

This fact makes me wonder: Does the food industry's fixation with aesthetics really benefit consumers or growers? Will most consumers want their favorite apples replaced with redder new varieties, if they know the story of Red Delicious?

Growing up in China, I was used to buying apples carried by street vendors in baskets under a shoulder pole. Vendors would slice samples of unbranded apples and passersby would buy them simply if they liked the taste. In my memory, prior to all the new varieties there were just two kinds of apples: red and green. The former being sweeter and the latter tart and crispy. Both were affordable and ubiquitous.

The book concludes with a discussion of democracy in the food system, urging citizens to view food as a public good and act accordingly. I could not agree more with this argument. To build a democratic and sustainable food system, the decision-making about food production and consumption needs to involve more civic engagement. This will need more citizens to be interested in engaging with the food system, and *Good Apples* may spark that interest.

—Ning Dai, *University of Waterloo*

#### REFERENCE

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#### *Food Justice and Narrative Ethics: Reading Stories for Ethical Awareness and Activism*

Beth A. Dixon

London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018

177 pp. \$120.00 (hardcover); \$39.95 (paperback); \$35.95 (eBook)

Beth A. Dixon's engaging roadmap of a book—she calls it a “travelogue” (p.17)—offers scholars and activists an ethical method for assessing, articulating, and ultimately activating a pathway toward food system change that runs through ethics, politics, and the creative work of storytelling. Dixon explores the impact that a particular kind of narrative, which she calls a “Food Justice Narrative,” can have when told and read in a particular way. The process of its writing and reading illuminates an ethical mode through which to analyze injustices across the food system, and positions a reader or viewer to see the issues anew.

Intellectually expansive, the book cites Aristotle and Plato, as well as more familiar names in food studies like Michael Pollan, Janet Poppendieck, and Joshua Sbicca. Expansive in form as well, the book ranges from memoir-esque journal entries on gardening and food pantry volunteering to philosophical expositions on the development of ethical reasoning, to case

studies on food justice stories that effectively describe, for instance, the struggles of migrant farm laborers to battle oppressive working conditions.

The core theme of the book, which draws a direct line from composing a narrative to developing ethical expertise to the work of ethical analysis and food justice, embeds itself within the book's format: Dixon's personal story tracks her own development of food system expertise through experience as it steadily merges with her analytical story. As a result, both form and content convey that, for Dixon, the process of crafting a narrative serves an educative, epiphanic function; it positions the writer as a citizen or as an intellectual pilgrim rather than simply as an expert. The reader, then, finds a complementary position as a fellow traveler. That epiphanic journey comprises a story within the story, where Dixon comes to understand the systemic basis of food system injustices while at the same time providing a model for readers to analyze the issues in a different way.

Dixon arrives at the subject of food justice by way of philosophy, which she teaches at SUNY Plattsburgh. She locates her text within the ecosystem of philosophical works on ethics, focusing on the acquisition and application of ethics to “practical settings in order to cultivate a sensitivity to what is ethically salient about particular situations that fall within the domain of food justice” (p.22). In that ecosystem, the practical application of ethical expertise to the issue of food justice seems to stand out as a new pathway for engagement; her form and methodology are versatile enough to be easily transferable to numerous other social domains and issues. Within the food studies ecosystem, however—for students, researchers, and activists alike—this work offers a useful method, grounded in ethics, for thinking critically on and writing about food insecurity, the mistreatment of migrant farmworkers, and other issues of injustice in the production, distribution, and consumption of food.

Dixon shows how a Food Justice Narrative creates an “epistemic vantage point ... ideal for undertaking food justice activism” (p.10). This vantage point positions the reader to see particular details of a story and the systemic, structural constraints shaping those details, which in turn can inspire action. Through its critical creative work, a Food Justice Narrative acts to “resist or to rewrite a particular master narrative ... to correct the ethical damage or oppressive ideology created” (p.137) by that master narrative, which conveys default societal perspectives on how one comes to be food insecure or how migrant farmworkers come to find themselves in oppressive conditions. These default narratives tend to focus responsibility on the individual and often connect deservedness for food or other assistance to the degree of one's “innocence” regarding

their circumstances. A Food Justice Narrative acts instead as a “counterstory” and points to the wider context of structural economic and political factors. In the case of food insecurity, for example, a counterstory shows how low wages, limited social safety net benefits, and the lobbying power of big agricultural corporations play a role, pointing to the straightforward fact that “the right to food is a fundamental right” (p.82). Dixon stresses that counterstories reframe the metrics for assessing injustices, moving from the individualized (and misleading) language of unconstrained free choice, deservedness, and blameworthiness to the collective language of rights and structural constraints on free choice. They are a call to political action rather than individual behavioral change.

