

Exploring Unseen Violence in the Picture Books of Jeannie Baker

Jeannie Baker'ın Resim Kitaplarında Görülmeyen Şiddetin İzini Sürmek

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Abstract

This article presents an ecocritical reading of two textless picture books, also considered silent books or wordless books and one picture book. In the close reading of *Belonging*, *Window*, and *The Hidden Forest* by Jeannie Baker, an Australian visual artist and filmmaker, the article turns to theories about the act of witnessing to interrogate its relation to the acts of reading and writing. Moving from the literary to the visual, witnessing theories in literature places the human subject in a position of responsibility. In other words, by just seeing, a person acknowledges the loss or exploitation they witness and their role as agents. Regarding the ecological catastrophes and climate crises, witnessing the changes in the environment due to urban sprawl, heavy industrialization, and human-related exploitations spreads over time and space, making it difficult to realize the extent of the loss. Jeannie Baker's books introduce the concept of subjectivity into the discussion, as changes in the environment occur because of human actions, making it necessary to reconsider one's relation to the environment and the subjectivities of the nonhuman as well. In the two textless books, *Belonging* and *Window*, the change the reader witnesses on the double-page spreads happens very slowly and subtly. The human subject who has already lost connection with nature and is unaware of the human impact on the environment encounters their destructive humanity in *The Hidden Forest*. Baker's drawings and collages place the reader in the subject position, making it necessary to think of oneself as the fictional character through the act of witnessing.

Öz

Bu makale sessiz kitap ya da yazısız kitap olarak da tanımlanan iki metinsiz resimli kitap ve bir resimli kitabın ekoeleştirel bir analizini sunmaktadır. Avusturalyalı görsel sanatçı ve film yapımcısı Jeannie Baker'ın *Belonging*, *Window* ve *The Hidden Forest* isimli kitaplarının yakın okumasının yapıldığı makalede tanık olma eyleminin yazma ve okuma pratikleriyle ilişkisini irdelemek için bir zorunluluk olarak tanık olma teorilerinden yararlanılmıştır. Metinden görsele geçilen noktada tanık olma teorileri insan özneyi sorumlu pozisyonuna yerleştirir. Bir başka deyişle, birey sadece görerek tanık olduğu kaybı ya da tahribatı ve bunlardaki eyleyen olarak rolünü kabullenir. Ekolojik felaketler ve iklim krizi bağlamında, hızlı şehirleşme, sanayileşme ve insan kaynaklı çevresel sömürü mekâna ve zamana yayılarak kaybın büyüklüğünü anlamayı zorlaştırır. Doğal çevredeki değişimlerin insan eliyle gerçekleşmesi bireyin çevreyle olan ilişkisini ve diğer varlıkların özneliğini yeniden düşünmeyi gerekli kıldığından, Jeannie Baker'ın kitapları özne kavramını ve özne pozisyonunu tartışmaya açar. *Belonging* ve *Window* kitaplarında resmedilen değişim yavaşça ve fark edilmeden olur. *The Hidden Forest* kitabında ise çevreyle ilişkisini zaten kaybetmiş bireyin kendi yıkıcı doğasıyla yüzleşmesi anlatılır. Baker'ın çizimleri ve kolajları okurun tanık olma eylemi üzerinden kendini kurgusal karakter olarak düşünmesini gerekli kılarak onu özne konumuna yerleştirir.

Keywords

Witnessing, subjectivity, responsibility, textless books

Anahtar Kelimeler

Tanık olma, özne, sorumluluk, sessiz kitaplar

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Introduction

A children's picture book author, film maker and artist, Jeannie Baker is well-known for her collages reflecting her concern about the environment and non-human beings. Nominated for Hans Christian Andersen awards for illustration in 2018, the artist has made numerous speeches about the role of picture books in raising awareness of children about social and environmental issues as well as enriching their imagination and artistic potential. Her picture books provide vivid descriptions of the social setting and traces the visible and implicit changes in the natural environment. The materials she uses for her collage works are all collected from nature like leaves, stones, and flowers, suggesting the idea that the environment is not merely a setting but a direct participant of the narrative process. In the absence of words, non-human beings such as the rocks, landscape, trees and plants acquire the role of the narrator and make the reader a distant observer of the pages. Nevertheless, the reader's encounter with the human characters on the pages complicates the issue of agency since the changes on the landscape and the deterioration of the natural setting are attributed to people making it difficult for the reader to refrain from responsibility. In this respect, the very act of reading, which is intentional by nature, necessarily includes the unintentional act of witnessing and places the human subject at a responsible position. The blurring boundary between reading and witnessing reminds one of the emphasis of ecocritical discourse on the notion of agency as well.

