

After the Final Page: Food Transformation Narratives and The Call to Individual Action

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Abstract:

In this paper I examine and define the concept of transformation literature through three different books engaging in a conversation with food politics, and the intersection of ethics and morality. The first of the three books is Michael Pollan's, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, which asks us to consider what it means to eat in full consciousness. The second book taking part in the conversation of transformative works is Barbara Kingsolver's, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, which is an account filled with information centered around eating in the most sustainable way possible, mainly through cutting out the toxic petroleum emissions and waste caused by industrial farming and the shipment of goods. The final book joining in the discussion is Tovar Cerulli's, *The Mindful Carnivore: A Vegetarian's Hunt for Sustenance*. This book is able to offer a well-rounded voice into the conversation of transformation narrative, opening up on his deeply personal journey from hunter to vegan and back to hunter again. In this essay I will look at how certain literary works such as these, pressures the reader to take immediate action more than others and the affects of such pressure through analyzing context outside of the novel. I also explore the contradictions in trying to understand how to take action given by text, which is an inactive source of material. Finally, this essay will explore how transformation narratives speak to the individual by attempting to harness each reader's unique power, creating mass change.

In the words of Paulo Freire, language at its core is both “reflection and action” (75). Written word is apart and parcel of language. The language of literature finds power in reflection, moving from the stagnant page to the mind. The mind, attached to the body, is able to take our reflection in written language and turn it into action – actions, which can exist as a concrete extension of the power of language. Yet, this transition from words into action isn't one that happens very easily, nor very often. Language is cyclical. It begins with individual experience, which language is able to harness, creating an image on the page. But, it is important to note the individual “experience is always primary, while the account is secondary, filtered through memory and conscious evaluation”

(Copper, 74). I want to know what happens when you try to complete the cycle. What does it take to harness the secondary account of another and turn it back into the primary source, into *your* actions? Some language pushes us to act more than others, to finish the cycle of transformation. In this paper I examine the concept of transformation literature through three different books engaging in a conversation with food politics, and the intersection of ethics and morality. I want to look at how certain literary works such as these, pressures the reader to take immediate action more than others, and the affects of such pressure. I also explore the contradictions in trying to understand *how* to act through an inactive source.

The first of the three books is Michael Pollan's, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, published in 2006. Michael Pollan is a highly accredited and established author, who has been writing on the intersection of nature and culture for over thirty years. He has written a myriad of books, five of which have been New York Times bestsellers. *The Omnivore's Dilemma* was one of the five New York Times bestsellers, as well as making the list of top ten best books in 2006 for both the Washington Post and the New York Times. *The Omnivore's Dilemma* also won a slue of prestigious awards, including the James Beard Award. This book took the world by storm due to Pollan's choice to investigate and find answers to questions about our food many were afraid to ask. In the book, Pollan goes beyond the comfort of his home, and travels straight to the source where our food is made, grown, and processed. Seeing and experiencing first hand what it takes to run industrial and family owned farms, and eventually trying out the hunting and foraging lifestyle, Pollan can join first hand experience with research to uncover realities of America's food practices. Pollan exposes

the current ways food is forced beyond its natural powers to fit our quick and easy lifestyle, and the major consequences that have come with ignoring the rules of Mother Nature. In a statement on Pollan's official website, he summarizes what *The Omnivore's Dilemma* will ask us to consider, writing - "What's at stake in our eating choices is not only our own and our children's health, but the health of the environment that sustains life on earth" (About Michael Pollan).

The second book taking part in the conversation of transformative works is Barbara Kingsolver's, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, published in 2007. Although Pollan is the biggest author of the three authors in terms of his influence, acknowledgements, and awards, Kingsolver still holds her own. Her work has been introduced into core literature curriculum in high schools and colleges throughout the nation, which I experienced firsthand in my own high school. Along with Writers Digest naming her one of the most important writers of the twentieth-century, she was also awarded the National Humanities Medal in 2000. Kingsolver's fiction work *The Poisonwood Bible* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and was named an Oprah Book Club selection. Concerning *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, this book also won numerous prizes including the James Beard award as well. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* was able to gain recognition due to its unique subject matter, covering a year in the life of Kingsolver and her family, as they learn how to tackle the hefty challenge of only eating what the land around them provides. It is an account filled with a wealth of information centered around eating in the most sustainable way possible, mainly through cutting out the toxic petroleum emissions and waste caused by industrial farming and the shipment of goods. Kingsolver's passion and desire for others to not

only to understand her choices, but also to take them up along side her, drives the narrative of this book with a very heavy hand. “Part memoir, part journalistic investigation,” *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* was Kingsolver’s first attempt at non-fiction. From excerpts written by her husband, to essays from her eldest daughter, it becomes a Kingsolver family affair flooding you with coverage on facts on the food industry, recipes, management of time and money, and answers to how and when foods grow. This book is truly set up to give their readers the tools to make healthier decisions come meal time.

