writing his first novel. It was during this time that Pullman honed the craft of storytelling (Yentob, 2018), which was to aid him in developing his career as a writer that now spans over fifty years. Pullman continues to live in Oxford and, like many authors before him, Pullman draws inspiration for his novels from this historic city (Parsons, Nicholson and Pullman, 1999).

Pullman published his first children's novel *Count Karlstein* in 1982 and, to date, has published over twenty novels, novellas and stories. Pullman’s works have been translated into more than forty languages and have sold over twenty million copies (Yentob, 2018). Pullman is an active and vocal contributor on issues such as politics, education and matters affecting authors (Singh, 2008; Pullman, 2017; Heawood, 2019; Flood, 2020). His views on God, however, have received particular attention as many of his works are critical of organised religion. Pullman says that he became sceptical of religion at an early age and that it is the corruption of power of some religious organisations that he stands against (Odean, 2000; Yentob, 2018). Pullman has received many accolades for his work. Most notably, in 2001, Pullman’s Novel *The Amber Spyglass* won the Whitbread Book of the Year award, the first time that this was awarded to a children's novel. In 2019, Pullman was awarded a knighthood in recognition of his contribution to the literary world (Jones, 2019).

1.1.2 Genre and Audience
Pullman is widely considered as a writer of children’s fantasy fiction. However, throughout his career, he has refuted this label, arguing that he considers himself a realist writer (Yentob, 2018) who writes stories with no particular age group in mind (Singh, 2008).
It is understandable that Pullman is regarded as a writer of fantasy fiction. His stories often take place in parallel worlds and feature otherworldly characters from talking bears to shadow demons, witches and fairies. While many critics have compared Pullman’s work to that of C.S. Lewis or Tolkien (Maguire, 1998; Parsons, Nicholson and Pullman, 1999; Sullivan, 2004; Lenz, 2008; Leith, 2013; Maddison, 2014; Elmhirst, 2017; Fields, 2017), Pullman generally rejects this comparison and is often critical of these writers (Lenz, 2008; Leith, 2013; Maddison, 2014). Pullman's primary criticism of fantasy as a genre is that the stories do not focus on the experience of being human (Odean, 2000). Pullman says that fantasy "doesn't talk about what it's like to be alive or to grow up or to have a romantic relationship or ... all the things that we get in realistic fiction" (Odean, 2000, p.54). Despite this criticism, Pullman acknowledges that the fantasy genre provides several effective mechanisms; for example, this genre allows for exceptional inventiveness and allows Pullman to communicate stories about growing up in a more vivid way (Odean, 2000; Andronik, 2003; Yentob, 2018). Pullman believes that by adopting these mechanisms, he can make his stories about the experiences of growing up, richer and more dynamic (Odean, 2000; Yentob, 2018). Pullman has also acknowledged that *His Dark Materials*, and therefore *The Book of Dust* novels, only worked when they took place in imagined worlds (Odean, 2000).

Although Pullman has stated that he writes with no age group in mind (Singh, 2008), he has expressed in interviews that writing under the genre of children's literature allows him, as an author, to explore what it is to be human far more than contemporary adult fiction allows. Pullman believes that “children’s books still deal with the huge themes which have always been part of literature - love, loyalty, the place of religion and science in life, what it really means to be human. Contemporary adult fiction is too small and too sterile for what [he is] trying to do” (Eccleshare, 1996). Another reason for writing under the genre of children's fiction may be attributed to the fact that children are generally more interested in fantasy literature than adults (Wartofsky, 2001). Since the publication of *His Dark Materials*, the trilogy has grown in popularity amongst adult readers; however, it could be
argued that the religious and philosophical aspects of these novels are what appeals to these readers rather than the fantasy elements.

1.1.3 The Lyra Collection

This study focuses on what can be considered as The Lyra Collection (Table 1.1); a number of novels, novellas and short stories that focus on Lyra Belacqua, the teenage protagonist, who lives in an imagined, parallel Oxford. The collection includes: the His Dark Materials trilogy, three short stories detailing the background to Lyra’s world and the more recently published The Book of Dust series. In many ways, the world in which these stories take place is much like our own. In Lyra’s world, however, so-called “anbaric” energy powers lights and people travel by Zeppelin airship and use strange truth-telling instruments called alethiometers. Most striking is the presence of daemons, manifestations of the soul that exist outside the body in the form of an animal. Daemons of children can change shape and settle into one form when the character reaches adulthood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year Published</th>
<th>Medium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Lights</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Novel [Book One: His Dark Materials]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Subtle Knife</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Novel [Book Two: His Dark Materials]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyra’s Oxford</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Novella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once Upon a Time in the North</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Novella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Collectors</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>E-Short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Belle Sauvage</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Novel [Volume One: The Book of Dust]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Secret Commonwealth</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Novel [Volume Two: The Book of Dust]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1 Texts in the Lyra Collection.

The His Dark Materials trilogy is arguably Pullman’s most famous work. Amongst other things, it depicts the story of the destruction of the Magisterium (the religious organisation in Lyra’s World), a quest to kill God and a retelling of the story of Eve (Eccleshare, 1996). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the religious and philosophical elements of this series have
received considerable academic interest (Ghesquiere, 2004; Lenz, 2008). Pullman has repeatedly noted that *His Dark Materials* was heavily influenced by Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Craig, 2000; Pullman and Brown, 2000). Pullman’s more recent series, *The Book of Dust*, is heavily influenced by real-world events, such as the refugee crisis (Mullan, 2019; Wagner, 2019), and Pullman's interest in politics is evident from these stories. *The Book of Dust* novels are markedly more mature than *His Dark Materials* (Craig, 2019) and Pullman acknowledges that they are aimed at an older audience although he holds the stance that age categories should not be assigned to books (Yentob, 2018). Although chronologically these novels sit before and after *His Dark Materials*, Pullman has stated that he does not want the books to be considered as a prequel or sequel to *His Dark Materials*. Rather he considers them as stand alone stories with equal importance to his famous trilogy (O’Kelly, 2017; Squires, 2017). Pullman has also released three companion books to *His Dark Materials* (*Lyra’s Oxford, Once Upon a Time in the North* and *The Collectors*) which aim to provide context for the worlds that Pullman created.

1.2 Justification

The work of Philip Pullman, in particular *His Dark Materials* and its companion texts, has garnered much academic interest. These studies focus predominantly on the religious and philosophical underpinning of the novels (Gooderham, 2003; Freitas and King, 2007; Gruner, 2011; Feldt, 2016). Other fields of study have looked at family ideology and childhood within the collection (Thompson, 2004; Moruzi, 2005; Swank, 2019). Within literary criticism, Pullman work has also received scholarly attention, including examination of his use of language and metaphors (Bird, 2001; Gooderham, 2003). There has been, to the best of this researcher’s knowledge, little research devoted to the role of food within these texts.

Foodways are abundant across the books and are one of the ways Pullman presents the familiar to the reader. The *His Dark Materials* trilogy and *The Book of Dust* series present complex and elaborate plots underpinned with religious and philosophical ideas. However, this is only one way in which the works may be approached. As Fitzherbert (2000, p.62)
states, within the novels, “the big idea is more heretical backdrop than driving force – the pleasure of these books lie in the detail of the sweep, rather than the fact of it”. It is within the description of the familiar that Pullman's writing shines (Cottrell Boyce, 2017). Therefore although these familiar aspects, such as food, may appear at first glance inconsequential in the novels, this thesis argues that foodways, and specifically the act of commensality, reveal much about the characters and the culture and society in which they exist.

Examining food in literature is an emerging area in food studies (Piatti-Farnell and Brien, 2018). Keeling and Pollard (2009, p.5) argue that “if food is fundamental to life and a substance upon which civilisations and cultures have built themselves, then food is also fundamental to the imagination and the imaginary arts”. Food and foodways are consistently present across all genres of literature, including children's literature. Indeed, both Hunt (2005) and Keeling and Pollard (2009) argue that within this area of academic research children’s literature is as significant and worthy of study as any other genre.

Much academic investigation has focused on what can be considered the culinary aspects of food –for example the foodstuffs present, how the food is produced and is prepared (Goldstein, 2018; Piatti-Farnell and Brien, 2018). The broader social and cultural aspects of food and foodways, both Goldstein (2018) and Piatti-Farnell and Brien (2018) suggest is of equal importance and significance to the academic community.

The social aspect of food is a common recurrence in fiction (Forster, 1927) and instances of shared food experiences are often amongst the most memorable engagements between characters in literary worlds (Shahani, 2018). Lamarque (2007, p.117) suggests that through literature, “familiar characters and plots are assimilated into a wider cultural consciousness and help define national stereotypes and norms of behaviour”. There is strong justification, therefore, in the study of commensality in literature particularly where social relationships are also being investigated.
In relation to this thesis, Pullman is an author who is principally interested in what it means to be human and how humans behave towards each other. It is unsurprising, therefore, that complex characters with rich and dynamic social universes populate the imagined worlds that Pullman creates. Consideration of the shared food and drink experiences within these worlds, is consequently, an interesting and valid area for investigation. Through examining shared eating and drinking experiences in Pullman’s universe this thesis offers a new viewpoint from which the novels and the characters can be considered.

As the research intends to focus on the characters social relationship with food, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate (Bryman, 2012). Within this qualitative paradigm, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis was selected as an appropriate research method. Although primarily used within psychology research, thematic analysis is now widely adopted within the fields of social science (Braun and Clarke, 2013, 2019) and within literary studies (Yaya and Sayra, 2019; Shahriari and Toosi, 2017; Barker, 2002). Therefore, as this research lies at the cross section between food studies and literature a qualitative, thematic analysis of the texts was considered a valid methodological approach.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

In considering a study of food in the work of Philip Pullman, several limitations were identified. Firstly, as little research has been conducted around food in Pullman's work, there was no guide as to significant areas of interest to build upon or examine. The study also had to take into consideration the time and scope which a Master’s thesis could allow. For this reason, it was considered appropriate to concentrate on one aspect of the foodways identified in the texts: shared eating and drinking experiences. Although firmly rooted in and approached through a food studies lens, the research is interdisciplinary, drawing from literary studies, sociology and psychology. This exposed a challenge in presenting the thesis in a way which would remain grounded in food studies while providing adequate context from other fields to communicate the findings effectively.
1.4 Aims and Objectives

As literary food studies represent a relatively new discipline in itself, this thesis aims to contribute to the field by focusing on a specific area of foodways: commensality. By investigating shared eating and drinking experiences in *His Dark Materials*, *The Book of Dust* and *Lyra Stories*, this study aims to add to the existing body of academic knowledge around Pullman’s works by presenting a new viewpoint from which the novels can be approached. The study aims to explore what these shared experiences can reveal about the characters and the culture and society in which they exist. Specifically, this research aims to answer the question:

*How do shared eating and drinking experiences create and maintain connections between characters in Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials, The Book of Dust and Lyra Stories?*

In doing so, the thesis will also investigate how connections between fictional characters differ from real-life human relationships and how our existing body of knowledge around commensality can be applied to the literary world.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is presented in six chapters:

Chapter One provides a general background to the study including an introduction to Philip Pullman and the works explored in the investigation. The research aims, objectives and limitations are also presented.

Chapter Two explores relevant literature about commensality as it pertains to socio-cultural boundaries and functions that influence interpersonal relationships.

Chapter Three explores why social bonding is important in terms of interpersonal relationships and group membership. As this study relates to commensality in literature, it
also explores how characters connections differ from human relationships and how commensality contributes to these connections. Chapter Three also discusses characterisation within Philip Pullman’s novels and introduces the core characters of the texts.

Chapter Four outlines the qualitative approach undertaken in this study. This chapter provides a justification for the use of thematic analysis as well as the key stages undertaken in the process.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the analysis. Three primary themes emerged after data collection and thematic analysis were conducted. Chapter Five presents the most notable findings in relation to each of these themes.

Chapter Six discusses the findings of the study in relation to relevant literature about commensality. The chapter also discusses how the shared food and drink experiences identified in the texts aid in character connection.

Chapter Seven provides a brief conclusion to the study and recommendations for future research.
Chapter Two: Commensality: Shared Eating and Drinking Experiences

This thesis aims to investigate shared eating and drinking experiences within the imagined worlds of Pullmans Lyra Collection. Within the field of food studies this is referred to as commensality. In order to explore these shared experiences within the texts it is imperative to first gain a rounded understanding of what commensality is through a comprehensive overview of relevant academic literature. Primarily, this chapter will focus on commensality as it pertains to socio-cultural boundaries and functions which influence interpersonal relationships.

2.1 What is Commensality?

Commensality, the act of sharing food and drink, is an inherently social activity which can reveal much about the society and the individuals who share in the experience. Perianova (2012, p.29) states: “Commensality is of exceptional importance as social interaction and as a strengthen of social and cultural bonds since it reflects a commonality of history, heritage and mentality”. It has been argued that the ways in which we share food is what distinguishes humans from other species (Visser, 1991; Wrangham, 2009). Arguably the most common form of a shared eating experience is the shared meal. The concept of a meal is, in itself, accepted to encapsulate eating with others (Douglas, 1972; Charles and Kerr, 1988; Simmel, 1997; Sobal and Nelson, 2003). Shared drinking experiences are not included as frequently in discussions on commensality: however, individuals engage in many forms of commensal acts from habitual family meals to feasts as well as cocktail parties, and communal drinking in bars. These shared drinking experiences also serve a necessary commensal function within society (Gefou-Madianou, 1992; Kerner and Chou, 2015).

