



## Lush Life

*Richard Price*

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*"Price is the greatest writer of dialogue, living or dead, this country has ever produced. Wry, profane, hilarious, and tragic, sometimes in a single line, Lush Life is his masterwork. I doubt anyone will write a novel this good for a long, long time."* — Dennis Lehane

*"So, what do you do?"*

Whenever people asked him, Eric Cash used to have a dozen answers. Artist, actor, screenwriter... But now he's thirty-five years old and he's still living on the Lower East Side, still in the restaurant business, still serving the people he wanted to be. What does Eric do? He manages. Not like Ike Marcus. Ike was young, good-looking, people liked him. Ask him what he did, he wouldn't say tending bar. He was going places--until two street kids stepped up to him and Eric one night and pulled a gun. At least, that's Eric's version.

In *Lush Life*, Richard Price tears the shiny veneer off the 'new' New York to show us the hidden cracks, the underground networks of control and violence beneath the glamour. *Lush Life* is an X-ray of the street in the age of no broken windows and "quality of life" squads, from a writer whose *"tough, gritty brand of social realism...reads like a movie in prose."* — Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*.

## Lush Life Details

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## From Reader Review Lush Life for online ebook

### Amanda says

Oh man, I've been waiting to read this since it was released last year. Price at his best and a must-read for anyone with any kind of relationship to New York City. A song of the contemporary Lower East Side constructed around an essentially random murder that here is spun out (very *The Wire*-like) so that we meet and know the entire cast of characters: the waiter-slash-artist-slash-whatever young, vibrant, neo-bohemian, white victim; the waiter-slash-writer not-so-young, stuck, white witness; the "old" (as in pre-hipster), marginal, immigrant, struggling LES, living on top of each other in tenements because they have to, because they are trying for a better life in this place; the "new," college-educated, rebel-without-a-cause, everyone is something-slash-something else, living on top of each other because it's romantically bohemian but they really have some level of a middle-class net at home in the suburbs, mostly white colonizers; and the precinct that witnesses, patrols, and polices this tiny corner of the New New York. On the surface, *Lush* is an excellent and well-paced cop/crime story; not far below it's an erudite examination of the shifting urban landscape, of the conflicts still playing out daily in the urban spaces of America. Price's famous skill for street language and dialogue is sharper than ever. Though a hefty 500 pages, it reads quick and smooth (one week of subway commuting [in which I passed right underneath the scene of the crime:] for me). Highly, highly recommended. Also, watch *The Wire*.

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### Paul Bryant says

1) Police procedurals are not thrillers or mysteries or detective stories, they're grind-em-out painful-detail-by-painful-detail hour-by-hour no-heroes no-feel-good gloomfests. Looking at the one and two star reviews on Bookface for *Lush Life*, it seems perhaps people are reading *Lush Life* for the wrong reasons. Ain't going to be any epiphanies here, no triumph, no resolution, if the bad guys are ever caught, which is dubious, it'll probably be through some banal circumstance, some by-the-book legwork. There'll be no Holmesian brilliance but there will be middle aged guys with sizeable guts, ex-wives they can't stand, kids they never see and of course drink problems.

2) Police procedurals appear to have taken over the world of crime writing, although I don't read that much crime fiction, so I may be talking out of my left ventricle. But I'm thinking of *The Wire*, *The Corner*, *Homicide* the TV show (so good it hurt to watch it), *Homicide* the book (might be the best true crime book ever), and even back to the venerable *Hill Street Blues* and *NYPD Blue*. And *The Sopranos* was kind of a Crime Procedural. You could fill up your bathtub with gritty police procedural dirty-realism fiction, never have to leave the hood if you don't want to.

3) Richard Price is extremely good at this stuff, this is a big fat book at 455 pages but the type was so tiny it was really a 600 pager, and takes place over around eight or nine days. So : this one is sloooooooooooooowwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww. Which is the opposite of what some people want crime fiction to be, so they will not be happy with Richard Price, they may wish to run him over with a motor mower as I did Don DeLillo when I attempted the malformed pile of hideous sentences published under the title "Underworld".