Last, but by no means least, joining in the discussion is Tovar Cerulli’s book, *The Mindful Carnivore: A Vegetarian’s Hunt for Sustenance*, published in 2013. Unlike Pollan and Kingsolver, who are both authors as their main career, as well as both have written and published multitudes of work, Cerulli first and only book is *The Mindful Carnivore*. Cerulli’s involvement outside of his work isn’t awards, or acknowledgments in the literary world, but is focused more on the conversation of conservation. Cerulli has a Masters in Arts and a PhD. He has spoken and led seminars for a multitude of wildlife agencies, nonprofit organizations and universities. Cerulli has been interviewed by leading media outlets such as the BBC, CBS, and NPR, and was also awarded the 2015 resident by Aldo and Estella Leopold Foundation. Most recently, Cerulli is working with clients in environmental conservation and public health for Metropolitan Group, which is a company dedicated to social change. *The Mindful Carnivore* is able to offer a well-rounded voice into the conversation of transformation narrative, opening up on his deeply personal journey from hunter to vegan and back to hunter again. Driven by the need to think of himself as a man who

saw the world with his eyes open, and in that, treated nature and the earth with care and respect, Cerulli chose to make one of the hardest decisions he ever made, and went hunting. He began his transformation with the heavy, yet unanswered question of, “why should my diet harm the earth? What right did humans have to treat animals so cruelly? And must not that cruelty harm humans in turn?” (14). Cerulli’s book exposes his intense struggle to find his rightful place in the world that chose to ignore the hardships that happen behind doors. He opens his eyes to the reality of the death that happens in order for him to live, but as he wisely states, “I do not need to weigh myself down with such awareness . . . But awareness encourages me to pause and reflect, to celebrate the food that reaches our plates, to respect the organisms we ingest and the people who bring them to our table, to say a few words of thanks before taking up fork or spoon” (258).

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A vital step to begin to understand where the concept of transformation narrative fits into the existing conversations on Michael Pollan’s, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Tovar Cerulli’s, *The Mindful Carnivore*, and or Barbara Kingsolver’s, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, starts by exploring where the authors, sellers, and other readers chose to define these three books. Combing through the authors’ official websites, main book sellers such as Barnes and Noble and Amazon, university databases, the Library of Congress, and Good Reads, I wasn’t shocked to find that the subject of food was the overarching category/genre representing these books. *The Mindful Carnivore* is under cooking by ingredient on Amazon, is bookmarked most commonly under food, nonfiction, memoir, and animals on Good Reads, and in the Library of congress its main subjects are

vegetarianism / veganism, hunting, nutrition, and health. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* is mainly saved under food, nonfiction, memoir, and gardening on Good Reads, and in Amazon is placed under the categories of organic cooking, organic gardening and horticulture, environmentalist and naturalist biography. As for *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, it is bookmarked most often in the food and nonfiction section on Good Reads, is found under cooking education on Amazon, and the main subjects given by the Library of Congress are food habit and food preferences. Surprisingly enough, Pollan's book was the only one that printed a sub-genre on the actual cover, which was culture and food.

Stepping back and looking at all the ways these books are filed, brings to light the repetition and focus on the subject of food, which as I mentioned before isn't shocking due to the presence of food as heavy subject matter in all three. What I *was* shocked by was the lack categories expressing more than what was on the surface level. Yes, each of the three accounts revolve around food, but the reason for the presence of food is arguably what these works are actually about. Food is culture, but the food and drink genre mentions on no connection on how food creates a deep cultural connections for humans, way beyond its preparation consuming. Pollan, Cerulli, and Kingsolver didn't write about food for the same reason Martha Stewart wrote a cookbook. Food is just the surface, but it isn't the main theme. Take *The Omnivore's Dilemma* for example. Pollan writes about food driven by the hope of bringing back knowledge that has been lost – the ability “to eat in full consciousness of all that is at stake” (11). Pollan believes this new understanding won't burden his readers, but will actually allow the true pleasures of eating to be possible once again. It is “the kinds of pleasure that are only deepened by knowing” (11).