Baker's books raise the question whether humanbeings are owners of the land. They are basically inhabitants of a city, portrayed as city dwellers living in houses with gardens or wandering in the countryside to get to know nature more closely. The choice of an indoor setting with characters looking through the window at their garden or the outside with characters walking and observing their natural surroundings points at the act of observing as an intrinsic component of the narrative. Observing the changes in the natural setting – be it a small personal garden or a place as large as a forest – generates an uneasy feeling as these changes are the direct result of human actions. The characters – as well as the readers – at this point start to question their role as agents of change, degradation, and loss witnessed in the environment. This also points at more complicated issues environmental studies today point at such as “environmental memory”¹ and “environmental ethics”². The concept of witnessing is particularly employed here as it includes not

¹ In “Uses and Abuses of Environmental Memory,” Lawrence Buell discusses the role of environmental memory in understanding human intervention of the environment. Personal, social, and collective scales of memory defines how environmental memory acts in forming spatial memories of the land people occupy.

² Deforestation, loss of land, water pollution, and extinction of animal and plant species are without doubt ethical issues and concern the right to life for all living beings. They are at the same time economic issues since they are the direct results of people's desire to build and sell more houses, establish new factories and build more roads. Environmental ethics emerged as a field of study in the 1970s with academic conferences and publications abounding in the following years. For more information, please look Clare Palmer, Katie McShane, and Ronald Sandler, “Environmental Ethics,” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 39 (2014), 421. 10.1146/annurev-environ-121112-094434

only the act of observing, but also the notions of responsibility and agency. Although both the witness and the observer watch a situation, the witness is different from an observer in that the act of watching brings with it the necessity to remember, thereby the responsibility of knowing. In other words, encountering a dire situation, an instance of injustice or an act of discrimination and the awareness that it exists even when one does not look at it entails taking the responsibility of knowing it exists. As James Baldwin coins the term in “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity”, it is the unavoidable condition of “bearing witness, helplessly, to something in which everybody knows”³. Although Baldwin’s statement refers to witnessing the long-held racial injustice in the West, it emphasizes the problematic relationship between witnessing and knowing. Even though it is currently quite easy to reach information in the age of mass media and digitalization of knowledge, there is also an increasing tendency in people to ignore the very basic realities of their life and remain in their comfort zone. Cultural and artistic productions, in this respect, make people confront with the realities they would not desire to know. Witnessing a traumatic past in Baldwin’s terms or confronting with a loss or deterioration necessarily creates a troublesome sum of knowledge and embarks a sense of guilt. The witness, therefore, acts with a sort of “knowledge of the facts of atrocity”⁴ as well as a kind of self-consciousness that all these atrocities can reoccur, and a lamentation of the past is no longer enough to take its responsibility. The fact that the past impinges on the present and the legacy of past atrocities that persist does not necessarily end up with acknowledging responsibility. The attempts to document violence or loss now create a necessity for new developments in “exhibition, museology, public cultural interventions and the activation of memorial sites” as these sites carry the potential to form a collective memory and a sense of past one can reclaim⁵. Jeannie Baker’s books respond to this necessity by acting as a public exhibition displaying the gradual loss in the natural setting and the changes from the past to the present. Her drawings and illustrations direct the attention of the reader to the physical changes in the surroundings and the factors behind them. In this respect, her visual stories resist perpetuating silent violence towards the natural world. The reader becomes the witness of this silent change, “testifying to what in principle cannot be seen”⁶ through the visual data presented. In this respect, the act of witnessing occurs in a textual setting when the reader confronts with the text and the story presented in it. More than that however, witnessing here goes beyond its conventional understanding and acquires a new and more holistic characteristic, becoming what Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim refers to as “engaged witnessing”⁷. During these times of witnessing, the reader realizes that the characters engage in transformative encounters with the non-human world, changing throughout the narrative. This productive engagement encourages the readers as well to

³ James Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962).