4) In this book detail is everything, detail is king, there are so many details of cop life, hood life, Lower East Side life, and each and every one could earn Mr Price some withering sarcasm and disrespect if he got it

wrong, so you have to say Mr Price is very sure of himself, very. Maybe he's banking on the probability that his readers will not be the people he writes about - that's a fair assumption, I read this one in leafy ultrawhite Suffolk, England, so I can't really challenge Mr Price on the way scores of coke are made on Delancey Street or if old Chinese guys have finally learned to trust banks and not carry their entire life savings around on their person or how detectives have to plan sneaky campaigns against their bosses to get resources to investigate their bad cases. Etc.

5) Anyway, first I thought this book was a balloon that took 50 pages to get pumped up and 400 pages to gradually deflate, but after a lot of minutes spent reading Mr Price's compressed, unskimmable prose and wrestling with what every other noun actually means, and marvelling how very very few similes or metaphors he uses, in contradistinction to so many other literary writers I might mention, taking in the fact that this book dragged me in and kept me in against my will almost, being almost entirely in the company of people I would run a mile from in real life, some of the time, reading on and on and feeling like there was no oxygen in the room, all of that, still, with every caveat, with every weaselly if and but and you have to take into consideration, still, this is a fine book, and those who like this kind of stuff will find it's the kind of stuff they like.

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### **Emily says**

I loved the first two hundred pages of this book, particularly the hundred-page long interrogation scene, which I couldn't tear myself away from. After that, the plot meandered to a slow close, without any of the previous urgency or interest. This is a book that's about the slow and painstaking grind of police work, but about 100 pages could have been cut out and it would have been better.

Part of the reason Richard Price's writing feels so unique is that characters simply *are*. He doesn't have the typical beats in a story that show you, as the reader, what you're supposed to be watching for, or introductions for anyone that comes on the page. His characters show up, play their parts, and move in and out as necessary. I couldn't even tell that Matty was the protagonist (if there was one) until the interrogation was under way. You get a real picture of Price's New York this way, with all its inhabitants and history. In some places this is far too heavy-handed (thinking about Eric and Bree talking about the Jacob Riis pictures in the basement, as well as Eric's literal ghost play), but it's still enjoyable for what it is.

It's too bad that Price spends so much time on Eric Cash and Billy Marcus, neither of whom interested me. Billy Marcus grieves his son's death through throwing himself into the investigation (which is painfully boring to read), and Eric Cash is the hapless friend who's there at the time of the death. The Eric story in particular felt like a letdown because (view spoiler). And then there's Matty, who's an interesting enough detective but somehow spends most of his time off the job having sex with all manner of attractive women, involved in his cases or not. Price seems to throw Matty and Billy into relief against one another as parents, but there's no real ending or payoff to this comparison. I think Price would say that there doesn't need to be, because that's not realistic, but I would also argue that every man in this book having sex with the same LES cocktail waitress is also not realistic, so we're at a stalemate there.

I liked this enough that I'm going to read *Clockers*, but I'm a little bemused by its critical reception.

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## Orsodimondo says

### LE MILLE OMBRE DI NEW YORK

**Il primo romanzo di Richard Price è del 1974, “The Wanderers”. In Italia viene tradotto “Gioco violento” ed esce tre anni dopo. Il film omonimo di Philip Kaufman è del 1979, che in Italia diventa “The Wanderers - I nuovi guerrieri”.**

Balzac è il nome che salta fuori più spesso, il riferimento più diretto che s'incontra leggendo i critici che si sono occupati di questo romanzo: per la vastità dell'opera, l'ampiezza e il rigoglio dell'umanità coinvolta, ma soprattutto, per la capacità di descrizione e analisi di luoghi, gesti, comportamenti, azioni, e reazioni.