Tovar Cerulli's book, *The Mindful Carnivore* is another great example of work, which deals with an awareness of his life and its affects on others that inherently brings in the topic of food. Throughout the book Cerulli constantly takes a step back and reflects on the impact his body has on the world around him. Food is the leading weight that drives our footprint deeper into the earth, which is why Cerulli also finds food as one of his main characters. It is in reaction to the reflection on food, that Cerulli uncovers the importance of what it means to celebrate "the food that reaches our plate, to respect the organisms we ingest and the people who bring them to our table, (and) to say a few words of thanks before taking up fork or spoon" (258). For Cerulli, even though his book is generalized as a food and nutrition work, it is far from it.

Looking at the context these books are surrounded by is important in understanding the greater conversation they are engaged in. Because these books are works of nonfiction and are dealing with global issues, addressing the context and life outside of the page is especially critical. Pollan, Cerulli, and Kingsolver are not omitted from this conversation, and all acknowledge the necessity of discussing the context of their book. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan's focus on context is evident almost immediately in his introductions title, *Our National Eating Disorder*. In Pollan's choice to address life surrounding his book is able to set the stage for the scope he believes is in need of reformation. Most Americans, myself included, have no idea where our food comes from, what is it actually made out of, what is good for us, and what is happening to the soil and animals we are consuming. Pollan goes on to say that what, "is perhaps most troubling, and sad, about industrial eating is how thoroughly it obscures," our relationship and connections to the natural world (10). Cerulli also joins in on the

conversation, grounding his personal food meditations with concerns for society, specifically when he comes to the realization that most meat he ate “came from the grocery store, and (he) gave no thought to its provenance... They all came neatly wrapped in plastic” (13). Cerulli notices that the supermarket is the ultimate separation, which keeps society from connecting with and understanding the natural world. In agreement with Cerulli, Kingsolver also expands on the presence of the supermarket and its affects, writing that because of the loss of knowledge on how foods grow, it has in return “rendered us a nation of wary label-readers, oddly uneasy in our obligate relationship with the things we eat. We call our food animals by different names after they’re dead, presumably sparing ourselves any vision of the beefs and the porks running around on actual hooves” (10). In Pollan, Kingsolver and Cerulli’s choice to address the context of their novels, they are also able to specify the audience of their book. Although it may seem like a happy accident, this openness on the type of audience the authors write to proves to be quite an important factor when meditating on the experience of reading their works.

Because the authors, (though mainly Pollan and Kingsolver), make it clear they are addressing an audience who is ill-informed on the subjects covered in their book, there is an expectation that as readers we will no longer be apart of that same group once finished. I expect them to transform my understanding of life to the point where reading about change isn’t good enough. After the final page, I expect a newfound desire take action. I knew that I wanted to learn more about the effects my eating had on other life. I wanted to consider the moral consequences I can easily ignore; yet I know exist outside of the grocery store or fast food restaurant. What was interesting about these books was

the fact that the authors wanted to know more about the same issues I did, but they searched to answer the question through taking action. Action so enormous and life altering, it justified a book to record what happened. It is in the disconnect of the authors' action versus the readers inaction concerning their books, both fueled by the same desire to eat in full awareness, which leads me to feel a weakened sense of connection with these accounts.

Beginning with what Cerulli hoped to accomplish in his work is easily made clear to us on the first page. Cerulli speaks on attending a retreat led by Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, who's word would later act as the driving force in Cerulli's journey from vegetarian, to vegan, to hunter. Thich Nhat Hanh, spoke of compassion, but "most of all, he encouraged mindfulness. Awareness. Aliveness. Being awake" (1). It was in this state of mind, Cerulli realized that even if he only ate vegetables, the soil he bought to grow them had decayed animals in it. In further research, he was exposed to the reality that even local or family farms are permitted to kill deer past hunting season to keep them from eating and killing the crops. Moved as man who sought to treat all creatures with compassion, Cerulli felt he had an "obligation to ask how they lived and died. To remember Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching on kindness. To eat with my eyes open" (67). Cerulli in the end chooses not to be weighed down by the awareness that is found when searching for the answers of how to eat, but allows it to encourage him "to celebrate the food that reaches out plates, to respect the organisms we ingest and the people who bring them to our table, to say a few words of thanks before taking up the fork or spoon" (258).

