



The Postman Always Rings Twice

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Cain's first novel - the subject of an obscenity trial in Boston and the inspiration for Camus's *The Stranger* - is the fever-pitched tale of a drifter who stumbles into a job, into an erotic obsession, and into a murder.

The Postman Always Rings Twice Details

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From Reader Review The Postman Always Rings Twice for online ebook

Lyn says

Desensitized.

I think that's why James M. Cain's important 1934 crime novella is not more relevant today. After decades of infidelity and violence, the shocking events Cain describes are just not as disturbing now as they were in the 30s. When this came out there were charges of obscenity and the book was banned in some locations. These days, flip a few channels on TV and you'll see worse. Hell, kids are playing games where there are more sexuality and violence.

But back in the day, this was edgy and original and dangerous. Cain's minimalistic tale of deceit and clandestine brutality influenced scores of novels and media since. This has been adopted to film seven times. I saw the 1981 version starring Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange and I thought it was mildly pornographic. From '81 til now even that description has been diluted.

Still a good story and worth the small investment in time (approximately 100 pages) to read some very early and influential noir.

Lou says

The actions of people in the pursuit of love and happiness are sometimes unplanned spontaneous and dangerous. In this story a man comes to town and becomes involved with a married woman. They plan and plot her way out of the marriage, options on the table they want things to be clean. They have a plan, how will it unfold? Will they walk away in each other arms in happiness?

One thing for sure is there will be blood.

Well if your familiar with the authors writing and read his novel Double Indemnity you will know that his story becomes intricate and a web that his characters must free themselves from. This was another enjoyable tale of individuals and the macabre.

I found this info on the title of the novel on good old Wikipedia..

The title is something of a non sequitur in that nowhere in the novel does a postman appear, nor is one even alluded to. The title's meaning has therefore often been the subject of speculation. William Marling, for instance, suggested that Cain may have taken the title from the sensational 1927 case of Ruth Snyder. Snyder was a woman who, like Cora in Postman, had conspired with her lover to murder her husband. It is recognized that Cain used the Snyder case as an inspiration for his 1943 novel Double Indemnity; Marling believes it was also a model for the plot and the title of Postman. In the real-life case, Snyder said she had prevented her husband from discovering the changes she had made to his life insurance policy by telling the postman to deliver the policy's payment notices only to her, and instructing him to ring the doorbell twice as a signal indicating he had such a delivery for her.

In the preface to *Double Indemnity*, however, Cain gave a specific, and entirely different, explanation of the origin the title for *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, writing that it came from a discussion he had had with screenwriter Vincent Lawrence. According to Cain, Lawrence spoke of the anxiety he felt when waiting for the postman to bring him news on a submitted manuscript—specifically noting that he would know when the postman had finally arrived because he always rang twice. Cain then lit upon that phrase as a title for his novel. Upon discussing it further, the two men agreed such a phrase was metaphorically suited to Frank's situation at the end of the novel.

With the "postman" being God, or Fate, the "delivery" meant for Frank was his own death as just retribution for murdering Nick. Frank had missed the first "ring" when he initially got away with that killing. However, the postman rang again, and this time the ring was heard: Frank is wrongly convicted of having murdered Cora, and then sentenced to die. The theme of an inescapable fate is further underscored by the Greek's escape from death in the lovers' first murder attempt, only to be done in by their second one.

In his biography of Cain, Roy Hoopes recounts the conversation between Cain and Lawrence, only he extends Lawrence's remarks. He did not merely say that the postman always rang twice, but rather that he was sometimes so anxious waiting for the postman that he would go into his backyard to avoid hearing his ring. It was no good, however, for if the postman's first ring was not noticed, his second one, even from the backyard, would be.

(view spoiler)

Jeffrey Keeten says

”Stealing a man’s wife, that’s nothing, but stealing his car, that’s larceny.”

John Garfield and Lana Turner in the 1946 movie.

Frank Chambers is a drifter, a man who, when life gets too heavy, catches the next boxcar out of town or puts his thumb out on the nearest highway. Being comfortable or achieving normalcy comes with too much responsibility. He’d rather bum it than have anyone relying on him.