**Il secondo romanzo, “Bloodbrothers”, esce nel 1976, ma da noi non viene mai tradotto. Il film omonimo di Robert Mulligan è del 1978. In Italia diventa “Una strada chiamata domani”.**

Richard Price, che ai suoi esordi riuscì ad avere tre romanzi pubblicati nel giro di soli sei anni, i suoi primi tre, tutti di successo, e i primi due diventarono film (ma lui non prese parte alla sceneggiatura), si è trovato ad affrontare la classica crisi da pagina bianca, e per una decina d'anni s'è dedicato al cinema, invece che alla letteratura (e s'è dedicato alla polvere bianca, riuscendo poi a disintossicarsi), è il prototipo dello scrittore che si documenta davvero: per “Clockers” (che diventò un film scritto e diretto da Spike Lee) ha passato letteralmente tre anni sulla strada, dividendo il tempo con poliziotti, spacciatori, consumatori, disoccupati, fino ad avere una pila alta mezzo metro di quaderni pieni di conversazioni sentite per caso, immagini, descrizioni, suoni. Un lavoro lungo che paga: quello che scrive, quello che pubblica ha un magnifico sapore di verità anche se è totalmente inventato, è la finzione più vera del reale.

**1986: ecco la prima sceneggiatura scritta da Price, “Il colore dei soldi”, per la regia di Martin Scorsese, il sequel di “Lo spaccone”.**

Per tornare a *La vita facile*, qui il Lower East Side di New York all'inizio del Terzo Millennio diventa paradigma di una condizione e di un'umanità molto più vasta di quella che anima quest'angolo della Grande Mela.

È un poliziesco per modo di dire: è vero, c'è un delitto all'inizio, tutto il libro segue le indagini per scoprire il responsabile, e alla fine il colpevole viene fuori.

Ma noi lettori lo conoscevamo quasi dall'inizio e, quindi, non ci lasciamo ingannare dal lavoro di polizia: è altro che ci interessa, ed è altro che interessa Price.

Per esempio: chi sono le persone che partecipano all'azione; come sono diventate quello che sono; che aspettative hanno dalla vita, e cosa l'esistenza può effettivamente aver messo da parte per loro; i luoghi in cui si svolge l'azione, come si sono trasformati nel tempo (trattasi di classico esempio di gentrification), che incidenza hanno nei fatti, nella gente che li abita.

**Un'altra sceneggiatura originale firmata da Price: “Sea of Love – Seduzione pericolosa” di Harold Becker, con Al Pacino, Ellen Barkin, John Goodman. 1989.**

Questo romanzo dimostra al meglio quanto l'esperienza cinematografica e televisiva, quando cinema e televisione sono alti (si va da "Il colore dei soldi" di Martin Scorsese alla serie "The Wire"), possa influire e alzare la qualità della scrittura, l'intensità della struttura narrativa. Price appartiene probabilmente alla prima generazione cresciuta a libri+film+tv.

E i dialoghi! Apprezzamento unanime e insistito, tutti dicono che nessuno ne scrive di migliori, sono un asse portante del romanzo, uno dei suoi aspetti più affascinanti.

**"Night and the City – La notte e la città" di Irwin Winkler, 1992, con Robert De Niro e Jessica Lange. Troppo scorsesiano per essere diretto da Martin.**

Ci sono altri due aspetti che mi hanno colpito molto, e positivamente: i dettagli – quelli marginali, quelli che sembrano note di colore (o di suono, di odore...), quelli che qualche lettore pigro o distratto taglierebbe per asciugare la lunghezza di questo romanzo, quelli che sembrano non servire alla storia, quelli che non portano avanti l'indagine – che sono quelli che aprono nuove porte, allungano la prospettiva, fanno piacevolmente deviare.

**"Mad dog and Glory – Lo sbirro, il boss e la bionda" di John McNaughton, con Robert De Niro, Uma Thurman, Bill Murray. 1993.**

E, la conoscenza della materia trattata, la conoscenza della strada, come se Price fosse stato anche poliziotto, direttore di ristorante, pusher, commerciante indiano, cameriere, ...

