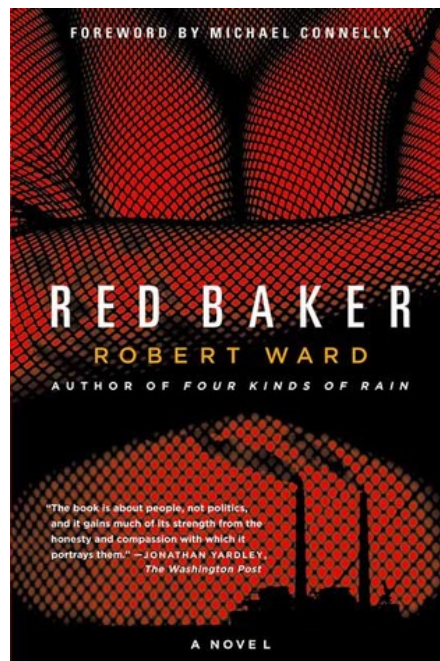




Red Baker

Robert Ward , Michael Connelly (Foreword)

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When Red Baker, a Larnel steel worker in Baltimore, Maryland, gets laid off from his job he goes crazy: boozing, attempted philandering, running away from his future. Filled with unforgettable characters from Red's angry but loyal wife, Wanda; his basketball-star son, Ace; his lifelong friend Dog, a casualty of the layoff; and Crystal, the go-go dancer at Lily's bar who embodies Red's fantasies of escape. *Red Baker* is a classic American novel about a man with no identity who tries to replace the one he's lost.

Red Baker Details

Date : Published September 19th 2006 by St. Martin's Press (first published 1985)

ISBN : 9780312362744

Author : Robert Ward , Michael Connelly (Foreword)

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Contemporary

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From Reader Review Red Baker for online ebook

Jake says

Recently, I read an Ann Tyler book for the first time. While she uses Baltimore, it's more as a backdrop for a family drama. Whereas *Red Baker* is blue collar Baltimore down to its loving, gritty soul. The city comes alive in a way that is difficult to do for many writers in that it's not a display for tourists but a functional character, one that exalts and drags down the protagonist (or anti-hero, whatever). Those familiar with the decline of blue collar labor in Baltimore, especially w/r/t the steel mills can relate and Robert Ward captures it in all of its kitschy, loving, racist, damaged glory. A must read if you're a native.

Rick Bylina says

I'm not sure how (or why) *Red Baker* by Robert Ward ended up as a free download, but I pulled it down. I had never heard of *Red Baker* or Robert Ward, even though *Red Baker* was listed as the best novel published in the United States in 1985. Really? The title character is a down and out (mostly of his own doing) laid-off steelworker in Baltimore in the mid-1980s. I've been laid-off five times in my life. I've never reacted like the type of asshole that this guy did.

Nevertheless, this is a good character study of someone missing out on all the signals in his life that people do care about you even when things look their worst. His descent is slow and painful. I would have died twice over with the abuse he puts his body through, and there are times, long before people tire of his antics that I don't understand why they care about the man so much.

While well written (the author's had 27 years to fix any issues with it), I found the ending not terribly redemptive. It was somewhat hopeful, but so many people were hurt along the way that it gives new meaning to forgiveness. Best book in 1985? I don't know, but despite my carping about some of its deficiencies it is a solid read with a dark, gritty view of Baltimore, serving as both a setting and a character, before some of the renaissance that went into making it a better city. It's a solid 4 for me.

Philip Alexander says

Robert Ward is a great writer. He manages to turn the crime novel on its head nearly every time. Most of stories are arguably crime stories; they are definitely on the hardboiled and noir side of the tracks, but categorizing his books pretty much ends there. He is an expert at depicting regular people forced to make difficult choices, with dead ends, addiction, troubled friends and family providing a compelling rip current that threaten to swallow his protagonist(s). *Red Baker* is no exception. This story moves and does so convincingly, propelled by Ward's chiseled prose. On the surface it is about a factory closing and the consequent unraveling of one man, *Red Baker*, but it is also a thoughtful, at times, eloquent tale of family and friendship, and of how loyalty endures even during the most dark and trying of times. Written in the mid 80's and reprinted in 2014, this is a modern classic, sadly underrated in much the same way *Thomas Savages Power of the Dog*, or *Elliot Chaze's Black Wings Has my Angel* were.

PEN Center USA says

1986 PEN Center USA Award Winner for Fiction

Almeta says

So twenty-five years later nothing has changed.

Families and friendships are torn asunder under the stress of unemployment.

If you or someone you know is currently desperately seeking a way to “keep it together”, I think you will find this book to be depressingly truthful.

I would rather read to escape.

Keir says

Where has this book been all my life? (Well, since I was 16, anyway.) Phenomenal, just top-notch. Loved it. Working on a longer, 25-year retrospective review for Booklist.

