“DESIRE, LIKE A MONSTER”

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Subjectivity in *Crush* (2005) by Richard Siken

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1 INTRODUCTION

The practice of psychoanalytic literary criticism dates back as far as psychoanalysis itself. One might even say that the roots of psychoanalysis are tied together with reading literature, given that one of the biggest cornerstones of the practice, the Oedipus complex, is based on the play by Sophocles derived from the myth of Oedipus, dating back around 500 BC. Even after over a hundred years, psychoanalysis influences the production of art as well as the interpretation of art. In the following dive into the world of lyrical art, I am participating in the tradition of reading poetry in terms of psychoanalysis.

1.1 The starting point

I am focusing on the poetry collection *Crush* (2005) by Richard Siken. It was always my first choice to study more profoundly, and only secondarily did the framework of psychoanalytic literary criticism get chosen as the tool for lyrical exploration. *Crush* is a collection of poems dealing with sexual desire, aggression, panic, self-destruction, abuse and confused subjectivity. What I primarily took in from the poems, back in perhaps 2011, was a character that heavily struggled with his sexuality. Later on, when I studied the poems more carefully while completing my bachelor's thesis on literary studies, I noticed the much wider context that fuels the character's individual struggle. He battles with both internal and external homophobia, which shapes the experience bound in the poetic narrative. During that research, I took note of how the loss of a lover particularly impacts this character, the main subject, and that point lead me, through readings on melancholia, to psychoanalysis. Of course, I previously had heard and learned the basics of psychoanalysis, so this detour through melancholia lit a little inkling in me that Siken's collection should be studied with psychoanalysis in the other hand.

The collection is a part of very nuanced history of homosexual literature. The overall presence of homosexual desire and the continuous struggle with it places the collection on a shelf that is mainly occupied by other narrations of tragic queer ends. It has been said that the straight world of art is obsessed with killing its queer characters; it is occupation that is generated from the affective aspects of tragedy (Woods 1998, 370). (Strangely enough, this type of approach is already psychoanalytic in nature; the identification happens only after the loss of the object.) Shaped by the AIDS epidemic of the late 20th century, the queer community is very well familiar with the reality of the societal neglect and hatred that leads to death. On the grapevine, one might say, there has been an overgrowing resentment

towards straight writers that bring an untimely death to queer lives in their narrations, because the tragic stories never seem to serve any other purpose than to only humanize queer experiences in their demise.[1] Simultaneously, I dare suggest that what nevertheless attracts the queer communities in the world of storytelling, is the accurate representations of queer plights. The demand goes hand in hand with the strive for justice and equality in the social realm. The pain needs to be known, but it needs to be told by someone who knows what they are talking about. More than that, something needs to be achieved through the pain. In other words, the stories need to come from the communities themselves as a part of the struggle to separate with death. I would argue that narratives originating from the communities themselves are also the only welcome route for telling the very familiar tale of queer death – the matter is in who is telling it.

The above tension is also a factor in my interest in *Crush*. It is by a homosexual male writer about male homosexuality. As such, its target audience is queer, though quite clearly consuming literature is in a sense without limits. I do not think all of the subtleties will open up the same way to a straight reader, or a female reader, and yet whatever they are be able to get out of the collection is quite sufficient for that particular audience. Nor am I suggesting that all homosexual experience is the same, but it is a major factor in both producing and consuming art. The experiences in the work propose questions about violence, sexual desire and masculinity through a male subject, which suggests the relative limits of deep relatability.

But to return to the topic of death, Siken writes about death; namely the uncomfortable denialism that it warrants. Because of his personal background – and the specifics of the collection – Siken succeeds in producing a narrative in which queer death is not used as a tool for getting a straight audience to mourn and accept a queer character only in death. Siken's subject ends up surviving after all. He tells an honest story of a subject in deep conflict with himself, dealing with loss and eventually choosing to surpass those agonies.

I find it important to participate in this project of detailing an alternative story of queer tragedy. It is not (yet) a very popular or very deeply detailed history of literature, but enough so that I dare suggest it a project at its infantile stage. It shares ties with a wider reparative

[1] There is most likely no real record of this, but the existence and popularity of sites like doesthedogdie.com is somewhat telling. It started as detailing from media productions whether a dog gets killed in film but has later on added a feature detailing whether a person from the queer community dies (amongst other viable categories). Similar sentiments of boredom are also very visible when the queer character does not get a happy ending, even if the character avoid death.

regard over storytelling in other forms of media. On film, the demand for a variety of queer narratives can be seen more clearly. The American organization, GLAAD has for example detailed some of the tragic queer narratives in American media the past few decades, concluding that LGBT+ characters end up dying more often than not. In addition, they keep track on how many queer characters are series regulars on primetime scripted broadcasts.[2] With this trend in mind, I want to further establish reading tragic queer literature as a valid route to examine the intricacies of death, because from narrations such as Siken's, a window opens to see the trauma carried by queer community deep within identity. It is not unlike a collective trauma; symptoms manifest generation after generation whether or not the individuals themselves were there when they were dropping bodies at the steps of the F.D.A.[3] or when the riots at Stonewall occurred. What is being carried in those symptoms is the fear of being the queer that finds an unjust end. Siken's poetry definitely has had an impact in moving such a queer to the point that his poetry has garnered quite the online following, all the time pulling in new readers.

Along the analysis, I find myself also participating in the study of masculinity and the pressures concerning masculine identities. Siken's subject is masculine and struggling to place that masculinity in a social context. This path is parallel to the primary focus of my study, which is occupied with understanding the construction of the subject in the collection. Reading poetry psychoanalytically means focusing particularly on the psyche of the subject; that psyche builds itself on the reflections of other men.

My own relationship with Richard Siken's work is deeply personal and thus my analysis will have some clear investments. These investments exist in multiplicities, but the most noteworthy, I should think, is the project of highlighting and creating value in production of queer art, which can and should be looked at with the more historical and complicated – even problematic – tools. In addition, I truly want to put my few cents in the discussion concerning the tradition to "bury your gays"[4], which is the practice of writing queer narratives in fiction (by straight writers, usually, in contemporary context) only to end them in the death of said

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[2] The latest look can be found on GLAAD's website, https://www.glaad.org/whereweareontv19.

[3] The abbreviation stands for the US Food and Drug Administration, which infamously poorly reacted to the epidemic. This metaphoric statement, of course, is a reference to the famous photo of David Wojnarowicz, who died of AIDS-related complications in 1992. In the photo taken during a protest, he is wearing a jacket in which the following is written: "If I die of AIDS – forget burial – just drop my body on the steps of the F.D.A."

[4] A more general introduction and some further examples for popular culture can be found on a wiki page for tv tropes. The trope is evidently widespread across media. (See TVTropes, "Bury Your Gays", n.d..)

characters. The function of the trope has historically been a way for queer writers to write about their experiences but has since turned into a way of promoting the queer demise. Four different usages have been identified for the trope: refuge, catharsis, exploitation and spectacle. The historic usage would fall under using the trope as refuge, whereas spectacle and exploitation are the more negative usages. (Hulan 2017, 17–18.) Siken's poetry is tragic and involves self-destruction, even death, but it happens through different motivations other than what, for example, Gregory Woods has professed as "we only move them when we talk about death" (1998, 370). Even if Siken's poetry is invested in death, I choose – and so does Siken himself – to find redemption at the end.

One should expect a journey through trauma, coping and confusion in the research below. Psychoanalysis proves quite fruitful in understanding the inhibitions placed on sexual desire in an attempt to keep the main subject restricted. Therefore, the main question is what can a psychoanalytic reading of *Crush* tell about the relationship between conflicted sexual desire and subjectivity? How does repression affect desire, and where can this process be seen in the poems? How does dreaming affect the expression of desire? With these questions in mind, I am going to detail the process of a psyche trying to locate himself in a social context.

1.2 The author and his work

Richard Siken (1967–) walks on a field of poetry in the footsteps of more (perhaps fabricatedly so) ambiguous homoerotic writers, but the nuances that have translated through time are similar between him and his predecessors. These recurring elements are telling of the need to express the intricate affinities no matter how disapproving the contemporary social realm for such publication is. Walt Whitman (1819–1892), for example, can be said to have paved the way for the likes of Siken. Whitman is presumed to have been gay, and his sexuality was for a long time something the American public needed to contain, so as to not spread a detrimental message to the American people about a publicly renowned writer: "The fantasy seems to be, at least in part, that if we can control Whitman's sexuality we can somehow control the sexuality of the nation." Whitman has been described as "a breaker of bounds" firstly for poetry but as well as in terms of gender, class and globalism. (Erkkila 1996, 6–7.) Whereas Whitman's ambiguity left plenty room for the 'traditionalist' audience to deny his homoerotic investments, Siken's poetry leaves very little room to imagine it anything other than explicitly homoerotic.

A very telling feature of Siken is the fact that he does not believe poetry can support an individual financially. He fears poetry's commodification, because that would mean an essential loss in the very nature of poetry. (Casey 2005.) I think this is a significant factor in the production of his kind of poetry, which is both deeply personal and self-incriminating as well as fictious, referring to the narrative quality of the collection. The subject in *Crush*, narration- and event-wise, leaves a lot to be desired in terms of wholesomeness and redemption, even if the end is somewhat happy. *Crush* is a sad collection of poems, some of which Siken had already been writing in 1990s, and it is partly produced to help him cope with the death of his boyfriend in 1991. (Casey 2005.) It is fair to ask the question, how much of a confessional the collection is precisely because of its background. Confessional poetry is not depended on its form as much as on its personal content; the speaker is closely tied to a real-life person whose experience is put into the poem (Middlebrook 1993, 635–363). Siken's own experiences are affective in the collection.

Siken has described the collection as having three sections, each dealing with the speaker's relationship with death: "In the first, he views death romantically and with longing; in the second, he understands it as a reality; in the third, the speaker "has been shot," says Siken, "and is possibly dying against his will."" (Casey 2005.) Death exists in the poems both in abstract and in concrete. Even without the understanding provided by Siken himself, many would find these sentiments on their own while giving the collection a read.

Siken himself has said the following after hearing an interviewer's description of his poetry:

> "If you think the world is a golden place made out of love, then the book is 'grim,'" he countered when I used the adjective to describe the despair and murderous images that appear in his poetry. "If you think that life is brutal and short, then the book is uplifting. I don't know if it's grim. I think it's true." (Casey 2006.)

I bring this up because it reflects how the reader influences the very nature of the poems. I have no qualms with Siken; I think the description is quite fitting. It perfectly reflects the difficulty dealing with my own position reading Siken.[5] The personal experiences of the

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[5] To give an example of my own background being affective in my reading of Siken, I want to quote a short review by Danielle Chapman (2005) of "Driving, Not Washing" from *Crush*:

> Ultimately, though, it's not compassion that gets us to go along with *Crush*; it's hard to sympathize with someone so consumed in his own drama. We listen to Siken just as we might watch a salacious Hollywood movie, knowing that when it's all over we'll be left with nothing but inchoate intensity and fear, but temporarily too titillated to care.

I do not agree with Chapman in her review. Notably, I take issue with the lack of compassion she says the reader ("us") is left with after sticking along with Siken. From my position – that is for sure different from Chapman especially in terms of sexuality – what follows that intensity, fear and titillation is hope.

researcher affect the interpretation. In psychoanalysis, this question persists, but often through the terms of analyst and analysand. The transference that happens in both of these instances is a significant factor in creating an understanding of the value found in the work. In an interview about the reception of *Crush* and his newer projects, Siken told the following:

> After *Crush* was published, I started receiving some fan mail. One said, "We used one of your poems at our wedding." Another said, "As a straight man and a father, I am going to have my sons read your book when it's time. Gay or straight, they need to hear your perspective on masculinity." And then there was the email: "My girlfriend hanged herself last night. She left a poem of yours as her suicide note." I decided to stop talking for a while. (Rooney 2015.)

The above quote is crucial in explaining the many faces *Crush* has already revealed. I would like to think that both my earlier reading as well as the following analysis work to reaffirm all that comes up in the quote in terms of thematical reading. What Siken has described of the reception also explains why *Crush* is important to analyze more closely in literary tradition. To have so many different stories involving one's work is remarkable.

Crush is a collection with an aim for survival through struggle. The collection has a narrative quality to it, which links all the poems in a web of confused causality and irregular chronology. The cohesive nature of *Crush* is plainly seen as intratextuality within the poems, an element that holds the story together enough to be understandable. Elements reoccur and repeat throughout the collection, through symbols and characters for instance. The narrative also revolves around itself throughout, placing the reader again and again in the same milieus and events. A more traditional approach to poetry is to read singular poems, and less emphasis is given to the relations within the collection in which the poems are located. The relations within a given poetry collection are important to examine, because they hold metapoetic meaning which works both to explain the particularities behind the composition of the collection as well as the internal message configured into the poetic narrative. (Haapala 2012, 159–162.) In the following analysis, the importance of reading a cohesive collection intensifies, because reoccurrences and returns also hold psychoanalytic meaning.

The specific aim of *Crush* is also emphasized by the following quote from Siken himself. It boils down to survival:

> "I have to let that Richard Siken go every day if I want to adapt and move forward."
> And it is on that note that he leaves *Crush* and looks toward his next project. "After the revelations in *Crush*, after the last declarative [in the final poem "Snow and Dirty Rain"], 'We are all going forward. None of us are going

> back,' the speaker has to write from a place where that has been internalized, being close to death and surviving death," Siken explains. "There is less room for whininess or self-pity. There have been successes. And I've had successes. I can't write 'poor me, poor me' anymore." (Casey 2005.)

A moment in time is captured in the collection, meaning it serves a purpose in the frames of that realm. This is a realm that many will still struggle through, suggesting that the work will always have an audience. Siken's later work is very much different from *Crush*. *War of the Foxes* published a decade later in 2015 deals with an entirely different experience. The fact that Siken himself has placed procedural meaning on *Crush* fits well together with the psychoanalytic regard over artistic mediums as processes which focus on transference of (traumatic) material and, as such, are attempts at conquering and revealing that material. In *Crush*, there are multiple levels of transference; on top of Siken's own investment in his work, there can be read another level of processing material, which is (as much as it can be) separate from the poet. The text creates a figure of patient, who is different from the speaker and instead is constructed by the higher power of the lyrical self. This muddles the understanding one might have of the 'real' subject of the poetry; he is hidden underneath these layers. The poetry then is itself a psychoanalytic process, including complex psychic traffic of repression, denial and anxiety.

Crush is also an excellent example of poetic tension, that is "the rich unity which arises through resolved opposites" (Cavanaugh 1974, 68). The feelings in Siken's poetry are muddled, often unpleasant and complicated. Many of 'the scenes' leave a bad taste in one's mouth. Nothing is ever as virtuous as one would first think, and the pleasures seem to be tainted and not wholly felt as pleasures at all. It is a different question, of course, does the work succeed in achieving that tension in a sense that the opposites are resolved? The end of *Crush* is not all that clear, but one cannot simply ignore the encouragement to move forward in the very last line.

It is useful at this point to further elaborate on the genre of the poems, because it has been dubbed as prose poetry in many cases – I too have thought of them as such because of their longwinded and narrative quality. Narration is an important aspect in powering the effectiveness of the collection as well as the individual poems. Be it as messy as it may in Siken, chronology is an important aspect in producing a narrative, because the intention is to keep the reader interested in what will happen next (Cavanaugh 1974, 28). In addition, because this narration is not linear and information is not given coherently, the desperate feeling of panic persists throughout the collection. The poems hang onto their form and their

location, especially when one begins to interpret them within the frames of psychoanalysis.[6] The gaps, the breaks, verse compilations, sentence structures, recurring themes and symbols have a crucial role in understanding where the subject is coming from, how the patient battles through his struggle. Though some of Siken's poetry does borrow from the practice of prose poetry, the collection's overall genre leaps closer to a hybrid of different mediums of poetic narration. In poetry, "every composition […] has both internal and external form", which are in effect "the organization of thought" and "the structure evident to the senses" (Cavanaugh 1974, 21). Without its structure, Siken's poetry loses some crucial significance, especially when viewed as a psychological process involving repressive forces of the mind on the unpalatable material.

The view of the lyrical self's locus together with the psychoanalytic reading of poetry, the borders between the power of the implied author and what the text itself is representing become very muddled. Siken's speaker is quite ambiguous; the layers of narrative power render the position almost useless, yet it holds massive importance as the tool for the lyrical self to speak and create the process and the patient in the text. Because of the problematic relationship between the lyrical self and the speaker, some peculiar questions about the relationships between the reader and the text arise. When is the text talking to the implied reader, when to the actual reader? When to the characters who are a part of the poetic story? Who is doing the talking? What role is given to the speaker, in the end, if the lyrical self is the conductor? Is he even real in terms of being the figure who is affected by the narration? There, of course, is not a singular correct answer to this, but my primary intention is to understand the speaker as a part of the implied author (or the lyrical self), and I put less emphasis on the poet himself. It needs to be noted, that in psychoanalytic reading, there lies a possibility to read a poem as a direct production of the poet himself; in those frames one might attempt to analyze Siken himself. Although my intentions are what they are, I cannot help but be influenced by the fact that Siken is who he is and has said what he has said about the purpose of the collection. It is actually not even profitable to try draw a clear line between the poet and the product, and a much more crucial inquiry is the factor that I, being an

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[6] The forms presented in *Crush* are not the only or even the original forms of the poems, which further complicates the question of genre and how crucial the composition of the poems are. Siken's poems are differently formatted for example on the website of Yale Series of Younger Poets (see Yale Series For Younger Poets). In the analysis at hand, I have attempted to replicate the forms present in the edition marked in the bibliography.

individual with my own particular frame of reference, am reading and analyzing the poetry at hand.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Because the eventual analysis is a joint effort in terms of conjoining together psychoanalytic theory and the interpretation of poetry, the theoretical realm I am dealing with is a crossover of both. Hence, a whole moment is dedicated to frame psychoanalysis and only after is literature introduced into the mix. The basics of psychoanalysis are introduced under, and I will go into the relevant specifics of it in the context of the analysis; in this way the purpose of some of the more obscure concepts unfold more meaningfully. At this point, it is crucial to explain the most important ones: the psyche's internal traffic, what pressures affect said traffic, what the psyche is constructed of, and how sexuality is formed according to psychoanalysis. Together with these aspects, desire is also framed as a source of tension.

In the following theoretical introduction, I utilize Sigmund Freud's own texts, but supportive help comes from the works of Stephen Frosh, who has produced multiple general readers on psychoanalysis. Deeper insight and criticism are offered from other writers, Judith Butler, for example. Kenneth Lewes' work is crucial in terms of criticizing psychoanalysis in its inadequacy to address homosexuality. When crossing over to the psychoanalytic literary criticism, multiple writers are beneficial in understanding the methodological approach to literature; Elizabeth Wright and Maud Ellmann are effective starting points, but some necessary attention to Jacques Lacan is also given.

2.1 Psychoanalysis – an overview

To start off the analysis at hand right, one must dive into the theory of psychoanalysis first. Developed by Sigmund Freud at the turn of the 20th century, psychoanalysis has thus far taken turns in multiple different directions in the hands of multiple different analysts. To understand the roots is therefore crucial; being that I, too, am a beginner in the field, the analysis is more or less tied together with the basic psychoanalysis and steer clear of the more critical and complex views produced after Freud. In its most simplified form, psychoanalysis is a method used to identify, understand, and eventually treat psychopathological conditions. It happens through talking, listening and analyzing.

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was among the first to start to theorize what goes on in the depths of the human mind. His starting point was in neurology, but he practiced the study of the mind on multiple levels definitely not ending in the biology

of the brain. No doubt his roots are in biology, and throughout his writings Freud emphasizes his investment in science and physicality of the body, but in psychoanalysis Freud found matters which were not scientific in the traditional sense. He could not perform repeatable experiments, in so far as the scientific method requires for things to be proven. Because of his interest in what could not be pointed out in the brain – the mind, or, the psyche – Freud stepped into more hypothetical waters. This is why Freudian psychoanalysis is at times even dubbed – albeit unjustifiably – as a work of fiction rather than an accurate science. (Frosh 1987, 6–10, 20.)