Directly, commensality translates as “eating at the same table” (Kerner and Chou, 2015) and it is referenced frequently as eating with others (Sobal and Nelson, 2003; Kerner and Chou, 2015). These generalised definitions of commensality, however, have received criticism as they do not take into consideration significant socio-cultural rules involved in sharing food and drink (Fischler, 2011; Murcott, 2019). Murcott (2019, p.46)
argues that without acknowledging these socio-cultural elements and functions, definitions of commensality remain “vague and variable” and can lead to an overly romanticised view of shared eating experiences. Commensality operates on a level of inclusion and exclusion (Douglas, 1972). The act of sharing meals turns the selfish, individualistic, act of eating (Simmel, 1997) into a collective experience. In doing so it transforms individuals into collective units (Belasco, 2008). These collective units or groups function on social rules and norms and through the act of commensality, individuals can forge and strengthen relationships (Fischler, 2011).

2.2 Socio-Cultural Boundaries of Commensal Circles

The type of commensal act in which individuals engage in depends on the nature and extent of the relationship between the participants. Douglas (1972) suggests, for example, that while family and close friends may share meals, acquaintances and strangers may only share drinks. Furthermore, Fischler (2011, p.535) observes that amongst the categories “there seems to be a gradient from intimate, familiar, informal, convivial to unfamiliar, formal, strictly etiquette-driven occasions”.

A number of models have been put forward to illustrate the different levels of relationships between peoples including the Social Universe Model of Douglas (1972) and Van Esterik’s (2015) depiction of commensal circles. In the “social universe”, as Douglas (1972, p.67) refers to it, two distinct groups may be identified: an outer circle who share drinks only and an inner, smaller, circle who may share both drinks and meals (Fig 2.1).
Commensal circles, as described by Van Esterik (2015), are socially constructed shared spaces, based on inclusion and exclusion, in which individuals engage in commensal acts of sharing meals, feeding others and exchanging food. Van Esterik’s (2015) visual model of commensal circles is fundamentally similar to Douglas’ (1972) model. Both portray a distinction between close family and friends and distant acquaintances and strangers. The most striking difference of Van Esterik's (2015) model lies in the inclusion of inner circles labelled “embodied commensality” which considers that commensality exists in-utero, during breastfeeding and in feeding young infants. Most discussions around commensality, Van Esterik (2015) argues, do not consider these as commensal acts. However, considering that the family unit lies at the core of commensal circles in general (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Sobal and Nelson, 2003; Fischler, 2011) and at the centre of the Douglas (1972) Social Universe Model, it stands to reason that young children should be included in discussions of shared eating and drinking experiences. The core encultured commensal circles in Van Esterik’s (2015) model more closely resemble those of traditional depictions of commensal circles. Inner circles consist mostly of family and close friends. As the circles move further from the centre, the spaces open, incrementally, to extended family, neighbours, acquaintances and strangers (Van Esterik, 2015).
Commensal circles provide context for social boundaries and delimit the social realms of individuals (Sobal and Nelson, 2003). These social boundaries, Douglas (1972) argues, is what provides meaning to shared food and drink experiences. As people engage in such meaningful experiences, they move between these circles resulting in their inclusion or exclusion (Douglas, 1972; Van Esterik, 2015).

An invitation to join a circle may be temporary or may remain over long periods. For instance, it is observed that an increased frequency in shared meals is seen as a characteristic of core commensal groups (Douglas, 1972; Sobal and Nelson, 2003). In addition, an invitation to join a meal often creates an obligation to attend and/or host subsequent events in the future (Douglas, 1972; Visser, 2009). Individuals may join and leave outer circles more readily as the bonds and relationships with the other members of the group are not as tightly knit.

Figure 2.2 Envisioning the Commensal Circle (Based on Van Esterik, 2015).

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2.3 Commensality and Social Class

Grignon (2001) argues that in order to understand commensality, the structures of society and the social relationships between individuals must be considered. Looking at shared eating and drinking experiences at a macro-level of society can reveal much about social stratification and can illustrate differences between social classes. As observed, individuals move between commensal circles resulting in inclusion and exclusion. In order to gain invitation to join a circle, however, individuals must have access to and an affiliation with existing members of that social group. Invitation may occur organically in a natural progression between individuals where acquaintances become close friends for example. However, our access to others often stems from the wider socio-economic groups to which we belong.

Food consumption is frequently discussed in terms of variables that reflect the structure of society including social class (Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992). Historically, upper classes have been observed to consume a wider variety of foodstuffs, use more extensive cooking methods (Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992) and consume more refined delicate dishes (Bourdieu, 1982). In today’s society, certain food and drink are still regarded as markers of social class, particularly wine (Charters, 2006). Wine is an example of a foodstuff that can aid in social distinction by excluding those from lower classes whilst simultaneously contributing to a collective identity amongst those who are included in the smaller niche group (Carolan, 2016; Charter, 2006). Carolan (2016) observes that the ability to appreciate the complexities between different wines takes time, money and access to a particular segment of society.

In terms of commensality, Simmel (1997 [1910]) argues that the cultural elements of the meal hold more significance for the higher classes of society. For lower classes, Simmel (1997 [1910]) says that food is more regularly considered only in terms of fuel. It could be argued that these views may not hold true in today’s society, as scholars such as Fischler (2011) do not observe a class distinction between the biological and social functions of
meals. However, Simmel (1997) also considered that shared food experiences allow individuals from different walks of life, or those who may have little in common, to come together. As Bourdieu (2010, p.184) discusses, commensal acts create “conviviality which sweeps away restraints and reticence”. Therefore, although an invitation to join commensal circles may be most readily observed between those who already have access to particular socio-economic or other pre-established groups, strangers may also join in.

2.4 Social Functions of Commensality

Shared food and drink experiences serve an essential function in society (Grignon, 2001; Fischler, 2011; Kerner and Chou, 2015). Commensality, Fischler (2011, p.529) argues, is “one of the most striking manifestations of human sociality”. Commensality provides a number of social functions which regulate behaviour (Fischler, 2011) and integrate society (Perianova, 2012).

2.4.1 Inclusion and Exclusion

As previously discussed, commensal circles can simultaneously highlight inclusion and exclusion (Van Esterik, 2015). Discussion of the inclusive benefits of commensality is more frequently displayed in the literature than discussions of exclusion. An invitation to enter a commensal circle brings with it an implied sense of equality between members (Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992; Fischler, 2011). Inclusion creates a sense of belonging as the other members of the group acknowledge each other as insiders. This in turn aids social bonding between participants (Douglas, 1972; Fischler, 2011) and social relationships are strengthened through congenial shared food experiences (Bloch, 1999; Grignon, 2011; Fischler, 2011; Murcott, 2019).

The action of excluding individuals from a shared food or drink event creates a social boundary between people and highlights that the outsiders are socially different from the insiders (Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992). This can lead to feelings of rejection, particularly when we consider that the value of belonging lies at a social level, where others
recognise that we are members of the same group (Hogg and Vaughn, 2010). Refusing to admit a person to a shared event is an external form of exclusion. However, internal forms of exclusion also exist where an individual rejects an invitation to share food and drink. Both forms of exclusion are considered as markers of distance and enmity (Appadurai, 1988; Bloch, 1999).

Division within commensal circles has also been observed in terms of hierarchical structure. Status within social groups is highly sought-after in society and food has historically been used as a symbol of social status. As individuals we tend to attribute positive characteristics of knowledge and intelligence to individuals who hold high status positions (Bordens and Horowitz, 2012). Delamater, Myers and Collett (2015, p.503) argue that an individual’s status in their social circle is “the single most important influence on his/her life” and that status is substantially more effective then personality in social exchanges. Commensal acts may illuminate struggles for dominance and power, and show up conflicts between the individuals involved (Grignon, 2001; Murcott, 2019). Commensal acts may also expose divisions within social groups. This accounts for Murcott’s (2019) observation that although commensality is undertaken frequently in the spirit of conviviality, this is not a universal characteristic of shared eating experiences. Often these occasions are difficult or indeed dangerous (Goldstein, 2018) resulting in feelings of displeasure. Murcott (2019) suggests that by considering these less desirable characteristics, for example exclusion or dominance, a more rounded understanding of commensality can be achieved.

2.4.2 Commensality and Social Bonding

Social bonding could be considered as the most prevalent and significant function of commensality (Fischler, 2011; Perianova, 2012). Perianova (2012, p.29) notes that “as an umbrella term bonding includes solidarity, affiliation, belongingness, comradeship, friendship and acceptance”. Sharing food and drink with others implies a status of equality between participants (Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992; Fischler, 2011). This creates a sense of belonging and strengthens social relationships (Fischler, 2011; Murcott, 2019).
Considering commensality in a wider social context, eating the same foods can aid a sense of group identity (Dovey, 2010; Ogden, 2010). The implied sense of equality created through a shared meal, Perianova (2012, p.33) observes, serves as a “marked statement of a shared collective identity”. Fischler (2011) argues that when individuals share the same foods they become more like one another. Furthermore, sharing the same types of foods brings with it a shared sense of community. Perianova (2012) also considers that as well as the act of eating together, eating the same kinds of food can bond members of the same group.

Food is so integral to families that in some cultures simply eating together can imply kinship between participants (Visser, 1991). Kinship is a socially constructed concept that concerns itself with how members of the group affiliate themselves (Zehn, 2019). Kinship is traditionally thought of as blood relationships; however, artificial or affiliated kinships can also be created (Fischler, 2011; Strong, DeVault and Cohen, 2011). Often, interpersonal connection and emotional bonds are more influential in constructing family units than blood relatedness (Strong, DeVault and Cohen, 2011). This allows individuals to forge new, unrelated family units. Additionally, research suggests that everyday behaviours play a significant role in building relationships and can be more influential than the feelings of love that individuals may hold for each other (Duck, 2007). The act of habitual commensality, therefore, provides an effective medium through which individuals can strengthen bonds and build kinship circles. Habitual, recurrent meals are most frequently observed amongst families or groups of kin and play a significant function in social bonding (Douglas, 1972). Repeated shared events allow individuals to develop a greater understanding of one another (Kerner and Chou, 2015). Social norms and trust develop over time (Delamater, Myers and Collett, 2015). Therefore, habitual family meals help to establish deep and lasting bonds between commensal circles. In addition, memories of food can exist over long periods of time. Often food memories can be evoked by tasting the same food at a later time. The individual is transplanted back to when they first experienced this food (Lupton, 1996). These memories are often connected to childhood family meals, mothers nurturing or young adult experiences.
Commensality has long been considered to symbolise fellowship (Robertson Smith, 1972; Visser, 1991; Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992; Perianova, 2012). For children, engaging with peers offers the first opportunity to exert independence and choice in those to which they relate. Through social exchanges such as commensality children become socially competent, establishing independence, and developing their sense of identity (Delamater, Myers and Collett, 2015). Shared food experiences may also suggest intimacy (Fischler, 2011) or romantic relationships (Miller, Rozin and Fiske, 1998) between individuals. This ties with the concept of inclusion and kinship, where food shared amongst family and close friends can provide assurance and comfort (Fischler, 2011).

Outside of pre-existing friendships and family circles, commensality allows individuals who were previously strangers, and possibly, enemies, to come together (Simmel, 1997). Throughout history, feasts have played a crucial role in maintaining and regulating society. Brillat-Savarin (1854, p.81) notes, “no great event ever took place, not conceived, prepared and arranged at a festival”. In more modern times, this same concept is considered in terms of gastropolitics (Spence, 2016; Pollock, 2015), which operates at the inclusion/exclusion level of commensality. When strangers or enemies come together over a shared eating experience, they can be considered as equals. Feasts allow participants to gain a better understanding of one another, aid in reconciliation and seal alliances (Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992).

Shared eating experiences, including feasts, can also delineate hierarchy amongst groups. Grignon (2001, p.24) states that “commensality first allows the limits of the group to be redrawn, its internal hierarchies to be restored and if necessary, to be redefined”. Before a meal can commence these issues, related to trust and hierarchy, need to be considered (Van Esterik, 2015). Socio-cultural rules apply a hierarchical structure to shared eating events and are commonly observed in formalised seating patterns (Belasco, 2008; Fischler, 2011). These seating arrangements are highly political (Visser, 1991) and greatly influence the relationships between participants (Brillat-Savarin, 1854; Duck, 2007; Fischler, 2011). Seating arrangements may also illuminate status and respect shown for certain guests.
Visser (1991, p.132) comments that “separate chairs encourage separateness, and also status: it is hard to distinguish oneself as one of a row on a bench”. Hierarchy may also be observed in where events take place. For instance, dining in a kitchen is considered to be more intimate than a dining room and is reserved for family and very close friends (Visser, 1991).

Like shared meals, shared drinking experiences serve a necessary function in society, of creating and maintaining social bonds (Gefou-Madianou, 1992; Kerner and Chou, 2015). Although shared drinking occurs amongst families, it is most often regarded as an activity of extended social circles. Douglas (1972, p.68) considers beverages themselves to represent “the detachment and impermanence of simpler and less intimate social bonds”. In contrast to meals which can contribute to bonds of friendship and kinship, drinking experiences often create temporary or situational bonds only (Gefou-Madianou, 1992). The transitory nature of bonds established through shared drinking is understandable when one considers these events in terms of commensal circles, as drinks are typically consumed amongst wider social circles or strangers. Furthermore, in most cultures, drinking alcohol is only deemed acceptable as a social act (Visser, 1991).