An intriguing opening for scholarly engagement with this work emerges from an idea Dixon raises and then sets aside: that of aesthetics and alternative forms of representation. Dixon chooses to focus on “the educative function of realistic narratives” (p.4), such as Kristi Jacobson and Lori Silverbush’s (2013) documentary *A Place at the Table* and Seth Holmes’s (2013) ethnographic study of migrant farmworkers in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*. This offers a generative place from which to build outward. What would it mean to read or write poetry or literary fiction (or create artworks more generally) for ethical awareness and activism, particularly on the subject of food justice? What role could aesthetic form play in furthering the ethical and activist content of the works? Moreover, what do the cascading impacts of climate catastrophe or COVID-19 mean for the composition of food system narratives?

Much ethical, activist, narrative (and aesthetic) work remains, particularly considering the long-overdue realization with COVID-19 that food system workers are in fact essential workers. A travelogue surely is meant to be picked up again, the story and method carried forward and carried on by others, even more so in this time of emergent possibility.

—Eric Himmelfarb, *New York University*

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- Holmes, Seth. 2013. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
 Jacobson, Kristi and Lori Silverbush. 2013. *A Place at the Table*. DVD. Los Angeles: Magnolia Pictures.

#### *Grain by Grain: A Quest to Revive Ancient Wheat, Rural Jobs, and Healthy Food*

Bob Quinn and Liz Carlisle

Washington, DC: Island Press, 2019

288 pp. Illustrations. \$28.00 (hardcover); \$27.99 (eBook)

What do you value in a grain of wheat? For the average consumer, a grain of wheat holds almost no value at all. For

agribusiness firms and conventional farmers, this value is primarily defined by maximum yield and optimal loaf volume, or the maximum loaves of bread that can be made from a bag of flour. But for Bob Quinn, a fourth-generation Montana wheat farmer, each grain represents a window into the quality of soil, the biodiversity of the farm, the measure of community well-being and human health. *Grain by Grain* is the story of how Quinn, using his training as a scientist and farmer, embarks on a mission to reclaim the value of wheat and farming to build a business that is “fundamentally based on adding and regenerating value, not extracting it” (p.168). Through his story, Quinn demonstrates the power of an entrepreneurial spirit and a values-based business in creating sustainable solutions for his community, his land, and our food system. While Quinn and Carlisle, author of *Lentil Underground* and assistant professor in the environmental studies program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, share authorship of this book, the story is told from Quinn’s perspective. In these pages, Quinn elevates the voice and experience of farmers as he shares how he has worked to restore the land, his community, and the food that will sustain his family and many others for generations to come, one grain at a time.

Quinn warmly invites the reader to join him as he recounts his path from a conventional farmer to organic farmer, from a wheat farmer to an ancient wheat farmer to a diversified farmer, from fossil fuel reliance toward energy independence, and from the field to the laboratory. Quinn is very clear—you don’t need to be an environmental crusader to see the synergies between economic and environmental value. He certainly wasn’t. He explains how he approached taking over the family farm with an entrepreneurial mindset and a drive to support his family. Quinn describes how over the course of four years, organic grew from a side project to the bulk of his business. “By then,” he says, “I was philosophically committed too, but it wasn’t only my beliefs that drove my transition; it was also my customers” (p.70). It was this philosophy and business acumen that led Quinn to cultivate and then trademark an ancient grain, khorasan wheat, as Kamut. As the demand for organic, healthful foods has grown, so has Quinn’s enterprise and his vision for the role his community can play in supporting a more sustainable future.

Quinn avoids overly romanticizing agrarian life by acknowledging the many hardships and trials and errors involved in farming, and especially when farming against the status quo of chemically intensive, extractive, short-term practices. Quinn provides an accessible, relatable, and comprehensive analysis of the damages to the environment, rural communities, farmers, and health wrought by an increasingly