⁴ Erica Lehrer & Cynthia E Milton, “Witnesses to Witnessing,” in *Curating Difficult Knowledge* ed Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton, Monica Eileen Patterson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

⁵ *ibid.*, 3.

⁶ Kelly Oliver, “Subjectivity and Subject Position: The Double Meaning of Witnessing,” *Studies in Practical Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2003), 133.

⁷ Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim, “The Ethics of Witnessing in Pandemic Times: A Tandem Reading of Jose Saramago’s *Blindness* and Orhan Pamuk’s *The White Castle*,” *Journal of World Literature* 7 (2022), 148.

attend the process and scrutinize their role in the creation of environmental injustices. Baker's picture books are, in this respect, congruent with the power of the written word to make the readers conscious of what is going on around them and engaged in an active reading process. Through the use of collages, Baker creates an artistic site where the readers can think of themselves as the characters in the story, question their role as agents of environmental change and seek for ways to reverse course of action. Similar to the act of visiting a museum and feeling responsibility of the past, the reader is confronted with an exhibition on the pages which addresses the issues of environmental responsibility.

Irene Kacandes' essay "Narrative Witnessing as Memory Work" highlights the role of reading in transmitting troubled memory through literature. Mostly writing about trauma narratives, Kacandes identifies layers of witnessing when one encounters a text: "witnessing at the level of the story", "at the level of the text", and "at the level of the production and reception of the text"⁸. Witnessing what happens in the text, the reader also realizes what narrative tools are used. In Baker's books, the common story is a kind of environmental ethos uncovering the replacement of the nature with buildings and that of animals with more and more people. Persistent in all her books, the degradation witnessed is the human impact on the natural setting as green is replaced with grey, the sky gets crowded with planes and the pictures of some species lost leaving their places to more people as the reader turns the pages. Looking out of the window or walking through the forest, the reader witnesses this loss at first hand unable to get distanced from its responsibility. What is witnessed is the destruction of an area to such an extent that it loses its 'natural' characteristics and turns into a more synthetic setting. Witnessing this environmental trauma, however, does not necessarily lead to the persistent pessimism of trauma narratives. As it includes both witnessing with the eye as a passive beholder and witnessing through the common knowledge of responsibility, the subjectivity of the reader with its potential for proactive behavior becomes the main concern. In other words, the reader/witness ceases to be "a solitary and isolated figure" and starts to act in "a collectivity of fluid actors"⁹. As Kelly Oliver also points out, the difference between "eye-witness testimony and bearing witness", which is also the difference between "subject position and subjectivity", "moves us beyond the melancholic choice between either dead historical facts or traumatic repetition of violence"¹⁰. In Baker's books witnessing turns into a productive and reconstructive act as a result of a sense of responsibility. Her textless picture books *Window* and *Belonging* can be read as sequels since the damage done to the environment by human hand in the former is restored through the re-greening efforts in the latter.

⁸ Irene Kacandes, "Narrative Witnessing as Memory Work: Reading Gertrud Kolmar's *A Jewish Mother*," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, Leo Spitzer (Hannover and London: University Press of New England, 1999), 52.

⁹ Deniz Gündođan İbrişim, "The Ethics of Witnessing in Pandemic Times: A Tandem Reading of Jose Saramago's *Blindness* and Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle*," *Journal of World Literature* 7 (2022): 149.

¹⁰ Kelly Oliver, "Subjectivity and Subject Position: The Double Meaning of Witnessing," *Studies in Practical Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2003): 134.



Picture 1: *Belonging*

In these two very famous silent books, this act of witnessing occurs behind a window with the characters aging at the turn of each page. While the *Window* documents the increasing domination of urban sprawl over the countryside, *Belonging* reflects the attempts to reverse the course of action and re-green the city. Both books explicitly demonstrate what Donna Haraway (2008) defined as “nature-culture” to denote the things labelled as either natural or cultural but encircled with one another in such a way that they are inseparable. The reader realizes the entrance of the capitalist consumer culture into the countryside when the billboards are covered with advertisements of Coca Cola and Pizza Hut, take-away coffee shops with disposable glass emerge at every corner and the number of cars passing by the window increase at every page. The newly built apartment blocks are promoted with their close location in the nature, surrounded by trees and looking at a beautiful scenery.