These waters Freud stepped into concern the mental processes of the psyche throughout human life, for example the conscious and the unconscious systems. Freud was especially interested in the unconscious processes, since these were – and still are – to be uncovered, whereas conscious processes could be reached rather straightforwardly in comparison. Furthermore, he proposed a theory of psychosexual development of personality, that stresses the role of sexuality. It particularly emphasizes the transition into adulthood in terms of restricting libidinal desires according to social necessities, and thus shaping the individual ready for the pressures and challenges of adulthood. The psychosexual development theory is still one of the more prominent theories, which are often referenced when a person's development is studied. In addition, psychotherapy, the practice of therapy in accordance with psychoanalytic theory, is regarded as one of the most useful therapy forms when treating patients with mental concerns relating to childhood trauma or sexuality, for instance.

A good starting point in introducing psychoanalytical theory is perhaps the way the psyche is constructed and how energies flow within it. These concepts form the basis in which the operants of the mind – thoughts, desires, instincts and restrictions – function. Freud identified three different classifications to understand psychic life, which should be considered cumulatively rather than separately: dynamic, economic and topographical views. The dynamic aspect is focused on the energetic interplay in the mind, which is the result of the clash between instinctual desires and requirements of the social world. (Wright 1993, 10.) The economic point of view refers to the balance of energy, which suggests that the general behavioral aim is to restore ease, that is, balance. The two sources of said energy are various external stimuli and internal drives or instincts. (Frosh 1987, 25-26.)

Two major instincts were then identified to further explain the movement of energy: life and death instincts. Life instinct "aims at preserving living substances and joining them into

larger units". The opposing instinct is the death instinct, which is the desire to dissolve these units to their original state, that is "a state of perfect rest and nothingness". (Frosh 1987, 31.) Freud revised this opposing nature of the instincts later. Death instinct strives for the organism to become desireless. Hence, its form might become destructive together with the sexual (life) instincts rather than opposed to them. Its nature is not a comforting one then: "[I]t will keep desire circling round its (lost) object instead of becoming fixated on the self." (Wright 1993, 144.) This particular revision will be fruitful considering later analysis of poetry; a further look into the mechanisms of loss theorized by Freud will be taken.

The last of the three viewpoints of the mind, Freud's topography distinguishes states of preconscious, conscious and unconscious (Frosh 1987, 25-26). In addition, he differentiated two processes in the psyche, the primary and secondary processes, which censor and regulate the materials moving between the states of consciousness. The need to create a full description of the mind as well as the need to differentiate between the different aspects of consciousness drove Freud to imagine a triangular structure of the mind. (Frosh 1987, 34.) Thus, Freud expanded his view of the topographical identification to include the structures of id, ego and superego (Wright 1993, 11). The separation between the structures is mainly in accordance of which state of processing material it occupies; is the material available or not. They are also different in terms of having and yielding internal power.

Id is wholly unconscious to the individual, and within it, the primal instincts of sex and aggression can be found – or, as they were previously already identified as, the life and death instincts. In id, the pleasure principle is encapsulated. Ego – the conscious self – is partly unconscious and partly conscious, and it regulates the uninhibited needs of id through rationality, or the reality principle. Ego also works to suppress these desires into conformity with societal demands. Additionally, ego forms and operates by the somatic events, sensations, and is thus realized as a bodily ego, that is, in other words, a mental projection of the surface of the body. What needs to be especially noted of ego is that it acts as the censor of repressed material. It's a counterforce against the strives of unconscious material trying to break through to the consciousness (Wright 1993, 12). At the same time, ego acts as the shield and structure of the subject, which defends against the punches of the uncomfortable material, whatever that may be. Lastly, superego is both an unconscious as well as conscious system which has a grip on both previous structures as well as the activity that flows through, because it is the moral judge of personality. (McLeod 2018; Frosh 1987, 34–35.) Through these topographic nominators the energetic play of the mind operates.

At the center of Freud's of psychoanalysis is repression; in fact, repression is "the cornerstone" of psychoanalysis (Wright 1993, 11). The nature of repression is somewhat two-fold. Frosh narrates earlier analyses of Freud to emphasize how repression is both a defense mechanism of the psyche against unpalatable material as well as a psychological process, that prevents any unconscious material from becoming conscious. In this way, it can be located as a reactionary action from the ego. Freud stressed that repression exists as a permeable of the unconscious, and the relationship between them is crucial. Furthermore, he identified two types of repression: primal repression and repression proper. The difference is in the accessibility of the material. Primal repression denies a representation of desire access to the conscious altogether, therefore it remains in and never 'escapes' the unconscious. Repression proper pushes already available material into the unconscious. It becomes repressed, because of its connection to previously repressed material. The difference lies in the links between the material and awareness; one form has webs of connectivity in the conscious processes. Frosh quotes Freud in stating that: "[T]he unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone." What is meant by this is that, in contrast to the unconscious, the conscious presentation includes both the presentation and the connecting signifiers for it, making it possible to actualize in the conscious processes. Unconscious presentations require these connections to be made for them to come into "the half-light of preconscious activity", as Frosh puts it, and then reach recognition of consciousness. (Frosh 1987, 21–24.) This clarifies the nature of repression proper. What needs to be noted is that repression is not a one-way or permanent phenomenon but a continuous process between states of mental. (Frosh 1987, 33.) Especially important is the notion about the unconscious and repression; they are dynamic and influence behavior. In psychoanalytic therapy, these connections are examined and created so that the manifested material can be discussed.

Wright neatly summarizes the basic function of repression: "[I]t serves to keep guilt-laden wishes out of conscious experience". What she notes, quoting Freud, as the return of the repressed, are the parapraxes (Freudian slips, as most know them), symptoms and dreams. (1993, 12.) They are all the strivings of the repressed unconscious material to come into the light of consciousness. The aim of repression is essentially to keep the individual safe from the effects that the guilt-laden material might cause, such as discomfort, fear, and ill feelings. Repression keeps the individual 'whole' and undisturbed, culminating in a strong ego and fluent action between id, ego and superego. Given that these feelings of discomfort are quite

usual for any given individual, and especially persistent in the poetry under analysis below, repression often fails, highlighting the material's inherent need to surface and come to awareness.

In Siken's poems, the dynamic and complex movement of mental activity, repression and its influence on behavior, can be recognized. The instances in which dangerous motivations are repressed and hidden to keep the subject of the poems safe from confrontation with his socially ostracized sexual identity become available for examination. Namely, these instances are moments of sexual desire and the pressures of homophobia that impact it. In addition, the effects of loss on sexual desire can be read from the poetry, too. In other words, the processes identified in psychoanalysis are processes similar to those that can be read from Siken's poems. Hence, I view his poetry as a process in the analysis; how the strivings for and failures of repression manifest in the poems' subject is explored. Freud's topographical identification of the mind is useful as a tool for sorting out how the subject's identity – culminating in the construction of the psyche – is affected by repressive forces.

Anxiety is the motivator for repression, Freud later concluded. It is essentially a disturbance of peace in the psyche – an arousal. This is noteworthy to mention, because said anxiety has an inherent effect on the development of a person. Starting possibly already at the traumatic event that is birth, anxiety manifests again as the signal of danger when a loss or a threat is felt. It is also there when superego is formed; the guilt-producing and punitive authority is internalized through anxious experiences. (Frosh 1987, 51, 64.) The levels of anxiety translate to shifts in the balance of energy in the psyche; it is a stimulant of the worst kind to a mind that is seeking a reduction of stress to achieve pleasure.

In the poems explored below, anxiety is often present as an overwhelming atmosphere, and it mainly manifests as panic, struggle with being consequential, and giving up control. These are firstly defense mechanisms to avoid danger, and secondly, symptoms, which have "an expressive function" about the displaced unconscious desires that are being defended against (Frosh 987, 64–65). In Siken's poetry, what reveals itself remarkably symptomatic in this nature is the way the subject is self-destructive in his relationships. His distorted relationship with attraction overconsumes him and strips him of his capability of being a consequential agent in his relationships. His love becomes about pleasing the partner, no matter the quality of said partner; this love is then experienced less than pleasurable. I would go as far as stating that his adventures in desire are more about it being a punishment for a wrongful choice of

sexual object than a satisfactory relationship. The distorted relationship with desire is a product of the mechanism of loss and the impact of homophobia.

What happens when individual desires must succumb to the repression of sociocultural demands and limitations? Sexuality is not only a biological need; it is about satisfaction. In fact, fantasies are produced "under pressure of external circumstances", and it becomes imminent, as Wright explains, that there is a "disjunction between physical need and mental satisfaction" (1993, 13). There is dissonance between achieving pleasure and fulfilling needs. According to Freud, humans operate mainly by the pleasure instinct, or the pleasure principle, which is unfortunate, because it is in opposition to the social world. The nature of pleasure is problematic for two main reasons.

Firstly, pleasure is derived from the reduction in stress or tension, meaning that it already requires a level of stimuli, either internal or external, to exist. Pleasure happens when a state of ease is approached but is never fully achieved because stimulation is never-ending. The second opposition to the rule of pleasure is the inherent interpersonal and social devastation that comes from attaining the aims of instincts that are life and death. Hence, the reality principle ends up being stronger, Freud claimed, because in the paradox of pleasure requiring suffering to begin with, people will seek out ways to reduce that suffering. In other words, humans will choose rational routes in the social world to avoid the anxiety that comes from satisfying the pleasure principle's needs. Because pleasure then is unattainable, fantasy is suggested as one of the ways "to take revenge on the world", because in fantasy, pleasure can be achieved. (Frosh 1987, 39.) This type of wish fulfillment is looked at more closely, when Freud's dream theory is explained in chapter 4, but it is also useful in examining the nature of the main subject, when faced with the dilemma between sexual desire and the need to reduce the pressures that homophobia in the social realm creates.

2.2 The core is heterosexual

I find it impossible to begin any psychoanalytic literary research without considering the rather problematic background of psychoanalysis, especially when my own analysis focuses on homoerotic poetry. Because of the troubled background, I would assume many are steered away from considering homosexual literature within these frames in contemporary studies. A short assessment of the historical clash is needed.

A major function of psychoanalysis, that is Freud's explanation of sexual development, needs to be understood to grasp how neurosis – or psychopathology – forms. The starting point in his theory is the polymorphous perversity – essentially a bisexual being that has not yet realized its separateness from parents and is able to find pleasure in peculiar ways – of the child which then goes through different developmental phases. These phases are firstly the oral, the anal and the phallic (or the Oedipal), and after these, sexuality lies latent until it develops into adult sexuality during puberty (the genital phase).

The phallic phase, also at times called the Oedipal phase, is the most crucial one in terms of sexual development. It is characterized by the Oedipus complex, which is the process in which the child recognizes that they can experience pleasure other than self-pleasure. The child experiences their first object of desire, the mother. After this, the development is different for males and females, Freud noted, and below I explain the route for males.[7]

The boy-child realizes in this stage that his mother lacks a penis and thus recognizes her as different from himself.[8] The father, he notes, has a penis and is his primary rival in the love of the mother. And soon the child realizes that the father must have castrated the mother, and castration becomes a fear of his as a possible punishment for pursuing his mother. Thus, the child strives to identify with the father to have a claim in his authority and the love of his mother, although now it would be displaced in women other than his mother. The complex is a process of identification. What is most important in this process is the fact that the child internalizes the incest taboo. These incestual desires are pushed into the unconscious and repressed. (Frosh 1987, 48; Lewes 2009, 65.) A worthwhile notion to make is that during the Oedipus complex, superego is formulated as well. Frosh describes it as "a carrot and a stick, an ideal and a punishment", demanding obedience to "an internal authority" instead of an external one (1987, 36). Indeed, it could be summarized that the main result of the aforementioned development process is a realized agency and identity checked for improper

[7] It needs to be noted that a girl-child's complex is much less thorough in its explanation of sexual development. Freud himself admitted that it unfinished and unclear. A girl-child's first love is also the mother, but she soon grows envious of her mother, who enjoys the father's admiration. She recognizes herself and the mother as castrated and, due to apparent penis-envy, strives to have her part in the father's authority by identifying with the mother and directing her desire towards the father. (Frosh 1987, 56.) It is fairly apparent how loaded with culturally gendered assumptions Freud's theory is. It has been heavily debated whether Freud only demonstrated how the contemporary power relations regarded female desire and sexuality, or whether he just participated in uplifting the patriarchal project. (Frosh 1987, 58; Morris 1997, 117.)

[8] The boy-child is often described to be *horrified* at the sight of the mutilated female genitalia. This spurs on the fear of castration.

desires. The child actively represses the incestual desire and accepts "the reality principle" (Morris 1997, 120).

The outcome of the complex is ideally heterosexual, because Freud claimed sexuality is foremost useful for procreation, but he did not insist on heterosexuality. He asserted that the biological claim about inevitable sexual attraction between opposite sexes is inadequate and full of misconceptions, because, in fact, there is a great variety of sexuality. He went on to describe homosexuality as a sexual aberration, an inversion. More so, he distinguished different types of inversions based on the frequency and exclusivity of pursued sexual satisfaction: absolute, amphigenous (bisexuality), and occasional. Freud was, in fact, opposed to assigning "inversions" the descriptor of degeneration, when the individual was not actually disturbed. He took as an example the ancient inverted activities of people, recounting the importance of homosexual relationships at the time. The more disturbing elements arise from other claims by Freud, for example, that "the inverted have a sexual drive which is less than normal, and their genitals are often somewhat withered". (Freud 1971, 61–67.)

Having said that, Freud's view of homosexuality is scattered throughout his writings, and he never extensively wrote about it. He never straightforwardly pathologized homosexuality, though he clearly held heterosexual orientation in higher regards. Lewes narrates that what Freud saw as ambiguous in this way, later became a doctrine to the field. Freud theorized the homosexual outcome in four different ways. These theories involve different routes of development in the ego and recognizing the object (of sexual desire). Because of these differences, some theories are more pathologizing than others, since maleness is either retained more firmly or identification with the mother happens too strongly, hence placing the male-child into a feminine position and thus inverted.[9] (Lewes 2009, 25–27, 31–34, 76, 77.)

Ellmann has also postulated a brief understanding of the Freudian view of formation of sexuality. She notes how, according to Freud, homosexuality is just as normal a position as heterosexuality. More disturbing, she says, is the implication that love is not only a relationship between two individuals but a "contest between three". This is stated to emphasize the latent incestual desire at the core of libidinal drives. (1994, 13.)

[9] The case study of Little Hans (Freud 1909) and the monograph about Leonardo Da Vinci (Freud 1910).

Freud's theory of sexuality has not gone without heated waves of criticism on multiple accounts. Because the most crucial event in the development of sexuality is the Oedipal phase, many took to dissect the complex and its significance in the formation of neurosis. Lewes points out the multiple points at which the explanation for the progression of the Oedipus complex runs into paradoxes. For example, for the boy-child, the witnessed mutilated female genitalia – the source of the castration fear – can be both the driving force for him to become homosexual and for him to retain masculinity and choose a heterosexual object.[10] What he concludes of the Freudian understanding of the complex is that, it is a product of its time and conditions. He further explains how sexuality as understood now is not as simple as it is made out to be in the Freudian analysis, even amidst the complicated complex. It is reductive to claim the pleasures enjoyed from sexuality are fully due to reproductive reasons, as Freud tended to emphasize. (Lewes 2009, 28, 35, 81, 108–109.)

If Freud can't be named the main culprit in defamation of homosexuality, then who can be? The eventual crude pathologizing of homosexuality happened at the hands of later psychoanalysts, who can roughly be divided by their emphasis on a development phase: the oral or anal phase. Their starting point, of course, was at Freud, but their routes separated because of Freud's ambiguity toward the subject, as mentioned before. Lewes concisely tells this progression of pathologizing. Though the heterosexual result from the complex is only *one* of the results, post-Freudian analysts interpreted and further developed the theory to favor only heterosexuality when the complex is successfully seen through. Most of the arguments supporting the unnaturalness of homosexuality rely on the incompleteness of the complex, which then results in the prevalence of homosexual object choice. That, or it was traumatic enough to push sexuality to pre-Oedipal stages, or in other words, to a less developed state (the oral or anal phases). The failure in any of the phases or in the complex itself will result in psychopathological problems in later life, or, in neuroses. Homosexuality was claimed to be one of these problems. Dubbed as a narcissistic condition to begin with (that is a libido concerned with self-pleasure only), homosexuality was named to be at the root of neuroses, instead of just coexisting in the individual together with other neuroses. Homosexuality (and many of its theorized forms) was pathologized. (Lewes 2009, 52–53, 57, 62, 65.)

[10] The case of the Wolf Man (Freud, 1918).

The progression is characterized by gross misconduct in scientific and psychoanalytic process. After the period of early psychoanalysis in the beginning of the 20th century, during what is called the oral period of 1930–1948, analysts steered further away from Freudian ambiguities concerning homosexuality, and, instead, configured inadequate characteristics and possibilities of cure for the inversion. No change for a more humane understanding came about even after the period. Lewes details how the infamous Kinsey Report of 1948 on male sexuality was largely ignored as evidence to be considered in understanding male sexuality. Instead, he explains, some type of loyalty to both a coherent theory as well as social conventions prevailed. Until the 1960s, the achievements regarding the nature of homosexuality are few, but Lewes credits the period of "conservative developments" for publishing "accounts of homosexuals who were essentially normal and healthy despite their deviant choices of objects". (Lewes 2009, 127, 159.)

Following the sixties, a regression to a dubious claim about "the unhappy homosexual" occurred due to the prevalence of Bieber report of 1962 as the primary investigation on homosexuality. The Bieber study was recognized as deeply flawed in its methods, yet it held clinical importance until further into the 1970s. What followed then was a shift in the field as the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the official list of psychiatric disorders in 1973. What also followed was a period of critique, which pointed out the political nature of psychiatric discourse, as well as a period of disarray due to contradictory evidence and ill-equipped methodology concerning the study of homosexuality. Yet, no real significant movement towards a more humane and compassionate psychoanalysis occurred, but new possibilities opened in the discourse. (Lewes 2009, 172, 197, 201–207, 217.)

Because of the very compromised history behind analyzing patients, who were also homosexual, I find it crucial to steer away from these attempted conclusions about the inherent pathology of homosexuality, be it as a result of failed complex or otherwise neurotic. It is also why I believe it is insufficient to reference in my analysis to the Oedipal complex as such. It becomes apparent that parental figures are important in understanding the subject of the poems, but the link with unfinished Oedipal complex seems too much of a reach as well as a disparaging take on the complexities of the poetic subject at hand. Where the likes of psychoanalysts mentioned above would see a failed complex, I prefer to see an identity at odds with societal demands and taboos of other kind, namely homosexuality and

how it is regarded as being ‘less’. In addition, it is fairly redundant to bend according to readymade theories when reading literature.

I must add that the practice of non-Oedipal understanding of neurosis is not a new one. Philippe van Haute has tackled the famous psychoanalysis of Dora (a case of Freud’s from 1905) and concluded it non-Oedipal, at the same time calling out the multiple other readings of Dora, referencing Oedipal complex despite it being unnecessary to Dora’s case. (Van Haute 2012, 54.) I might add that in the case of analyzing Siken’s poetry it becomes too complicated as well as speculative to pinpoint the underlying problem at the Oedipal phase, when the influence of societal prohibition of homosexuality is realized comprehensively only after the subject has become aware of the reception it might garner. So, instead of nitpicking the failures of the complex, it is more reasonable to analyze the importance of upbringing and first sexual awakenings in more vague frames – namely the expectations the subject assumes of himself as a masculine person. Because of this, some attention needs to be paid to the cultural and generational forces affecting the formation of a masculine identity, but it is best detailed in context later on.