2.5 Summary

Shared eating and drinking experiences offer a window into the social worlds of the participants. As well as satisfying a biological need, sharing food and drink allows social behaviours to be regulated. In many ways, these shared eating and drinking experiences act as a code to represent the underlying socio-cultural aspects of the event (Fischler, 2011; Douglas, 1972). Commensality provides a necessary social structure with defined rules and obligations under which the selfish act of eating can be transformed into a shared activity. Commensality aids in integrating society through a number of social functions. Commensal functions operate at the level of inclusion and exclusion through social boundaries which highlight hierarchies and class distinctions. Of the highest significance are the bonds that are forged and strengthened through shared experiences. Individuals can form alliances and friendships through shared meals and communal drinks. Habitual meals can reinforce a
sense of kinship. Through acts of commensality channels of communication can open up and an understanding can be reached between adversaries. Commensality reveals much about how individuals behave with each other within groups. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the social relationships which lie at the heart of commensality in order to establish a rounded picture of the function that commensality plays within society.
Chapter Three: Character Connection

In order to gain a rounded picture of commensality we must first consider why bonding is important in terms of interpersonal relationships and group membership. As this study relates to commensality in literature, it is further necessary to explore how characters connections differ from human relationships and how commensality contributes to these connections. Chapter Three will also discuss characterisation in Philip Pullman’s novels and introduce the core characters of the texts.

3.1 Interpersonal Relationships in Groups

Commensal acts take place between individuals in social groups, forging and strengthening interpersonal relationships. Human relationships, Duck (2007, p.239) states, “are not simply states, nor are they just affective, inevitably continuous places where we experience our emotions in the context provided by connection to many other people”. Instead, Duck argues, human relationships “are also places where we check our facts ... transmit, compare and question information or its sources, and generally form, compose, modify or develop our views of the world and how to confront or ally with other people’s take on them” (ibid, p.239).

Relationships take place in the context of social groups in which membership is highly valued. Bordens and Horowitz (2012) argue that groups are vital to humans as they strongly influence our sense of worth which determines how we relate to other groups within society. Furthermore, our relationships with others strengthen our individual sense of identity (Hogg and Vaughn, 2010) and a wider collective identity (Perianova, 2012). However, groups are more than a collection of individuals. Members of a group interact with and influence each other (Bordens and Horowitz, 2012) and collectively the group holds specific characteristics such as shared interests or goals and shared perspectives and emotional ties to others in the group (Dovey, 2010; Bordens and Horowitz, 2012). Groups display uniform attitudes and beliefs in the form of social norms and the hierarchy within
groups provides structure to social groups, designating roles to the group members (Hogg and Vaughn, 2010).

Entering into any social exchange, including commensal acts, involves adherence to pre-established social norms. Norms can be considered as rules or standards observed by all members of a group and are deeply rooted in the group’s values and culture (Belasco, 2008; Delamater, Myers and Collett, 2015). Such norms allow groups to function effectively (Hogg and Vaughn, 2010) and contribute to the overall cohesiveness of the group (Bordens and Horowitz, 2012). While the act of commensality can satisfy our social needs and create a sense of community, participating in shared eating and drinking experiences involve mutual obligations (Robertson Smith, 1889; Freud, 1940) and socio-cultural rules (Visser, 1991, 2008; Perianova, 2012; Murcott, 2019) that must be observed. As Belasco (2008) argues the rules change depending on the importance or weight of a particular dining event. Meals, for example, are socially constructed events with governing rules and etiquette (Douglas, 1972; Simmel, 1997). Similarly, drinking in a bar or café brings with it strict social etiquette which Gefou-Madianou (1992) refers to as ritualised behaviour. Norms and etiquette vary widely across cultures and societies (Belasco, 2008). Understanding these rules and accepted behaviours is essential in gaining repeated admittance to a group, or similarly to a commensal circle.

Observing social norms, etiquette and social rules of a group that shares food and drink will help to establish a person within that group. This in turn helps to cement trust between group members as individuals trust those whom they consider insiders (Hogg and Vaughn, 2010). All forms of social exchange require a degree of trust in the individuals who they are engaged with, whilst repeated exchanges lead to a sense of trustworthiness between participants (Delamater, Myers and Collett, 2015). Consideration of the difference between sharing food and sharing beverages explains why people share drinks with those with whom they are less acquainted.

As Delamater, Myers and Collett (2015) observe, trust in interpersonal relationships, builds over time. Routine and trust are built though repeated social interactions where participants
engage in banal conversation and reflect upon their own and others gestures and body language (Pollock, 2015) developing an understanding of each other. Drinking together creates situational bonds. For example, consuming alcohol in bars creates “a temporary ambience of oneness, fraternity and equality that does not exist outside the bar” (Gefou-Madianou, 1992). Drinks may also strengthen established bonds (Gefou-Madianou, 1992), however, a prior acquaintance between participants is not entirely necessary. In contrast, meals are typically consumed amongst those who already know one another and will have shared drinks previously (Douglas, 1972). Furthermore, an invitation is often required to socialise together through a meal (Visser, 1991).

Meals are formalised in their structure, being tied to a particular time of day and are typically categorised (Douglas, 1972). For example, in social circles the named category of dinner would imply certain elements (for instance an evening, sit-down savoury meal) which is understood by members of a particular society. Participating in formalised meals requires a greater understanding of social norms. Drinks often do not hold the same degree of categorisation and take place informally.

Initially, in new interactions little trust is required amongst individuals however as intimacy grows and relationships evolve considerably more trust, and adherence to social norms, is necessary in commensal exchanges between individuals. This may account for why meals are typically consumed amongst those whom we are already intimately acquainted with.

3.2 Considering Character Connection

From reviewing the academic literature on commensality, it is evident that sharing food and drink plays an essential role in integrating society. As observed, the most significant function of commensality is that it aids in social bonding and contributes to creating and maintaining relationships between individuals. However, it could be argued that although literary characters may hold similarities with people in the real world, they are not the same. Therefore, it is important to consider the differences between humans and literary characters when approaching the topic of commensality in fictional literature.
The characters that populate the worlds of literary fiction may be considered as incomplete beings (Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, 2010) as they do not exist outside of the context in which they are portrayed (Lamarque, 2007; Eagleton, 2013). Effectively, these characters have no pre-existing history (Forster, 1927; Lamarque, 2007; Eagleton, 2013). Our perception and knowledge of the characters can extend only to what the author presents to us, the reader, and the lens through which the novel is read. Lamarque (2007) suggests that this is the striking difference between real people and literary characters.

In many ways then, our interaction with characters is similar to our interaction with strangers. With strangers, no prior knowledge exists about the characteristics of the individual and the person is taken at face value (Duck, 2007). Knowledge and understanding develop over time in much the same way as the reader’s knowledge of characters emerges during the course of a novel or series of books. One way in which readers can bridge the gap in knowledge is through schemata (Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, 2010, p.14). Here, readers apply pre-existing information to experiences observed in the text. Schemata are a common way in which we can make sense of situations or new events where little information is provided by applying pre-existing thoughts, beliefs and attitudes to the situation (Hogg and Vaughn, 2010). Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider (2010) argues that a reader’s approach, such as sociology, feminism or in this case food studies can build schemata. This technique can help draw meaning from the texts and provide insight into certain aspects of the novel.

Characters in fiction rarely appear alone throughout a story and generally interact in “character constellations” to form social bands that are interrelated (Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, 2010, p.26). Here again our knowledge of social groups in the real world can aid in understanding these character constellations. Like groups of individuals, character constellations are not merely a collection of characters that appear together in the texts. There are underlying forces driving their involvement with each other. How characters interact within these constellations is therefore integral to a story. However, here again we have to consider that the reader can only know what the author chooses to share about how
the characters relate to each other and to gradually deduce more from the interactions throughout the narrative. Through social interactions and shared exchanges such as commensality characters can meet, form alliances and friendships or exchange information. Furthermore, through sharing meals and similar foods, it could be argued, they exhibit a social identity in much the same way that humans do. Shared eating and drinking experiences can help the narrative move forward, provide the reader with context or create tension within the plot.

It appears then that social exchanges such as commensality may offer insight into the social worlds within literary fiction. However, an argument could be made that characters are connected rather than form relationships, and that the term character connection may be more appropriate than relationships in discussing figures in literary worlds. The characters that populate these worlds are imagined and the reader is privy only to what the author chooses to reveal about them and their interactions with one another. Similarly, the bonds that social exchanges such as commensality create, exist only in the pages of the novels. These bonds have been created by an external force, the author, rather than being socially constructed by the individuals who have shared in the social exchange. Although an understanding of human relationships can provide insight into character connections, the differences discussed above need to be considered when exploring foodways in literary fiction.

Pullman’s *Lyra Collection* offers an excellent opportunity for this. Fitzpatrick (2013, p.112) suggests that “when authors refer to food they are usually telling the reader something important about narrative, plot, characterization, motives, and so on”. As observed, Pullman is a writer who cares about people and what it means to be human (Odean, 2000). Therefore it can be argued that he is aware of the relationships he portrays. Pullman is also a masterful storyteller who understands the rules of constructing a novel (Yentob, 2018). It is interesting therefore to explore commensality amongst the characters and how this aids bonding and creates connections between them.
3.3 Characters in the Worlds of Philip Pullman

In discussing Pullman’s writing, David Fickling says that “there is an intense sense of reality and closeness to being human and being in the world that [Pullman] is able to vividly conquer” (in Yentob, 2018). However, as discussed, there are fundamental differences between humans and literary characters. It is therefore interesting to consider the writing of Philip Pullman in terms of social exchanges between his characters.

The created worlds of Pullman are populated by a large and varied constellation of characters. Pullman has been praised for the rich detail and roundness of these characters (Jones, 2000; De Lint, 2001). Looking at the characters within the Lyra stories, Pullman appears to have drawn inspiration for them from his own life, particularly when this is considered from the perspective of the protagonist Lyra Belacqua. As a child, Pullman was an outsider in many ways. Within his own family, he was different; he favoured books and yearned for intellectual companionship (Miller, 2005). Moving regularly from home to home also made him an outsider amongst his peers (Elmhirst, 2017). Lyra too is an outsider cloistered within the grounds of Jordan College. The functional or almost orphan character is common in children’s literature as a means to drive the plot forward (Nikolajeva, 2005; Yentob, 2018). In His Dark Materials, Pullman creates a number of these “orphaned” characters. Lyra has grown up without parents in the care of the scholars of Jordan College; Will’s father has been absent all his life and the children in Citagazza are orphaned after the adults flee or were killed by the soul-eating spectres. The protagonists are loyal to each other, fatally flawed yet essentially caring (Jones, 2000). As Pullman alludes, they are like real children (O’Kelly, 2017).

Considering the core constellations of characters who share food and drink experiences in Lyra’s world (Fig 3.1) it is clear, even at an initial stage, that the boundaries of the social groups in this universe are permeable and characters may move between them. Often characters are members of several social groups and/or move between groups over the course of the novels. Therefore, by exploring shared eating experiences, connections between characters may be illuminated, alongside other aspects of the society across Pullman’s worlds.
3.4 Summary

Individuals value membership of social groups and the relationships they hold with others within these groups which validate their need for belonging. Membership of a social group or commensal circle brings with it implied obligations and social norms that must be adhered to. Social interactions including commensality help establish trust between participants and aid in social bonding. In many ways, the characters that populate literary worlds are similar to humans, however they cannot be considered as complete beings. Readers can only know what the author chooses to reveal about the characters in the novel. Similarly relationships between characters are created by the author rather then being socially constructed. Therefore, they remain connections rather than relationships. Social exchanges such as commensality provide the author with a means to effectively establish these connections.
Chapter Four: Methodology

Chapter Four outlines the qualitative approach undertaken in this study. The texts were analysed using Braun & Clarkes (2006) Thematic Analysis framework. The process involved a stage of data collection in which the texts were read and instances of commensality were complied. Each of the six stages outlined by Braun and Clarke were then applied to the dataset resulting in a collection of three significant themes.

4.1 Research Design

This thesis explores shared eating and drinking experiences in the imagined social worlds of Pullmans ‘Lyra’ Collection. A qualitative approach was selected as the most appropriate, as the data consists of written text (Bryman, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, the texts were examined in relation to characters social interactions through foodways. Previous studies in the field of food and literature offered justification for the use of a qualitative approach and for the use of Thematic Analysis and the research method to be employed in the study (Yaya and Sayra, 2019; Shahriari and Toosi, 2017; Barker, 2002). Bryman (2012, p.380) argues that a core feature of the qualitative paradigm centres on an interpretivist epistemological position stating that within qualitative research “stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants”. It is widely accepted within qualitative research that there may be more than one reality and that an individual’s reality is closely related to the framework in which it is placed (Clarke and Braun, 2013; Berger, 1966). Miller and Deutsch (2009, p.18) stress that a qualitative paradigm considers “human behaviour as fluid, dynamic, and highly situational over time and place”.