Kingsolver's book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* is steeped in this aim to inform readers, which as I just mentioned before has made the book prone to criticism on her

words feeling too preachy. Kingsolver states what she believes her book will accomplish in the hands of her readers, writing, “If this book is not exactly an argument for reinstating food-production classes in schools (and it might be), it does contain a lot of what you might learn there” (9). Kingsolver says, “This is not a how-to book aimed at getting you cranking out your own food”, but a book which gives us the basic knowledge of how foods grown and when to look for them (10). Kingsolver believes that in our education, we will be able to move away from, “a nation of wary label readers, oddly uneasy in our obligate relationship with the things we eat” (10). And finally, Kingsolver wanted show her readers “proof that a family living on or near green land need not depend for its life on industrial food” (22).

With this understanding of what Cerulli, Pollan, and Kingsolver all hope to accomplish throughout the book is interesting when comparing it to the relationship with their readers. When authors are dealing with topics which meditate on right and wrong, while in the same breath have to consider the fact that the majority of their readers are inexperienced in the topic, is something that can often lead to people feeling condemned by the author. In our case, if the author is not careful when speaking on what it means to eat in awareness, and what it looks like to eat in ignorance, the reader can easily be made to feel condemned for their current food habits if they do not line up with what the author says is right and wrong. This is a common problem transformation narratives are cursed with, because of author’s awareness that their readers are most likely partaking in the very actions they hope to put an end to.

Cerulli’s relationship with the readers is somewhat different to the other two author’s, never addressing what he hopes his readers will learn directly. The reader /

author relationship is treated a lot more like fiction novels tend to, in that our presence is rarely, if never acknowledged. As for the relationship Pollan and Kingsolver choose to engage in with their readers, is much more explicit. While they both express interest within their writing to treat the reader as a main character of sorts, their tone is quite different when compared to the other. Kingsolver chose to tackle the way she addresses her readers in a teacher / mentor to student relationship, where as Pollan leans more towards the investigator, presenting his readers with facts almost seemingly unattached to his personal bias, or opinion (not including part three) so that we can make a decision driven by our own views of right and wrong.

One way the relationship the authors create with their readers is by joining the conversation of reader responses outside of the academic conversation. Good Reads is a great place for this, and is one of the largest sites set up for readers to share their opinions on books, as well as find good recommendations. On the website, they have on record 2.5 billion books that have been added to their system, as well as 87 million reader reviews posted. Aside from their extensive representation of published books, Good Reads is one the few platforms that has been able to create a community of people invested in providing an in-depth and critical discussion on the book at hand, while also keeping inappropriate comments to a surprising minimum, without any censoring rules. Along with this, I am also always able to find both positive and negative reviews on the book in question, which usually includes a diverse representation of the population (although this changes depending on the books intended audience). Most importantly, Good Reads is able to provide me with conversations surrounding the book outside of academia, which is vital when researching the affects of reader interaction with the work.

When looking at the reader response to Michael Pollan's, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, we are able to compare the author's intentions to the readers' reaction, which will help in understanding the success of Pollan's novel as a transformative narrative. Pollan is clearly setting up his readers to expect an experience of some sort of change once having read his book. Looking at the response of readers other than myself, I wanted to see if they too felt the same expectation for transformation, and if his book was able to fulfill what they needed in order to make a change. Starting with the more negative responses, it seemed that the ones who struggled with the book were mainly bothered by Pollan's flippant conclusion that it was fine to eat meat as long as you care about where it came from. One reviewer summarized this problem, writing that the

“book seemed to me to be the author's belabored argument that it's perfectly fine to eat animals. His treatise looked like his attempt to avoid cognitive dissonance... so that he could continue to eat in peace as an omnivore, along with about 97% of the U.S. population; ... his waxing poetic over the glories of killing and eating animals did not sway me. It's interesting that Pollan continually rebuts his own arguments, but I wasn't convinced his questioning was as honest as he wanted it to appear, as it seemed to me he already knew the answers he wanted to arrive at about being omnivorous” (Lisa Vegan).

Because Pollan chose to present his novel in a way that appeared to be an attempt at equal consideration for and against hot topic subjects, readers such as Lisa were skeptical when Pollan concluded with telling his readers it was fine to continue consuming meat. Lisa questioned Pollan's honesty due to his obvious love for the taste of meat throughout the book, as well as his depiction of his hunting excursion, reminiscing on it as an adrenaline filled excursion, rather than an experience done to deepen his respect for the natural cycle of life. Along with this continued grievance, another frustrated reviewer was also bothered by the lack of solutions Pollan offers at the end of his work.