Juliet Newbigin, a British psychoanalyst, has reflected on the history of psychoanalysis towards homosexuality. She reiterates the history already told by Lewes and notes that not enough progress has been made from those days. Material reproducing previously established and falsely constructed notions of homosexuality is still being presented for trainees uncritically. She makes her point as follows:

> I hope to have shown that psychoanalysis has in the past developed a theoretical bias that has distorted its view of the experience of lesbians and gay men and, in detecting and questioning this bias, we have an opportunity to make our discipline more open and responsive to the complex society we live in. We should return to the open-minded curiosity and self-questioning which Schafer (1995) points out goes best with being consistently analytic. (2013, 24.)

The phrase “consistently analytic” here I would like to attach to a point made by Ellmann – concerning mainly the literary study of text through psychoanalysis but applicable here, too – on how it is no use to rely on pre-made theories. (1994, 2, 10–11.) This is something Jacques Lacan has also stated, similarly, as it becomes apparent below. The view emphasizes the individuality of cases, which need to be taken in as they are instead of bending them according to already established theory.

It is interesting how exactly socially restricted pleasure intersects with the heterosexist project emphasized by Freudians (to a lesser extent) and post-Freudian analysts. Homophobia is a production of the social structures in which sexuality is regulated. Pleasures derived from erotic same-sex interactions are, in other words, subjected to social repression in more complex ways than incestual desires alone. Freud was clear in emphasizing how "civilization is no gift to the individual" (Frosh 1987, 40). It is absurdly clear how same-gender attraction falls under "threats" (Frosh 1987, 40), which civilization aims to regulate either to a tolerable level or out of existence.

Frosh actually frames the nature of homophobia neatly in his summary of how repression is a painful project:

> But even more important than this raising of possible alternatives to dominant organizations of sexuality is the recognition that what Freud describes is the way society enters into the essence of the human individual, organizing the instincts where usually we consider that we are most privately ourselves. This does not happen smoothly, however: repression is a painful phenomenon, fraught with crises; pleasure is not easily overcome by reality. Indeed, the trauma of sexual restriction is one which lives on the inside through the whole of life, generating what we know as normality and what we experience as neurosis. (1987, 46.)

The detailed context in the above quotation is for most analysts, of course, the formation of sexuality during infancy, yet it perfectly describes the struggle of existing with a sexual orientation that is considered wrong or pathological. If such careful thought would have been given to the multiplicities of sexuality – instead of being concerned only with the incest taboo – to begin with, perhaps some of the more 'out-there' causes for homosexuality would have been left unvoiced.[11] Indeed, the displacement of fear in incest is described by Monique Wittig perfectly: "The straight mind continues to affirm that incest, and not homosexuality represent its major interdiction. Thus, when thought by the straight mind, homosexuality is nothing but heterosexuality." (1980, 110–111.) The quote also emphasizes the psychoanalytic project to reason homosexuality back into heterosexuality. In an article invested in discussing limits and opportunities of identification in poetry, Jacqueline Rose discerns from Freud's texts the demand to identify the unconscious homosexual object-choice all human beings make. To quote: "For it is the homophobic who is most deeply and

[11] To be fair, I have to be transparent in my inadequacy to make such claims, as I am neither a historian nor a psychoanalyst. Moreover, it is still fruitful time to make such examinations.

compulsively involved in the repudiation of homosexuality in him/herself (the social implications of such a general recognition would clearly be vast).” (1994, 228.)

In the historical psychoanalytic deconstruction of homosexuality, “the homosexual” – almost always described as a singular object – is mostly constructed as feminine. Homosexuality, because it seemingly stems from some form of failed sexual development, places the neurotic sufferer in a position that is less-than compared to the fully realized masculine heterosexuality. (Lewes 2009, 104, 225.) The connection between femininity and homosexuality becomes strikingly clear, which is why on multiple occasions the narrations of homosexuality and female sexuality in psychoanalysis sound similar. Because the fear of castration is a fear of feminization, during the Oedipal crisis, Butler explains, what is punished is not the incestual desire towards mother but homosexuality (2002, 76).

Because Siken’s subject is masculine, tension arises from assumed social locations and how identity directly contradicts these locations. Specifically, the subject of the poems has ingested expectations for his subjectivity from reflections on his familial relationships. He contrasts himself with the images of his father and brother. Indeed, the masculine subject position is created in the immediate family: “[I]t is in the family that boys first come to understand their privileged status and the ways in which male privilege equates to power.” (Adams & Coltrane 2005, 233.) Such expectations do not align with homosexuality and are in direct opposition to the feminine position. This tension is a key ingredient in Siken’s poetry; it becomes evidently clear in the reading of “You Are Jeff”.

The suggestion of being less-than because of one’s identity raises some questions about the role of power. One’s power undeniably comes under threat when the identity in question is seen deprived in the hierarchy of (masculine) identities. The threat has an impact on how the individual realizes the reach of their power, which then correlates to the actions or inactions chosen to cope with regulatory institutions. Butler has also expanded on this complicated concept. One’s power – or agency – is spoken as “a will”, that turns on itself to follow social restrictions.

In the operation of desire, a crucial role is played by “the conscience” which prohibits the very actions desire raises in an individual, according to Freud. The conscience, of course, has internalized the social regulations which create the limits of expression for desire, but “the problem is more complicated than that”. The subject turns on itself to follow the social regulations, motivated by the conscience; the strength of the conscience in this function

correlates “with the strength of one’s own aggression”. Conscience is “self-derived”, which complicates the inquiry of between conscience and internalized social regulations. (Butler 1997, 65–70.) There are definite links between the concept of conscience and the concept of ego in terms of aiming to preserve the subject’s coherence amidst the pressures of the social world. Butler’s problematization of the primordiality of conscience suggests a rather dire view of the subject, who has denied its desire. From reading Freud, she concludes that “the desire is never renounced, but becomes preserved and reasserted in the very structure of renunciation”. In other words, “prohibition becomes the occasion for reliving the instinct”. (Butler 1997, 81.)

In *Crush*, this complicated realization of condemned desire occurs. The repression forced over the instinct does not repress it, to be exact. Instead, desire happens through repression, which is manifested in the behavior of the subject in realm of the poems. The subject avoids clear identification with homosexuality, keeps teetering on the edge of denying it even amidst the erotic relationships. In those instances of denial, homosexual desire becomes explicit.

Now I turn to introduce Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) into the theoretical field of this particular research. He is an undigestible point at which to begin understanding literature through psychoanalysis, because he had a distaste for most of the contemporary psychoanalysts and many of his ideas escape most of the people. But due to his contributions to the reading of both literature and psychoanalysis, he needs to be discussed, however briefly. For Lacan, “culture is understood primarily as a set of linguistic structures and significations” (Butler 2002, 55). It has been said that the Lacanian psychoanalysis is primarily more palatable to approach from the standpoint of literature and philosophical studies, because of its understanding of power, signification and sexuality through language. The Lacanian approach gives the student of literature an alternative path along which to trek through, because of its investment in deconstructing how meaning is created. A more traditional psychoanalytic approach to literature focuses on character and author studies, but those persuaded by Lacan, explains Juhani Ihanus, reiterating Ellie Ragland-Sullivan (1984), aim to grasp literature in its entirety, including “paralinguistic confluences between visible language and invisible influences”. (Ihanus 1995, 87–89.)

Anyone would agree that Lacan is difficult to discuss and requires an in-depth study to fully understand what his aim is. But from Lacan, I want to introduce some key concepts

pertaining to both literature and psychoanalysis. He, much like Freud, formulated an understanding of how the mind is built; the three registers or orders through which the human mind is realized: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Janne Kurki provides an easy basic understanding of these entangled concepts:

> To simplify, it could be stated that the three orders or registers, as they are usually called, form three, in a sense crucial, basic assumptions. The first assumption, the Real (R), assumes that *there is*, in other words, in French, il y a. The second, the Symbolic (S), assumes that *language is*. The third, the Imaginary (I), assumes that *there is likeness* (and thus identities). (2004, 28, my translation and emphasis.)

The above quote is one to illustrate the abstract way that Lacan understood internal traffic. It is also the basis for understanding how identity is realized in contrast to Other. Because Lacan was invested in explaining the intrapersonal and extrapersonal relationships of people through language, he took part in discussing some aspects of structuralism and semiotics. Lacan borrowed from Ferdinand de Saussure in formulating an understanding of what it is to signify. He took Saussure's diagram of signified/signifier – the acoustic material form of a sign over the concept or the idea of the sign (Jokinen 2003, 23) – and turned it on its head, not discrediting Saussure but expanding his view. Whereas Saussure resigned from exploring the relationship between signified and signifier, in his reconfiguration of the diagram, Lacan highlighted this question. In Lacan's algorithm, signifier is given primality; reading is focused on the signifiers, because the signified are formulated according to the signifiers. The Lacanian view centers around "the relationships between signifiers and analyzing their dynamics". Lacan's metaphor and metonymy are crucial concepts in describing these dynamics. The basic conclusion from his metaphor is that "signifiers/things can be replaced with other signifiers/things". His metonymy on the other hand depicts how "desire moves from one object to another". (Kurki 2004, 22–27, my translation.)

I must now interject that my analysis does not come close to a Lacanian view, but he has influenced psychoanalysis as well as literary criticism to such an extent that it cannot be disregarded in any case. Because of his investment in detailing what exactly is meaning, how it is given and how does it come about being, his work is influential. In the footsteps of Lacan, psychoanalysis became a science of the letter. "It makes choosing and carefulness more possible", as Ihanus puts it: "The magnetisms […] between the text and the reader need to be brought into the awareness of the reader". It is a strive to free the images that are born of that interaction from resistance and inhibited meaning. It is an emancipatory factor that

expands this type of psychoanalysis from being 'only' a branch of hermeneutics. (1995, 95–96, my translation.)

2.3 At a junction with literature

The tradition of reading fiction through psychoanalytic lenses is far from a dying practice, but the nature of such a reading in contemporary studies is more applied. Psychoanalytic approach inspires endlessly diverse readings of literature. It is a rare occasion to find two very similar contemporary approaches to literature with psychoanalytic tools, especially in terms of reading queer fiction, which Siken is a part of. The traditional sense of reading literature with psychoanalytic lenses is usually more straightforwardly Freudian and analytically more comprehensible, because they involve the decoding of "Freudian motifs" in the text (Ellmann 1994, 2). For example, "the psychobiography" of Edgar Allan Poe by Marie Bonaparte, is quite clear in its approach; it is an attempt to detail a specific pathology behind the artist. (Wright 1993, 38–45.) More modern takes involve more complex approaches which have looser ties to psychoanalysis, one of which is the fascinating reading by Joseph Litvak of Proust as a part of projects of both queer and Kleinian object-relations theory; "good and bad mouth-objects and complex inner pleasures" are examined (Sedgwick 1997, 29).

It could be said that poetry is analogous to the process of psychoanalysis. The researcher is the analyst, who has the capability to "operate through talk" with the text but also "listens to the slips and silences" in the text (Frosh 1987, 75). The reader is talking with the text. The use of metaphors, allegories, emissions, reflection and the form of the poem itself are slips and silence creating an understanding of a psyche and all its traffic. It all comes together in the listening, or the interpretation. But at the same time, the text itself cannot be a patient, because it is limited by textuality. It does not elaborate on the things it presents; the interpretation happens between the text and the reader through a type of transference. In psychoanalysis, transference occurs when the patient unloads their traumatic and anxious experiences on the neutral recipient, the analyst. The analyst takes on the role of the trauma, participates in the delusions of the patient to be able to comprehend and restructure the value in them. (Ellmann 1994, 10.) Such transference happens between the text and the reader/researcher – one must take part. In literary interpretation, the transference undeniably pulls material from the researcher during the task of making the text comprehensible.

A digestible point at which to begin to explain the more materialistic connections between literary studies and psychoanalysis is to mention Lionel Trilling (1905–1975) and his article "Freud and Literature", which critiques Freud's relationship with literature. Trilling was among the first to problematize the relationship Freud had with art. Trilling's article begins by stating, how the stuff of psychology is the same stuff that poetry is. Emphasis is put on how the perception that Freud has of art is an inadequate one, but psychoanalysis has nevertheless provided much to think about in the literary field in terms of using latent material in text and further discovering said material from its cover. He specified that the psychoanalytic method can "explain the inner meanings of the work of art and explain the temperament of the artist as a man". (1950, 95–103.) In his explanation, Trilling also noted how Freud saw inadequate the attempts at explaining the author through his work. The relationship between psychoanalytic method and the artist is a complicated one, because what needs to be looked at are the symbols given by the artist, but the symbols do not occur without the free association of the artist. (Trilling 1950, 106.) This is not to say that a dedicated practice was not created along these lines of delving into the psyche of the artist. Id-psychology is namely interested in the undisclosed desires of the creator of the art – the work of art relates back to the psyche of the artist. (Wright 1993, 37.) As it became previously apparent, I too struggle with the question of the artist's input into the work, but I attempt to remain out from Siken's psyche and concern myself with the text's psyche only.

It is imminent that I now come back to the statements made earlier on how literary research cannot fall back to already formulated theories in the psychoanalytic field. I, too, dare state that the more explanative components of the psychoanalytic theory are to be disregarded in analyzing works of fiction. Especially theories attempting to detail the etiologies of sexuality are best to left untouched. Social and cultural conventions and the eventual changes in them surely explain why exactly strict viewpoints are nonsensical to apply, not to mention it is detrimental to poetry itself. As Trilling put it: "Changes in historical context and in personal mood change the meaning of a work and indicate to us that artistic understanding is not a question of fact but of value." (1950, 105.)

I must admit that this approach is one that leaves much room for insecurity in the research process. If there are no clear signifiers to fall back to, how exactly does one study anything? It is a terrifying path to follow, but the kind that one must take if one has the desire to explore psychoanalytic reading. It is not as if I steer fully off the psychoanalytic road; it is there, a strong and undeniable trunk. Oddly enough, I found some comfort in the Lacanian

psychoanalytic literary criticism. In Kurki's dissertation, I found a crucial notation of the Lacanian view of reading literature psychoanalytically: "Instead of reducing literature to the psychoanalytic theory, what should occur is the adaptation of psychoanalysis to what it can find in literature." (2004, 11, my translation.)

The difficulties in the relationship between psychoanalysis and literary criticism have garnered a lot of discussion. Wright took part in that discussion, and she has explained the following about the relationship between the student and the work of literature. She too recognized the different practices of unveiling the creator and unveiling the text itself. Wright gives a couple of examples[12] in this practice, that all place all too much claim on "return of the repressed" over the artist's "conscious mastery". Some key points are concluded from the examples. Firstly, as much as the researcher can be the analyst of the text, they are also an analysand to the text. Secondly, "the limitations of psychoanalytic character-analysis are analogous to the limitations of literary character-analysis". Lastly, the production of figures is bound in culture and history. (1993, 37–55.) To rephrase, Wright reiterates how transference occurs between the reader and the text, and from this interconnection, no one is exempt. More so, psychoanalytic reading does not have the power to step over the limits of the text; the interpretation revolves around the material presented in the text. Finally, the reading of any given text changes throughout history.

Ellmann gives an account of the difficulties in psychoanalytic literary criticism as well. Her tone is critical, when she details the problematics of power in interpretation. An important notion is that "psychoanalysis can teach us […] to substitute the art of listening for the seizure of meaning." The text provides the frames for interpretation, and the reader's responsibility is to use these frames instead of turning to prepacked theories. Ellmann warns about "the trap", in which a psychoanalytic critic claims authority over the literary text, that "they can see through it better than it sees through them". (1994, 10–11.) In Siken, this tension intensifies, because of the nature of the subject and his tendency to try to steer away from revealing himself through providing an alternative story. It is deviously easy to fall into silence while listening to him, instead of trying to seize his investments in the presented narration. At the same time, careful listening is the key into the details behind locked doors of repressive actions.

[12] These examples are already previously mentioned Marie Bonaparte's work on Edgar Allan Poe, Frederick Crew's reading of Hawthorne, and D. H. Lawrence's take on American culture across multiple texts.

By now I have begun to unravel how the routes of psychoanalysis and literary studies are parallel in many ways even though their respective fields are on different levels all together in terms of science. Psychoanalysis is heavily involved in undisclosed desires – hidden meanings, as Trilling put it – and analyzing how they manifest, and thus it meets literary theory at intersections, looping together and overlapping in many conceptual matters. Surely, poetry is the product of organization and precision – not just a product of the unconscious – but the psychoanalytic functions work to deconstruct libidinal desires from the text (Morris 1997, 122). Namely, allegory and its close sibling metaphor are clearly analogical to the concepts of displacement of desire as well as latent and manifest content of dreams; I will consider metaphor in closer detail.

Metaphor in its most simplified form is a transference of meaning. It creates meaningful connections between things that do not have factual connection. It creates new, and it requires interpretation to figure out what exactly is being told. Despite the rather free nature of metaphoric function, some consistencies have been established in terms of describing what type of metaphor is at hand. There are no rules written on what a certain metaphor might represent – it requires interpretation within the context of the text. Certainly, language has connotations, so in the metaphor itself, these subtleties should be taken into consideration. These connotations are cultural and are strong influences on all tropes. (Viikari 2000, 82–83.)

It is fruitful to create a link between the importance of listening to a poetic speaker and a patient under analysis. In poetic analysis, the silences and spaces between words are as crucial as the words themselves (Viikari 2000, 92). This statement is analogous to what Frosh describes – already partly quoted above – about the responsibility of the analyst: “Analysis operates through talk, but listen to the slips and silences that infiltrate the associations of the patient, viewing them as leverage points to begin the process of shifting the great mass of resistance.” (1987, 75.) The similar methodology between these two practices are quite clear, and the analysis below will certainly take on the omissions and gaps in poetry. Certainly, a metapoetic layer is added onto the voices of the poetry, which complicates the analysis.

Siken’s poems often paint a scene about an event that is taking place. His descriptions are cinematic, which is not a coincidence but rather both a conscious choice as well as an influence from his work as a filmmaker. It is therefore not obvious, when exactly the world

that is referenced is and is not at the core of the poetic function (the poetic message). The alternative story provided in the poetry makes the analysis of the function difficult. Auli Viikari, in a reader of poetic fundamentals, asks when exactly are we speaking in terms of parables and figures? The relationship that the poem has to the real world is not separate from its function, but it does not define it. Poetry exists both in the world and outside of it. (Viikari 2000, 75.) In Siken, this tension present at all times in afterthoughts, images, and movement. Cinematic approach gives the opportunity to build scenes and give emphasis on the viewpoint from which the poem is 'seen'. Multiple poems are scenic in addition to being a part of an alternative story, which works to distance the lyrical self from the text; it provides an extra layer of security under which the 'real' subject can hide, because someone else is being narrated as the "you" of the poetry. This cinematic effect occurs most clearly in "Dirty Valentine", "Planet of Love" and "Driving, Not Washing". The layers in the poetic narration convolutes the relationship between 'the world' and the poetic function.

In the following readings, I am going to discuss both the speaker, the subject and the object. These concepts need to be explained further to grasp what they represent. Of course, the psychoanalytic framework is going to affect the discussion concerning these positions. Notably, what I mean by 'the whole subject' constructed in the poem is the psyche, in which the wholesome realization of subjectivity happens. In subjectivity, the individual actualizes agency and self-governance. This is heavily linked to the process of identification, and arguably these two concepts cannot be discussed separately. In the context of later analysis, this would mean the coming together of the pronominal position of "you", "I" and "he", which illustrate the fractured identity in "Unfinished Duet", but a more detailed understanding of the layers of speech in *Crush* is crucial. The layers of story presented above already explain to some extent the layered speech, but I need to elaborate on it.