It all begins with a sandwich in a California diner on a road in the middle of nearly nowhere. Nick “The Greek” Papadakis owns the diner and is in need of some help. The Greek offers Frank a job which even though he is broke still sounds like...well..work.

Until he meets Cora.

”Then I saw her. She had been out back, in the kitchen, but she came in to gather up my dishes. Except for the shape, she really wasn’t a raving beauty, but she had a sulky look to her, and her lips stuck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her.”

He takes the job.

Something sparks between them, something desperate, something twisted, something so bad it is good. The first time The Greek leaves them alone, Frank is all over her:

"I took her in my arms and mashed my mouth up against hers....'Bite me! Bite me!'

I bit her. I sunk my teeth into her lips so deep I could feel the blood spurt into my mouth. It was running down her neck when I carried her upstairs."

The steamy kitchen scene from the 1981 movie starring Jessica Lange and Jack Nicholson

The pain they inflict on each other in that encounter is only the beginning of this passionate, sadomasochistic relationship with unexpected moments of what could be termed romance. *"Tomorrow night, if I come back, there'll be kisses. Lovely ones, Frank. Not drunken kisses. Kisses with dreams in them. Kisses that come from life, not death."*

Which would all seem very sweet except for the fact that they are planning to kill The Greek. Frank would have never had the ambition for such a deed on his own. His idea is that they just take off, become gypsies, live off the land, but Cora wants to be free, and she also wants the diner.

She is a femme fatale.

"I ripped all her clothes off. She twisted and turned, slow, so they would slip out from under her. Then she closed her eyes and lay back on the pillow. Her hair was falling over her shoulders in snaky curls. Her eye was all black, and her breasts weren't drawn up and pointing up at me, but soft, and spread out in two big pink splotches. She looked like the great grandmother of every whore in the world. The devil got his money's worth that night."

1946 poster for the movie

Frank is caught up in this woman who is game for anything. She lets him do things to her that would have most any other woman screaming for help. It is hard to determine if Cora actually had any feelings for Frank or for The Greek. Certainly, The Greek and Frank liked each other more than Cora liked either of them. Was she playing the game she had to play to get the accomplice she needed? Was the perversion of their relationship something she needed as well? The Greek was too old for her, but Frank as it turns out was not who she needed either.

The trial sequence is convoluted, crafty, and artful as their attorney builds this elaborate defense designed to defeat his frenemy, the prosecutor. He doesn't care if they are guilty. He only cares about winning. Frank turns on Cora; Cora turns on Frank (another form of foreplay?) which is all part of the defense attorney's plan to set them free. The ending of the novel certainly seems a commentary by James M. Cain that people do not escape their guilts nor their destinies.

One of the more suggestive movie posters from 1981.

There has been much puzzlement over the title because there is no postman involved in the story or anything that would readily suggest a reason for the title. I've been doing some research, and it seems that the most logical explanation that people have come up with is that in this time period when the postman delivered the mail, he would ring the bell on the house once, but if he had a telegram, he would ring twice. Telegrams were expensive, and to receive one generally meant that something bad has happened. The title probably made more sense to people in 1934 than it does to us today. If we accept this explanation, then Cain is warning his audience that nothing good is coming.

This is a terrific noir novel, a prime example of the genre. This book and this writer have certainly had an enduring impact on not only the hard boiled mystery novel, but also on literature and Hollywood. The book has been filmed seven times with most people agreeing that the 1946 version with John Garfield and Lana Turner was the best. The book was banned in Boston for being too sexually violent. There were several scenes that even by contemporary standards had me squirming due to the graphic nature, but I was also reading with a certain amount of awe at the audacity of an author trying to depict the very real, dark aspects of a deranged, desperate relationship. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!**

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Richard says

"Tomorrow night, if I come back, there'll be kisses. Lovely ones, Frank. Not drunken kisses. Kisses with dreams in them. Kisses that come from life, not death."

With the one-two punch publication of both this novel and the serialized version of *Double Indemnity* in the mid-1930's, James M. Cain truly popularized what we know of now as being the hard-boiled sub-genre of **roman noir** in American fiction, a long time before the term was even coined. Since its publication, this book has spawned so many copycats, and inspired so many writers and an entire genre of movies that its story of a man falling for a femme fatale, their descent into crime, and their eventual doom is kind of a cliché at this point. But even to this day, over 80 years later, very few have been able to match the intensity of both this and *Indemnity*.

