*Red Channel in the Rupture*, by Amber Flora Thomas reviewed by Hannah Cokash

Red Hen Press, 2018

*Red Channel in the Rupture* is a delightful collection of poems from Amber Flora Thomas. Thomas has received several poetry awards, including the Dylan Thomas American Poet Prize, the Ann Stanford Prize, and the Richard Peterson Prize. Currently, she is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at East Carolina University. Written in 2018 and published by Red Hen Press, her book focuses on the embrace of change in life through loss or death. Time, is examined through sections of a camera: stills, apertures, and reels. Every poem is a call from Thomas’s past, due to damage of relationships in her direct environment and home. She merges the past into the present through powerful imagery and depth and uses her pain to create such moving poetry. A memory is like a photo, a moment captured, almost frozen in time.

In *Red Channel in the Rupture*, key elements that struck me were Thomas’s usage of sound (repetition, unity through alliteration), a slow-paced rhythm that makes you stop and read each line carefully, strong sensory details that invoke tactile, kinesthetic, visual, olfactory, and emotional\symbolic imagery, vivid diction.

One of Thomas’s strengths is imagery, it serves as part of her poetic, vibrant style of writing. In the poem, “Down in the River”, she writes, “Here was the sound: hushed cords twisting muscle and flex while they held themselves against the shore of my being there.” This works because its a great example of her expressing a crystal clear image by being vivid, and using the appeal of the auditory senses. In another poem, “Atlantic”, Thomas comments, “My dog chases a sandpiper toward the surf, chasing, chasing until the bird flies off, both of them snagged by a wave’s foamy edge.” Here, Thomas’s imagery paints a pleasing, relaxed day spent at the beach with her dog. It leaves the readers feeling soothed by what is visualized. In one of my favorite poems, “Take Only Pictures”, we see, “Sunflowers dip their blazing heads over the trail, and every single one of them gazes into me.” As you can see, this is another great effective because Thomas gives the readers rich tactile, visual imagery while also pertaining to something genuine and personal in the pieces, humanizing the flowers. Throughout the collection, Thomas has this sway over imagery that appeals to the senses of auditory (hearing), tactile (feeling), and kinesthetics (languid). It was this strength of her’s that became one of my favorite parts of her poems to read. Vivid diction is another element that shows itself to be useful. This time, only focusing on one of the poems, “Damaged Photos” pertains to the power that the past, and present in pictures can have over people. Thoughtful, uniquely chosen words that struck me were, “scattered”, “facelessness”, “forgotten” and “blur” . Pictures from the past can make someone feel forgotten, feel scattered-- this puts complexity on the tonal depth of the piece as well as give the readers a deeper visual, “whiteness”, “red kimono’s thirty-seven cranes”, “headless”, “breath swollen”, “over-exposed”, and “dulling”. What I admire about Thomas’s usage of diction here, is it creates this melancholy, yet delicate atmosphere that allows the readers to understand and sympathize with what she is trying to convey through passionate, significant feelings.

Additionally, the impactful usage of depth in her poems was interesting. She talks about past experiences in her life, some negative, while others were positive as well as the coming and going of time. The importance of the past, while also letting go into the present and future. For instance in this poem “A Wild Thing”, Thomas writes, “Here, saying, open that ragged gut of fluff, be gone in wild places, be grateful anyway if this is the worst thing that happens on your street today.” Poignantly speaking, understanding depth in pieces like this almost seem therapeutic for the reader and for the poet. Additionally, in this poem “Pollen”, Thomas expresses that, “I’ve scattered in every direction so you cannot breathe me in. I will not be breathed in by you.” See, this quote is smart because it communicates feelings and thoughts effectively. Thomas isn’t afraid to self-express in her poetry, through the usage of depth it becomes an outlet for venting, learning, and growing. Another poem that expresses emotion really well is “Headwind”, “You didn’t know I was the lookout. Get accustomed to the sad girl picking you out of the sea, the knot caught in her throat, and the unraveling of her speech: an endless rope thrown out of me.”. It allowed me to see into the soul of Thomas, understanding what was weighing on her mind and in her heart because she seems to self-express a lot. “The numb ladder through my knees shook, and I tried not to be a child for the last time. The gulls soared. Heavy ropes knotted around anchors strained. I choked like a girl finished crying, mascara and eyeshadow running from her gaze. I told her: You are flesh, now bow. Uncross your legs.” (“Moment in Which the Self Moves Under Song”). Depth, Thomas’s best element, shines on a light on expressing those ugly feelings and memories we hide away and turning it into something lovely, and meaningful.

*Red Channel in the Rupture*, has a significant message to it that can teach many lessons. Embrace change. Move on. Find beauty in the ugliness of your mistakes. Letting go of our shame, fear, and guilt that we carry with us. Remember the memories of the past but don’t be frightened to make new ones. Images and experiences in this poetry collection bleed together as we confront loss and death with Thomas together. She has an underrated way in immersing the readers into her work, by connecting us to loss. A common feeling felt by many people. But through those key elements of vivid diction, sensory details, and depth Thomas wishes us to embrace and accept her feelings of time and of the past and grow with her. *Red Channel in the Rupture* is recommended for those who seek out acceptance from the past.