Focusing on structure means focusing on the materiality of poetry. The moment one is engaging with the meanings behind certain lyrical choices, one steps into the realm of materialism – and of metalyricism (Oja 2018, 31–32). Metalyrical speech exposes the 'real' subject from his hiding place at the position of the lyrical self, who is telling the story through the speaker in this particular analysis. Metalyricism also explains why I call Siken's poems self-incriminating. Despite the lyrical self's attempts at offering a made-up story, he reveals himself in the poems.

The subject I am dealing with is the subject that is constructed under the layers of the poetic narration. As such, the subject culminates in the lyrical self, that is both absent from the story as well as the ever-present authority over the narrative. The narration is done by the lyrical self through the speaker; the material concerning the subject presents itself directly in the metaspeech of the poetry as well as in the breaks of the story that is being presented by the lyrical self. Reducing the subject only to the level of the speaker effaces the poetic message's nuanced information about trauma and the attempts to repress it; one needs to remember that the collection has an aim of survival. There is self-awareness of the struggle and incapability in the speaking voice, which means that the subject is not helpless but very actively creating a story which highlights what he has been through. The subject is also understood as fractured at times, when he manifests at different pronominal positions. The 'real' subject occupies multiple places, which translates to multiple voices in the poems One needs to pay careful attention to the shifts in the positions to catch the details the changes offer to further understand just how complicated the traffic in the psyche of the subject is.

In examining the most significant rhetorical tool in Siken's poetry, metalyrical speech, and its effect on the poetic narration, a couple of poems are useful as samples.

In "The Torn-Up Road", the following is uttered: "There is no way to make this story interesting. […] I want to tell you this story without having to confess anything, […] I want to tell you this story without having to be in it [.]" (C, 9.) In this metalyrical voice, the 'real' subject comes out from hiding and takes over the speaker. It is honesty from the 'real' subject behind the entire panic-ridden collection; in these moments he is not describing the fabricated and passive "you". He gets rid of the layers of storytelling and talks honestly about his reluctancy to disclose his story. These moments of speech are the most comprehensible points at which the subject I am trying to engage with is audible directly, but his silence or distance from the second person voice (poems conducted through "you") in other cases is only a hindrance – a layer of repressive security, to be more specific – which can be broken through to access the subject himself.

In "Litany in Which Certain Things Are Crossed Out", similar feelings of discontent are repeated. Span across five pages, the poem hammers in 'the message', which, in this case, is again to self-reflect one's position as a participant or a reader as well as to call into question the narrative that is being presented. The lyrical self is again exposing himself as the storyteller, who is writing this particular story through the speaker, which is a medium

wholly under his manipulation. The most obvious tool to break the wall between them is self-reflexive metalyrical speech. Who exactly is speaking to whom, when the poem says: "Who am I? I'm just a writer. I write things down." (C, 11.) Much like in other poetry, in this particular poem there is no clear point, where the difference between the so-called lyrical self, the poet and the speaker can be identified. Whichever one may choose to engage with in analysis, depends on the poem. (Oja 2018, 20–21.)

The lyrical self is much more available than the poet himself, even if the voice often lacks presence in the poetry and even if Siken's personal investments are audible in the story; the lyrical self is also much more crucial than the speaker position, even though these two concepts are inherently linked. Siken is very adept in keeping the tension between the lyrical self and the speaker tangible throughout the collection. The speaker is always teetering on the edge of breaking 'the fourth wall', the barrier separating him from his audience; the lyrical self fails at keeping himself inaudible. In addition, speaking most of the poems in the second person voice, "you", emphasizes the necessity of relating to the lyrical self, no matter how uncomfortable that position might be. It is almost alienating, because the experiences that are presented are far from universal.

It is evident then that the voice in Siken's poetry speaks in layers. There is the speaker, which utters the poems. Then there is the lyrical self, that is an authority over the speaker. As a concept, the lyrical self comes close to the implied author in narratological terms. The difference between the speaker and the lyrical self is in the agency over the text; the speaker is constructed as someone else compared to the lyrical self. The second person voice muddles the role of the speaker entirely; the barrier between the lyrical self and the speaker is very thin because of this particular tool. The lyrical self has hindsight that the speaker lacks; the speaker is more actively a part of the narration in the poems, when it is present as the "I" of the poem. The lyrical self more often than not steers clear of this position and is then somewhere above the story. And that is what *Crush* is; a story seemingly about someone other than "me", or rather, "him", the lyrical self. Yet, it is exclusively about the lyrical self, which can be seen in the cracks of the story – the metalyrical speech, as presented above. Despite the attempts at distancing himself from the poems' narration (the use of the second person voice), the lyrical self is describing his deeply affective journey with desire.

The patient whose journey the reader[13] (or the listener) is here to witness is created by the lyrical self. He himself is not the patient; he offers a story about a symptomatic patient which culminates into the "you". Because of this creation exactly, the poems work as processes for the lyrical self to deconstruct his experience, which are reflected in the alternative story, which focus on nevertheless on the lyrical self as the main subject.

Moving on to the object position, the psychoanalytic theory is best utilized in explaining the meaning of the object referred to in the poems in addition to the more simplified way of explaining the object as the target of discussion only. In Siken's poetry the position of the object is occupied by the desire itself as well as a personified choice of object, titled at times by a name, "Theodore", or a pronoun "you" or "he". As it became clear in the above explanation, sometimes, the "you" is only a passive you, through which the poetic voice manifests. Because there are many "yous" in the poetry, the analysis becomes very challenging (ironically enough, very fittingly so for the purposes of psychoanalysis). There is no clear distinction when the "you" under discussion is the object of desire or the reflection of the lyrical self placed into the poem. There might not even be the need to make that distinction. Some psychoanalytic views – by Mikkel Broch-Jacobsen in the footsteps of René Girard, for instance – hold desire as inherently mimetic; by competing for an object of desire against someone else, desire is actually induced from the need to identify with the competitor in the triangular contest for love. The object of desire is not the trigger for desire itself, meaning there is no essential link between the object and desire. (Ellmann 1994, 13–14.) In *Crush*, the subject does not have a competitor. The challenger is actually death, which has taken the object of desire, essentially then making the subject identify with death itself, which explains the destructive relationship the subject has with desire.

The different speech positions in the poetry are dynamic, because of the complex relationships between the lyrical self, the speaker, the subject, the object and the reader. They switch places when any particular poem requires them to, through multifaceted means of lyrical tools. The lyrical self is accountable for the value systems in the poetry. It is not always fruitful to study this rhetorical level of poetry, but in Siken it is a crucial aspect in order to really hear the meanings placed within the narrative process in which the previously

[13] Or maybe one should speak of the reader as a participant, because they are actively being placed into the poetry as the "you". The reader has a role in the poems. This is the reason why reading Siken psychoanalytically becomes challenging; the reader position is intimately close to the poetry. As much as the you is a reflection of the lyrical self, it is also a call to the reader to relate to the self in the poetry.

mentioned patient is created. In the process of creating the patient, the lyrical self constructs events that reflect his difficult relationship with desire.

To clarify, the overall combining factor between – what at times seem to be rather separate – voices in the poems is the lyrical self, who is the authority over what message exactly is sent through the poetry. The lyrical self also strings together the different positions between the I-you shift. (See Hökkä 1995.) This is why I understand the 'real' subject being constituted in the lyrical self. So, what is actually found in the narration of the poems is only an image of a hidden 'real' subject, which allows the multiple positions and fractures of him to be mobile in the poetry's world.

I want to refer "Litany in Which Certain Things Are Crossed Out" again. In many ways, this poem is a commentary on what evolves throughout the collection. Its metalyrical nature brings closer the reader and the lyrical self. It also highlights the self-awareness that the subject-speaker, culminating in the lyrical self, has but is also an example of how he values himself. He is the destructive force in the journey of love.

> Who am I? I'm just a writer. I write things down.
> I walk through your dreams and invent future. Sure,
> I sink the boat of love, but that comes later. And yes, I swallow
> glass, but that comes later.
> And the part where I push you
> flush against the wall and every part of your body rubs against the bricks
> shut up
> I'm getting to it. (C, 11.)

Very abruptly the speaker breaks his narration to tell his reader to "shut up". The particular moment about erotic intimacy above is like a tangent he digresses into accidentally, amidst his telling of an alternative story. He snaps out of it, quickly. There is immediacy in his tone in attempting to construct something else that is not his experience. It is as if he is trying to appease his audience by assigning him the role of the bad guy and giving the audience an opportunity to revel in fantasy. It is not clear to whom he is addressing the "shut up" to. Is he frustrated with himself for digressing during the narration? Or does the speaker anticipate frustration from the reader? In any case, sex is what is keeping the story compelling to him. The eroticism is something he cannot avoid.

It is evident that the lyrical self cannot resign from being in the story himself. He inserts himself into the speaker, because the story relies on him, which is why he admits to being the detrimental force in the narrative. It is also why the alternative story ends up in "flames", because "love always wakes the dragon" (C, 11).

> […] Okay, so I'm the dragon. Big deal.
> You still get to be the hero.
> You get magic cloves! a fist that talks! You get eyes like flashlights!
> What more do you want? […] (C, 12.)

But the reality is that the reader sticks along with him exactly because what is being presented is not fantasy or fabrication. Here is where the honesty becomes a key factor. The little details the metalyrical speech gives are what make the current story engaging. Otherwise it might just be exhausting drama.

Before moving onto the actual reading of poetry, I want to give a moment to highlight the fact that reading poetry is investment in words. I find endless comfort in Jeanine Vivona's work on reading poetry and psychoanalysis. She gives a reading on Billy Collins' poem, which illustrates exactly words' and poetry's "multisensorial reverberations as sources of meaning" (2013, 1110). She exemplarily takes words in as they are and how they affect the reader, which then affects the poem itself. I aim to take in Siken's poetry in such a way, letting it affect me and unleash the transference to the best extent. Now, I will take part in *Crush*'s delusions.

3 READING I: Locating struggle

There is no natural point at which to start explaining Richard Siken's work especially through the lenses of psychoanalysis. Every point seems lacking, out of context and irrational, because the poems exist in multiplicities, constantly referencing each other and relying on the collective for them to be comprehensible. Surely one can read many of the poems on their own, but after indulging in the whole of *Crush*, it seems evident that together, they have a story to tell.

To emphasize the importance of the factor of cohesion in reading Siken, I am going to reference a couple of poems. A looser connective element throughout the collection is the symbol of light, which serves as the motif for inevitable redemption. Notably, the first two sections of the collection begin with a poem centering on discussing the light within. The first poem "Scheherazade" in the whole collection speaks of "our bodies, possessed by light" (C, 1). The next section opens with the poem "Visible World": "The light is no mystery, / the mystery is that there is something to keep the light / from passing through." (C, 19.) It is fairly apparent that this light holds the same meaning in both poems; it symbolizes undeniable goodness. In similar effect, the second section ends with the poem "Saying Your Names", which talks of "the illuminated cities". Compared to the two previous ones, the last section is different in tone all around which muddles the meaning of light as well. Though light is a recurring symbol, it is presented in different forms other than being formulated along that tension between direct and abstract light. For example, in "Planet of Love" the speaker narrates that "you're the star" (C, 39), and the tone of it in the context of the poem is not necessarily as innocuous compared to the previous references to light. Later, in "The Dislocated Room" he notes that "there is / some sort of shining star now buried deep inside you" (C, 47). In the context of this poem, the tone shifts to a more threatening one; that light within the subject is in danger of being subdued. The meaning of light is a major component in constructing the eventual relief that is absent otherwise in the panic of the journey. Being both light in terms of being luminous as well as signifying something that is not heavy or burdensome, is quite an important aspect of the narration in the collection. My suggestion is that light is mainly a symbol for goodness of the subject, which then emphasizes the need for it to prevail. To quote "The Dislocated Room" again: "*Cut me open and the light streams out. / Stitch me up and the light keep streaming out between / the stitches*." (C, 48.)

One recurring metaphor in the collection are the multiple images of an accident or a crash, and what spirals around it. “The Torn-Up Road” features the crash through different sensations, offering the experience to be felt by the reader: “A pause, a road, the taste of gravel in the mouth. The rocks dig into my skin / like arrowheads. / And then the sense of being smothered[.]” (C, 9.) In “I Had a Dream About You” and “You Are Jeff” one can easily read the formation of the crash as well (C, 28–30, 50–58). The crash is something one might even expect already from the title of the work; *Crush* as the name of the collection holds multiple meanings from the feeling of being crushed, crushing something yourself, and to having ‘a crush’. In addition, the more carefully one reads *Crush*, the more peculiar the meaning of the crash becomes. It is loaded with erotic yet deadly tension.

Intratextuality is also why one is met with a man who eats something (a fruit pie, an apple), notably in two different poems, “Little Beast” and “A Primer for the Small Weird Loves” (C, 5, 22). I cannot but find some religious connotations in fruit and the fact that another person is consuming it; the symbolization of sin, wrongdoing. Religious aspects are not something I am going to focus on in my analysis, but there are recurring religious images in Siken’s poetry which warrant attention. In addition, the (bad) man is a threatening entity throughout the collection. It is a looming sign of insecurity, in which the feelings of abuse accumulate. The man remains quite a vague figure throughout the collection, suggesting perhaps that it is both an intimate affective extension of the main subject and a repressed traumatic figure, which cannot be worded clearly.

In “Little Beast” the reader is met with also the green-eyed boy: “He had green eyes, / so I wanted to sleep with him[.]” (C, 5.) Then he is met with again, though this time in much more tragic frames in “A Primer for the Small Weird Loves”: “The green-eyed boy in the powder-blue t-shirt standing / next to you in the supermarket recoils as if hit, / repeatedly, by a lot of men, as if he has a history of it.” (C, 22.) There are definite links between the two poems and the feelings they transfer, both in terms of being vulnerable and being subjected to abuse.

These are only some of the recurring elements, that illustrate the crucial intratextuality between the poems. Repetitive elements will keep coming up in the analysis itself, notably the symbols of hands is explained in the frames of “Unfinished Duet”. Intratextuality makes it challenging to construct the following readings, in terms of constructing coherent yet

separate aspects of analysis. Reading Siken requires a lot of thought, which is why I think some previously established context is necessary.

I operate on the presupposition that in Siken's poems, there is an underlying trauma of homophobia, which shapes the speaker of the poems. This trauma manifests in the actions taking place as well as in the positions the subject finds himself in. He is in constant anxious struggle with himself because of it. This affects his agency in a limiting manner. Agency is understood as a part of identity and subjectivity formulated during the developmental phases, a part of the psychosexual maturing. The trauma should be recognized as the affective factor of repression as well as the source of anxiety, and this internal traffic of trauma can be viewed as a part of the continuum of the primordial trauma that is suggested to be formulated already at birth (and at the rejection of mother as an object during the Oedipal crisis). Escaping trauma is the driving force and motivation of the subject to continue repressing his sexuality, because it is essentially a social taboo that affects how he is perceived as a masculine entity. In the escape from such unfair hurt, his desires become distorted. The fact that he has experienced a loss of an object of desire works to reaffirm the struggle with sexual desire. The subject is both self-destructive – desiring death – as well as hurtful towards who he loves. The struggle's immediacy pertains throughout the collection, which can be overwhelming in terms of reader reception. (See Elkki 2018.) As the foreword by Louise Glück describes: "The speaker is never outside of it [panic] long enough to differentiate panic from other states." (Glück 2005, vii.) One could also anticipate the continuous rush after reading the opening poem "Scheherazade".

The title comes from the narrator of *One Thousand and One Nights*, an Arabic collection of tales. In the story, Scheherazade keeps surviving night after night by telling unfinished stories to the murderous and paranoid monarch, Shahryar, until the man falls in love with her and spares her from the fate, that all previous wives had experienced. I mention this, because it parallels the speaker's need to reiterate the struggle and create other stories throughout the collection. As distorted as it is as a so-called coping mechanism, it is in many ways the only way for him to survive. This suggests that the collection is a process of its own. In the opening poem itself, the speaker asks: "Tell me about the dream where we pull the bodies out of the lake / and dress them in warm clothes again." (C, 3.) The "again" is curiously placed, because it has a double meaning in the act of redressing the bodies as well as just referencing to retelling the dream again. Of course, the point of view given to the reader is only that of the lone speaker himself, which limits one's understanding of what one

could call the real sequence of events; not that those events even matter in the end – the inherent guilt should be the focus of examination. Thus, the fact that what is presented in Siken's poetry is a deep internal and self-centered conflict is emphasized.[14] This struggle is perhaps the most fruitful point to start in detailing the complicated relationship the subject has with desire.

Some notions about the tools of poem analysis are helpful to understand in the following analysis. Materiality of the poem has already been mentioned, but to reiterate; it is means to be concerned with the physical form of the language used in the poetry. Essentially then it is investment in the words, rhythms, rhymes, length, and other characteristic pertaining to the language used. Materiality cannot be separated from the message of the poem, but at times it might be emphasized, if the poem's message is otherwise incomprehensible. (Kainulainen et al. 2012, 15–17.) I will be focusing on the imagery of the poems, the overall instances depicted, but they will be usually taken in as metaphorical expressions, meaning that they have an alternative meaning in contrast to their direct meaning. On top of that, the different sensations of the poems are a huge influence on the analysis; this is analogous to the workings of transference which was already discussed above. Most clearly it comes across as affectivity, which gets emphasized in the way the reader must take part in the emotions of the poem. Affectivity culminates in the ways the poem transfers the speaker's emotional positions. (Seutu 2012, 249.) In Siken, I focus especially on these elements, and their cooperation to formulate the journey of *Crush*.

3.1 The return of the repressed

Moving onto the process of repression, a worthwhile notion to make about repressing sexuality is that it is never quite successfully seen through, and most likely this is because it is such innate and powerful a drive that it cannot be just outright denied. Moreover, it has such definite links to other material in a person's life that it is bound to resurface continuously. It will express itself as symptoms of other kind, like it was stated in the theoretical background chapter (2.1). More generally repression, though impactful on behavior, does not prevent the subject from seeking satisfaction. It is the form and reception of satisfaction that should be looked into. The subject of Siken's poetry struggles with

[14] Here some psychoanalysts might have found it appropriate to turn to explanations of narcissism, which has been regarded by many in the realm of early analysis as the end-all, be-all cause of inverted sexuality in the psyche of 'the homosexual', as established in the chapter 2.2.

society's downgrading of homophobia, which affects his self-composition throughout; he understands himself as something completely defective which requires masquerade and unique conduction of self that needs restrictions. He desires to fulfill his sexual need, but it is few and far between that he succeeds to a satisfactory point. It is not only a consequence of homophobia but of loss as well.

The problematic relationship with desire translates to so called returns of the repressed. The subject experiences these returns of figures of sexual desire as distorted sexual performance, which is why his erotic relationships have an abusive nature. Other forms of the return are already mentioned above: the parapraxes, symptoms and dreams (Wright 1993, 12). Dreams will be analyzed in more detail later, but for now these three concepts are looked are more generally as the returns. Siken uses multiple lyrical and structural tools to create the phenomena of repression and resurfacing in the poetical realm. External structure heavily influences the internal structure.

Material aspects are especially worthwhile to stew in for a moment. In his poetry, Siken often uses a long format and certain structural tools. His rhetoric relies heavily on typography. The line breaks are crucial in providing emphasis and punctuation to an overall very dramatic narration of alternative realities, between which the speaker moves in order to prove "a better story" (C, 11). In "Litany in Which Certain Things Are Crossed Out", the reader is met with a writer that is constructing a story about something else but at the same time covering for himself and his current state, diverting attention away from his 'real' current task. I pointed out earlier (chapter 2.3) that in this poem metalyrical speech is apparent. The reader is brought much closer to the lyrical self; he is letting his voice be heard in the speaker. I want to emphasize the honesty in his voice, which directly speaks of desire and the fear the lyrical self has of never experiencing it to a satisfying level. The avoidance he also practices with desire can be read from the excerpt as well. His previous "non-definitive acts" are a production of repression as well as denial, picked out from "a catalog", like they are on demand, readily available without much intention behind them. Yet, at the same time "every morning" he is faced with the fear of never achieving that intimate relationship.

