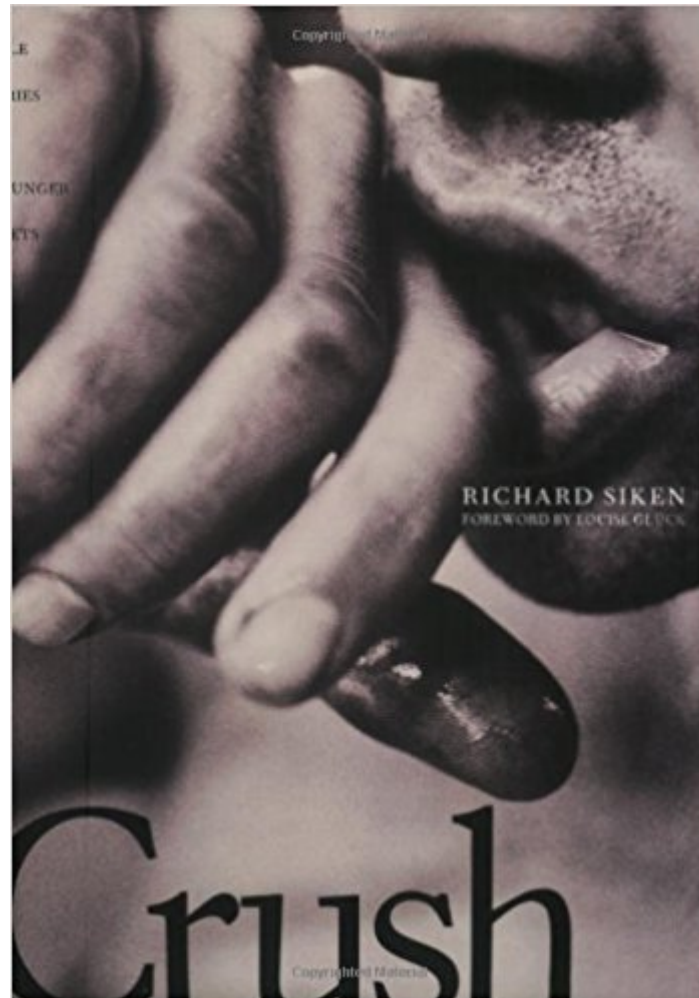


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Crush (Yale Series Of Younger Poets)



Synopsis

Richard Siken's *Crush*, selected as the 2004 winner of the Yale Younger Poets prize, is a powerful collection of poems driven by obsession and love. Siken writes with ferocity, and his reader hurtles unstoppably with him. His poetry is confessional, gay, savage, and charged with violent eroticism. In the world of American poetry, Siken's voice is striking. In her introduction to the book, competition judge Louise Glück hails the "cumulative, driving, apocalyptic power, [and] purgatorial recklessness" of Siken's poems. She notes, "Books of this kind dream big. . . . They restore to poetry that sense of crucial moment and crucial utterance which may indeed be the great genius of the form."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Richard Siken, *Crush* (Yale, 2005) When I compile my list of the ten best reads of the year, I have no doubt whatsoever that Richard Siken's first book, *Crush*, will be on that list, possibly at the top. I could stare at the cover for hours-- a close-up of a mouth, and a hand, thumb wet with blood, or perhaps motor oil. It fits perfectly with the contents of the book, which are clingy, suffocating, obsessive, and uniformly brilliant. Louise Glück writes in her introduction that "[f]or a book like this to work, it cannot deviate from obsession (lest its urgency, in being occasional, seem unconvincing)...". She is, of course, correct; how obsessive can you be if you are not constantly turning your obsession over in your mind or your hands? And Siken provides a picture of obsession that is hauntingly pure. "...Your name like a song I sing to myself, your name like a box where I keep my

love, your name like a nest in the tree of love, your name like a boat in the sea of love-- O now we're in the sea of love! Your name like detergent in the washing machine. Your name like two Xs like punched-in eyes, like a drunk cartoon passed out in the gutter, your name with two Xs to mark the spots, to hold the place, to keep the treasure from becoming ever lost. I'm saying your name in the grocery store, I'm saying your name on the bridge at dawn. Your name like an animal covered with frost, your name like a music that's been transposed..." ("Saying Your Names") There is something not right about this, and it's obvious from even a cursory read. In the hands of many (perhaps most) other poets, a passage like this would come off sappy-sweet.

Richard Siken's *Crush* is urgent, its voice an aggressive invasion. From the first sentence of his first poem, the reader engages death, love, and longing. "Tell me about the dream where we pull the bodies out of the lake / and dress them in warm clothes again" (3). There are no subtleties here, only language that literally forces the reader to engage the writing and the beauty of the rhythm on the page. It is in this language and rhythm that Siken develops a very tight and eloquent structure. Siken's voice is consistent throughout the collection - at times raw, uninhibited, escaping the clothed bitter aftertaste of conventional language and in other parts soft, rhythmic, alliterative, and safe. "The Dislocated Room" is crafted in just such a manner. It begins on a beautiful evening where it would seem all is at peace: It was night for many miles and then the real stars in the purple sky, like little boats rowed out too far, begin to disappear. And there, in the distance, not the promised land, but a Holiday Inn. (46) But the dislocation begins. The reader quickly peels back the layers of the poem and finds something sinister and raw in a Holiday Inn somewhere, anywhere in America. This is the in-between, the waiting that happens in the space between one note and the next, the part where you confuse his hand with the room, the dog with the man, the blood with the ripped up sky. He puts his hands all over you to keep you in the room. (47) The sky is no longer purple with stars "like little boats rowed out too far" but violated, filthy, stained.

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