PS

in effetti, c'è un terzo aspetto che mi ha colpito, e che non ha nulla a che fare con Price, per sua fortuna: la mediocre edizione italiana, tradotta male, e redatta peggio, con frasi che rimangono senza senso, termini che sembrano davvero fuori luogo, refusi...

**"Payback – Il riscatto" di Ron Howard, con Mel Gibson, 1996.**

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**Dan Schwent says**

Bartender Eric Cash sees a coworker murdered and proves to be a poor witness. But was he really just a witness or did he shoot Ike Marcus? And if he didn't, who did?

During my second meeting with Kemper, he mentioned Richard Price being pretty good. I promptly forgot the name until a year later while I was watching The Wire, another Kemper recommendation. I found this down at the used bookstore and picked it up.

It pains me to say it, since I hold Kemper and The Wire in high regard, but I wasn't head over heels for this book. Before Omar corners me on the street with a shotgun, I will elaborate.

There were a lot things I did like about Lush Life. I liked how Price muddied the waters. The interrogation scenes were pretty powerful. Eric being scared was understandable. I also really liked that Matty's kicks were

at least as messed up as the project kids that factored into the story. Price's writing is clever and there was some unexpected humor in it.

The thing I didn't enjoy was how long and drawn out everything felt. The book was about a hundred pages too long for what it was. It felt like Price couldn't decide if he wanted to do crime/mystery or literary fiction and it didn't quite work for me as either kind of book.

Still, it wasn't a bad book. I liked it more than I disliked it. I'll give it the traditional safety rating of 3.

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### **Guille says**

No es que sea mala novela, es que no es mi tipo (y no sé por qué, como esta vez, me empeño en que lo sea).

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### **Dave says**

Absolutely tremendous! Like fireworks exploding in the air! Price has given us a tough, nasty police procedural that is in some sense like an episode of Law and Order with the police picking and poking and hoping to come up with something that made sense and led them to the perpetrator.

Gritty, realistic, and poetic. His dialogue screams the language of the streets. Characters aren't necessarily described, but they are -through the dialogue - set out in all their glory.

While I imagine some find the pace slow and ponderous, to me it was like entering a dimension of page-turning madness.

Writers like this ... you know from page one you gotta dredge the ocean for everything he ever wrote.

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### **Mike Lindgren says**

Richard Price's novel *Lush Life* is a messy brawl of a crime story; diffuse, overlong, ambiguous and vexing, the book is, in short, a perfect fictional mirror for contemporary New York City. Price's story deals with the fallout of a random murder on the Lower East Side: Two young black men from the nearby projects attempt a stickup of three barhopping hipsters, which goes awry when one of the victims resists in a burst of misplaced bravado. The ensuing investigation blows a huge hole in the lives of everyone involved, from cops to families to friends to assailants.

The first third of the book, dealing with the murder and its immediate aftermath, is a tight and exhilarating piece of writing. When the leads fizzle and the investigation stalls, however, the narrative loses some of its momentum as police, witnesses and suspects settle in for an enervating waiting game. Price is a canny and observant writer — his dialogue snaps and snarls with the profane rhythms of everyday speech — and he has a pitiless sense of social geography. One sequence in particular, a depiction of a vigil organized by the dead boy's friend, is such a cruelly accurate portrayal of the fatuousness of the young bohemians invading the neighborhood that one doesn't know whether to laugh or cringe. Price, whose most recent busman's holiday was scriptwriting for *The Wire*, has a nose for the inner workings of urban life: fiction *vérité* at its finest.

What makes *Lush Life* so potent a read, despite its flaws, is that it upends the tidy certainties of most crime fiction, substituting a more real and jaggedly uncertain narrative. The cops on the case are hamstrung by bureaucratic inertia; the murdered boy's father is deranged with grief; the survivor is unhinged by guilt and resentment; and the man who pulled the trigger is not some evil psychopath but a numb, confused kid. The book's ending implies a nearly classical fatalism about the relentless cycling of history, personal and urban. As in life, tragedies explode and fade, lives crumble and renew, and the city moves on. From *The L Magazine*, March 12, 2008

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## Perry says

### Lush Lifeless

I bought this book a few months back after belatedly binge watching *The Wire*. My thought was that Price, who wrote some of the episodes, might have captured that magic here.