[…] Every morning the same big
and little words all spelling out desire, all spelling out
You will be alone always and then you will die.

So maybe I wanted to give you something more than a catalog
of non-definitive acts,
something other than desperation. […] (C, 11.)

Whatever nonchalance that the subject tries as the speaker, is fraudulent and comes across as discontent: "You want a better story. Who wouldn't?" (C, 11.) The "better story" he ends up offering quickly becomes a story about danger, which is an example of how he cannot deny, or repress, the complicated relationship he has with desire. His involvement is inevitable, and in this poem he manifests as "the dragon". His attempts – as bitter sounding as they are to begin with – at creating a story about "love" compulsively turn into a tragedy.

[…] A forest then. Beautiful trees. And a lady singing.
Love on the water, *love underwater*, *love*, *love*, and so on.
What a sweet lady. Sing lady, sing! Of course, she wakes the dragon.
Love always wakes the dragon and suddenly
flames everywhere.
[…] (C, 11.)

In this excerpt, tension is built with short sentences, repetition and line breaks. The story offered by the speaker is concise and unelaborated. It is built with little to no substance and deals with rather stereotypical fantastic elements. The italicized line sounds mocking, telling of how shallow the subject sees the figures of romantic love. The figures introduced in the alternative story become symbolic in order to represent the subject's understanding of what 'real' love involves. His understanding is lacking, which is why the figures are quite flat, and what transpires is disaster. "Flames everywhere" is so far apart from the rest that, should this be read aloud, it would require a moment of silence before it is uttered. It occupies an entire line on its own. It calls for a moment of stillness and stewing in it. This also emphasizes the content of the line itself, because it signifies destruction brought on by love.

The subject wants to "do it right for once" (C, 12) which is why he is so insistent on keeping this fantasy going. Suddenly, the scenery changes to images that do not quite make sense in the previous narration.

[…] you know the story, simply heaven.
Inside your head you hear a phone ringing
and when you open your eyes
only a clearing with deer in it. Hello deer.

Inside your head the sound of glass,

a car crash sound as the trucks rollover and explode in slow motion.

[…] (C, 12.)

From narrating heaven, he abruptly turns to describe a series of events that apparently lead to an accident. It is constructed through quick moments that zoom out from a very internal focus on a particular sound to the visual of deer to which he manages to only say a greeting. Then the crash takes over, audible and slow. This image is not visible, which overall emphasizes its metaphorical condition as well as its link to the destructive nature of love. It is an intense moment of return of the repressed. The image of the crash is break in the fantastic fabrication; it affects the speaker's flow, because he just snaps back from it, as if he was never supposed to go there to begin with: "Hello darling, sorry about that." (C, 12.) The voice regains composure, recoiling back from moment of trauma, but only for a moment. The poem changes to a desperate and tattered explanation of anything and everything that went wrong, which undeniably is associated to the figure of the crash. The repressive material is pushed to the front, so the flow of creating another story is long gone from the poetic narration. Thoughts become muddled, the speaker does not elaborate on the things says.

After the crash, the disruption of energy in his psyche can be sensed. The economic view, as Freud named one of his viewpoints of the mind, is most helpful in understanding the shakiness of the rest of the poem. The balance of energy has been thoroughly disturbed by the resurfacing of traumatic material, which increases the subject's panic as well as the need to control the anxiety created. The images given by the speaker are almost idle, uncontrolled verbalizations of everything that the speaker wants to fix or erase out of existence, which is why he is eager to assert his power and "take" them back. This act is underlined by how these particular stanzas stand on their own, demanding recognition.

[…] You see, I take the parts that I remember and stitch them back together

to make a creature that will do what I say

or love me back.

I'm not really sure why I do it, but in this version you are *not*

feeding yourself to the bad man

against a black sky prickled with small lights.

I take it back.

The wooden halls like caskets. These terms from the lower depths.

I take them back.

Here is the repeated image of the lover destroyed.

Crossed out.

Clumsy hands in the dark room. Crossed out. There is something underneath the floorboards.

Crossed out. […] (C, 12–13.)

The speaker both provides the images and takes them back, giving them a paradoxical nature of both existing and being denied existence. Stating that certain images are "crossed out" gives the visual of an actual action, that discards the very point being presented. The motivation behind this action is to regain love that is unlike what has been experienced thus far. It is worthwhile to note that the image of a man returns in this poem, too.

The act of crossing out is also a form of repression the subject of poem is actively trying to achieve. By taking the images back, the subject is attempting to restore ease over the disruption the return of the crash created. There is strange poetic tension in the text, because the speaker says: "I'm not really sure why I do it[.]" The subject thus is not wholly aware of why he is trying to erase these images, but the poetic narration shows that these images are not pleasant and thus warrant denial from the subject; one can read the need to ease the anxiety the images create in between the lines. I also want to stress that they are "terms from the lower depths"; the line clearly tells that they are images originating from somewhere deep within, which still have ties to the tangible world. Clearly, the repression Siken's subject is experiencing is repression proper; his experiences have ties to previously repressed material, meaning that his repressive acts teeter somewhere between the conscious and unconscious, because the push from the repressed material is so forceful all the time. The material is, to use Frosh's expression (1987, 21–24) again, in the half-light of consciousness.

The above analysis is an attempt to identify the return of the repressed in one way. The tangential content and the dramatic line breaks offer slippages of thoughts, that reflect what is actually pushed back and what keeps surfacing. The sudden change between the subject's desperate attempt at covering for himself and the accident is a powerful one. The practice of crossing out images or parts of the story is absurd denial as well as admittance to the reality of what happened. The subject surely has an idea of himself as the criminal, who is directly at fault in unsuccessful love stories, yet there is no record of the accident itself in the collection. The reader does not get to know where the figure of the accident actually stems

from or what transpires according to the other participants, so the cues to understand it are only linked to the subject's problematic relationship with sexual desire, which is why he appropriates the role of the dragon, the bad guy, in the story. The combination of repression and guilt is a major factor in constructing a false sense of malignant consequentiality. It all comes back to his understanding of the effect his sexual desire has on others, which is definitely disturbed by the loss the subject has experienced. The nature of his sexual desire has become symptomatic through the displacement of consequentiality.

After the subject's crude manipulation of reality, he describes a concise journey through airport bathrooms and airplanes that lead him to his object of love. The description of their reunion is soft only for a moment, and the poem returns to what the subject tried to erase out of existence just a couple of stanzas earlier; his companion is far from a creature that will do what the subject says. The nature of their relationship was apparently not very fair, because the quote from the (ex-)lover paints an obsessive and unhealthy image of the subject. His demands, it seems, were always uncontainable:

> […] You said I could have anything I wanted but I
> just couldn't say it out loud.
> Actually, you said *Love, for you,*
> *is larger than the usual romantic love. It's like a religion. It's*
> *terrifying. No one*
> *will ever want to sleep with you.*
> […] (C, 14.)

Now, that it is clear that the subject is proven to be lousy at telling a good love story, he demands his audience to write a better one: "Okay, if you're so great, you do it– / here's the pencil, make it work…" (C, 14.) He calls for a "jump ahead to the moment of epiphany" (C,14), but he knows this is not possible nor a satisfactory ending to the complicated self-narration: "But it doesn't work, these erasures, this constant refolding of the pleats." (C, 14.) It is proof that the subject has self-awareness of his problematic condition, but he has no control over the consequences his behavior reaps. These refolded pleats are the return that he cannot escape, but he does not have the tools to manage his anxiety. By the end of the poem, it is compelling how poorly his repression works in terms of keeping his ego safe from turmoil. The subject is guilt-laden to a point that he exercises almost sober thought at what he requires to feel better: "Dear Forgiveness, I saved a plate for you." (C, 15.)

To further illustrate the return of the repressed, I am going to reference another poem, "Straw House, Straw Dog" which is an excellent example, because it involves dreams as well as repetitive lines, which both work to create a continuum of resurfacing of repressed material.

In "Straw House, Straw Dog" one comes across a rather laconic poem. It is repetitive and constructed of short sentences and circling around stages of grief. In terms of images and symbols, the poem is connected to "I Had a Dream About You", though structurally these two are very different. The poem at hand is constantly crossing the line between dreams and waking life. In terms of narrative chronology, it lands somewhere right after the loss the subject has experienced, and as such it is the starting of the lowest point of his journey to survival.

The first verse is very disorienting. The emptiness of the subject's days is relived multiple times to a point that the material is blurring together. The speaker narrates tasks that are very meaningless and cyclic, suggesting a routine that eventually blends into the dreams and gets morphed. The repetitiveness of the material is a notion about compulsivity, which in turn is reflective of the immediacy of the resurfaced material.

> I watched TV.   I had a Coke at the bar.   I had four dreams in a row
> where you were burned, about to burn, or still on fire.
>   I watched TV.   I had a Coke at the bar. I had four Cokes,
> four dreams in a row.   […]   (C, 31.)

The blurring between the dreams and reality happen through slight shifting of details between the figures given in the poem. Details are displaced, which creates unease and discomfort. This association between waking life and dreams emphasizes the relationship of re-emerged material to behavior; its presence is intimate.

> Here you are in the straw house, feeding the straw dog. Here you are
>   in the wrong house, feeding the wrong dog. I had a Coke with ice.
> I had four dreams on TV.   You have a cold cold smile.
> You were burned, you were about to burn, you're still on fire.
>
> Here you are in the straw house, feeding ice to the dog, and you wanted
>   an adventure, so I said   *Have an adventure*.
> The straw about to burn, the straw on fire. Here you are on the TV,

saying *Watch me, just watch me*. (C, 31)

The speaker's dreams are filled with images of his lover burning, which is somewhat explained by the fact that he was "cremated" but is more acutely telling of how the speaker keeps imaging his object of desire. A worthwhile notion to make is that in "I Had a Dream About You", one is faced with the image of the lover burning as well, but in context in which it does not make much sense (referring to the beginning of the poem and the hue of red all over it, see chapter 4). Intratextuality is then key in understanding how the images of the lover alive are constructed. They are merely returns that hold no substance other than being a reminder of the object of desire. Attention should be paid to the parallels between the straw house burning and the lover burning, because it is effective in showing the way the desire for the lover returns. It is constant and hot danger – flammable and destructive. The contrast between cold and burning is one to emphasize the difficult feelings the speaker has towards the dead lover. Evidently, aggression is built in the instances where the speaker is face to face with the lost lover.

> […] Four dreams in a row, four dreams in a row, four dreams in a row,
> fall down right there, I wanted to fall down right there but I knew
> you wouldn't catch me because you're dead. I swallowed crushed ice
> pretending it was glass and you're dead. Ashes to ashes. […]
> I woke up in the morning and I didn't want anything, didn't do anything,
> couldn't do it anyway. […]
> And I can't eat, can't sleep, can't sit still or fix things and I wake up and
> I wake up and you're still dead, you're under the table, you're still feeding
> the damn dog, you're cutting the room in half. […] (C, 31.)

The continuous instances of the lover feeding the dog returns with a particular meaning. They are out of immediate reach, occurring by proxy in the dream, which gives the impression that the affectivity exists in the background rather than being under evaluation. Yet the manifestations are bothering the speaker, who, in fits of anger tells him to "[f]eed him whatever" and "burn the straw house down" (C, 32). The carelessness indicates frustration; he is being plagued by these instances. The dog is the medium for the love between the speaker and his object of desire. In the act of feeding the dog the love is kept alive. It is a useless task because the dog is only "straw"; the love, too, is useless. In his disregard, the speaker denies himself of the process of mourning, which then translates to the bitterness and anger he holds on to, when faced with the images of his lover.

In his waking life, the subject is desireless and incapable, stripped of any instinctual action expect wanting to “fall down”, following along his lover right into death. It is a cry for the peace of death, because the intensity of the grief keeps building, until it reaches a point at which the speaker reveals the death to be unjustified in his view. This is a key factor in morphing his relationship with desire in later encounters: “You can sleep now, you said. You can sleep now. You said that. / I had a dream where you said that. Thanks for saying that. / You weren’t supposed to.” (C, 32.) The dream is a message from the lover that suggests that now the subject can sleep in peace, which seemingly baffles the subject. The subject is more invested with death as a peaceful option away from the anxious turmoil. The last line has multiple meanings, referring to both the act of saying as well as of dying. These are inherently linked; neither of these should have happened, not the death or the need for appeasement. The blunt thank-you lacks thankfulness, because it does not reverse the fact that the lover is death.

In the above analysis, the dream is a key concept in understanding the return of the repressed. At the same time, it illustrates the parapraxes in poetical form. These can be found in the beginning verse where material is blurred between dream and waking life. The associations between “wrong” and “straw” are telling of the injustice of the untimely death of the lover, which is then featured in the dream. Similarly, what is demonstrated is the association between unpalatable material and links that pull them from the unconsciousness to consciousness. The drinks have ice in them; the dead lover has a cold smile. These associations are telling of the parallel practices between creating meaning in poetic form and finding meanings in the analysis of talk.

Before moving onto other analytical realms, it is worthwhile to mention, that despite this loose attempt at separating manifestations of the return of the repressed under its own headline, this phenomenon is a crucial factor in the entirety of the collection. The above examples are not by far the only ways to locate the return, especially not in a collection that is arguably wholly an example of repressed material resurfacing. By now, one might have an understanding of how the difficult relationship with sexual desire can be located in the material aspects of Siken’s poetry; it is very much tied into the tangential thought and the material presentation of the poem.

3.2 Poem as a process

Turning back on the non-linear format of the collection, one finds a subject that moves backwards and forwards in his experience dealing with repression and sexual desire. In this journey, the individual poems are only moments of energetic movement in the psyche. I refer here to the Freudian view of energetic movement in the mind in terms of material that is actively being repressed, more or less unsuccessfully. Looking back at "Straw House, Straw Dog", one spots these characteristics as well. There is movement from active stress to a more balanced relationship with the state of affairs. Siken's poetry offers other mental journeys, one of which is the poem "You Are Jeff" [15]. This view is heavily tied into the particularities given in the chapter 3.1, emphasizing yet again the link between form and content.

The process in this particular poem is unfolding as one reads through it. Consisting of 24 verses in total, the overall construction of "You Are Jeff" is based around returning to moments of significance in one's experience. This is why the verses are concise and involve usually only one setting that serves a point in the process of unfolding identification. The subject is actively trying to detangle and overcome the barriers insisted by ego which is actively trying to protect the self against unpalatable material that might be detrimental to the survival of the subject; the ego is acting as a shield, keeping the subject together, though how successfully is evidently questionable. There are multiple settings throughout the poem, but only one of them the speaker keeps reiterating – the road. It is 'the main event', though obviously a metaphorical state of mind, during which questions about subjectivity and needs for identification manifest. The other settings are moments from the past, occasions in which the subject has had to negotiate his subjectivity in relation to desire. The persisting question is how he is supposed to conduct his masculine identity in light of all these aspects that seemingly disallow said masculinity.

"You Are Jeff" utilizes a pronominal state that confuses the positions that the reader and the implicit reader are occupying. The speaker speaks of "you", and it is far from self-explanatory, whose self-reflexive struggle is being negotiated. The title of the poem gives the reader a position from which they should regard the story from. At the same time, the story is very specific to Jeff, or multiple Jeffs as it is uncovered: "There are two twins on motorbikes but one is farther up the road. Let's call them Jeff." (C, 50.) Yet, the subject ends

[15] I want to note that some parts of this analysis of "You Are Jeff" come close to the analysis I've already conducted on it in my bachelor's thesis (2018), though here it is framed differently.

up moving from being solely the speaker to an active part of the poem on multiple occasions throughout the poem, when a shift from you to I occurs.

In the analysis of poetry, pronominal shift is a tool used to distance the lyrical self from the poem, but the lyrical self is the conductor of the content bringing together these fractured parts. Though the speaker often is "the personified I" as well as the "self" under discussion, but "the lyrical self is not automatically either of these two", which is one to highlight the complex levels of constructing voice in poetry. (Hökkä 1995, 111–112.) In light of this – in addition to the purposes of psychoanalytic reading – the most appropriate view of the poem is to see it as the internal struggle of the speaker in which the lyrical self resides despite his efforts at distancing himself from the narration.

The pronominal tool is used to distance the very intimate struggle from the speaker, because the themes and suggestions of the narration are so sensitive in nature, that it leaves the speaker in a vulnerable position; in addition it is the highest form of relatability and demanding recognition for the intricate details of his struggle. He is still trekking is own story, because he asserts authority over it by commanding the "you" to refrain from choosing sides: "It is still to your advantage to remain impartial. […] Do not choose sides yet." (C, 50.) To reiterate, though it is not explicitly the speaker/subject under scrutiny in this poem, the intimate detail of the poem reveals that it is about the speaker/subject, but making the (implicit or physical) reader step into his shoes emphasizes the need for avowal to the complexity of his neurosis with identification.

The struggle is namely pinpointed in the confrontations between Jeffs, which reflects how the problem of identification concerns mainly the expectations placed in masculine subjects. Webbed into the Jeffs are the multiple masculine entities that bring discomfort in the subject's understanding of self. His father and brother and the object of his love are present and complicate the described journey of navigating identification with the pressure of social expectations opposing him. The men in his life influence what he should or should not become, alluding to the demands of masculinity and what is appropriate for men to be. What occurs, in Freudian terms, is repression proper, and, evidently, its failure. The repressed sexual desire towards men keeps coming back to the subject because of its links with masculinities of his brother and father, hence it is accessible to the subject as an active struggle and not out of reach, in the unconscious. It is in "the half-light", as expressed by Frosh (1987, 21–24). Furthermore, the way the negotiations are circling around Jeffs is an

example of the return of the repressed, which is only a factor in the processes of the psyche, and under focus here is the overall intense struggle with identification. The conflict the subject experiences is, in other words, constituted in Jeffs:

> […]
> There are two twins on motorbikes but one is farther up the road, beyond
> the hairpin turn, or just before it, depending on which Jeff you are.
> [...] My name is Jeff and I'm tired
> of looking at the back of your head. My name is Jeff and I'm tired
> of seeing my hand me down clothes. Look, Jeff, I'm telling you, for the
> last time, I mean it, etcetera. They are the same and they are not the
> same. They are the same and they hate each other for it. […] (C, 51.)

The above excerpt of the third verse also highlights the distaste the subject has for his state of being. At the same time, it underlines the intense need for resolution, which is essentially the need to reduce the tension. Pleasure is far removed from this instance. The speaker sees the conjunctive traits between him and the others he reflects himself upon, but he also realizes that they are different – the same and not the same. The comparison and reflection happens along the road, competing against the brother. The subject feels inferior compared to the brother's masculinity. The brother is the other twin "farther up the road", and this distance between them is repeated four times – in verses one, two, three and four. It needs to be noted that this is not the real brother but a representation of him, that is connected to the subject's desire to men through masculinity, again, alluding to the function of repression. Placing the twin brothers on two different points on the road creates an on-going race to "the hairpin turn", which should be considered as a turning point in the struggle. It is never really reached, and the struggle keeps happening along the distance. "The checkered flag" (C, 55) never comes, but the twins do reach each other. What the race boils down to is the attempt to "define the space between them".

> […]
> Two brothers: one of them wants to take you apart. Two brothers: one
> of them wants to put you back together. It's time to choose sides now.
> The stitches or the devouring mouth? You want an alibi? You don't get
> an alibi, you get two brothers. Here are two Jeffs. Pick one. This is how
> you make the meaning, you take two things and try to define the space

between them. Jeff or Jeff? Who do you want to be? […] (C, 56.)

There is something in the above quote that I cannot quite grasp fully. Why is it that the one who is trying to take them apart is "the devouring mouth"? Perhaps severing ties with the other Jeff seems to be detrimental, referring to the fact that repressing this necessary confrontation leads to twisting of desire into being "the devouring mouth" that consumes whatever come across its way. Stitching the two masculine positions together would produce something else entirely – a reparation. The poem asks, what is the difference between Jeff and Jeff. The distance between them is the progression of the poem, I suggest. The speaker is trying to define the distance through the 24 verses; thus the attempt of defining the subject occurs.