Concerned with the issue of spatiality, the narratives interrogate the relation between the rural and the urban, nature and culture, sustainability and consumerism. *Window* is the story of loss, the story of degradation and degeneration. The process of loss is so slow that it most of the time catches a person unaware. The main character, Sam, is a baby on the first page and his mother is looking out of the window to a scenery full of plants and trees. Parallel with Sam’s growing, the reader observes the changes in the landscape, the decrease in green and the gradual appearance of new

buildings around. Likewise, in *Belonging*, there is a gradual change, but this time it is a change towards better. Year by year the landscape becomes greener and the neighborhood is regenerated. At the beginning, there is almost nothing green but glimpses from the chaotic life of a city with an instance of burglary, smashed cars, and multinational companies spread everywhere. However, on the following pages, the insistent efforts of the dwellers to make the neighborhood green again are seen.

Both books raise questions about ownership, challenging the claim of humans over the land. More importantly, they hold witness to the changes observed in the natural setting, reminding Buell's premise that "literature and other expressive media might act as carriers of environmental memory"¹¹. Considering that changes occur slyly leaving individuals unaware and unable to remember what a particular setting looked like before, the role of literature in documenting this change becomes even more critical. The slow change seen from the window in *Window* and the first pages of *Belonging* directly refers to Rob Nixon's notion of "slow violence"¹² since the change witnessed from the window occurs very slowly, spread over years/pages and almost unnoticed. For Nixon, the reason why this change is so often disregarded is the persistent capitalist drives in many countries. The change of the setting through time given in the double pages of both books reveal human agency in both the environmental deterioration and the revitalization of the neighborhood. On each spread, the reader encounters a new facet of capitalist move with "Deli Cups", "MacDonalds", "firewood for sale", and the supermarket with special offers occupying a building which was once a home. Nixon's emphasis on the unnoticed effect of capitalism on the vulnerable groups such as the poor and disadvantaged ones also resonates on the pages which depict the replacement of the poor residents of a neighborhood with the newcomers now residing in apartment blocks. The house seen from the protagonist's window is understood to be a home to economically disadvantaged people since it is written on a paper hung on the door that there is "no bread" inside. In many pages, a boy is seen looking behind the window of this house, unable to engage with the children playing outside. Towards the end however, the same window looks barred and the house abandoned only to be demolished to open space for a huge supermarket chain on the following page. The silent replacement of the old residents with new ones and trees with more buildings reflects the destructive aspect of the gentrification processes adopted in many neoliberal countries. It also exemplifies the extent and scope of violence "typically not viewed as violence at all"¹³. Documenting not only the environmental trauma generated by capitalist motives but also personal traumas of the former inhabitants forced to move, Baker's narrative "reveals the need to understand human and ecological traumas as inseparable"¹⁴. The disappearance of the house is not realized let alone discussed when the space it once occupied is rapidly filled with a supermarket.

¹¹ Buell, 2017, 96.

¹² Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹³ Nixon *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2.

¹⁴ Summer Harrison, "'We Need New Stories': Trauma, Storytelling, and the Mapping of Environmental Injustice in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* and *Standing Rock*," *American Indian Quarterly* 43, no.1 (2019): 3.

People with shopping bags and trolleys outside show that the new supermarket is easily accepted within the neighborhood together with the silent emergence of new construction sites, enlarged roads and more cars. At the end of the book, the protagonist also empties his house leaving his garden to the salesman to display second-hand cars. Now looking from a new window with a baby in his arms, he – again silently – witnesses the loss in his previous neighborhood. Whether he feels obliged to sell his house or it is an act of escaping is open to discussion, but when read as a sequel, *Belonging* reveals that he regrets and decides to take action.



Picture 2: *Window*

In *Window*, character development is observed when Sam changes from an aggressive child trying to attack two little birds to a grown-up man feeling uneasy with the change in his neighborhood. The book opens when Sam is a baby in her mother’s arms. As he grows, he is seen to be playing in the garden or with his cat by the window. However, when he reaches the age of a school child, he is observed to gradually lose his child innocence and acting with a self-centered attitude to show his superiority to other living beings. The tendency in humanbeings to violence is evident when Sam, who used to caress the animals on his lap and spend most of his time in the garden, makes a slingshot to target the birds on the roof. As the garden shrinks leaving limited space for him to play and keeping him mostly indoors, he gets more offensive, once again revealing the intertwined nature of environmental and personal loss. The unnoticed change in the neighborhood directly affects the human nature, easily creating hierarchy between the human and non-human as well as a “compulsion to conquer, harmonize, domesticate, violate and exploit every

natural thing”¹⁵. This anthropocentric view of life inevitably and slowly brings with it alienation from the world. One other unnoticed result of the extending distance between human and non-human is self-alienation, a topic Baker handles in her picture book *The Hidden Forest*.