Unfortunately, and I'm being as frank as I can: though I read this a few months ago, I do not remember a character in this book or the particulars or the outcome. Yet, I do remember that I found it as flat as a day old fountain drink and that I looked forward to the ending because I'd lost all desire to read any more of it.

It's not a bad book. It's just a particularly unremarkable one.

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## Ned says

Price is simply the best writing about inner city life and, especially, the workings of police and the criminal justice system. The dialogue, action and inner monologues crackle with life. This writing style was coincidentally the same as the last book (*American Rust*, Meyer) where the action is initiated with a criminal act and the story told from many different vantages in a plot-driven drama. Price is remarkably well researched, telling the story of a place and time (the lower East Side), working in the Jewish history and the more modern gentrification where the young urbanites sentimentalize amongst the less fortunate (e.g. the housing projects). All the characters are conflicted, working through cynicism and failed marriages, relationships and general pathos. Every word is a delight, and the characters are deep and interesting. But the dialogue is exceptional, raw, imperfect yet spot-on and true to its peoples. The history of 9/11 and the rich tapestry of NYC is beautifully displayed.

Here's a main protagonist cop, lamenting his own failed fathering, observing the father of a victim reeling and recovering (p. 315): "Because that's what you do, Matty thought, that's what you are supposed to do, you take care of them, you lay down your life if you have to, not spend every night of your aging gerbil on a training wheel existence getting wasted and looking for strange, or waiting on that sea of malice and mayhem out thereto set your chest pocket to trembling."

And here's that same cop, reflecting on a temptation (p. 373): "He had known cops who had on occasion slept with witnesses, slept with suspected perps, confirmed perps, slept with the wives, sisters, and mothers of victims, and had even slept with the victims themselves if they recovered. You walk into lives abruptly turned inside out by the arbitrary malice of the world, and you, your suit and tie, your heavy black shoes, your decent haircut, and your air of seriousness, you become the knight, the father, the protector....All of which is to say that sometimes it fell into your lap if you were that kind of individual. Which he was not, was not."

Remarkable.....

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### **Greg says**

There is a scene in the middle of *Lush Life* where the *New York Post* runs a story about one of the characters, a mid-thirties LES wanna-be someone but never will be anyone (or an aging failed hipster); the story is page three, pretty prominent placement usually reserved for stories like "Jacko has gone Wacko". Within hours of this story hitting the *New York Post* every slimy greasy hipster of the Rivington St. area has seen this story and turns this guy into a social pariah. Wanna be actors and filmmakers and writers and artists, they all read this story and shun the man. I read this scene in the book and I thought I was going to get an aneurysm from the exploding yells of BULLSHIT! going on in my head. Hipsters would never read the *New York Post*, they wouldn't know first thing in the morning what is exclusively on page three of that rag. If you don't know what the *New York Post* is like or no idea of the newspapers in NYC, just trust me, no one that would be hip and living downtown or in Williamsburg or wherever else is going to be reading *The Post* first thing in the morning, never mind a whole neighborhood of annoyingly creative individuals.

This might have been bullshit but it was needed for the plot to move forward so I grudgingly accept it in the story and if this same scene had taken place in Baltimore I probably would have accepted it, why? Because I'm not familiar with those papers except that HL Mencken once lorded over the country's conscience while writing for one of them.

When this came out everyone seemed to be wetting themselves over this book. Maybe it was just a New York thing, but it was like this was the greatest thing ever, or so it felt like in the bookstore at the time. Maybe it was because everyone was having *The Wire* fever and this was a novel by one of *The Wire* people, but set in the Lower East Side and featured hipsters rubbing up against project kids. Maybe us New Yorkers felt like it was our own little bit of the game going on, one where us whitey's could safely stand on the sidelines and watch from that awful retro 70's living room looking bar The Johnson's or at Moby's vegan eatery in between getting some ironic tattoos and maybe slumming it at a hardcore show at ABC No Rio. Maybe we could feel like we might be from some bumfuck conservative Mid-West town but, yo, we could be hangin with Omar, dawg!