For these reasons, an interpretivist, qualitative framework was deemed the most suitable for investigating the relationship between foodways and character connection in the novels of Philip Pullman. A full and comprehensive reading of the texts by Philip Pullman provided the basis for the collection of a relevant dataset and the subsequent analysis.
4.2 Materials

Eight primary texts were identified for examination. These centre on the protagonist Lyra Belacqua and/or the world in which she lives. The texts (see table 4.1) include the three volumes of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy (*Northern Lights, The Subtle Knife, The Amber Spyglass*); three short stories released after the trilogy (*Lyra’s Oxford, Once Upon a Time in the North, The Collectors*) and two volumes of *The Book of Dust Series* (*La Belle Sauvage, The Secret Commonwealth*).\(^1\)

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<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
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<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>Northern Lights</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Subtle Knife</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>341</td>
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<td>The Amber Spyglass</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>399</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Book of Dust Series</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>La Belle Sauvage</td>
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<td>570</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Secret Commonwealth</td>
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<td><em>Lyra Stories</em></td>
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<td>Lyra’s Oxford</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once Upon a Time in the North</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Collectors [e-short]</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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*Table 4.1 List of Novels, Novellas & Short Stories in the Study.*

\(^1\) Note: A third volume of *The Book of Dust* is expected. As of May 2020 no release date has been announced.
4.3 Data Collection

The texts were read between December 2019 and February 2020. All of the texts were available in hardcopy, apart from *The Collectors* which was released as an e-short only. Each text was carefully read and every reference to food and foodways, in line with Anderson’s (2004) guidelines, was highlighted. Anderson suggests: “Foodways encompass the many complexities of food procurement, production, preparation, consumption along with behaviours, attitudes and beliefs associated with it” (Anderson, 2004). At this initial stage of data collection the research project intended to explore the use of all foodways in the texts. The references were then compiled in an Excel spread sheet to create a data set of over 1000 items (Table 4.2). This was a time-consuming but essential task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>No. References to Foodways</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Once Upon a Time in the North</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Collectors</em> [e-short]</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.2 Number of References to Foodways by Text.*

4.4 Thematic Analysis
Thematic analysis, previously considered only as a tool to be utilized within qualitative studies (Boyatzis, 1998), has come to be recognized as a method in its own right. This is credited to the systematic process developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Indeed, although thematic analysis as a stand-alone method has received criticism (Bryman, 2012), it has become widely adopted amongst researchers across the social sciences and other disciplines (Braun and Clarke, 2013, 2019).

Thematic analysis was identified as an appropriate method to investigate the relationship between shared eating experiences and character connection for several reasons:

- The aim of the research, to explore the relationship between shared food experiences and character connection, aligns itself with the objective of thematic analysis, defined by Clarke and Braun (2014, p.6626) as “a method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data”.
- One of the major benefits of thematic analysis lies in its flexibility (Bryman, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2006). It can be considered as a method that is “essentially independent of theory and epistemology” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.5). Consequently, it can be effectively applied to all manner of research questions and designs.
- As mentioned above, thematic analysis has been adopted in recent years as a methodology in studies in Contemporary Fiction (Shahriari and Toosi, 2017); African Literature (Yaya and Sayra, 2019) and Fantasy Fan Fiction (Barker, 2002).
- Finally, thematic analysis is a frequently adopted method within qualitative analysis (Bryman, 2012), particularly amongst first-time researchers (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006, p.4) argue that “it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis”.

4.5 Data Analysis

This section outlines the six key stages in the process of thematic analysis identified by Clarke and Braun (2014; also Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013) and how they were employed during the analysis stage of the study. Clarke and Braun (2014) stress that the stages are recursive in nature. The stages are: 1. familiarisation; 2. generating initial codes; 3.
searching for themes; 4. reviewing potential themes; 5. defining and naming themes; 6. producing the report.

1. Familiarisation
This initial stage involves immersion in the data through the reading and re-reading of the dataset, noting initial ideas and overall impressions (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013). Clarke and Braun argue that the objective at this stage is to “learn the content of the dataset “inside out”” (2014, p.6626) and become “familiar with the depth and breadth of the content” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.16).

With a large dataset of over 1000 references, this was a lengthy process, conducted over several weeks, with frequent revisits and checking of the data. The dataset was fully read three times in total, at which point it was considered that the objectives of this phase had been achieved.

At this stage in the analysis, the parameters of the research question were readdressed. The data collection phase resulted in a very extensive dataset, which could not be efficiently examined in line with the scope of a master’s thesis. A decision was taken, therefore, to concentrate on one aspect of foodways only. Throughout the data collection and familiarisation stages, shared eating experiences appeared regularly and consistently across all the texts. As the concept of commensality is rooted at a social level, it was deemed suitable to consider these shared eating and drinking experiences in relation to character connection.

2. Generating Initial Codes
Braun and Clarke define this stage as a “process of identifying aspects of the data that relate to [the] research question” (2013, p.206) and which “appears interesting to the analyst” (2006, p.18).

From this point, analysis continued in relation to a relevant subset of the entire data collected. Braun and Clarke (2013, p.206) refer to this as selective coding and state that it
“involves identifying a corpus of ‘instances’ of the phenomenon that you’re interested in, and then selecting those out”. As the study aims to explore the relationship between shared food experiences and character connection, only data pertaining to commensality was coded. This resulted in a substantially smaller data subset (Table 4.3).

An initial set of fifteen codes, related to character relationships and behaviours around shared eating experiences, were identified at this stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>Fellowship</th>
<th>Information Exchange</th>
<th>Kinship</th>
<th>Power Play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>Fraternity</td>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>Duty/Obligation</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Social Class</td>
<td>Rivalry</td>
<td>Status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.3 Initial Codes Identified in Thematic Analysis.*

3. Searching for Themes

This stage involves sorting data into potential themes. Clarke and Braun (2014, p.6627) state “a theme identifies a meaning patterned across the dataset, which is important for illuminating the research question”. Significant codes may become themes themselves, or several codes may also be combined under ‘overarching’ themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The fifteen codes identified in stage two were arranged under four overarching themes:

(i) **Social Ranking** (Hierarchy, Status, Social Class)

(ii) **Antagonism** (Dominance, Exclusion, Rivalry, Power Play)

(iii) **Social Bonding** (Alliance, Fellowship, Fraternity, Intimacy, Kinship, Situational Bonding: Understanding, Hospitable Duty/Obligation)

(iv) **Medium for Information Exchange**

4. Reviewing Potential Themes

Reviewing the identified themes ensures that these themes make sense both at a coded data level and when considered in terms of the entire dataset. Clarke and Braun (2014, p.6627) argue that themes should be “coherent and substantial, with clear boundaries and a distinct central organizing concept”.

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In reviewing the themes, a reflexive approach was taken to ensure that the themes made sense in relation to the research question. While three of the themes fell within Clarke and Braun’s (2014) guidelines, the fifth theme *Medium for Information Exchange* was not deemed suitable. After re-examining the data related to this theme it was evident that each of these exchanges contributed to long-term or situational bonding and was therefore not necessary as a standalone theme.

5. Defining and Naming Themes

In reference to this stage, Clarke and Braun (2014, p.6627) state that “detailed and complex definitions of each theme, which capture its shape and texture and how it relates to other themes” are identified and named. Clarke and Braun (2014, p.6627) also note that at this stage, “the analysis must go beyond simply summarizing or paraphrasing the data, to tell a rich, nuanced, conceptually informed interpretative story about the meanings embedded”.

Definitions of each theme were developed and concisely stated (see Chapter 5). The coded data were examined and key data extracts were compiled to illustrate the themes. These extracts, Braun and Clarke (2013) argue, are an essential component of the written narrative and help communicate meaning to the reader.

Final names were applied to each of the three themes. In naming codes, Braun and Clarke (2006, p.23) suggest that they should be “concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about”.

(i) **Position, Prominence and Prestige**: deals with various types of *Social Ranking* (Hierarchy, Status, Social Class)

(ii) **Rule, Rivalry and Rejection**: incorporates negative social interactions or *Antagonism* (Dominance, Exclusion, Rivalry, Power Play)

(iii) **Family, Friends and Familiars**: encompasses all of the positive aspects of *Social Bonding* (Alliance, Fellowship, Fraternity, Intimacy, Kinship, Situational (Understanding/Hospitable Duty/Obligation)

A thematic map (Fig. 4.1) was created to illustrate the final themes.
6. Producing the Report

The aim of this stage is to effectively communicate an “interesting account of the story the data tell [sic] – within and across themes” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.22). This final stage also provides the researcher with "the opportunity for refining the analysis…or determining the order in which the themes are to be presented” (Clarke and Braun, 2014, p.6627) (see Chapter 5).

4.6 Summary

A qualitative approach was undertaken to explore how commensality aids character connection in the works of Philip Pullman. Thematic analysis was employed as an appropriate method to adopt within the study. The data was collected and the steps of Braun and Clarke’s approach were applied to the dataset. Three core themes were identified upon completion of the analysis. A selection of the most significant findings will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Five: Findings

The *His Dark Materials* trilogy, *The Book of Dust* series and the *Lyra Stories* offer readers rich and vibrant worlds populated with a diverse constellation of characters. A reading of the texts, makes it evident that foodways are abundantly portrayed across the imagined universe that Pullman creates. In particular, commensality appeared frequently in all the novels and became the primary focus of this study. A comprehensive analysis of these shared experiences identified three primary themes: Social Ranking; Antagonism and Social Bonding. This chapter presents a selection of key findings from each of these themes and discuss these findings in relation to the primary texts.

5.1 Position, Prominence and Prestige

The first theme identified was Social Ranking which provides insight into the social class and status within the society of the characters. Much of this is revealed through the food and the drinks that the characters share as well as the settings in which these experiences take place.

5.1.1 What Characters Eat and Drink

The food in fantasy fiction is often imagined or magical. However, this approach is not adopted by Pullman in the worlds he creates. Foodways are one of the ways in which Pullman presents the familiar to the reader and foodstuffs, throughout the novels, are recognisable to the reader (Table 5.1). Even within the land of the Mulefa (sentient, four-legged creatures) the food is described in a way that relates to food within our world: carrot-like roots; thin bread-like chapattis, hazel-like nuts (TAS\(^2\), p.429); mint-like tea (TAS, p.437); red fruits (TAS, p.458).

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\(^2\) Texts are abbreviated in this chapter: NL (*Northern Lights*); TSK (*The Subtle Knife*); TAS (*The Amber Spyglass*); LBS (*La Belle Sauvage*); TSC (*The Secret Commonwealth*); TC (*The Collectors*).
Table 5.1 Foodstuffs Present in The Lyra Collection.

Although there are a wide variety of foods and dishes shared by the characters, it is the act of sharing that contributes to connecting characters and illuminating their social worlds.
There are only a few foodstuffs that, in themselves, are significant, such as the Fen Eels which appear to form part of the social identity of the Gyptian community.

In *The Secret Commonwealth*, Lyra becomes curious as to the secret of Fen Eels after an unsuccessful attempt to prepare them herself. Ma Costa reveals: “You gotta cut them on the diagonal. You won’t think it made any difference, but it does” (TSC, p.291). Rosella says that when you make the gravy, “you toast [the flour] first. In a dry pan. Just to give it a bit of colour. Not much. My mum says it makes all the difference” (TSC, p.309). Betty says the secret is a cooking apple: “It cuts the fat a bit. It boils down so you don’t know it’s there but it makes the gravy all silky and just a little bit tart” (TSC, p.311). When Lyra tells Giorgio she was learning to make eels he tells her: “High time you knew” and reveals: “They got to be moon-caught eels” (TSC, p.309).

There appears to be secrecy around the Fen Eels which the community do not want outsiders to know. Ma Costa tells Lyra that “only a real Gyptian can stew eels” (TSC, p.312) and that “it takes a lifetime to know how to do ‘em proper” (TSC, p.291). Despite this she offers to reveal her secrets and to show Lyra how to make them. Rosella only divulges her secret after Farder Coram, the head of the Gyptians, confirms that it is ok for Lyra to be privy to the information (TSC, p.309).

Although less varied than the foodstuffs present in the novels, the beverages the characters consume reveals more about the characters and their society (Table 5.2). Alcohol is consistently present across all the novels and, strikingly, children regularly consume alcohol in the worlds that Pullman creates (NL, p.47, 119, 365; TSK, p.178; TAS, p.102). Alcohol is typically consumed socially and there are few instances of characters drinking alcohol alone. Beer is consumed by a number of social groups. From the texts we know that the scholars usually drink ale (LBS, p.4, 88; TSC, p.54) while the Gyptians are referenced drinking generic beer (TSC, p.224, 259, 288). A number of spirits are referenced in the texts. Some spirits including brandy, whiskey and vodka are enjoyed by a several character groups while “Jenniver”, a spirit similar to gin, is only consumed by the Gyptians.
Wine, it could be argued, is the most socially significant beverage consumed in Lyra’s world. As mentioned, children in this world consume alcohol, typically in the form of wine. In *Northern Lights* when Lyra visits the Gyptians she is given a glass of wine while the adult characters, Farder Coram and John Faa, drink Jenniver (NL, p.119). Later in the novel Lyra and her friend Roger are given wine mixed with water at Lord Asriel’s lodgings (NL, p.365). Providing wine to children appears to be culturally acceptable amongst society at large. In *La Belle Sauvage*, for example, it appears to be accepted practice to rub wine on baby’s gums to alleviate teething pain (LBS, p.403).