Picture 3: *The Hidden Forest*

In addition to the story of loss and reconstruction in *Window* and *Belonging*, Baker’s award-winning book presents a story of self-awareness, recognition and understanding. Published in 2000, *The Hidden Forest* revolves around the encounter of a human being with the undersea, his self-contemplation about the way he sees the sea and reconsideration of his relation to the non-human. In other words, the book suggests new subjectivities by decentering human agency. Going beyond the “material” concerns of environmental narrative – talking mostly about “trees, species, fish, soil, human existence, diversity”¹⁶ – *The Hidden Forest* reminds the reader that nature and human nature are intertwined and not that different from each other. It opens with the protagonist, Ben, fishing by the seashore full of seaweeds. Frustrated with his catch of only tiddlers, he empties the bucket on the ground and “let them die”. He knows that they are all there but do not come near his fish trap. In his next try, he finds his trap unable to move as it has caught something heavy. When he loses his balance standing, he falls into the sea facing the underwater with his terrified open eyes. At this point, the story narrates Ben’s encounter with the sea, a realm he thinks he is

¹⁵ Sandip Kumar Mishra, “Ecocriticism: A Study of Environmental Issues in Literature,” *BRICS Journal of Educational Research* 6, no. 4 (2016): 169.

¹⁶ Lesley Instone. “Situating Nature: On Doing Cultural Geographies of Australian Nature,” *Australian Geographer* 35, no. 2 (2004): 132.

familiar with. However, when he realizes a dark figure beneath him, the sea makes him uneasy with its unknown aspects. The focus of the narrative on spatiality denotes the sea as an uncanny space of “volatile unpredictability between inside and outside”, Ben’s mind and what he experiences with his physical body¹⁷. Initially disregarding the underwater and not understanding what it includes in it, he considers the sea as no more than water, sand and rocks. What he encounters, on the other hand, is a huge kelp forest looking different from seaweed. Baker has revealed in many of her interviews that the particular kind of kelp found in her book is known as “Giant Kelp” and found in the coasts of North and South America, South Africa and New Zealand¹⁸. Likening it to a large rainforest, she also underlines its “multilayered and magical” characteristics. Reminding one of the use of forest in fairy tales as magical as well as uncanny settings home to infinite possibilities, the forest motif in the book reestablishes the human-non-human material connections through the use of the sea as the uncanny. The kelp forest located under the sea welcomes Ben and his friend Sophie with its diverse life forms and colorful variety. Going beyond the romantic notion of the term as a place of solitude and peace, the kelp forest reveals itself as a space for humans to encounter themselves.

The book uncovers the hidden beauty behind what is seen. It also investigates the way humanbeings see the world. To his surprise, Ben does not end up caught in the slimy kelp, nor does he become prey to animals. When he understands that the dark figure is a huge whale, he also realizes that the animal does not attack him although he is a human intruder to its habitat. This encounter scene is the only page in the book that does not have a text. The reader rather finds a visual text to interpret. The whale looks directly in Ben’s eye, not harming him, it just passes by. In the absence of words, it becomes possible for the reader to think of themselves as fictional characters. At the beginning of the book, Ben’s letting the tiddlers die in the sand reflects his utter indifference to the natural world. It is only when he gets to know the underwater closely that he starts to respect it and character development occurs. In this narrative, Ben’s acquiring new knowledge about the sea through his observations brings understanding and acceptance. Once again, the strict boundary between nature and culture is erased and Ben, as a representative of the consumer capitalist culture, finds himself encircled with nature under the water. Baker’s emphasis on the change in Ben’s perceptions of the natural world can also be read as a reminder of the role of stories in reshaping existent realities. Ben’s unexpected encounter with the undersea is narrated as the story of human encounter with an unrealized face of the natural world. The feeling of uneasiness Ben has at the beginning is due to his ignorance of the more-than-human world rather than its potential for danger. The attempts to explain the nature of the relationship of humanbeings to the environment underline the existent perceptions and long-held beliefs of individuals that show nature as an unknown realm full of threats and dangers. This is also a justification for their insistent attitudes to ‘tame’ and control the nature. As Harrison also underlines, “our present crisis relationship to the environment is, in part, the result of a story that we’ve told ourselves and that

¹⁷ Lesley Instone, “Situating Nature: On Doing Cultural Geographies of Australian Nature,” *Australian Geographer* 35, no. 2 (2004): 131.