Sorry, I'm quiet annoying with this review.

Whatever.

What I'm trying to say was, everyone was creaming themselves over this book, and it was good, it was a little more involved than the usual George Pelecanos novel (which are good, I wouldn't say great but a solid

good), but it wasn't nearly as good as *Clockers*. It was a good read but the novel never really grabbed me the way I wanted Price's story to grab me after loving *Clockers* so much, and I kind of felt like the hype machine surrounding this book made this out to be his best novel ever.

I did love the hipster funeral / memorial service. Price might have missed the mark on the periodical reading habits of hipsters but his portrayal of them in this scene was callously great. It made me laugh. It made me want to throw napalm onto Bedford Avenue. Good stuff.

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### **Yulia says**

Lazily written, this book may well make for a good movie one day, but it seems Price has spent too much time writing TV scripts, he's forgotten how to write prose (of course, I've not read anything else of his, so perhaps he never knew). No, lists of people, objects, sights, and neighborhoods can't substitute for atmosphere, perception, and insight. It's insulting to be given his mental scraps. I'm not starving here. I'll meet you on DVD.

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### **Zoeytron says**

This is a fine police procedural, chock o' block with the day-to-day ins and outs, the dos and don'ts, and the exasperating politics of law enforcement. Richard Price is right at the top of the tree in creating perfect characterizations of individuals who are far from perfect.

Matty Clark is the lead investigator of a street mugging that morphs into a shooting and results in murder. Matty is divorced and the father of two nearly grown sons. He has been far removed from their lives and is indifferent to them to the point where he tends to think of them as "the big one" and "the other one". Not particularly endearing, to be sure, but what Matty lacks in hands-on parenting, he exhibits in his dedication to the job. His partner, Yolanda, is a product of the city housing projects. She is an apt flip side to Matty, with her soft voice, gentle ear, and caring manner. Just a different way to get information, yo. Eric Cash, Billy Marcus, Big Dap, Little Dap, Minette . . . all characters great and small are written with an eye to detail that is superb.

By far my favorite part of the book was the lengthy interrogation of Eric Cash by Matty and Yolanda. It was brilliantly written and almost exhausting to read, shades of *The Wire*. No one has managed to come close to grabbing the brass ring to a lush life in this novel, but it is not for want of trying.

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### **K.D. Absolutely says**

The two faces of New York Lower East Sides: one a high-priced bohemia and the other a home to hardship, its residents pushed to the edges of their time-honored turf.

**Eric Cash** is one of those residents. He has been a bartender for 8 years and dreams of becoming an actor or a writer or a restaurateur. He has been dreaming that long – in fact for 8 years – so that he is now the oldest

employee at Café Berkman. At 32, although he is already the manager, he is bored on waiting when any of his dreams will finally happen. One of the new and young bartenders is **Ike Marcus** and Eric envies him for his confidence and hustle. One early morning, coming from a night of drinking, together with a friend of Ike, Eric and Ike were accosted by two muggers. Ike dies. Eric becomes the prime suspect and all he remembers are hearing Ike Marcus says “Not tonight, my man.”

What follows, and comprise the bulk of this book, is the detailed investigation of the crime by a female police officer, **Yolanda** and an Irish policeman, **Matty Clark**. I am not fond of police investigation or crime novels . I do not even watch NCIS. My problem with TV series is that I tend to like the first season because the plots are fresh and believable. But when they survive the first season, they tend to complicate their plots to the point of implausibility and ridiculousness.

One of the blurbs says that this is the new *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. In a way, it is true because the writing is lucid, the characters are well-developed and the prose are striking. However, the characters seem so distant that I could not emphasize with them. It might have something to do with me not having seen New York yet (I cannot picture the Lower East Side and the two types of lives there) but I guess that the situations they are in are a lot better than what we have in the Philippines. Here? A novelist cannot fill up 400 pages even if he chooses to use double space and font 12. When a homicide or whatever happens, it will be in the newspaper the following day and it will be forgotten after a week or so. There are just too many crimes that people are used to this. In fairness to our police, some crimes get resolved but some are not and forever remain as mystery.