Simone Subliminalpop says

Romanzo estremamente compatto, avvolgente e opprimente, quasi quanto la Baltimora inospitale, spazzata da gelo e neve e cosparsa di ghiaccio, nella quale muove i suoi passi sbilenchi e senza meta il protagonista Red Baker. Quarantenne, alcolista, fresco di licenziamento e senza molte altre prospettive; una giovane amante che balla in un locale gestito da mafiosi, un amico dedito ad alzare le mani molto velocemente, una moglie e un figlio che ama più di ogni altra cosa.

Robert Ward descrive molto bene la spirale di rassegnazione e delirio nella quale il protagonista precipita e da cui non sembra esserci via d'uscita, tra tentativi sempre più maldestri e ricadute che ogni volta lo avvicinano un po' di più al fondo di tutto. Non ci saranno appigli, momenti di tregua, quei pochi diventeranno ben presto solo fugaci chimere, fino all'epilogo, forse un po' scontato, ma non per questo meno accogliente, come il primo vero respiro da quando si è entrati nella vita di Red Baker.

<http://www.subliminalpop.com/?p=8792>

Tom says

review: Here's my review system--I score on four categories and average them together for the number of stars. The four categories are: character development (are the characters deep and complex, plot (is it interesting), voice (is the narration smooth and engaging) and cliché level (is it predictable.)

Character development: 5 stars-- Ward is very sharp here--and you really get to know his characters

Plot: 4 stars-- Great stuff finding out about where Red is heading

Voice: 5 stars-- Remarkably insightful!

Cliche Level: 5 stars-- Clearly, something different!

Fred says

2006

Cosimo says

Essere buoni non conta nulla

“E questo era ancora una volta il problema. Avevo bisogno di tutto e subito. Chiusi gli occhi e mandai una piccola preghiera a un Dio che poteva o non poteva essere là fuori, sopra le case a schiera. “Fammi fare la cosa giusta,” gli dissi. “Non farmi perdere le persone che amo. E proteggi Baltimora”.

Robert Ward è stato scrittore e sceneggiatore di crime story, con *Red Baker* ha vinto nel 1985 il premio Pen West come miglior romanzo americano dell'anno, scoperto da Joyce Johnson, editor ed ex compagna di Kerouac; Ward faceva l'insegnante di scrittura, ma poi Tom Wolfe l'ha invitato a New York a vivere e creare nel *new journalism*. E' stato amico di Carver. Ha scritto una storia difficile, vista dal basso, un operaio licenziato, sposato con la ragazza del liceo e un figlio, per loro farebbe qualsiasi cosa, ha un'amante di cui è innamorato, con la quale fuggirebbe in Florida, mentre è anche una persona che non ce la fa più, che si arrende alle cose. L'acciaieria di Baltimora ha chiuso e gli resta solo Wild Turkey, whiskey rye e anfetamina, le pillole del dottor Raines, per tenere sotto controllo i demoni interiori, la vergogna e l'orgoglio. Un amico si suicida, altri si distruggono con alcol e droga, la periferia della città si spegne nel degrado umano, nella desolazione e nella miseria. Il suo migliore amico, Dog, chiamato così perché ama i cani, sta impazzendo, sta perdendo la ragione. E' preda di violenza e paranoia, passa le giornate a bere e crede che la moglie lo tradisca. Red Baker cade e non sente l'impulso di rialzarsi, ma solo il desiderio di sprofondare o di scomparire, di essere un altro o di non essere più nessuno, in una tensione furiosa che avvelena la sua sensibilità. Ama la moglie Wanda e il figlio Ace, ma non riesce a essere felice con loro. E' felice con l'amante, la giovane spogliarellista e cantante Crystal, è innamorato ma non disposto a affidarsi a un nuovo futuro. E' un bugiardo e un fallito, sceglie sempre l'errore e la falsità, non ha dignità. Gli uffici di collocamento sono grigie discariche sociali e la tentazione di una evasione con la proposta di un lavoro sporco ma facile non tarda a concretizzarsi. E così precipita nella negatività, nella pulsione oscura, nella circolarità del disfarsi, nella dolcezza dell'abbandono e nella levità della rabbia. Quando cominci a pensare che qualcosa ti sia dovuto è l'inizio della fine. Tutto finisce nella disperazione, nell'imprevisto e nel lutto. *Era la filosofia di Red Baker: sei sempre con la testa nel fango, ma fin quando puoi respirare continui a essere in vantaggio*”. Questo romanzo è un dramma umile e autentico, una tragedia non priva di grazia e speranza, un'avventura in cui una crisi profonda si risolve, attraverso un triste e angoscioso sacrificio, in una dolorosa redenzione, in una amara e straziante rinascita.

“E quando mi fermo, col cuore che mi esplode dentro il petto, e la polvere che soffia dietro di me, è come se

avessi capito qualcosa. Qualcosa sugli amici e su ciò che distingue un uomo da un altro. Non conta il cervello o il denaro, ma quanto rischi per amore”.