Tokay is repeatedly referenced as a rare and elite wine that is not widely available. In *Northern Lights* the Porter tells Lord Asriel that there are only three dozen bottles left of the 1898 vintage (NL, p.12). Lord Asriel is “very partial” to this particular vintage (NL, p.5) and appears to exclusively drink Tokay throughout the novels (NL. p.5; TAS, p.378; LBS, p.182). This is unusual as most characters consume a variety of beverages, with the social occasion dictating the beverage consumed. This alludes to Lord Asriel’s wealth and may suggest that Tokay forms part of Lord Asriel’s identity. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lord Asriel shares a glass with King Ogunwe (TAS, p.378). In *La Belle Sauvage*, Hallgrimsson

Table 5.2 Drinks Consumed in The Lyra Collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non Alcoholic</th>
<th>Beer</th>
<th>Spirits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chocolatl</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Whiskey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordial</td>
<td>&quot;Badger Ale&quot;</td>
<td>Bourbon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice</td>
<td>Dark Beer</td>
<td>Brandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generic</td>
<td>Generic</td>
<td>&quot;Jenniver&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Orange Juice</td>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Plum Brandy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Pale Ale</td>
<td>Raw Spirits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Condensed</td>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>Vodka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Milk Powder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Drink</td>
<td>&quot;Brantwijn&quot;</td>
<td>Cocktail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft Drinks</td>
<td>Burgundy</td>
<td>--Margarita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cola</td>
<td>--Canary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generic</td>
<td>Chianti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lemonade</td>
<td>Claret</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>Generic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Camomile</td>
<td>Port</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- &quot;Choy&quot;</td>
<td>Tokay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Jasmine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
offers a glass to Farder Coram, head of the Gyptians who declares “that would be a rare pleasure” (LBS, p.60). Another guest joins in:

“We don’t taste it very often,” said Lofgren. “Every time I see a bottle there’s less in it then there was before” (LBS, p.61).

It is also shared between the Witch Queen Serafina Pekkala and the witches consul Dr Lanselius (TSK, pp.41-42) and by Lord Boreal and Mrs Coulter (TSK, p.197, 311). In all these instances Tokay is offered to a guest. Specifically offering Tokay suggests that there is a level of status associated with the guest as they being offered something rare, expensive and exclusive.

The status associated with Tokay is also illuminated by the younger characters’ interest in the wine. In La Belle Sauvage, a teenage Malcolm brings Lord Asriel a glass of Tokay:

The Tokay was a rich gold colour, and smelled sweet and complicated. Malcolm was seldom tempted by the drinks they sold in the Trout; beer was bitter, and wine was usually sour, and whisky was abominable. But if he could find the bottle later he’d take a sip of this all right, once his father’s back was turned. (LBS, p.182).

Malcolm’s interest in Tokay is surprising as he admits that he was not usually intrigued by the idea of consuming alcohol. As Tokay is depicted as an exclusive wine this may also reveal something to the reader about Malcolm’s preferences and an aspect of his identity through food.

5.1.2 Where Characters Eat and Drink

Characters frequent a wide variety of establishments across the novels from restaurants and bars to cafes and markets. Considering two examples, The Royal Artic Institute and George’s Café (Table 5.3), it is clear these venues cater for very different clientele. The Royal Artic Institute is referenced as a private club where Mrs Coulter is a member and takes Lyra as a young girl (NL, pp.77-78). In contrast, George’s Café is a casual spot in
the covered markets where the adult Lyra takes her friend Miriam (TSC, pp.20-24). In both examples, the character who selects the venue appears to regularly frequent it. This offers insight into how these characters view themselves within society: While Mrs Coulter considers herself to belong amongst the privileged and elite circles of society, Lyra is more comfortable amongst the everyday middle and working classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Royal Artic Institute</th>
<th>George’s Cafe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>London (Grand, Stone Fronted Building)</td>
<td>Oxford (Covered Market)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admittance</td>
<td>Members Only</td>
<td>Open to Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clientele</td>
<td>Upper Class: Colonels, Captains, Lords, Doctors</td>
<td>Working Class: Market Traders, Local Workmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Consumed</td>
<td>Calves Liver and Bacon</td>
<td>Bacon and Eggs, Currant Bun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverages Consumed</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Tea, Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Culture</td>
<td>Snowy Tableclothes, Bright Silver</td>
<td>‘Pint’ Mug</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Northern Lights, 2007a, pp.77-78) (The Secret Commonwealth, 2019, pp.20-24)*

Table 5.3 Comparison of Food Venue in the Texts.

Some venues are only frequented by particular social groups, whilst others serve a wider catchment of society and act as key connection points within the novels. Two significant examples are Jordan College and The Trout Inn.

Jordan College is home to a cohort of scholars and faculty and is also where the protagonist Lyra grew up. The main Hall is described in the opening paragraph of *Northern Lights* and reveals much about the status of the college:

Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening Hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen. The three great tables that ran the length of the Hall were laid already, the silver and the glass catching what little light there was, and the long benches were pulled out ready for the guests. Portraits of former Masters hung high up in the gloom along the walls. Lyra reached the dais and looked back at the open kitchen door and, seeing no one, stepped up beside the high table. The places here were laid with gold, not silver,
and the fourteen seats were not oak benches but mahogany chairs with velvet cushions. (NL, p.3).

In these few lines, the reader is made aware of several things. The Hall appears large suggesting the status of the institution as it may entertain many guests at once. Similarly, the wealth of Jordan College is communicated through the gold and silver material culture displayed. A clear hierarchy amongst the guests is also alluded to in the distinct separation of a high table and three long communal tables. The fourteen chairs at the high table further suggest the exclusivity of the guests who are permitted to dine there. The reader learns elsewhere that a large stipend is set aside to keep the wine cellars adequately stocked (NL, pp.34-35) and that the college employs a steward to oversee “the college ceremonies, the great dinners, the silver, the Retiring Room and all its luxuries” (TSC, p.47). Jordan College is highly regarded for its celebrations, of which The Founders Feast is the most splendid (TSC, p.47). This further suggests the wealth of the college and the frequency at which it entertains.

There is a definitive hierarchy within Jordan of where guests may dine and which commensal events characters are permitted to attend (Fig. 5.1). For example, although Lyra has often dined in the Hall and even at the high table, she has never been invited to dine at “a full feast” or to enter the Retiring Room as she is a female (TSC, p.48). The Scholars dine regularly in The Hall, The Buttery or The Senior Common Room (NL, p.38, 62). Distinguished male scholars and guests may join the master for wine and poppy (opium) in The Retiring Room (NL, p.7) while other female guests are entertained in the Master’s Private Lodgings (NL, p.30, 61, 65; TSC, p.92).
The Trout Inn is owned by Malcolm Polstead’s parents and acts as a focal point in *The Book of Dust* series. Although a diverse clientele frequents this establishment, hierarchies and distinctions exist amongst the patrons. The Inn comprises of a saloon where scholars drink, a public bar frequented by watermen and farm labourers (LBS, p.4) and a private dining space, The Terrace Room (LBS, p.11).

The Trout is a meeting place for several characters (Fig. 5.2). These encounters allow information to be exchanged and they provide critical background knowledge to the reader. While most guests arrive in the main bar, the Terrace room is utilised on separate occasions by members of the upper class: Lord Nugent (LBS, p.11) and Lord Asriel (LBS, p.181). The behaviour of Malcolm and his parents towards these guests reflects their social status. For example, we learn that Mr Polstead himself serves Lord Nugent (LBS, p.14) and the guests are given extra beef (LBS, p.15) and “nice big apple(s)” (LBS, p.18).

There is a distinct separation at The Trout between the public and private spheres. Malcolm and his family work and live at the Inn and therefore eat in the kitchen (LBS, p.237).
However, in both novels the only other character invited into this private space is Lyra when she is forced to leave Jordan College as an adult. What is interesting here is the relationship that Lyra and Malcolm hold at this point. Lyra has only recently learned that Malcolm was instrumental in saving her life as a baby (TSC, p.109) and they have only engaged socially on one previous occasion (TSC, p.121). Extending an invitation to enter the kitchen displays a great degree of trust in Lyra’s character by the Polstead family. It also suggests that Malcolm regards Lyra as a close member of his social universe.

![Figure 5.2 Where Characters Eat and Drink at The Trout Inn.](image)

While many characters cross paths or meet throughout the stories, they often move in different circles and may not typically share meals or drinks. Lyra is an interesting character, as she appears to move with ease amongst a number of social classes throughout the novels (Fig. 5.3). Lyra spent her childhood and adolescence in Jordan College and has shared her meals with the scholars and faculty (NL, p.38, 65; TSC, p.65). Lyra was considered as an insider in this social group and through these habitual meals, the scholars may have provided her with a sense of kinship.
Although Lyra’s parents, Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter, are members of the social elite, Lyra appears to be most comfortable dining amongst the working classes. For example, Lyra is aided by the Gyptian community on many occasions and is invited to dine in the homes of several of these characters including Ma Costa (NL, pp.106-107, 114; TSC, p.301), Giorgio Brabandt (TSC, p.218, 220, 224, 250) and Farder Coram (NL, p.119; TSC, pp.285-288, 301). Here again, there is an implied intimacy which comes with dining in a character’s home. Lyra’s ability to seamlessly move between social classes allows her to share drinks and meals with many other characters, creating connections through these commensal acts.

Figure 5.3 Main Character Groups with whom Lyra Shares Drinks and Meals.
5.2 Antagonism: Rule, Rivalry and Rejection

While the majority of encounters around food are positive and aid in social bonding, there are also examples where characters intentionally exclude another. It is more frequently observed when an offer of food can be seen as a power play or an opportunity for one character to gain dominance over another. Consideration of these adverse aspects of commensality in the worlds of Pullman’s *Lyra Collection* therefore is also necessary in order to establish a rounded view of how shared experiences connect characters.

5.2.1 Dominance

Throughout the novels, characters often extend an invitation to share food and drink to control or manipulate others. One of the clearest examples of dominance in the novels is displayed when Mrs Coulter, working on behalf of the Magisterium, uses an invitation to share a drink to influence and ultimately kidnap vulnerable children. In *Northern Lights*, Mrs Coulter is seen approaching a young boy, Tony Makarios, with an offer to join her for a glass of Chocolatl, a beverage similar to hot chocolate (NL, p.43). Pullman reveals a lot about Tony and his attitudes to food over a few short paragraphs. The reader knows that Tony is rarely fed at home, that his mother is an alcoholic and is often unaware of her son’s needs. Although Tony has money in his pocket, he will not “waste” it on food (NL, p.41). Instead he prefers to steal from the markets. Today he has sneaked an apple, some nuts and a beef steak pie and is eating them on the steps of the oratory (NL, pp.41-42). From this we can deduce that it is the social elements that the exchange offers which entice Tony to leave with Mrs Coulter. Through her offer to share a glass of Chocolatl, Mrs Coulter offers warmth, safety and affection that proves irresistible to Tony, and the reader learns, a dozen other children who have also been kidnapped by Mrs Coulter (NL, p.43).

While Mrs Coulter renders these children subservient, her charms are not as effective in *The Amber Spyglass* when she tries to manipulate Will Parry. Mrs Coulter has drugged and abducted Lyra and brought her to a remote cave. When Will comes to the cave and confronts Mrs Coulter she offers him juice, made from a local fruit, adding: “I’ll have some
too...It’s quite safe” (TAS, p.139). This offering does not yield the same power as the
Chocolatl however. Although like Tony and the children in Oxford, Will is initially
seduced by Mrs Coulter’s beauty, he is less trusting of her motives. Through this shared
experience Mrs Coulters lies are exposed. In an attempt to garner sympathy from Will, Mrs
Coulter tells him that she is forced to live in the cave surviving on dry bread and sour fruit
alone. However, Will is already aware that a young girl, Alma, has been bringing rice,
bread, tea and milk to the cave (TAS, p.133). Furthermore, Will has just tasted the fruit,
which was “fresh and sweet” (TAS, p.139). In contrast to the lost children, Will has a
purpose in sharing a drink with Mrs Coulter. Furthermore, Will’s need for belonging and
attachment is satisfied through his own mother and his friendship with Lyra. His motive in
engaging with Mrs Coulter is solely to gather information on how he can rescue Lyra and
therefore, Mrs Coulter’s faux affection and false flatteries do not beguile Will.

Mrs Coulter is not the only character who attempts to manipulate young teenage characters
by extending an invitation to share food and drink. In La Belle Sauvage, the reader learns
that Gerard Bonneville bought the teenage Alice fish and chips before attempting to seduce
her (LBS, p.482). Similarly, in Northern Lights, an unnamed man produces a hipflask and
tries to persuade Lyra to take some in her coffee (NL, p.101). In The Amber Spyglass Will
is invited into the home of a priest, Semyon Borisovitch, saying that they “will talk and eat
together” (TAS, p.98). Borisovitch first serves tea sweetened with jam (TAS, p.98), and
later insists that they share a glass of homemade vodka (TAS, pp.101-102).

5.2.2 Rivalry and Power Plays

Poisoned food and drink has long appeared in fairy tales and other children’s stories. In
Pullman’s worlds assassination through poisoned food and drink is observed on several
occasions. The opening chapter of Northern Lights depicts the attempted assassination of
Lord Asriel by the Master of Jordan College. Here, the Master spikes a decanter of Tokay
with poison, confident that Lord Asriel will indulge in a glass (NL, p.5). Although Lord
Asriel is invited to join the scholars for dinner he declines the invitation and chooses to
wait in the Retiring Room. The plan to poison Lord Asriel fails, however, as Lyra has
overheard the Master plotting and stops Lord Asriel from drinking the Tokay revealing the Master’s intentions. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Mrs Coulter succeeds in murdering Lord Boreal (also known as Charles Latrom) with a glass of poisoned wine (TSK, p.311). In *The Collectors*, when the character Horley goes into anaphylactic shock after eating nut pudding, the reader is led to believe that Grinstead intentionally did this as he lights a cigarette and waits for Horley to die rather then call for help (TC, n.p.).