In contrast to the ones feeling unimpressed, there were also many reviews that said they felt Pollan had done exactly what he promised. One reader summed up these feelings the best, writing that “between industrial and sustainable food, between eating new things and eating what you ‘know’, (and) between conscious eating and willful blindness” Pollan was able to paint a clear picture of the omnivore’s dilemma, bringing awareness to the issues at hand (Good Reads, Trevor). The reader went on to write, “This book didn’t make the writer a vegetarian, and it didn’t make me one either – but I did come away from this book wanting to be more aware of what I eat and what the choices I make when deciding what to eat mean” (Good Reads, Trevor). It is important to remember what Pollan intended *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* to accomplish – provide the opportunity to learn more about what we eat, and in that knowledge we can eat happier. It isn’t so much promising this to result in action, nor does he really write that he will give us ideas on how or what to do with our new knowledge, rather *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* is a presentation of information given to us through the filter of Pollan’s experience, which is just what this reviewer appreciated. As for what to do next, that answer lies outside of this particular work.

Moving on to the conversation surrounding *The Mindful Carnivore* on Good Reads, after reading a fair few reviews I found there is most always a generally agreed upon problem as well as the praise in the book. The biggest problem most people had with Cerulli’s book, which I have to agree with, concerned Cerulli’s inability to edit down pages and pages of data and information, which could have easily been condensed into only a few paragraphs. These moments of data thrown that he throws at the readers is especially uncomfortable due to its tone change when compared to his main poetic and

meditative prose. Aside from that, there seemed to be an overall positive outlook, summarized well by one reader that *The Mindful Carnivore*, “was by far and away one of the more thought-provoking, clearly explained, and beautiful books that I’ve ever read on vegetarianism, eating in general, or humanity’s connection to nature... Cerulli’s writing never becomes dry or boring, and it never becomes preachy” (Emily Park). Aside from Park’s review representing the common opinion on Cerulli’s book, I took note of her specific comment because of her choice to mention what the book was not – preachy.

Almost as the complete opposite of what drove the narrative in *The Mindful Carnivore*, Kingsolver wrote her book driven by the conversation and affects she had on the reader, but in that choice to acknowledge the reader so blatantly, it also made a lot of people feel alienated in their current practices. In one reviews of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, a sassy reader, Kate, tagged her review on as “author-get-over-thyself” making her feelings quite clear right off the bat. Kate’s very first sentence in the review unsurprisingly followed with, “I do not want to have lunch with Barbara Kingsolver. I do not want to sit across the table from the self-satisfied woman and have her gently scold me for eating imported ‘world traveler’ foods, like bananas” (Good Reads). Kate goes on to express her frustration in Kingsolver’s choice to present this extremely limited and taxing way of living, eating, and cooking as though her family “all managed to do it *without fighting*... No such humanizing details” were offered up to make us feel like we could relate to their experience in any manner of speaking (Good Reads). Kate ended up rating the book a 4 out of 5 stars, despite her frustration of Kingsolver’s tone, due to the informative subject matter, admitting that *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, had instilled a desire to pay attention to local growing seasons, try to shop at farmers markets, and even

attempt to grow a few vegetable on her own. Many other reviewers shared Kate’s similar opinion, as they felt torn between feelings of frustration with Kingsolver’s “rather heavy dose of preaching”. One reader explained this feeling of frustration, writing, “What I ended up with was an essayist trying relentlessly to convert me over to her point of view. America is bad, cooking your own food is good, be ashamed of your horrible non-food-cooking empty life” (Good Reads, Shaina). What I found most interesting was a reviewer who left Kingsolver’s book five stars, yet they too mentioned the presence of preaching. This statement is the only negative remark amongst the endless praise, writing, “There’s some sound political analysis of why and how our food chain has become a fossil-fuel eating monster that disserves developing economies around the world while eroding our health here at home. There’s some preaching (oh well). There’s a careful explanation of why and under what circumstances raising animals to eat them can be the best use of the planet’s resources ... I feel like we’re living just a little bit more” (Good Reads, Elizabeth). It becomes clear this woman chose to see past Kingsolver’s tone due to the book’s ability to change her life for the better. This is important to notice when understanding the nuances of transformation literature, and if it is successful, or not. Elizabeth and Kate were both okay with the preaching because they were able to implement a physical change in their lives thanks to Kingsolver’s work. Elizabeth and Kate were able to harness the secondary account of they reflected on, and turn it back into the primary source, into *their* own actions.