Crime novels are nice to read. However, they are normally fast-paced and plot driven. This book is just the opposite: long, slow and prose-driven. I liked Richard Price's use of phrases that rhyme. I liked his witty one-liners. I like sharp exchanges between the investigators and Eric. However, the long windy narratives are similar to a police investigator suddenly turned into a novelist and he just stays inside the police station tinkering with his computer the day whole trying to write a novel.

I picked this book because supposedly US President Barack Obama read this during his 2009 summer vacation.

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## **Matt says**

Eric Cash is a restaurant manager in New York City. He's a failed writer and actor, coming to the long-gestating realization that he's never going to achieve his heartfelt goals. One night, he goes out with a co-worker, Ike, and Ike's friend Steven. There's a mugging, or so Erick says, and Ike gets shot and killed.

This is the plot of Richard Price's *Lush Life*. But like *Clockers*, plot isn't high on Price's list of things to do. He is a master of place and dialogue.

Sure, this is a police procedural of sorts, with two detectives, Matty Clark and Yolonda Bello, doggedly on the trail of Ike's killer. The first third of the book is the mystery phase, and Price kind of builds that up. So it's surprising when he gives away the game with more than half the book to go. From that point, it's a character study: Eric, coming to terms with life as he knows it; Steven, using his friend's death to jump-start his career; Billy, Ike's father, trying to keep from going to pieces; Billy's wife, trying to save her husband; and Matty, who's got all sorts of things going on: his good-for-nothing kids; his attraction to Billy's wife; and

the identity of the killer.

The hardest thing to do in writing is dialogue, and that is where Price is the master. His handle of the urban idiom is unparalleled. I actually spent a great deal of time on Urban dictionary.com figuring out what some of his phrases meant (for instance, "dugout" is a vulgarity for woman; "hamster" refers to children). His characters talk in a slangy patois that is at times evocative, poignant, and hilarious, and sometimes a mishmash of all three, with a few mixed metaphors thrown in for good measure. For instance, this passage between two cops:

COP 1: "Perception, reality, whatever. They're not happy, and s\*\*t rolls downhill. They're at the peak, I'm like mid-mountain, and you're in this, this arroyo at the bottom. If I can be any more picturesque than that, let me know."

COP 2: "In my father's house there are many bosses."

Price is also known for creating fully realized worlds. A street-level view. This world is New York's Lower East Side. It's a place where Chinese immigrants and blacks live side-by-side with rich white yuppies. It's a place where ancient tenements and rundown synagogues sit next to refurbished brownstones and spiffy new cafes. It's not a cauldron so much as the collision of two tectonic plates.

Here's Price describing a hotel room:

Despite its stark opulence, the place was the size of a shoe box, with barely a foot clearance between that huge bed and the three-sided terrace, which offered an imperial overview of the area: a sea of cramped and huddled walk-ups and century-old elementary schools, the only structures out there aspiring to any kind of height the randomly sprouting bright yellow Tyvek-wrapped multistory add-ons, and farther out, superimposed against the river, the housing projects and union-built co-ops that flanked the east side of this grubby vista like siege towers.

To me, this is a world as distant as Tolkien's, yet under Price's pen, it is fully realized.

I really enjoyed *Lush Life*; it has the kind of multidimensional characters that are rare in genre fiction. The lack of a plot, though, does get tiring, especially since a lot of scenes just tend to pad out the length. Oddly enough, I think this book should have been much longer or much shorter. It could have been shorter by excising some of the under-developed characters. For instance, and oddly, in comparison to *Clockers*, the black characters - Big and Little Dap, Tristan - get short shrift. If you're not going to flesh them out, it seems a little bit of a pander to keep them around. Or else the book could have been longer, an epic; in that instance, Price could have given more attention to the minor subplots, like Matty's kids.

