Deborah A. Miranda. *Altar for Broken Things: Poems.* BkMk Press, 2020. 110 pp.
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We're looking for a river. We're looking
for an incredulous current, sand soft as a kiss,
a hover of trout circling the kettle.
"Looking for a River"

Alter for Broken Things is a lyrical pilgrimage for devotion and integrity in which the land itself is the site of worship. Miranda's poetry takes an encompassing view of the ways that perception and intent intersect with faith. An altar, the reader is reminded, takes its name from elevation. As these poems guide the reader, it is made clear that altars abound. The currents of these poems move in the territory of the sublime, but the abiding faith and beauty of the speaker's telling is an unimpeachable guide.

In "Questions About Lightning," the speaker ponders: "what if / this land and her body / bear the same jagged scripture?" (36). The connection between land and self underpins the deep empathy of these poems. Alter, one comes to understand in this collection, is both noun and verb. High places of faith and dignity abound as do the vicissitudes of violent alteration and the necessity of rumination.

Keen attention is paid to the way experience imposes itself on the skin of the land and its people. Scars call out from the lines, but the use of the imagery of scarring vaults over the expected metaphors of trauma and healing and become something much more compelling—small alters on the skin itself. Impositions of violence, colonialism, and the traumas of a life lived show up on the skin in these poems and allow each being's lived experience to become a place of worship and an invitation to beatitude. Places of faith with all their complications, harms, and comforts show themselves in astonishing ways in these poems. In "Scar," the perspective moves from creature to creature:

> A Red fox tucks himself
> Into a cedar hollow,
> Watches me flash past.
>
> Bullets of yearning,
> Red-tailed hawks scout
> From the tops of pines,

Feathers groomed
To a sharp crease. (26)

Healing becomes an iteration of cleansing and thus an office of faith. Like the body healing around trauma, these poems envelop to contain and protect.

Disunity and wholeness turn and turn in this collection. The titular broken things are given due honor as the poems show that the oak within the acorn requires rupture. Repeated images of cradling and embracing—earth, water, cocoons, acorns—show the way the world makes space for a cycle of creation and rupture. In "Corazon Espinado," the spare lines hint at the toll: "Here, God / is a seed / sewn by chance. / Here, rock is womb" (35).

Birth and generational joy seem to flourish in these tender envelopments. The moments of delicacy and protection carry deeper power for their juxtaposition within the ruptures of colonialism and interpersonal violence. In "Ursa Major," on the star-cast prairie, the tone is one of tender imploring to the land for the safe delivery of a grandchild.

The delights of wonder and love come with unexpected guides. In "My Crow," the speaker frankly states, "I know I'll travel to heaven in the guts of a crow—" (24). Land is the steady grounding, but it is every bit as wily and powerful as the humans walking its skin. It is in these moments of delightful current and unexpected juxtaposition that the reader can feel Miranda's deep well of perspective and poetic skill.

This collection examines language and colonization with ranging interrogations of history. There is a sureness that makes it feel as if the poet is speaking late into the night with the past and the present, ready to tell the future about it come morning. This authorial voice is one of clarity and empathy—it allows the reader to move through the rapids of the poems reckoning with the legacies of imperialist violence with a sense of clear-eyed imperative. In "26 Ways to Reinvent the Alphabet," language is a snare: "Alphabet, you came for me / with a colonizer's awful generosity" (81). The violence of a past is rendered academic to the colonizing mind in "When My Body Is The Archive":

When my body is the archive,
Strangers track ink all over
My grandmothers' language,
Blot out the footprints of a million
Souls from the edge of the continent;

Stolen land stays stolen
Even when thieves pluck
Our Ancestors' names
From mission records,
Sell *Tutuan* and *Malaxet*
Online to those who want
All the blessings,
None of the genocide. (99)

Journeying and transfiguration lend a beatific and epic tone to these poems. The power of the divine rests in alters inside of oysters. In "God's House," the arresting imagery of the alter in a sand dollar pierces the eye:

Imagine the inside of a sand dollar:
arches rising to a peaked roof, light
streaming in through tiny holes /

Turtle Woman looks for that cathedral
Everywhere. (57)

The figure of Turtle Woman is a point worth noticing. In "All One," the iterations of Turtle Woman show what it is to love a wounding and wounded world. The cascade of images creates a gentle fortitude. Endurance and devotion are palpable in the poems. The long dedication to loving a difficult thing is thoughtfully rendered in "When You Forget Me":

The past is a poor broken basket,
Woven by hands that had no muscle, no song.
When you forget me, every word we spoke together
Just before or after slow first light, lips still wet,
—*doe, heron, stone, prayer*—erases itself
from every language, as if never spoken. Extinct. (63)

Because the book's tone of intense desire to recognize beauty and connection is so honestly earned, moments of violent disruption are all the more profound. Violent ruptures of destruction and weaponry, American shootings and mass murders fueled by hatred appear with the stunning frank pain that they do in life. One moves from a poem of the land's delicate web of comforts to a recounting of a hate-fueled shooting in the

manuscript much as a person lives the experience. In "Almost Midnight," the reader is confronted with these juxtapositions:

> We're all walking on bones
>
> Some of us are walking on more bones
> than others. Breathe. Back to the body
>
> Little one. The human word is broken,
> but so beautifully. (78)

The poems in this collection create a riparian mosaic meandering through the land of faith, love, degradation, and healing. Fragmentation is a form of breaking, but it also facilitates perspective. It takes a worthy guide to facilitate the movement from shock to engagement. Miranda manages to balance urgent and searing images with gentle imperatives, allowing the reader to hold what is dear, even when it is ruptured. As Miranda writes in "How to Love the Burning World": "You aren't required to love the flames. / But love the burning world. / You owe her that."

Laura Da'