¹⁸ Jennie Baker, *Exploring a Hidden Forest*. 2016. www.janniebaker.com

we can therefore change”¹⁹. Baker’s stories, in this respect, scrutinizes our perceptions of the natural world, how we condition ourselves towards it and what is needed to create a new story of human-non-human interaction. This is also an artistic reaction to the existent but unseen violence that guide most of our actions and how we treat the environment.

Conclusion

Within the postmodern ecocritical arguments, it is now possible to view human’s anthropocentric attitude of dominating or controlling nature as an act of violence. As the change of the environment occurs only very slowly and most of the time unnoticed, this violence can also be categorized as slow violence. Although there is not a direct reference to the victimization of the poor in Baker’s books except in *Window*, the emphasis on the pace of environmental degradation and the replacement of former residents with wealthier inhabitants exemplify the material concerns of the story. The ecocritical perspective envisaged in the three books analyzed is made strikingly evident through the use of collages and in the absence of words. In Nixon’s terms once again, Baker’s “narrative imaginings” that powerfully document the gradual change in the environment “witness sights unseen”²⁰. The character development of Sam in *Window* and Ben in *The Hidden Forest* necessitates an active reading act from the reader, making it important to question one’s attitude towards nature and reconsider relations with non-human. More importantly, Baker’s artistic productions prevent the silent complicity of masses and the acceptance of this violence as something natural, which also makes it possible to resist environmental injustice. Although Nixon’s term offers a ground for geographical research and Baker’s books are mainly products of her observations of the wildlife in Australia, the discussions they foster are beyond geographical borders and concern common and universal issues. They raise a number of questions framed by recent ecocritical perspectives making the readers take the responsibility of their daily actions.

By pointing at the interwoven issues of subjectivity and violence or agency and environmental change, the narratives highlight the subjective registers of environmental degradation and open up new questions. The emphasis on agency and violence necessarily points at the injustices done to the environment by human hand. The appearance of more and more apartment buildings and stores in the surrounding is the direct result of human greed for more money and material possessions. The prevalence of global brands on the walls seen from the window is a constant reminder of fast and hectic pace of life, leaving nearly no room for the inhabitants to contemplate their once healthy relationship with nature. In this respect, environmental justice is seen to operate on both sides, affecting both the vulnerable side, natural life, and the agent of injustice, individuals. Considering that Baker’s books vividly document the harms done on nature by human hand, visual and textual narratives are accepted to transmit

¹⁹ Harrison, 2019, 4.

²⁰ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 15.

memory. In this respect, documenting the environmental injustices witnessed in a specific area actually goes hand in hand with the operations of environmental memory. The lived experiences of the characters in the books in “finite life spans”²¹ hold them responsible for what they witness as harms done by themselves or others to the natural environment they occupy.

Jeannie Baker’s artistic creations in the three books discussed above are alternative narratives in that they on the one hand document the present reality without ignoring its link with the past and, on the other hand, rewrite this present reality by inviting the reader into a self-reflexive act of evaluation. The existent violence is witnessed through the protagonists – as well as the reader’s – observations of the change in the physical setting. This change occurs as a result of long-held assumptions that humanbeings must dominate the nature to protect themselves. It is necessary to rewrite new stories of nature to question the validity of these assumptions and reaffirm the non-human world as a living entity not different from people. Baker’s use of collages instead of words can be read as an attempt to create alternative stories to the conventional ones, to “reintegrate the individual into a more-than-human living world”²² and to enable people to “belong” to the neighborhoods they inhabit. They also show the need for alternative narratives that will help to reestablish people’s impaired or lost attachment to nature.

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²¹ Lawrence Buell, 2017, 96.

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