Inspired by both the ups and downs considered in reviewing the experiences with Kingsolver’s book, I realized I am both thankful for the wise and realistic advice she collected, while at the same time I cannot ignore how the sermon-esque prose hindered

my ability to fully devote myself to her work as well. In the essay, “Together at the Table: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and Thoreau’s *Wild Fruits*”, Gioia Woods examines Kingsolver’s use of rhetorical approaches, writing that her “scriptural prose style, almost jeremiad, exhorting readers to change their attitudes and their lives. Like Thoreau, Kingsolver infuses her nonfiction with an attitude of close, scientific observation. [Both] demonstrate how ideas can be understood in terms of their practical consequences” (265). Yet, even with the prose style on her side, I couldn’t shake the feeling that Kingsolver started to change from the carefree teacher who was happy to have us in her class, to an anxious woman who feared we would walk out at any moment. I started to believe more and more that I was the person she judged for living such a selfish and reckless lifestyle in terms of my food habits. Because I am the kind of person who is very hard on myself, I blamed these feelings of guilt, failure, laziness, and idiocy mainly on something I hadn’t done good enough. But, my internal reaction to Kingsolver’s book isn’t something to look over. This unique and immediate reaction is important when dealing with transition literature because of its connection to the reader. Transformation narratives affects each reader in their own individual way, and taking note of the reaction to the language, good or bad, will expose the books ability to enact change or not. Change can only happen if it begins on the personal level, so acknowledging our feelings in reaction to what we are reading, especially when reading with the hope of transformation is imperative. It wasn’t until I had to explain *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* out loud, that I was able to realize so much of my self-deprecation stemmed from the unwavering stream of heavy-handed opinions, followed by facts calculated in respond to the readers inner thoughts on what we had just read. The structure of her work really played into this concept of “winning

the reader over”. Kingsolver would give us a story on how important it was to buy from local farmers, and as was reading such, I would think to myself how I couldn’t really afford shopping only at farmers markets. Then, not even a few seconds after my apprehensive reaction, Kingsolver hit me with the line, “ It’s interesting that penny-pinching is an accepted defense for toxic food habits, when frugality so rarely rules other consumer domains” followed by an insert written by her husband title, “Paying the Price of Low Prices” (115). This set up wasn’t an accident, and because Kingsolver had earlier acknowledged she was talking me, the reader, I had felt very cornered at the point no matter how right she might be. This happened more than once throughout the book. For example, after a stunning few pages of Kingsolver making fresh homemade meals, I started thinking about how unrealistic that practice would be for my lifestyle. Yet again, Kingsolver quickly switched her tone, writing, “Takeout is not the only easy way out. With a basic repertoire of unfussy recipes in your head, the better part of valor is just turning on the burner and giving it a shot” (129). And again, Kingsolver followed this with the very appropriate insert by her eighteen-year-old daughter giving us quick and easy recipes to really squish the “I don’t have time” thoughts running around in my head. It seemed like *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* was written for the people like me who use money and time as a reason (or shall I say excuse) not to buy more or only locally grown food. I chose to read *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* wanting to learn more about the food we eat, how to eat more sustainable, and I wanted to be healthier in my eating habits. Kingsolver, aware of the culture she resides in, must have known her general readers were grabbing McDonalds right before picking up her book; or shopped at their local Wal-Mart or Aldi’s to get the best deal on a frozen pizza. The problem is, Kingsolver had

become so far removed from her audience she ended up offending a lot of us do to her inability to relate to the ones she was talking to. As I mentioned earlier, Kingsolver explicitly explains she chose to write *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* to provide people with the basic knowledge of how foods grow and when to look for them (10). Kingsolver acknowledges that she is writing to people who have no idea how to eat outside of the supermarket and fast-food restaurants, yet instead of leading her advice with understanding, she lead by condemning anyone who uses time and money for an excuse should be ashamed of themselves.