In all three instances, there appears to be a pre-existing connections between the murderer and the target. Lord Asriel has a close connection to Jordan College through his work and also his daughter, hidden as his niece, lives there. Grinstead and Horley are both scholars and appear to know each other as they talk quietly amongst themselves, away from the rest of the guests. There is a sense of intimacy between Mrs Coulter and Lord Boreal. They refer to each other by their first names, Marissa and Carlo which is unusual as both characters are typically referenced by their full name. In all three examples, the murderers take advantage of the established trust their existing connection provides.

While some characters resort to murder to eliminate problems in their social worlds, not all rivalries are confronted in this way. A good example of how commensality can aid understanding between rivals can be observed in the exchange between Malcolm Polstead and Olivier Bonneville. Malcolm confronts Bonneville and instead of attacking him he tells Bonneville that they have to talk:

> ‘You’ve got no choice,’ said Malcolm.  
> ‘You’re going to come and sit down and drink some coffee with me and talk. There’s a café just around the corner. If I’d wanted to kill you. I could have done it any time during the last fifteen minutes. I’m in charge. You do as I say’ (TSC, p.502).

This reveals something of Malcolm’s nature where he displays reasoned logic and chooses conversation over brute action on many occasions both as a young boy and as an adult, resorting to violence only in self-defence. By initiating the exchange Malcolm retains the upper hand and is clearly in control. Malcolm chooses the café and selects seats in the
corner. He also decides what they will drink and orders coffee for both of them (TSC, p.502). It appears that they remain a long time in the café, and when Malcolm offers Bonneville more coffee, Bonneville agrees, staying to talk with Malcolm for longer (TSC, p.510). Although they do not come to an agreement, both characters benefit in terms of the information they acquire and gain a better understanding of each other in this exchange.

A less diplomatic exchange can be seen in *The Amber Spyglass* when Mrs Coulter is caught trespassing in the President of the CCD’s (Consistorial Court of Discipline) office. Mrs Coulter is arrested and brought to the President by Brother Louis and the guards. Here, the two characters battle for dominance in the exchange:

> The President’s eyes widened as he saw who it was, and smiled wolfishly.  
> “Mrs Coulter,” he said, offering his hand. “I am very glad to see you. My study is cold, and our hospitality is plain, but come in, come in.”  
> “Good evening,” she said, following him inside the bleak stone-walled room, allowing him to make a little fuss and show her to a chair. “Thank you,” she said to Brother Louis who was still hovering. “I’ll take a glass of chocolatl.”  
> Nothing had been offered, and she knew how insulting it was to treat him like a servant, but his manner was so abject that he deserved it” (TAS, pp.325-326).

Although initially, Mrs Coulter allows Farther MacPhail the upper hand in agreeing to the seating arrangements, she dismisses social etiquette and demands that she is brought a specific drink without being offered anything and without any indication of what may be available. Chocolatl usually appears in the texts as a rich and often decadent drink (NL, p.44; TSC, p.568). Here however, Mrs Coulter describes the chocolatl as “thin and weak” commenting: “How like these tedious priests…to take their self-righteous abstinence out on their visitors too” (TAS, p.327). There is a forced cordiality which accompanies this exchange and which is enforced through the accepted etiquette and social norms associated with engaging in a commensal act.
5.2.3 Exclusion

Although arguably every commensal acts enacts boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, deliberately excluding someone from a commensal circle is used to assert authority or to make the excluded individual feel like an outsider. In *The Secret Commonwealth*, this is observed between the new master of Jordan and Lyra who is now in her early twenties. As mentioned previously, Lyra has lived in Jordan College amongst the scholars all her life and has retained a room in Jordan College and regularly dines with the scholars despite attending St Sophia’s, a female college close by. The new Master of Jordan informs Lyra that she must move out of her room in the main college and into the servants quarters and, most strikingly, that she is no longer permitted to share in these meals in the dining Hall (TSC, pp.97-98). In doing so, the Master intends to embarrass and alienate Lyra; rendering her an outsider. However, although hurt by this development, Lyra reveals that she generally prefers to dine with the servants (TSC, p.90) and that “it’s no humiliation at all to eat with [her] friends” (TSC, p.119).

5.3 Social Bonding: Family, Friends and Familiars

Through shared eating and drinking experiences, characters are connected, and social bonds are created and maintained. These include bonds of kinship and fellowship as well as contributing to the formation of alliances. While some bonds remain across all the novels and span decades, others are situational and serve a specific purpose.

5.3.1 Kinship

Family units, both blood and artificial, consistently appear across all the novels. It is interesting to observe how the non-human characters represent ideas of family and shared meals. For example, the witches are depicted as a clan and regularly eat together (TSK, p.49, 269). Similarly, Mulefa creatures appear almost human in the ways in which they behave socially as they cook and collectively prepare food (TAS, pp.127, 231-232, 429). Hospitality is important to these creatures. As a social group they value respect and etiquette. They extend an invitation first to Will and Lyra to stay and share food with them
(TAS, p.429) and later to the Gyptians (TAS, p.505). In many ways, the Mulefa appear to hold a social structure and family dynamics similar to our own.

Malcolm Polstead and his parents represent the most traditional and conventional idea of a family. What is interesting in their shared meals is that although there are many examples of Malcolm eating in the kitchen and conversing with his mother (LBS, p.11, 51, 104, 177, 197). Mrs Polstead rarely joins Malcolm and continues to work while he eats. There is only one example of the Polstead family eating together (LBS, pp.237-238), when the storm reaches Oxford and the Inn is quiet.

But since so few customers came at all, and since the assistant barman Frank was on duty in case they did, Malcolm and his father and mother sat down together in the kitchen to have supper.

‘Might as well finish up these cold potatoes. Can you eat any more, Reg?’
‘You bet. Fry ’em up.’
‘Malcolm?’
‘Yes please.’

Into the frying pan they went, sizzling and spitting and making Malcolm’s mouth water. He sat there happily with his parents, thinking of nothing, content with the warmth and the smell of frying food (LBS., pp.237-238).

The love between Malcolm’s family is evident in this exchange and the warmth of his family home is frequently referenced in the novel (LBS, p.197, 218, 238).

These cohesive family units shared by the Mulefa and the Polsteads are strikingly different from that of the protagonist Lyra. In the opening chapters of His Dark Materials trilogy Lyra is presented as a functional orphan. Lyra is unaware that Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter are her parents. While Lord Asriel and Lyra are acquainted, she believes he is her uncle. Lyra meets Mrs Coulter for the first time when Mrs Coulter attends a dinner at Jordan College and asks Lyra to come and live with her as her assistant (NL, pp.67-72). Neither Lord Asriel or Mrs Coulter ever explicitly confirm to Lyra that they are her parents, Lyra learns about her background through Ma Costa (NL, pp.122-126).
When Lyra and her parents engage in shared eating and drinking experiences, these encounters are often formal and the characters interactions appear strained. For example when Lord Asriel visits Jordan College he requests Lyra to join him in the Senior Common Room for tea with the old Master of Jordan and a group of scholars (NL, p.38). Towards the end of *Northern Lights*, Lyra meets Lord Asriel again, at his lodgings at Svalbard. Their encounter here appears no warmer or intimate and Lord Asriel treats Lyra with the courtesy due to a guest rather than a family member. He instructs his servant to bring Lyra and her friend Roger food and settle them in for the night (NL, p.365). Lord Asriel neither prepares the meal or stays to dine with his daughter.

Although Lyra and Mrs Coulter do share meals, these too are formal and unconventional in the context of kinship. Their initial meeting takes place in the formal setting of the old Masters lodgings, in the company of other female scholars (NL, pp.65-72). During the time that Lyra lives with Mrs Coulter, they dine at the Royal Artic Institute (NL, p.77) and Lyra accompanies Mrs Coulter to meetings where Lyra is presented more as a companion for Mrs Coulter then a daughter (NL, pp.82-83). It appears that through these shared experiences, Mrs Coulter aims to culture Lyra. Mrs Coulter’s guests “would be very taken with Lyra and order special dishes for her, and she would learn how to eat asparagus or what sweetbreads tasted like” (NL, p.82).

Considering the unconventional way in which Lyra has grown up, it is unsurprising that she creates artificial kinship with other characters. As discussed earlier, Lyra often dines in characters’ homes. When Lyra stows away with the Gyptians in *Northern Lights*, Ma Costa appears as a mother figure to her, warmly embracing Lyra and welcoming her into her home (NL, p.111). Lyra is observed during this time not as a guest but as an honorary member of Ma Costa’s family. Lyra quickly adopts the social norms of the group and helps around the boat rather than acting as a guest (TSC, p.291).

Twenty years later, when Lyra comes to the Fens, she is welcomed again into Ma Costas private sphere (TSC, p.282) and helps around the house (TSC, p.291). Similarly when Lyra
visits The Trout, Malcolm and his family welcome her into their home and, again, Lyra is observed insisting to help Mrs Polstead with household chores (TSC, p.135). The most significant bond of kinship Lyra holds is arguably with Will Parry in *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*. Of all the connections between characters in the novels, Lyra and Wills transitions and develops the most. When Lyra and Will first meet in the abandoned café in Citagazze, their initial shared experiences contribute to them forming an alliance (TSK, pp.22-25). However, through subsequent, habitual meals (SK p.56, 106-107, 206, 222; TAS, p.163, 441, 485, 506, 508) they develop a close friendship, and ultimately, an artificial kinship circle.

5.3.2 Intimacy

A number of exchanges take place across the novels that illustrate the importance of commensality in creating intimacy between characters. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Malone tells Lyra and Will a story about her decision to stop being a nun (TAS, pp.442-449). In the story, Malone and her friends are sharing a meal in a garden. As the meal progresses, Malone realises that there is a side of her which enjoys social interaction and enjoys “the taste of wine and grilled sardines” (TAS, p.443) and that she is curious about other facets of herself. During the dinner Malone eats a piece of Marzipan and is transported back to when she was twelve years old and fell in love for the first time. Malone shares that the boy at the party “took a bit of marzipan and he just gently put it in my mouth … and I fell in love with him just for that, for the gentle way he touched my lips with the marzipan” (TAS, p.445). When Malone tastes the marzipan as an adult it reminds her of a time when she was uninhibited and decides to leave the Magisterium to live her life freely.

Malone’s story acts as a catalyst for Lyra and Will to acknowledge their own growing feelings for each another. Although they are only twelve years old the young teenagers are aware that they have a deep connection with one another. Malone packs Lyra and Will a picnic of flat bread, cheese and “sweet thirst-quenching red fruits” (TAS, p.458) which the characters share. This shared meal is markedly different from the many others the
characters have consumed together. There is a notable nervousness between the characters as they engage in this shared experience:

They unfolded the cloth and ate some bread and cheese. For some reason their hands were slow and clumsy, and they hardly tasted the food, although the bread was floury and crisp from the hot baking-stones, and the cheese was flaky and salty and very fresh. Then Lyra took one of those little red fruits. With a fast-beating heart, she turned to him and said, “Will…”
And she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth. She could see from his eyes that he knew at once what she meant, and that he was too joyful to speak. Her fingers were still at his lips, and he felt them tremble, and he put his own hand up to hold hers there, and then neither of them could look; they were confused; they were brimming with happiness (TAS, p.468).

The reader is told that, many decades later, Will remembers Lyra feeding him the red fruit: “Sixty years and more would go by, and as an old man he would still feel some sensations as bright and fresh as ever” (TAS, p.486). The reader also learns at the end of His Dark Materials that Lyra and Will must return to their own, respective worlds, and be separated from each other forever. This adds a sense of poignancy to the exchange however it also illustrates the power of shared eating and drinking experiences in creating connections between characters that transcend physical distance.

5.3.3 Fellowship

While the connection between Lyra and Will may be the strongest forged in His Dark Materials, many other characters create and maintain close friendships in the novels which are aided through commensality. As a child, Lyra’s closest friendship was with a kitchen boy named Roger. In the opening chapters of Northern Lights Lyra and Roger are observed playing in the wine cellars at Jordan College. Curious to what the wine tastes like, the children steal a bottle. This experience in the cellars strengthens Lyra and Rogers connection. Shortly after, ‘the Gobblers’, child-snatchers working on behalf of the
Magisterium, abduct Roger. When Lyra hears of this, she leaves Oxford, and accompanied by the Gyptians ventures north to save him.

Lyra develops a number of connections across the novel which blossom into friendships in her adult life. In *The Secret Commonwealth*, Lyra visits an elderly Farder Coram and is, once again, welcomed into his home. Lyra makes coffee and later when Rosella brings Farder Coram his dinner, the reader observes that Lyra has been included in the meal. They share the fresh bread and butter, pickled herring and a bottle of beer (TSC, p.288). Similarly, Lyra and Alice Lonsdale have an interesting connection which transitions as Lyra grows up. Alice has known Lyra all her life. She helped Malcolm save Lyra as an infant and later took care of Lyra when she worked as the housekeeper in Jordan College. Now, they are both adults and a friendship has blossomed between them. Lyra visits Alice on this occasion with a gift of Maidment’s truffles “at a time when she knew the housekeeper would be taking tea in the parlour” (TSC, p.83). The characters are observed like old friends gossiping over tea about Lyra’s lovelife and other news around Oxford.