The poem sets the Jeffs against each other also in a setting that is much closer to a negotiation than playing catch-up. They come together in a card game, that is ultimately a lot trickier than a simple race. At the table with him are the brother, the father and the lover, all of them Jeff. First, the lover is unfamiliar to the subject but recognized as an equal "on your team" (C, 52), and it seems they are ahead in the game, but the other Jeffs are threatening nevertheless, highlighting their power over the subject: "[Y]et the other Jeffs keep smiling at you like there's no tomorrow. / They all have perfect teeth: white, square, clean, even." (C, 52.) The connotations rising from the description of the teeth are analogous to the 'purer' state of masculinity that the opposing team occupies, in contrast to the seemingly degraded state of the subject and lover-Jeff: square in opposition to queer. I find this moment to be a representative of vague anxiety, as well, because the subject cannot quite place his own feelings about the team opposing him. Yet the tenseness between them is rather tangible. Are the other Jeffs perhaps bluffing or do they really have the higher ground? The card game is an instance of distrust and doubt. I want to point out the links between the descriptions of the Jeffs' teeth and "the devouring mouth" of a later verse. It may suggest that any integration between the Jeffs leads to something uncomfortable, something incomprehensible, again highlighting the difficult relations between homosexuality and masculinity.

The homosexual desire is coming under fire by the repressive forces in his psyche, but because of the undeniable sexual connections between the subject's object of desire and his brother (and father), the struggle keeps manifesting and pending resolution. This intimacy is established in the seventh verse. There is odd eroticism in the progression of the verse, because one of the Jeffs is recognized as the boyfriend directly.

> […]
>
> You are playing cards with three Jeffs. One is your father, one is your brother, and the other is your current boyfriend. All of them have seen you naked and heard you talking in your sleep. Your boyfriend Jeff gets up to answer the phone. To them he is a mirror, but to you he is a room. *Phone's for you*, Jeff says.
>
> […] but you can't talk right now, one of the Jeffs has put his tongue in your mouth. Please let it be the right one. […] (C, 52.)

The verse ends with a suggestion of incest, but not so extensively that I would dare elaborate on it. Rather it pinpoints how the subject understands his struggle with his sexuality. He associates his desire with the masculine representatives that come from his kinships. His father is a parent that brought him up and saw him in these intimate situations; his brother has experienced all of these instances simultaneously. The "other" Jeff has witnessed his vulnerability as well, but the context is different all together. They all are males, though, which seemingly complicates the recognition between them. Here is one of the only moments when a careful reference to the Oedipal complex is useful. It is clear that the subject at hand here has realized his sexuality through reflection on his father, which sprouts the fear that he is kissing someone that is not his father but alike his father.

Freud has concluded that identification and sexual object-choice are independent processes, but it is "possible to identify oneself with someone whom, for instance, one has taken as a sexual object" (Freud 1981c, 63). This notion solidifies the meaningfulness of the negotiations between the Jeffs when taking into consideration their differing roles in his upbringing.

I want to dedicate a moment to consider the kinships named in the poem more closely, namely the role of the brother, because even though the poem does start with naming the two Jeffs as brothers, this relationship gets severed later on. In fact, the speaker directly repudiates their kinship: "Let's say they are not brothers / anymore. That's right, they are not brothers, they're just one guy, and / he knows you, and he's talking to you, but you're in pain and you can- / not understand him." (C, 57.) Here, the twins collide into one, and intrapersonal communication is trying to take place, perhaps in an attempt at trying to persuade the subject away from the degeneration of his sexuality, but the opposite is also as possible. It seems that because the subject cannot understand them, resolution is not yet

possible. Because soon they are interrupted by the authoritative voice of the speaker again, yelling: "What are you still doing in this field? Get out of the field! You should be in the hotel room!" (C, 57.) It is imminent that the subject won't find his answers in this particular moment with the brothers. One cannot but think the speaker voice is directly commanding the subject, and the subject does listen to him and leaves. Even more than that, it is a possibility that the speaker actually occupies momentarily the place of the merged twins, because he knows where the subject needs to be next. This particular instance is one of anachronism; the subject-speaker is telling a tale that has already happened but invests his power over the retelling, meddling when he needs to push the story along; the lyrical self is available in this moment for observation. The reader, then, at this point, is really just an audience that is here to listen and follow along, which makes it more challenging to read the psychoanalytic struggle woven into the seams of the story; how powerful a grip the lyrical self has on the transference of the story is a great question, because it renders useless the problem of resisting the text. The need to listen and to makes sense of the omissions and expeditions gets emphasized instead.

Now, some notions about masculine subject formation are required. Seemingly, not all masculinity is equal, or at least this is the contemporary power dynamic influencing subject formations. Arto Jokinen, heavily referencing R.W. Connell, explains that masculinity is formed in comparison to other masculinities. Men compete against each other, through which they garner acceptance and respect. (2003, 12–15.) In "You Are Jeff", this competition can be located, and it is significant in understanding why the subject of the poems finds himself in negotiations between representatives of his kin. Understanding how masculinity is formed also illustrates the complex effect comparison has on masculinities that are considered to be less-than.

The visuality of a biker race is interesting, and agreeably very particular in meaning, within the frames of understanding masculinity. In the poems, as many have previously already noted, Siken utilizes scenery that is very American in nature. There are motels, movies, leisure, opportunity and individualism all concocted into one narrative. The scenery with motorbikes is a part of this, happening at the core of American-ness; the long road, never-ending, reaching for something that you do not quite know.[16] In addition, the motorcycle

[16] One can actually find the reiteration of these characteristics first in "Wishbone": "It's a Western, / Henry. It's a downright shoot-em-up." (C, 40.) Then again they appear in "Driving, Not Washing": "It's a road movie, / a double feature, two boys striking out across America[.]" (C, 42.)

scene garnered popularity in 1940s in the United States, from which these figures of leather-clad tough motorcyclists emerged and spread throughout Europe. They were, and still in many ways are, homosocial formations, where relationships between men were forged strong. At the same time leather garnered popularity in the queer community; queer men invested in leather both as symbol of masculinity as well as of eroticism. (See Dosani 2019.) All of this, of course is not inherently visible in Siken's poetry, but there is significant influence that can be extracted from the background information concerning the motorcycle scene. It reaffirms the question about masculinities in the poem.

I will now turn the gaze towards the recurring elements of "You Are Jeff", and in this way discussing repetition as poetic device. It can also be understood as a form of the return of the repressed. Overdetermination is a key concept in this particular poem. Conjoined by Freud, it refers to the multiple occasions in which a theme becomes apparent (1981a, 306–307). Mainly Freud utilizes it in his interpretation of dreams, but it is not unusual to use it to discuss art. It is not unlike a lead motif that keeps appearing at multiple instances during a narrative. In the poem, what is constantly being represented under multiple different guises is firstly the struggle to integrate parts of self in terms of homosexual desire, secondly the experiences of childhood, and thirdly the communicative failings derivative from the previous two. They present themselves in various forms of which two, the road and the card game, have already been investigated. Some more smaller elements are worthy of examining as well.

The resolution is one of these elements – the integration of the parts of self back into a coherent being. It is the very thing the subject is trying to reach. It is firstly tied to the journey on the road, "the hairpin turn". The speaker on various occasions proposes that the subject should pay attention to the turn. The line "Consider the hairpin turn." appears in the first, 12th and 16th verse, and as I stated earlier, it is never reached. In the 12th verse, the following describes the importance of the turn and how it is deliberately avoided:

> [..]
> Consider the hairpin turn. It is waiting for you like a red door or the
> broken leg of a dog.
> […] It is waiting,
> like a broken door, like the red dog that chases its tail and eats your rose-
> bushes and then must be forgiven. Who do you love, Jeff? Who do you
> love? You were driving toward something and then, well, then you

> found yourself driving the other way. […] (C, 54.)

What lies beyond, is left unsaid, and that is perhaps exactly why the subject keeps avoiding it. The nature of the journey – what happens on the road – speaks volumes on what is the meaning of the turn – the resolution. The final verse is the closest the subject comes to a resolution. A moment is described between the subject and a boy "who won't tell you that he loves you but he loves you" (C, 58). It is a moment of stillness in the car. The poem leaves the subject stewing in distress, trying to battle those feelings of discomfort that come for subjecting oneself to love: "[Y]ou're trying to / choke down the feeling, and you're trembling, but he reaches over and / he touches you, like a prayer for which no words exist, and you feel your / heart taking root in your body, like you've discovered something you / don't even have a name for."

Secondly, the resolution is condensed in to the "room". It represents a similar type of resolution. Whereas, after the hairpin turn, the subject would be deciding on his own identification, by stepping into the room he more explicitly accepts his homosexual desire. This is because the first time a room is mentioned in the poem is in connotation with the boyfriend-Jeff: "To them he is a mirror, but to you he is a room." (C, 52.) The resolution in the room is more tied into the object of desire. The room is also depicted as both something out of reach, something the subject keeps circling around but not stepping in as well as something he does eventually find himself in.

> […]
> You see it as a room, a tabernacle, the dark hotel. You're in the hallway
> again, and you open the door, and if you're ready you'll see it, but
> maybe one part of your mind decides that the other parts aren't ready,
> and then you don't remember where you've been, and you find yourself
> down the hall again […] It's a puzzle: each piece, each room, each time you
> put your hand to the knob, your mouth to the hand, your ear to the
> wound that whispers.
>
> You are in the hallway again. […]
> You are in the hallway. Open the door again. Open the door. […] (C, 53.)

I make the distinction in the nature of the resolution due to the fact that the subject's reaction to the hairpin turn is different to his reaction to the door. The door is clearly enticing, calling

to him, whereas the hairpin turn is something he journeys towards, along which he faces the masculine requirements he struggles with. The room is defined by the lover and the connection to another person, which 'just' happens, in a sense. The road is in many ways a more complicated journey:

> […]
> Consider the hairpin turn. It is waiting for you like a red door or the
> broken leg of a dog.
> […] It is waiting
> like a broken door, like the red dog that chases its tail and eats your rose-
> bushes and then must be forgiven. Who do you love, Jeff? Who do you
> love? You were driving toward something and then, well, then you found
> yourself driving the other way. […] (C, 54.)

Identification is a more permanent choice to make; fulfilling desire can be only momentary. The above verse ties the two together though, meaning that either choice is consequential in terms of the other one as well. The door to the room is more intimate and enticing, "red", which is why the subject eventually does end up in the room. The color red acts both as an attraction as well as a warning. The interference of the speaker is key in this shift, already quoted above: "What are you still doing in this field? Get out of the field! You should be in the hotel room!" (C, 57.) The next verse is a metaphorical coming together of the parts of identity. Somewhere along the next verse happens a shift from silence to guidance, from outside the room to the inside, through fear towards reconciliation.

> […]
> Hold onto your voice. Hold onto your breath. Don't make a noise,
> don't leave the room until I come back from the dead for you. I will
> come back from the dead for you.
> […] I'm in the hallway again, I'm in the hallway.
> […] Leave the lights on. Keep talking. I'll
> keep walking toward the sound of your voice. […] (C, 57.)

The above excerpt also clarifies an earlier verse, in which the subject keeps hearing a voice singing from a bathroom: "[A]nd someone is in there, singing very softly. Is he singing to you? / For you? […] you cannot make out all the words, but you're / sure he knows you're

in there, and he's singing to you, even though you / don't know who he is." (C, 53.) It is a statement of the attractive nature of what is inside the room.

There is also an undeniable connection to the lost object of desire, when the speaker utters "until I come back from the dead for you". But now, the speaker-subject is dead, and not the object. By this point the figure of the dead lover is proven complex, and I have my reservations on declaring that the lover is a 'literal' object of desire. Instead, what seems more fitting is that the dead lover is akin to the repressed sexual desire. The poem in this way plays with the positions of the subject and the object. Killing the object of desire to keep it out of reach seems a safe way to stay away from harm that engaging with it might trigger; at the same time the subject has also been killed because he does not have adequate access to desire. This emphasizes the inherent value of sexual desire to him, which why he now is making his way to connect the two again.

In these different resolutions, different things get emphasized. The hairpin turn can be seen as the societal consequences the subject has to face, should he move forward and declare his object of love. The room occurs in the realm of intimacy, in which no one might have a window into. Reading the poem as a continuous journey makes it blatant of how the subject's agency is fractured into different positions that he is trying to bring together. This is why during the most crucial instances the speaker locates himself in the poem's space and takes over positions in which the subject has primarily been depicted in. It is telling of the need to bring together a coherent subject once again. It is truly perplexing how complex the strive for the completion of subjectivity is in the poem, and this is something that I will focus on dissecting with the help of Freud's topography.

3.3 The Is, the Yous, and the Whys

It is not a simple task to discuss the position changes in Siken's poems, which surely became clear in the discussion on subject in chapter 2.3. What follows next is tackling the difficult speaker-subject position in terms of the poetry. Though the speaker is very consistent in his tone throughout the collection, his assertiveness changes according to how much authority the whole subject (all the layered voices condensed) is given through the collection. At times, he is the sardonic and scrutinizing voice looming over the subject of the poem. At times, he is the comforting guiding light offering the subject an opening to overcome whatever he is going through. Siken himself has reflected on the collection in terms of this variation in the

speaker's tone: ""The first part [of the collection] is man against man, the second is man against God, the third is God, the director of the movie, in a helicopter trying to give advice and finding that no one is listening."" (Casey 2005.) Siken's own explanation is fruitful for the following analysis, because it further clarifies the position changes, which affect the tone given to the function of agency displayed by the speaker's authority. But what I want to argue is that the positions all culminate into the speaker-subject himself, again residing somewhere in the position of the lyrical self, in his totality. The separation of his whole subjectivity into different actors in the poems is telling specifically of the negotiation between the id, the ego and the superego of the subject. Basically, under discussion is the need to bring the subject together.

I am going to study the workings of the fractured identity through one particular poem, "Unfinished Duet". It is an honest discussion between three different subject positions – the I, the You, the He, all of which are also present in multiple other poems. They are fully entangled together to a point where it is difficult to know who is conducting the narration of the poem itself, who is affected, and who has the power. Siken utilizes italics to differentiate between the voices in the poem to some extent, which works to portray the poem as a discussion, or a duet, as the title already reveals. The practice of italicizing lyric is an established tool used to particularly separate different and opposing voices but strung together by the lyrical self that is mediating between them and granting neither the authority which is under the lyrical self's possession (Hökkä 1995, 112). The poem is one long verse, which makes it challenging to pick only a few lines to represent the process of the poem as a dialogue between the different parts of the subject. In short, the speaker occupies two positions discussing a third participant, but the poem constructs a singular subject through these three positions.

The most important symbol of the poem are the hands. The subject's body has been reduced to the hands, a metonymic way of emphasizing the significance of bodily autonomy and acceptance of oneself. Feelings and actions are projected onto the hands, whereas the face or the body is deemed insufficient or unable to conduct required intimacies to feel satisfied.

> […] *And his hands?*
> His hands keep turning into birds
> and flying away from him. *Him being you?*
> Yes. *Do you love yourself?* I don't have to

answer that. *It should matter.* He has a
body but it doesn't matter, clean sheets
on the bed but it doesn't matter.
[…] You miss
the point: the face in the mirror is a little
traitor, the face in the mirror is a pale
and naked hostage and no one can tell
which room he's being held in. […] (C, 26.)

Firstly, the above lines illustrate the conversation between the different voices in the poem more concretely. All of the Is, the Yous and Hes are present in the excerpt, and they are obviously connected: "*Him being you?* / Yes." I suggest that "he" is considered as the ego of the subject, because it seems imminent that the ego of the subject, the self, keeps lacking satisfaction or pleasure. He is being inhibited by something. In the above quote, this is illustrated by the indifference to "clean sheets" and the fact that he is a "hostage" unable to be located. This implies that the superego and the id are the ones performing the duet. The ego has no authority on a textual level in the poem, but instead he is a matter of discussion between the id and the superego. The fact that he is not a crucial operant in the poem is telling of the nature of the ego; it lacks agency, again, referring to his nature as "hostage". I also want to pay attention to the corporeal indication given in the poem. Ego includes a projection of the body, through which self is realized.

> [E]go is formed by processes of internalisation which are modelled on the somatic events with which the infant is familiar. An important point here is the notion of the ego as a bodily ego, representing itself to itself along the lines of the bodily sensations with which it is imbued[.] (Frosh 1987, 35.)

In the poem, the subject's body is described in a demeaning way. In addition to being bare, the most 'telling' feature of his body is devalued; his face cannot be trusted. Being that this is "the face in the mirror" reflects the measure of self-value, which is not a very substantial amount, obviously.

The ego's possibilities, that is, the self's possibilities, of self-governance and the ability to decide escape the subject, conveyed as "his hands keep turning into birds / and flying away from him". In conclusion, the ego occupies the position of the object being observed by the other two voices. The ego is incapable of acting as the shield of the subject, incapable of

keeping him together in the face of the pressures his socially complicated identity insists from outside authorities.

So, if the ego's place is located as the he, then what positions do the other two occupy and how impactful are they? Who is doing the talking in this poem? The id operates according to the pleasure principle, whereas the superego is an authoritative and punitive voice in the psyche. The key ingredient in separating the two in the duet is the nature of the whole subject of the poem – the psyche inhabiting all of these different actors. The psyche presented is not well; the subject is neurotic in a sense that he is incapable of conducting a wholesome approach to his needs and desires because of trauma. This is why I argue that the superego is defective in the poem. It has not been realized in a way that is ultimately beneficial to the ego. There are blockades inhibiting the processes required between the ego, the id and the superego. A deeper look into the theory of psychoanalysis is useful in explaining the more detailed formation of the superego.

Perhaps 'defective' is a misleading descriptor of the superego in question, mainly because it is a reactionary force that theoretically functions exactly as it should. It has been formulated according to what the psyche has deemed safe in order to operate in the social world, learning the moral restrictors to behavior and acting as the carrot and stick (Frosh 2012, 74). Freud calls this type of superego "severe", because it "has made a one-side choice and picked only the parents' strictness and severity, their prohibiting and punitive function" (Freud 1981c, 62). I am not satisfied with this descriptor either, because I wouldn't go as far as to credit the case of Siken's subject to parental influences, mainly because parents are quite absent in the poetry.

Maybe 'inadequate' would suffice, because the superego is working to preserve the subject's safety but at the same time, because of its 'moral code', is a hinderance to the appropriate development of personality that subject would actually require. The superego's nature is said to be the cause of "why people so often feel at odds with themselves" (Frosh 2012, 75) but to describe the struggle experienced by the poem's subject in this way seems far too trivializing. Not everyone feels this much at odds with themselves. This also highlights how difficult it is to verbalize the suffering experienced by marginalized subjects. It is imminent to bring in the aspect of having been grown up with homophobia looming over your shoulder all the time. It is not justified that the social world has been constructed to oppose certain identities in such a manner, that leads to this type of distortion of subjectivity. Freud explains

the role of superego as follows: "The super-ego is, however, not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against those choices." (Freud 1981d, 34.) The superego is a reactionary force against mainly the incestual taboos which are suppressed during the Oedipal complex to achieve identification, but on top of that, it works to suppress the homoerotic desire that this particular subject at hand feels. Freud explains it as follows:

> The way in which the super-ego came into being explains how it is that the early conflicts of the ego with the object-cathexes of the id can be continued in the conflicts with their heir, the super-ego. If the ego has not succeeded in properly mastering the Oedipus complex, the energetic cathexis of the later, springing from the id, will come into operation once more in the reaction-formation of the ego ideal. (1981d, 38–39.)

The quote from Freud is effective in emphasizing that the incomplete complex – incomplete development – leads to problems with subjectivity later in life. But because the discussion around the Oedipus complex and identification process is not without heavy criticism especially concerning homosexual orientation, I am better off moving onto other aspects of the process of reaching identification in the poem. It is nevertheless a good notation to make in explaining why the superego is working against achieving subjectivity.