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Recognizing the opinions of the general public and their reaction to *The Mindful Carnivore*, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, and *Animal, Vegetable Miracle* helped dissect how effective these novels are when working as transformation narratives pushing for individual change in their readers. Yet, this is only one type of context the three novels are situated in. Scholarly response is a completely different environment, which is able to give fresh and interesting arguments over on untouched or unanswered concepts within these three books. Diving deeper in the “how to” information, which Pollan, Kingsolver, and Cerulli provide us, Professor Julie Guthman from the University of Santa Cruz fiercely contends the right and wrong matters concerning their answers on the “how to” in her critical essay, “Commentary on teaching food: Why I am fed up with Michael Pollan et al.”. Using *The Omnivore's Dilemma* as her main source to attack due to its wide and expansive reach to readers, Guthman states that one of her overall issues with this book, and others, is the proposed solution of to issues in food politics. Guthman writes that the “entire premise of (*The Omnivore's Dilemma*) is that if one traces a meal

from its biological origins to its ingestion, one will make better decisions as to how to eat” (262). Pollan’s solution for his readers’ lies in the belief that it isn’t really about changing the food industry, but changing the choices of the individual. Guthman strongly rejects this belief, stating “while I grant that I take my personal eating choices seriously, I see them more as ways to opt out, than a road to change. In other words, I don’t harbor the fantasy that individual, yupified, organic, slow food consumption choices are the vehicles to move toward a more just and ecological way of producing and consuming food” (263). Rather, her solution is addressing the structures of inequality through changing policy. This comment really asked me to take a step back and re-asses what I was searching for. I have been seeking out “how to eat” accounts because I believed it was the best way I could make a difference. The power of the individual holds the most tangible way I can control a problem much bigger than myself, and it is in transformation literature that drew me to it. The transformation narrative is guided by a desire to help push the individual on the path to change for the better. Authors can achieve this by focusing on stripping down overwhelming global issues into problems and solutions small enough for the individual to control and help change. Yet, Guthman sees this focus on the individual equal to inaction, disputing that dietary issues as the main focus of food politics, are hurting the power of policy issues, and in reaction the concern for policy is “dampened by a rather anemic plea at the end to ‘have it your way.’ ” (264). Is the desire to eat in full consciousness not a step to bringing to light the issues of policy, giving it a platform to create change? Maybe it is a flaw of the genre “how to eat”, which merges “a naturalistic argument (nature as a model) with a political one (failure of regulation)”, that

is possibly based in a misguided hope it could make a large change in the world of food (Guthman, 263).

Where Guthman's argument finds its foundation is the action of eating locally. Although eating locally can keep me away from industrial farms participating in the inhumane treatment of animals, and is also able to cut down the petroleum used in transportation, at least as of right now local farmers cannot sustain the entire United States population. If we were to all turn to eating locally as Kingsolver and Pollan suggest, people would starve to death. Although this is hypothetical, eating local isn't truly a solution to the problem at hand; it is only a mere Band-Aid trying to mend a wound in need of stitches. In reaction to this, I can see why Guthman supports focusing on policy, which has the ability to make changes that will help the *entire* population.

Since I can remember I have always had trouble trying to define public policy, and I am not alone. The Center of Civic Education explaining, "Getting scholars to agree on a single, all-inclusive definition of public policy is no easy task. Broadly, we might say that public policy is simply what government (any public official who influences or determines public policy, including school officials, city council members, county supervisors, etc.) does or does not do about a problem that comes before them for consideration and possible action" (Public Policy). Public policy is about responding to an issue in need of attention, and keeps focus on the needs of the "public". This is exactly why Guthman argued for policy, as it carries the possibility to create a legitimate transformation in the American food industry and lessen our environmental impact. Yet, as I note the power of public policy, I also need to emphasize the intensity and dedication it takes to become educated on the policies at hand, and how make a change. Learning

about policy isn't an easy feat, nor is it really one that everyone could realistically do. Although Guthman offer policy as the solution, instead of dietary change, I have to challenge her reasoning. Although policy does help effect change, she offered no realistic answer for the mass. Because she chose to argue against Pollan's solution, which deals with addressing options for the individual, Guthman by association should suggest new solutions for the individual in return. There are only a small number of people who chose to get an education in policy, and although I will acknowledge once those people have that education their power to make a difference is a lot stronger than the average Joe – it still doesn't make policy a solution I can realistically take up.

