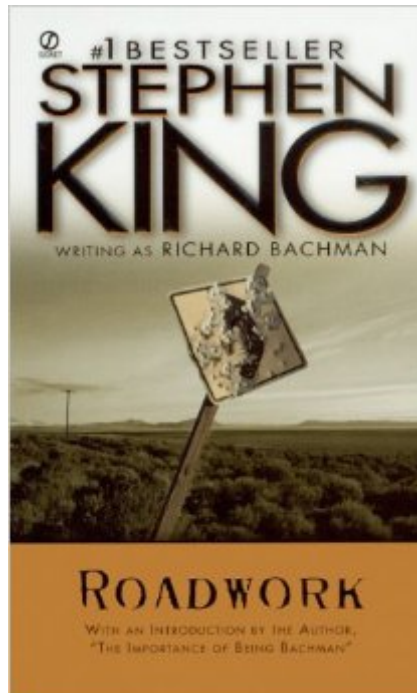


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Roadwork (Turtleback School & Library Binding Edition)



Synopsis

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES ONLY. When a highway project leaves him unemployed and threatens to destroy his home, one man takes on the forces of progress as he embarks on a vengeful showdown of epic proportions. A novel originally written under the Richard Bachman pseudonym.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I think it's safe to say that Roadwork is King's least-read novel, largely because it represented an attempt on King's part to go straight, to prove he could write a mainstream novel. Written in between 'Salem's Lot and The Shining, Roadwork was released in 1981 as Richard Bachman's third novel. I first read it as a young teenager, and I no longer remembered a great deal about it - except that, at the time, I did find it somewhat boring. King himself has never gone so far as to call Roadwork a good novel. Reading it again now, though, I was surprised by the sophistication and emotional power of the story. You almost have to have experienced some of the pressures of adulthood to really relate to the protagonist, Barton George Dawes, and it really doesn't matter that the story is imbedded in the socioeconomic worries of the early 1970s. In its essence, Roadwork is the story of a man pushed beyond his means of coping with change. On the face of things, Dawes doesn't have it that bad. He has a good wife, a good job, and friends. Inside, though, he is suffering miserably - and has been since his little boy died of a brain tumor three years earlier. Having never allowed himself to grieve properly, his mind proves unable to bear the disruptions caused by a new local road construction project. He's worked for the same laundry since he got out of school, and it will

have to relocate elsewhere because of the roadwork - and he is the one responsible for finding a new site. He's lived in the same house since he got married, and it too has a fateful date with a wrecking ball - and he has to find a new home for him and his wife. It's just too much for him, and he can't do it.

There are really two classes of King readers. The first are the early-career lovers. These are people who like suspense (though I have yet to learn how you get that from a forum where the subject controls the pace) and raw plot motion, and there's nothing wrong with that, but it's definitely not a very rich or complete approach to take. The second group are the late-career fans of work like *Hearts in Atlantis* and *Desperation*, who generally give a more deep and introspective read to the work and aren't as concerned with things moving along at a brisk clip. For those who may be wondering, I am probably best classified as one of the latter. The first group will hate this novel. Rather than being a continuously moving story about a collection of things happening to people, *Roadwork* is essentially an examination of the destruction of one man. And let me tell you, that character examination is SUBLIME. The only character that I have read in a King work who was clearly better defined was Johnny Smith from *The Dead Zone*, and this book would best be compared to that earlier work. There is very little to be bored with in this book if you're not worried about things always happening. If you are, you might be better advised to move on and leave this one alone--there aren't a lot of bodies or explosions. The atmosphere and characterization, however, are superb. I read this as part of the Bachman Books, which have regrettably been taken off the market as a set, and I was impressed by the depth and expression that King managed in this side-project (not reflected in his other work under the pseudonym). There are problems with this book, though. For one thing, it is absolutely mired in the seventies. Younger readers may get lost trying to relate to such a thing as an oil embargo.

Roadwork starts off suspensefully, as a crazed man with a knack for carrying on conversations with himself buys a high-caliber rifle and a .44 Magnum revolver. However, the explosive result of this purchase, which you might expect to be soon coming, doesn't arrive until the very end of the book. To get there, we must wade through some very dense, overly-detailed (but very well written) exposition. Bart Dawes has finally been pushed too far; at age 40, he's lost his only son to a brain tumor, and now the public works commission has decided to build a new highway system, which will not only go through (and thereby erase) the building Bart's worked in for the past twenty years, but also his home. Bart must move, but he refuses to. In the process, Bart will lose his job, his friends,

his wife, and his sanity, but he stands strong in his refusal to leave his home, reminiscent in a way of Hank Stamper in Ken Kesey's "Sometimes a Great Notion." Roadwork is different than anything Stephen King (well, Richard Bachman, to be precise) has written; it's more a character study than anything else. As King himself wrote in his "Why I Was Bachman" introduction to the first edition of The Bachman Books, "Roadwork is probably the worst of the lot, because it tries so hard to be good." And that's the whole of it: Roadwork reads like it's been written by a young writer who's trying hard to appeal to the literary crowd. It's verbose, packed with introspection, and moves along at a snail's pace; the total opposite of the Bachman/King extravaganza The Running Man. It's no surprise that King relates that Roadwork was written at a time when he was trying to impress those elitists whom would ask him at cocktail parties if he'd ever write "something important."

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