In *La Belle Sauvage*, set ten years before the *His Dark Materials* trilogy begins, it is Malcolm Polstead’s friendships that are the most significant. In contrast to Lyra, Malcolm develops a number of friendships with adult characters while he is still a child. Sr Fenella and Malcolm regularly meet and as they prepare vegetables or make bread, they talk openly and frankly about life. Pullman writes: “As he pulled and pushed at the dough, Malcolm pressed the nun with questions” (LBS, p.53). Similarly, Malcolm appears to have a very mature connection with Hannah Relf. Malcolm and Hannah regularly meet at her home and share a glass of Chocolatl (LBS, p.94, 117, 168) or tea (LBS, p.250, 287) and discuss books and politics. In *La Belle Sauvage*, Hannah’s home represents a middle ground between the innocence of his childhood in Oxford and the dangerous journey he will take. Pullman writes: “[Hannah’s] familiar room was warm, the chair was comfortable, the plate of biscuits was to hand. If his mother’s kitchen was where he felt safe, this little room was where he felt how big the world could be” (LBS, p.218). Through these exchanges Malcolm learns that the Magisterium are threatening the baby Lyra’s life. These friendships prepare Malcolm for his journey to rescue Lyra and deliver her to Jordan College.
The connection between Malcolm and Alice is forged in *La Belle Sauvage* and appears to have held strong as they remain friends twenty years later. Although the characters were acquainted at the start of *La Belle Sauvage* they were not friends at this point. Through the experience of rescuing Lyra they develop a strong and enduring connection. This connection is aided through shared food and drink experiences. For example, when Malcolm offers Alice orange juice as a peace offering (LBS, p.350) or when Malcolm prepares food for Alice while she takes care of the baby Lyra (LBS, p.417). Alice also shows her affection for Malcolm through food, bringing him bread and cheese and a restorative broth after he is injured later in the novel (LBS, p.429).

5.3.4 Alliance

While many of the characters are connected through kinship circles and friendships, other characters form temporary alliances. In *His Dark Materials*, for example, many characters aid Lyra in her quest to rescue Roger in the North and later to fight against the Magisterium. Sharing food and drink allows these characters to interact and to exchange information that is vital in driving the plot forward.

Other alliances, however, reveal much more about the characters and the effectiveness of commensality in establishing trust and building alliances between them. In *The Amber Spyglass*, for example, Will is travelling alone in search of Lyra who has been kidnapped. Along the way he encounters an angel Balthamos who has come to persuade Will to abandon his quest and join the fight against the Magisterium. Will stops at an abandoned camp site where he raids the soldier’s rations and is first seen to eat alone. Later, however, when they stop to rest Will offers to share the rations with Balthamos:

“Would you like some food?”
Balthamos moved slightly: he was tempted.
“I mean, I don’t know if you eat at all,” Will said, “but if you’d like something, you’re welcome.”
“What is that...” said the angel fastidiously, indicating the Kendal Mint Cake.
“Mostly sugar, I think, and peppermint. Here.”
Will broke off a square and held it out. Balthamos inclined his head and sniffed. Then he picked it up, his fingers light and cool against Will’s palm.

“I think this will nourish me,” he said. “One piece is quite enough, thank you.”

(TAS, p.25).

Later in the novel, Lord Asriel sends the Gallivespians, small humanoid creatures, to convince Will to join him on his quest to destroy the Magisterium. Will and the Gallivespians reach a mutual agreement to help each other and their alliance is acknowledged with a shared meal. Here again, it is Will who extends the invitation to the new arrivals.

‘Let’s eat together. Do you eat our food?”
“Thank you, yes,” said the lady.

Will took out his last few dried peaches and the stale flat load of rye bread which was all he had left, and shared it all out among them” (TAS, p.172).

While the spread is not typical of a celebratory meal, the act of commensality is what makes this exchange significant and acknowledges the Gallivespians as insiders in this newly formed band of characters.

5.4 Summary

The food and drinks that the characters in the texts consume, the establishments they frequent and who they choose to engage which in these experiences, reveal a lot about the characters and their social worlds. The shared act of commensality creates and maintains bonds between characters forging alliances and friendships. Sharing food and drink is also effective in strengthening connections within kinship circles and in forging artificial kinship amongst characters that otherwise lack this necessary social structure. The findings of this study therefore indicate that the act of sharing food and drink plays a significant role in the social universe Pullman creates. These findings will now be discussed in relation to
the literature on commensality in order to establish how these experiences aid in connecting characters in *His Dark Materials*, *The Book of Dust* and *The Lyra Stories*.
Chapter Six: Discussion of the Findings

Commensality is an inherently social activity which reveals much about the society and the individuals who share in the experience. This thesis aims to investigate what shared food and drink experiences can reveal about character connection in Philip Pullman’s *Lyra Collection*. Specifically, the study aims to investigate how commensality aids character connection across these literary works. A thorough qualitative analysis was conducted and the main findings were presented in relation to the primary texts in the previous chapter. Chapter Six will discuss these key findings in relation to existing literature around commensality and character connection. By doing so, this chapter aims to discuss how Pullman uses shared eating and drinking experiences to create and maintain connections between characters.

6.1 Commensality: Sharing Food and Drink in Pullman’s Imagined Societies

Commensality is often referenced as “eating at the same table” (Fischler, 2011; Kerner and Chou, 2015). However, as discussed previously, the act of sharing food and drink is more complex than this simple definition and encompasses a wide range of socio-cultural elements which regulate behaviour and integrate society.

Grignon (2001) argues that in order to understand commensality it is necessary to consider the structures of society and the social relationships between groups. In literary novels, characters exist and interact within wider constellations of characters (Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, 2010). In many ways, these groups are similar to those which exist in the real world. Social groups in these constellations hold specific characteristics such as shared goals, perspectives and emotional ties to others in the group (Dovey, 2010; Bordens and Horowitz, 2012) and adhere to pre-established social norms and hierarchies amongst group members (Hogg and Vaughn, 2010). As observed in the real world, membership of social groups is highly valued amongst individuals and contributes to a sense of self-worth (Bordens and Horowitz, 2012) and identity (Hogg and Vaughn, 2010). Similarly, membership of social groups in character constellations provides an existence for these characters, creating a sense of belonging and identity in the imagined worlds they populate.
In Pullman’s universe, characters appear to exist within defined social groups, often structured based on social class or membership of established organisations (see Fig. 3.1). The boundaries of these social groups are permeable, and characters often move between groups over the course of the novels and/or hold membership of several groups.

Consumption of food is often discussed in terms of variables such as social class (Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992). In the novels, there does appear to be a distinction between the types of meals consumed by different social groups. For example, while bacon is consumed amongst many groups, how it is prepared or presented is strikingly different. Mrs Coulter dines on calves liver and bacon at the exclusive Royal Artic Institute whereas Lyra orders bacon and eggs and a ‘pint’ of tea at Georges Café in the covered market (see Fig. 5.3).

As discussed in the previous chapter, characters’ choice of beverage is often telling of the wider social groups to whom they belong. Charters (2006) observes that wine is still regarded as a marker of social class amongst our society today. Similarly, in Pullman’s universe, particular wines such as Tokay can be considered as social markers. Tokay aids in social distinction amongst the characters by excluding those from lower classes while contributing to a collective identity amongst the characters who share the wine (see Charters, 2006; Carolan, 2016). Simultaneously, the act of commensality aids social bonding amongst the characters who share Tokay (see Fischler, 2011; Perianova, 2012). Furthermore, these characters repeatedly refer to the scarcity of Tokay in this imagined world and discuss the lengths to which they go to obtain the wine. This suggests that there is a shared interest amongst these characters in collecting Tokay. Holding similar interests and attitudes provides consensual validation amongst members of a group (Hampton, Fisher Boyd and Sprecher, 2018) which in turn further connects these characters.

Tokay is not the only foodstuff which contributes to social identity in Pullman’s universe. In general, eating and drinking the same foods is considered to aid in creating a collected sense of identity (Dovey, 2010; Ogden, 2010). Perianova (2012, p.29) argues that commensality “reflects a commonality of history, heritage and mentality”. This is best
observed in the particular food and drink which are exclusively consumed by the Gyptian community. For example, only Gyptian characters (or honorary community members such as Lyra) are observed to consume Jenniver. Similarly, the Fen Eels are symbolic within the community and contribute to a sense of social identity amongst the Gyptian characters. The geographical area of the Fens is significant as it acts as the epicentre for the community. This suggests the idea of terroir or taste of place (see Trubek, 2008). Foodstuffs tied to specific locations is not common across the novels. As terroir is often considered in terms of a “crafted mythology attached to the power of place” (Demossier, 2018), it is interesting that Pullman chose to highlight the eels in relation to where they are from as this adds to the sense of mystery and superstition associated with the characters who eat them. These superstitions are observed again in how the eels are prepared: they should be moon-caught (TSC, p.309) and sliced diagonally (TSC, p.291) for example. The community also appear to be selective about who they share the culinary “secrets” of the Fen Eels with. This further suggests that Fen Eels contribute to a sense of collective identity amongst the Gyptians. The fact that these characters are so open with Lyra suggests that they consider her an honorary member of their community. However, although Lyra is deeply connected with these characters though their adventures in *His Dark Materials* and subsequently *The Secret Commonwealth*, she knows that she is not a Gyptians at her core. Lyra considers: “Even if I passed a lifetime here and learned to stew eels properly, this isn’t my home and it never will be” (TSC, p.292). Food is one way in which Lyra connects and bonds with these characters however, for her, sharing the same food does not make her the same as this group.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the social groups within our world and those of Pullman’s imagined universe is the presence of otherworldly beings. All otherworldly characters in Pullman’s universe eat – the Mulefa, Panserborne, Witches, Gallivespians, to name a few. While this is not unusual in itself, what is interesting are the behaviours these characters exhibit around food. It has been argued that the ways in which we eat - share food, prepare food by cooking - is what distinguishes humans from other species (Visser, 1991; Wrangham, 2009). However, in Pullman’s universe, the Mulefa (sentient, four-legged creatures) and the character of Iorek Byrnison (the Panserborne talking bear) appear
to collect and prepare food for others (TAS, p.117, 131, 231) and most significantly to cook this food (TAS, p.178; 232). This suggests that an innate connection exists between the ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ characters in Pullman’s worlds and establishes these otherworldly beings as fundamentally similar to ourselves.

6.2 Commensal Circles in the Texts

As discussed previously, the imagined worlds Pullman creates in His Dark Materials, The Book of Dust and Lyra Stories are populated with a rich and diverse constellation of characters. Throughout the novels, these characters engage in many forms of commensality from family meals to feasts, drinks amongst colleagues or friends and cocktail parties to name a few. Typically, a pattern is observed where characters who are more intimately acquainted share less formal and habitual meals while characters who are newly acquainted often share drinks only. This follows what Douglas (1972) and Fischler (2011) argue, that the type of commensal act in which individuals engage in depends on the nature and extent of the relationship between the participants.

There is a general consensus amongst the literature on shared eating experiences that core commensal circles represent close family and friends with the degree of familiarity decreasing as the circles move away from the centre (Douglas, 1972; Van Esterik, 2015). This is also observed in Pullman’s universe and can be quite effectively considered in relation to the Gyptian community. Commensal circles within this community (Fig 6.1) appear to echo what Douglas (1972) and Van Esterik (2015) have observed within the real world.
Within the core commensal circle, meals are shared in the characters’ homes. Significantly, only one character from outside this social group, Lyra, is permitted access to this circle. In doing so, the Gyptian characters recognise Lyra as an insider (see Douglas, 1972; Van Esterik, 2015). As Van Esterik (2015) observes, all shared eating and drinking experiences require a degree of trust between participants, in particular within core commensal circles. Therefore, by allowing Lyra to dine within their homes, these characters exhibit a significant degree of trust in Lyra’s character. As repeated social exchanges, such as shared meals, establish a deeper sense of trust between participants (Delamater, Myers and Collett, 2015) these intimate experiences bond Lyra and the Gyptians and also highlight Lyra as an honorary member of their community.

In wider commensal circles, Gyptian characters are often observed frequenting bars to socialise and to acquire information. Gyptian characters are also observed eating with others outside the home. For example, when Fr Coram and Lyra visit the Witches consul, they share coffee and spiced cake. Similarly, at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, the Gyptians share a celebratory feast with the Mulefa creatures and other characters. In contrast to the meals which Lyra shares in the Gyptians’ homes, there is a sense of formality to the shared food experiences which take place outside the home. Furthermore, the characters are observed adhering to social norms and etiquette appropriate to the context.
of the shared public event. Again, this relates to the existing literature around commensality where participation in shared experiences involves mutual obligations (Robertson Smith, 1889; Freud, 1940) and adherence to socio-cultural rules (Visser, 1991, 2008; Perianova, 2012; Murcott, 2019).