It all goes back to the power of the individual. The only efforts I can honestly and completely have control over are my own. I cannot force the meat industry to care about the suffering of animals, I cannot make multi-million dollar corporations put what is good for the environment before their own pockets, and I cannot change every label on all the egg boxes or cartons of milk to read more honest descriptions on their environment. But, what I *can* do is change my habits. The power of the individual for me holds the most tangible way I can control a problem much bigger than myself. For me it began with reading to educate myself. I chose *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, *The Mindful Carnivore*, or *Animal Vegetable Miracle*, driven by two desires. One was that personally, I knew I wanted to learn what ethically questionable practices in food production and the effect on the environment, so I could better align my own moral practices with how I ate. I didn't want to be a hypocrite, caring for the suffering of animals I see, while pretending I didn't know the meat I ate was treated without any respect for life. So once again, I am back to

where I started, searching for what actions are realistic for me, and what actions will actually make a difference?

Time and time again I have heard the same question asked when a person declared they are vegetarian or vegan in an efforts to fight against industrial farming – “What difference does that actually make”? Researchers J. Poore and T. Nemecek were finally able to offer up an answer to this infamous question in their research article, “Reducing food’s environmental impacts through producers and consumers”, published in 2018 by *Science*. In their article Poore and Nemecek give first hand information on the affects our diet has on the environment, and what concrete choices we can make as the consumer, which are *proven* to produce positive outcomes. Poore and Nemecek begin by illustrating the few ways in which consumers can help to mitigate the issue at hand, disclosing news I was happily surprised to hear, writing that today “dietary change can deliver environmental benefits on a scale not achievable by producers. Moving from current diets to a diet that excludes animal products has transformative potential ... (reducing) food’s GHG emissions by 6.6(5.5 to 7.4) billion metric tons of CO₂eq (a 49%reduction); acidification by 50% (45 to 54%); eutrophication by 49% (37 to 56%); and scarcity-weighted freshwater withdrawals by 19% (-5 to 32%) for a 2010 reference year” (pp. 987-992). In simpler terms, cutting down on meat, and or switching to a mainly vegan diet would make a huge difference in lowering the emissions of green house gasses, which are responsible for global warming. This deceptively small change in diet is able to create such a large drop in emissions, because the United States “per capitameat consumption is three times the global average” (Poore, pp. 987-992). Recognizing that no matter how exciting these numbers may be, for many people halting

their consumption of meat is not a reality, but not all is lost thanks to Poore and Nemecek offering a second, and just as important scenario – avoiding high-impact producers. It is unclear what companies and products are categorized as “high-impact”, which Poore and Nemecek acknowledge, suggesting a need for more communication on the average product impacts. In finishing they speak on the realities of people actually enforcing these changes, stating, “Though dietary change is realistic for any individual, widespread behavioral change will be hard to achieve in the narrow time frame remaining to limit global warming and prevent further, irreversible biodiversity loss. Communicating producer impacts allows access to the second scenario, which multiplies the effects of smaller consumer changes” (pp. 987-992).

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I began this journey hopeful that when I read *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, *The Mindful Carnivore*, or *Animal Vegetable Miracle*, I would finally experience the push that gave me the confidence to change my food habits for the better. I cared about ending the hypocritical and ignorant lifestyle of eating animals that suffered to feed me, while morally I believed I would never consciously allow any animal suffer at my hands. I also cared about taking better care of the environment. I was angry at the food industry’s destructive impact on the O-zone layer and global warming, and American’s disregard for respecting the natural cycle of life, and I wanted to find a way to do better. That was where reading came in for me. I didn’t know how or what action to take in searching for an answer, but I did know I could begin by educating myself. Reading *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, *The Mindful Carnivore*, or *Animal Vegetable Miracle*, and criticism on such was my first step in my action. But, what I wasn’t ready for was the possibility that by

educating myself on what to eat, or what not too wouldn't actually bring me the answers I was expecting. What does it mean if I can't help the animals or the environment at all? That it is just for my own sake and the consistency of my own moral code to choose not to eat meat I know suffered, or buy groceries that travel thousands of miles to get to me. I began this paper completely unaware of what I would find, but I had also began this journey afraid of awareness concerning the subject of morality and food. The supermarket keeps us at a distance for a reason. Right? The way the printed page is only secondary, I will always be kept at a distance. When I step back and think about what Pollan hopes to achieve through sharing his ideas on how to eat in full consciousness, or what drives Cerulli to go hunt, or why Kingsolver chooses to involve her whole family in the experiment of eating locally, or why Guthman believes in the power of policy and not diet changes, I realized their words only find power once we turn the final page. After that, it is my job to finish the cycle and answer the call to individual action - now it is time I make my own story.

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