Being that the superego is inadequate, then it would seem fitting that the one talking as the "I" is the superego. The pleasures are initiated in the italics, telling of the nature of id. An example helps clarify this feature.

> […] *Everyone in this*
> *room got here somehow and everyone in*
> *this room will have to leave.* So what's left?
> Sing a song about the room we're in?
> Hammer in the pegs that fic the meaning
> to the landscape? *The voice wants to be*
> *a hand and the hand wants to do something*
> *useful. What did you really want?* Someone
> to pass this with me. *You wanted more.*
> I want what everyone wants. […] (C, 27.)

The voice differentiated by the italics speaks from a point of definition and eventualities, meaning it does not leave that much room for negotiation for the outcome. Its tone serves as a form of guidance to an outcome, which can be influenced but it has to happen in any case.

At the same time, it deals with “want”. Every aspect for this voice is about desire, whereas the separated voice is much more aggressive and defensive. One could argue that here the ego is the one opposing, instead of the superego, and I would add on to that that the superego operates between both the unconscious and the conscious, so it is certainly not impossible that it has a way of reflecting the anxieties felt in the ego or the desires required by the id, for that matter. Moreover, because the superego has not been formed through sufficient growth, it is more or less incapable of guiding the ego. What the id suggest, almost demands, “more”, is downplayed by the superego in an attempt to lessen the impact their negotiation could have on the ego.

The negotiation is realized in figures, that speak of both of these voices as “we”: “The wind blows and it makes / a noise. Pain makes a noise. We bang on / the pipes and it makes a noise.” (C, 27.) The lines string a link between the ego’s struggle and the actions of the id and the superego, pinpointed in “noise” and the fact that “pain makes a noise”. Unfortunately, their negotiations lead nowhere at this point, but perhaps the process is not as hopeless or desperate as one could think from the tone of the conversation. The most crucial sentence of the poem gets repeated: “His hands keep turning into / birds, and his hand keep flying away / from him”. To this the id, the other speaker, counters as the last notation: “*Eventually the birds must land*” (C, 27). After all, the duet is unfinished.

It is probably a good time to refer back to Siken himself. He notes that the second part of the collection is “man against God” (Casey, 2005), and “Unfinished Duet” is a part of this particular section. My analysis likens both the id and the superego to this “God” Siken speaks of. Not taking the more in-depth notions of religious interpretation into account, I will rather focus on what this connection means to the nature of the id and the superego. What does it tell of them? That they are all powerful? Not quite, it seems. They can’t seem to operate well enough that it would be lucrative to the ego itself. I’d even argue that being god-like escapes them mainly because the superego is inadequate and acts like a passive-aggressive teenager instead of taking responsibility normally placed in its realm. Freud’s pupil and daughter, Anna Freud, is useful to reference in understanding the nature of superego. She has explained that the superego is more conscious than unconscious, the boundaries between it and the self, the ego, are often blurry. The superego reveals itself, in fact, when it is scrutinizing the ego. (Freud 1969, 12.) But it is her father’s description of the superego that truly hits home in this poetical context:

> While melancholic can. like other people, show a greater or lesser degree of severity to himself in his healthy periods, during a melancholic attack his super-ego becomes over-severe, abuses the poor ego, humiliates it and ill-treats it, threatens it with the direst punishments, reproaches it for actions in the remotest past which had been taken lightly at the time – as though it had spent the whole interval in collecting accusations and had only been waiting for its present access of strength in order to bring them up and make a condemnatory judgment on their basis. (Freud 1981c, 61.)

Freud's description is important to add onto the more general notion of the nature of the superego, because it is more heavily linked to the "melancholic", whose condition affects the functioning of the superego. Siken's subject is undeniably melancholic; the quote further explains the problematic nature of his superego.

What of the id then? This linkage could mean that the id is God, which has certain implications concerning the very basis of subjectivity and identity formation. Perhaps it is even important to stress the importance of instinctual activity at the roots of personality, which emphasizes the significance of sexual desire. This understanding brings the relationship with sexual desire at the forefront of the question about identification.

Freud discerned some libido-based types of personality. Although, I don't think it is necessary to refer to the subject of the Siken's poetry overall through some specific personality type, one of the types is useful in illustrating the relationship between sexuality and these different sites of agency that seems to be at odds. This is because one of the types Freud theorized of is the erotic-compulsive type. In this type, the libido, sexual drive, is not operating on its own, and instead, it is heavily influenced and limited by the superego as well as current partners, parents and guardians. (Freud 1971, 283.) In the analysis above, this type of personality is illustrated quite neatly, though the suggestion has to be thought in the overall context of the collection for it to really describe the conflict the subject is feeling and how it affects its behavior.

In the above analysis, what I have attempted to describe is the internal traffic of the psyche of the subject, which locates the relationship with sexual desire at the deepest level of negotiating identification. The imbalance of energetic movement is one to highlight the subject's troubled state. In "Unfinished Duet", the effect of repression reflected onto the ego is seen.

4 READING II: Working the dream

I have chosen to address Freudian dream analysis as a separate chapter all together, because of the different mechanisms concerning unconscious activity. The dream realm is a separate reality in multiple ways, but the most significant aspect is that in dreams, one deals strictly with metaphorical figures. In chapter 3, the behavior of the subject can be regarded as more tied together with realness in a sense that it is more pertaining to materiality, but the following analysis is specific to dreams, where even a poetical environment gets shifted off of its place. One particular poem has been chosen for this analysis, "I Had a Dream About You".

Dreams have been under study in the scientific field for quite a while. The particularities of how and why they happen still remain undiscovered. More than that, they have been an impactful part of the human experience throughout time, be it through interpreting dreams as warning signs or predictions or hidden desires. Freud's psychoanalysis was heavily invested in dreams. One of his most notable works is centered on figuring out what exactly dreams tell us, accordingly named *Interpretation of Dreams* (orig. 1899).

The theory behind Freud's understanding of dream functioning is laced together with psychoanalysis and its understanding of repression. Its central claim is that the unconscious manifests in dreams rather freely but in disguise, or in other words, as latent. In dreams, desires come out to play uninhibited, but they go through a process, that morphs how they are eventually perceived as dream-content to avoid the censorship of conscious activity. Freud theorized that desires, which are restricted in the waking life, are fulfilled in dreams. Therefore, dreams act as wish fulfillments striving to satisfy whatever the individual represses awake. (Freud 1981a, 160; Freud 1981b, 550.)

It is important to add onto the above description the complex nature of anxiety dreams. Freud primarily thought that these dreams serve just as well as wish fulfillments but are more knotted. He later revised his view, after having come across criticism that brought up dreams involving war and how they offer no wish component whatsoever. Freud expanded his theory in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1932) to include the effect of traumatic neuroses in dreamers, which debilitates the formation of dreams and leaves the dream-work incomplete as wish fulfillment. (Freud 1981c, 29). More so, Freud later concluded that "anxiety in dreams […] is an anxiety problem, not a dream problem" (Freud 1981b, 582, footnote).

The material in dreams should be regarded as metaphorical and shifted in meaning. Freud asserted that it is a fact that the content of the dream is derived from experience but is affected by memory; things seem to be more accessible in dreams than in waking memory. Dreams involve both experiences far from an individual's past as well as experiences from the past few days. What seems to manifest simultaneously with impactful events are very insignificant parts of remembered material. Dreams are also often forgotten and reconstructed affecting their content. (Freud 1981a, 11–18; 43.)

It is then very apparent why dreams are not an exact story about self. Instead, through the processes of displacement and condensation, the meanings behind dreams are masked in manifest content. Freud asserted the interpretation of dreams as the specific process aimed at discovering the latent content, that is "the dream-thoughts". (Freud 1981a, 277.) This process of change is also why those manifesting significant events might get reduced to smaller details (and vice versa) in dreams. Freud's dream-work is first and foremost the work of interpretation in the context of the patient's experiences:

> The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts. If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation, we should clearly be led into error. (Freud 1981a, 277.)

I want to treat poetry like dreams because it pressures me to look into the finer details of the poem. Especially poetry dealing explicitly with dream-content needs to be examined in a way that does not rely on established understandings about symbolization, chronology, and memory for instance. It is also the reason why anxiety cannot be viewed as anxiety alone, which is important in reviewing Siken's poetry specifically, because of its multilayered nature.

Now moving on with "I Had a Dream About You". The title of the poem explains primarily why I took an interest in it in terms of Freud's dream analysis. More than that, the content of the poem is a mix of dreamful desires and something traumatic. The casualness of everyday life – although oddly riddled with certain strange signifiers – prime what seems to be an accident, injury, or death even. The scenes described in the poem are also very brief, which is one feature Freud explains dreams to have. The interpretation – though never completely finished – is far more extensive than the dream-content. This is due to the process of condensation. (Freud 1981a, 279.)

Displacement, though it occurs simultaneously with condensation, is different in nature, because dream-thoughts may be found from rather odd, nonsensical forms of dream-content. The centrality of elements in dream-content differs from the centrality of dream-thoughts, that is the material found behind the dream. (Freud 1981a, 305.) What this process does is push the point one needs to focus on into the sidelines. In addition, dreams are full of symbolism, and Freud was stern in his claim that dreams cannot be interpreted without taking these symbols into consideration. He has also compiled (borrowing from Wilhelm Stekel mostly) some generalizations about thus far understood dream-symbols, which have a rather recognized nature. He does note that the list is incomplete and should serve as an encouragement for further research into the symbols. (Freud 1981b, 350–359.) I am going to come back to this list, but I will also consider it only as an alternative or a guidance to the on-going analysis.

The progress of the poem is not linear or chronological – so it does not follow a strict narrative. Instead, the instances change, and the places change quite quickly, jumping forwards and backwards, returning and moving, which gives the text a dream-like quality. What occurs is both nonsensical and quite an obvious continuous return to something that is unpleasant and actively under fire by the ego to keep repressed. Yet there is an attempt at a wish-fulfillment. Some elements previously introduced in other poems appear in this particular one again. The reader is firstly being presented with quite pleasant images, which seem odd enough to warrant only some discomfort mainly because the features in the dream-narrative are peculiar. What follows, though, is an anxious chase for something that is undead, dead but alive, and when one reaches the end of the poem, the falseness of the pleasantness of the beginning becomes clear.

The beginning can be read as a wish for an adventurous love or a relationship. It is a lot lighter in tone, wonderful even, in its mundane regularity compared to what follows after a very specific break in the dream-narration. There is casualness depicted in the leisure of drinking; an atmosphere of vacation is established. There is comfort in the almost camp metaphor for sex that ends the first dream-instance. The color of this particular verse is notable; it is very red and orange. It could be either a warning sign or the glow of passion. Being that the instance ends rather playfully, it is perhaps the clearest wish-fulfillment in this dream-instance. The odd signifier is glaring on the third line of the excerpt below.

[…]

You were drinking sangria and I was throwing oranges at you,

but it didn't matter.

I said my arms are very long and your head's on fire.

I said kiss me here and here and here

and you did.

Then you wanted pasta,

so we trampled out into the tomatoes and rolled around to make the sauce.

You were very beautiful.

We were in the Safeway parking lot. I couldn't find my cigarettes.

You said *Hurry up!* but I was worried there would be a holdup

and we would be stuck in a hostage situation, hiding behind

the frozen meats, with nothing to smoke for hours.

You said *Don't be silly*,

so I followed you into the store.

We were thumping the melons when I heard somebody say *Nobody move!*

I leaned over and whispered in your ear *I told you so*.

[…] (C, 28.)

In the above quote, there are two dream-instances. Their nature is two-folded. Firstly, these dreams bring the subject's lover alive, because the poem is placed in the chronology of *Crush* at a point, where the lover is already lost. The subject dreams of these mundane instances because he gets to be with his lover. When they are together, these events, that clearly take their material from regular experiences (holidays, grocery shopping), turn into something exciting. But the glaring signifier that I am talking about, the entirety of the third line, produces a suspicious atmosphere in the otherwise wholesome interaction. The line seems almost out of place with its morphed corporeality. Its nature becomes clearer when compared to a poem that follows, "Straw House, Straw Dog", analyzed in 3.1.; the burning is a sign of cremation as well as destruction.

Secondly, these events seem to be premonitions of what is to come. "A hostage situation" happens in the store. What is described is a fear of being stuck, "with nothing to smoke for hours". Cigarettes is the key symbol in this excerpt, though arguably a rather mundane part of human life. A traditional Freudian view of the cigarette would take into consideration its

form and claim it phallic, but attention needs to be paid to the nature of cigarettes as a form of self-destruction. Nicotine is addictive and a smoker tends to smoke despite knowing the possible consequences that are detrimental to health. This is not unlike the perception that a repressed homosexual can have of his own sexuality when it is understood as a social transgression. Yet he is afraid to be without cigarettes, which also resembles Butler's understanding of performing desire in the denial of desire in chapter 2.3. On another note, a hostage situation to the speaker means getting caught, which alludes to the looming danger. Combining these elements with the ending overdetermines the fear of never reaching pleasure, being held up in something bothersome. The poem leaves the speaker stuck "waiting", for a lover that never comes.

The mundane dreams are described as "the dreams we should be having" (C, 28), referring to the fact that they – he and his lover, people like them – should be having dreams that are moments of joy and excitement, fulfilling desires in a playful way. As moments, they exude juvenility, hinting at the fact that in the dream-world, the subject and his lover are young and careless. The dream fulfills almost every desire a teenage kid could want: leisure, a hint of rebellion, excitement, ice cream, otherworldly encounters ("and then we saw the UFO") and adventures. But what they get instead is something distorted. Attention should be paid to the line that follows: "I shouldn't have to / clean them up like this." (C, 28.) The statement comes at a curious point in the poem, because it separates the two different scapes in which the dreams occur. Before the break, the mundane dreams are presented, but after, the anxiety-infused dreams take place. I understand this break accordingly; the mundane images that prime the anxious dreams are fabricated in a sense that they are not real. They are the dreams he "should be having". To clean them up means taking the content of the dreams he is having and replacing the elements so that they are more pleasant, which is what the beginning represents. It is repression insisted upon material that comes up in dreams, morphed up unrepressed. What follows such imaginary instances are the dreams the speaker-subject is in fact having. They are uncomfortable, unrepressed, but distorted.

In these anxious dreams, the injury or accident returns, this time with clear consequences. This part of the poem is infested with an obsessive tone, because the lover is absent, silent and rigid, and the speaker refuses to let him go. The redness from the beginning returns, though this time it is definitely a sign of danger. It is a sign of blood spilling.

[…]

You were lying in the middle of the empty highway.

The sky was red and the sand was red and you were wearing a brown coat.

There were flecks of foam in the corners of your mouth.

The birds were watching you.

Your eyes were closed and you were listening to the road and I could
hear you breathing. I could hear your heart beating.

I carried you to the car and drove you home but you
weren't making any sense. […] (C, 29.)

It is quite clear that the lover is not alive. The image of him lying on the road having symptoms of seizure is very apparent. The speaker is very insistent on being with his lover despite all the signs that are telling him he is not okay: "You were lying on top of the bedspread / in boxer shorts, watching cartoons and laughing but not making any sound. / Your skin looked blue in the television light. / Your teeth looked yellow." (C, 29.) The lover is in the focus in this particular verse, telling of the way the speaker is paying careful attention to him, and in this way directing the reader's attention to the lover's being. His sickly form signals that he is not exactly alive and is manifested in the dream for this particular moment of closeness: "Still wet, I lay down next to you." (C, 29.) I cannot ignore the connotations between the beginning's "frozen meats" and the blue skin of the lover, which recounts the predictive nature of the pleasant beginning, and that uncomfortable material manifests almost unintentionally.

The dreaming takes a turn, and the poem describes another morphed moment, which resembles a wish-fulfillment more than the above instance. Between the first and last line of the quote something unrelated is told. This return to the road places the subject and the lover at similar advantage points and makes the lover an active part of the situation. In the above quote, the speaker carries the weight of the absent lover. Below, he does not have to be the one responsible. Moreover, in the previous instance, the lover was in the middle of the road, and in the below quote, he is on the side – outside of harm's way. The recurring element from the previous instance is the color brown. Before, the lover was wearing a brown coat, but now the speaker has brown shoes.

[…]

In the dream I don't tell anyone, you put your head in my lap.

Let's say you're driving down the road and your eyes are closed

but my eyes are also closed.

You're by the side of the road.

You're by the side of the road and you're doing all the talking

while I stare at my shoes.

They're nice shoes, brown and comfortable, and I like your voice.

In the dream I don't tell anyone, I'm afraid to wake you up.

[…] (C, 29.)

But in the dream, fear is condensed – specifically the fear of losing the lover. To wake him up means to disrupt the careful wish between dreams and reality. The separating the wish in the dream he does not tell anyone with a reiteration that spares the lover's life produces the weight of the responsibility the speaker feels of the incidence. There is comfort in the instances he lives in his untold dreams; in them, the security of love is preserved. Outside of them, the responsibility gets turned into obsession.

The dreams that follow these instances are better explained through the recurring concept of consumption in the poem. First, I want to focus on the act of eating food stuff. Then, I will discuss eating that extends to preserving the object of love.

Food keeps coming up in the dreams. The pasta instance has already been mentioned as a metaphor for sex. Should one presume that the beginning is a fabricated dream-sequence, the cliché of the metaphor is explained. The connotations between the scene of the accident and the rolling around in pasta is effective; the redness is transferred between the dreams.

As a part of what seems to be a date, the speaker's lover buys him an ice cream. Following the established Freudian suggestions about dream-symbols, the ice cream can stand for a male sexual organ; what occurs then is an exchange of sexual kind. As I've already mentioned, juvenility plays a part in this exchange. Hence, I suggest a double meaning of sorts: sexual curiosity as well as youthful innocence.

But only on this occasion does food appear as a part of sexual wish fulfillment. When ice cream is mentioned later, it is much more concrete as an element: "I woke up and ate ice cream in the dark, / hunched over on the wooden chair in the kitchen, / listening to the rain." (C, 30.) The visual given represents depression, and this is a moment in the poem that can stand outside of dream-analysis, and as such, it provides some context of how the dreams are affecting the subject. When ice cream is contrasted as an element between these two moments, it has two natures and two different effects – joy and mourning.

The consumption repeats. The speaker's counterpart is depicted as follows: "You were crying and eating rice." (C, 30.) I first found this visual rather bizarre, but the meaning of rice becomes clear after reading further: "You had a bottle of pills but I wouldn't let you swallow them". (C, 30.) The visual connotations between rice and pills bring them together to create an understanding that the speaker is plagued by the images of the lover self-destructing. According to generalizations compiled by Freud on dream-symbols "[t]he secretions of the human body – mucus, tears, urine, semen, etc. – can replace one another in dreams [...] what in fact happens is that significant secretions, such as semen, are replaced by indifferent ones" (1981b, 359). What indeed does happen, when the lover's tears are something else than tears. Truly, it is a way of perverting the nature of the dream completely but in a way that signifies the overwhelming nature of sexual desire in these moments as well. But one is still left with the question why the speaker cannot let his lover go.

Keeping in mind that this is the part when the lover has already passed, so what is being presented here is a preserved object. It is a substitution for the flesh-and-blood lover who is totally unreachable, but in the dreams, the lover is brought back alive to serve the subject's need, which is a wish-fulfillment at its best.

In light of this, it is useful to take a look into Freud again, namely his lectures concerning melancholia. According to him, when a person experiences a loss, it is absorbed into the self and becomes a part of the identity, that is, the ego. When this process is incomplete, the individual cannot move on and instead keeps circling around the lost object. (Butler 73, 2002.)