As discussed, within the Gyptian community there is a distinct separation amongst commensal circles (see Fig. 6.1). Elsewhere in the novels, rules surrounding who may eat together is also observed amongst other character groups. For example, the social structure present in Jordan College dictates where characters are permitted to dine (Fig. 5.1) and therefore which characters may interact and form connections through shared eating and drinking experiences. What is interesting to observe amongst both social groups – scholars and Gyptians - is that the characters appear to adapt their behaviour depending on the social situation in which they are engaging in. For example, Farder Coram shares food and drink with a number of different social groups and classes and appears to understand and adhere to different social norms depending on the context of the commensal event. Belasco (2008) suggests that norms and etiquette surrounding commensality vary widely amongst different cultures and societies. Similarly, Belasco (2008) also observes that socio-cultural rules change depending on the importance or weight of a particular dining event. The fact that characters appear to adjust their behaviour depending on who they are engaging with and where this act takes place reveals that they are emotionally and socially intelligent. As observed, adhering to rules and social norms is essential in order to gain membership to a social group (Bordens and Horowitz, 2012) or commensal circle. This suggests that these characters, and Pullman as an author, understand the importance of commensality in creating and maintaining connections between characters.

6.3 Social Functions of Commensality in the Texts

An invitation to enter a commensal circle brings with it an implied sense of equality between members (Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992; Fischler, 2011). However, as Murcott (2019) suggests, not all exchanges are undertaken in the spirit of conviviality,
and the adverse aspects of commensality must also be considered to establish a rounded picture of shared eating and drinking experiences.

As observed in the texts, there only few instances where a character is intentionally excluded from a commensal circle. In many ways this marks the actions of the new Master of Jordan College towards Lyra as particularly significant. In forbidding Lyra to dine amongst the scholars and faculty at Jordan College the Master aims to create a social boundary between Lyra and the rest of this group. Doing so highlights Lyra as an outsider and therefore socially different from the insiders (see Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992). While Hogg and Vaugh (2010) argue that exclusion leads to feelings of rejection, this is not observed here as Lyra states that she is not ashamed to eat amongst the servants who she considers to be her friends. This suggests that neither Lyra’s sense of identity nor her social needs are met exclusively by this particular social group. Although she is hurt by the Master’s moves, it appears that she identifies as a member of multiple social groups. This is continually evident across the novels where Lyra moves seamlessly amongst social groups and classes, forging connections amongst many different character groups (see Fig. 5.3).

As observed, status within social groups is highly sought after in society (Delamater, Myers and Collett, 2015). Similarly in the texts, status is highly prized, particularly amongst characters such as Mrs Coulter. It is evident that Mrs Coulter values her membership of an elite social group which she expresses by where she dines, what she consumes and who she chooses to share food and drink experiences with. Often, commensal acts highlight struggles for dominance and power, and show up conflicts between the individuals involved (Grignon, 2001; Murcott, 2019). The exchange between Mrs Coulter and Fr. MacPhail is an excellent example of how commensality can illuminate struggles for power and dominance as this exchange takes place between two characters with a similar level of status within society.

Hierarchies are often revealed amongst groups through formalised seating arrangements at meals (Belasco 2008; Fischler, 2011) These arrangements are often political (Visser, 1991)
and can greatly influence connections between individuals (Brillat-Savarin, 1854; Duck, 2007; Fischler, 2011). Formalised seating is not typical in Pullman’s novels. This is unsurprising as the majority of shared drinks and meals take place in less formal settings or amongst characters who are already familiar with each other. There is evidence in the texts however that the importance of seating arrangements is utilised on some occasions. For example, in the opening chapter of *Northern Lights* the description of the dining hall clearly illustrates how hierarchy can be used to distinguish status amongst diners (NL, p.3). Furthermore, on a small number of occasions characters are requested to sit in a designated seat. This can highlight respect, for example where Lord Boreal offers Mrs Coulter the seat by the fire (TSK, p.197) or dominance, as witnessed when Fr. MacPhail shows Mrs Coulter where to sit (TAS, p.325). In both instances, the motives behind these behaviours are political, either to garner favour or exert control.

In society, social bonding is considered the primary function of commensality (Perianova, 2012; Fischler, 2011). Amongst the characters who populate Pullman’s imagined worlds, commensality provides a similar core function where commensal acts bond characters creating connections of kinship, fellowship and alliance. Simmel (1997) argues that the process of sharing food and drink transforms the selfish, individualistic act of eating into a collective experience. Collective experiences are highly effective in literature as they allow characters to meet, to exchange information and to drive the plot forward. In Pullman’s works, shared eating and drinking experiences in particular forge and strengthen connections between characters for exactly the reason which Simmel describes. This is particularly effective in establishing alliances between characters. When Will searches for Lyra, for example, he offers food to Balthamos connecting the two characters and strengthening their alliance. Balthamos is an angel and as such he is not automatically expected to eat at all or to consume the same food as Will. While this act of commensality bonds the characters, the gesture also reveals something of Wills character and that both characters understand how powerful sharing food can be. Similarly, Will is observed again later in the novels, extending an invitation to the Gallivespians to share a meal with him and Lyra that cements their alliance. It could be argued therefore that Pullman, in creating these characters and making them perform these commensal gestures, also appreciates the
significance of shared food and drink experiences and how these can be utilised to connect characters in his novels.

Commensality is an extremely important function amongst kinship circles as research suggests that repeated behaviours are more influential than feelings of love in establishing relationships between individuals (Duck, 2007). Furthermore, it has been argued that emotional bonds and interpersonal connection are often more influential in constructing family units than blood relativeness (Strong, DeVault and Cohen, 2011). Family units make up the core commensal circles in most societies (Douglas, 1972; Van Esterik, 2015). In Pullman’s universe, a number of family units are portrayed which differ significantly in their social structure and make-up. Habitual family meals fulfil a basic, fundamental need for nourishment, but also contribute to fulfilling higher social needs of belonging (Maslow, 1943). While these social needs of acceptance and belonging are satisfied within traditional family units for certain characters such as Malcolm, other characters including the protagonist Lyra have to seek out artificial kinship in order to satisfy this need to belong within a core commensal and social unit. Repeated social exchanges such as commensality also allow individuals to develop a greater understanding of one another (Kerner and Chou, 2015) and aid in developing social norms and trusts within groups as these develop over time (Delamater, Myers and Collett, 2015). This is evident both amongst kinship circles and in friendships amongst characters who share food and drink throughout the novels.

Commensality has long been considered to symbolise fellowship (Robertson Smith, 1972; Visser, 1991; Mennell, Murcott and Van Otterloo, 1992; Perianova, 2012). It is unsurprising, based on the unconventional family unit Lyra is a member of, that her friendships are the most significant connections which she maintains. In *His Dark Materials* her affection for her friend Roger spurs Lyra forward on an adventure to save Roger after he is kidnapped. Similarly, Lyra and Will develop an intense friendship, and later a sense of kinship, which drives much of the plot of *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*. Delamater, Myers and Collett (2015) suggest that through social exchanges children become socially competent, establish their independence and form a sense of identity. Establishing core connections as friendships rather than as kinships allows Lyra
to set off on adventures without the constraints of parents or family ties (in Yentob, 2018). However, this also allows the reader to understand who Lyra is as her identity is shaped through the connections she forges and creates as a twelve-year-old girl in His Dark Materials and later as an adult in The Secret Commonwealth.

6.4 Summary

Foodways are abundant across the imagined universe Pullman creates in His Dark Materials, The Book of Dust and Lyra Stories. However, as expressed in the findings it is the social exchange of sharing food and drink which connects characters and offers a window into their social universe. Through witnessing shared food and drink experiences the reader grows to understand the culture and societies in which these characters exist. Commensality aids character connection and can reveal group structures and hierarchies as well as divisions in social class amongst the characters. Much of this can be observed in where these shared experiences take place and what the characters consume. Through shared eating and drinking experiences characters establish trust and social norms which strengthen the social groups in which they are members. Commensal activities allow characters to meet, interact and grow to understand one another. In doing so, connections are forged and strengthened between individual characters and wider character groups.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Further Recommendations

7.1 Final Conclusions

This thesis has explored shared food and drink experiences in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy, *The Book of Dust* series and the *Lyra Stories*. Specifically, the research aims to explore how shared eating and drinking experiences create and maintain connections between characters across the novels and stories in the collection, in the context of the existing body of knowledge within food studies.

As discussed throughout this thesis, Philip Pullman is an author who is principally interested in how humans behave and how they relate to one another (see Odean, 2000; Yentob, 2018). The imaginary universes that Pullman creates are populated by dynamic and realistic characters and the actions of these characters are often thought-provoking. As commensality is an inherently social activity that regulates behaviour (Fischler, 2011) and integrates society (Perianova, 2012) consideration of commensality within these worlds, is therefore, an interesting and valid area for investigation.

A substantial body of work exists on commensality amongst humans in the real world with a general consensus that sharing food and drink serves an essential function within society (Gefou-Madianou, 1992; Fischler, 2011; Perianova, 2012; Kerner and Chou, 2015). Food Studies is itself a burgeoning, interdisciplinary field of study that is primarily interested in human relationships with food. Within this, the field of literary food studies is emerging as an exciting area of enquiry. This is unsurprising as the social aspect of food is a common recurrence in fiction (Forster, 1927). Foodways are abundant in the imagined universes Pullman creates in his work. However, as expressed in the findings it is the social exchange and sharing food and drink which really serves to connect characters and offers a window into their social universe.

Of particular interest was how the social functions of commensality, as we understand them within the real world, can be applied to literary figures. As stated previously, Pullman is
an author who considers himself a writer of realist fiction (Yentob. 2018) despite these novels taking place in imaginary interwoven with elements of fantasy. Pullman’s interest in humans and their relationships is evident throughout his work. However, as discussed, there is a difference between literary figures and human beings. The characters that populate the worlds Pullman creates should be considered as incomplete beings (see Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider, 2010), as they have no pre-existing history outside the texts (see Forster, 1927; Lamarque, 2007; Eagleton, 2013). What the reader understands about the characters in these novels and how they interact within a wider constellation of characters is dependent on what Pullman, as the author, chooses to share with us.

Figure 7.1 Characters Who Share Food and Drink in His Dark Materials Trilogy.
Figure 7.2 Characters Who Share Food and Drink in The Book of Dust Series.
Figure 4.3 Main Characters Who Share Food and Drink Across The Lyra Collection

Throughout the collection of works explored in this study, characters regularly share food and drink. Through these social interactions and shared exchanges characters meet, exchange information and form connections (Fig 7.1-7.3). While some of these connections are situational and are intended to provide the reader with context or to help move the narrative forward, other long-term connections are also created and are presented as alliances and friendships. As in the real world, character connections are strengthened through congenial shared food experiences (see Bloch, 1999; Grignon, 2011; Fischler, 2011; Perianova, 2012; Murcott, 2019). Through shared food and drink experiences the reader also grows to understand the culture and societies in which these characters exist. Commensal exchanges often reveal group structures and hierarchies as well as divisions in social class amongst the characters. Much of this can be observed in the locations in which these shared experiences take place and what the characters consume. Furthermore, sharing similar food and drink also shapes the social identity of the characters in much the same way as is observed in the real world.
Considering commensality within these works, therefore, offers the reader insight into the social worlds of the characters that exist within Pullman’s imagined universe. Fitzpatrick (2013, p.112) suggests that “when authors refer to food they are usually telling the reader something important about narrative, plot, characterization, motives, and so on”. This appears to hold true in relation to Pullman’s *Lyra Collection* works. Furthermore, it could be argued that Pullman is highly aware of the importance and power of commensality. This is observed in the way in which shared eating and drinking experiences are presented in the novels. For instance, different characters share similar foods or drinks; different types of meals are served on different occasions and hierarchies are seen in formal events such as feasts, to name a few. Most strikingly however is the behaviour of the characters around these commensal events. Characters are repeatedly witnessed enacting social norms around shared eating and drinking experiences. There is a significant emphasis on hospitality between characters also with characters extending an invitation to share food and drink not only to bond but also to forge alliances and to settle disagreements. Furthermore, otherworldly beings in the texts often prepare and share food in a way that resembles our human behaviour creating a sense that these otherworldly characters are similar to us.

As discussed, the reader is only privy to what an author chooses to share about the characters and the social universe in which they interact. The examination of foodways and, in particular, commensality in these novels and stories, clearly shows that Pullman uses shared eating and drinking experiences as a way to integrate the constellations of characters and creates connections between them. In doing so, Pullman reveals much about the characters themselves and the wider social universes in which they exist. This confirms what this thesis aimed to investigate: principally that commensality is extensively utilized to aid character connection throughout Pullman’s *Lyra Collection*. 
7.2 Further Recommendations

The exploration of the concept of commensality in the *Lyra Collection* in this thesis was subject to several limitations. The study had to be undertaken within the scope and time available for a master’s thesis project. As little prior research has been conducted on foodways in Pullman’s literature, there was little indication of areas of interest or of research that could be built on. Although this proved a challenge, it also provides opportunity for further areas of study. Foodways are common throughout the texts and any number of avenues could be explored in greater depth. For instance, the differences in food consumed in the public and private spheres or a deeper analysis of the wines consumed in Pullman’s worlds could form the subject of future study. There are also more philosophical aspects of consumption that are not discussed in this thesis, including the concept of the Spectres eating people’s souls or of Iorek Byrnison consuming the body of his friend Lee Scoresby as a ritualistic act after he dies. The idea of the Third Place, and how this is represented in the texts as a medium for information exchange, is another potential area for investigation aswell as from a literary perspective, the choice of words and use of food language as metaphor is yet another area that could warrant further investigation.


Reference List