For some unknown reason, the book takes place in 2002. Why 2002? I don't know. Kind of weird and arbitrary, though. One lasting question I have: do New York restaurant workers use as much cocaine as Price describes? I have a sneaking suspicion they do.

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## Alexander says

Sehr fader Krimi, der mit reichlich Lokalkolorit und Sozialkritik in schier unerträglichem Ausmaß gestreckt wurde.

„Sehr nett zu lesen (sehr nett zu vergessen)“ würde vielleicht Arno Schmidt auch über diesen Autor spotten.

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## Jessica says

Man, I am so over New York City. Seriously. I want to pack it all up and move to Berlin.... too bad I don't know any German.

Seriously, this place sucks.

That's about all I got out of this book: a heightened sense of dissatisfaction and frustration with my environment. As mentioned below, I never cared at all about any of the characters, and there didn't seem to be much of a point to the plot or anything that anyone did the whole time. I guess I mildly enjoyed it, in a bored kind of way. It was funny how in the last quarter of the novel the guys in the book suddenly out of nowhere started having all kinds of sex with all kinds of ladies! I'm glad I've reached that magical age at which I get to read/watch stories about men who are way older than me hooking up with sexy, attractive love interests who are way younger than me. That makes me feel awesome. I'm officially an adult woman now. Walk me out behind the barn and shoot me, please. Thanks!

I'm totally serious about moving to Berlin. You think they need English-only speaking social workers? If so, I'm there.

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## Patrick Brown says

I had high hopes for this book. I really only know Price's work from films (Clockers, Life Lessons (which is the first part of New York Stories)) and TV (The Wire), but I was looking forward to reading a book of his. I got a galley of this one (due out in March) and figured I'd give it a shot.

Lush Life follows several characters around the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the wake of a murder. The characters are well drawn and three dimensional, even some of the minor characters (I'm thinking of a beat cop of Chinese descent who appears at various points in the book). It's not hard to see why Price can successfully write for a show as complex as The Wire.

My complaint with this book really comes down to personal taste. The character I was least convinced by (and, therefore, least compelled by) was the father of the murder victim, who stumbles around this foreign neighborhood trying to avoid putting his life together by solving the murder. Price is fascinated by the man's grief, but I found him tiresome after only a few scenes. Perhaps this is because I'm still relatively young and don't have a kid of my own, but I couldn't access his grief. Unfortunately for me, the book lingered on him for huge stretches at a time.

Lush Life is evocatively written, bringing to life a specific slice of New York, one that represents the conflict many cities face, as the tide of gentrification pushes into more and more neighborhoods. It's worth a read,

especially if you're a fan of *The Wire* (there's a hotel in the book named *The Landsman*), but it didn't set my world on fire.

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### **Will Byrnes says**

Set in Manhattan's Lower East Side, *Lush Life* shows a place that is rich in all sorts of humanity. The crime is a meaningless street homicide, but Price uses the event as a McGuffin for painting a portrait of a piece of New York, a vision of a neighborhood in transition, complete with city projects and gentrifying real estate, cops, robbers and residents, the way things are, politically. There is a lot going on here. Price is a veteran of *The Wire* and if this work seems like the sort of ensemble work he did in showing the seamier underside of Baltimore it should come as no surprise. The strength here is language. Price is a master of dialogue and dialect. He speaks with many diverse voices, all convincing. I loved this book for its craft and its feel for place and sound of people. What held me back from loving the book more was that I never really felt very attached to any of the characters. I did not much care what happened to them. But maybe I am just a callous Noo Yawkah. *Lush Life* is a lush read, in the Edenic and not in the alcoholic sense.

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### **Alison says**

*Lush Life* is a complex, gritty crime novel that also happens to be a haunting, anxious tale of gentrification, community and fatherhood, wrapped around a poison-pen love letter to the Lower East Side. Ignoring any one of those facets would miss the nuanced big picture thing that Price has going on here, but *Lush Life* doesn't require all that much digging and scratching on the reader's end. It's a visceral, immediate read. Don't be surprised if you can't put it down.

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