Judith says

This book was well written, a must for me to enjoy a book. It is the story of an out-of-work steel worker, and his enslavement by his own ego. He had so much to be grateful for, yet he couldn't get past his need for a "manly" job to see the wonders of the life he had. Although we are as dissimilar as two people can be, I can see my own struggle with ego in his.

Nathan Southern says

Originally published in the mid-80s, Ward's fourth and most popular novel follows a desperate period in the life of the titular character - husband, father and Baltimore steelworker pushed to the edge of the abyss when his company lays him off. With nothing much left to lose, he gambles it all on a scheme that involves pilfering bookie money from some neighborhood goons. Given his assistance from a policeman pal, Red is banking on the assumption that the likelihood of fallout with the authorities is slim.

On the face of it, this has the elements of a caper, but most telling is how few pages the actual theft occupies. Though Baker has a passage or two of high-wire tension, the chronicle as a whole doesn't rely on suspense and it isn't really about the specifics and aftermath of a crime; the opening sentences, which freely hint at the story's resolution, tell us that much.

Instead, Ward uses his protagonist's story to climb inside the mind and heart of the prototypical Reagan Era tradesman, for a startlingly intimate cross-section of the industrial strata of life on the eastern perimeter of the Rust Belt. He sees the American working class with the purity and the clarity of Walker Evans, only here, the perspective is an internal one - an everyman casting his gaze outward onto the surrounding world. As a result, the tale resonates psychological and emotional comprehension with beguiling richness. In its treatment of characters frequently overlooked in American fiction, it feels neither patronizing nor judgmental, but empathetic in the same vein as Steinbeck.

Much to his credit, Ward's view isn't a narrow paradigm. In less than 300 pages, via Red's outlook and experiences, we somehow get the whole sweeping picture of the blue collar experience, with all of its yens, fears, paper-thin rationalizations, crippling self-delusions and struggles for liberation. We begin to understand how elements both extreme (alcoholism, pills, mistresses) and incidental/low key (irony, sarcasm) function as psychological barbiturates - anesthesia against the cruelty of the universe. Ward also shows us the lure of crime as a potential out for the underdog, yet reminds us just how easily the dice could fall either way, resulting in personal triumph or cataclysm. Even when a victorious note sounds, brooding undercurrents of fatality, of despair, of apocalypse, linger sub-rosa, never far from the surface. Two of the central themes involve the neglect and desecration of the surrounding world, and the capriciousness of fate for individual lives - ideas that add to the story's foreboding quality. But lest this sound difficult to endure, the author's compassion for the main character and his plight permeates the material and keeps it buoyant - concluding with a stunning, poetic note of personal reinvention and self-deliverance for Red.

Ward's style of writing - typically so electric and vibrant - peaked with this tome. In addition to numerous passages that are wickedly funny (a throwaway bit about modeling an Italian restaurant after the movie

Spartacus tops the list), the descriptions and dialogue have a kind of surrealistic lucidity - where else do you get metaphors like, "His eyelids hung down over his face like two broken blinds in a Baltimore street flophouse" and "I would dream of being driven blindfolded in chariots... knowing that somewhere, just around one of the bends, there wasn't going to be any more concrete, and I would fall off the edge of the world"?

Even 30 years after its initial appearance, the novel continues to affirm its author's stature as one of our most gifted literary craftsmen and chroniclers of the Middle American experience.

Gareth Price says

What happens when you get laid off from the job you have been doing for nearly 20 years and you discover no-one is interested in employing you again so you can support your family ? Red Baker finds out in this cracking novel. First published in 1985 it still feels relevant today and Ward has created a fine narrator in Red - you may not always agree with his thoughts or actions but you will understand what compels him to do what he does.

Had been looking forward to this after seeing that Harry Crews had recommended it and it didn't disappoint. Superb

Johnny says

While you may find this in the mystery section or in a list of crime novels, it is far more a literary novel than a genre work. And a good one.

The empathy and compassion for the characters and the stark portrayal of the pain, confusion and humiliation of unemployment while not always fun is consistently compelling.

A fully realized and unbelievably flawed (read: human) main character within a simple and complete story. I found myself caring about Red Baker, not despite his flaws, but almost because of them.

Nik Korpon says

Wonderful read. As a lifelong (more or less) Baltimorean it's fascinating to watch the beginning of the identity changes Baltimore has been going through for the last thirty years. Add in the downbeat local economy and this book is just as relevant now as it was in 85. Hell, even the O's are winning again. The backdrop of Baltimore does well to mirror the decline of Red himself, both disarmingly charming despite their myriad of problems.

Red Baker is a beautiful and gritty document of a lost man trying to find himself. It's a contemporary classic noir in the best way, because it's not about the guns but the darkness in the soul of a man, trying to hide it.