One running theme in Siken's poetry is the loss of a lover, reiterated by Siken himself, but is also clearly read from the poetry itself. An excerpt from already examined "Straw House, Straw Dog" for example: "I wanted to fall down right there but I knew / you wouldn't catch me because you're dead. I swallowed crushed ice / pretending it was glass and you're dead." (C, 31.) The speaker has lost someone, and he is constantly still trying to reach this someone even beyond the barricades of death, which complicates the communication between the fractured pieces of identity in the narrative. The desire for death overconsumes the psyche over whatever healing process the subject requires to move on. He is incapable of dealing with the anxiety that comes from losing someone. The strategies of melancholia are in this sense crucial to the analysis of Siken.

Some post-Freudian analysts have regarded the basis of drive theory too biological, claiming that it neglects the impact of human experience – namely loss and love. These relational psychoanalysts want to bring the intimate relations more to the foreground of analysis and understanding the human mind. Frosh is quick to point out that Freud was not disregarding of "the more humanistic element of psychology", and his text of *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) is still very much influential in this sense. (2012, 140.)

Melancholia is akin to depression. Mourning is described to be a normal reaction to loss of an object; in contrast melancholia is a persistent and often a disproportioned affect to loss, because that loss is not recognized and is not incorporated. It moves to the realm of unconscious and continuously troubles the psyche:

> The object is not recognized so it cannot be seen for what it is, and therefore cannot be let go of. […] In a complicated way, this means that the object is in some sense *preserved* as an unconscious entity, kept alive so that the person can somehow believe in its continued existence – but also, like a ghost, not laid to rest. (Frosh 2012, 143.)

In dreams, this type of activity is bound to intensify, which is what the subject in the poem is experiencing. Because he is feeling intense guilt concerning both the nature of his desire as well as the passing of his lover, the anxiety persists in dreams, and thus he is not experiencing 'true' wish-fulfillments.

One could even suggest that his dreams are actually punishment-dreams. According to Freud, these occur when the ego has a larger effect on the dream-content:

> What is fulfilled in the is equally an unconscious wish, namely a wish that the dreamer maybe punished for a repressed and forbidden wishful impulse. […] Thus punishment-dreams indicate the possibility that the ego may have a greater share than was supposed in the construction of dreams. (1981b, 557–558.)

It may very well be that the subject's ego is seeking punishment for socially transgressive desires. It would also clarify why he offers fabricated dreams at the beginning of the poem. Those, one could say, are the real wish-fulfillments he hopes to have, since his dreams do not offer that satisfaction.

Returning now to the consumption. Other times it is rather cannibalistic. Freud needs to be engaged further for an explanation. Coming back to the formation of sexuality during childhood, the pregenital stages involve firstly the oral period and secondly the anal period. Freud actually also suggests that one can call the oral period "cannibalistic", and this is why

I also describe the following as such. The period is pregenital, because sexual performance has not yet differentiated from the action of swallowing. (Freud 1971, 109.) I refer to this phase of sexual formation with some reservations, due to the fact that it has been utilized to pathologize homosexuality, as it became apparent in chapter 2.2. But it would be neglectful to ignore the strange orality of the dreamful poem. Instead of reverting the orality back to an inherent pathology of homosexuality, it is useful to regard the pleasures obtained from oral sexual performance as performance that is allowed in a sense that, because of its pregenital roots, it lacks the same condemnation that genital activity would receive. Alternatively, because what one is dealing with is a dream, it is not unreasonable to state that the unconscious energies would offer distorted images of sexual activity that is regarded as degenerated by the conscious mind to keep the economy of energies undisturbed.

The consumption first appears rather innocent as a part of the playful instances of the fabricated dreams, right after the hostage situation. A quote from the beginning is useful in demonstrating this:

> […]   and I was trying to convince you that I was a vampire.
> On the way to the hardware store I kept biting your arm
>   and you said if I really was a vampire I would be biting your neck,
>   so I started biting your neck. […] (C, 28.)

At this point, the need to ingest is attached to playful flirtation that does not progress into full consumption. The poem plays with the erotogenic zones, the mouth and the neck. Yet the dreaming comes back to the act of consumption in a much more concerning manner, which is also the point at which the poem ends. The speaker's obsession with his companion frames the need to preserve the object, which culminates in him keeping the lover captive and chasing him down.

> […]
> I put you in a cage with ocelots. I was trying to fatten you up
>   with sausages and bacon.
>   Somehow you escaped and climbed up the branches of a pear tree.
> I chopped it down but there was nobody in it.
>   I went to the riverbed to wait for you to show up.
>   You didn't show up.
>   I kept waiting.

[…] (C, 30.)

It is sufficient to mention again dream symbolism. If one follows the generalizations of dream-symbols by Freud, in the above quote, the tree that is being climbed stands for a male erection (1981b, 355). The act of chopping it down would then mean to retain that erection soft again, but to no satisfactory conclusion. The object is unattainable even after. Taking Freud's notions further, overdetermination, the act of dream-work in which an instance is being represented multiple ways, happens in the quote, because animals also stand as figures of genitals (1981b, 356), and ocelots are feline animals. The speaker speaks of trying to fatten his lover up, or, in Freudian sense, getting him hard. I need not mention the connotations sausages have in this context. This way sexual activity is overdetermined in the dream. These last verses also emphasize the avowal of oral sexual expressions, instead of straightforward erotic images.

Over the course of the poem, it becomes imminent that the speaker-subject and his object of desire are on different level of activeness in terms of being consequential to the outcomes of the incidence. What begins as a more or less mutual pursuit formulates into continuous yearning for the unreachable, which manifests as the preserved object. The lover is present as a wish but absent otherwise. The relationship is overtly depended, where neither of the partners know how to be alive, difference being that the lover is already dead and is only momentarily constructed alive in the subject's dream. He has placed enormous importance on his relationship with the object: "the boy on the bridge, the boy who always keeps me / from jumping off the bridge." (C, 30.) This dependence turns into guilt because he carries the weight of the injured lover. The subject is defiantly trying to keep his lover alive in his dreams to avoid the inevitable destruction of himself that would occur should he face the feelings of guilt head on. The dreams are then manifestations of the guilt that prevents the repression from keeping the ego safe. To rephrase, the subject represses the reality in his waking life which affects the dream-work and translates into these undead images of his object of desire, which serve as reminders of the guilty feelings the speaker harbors.

I want to end this section, surprisingly enough, firstly discussing Lacan, specifically the Imaginary. Kurki provides a helpful account of this particular register. In the Imaginary, the entire spectrum of human life is registered. This is where the ego is formulated. At the same time, it requires immediate alienation, because formation of identity relies on relating to an Other. (2004, 29.) I am mentioning this because of what Kurki provides as the stuff of the Imaginary: comparison, competition, envy and aggression, which are almost too relevant for

the analysis above. The subject I have analyzed in the current chapter and the previous chapters is entirely formed through these feelings.

These feelings are linked to melancholia, already observed above to an extent. I want to link it to a larger concept, connecting the poetry's subject into the social context he is evidently living in. This requires a slight detour into the roots of the concept. Frosh webs the theory of melancholia together with social theories concerning postcolonial configurations of subjectivity. He explains that because of the incapability of accessing lost cultural objects, the sensations of mourning fail and result in, at times, "a psychic response in which the unbearable nature of this loss is denied and replaced by a manic rush towards the *colonizer*'s mode of being". (2012, 143.) I want to utilize this frame to examine the effect of societal homophobia, because it seems somewhat analogous. The subject in Siken's poetry occupies a destructive subjectivity because of his inaccessible and denied loss, that is, his sexuality as well as a dead lover. He begins to perform the role of his abuser – both in more abstract terms as well as more physically. The subject is both self-destructive and abusive to others; he internalizes what he has understood as the source of his loss and targets that outward. His sexual nature gets morphed. An excerpt from a poem is crucial in illustrating this formation of subjectivity. The last verse of "A Primer for the Small Weird Loves" is the most concise:

> […]
> The stranger says there are no more couches and he will have to
> sleep in your bed. You try to warn him, you tell him
> you will want to get inside him, and ruin him,
> but he doesn't listen.
> You do this, you do. You take the things you love
> and tear them apart.
> or you pin them down with your body and pretend they're yours.
> So, you kiss him, and he doesn't move, he doesn't
> pull away, and you keep kissing him. And he hasn't moved,
> he's frozen, and you've kissed him, and he'll never
> forgive you, and maybe now he'll leave you alone.
> […] (C, 25.)

The above excerpt is full of simple sentence structures linked together with the conjunction "and" which creates the effect that these actions are piling on top of each other, cumulating

into inevitable abuse from the subject – or at least what the subject understands as abuse. According to his understanding, his desire and the performance of that desire is detrimental to others. When warnings do not work, he is sure the acts themselves will repel away other potential lovers, and prove that he is the bad man.

The verse is primed by six others that construct a cycle of renouncing self-worth, a practice that has been learned from an early age, and locating oneself in relationships, which are based on abuse: "You're in the eighth grade. […] and you know that a boy who likes boys is a dead boy, unless / he keeps his mouth shut […] The man on top of you is teaching you how to hate, sees you / as a piece of real estate[.]" (C, 2 –23.) I want to highlight firstly the repetition of the word "boy", because brings out the gendered nature of the threat. Secondly, I want to note the rhyme between "hate" and "real estate". There is ironic vibrance between the words. It conveys the particular nature the subject internalizes in the moment.

Eventually, this leads to extending that worthlessness onto others, displacing it into practices of abuse essentially beginning to perform the abuse he has felt, referencing the longer verse quoted above. Another point to make from it, is the fact that somewhere along the verse "the stranger" stops being a stranger and turns into someone the subject cares for enough that he feels responsible; perhaps the lost lover, who is "frozen", and unreachable. The routes of losing a lover and feeling guilty about it and the experiences of social rejection are tied together. If the subject attempts to be as destructive as he can be – heartbreakingly enough, in a way that a lover is usually considerate passionate but is now morphed to appear detrimental – then maybe the subject can escape being plagued by these particular desires.

Frosh describes this mode of action as "empty rage and odd deference to those who possess things to which they can point as having value". Moreover, he explains that "envy and internecine destructiveness arise, a mode of violence that cover over loss". (2012, 144.) This particular understanding of melancholia through social theory is an excellent concept to try decoding, why exactly Siken's poetry constructs such a subject. The subject is angry. There is bitterness and resentment over moments of gentleness that seem inaccessible to him.

The intricacies of melancholia concerning the formation of identity (understood as culminating in ego) in the context of homosexual orientation are better explained by Butler:

> This process of internalizing lost loves becomes pertinent to gender formation when we realize that the incest taboo, among other functions, initiates a loss of a love-object for the ego and that this ego recuperates from this loss through the internalization of the tabooed object of desire. In the case of a prohibited

> heterosexual union, it is the object which is denied, but not the modality of desire, so that the desire is deflected from that object onto other objects of the opposite sex. But in the case of a prohibited homosexual union, it is clear that both the desire and the object require renunciation and so become subject to the internalizing strategies of melancholia. (2002, 75.)

So, the heterosexual subject remains free to perform his desire, coping with the loss of the object, whereas the homosexual subject is required to deny both "the modality" and the object, subjecting them to the process of melancholia, giving way to the destructive subjectivity described above. Frosh's explanation (borrowing from Rhanjana Khanna) of melancholia and social theory is complementary to Butler's extension of melancholic gender formation. Together they work to provide an understanding of Siken's poetical subject in a wider contextual frame. It illustrates why the subject regards his sexuality as damaging.

Here is where I come back to the injury that the subject's lover seems to be facing throughout the collection – the crash or the accident. After examining these dream sequences, I don't think the image of the crash is literal. It seems much more appropriate to understand the crash as slow sickness, that has consumed the lover. In "Litany in Which Certain Things Are crossed Out", the crash "explode[s] in slow motion". The speaker in the poem states that "in this version you are *not* feeding yourself to a bad man[.]" (C, 12.) This disruption to the image of the crash occurs in "I Had a Dream About You": "I mean the buildings that were not the hospital. / I shouldn't have mentioned the hospital." And then again the specifics of a planned death arise in "Straw House, Straw Dog": "You wanted to be cremated so we cremated you[.]" (C, 31.) The little details are suggesting that the crash is more or less a distorted image of the actual meaning of the death of the lover. It is not an accident. The subject is careful in keeping this image together, because the reality of the situation is too painful – and possibly too gruesome, which is why he orchestrates this thriller of a cinematic story, which is perhaps the better story he thinks everyone deserves.

It is appropriate then to finally finish with the titular poem. In "Driving, Not Washing" the pressures of the questions of choosing an identification keep building. A film-like atmosphere is yet again present, and the speaker involves the reader as the audience to a story about two boys on the run. The focalization shifts between the first person and the third person narration, which confuses again the difference between the speaker and the subjects in the poem.

> […]

and you're off, you're on the run, a fugitive driving away from
something shameful and half-remembered.
They're hurling their bodies down the freeway
to the smell of gasoline,
which is the sound of a voice saying I told you so.
Yes, you did dear.
[…]
Henry's driving,
and Theodore's bleeding shotgun into the upholstery.
It's a road movie,
a double-feature, two boys striking out across America, while desire,
like a monster, crawls up out of the lake,
with all of us watching, with all of us wondering if these two boys will
find a way to figure it out. […] (C, 42.)

The features that complicate the nature of the poetry collection are intensified in this poem. These story-like qualities are overwhelming in the entire collection, and between the lines, the reader gets a glimpse to the psyche of the lyrical self despite the multiple attempts at hiding the substance that he would consider desperate. He has tried and somewhat succeeded to tell the story "without having to be in it" (C, 9). By now I understand this form of poetry as crucial to the transference of emotion. Amidst all this dramatic storytelling, I have tried to focus on what filters through. In the above quote, it is stated quite straightforwardly: "while desire, like a monster, crawls up out of the lake". The question that then arises is, what are "all of us watching" able to do about it, how – if at all – are we able to resist.

5 CONCLUSION

I admit the journey from above to here has been longwinded and complicated. The immediate need to ground the work into the theoretical realms of psychoanalysis already provides a flood of information, that one feels like it is a path of its own. The journey through literature is not certainly any easier. Yet I do feel like something unraveled in the above analysis. To what extent, I am not sure, but psychoanalytic reading of Siken's poetry certainly brings some clarity of to the complex affects between internal and external structure.

What then can exactly be concluded from the above journey? What does psychoanalytic reading tell us about sexual desire and subjectivity in Siken's poetry? The first notion is that sexual desire cannot be successfully repressed, and it keeps resurfacing. This is demonstrated as the return of the repressed. Despite the subject's attempts at derailing or masking his desire, it keeps attracting him. Simultaneously, he is processing the loss of his lover, which appears mainly as denial of said loss; he fails in repressing this as well. More so, these two aspects are heavily tied together. It also becomes clear that in the loss of a lover, something is lost from the sexual desire as well, essentially suggesting that desire dies as well. The conditions of the lover and sexual desire are parallel and prove to be symptomatic in the subject's behavior. Sexual desire is regarded to be detrimental to the potential of love primarily because of social demands but this view gets solidified in the loss of the object, but such tragic nature of desire is often the only way desire can even manifest for the subject of the poems.

The second notion is that repressing sexual desire affects the subject in its entirety. *Crush* is a description of deep internal struggle. It deals with a subject that is at odds with himself. He struggles to locate himself in social context, because the mirror of masculinity he reflects himself upon competes against his inherent identification. This results in conflicted subjectivity. The subject views himself occupying the role of the abuser, because of his understanding of the nature of sexual desire, be that understanding truthful or not in 'reality'. His guilt consumes him either way.

The conflict is apparent in the constant negotiations with oneself. These are what "You Are Jeff" and "Unfinished Duet" best represent but are an active part of many other poems in the collection. The conflict manifests as fractured parts of self that seem to be discussing together what exactly 'they' – meaning the whole subject – should do or want. In

“Unfinished Duet” the two voices discussing a third participant is the best example of this activity. The complicated relationship between ”I”, “You” and “He” is seen as representation of the negotiations between the psyche’s parts id, ego and superego. “You Are Jeff” continues in a similar manner but formulates a clearer process of self-reflection and adds on the factor of masculinity in the journey to find identification.

Thirdly, in dreams, the subject fabricates a reality that could potentially fulfill his wishes of experiencing desire as pleasure. Yet, the effect of his waking life is so strong that it distorts his dreams into representations of guilt and yearning. Dreams’ power of being wish-fulfillments is undermined by the ego’s restrictions. Usually, dreams escape the censorship of the ego by disguising them into something other than wish-fulfillments, but Siken’s subject experiences dreams that do not quite achieve their goal. Instead, what manifests are dreams that highlight the responsibility the subject feels over the loss of his lover, which highlights the superego’s inadequate and cruel internal authority over social taboos. Through symbolic representations, the felling of responsibility is tied together with sexual desire and leave the object of desire unattainable even in dreams.

To summarize, a distorted relationship with sexual desire is regarded as the root cause for the tragic events that Siken’s subject experiences. He has a limited understanding of the consequentiality his desire could truly hold in the transpired events, which translates to guilty feelings and devaluing of self. This poetic journey is first and foremost self-reflection amidst all the fictional detours it takes, which is why I understand the recognition *Crush* has gathered thus far. In its veiled honesty one finds an opening to perhaps face the miscalculations one might have of oneself as well as of the prevalent social conditions that produce certain types of uneasy characteristics.

Coming back to the claim that I presented earlier that *Crush* is definitely best read in its entirety instead of only particular poems. Throughout my research, I most definitely confirmed this, at the very least for my own purposes. The essence of neurosis can be pinpointed into singular poems or certain parts of them, but it is almost peculiarly perfect how this essence gets amplified when considering the entire collection. When themes and symbols, entire lines, figures or similar effects keep returning over and over again in the text, is it not then that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts? I find myself struggling to consume only one particular poem from *Crush*, and instead I almost always read it from cover to cover.

Now that I am, in a sense, coming out of this poetical journey, I find myself looking back at the part where I reference multiple different notions on how the researcher fails to be an authoritative voice over the text. I cannot say that I tried to be, much less succeeded in such a task accidentally. Yet, I attempt to make sense of Siken's poetry as a narrative that demands to be heard and understood; is this an act of listening to the poetry or am I acting as the authority? Siken's poetry has lived so close to me for such a long time that, though I did justify my conclusions above with fairly reasonable practices of literary studies, I keep asking myself, do I understand his poetry like I do mainly because of my own lived experiences with the words, the places, the suggestions that he chooses to use. Did I only reveal myself and join the many others who have been affected by Siken? More than that, did I succeed in hearing the message, that which I claimed to be hidden in behind the text, behind "the better story"? Or did I succumb to the will of the lyrical voice, which is given the textual authority over narration?

I cannot say that I have mastered what it is to read poetry and psychoanalysis together, which solidifies the persisting need to incorporate the open-ended practices of psychoanalytic literary criticism to the mainstream of literary studies. When one uses psychoanalysis as a reading aid, one has to take into consideration the intricate details, omissions, breaks, word choices, and so forth to piece together an understanding and still come out with more questions than answers concerning meaning and the authority over text. By this I do not mean that interpretation always escapes the reader. What I mean instead is that there is always more space to define, which is an encouragement to both read more and read with vigor. I am most certainly confident that my analysis is yet again only one of the faces *Crush* has. Perhaps, what gets emphasized then is the need for not only for diverse artists but for diverse consumers as well. An essential part of storytelling is the audience that is receiving the story.

Here is where I come to the future readings of tragic queer stories, even if Siken's story is not exactly tragic at the very end of it. There is great opportunity in studying these tragic narratives, even if their nature might garner some frustrated and bored sighs from the contemporary audience at first. Being concerned with death does not mean to repeat and, thus, reinforce the tired queer ends. Instead, one can find intricate details about subjectivity *and* subjection by investing in queer stories revolving around death. Thus, I suggest not disregarding the premises of the trope of "bury your gays" entirely, but to regard the tragic frames of narrated queer lives with detail. I hope this approach will in future research fortify

the grounds for explaining the potentially collective affectivity of trauma that haunts queer identification.

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