Except for the shape, she really wasn't any raving beauty, but she had a sulky look to her, and her lips stuck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her.

I initially thought that this was better than *Indemnity* but now on my second reading, I saw that while it's still great, and still has a stellar, superior ending, *Postman* pales a bit in comparison. But it's still stronger and tighter than many books in its genre and beyond. It's a little over 100 pages of high tragedy as we witness these two emotionally weak but determined characters dig themselves deeper into a hole of self-destruction and form a bond started by love and transformed into hate, a bond that they realize will never be broken, no matter how much they want out. Can anyone else think of any flawed couples like this in recent bestselling fiction? Of course you can. Yep, and it all started with *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

I ripped all her clothes off. She twisted and turned, slow, so they would slip out from under her. Then she closed her eyes and lay back on the pillow. Her hair was falling over her shoulders in snaky curls. Her eye was all black, and her breasts weren't drawn up and pointing up at me, but soft, and spread out in two big pink splotches. She looked like the great grandmother of every whore in the world. The devil got his money's worth that night.

Julie says

I should be *embarrassed* by how much fun I had reading this. . . but I'm not.

Instead, I feel like I've knocked back five Cuban coffees or finally had that fantasy tryst with the Fiennes brothers.

Wow, am I *amped*!

This is my second James M. Cain novel (the first being *Mildred Pierce*—which I immediately read twice) and I'm just swooning over the overdrive, over-the-moon, over-the-top quality of the writing here.

There is NOTHING in this skinny novel that screams *this will work for you!* Quite the opposite. There's almost ZERO character development, the dialogue is almost laughable, and the plot just keeps picking you up and ploinking you down, wherever it wants you to be, beyond reason.

And yet. . . it works. It works. It works. Well, it certainly worked for me.

This is Frank's story, his story of what happens between him and some dame. . . a dame name Cora, whose “lips stuck out in a way that made [him] want to mash them in for her.”

He wants to mash them in? Her lips? Wha?? That's so violent!

And Cora wants him to mash them in, too, and she wants him to *sock* her and *rip* her and I SHOULD BE TERRIBLY OFFENDED. But, I'm not.

I realized, quickly, that I shouldn't waste my time wondering if this 1934 noir thriller is misogynistic. It's not the point. Neither is the violence (which is silly by today's standards anyway).

To appreciate this story, you've got to just sit back and enjoy the ride.

This is a story of two sick motherfuckers on a fast-paced outlandish journey. . . and I delighted at every moment of its overdone, illogical plot. I literally screamed out in disappointment, when I arrived, far too quickly, at the last page.

Dang it! Don't take my fun away.

Sob. Don't take my fun away!

Tfitoby says

Edit: It seems I quite overlooked the fact that this book was part of my HRF Keating challenge and as such requires an extra paragraph to discuss the selection by the famous critic/author. *"From out of nowhere, in 1934, a journalist-turned-writer produced a kind of masterpiece...placing him at once in the front rank of American storytellers but also adding an equal mastery of place...a story about justice imposed implacably by the ironies of chance."* and who really can argue with that or its selection as one of the all time greats of crime writing?

This noir novel that paved the way for all future noir writing is still as entertaining and still as bleak

A book this famous and this popular needs no review. I enjoyed it. The building blocks for every loser protagonist who ends up with the fuzzy end of the lollipop because of their own short comings are contained within Frank Chambers account of how he came to kill Nick Papadakis. He's a restless bum who can't keep out of trouble, she's a small town beauty queen who found herself slinging hash in the middle of nowhere with dreams of doing something, anything with her life. A deadly combination that would lead to a brush with the devil that nobody will walk away from.

KamRun says

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[illegible]

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Brina says

James M Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is a fun, racy hard boiled crime noir classic. First published in 1934 and banned in many places for its provocative scenes, the novella is a fun read full of memorable scenes. Albert Camus used this story as his basis for *The Stranger*, propelling Cain into the limelight. Later, Cain wrote *Double Indemnity*, cementing his place as a successful noir writer. Yet, it is for *Postman* that he is best remembered.

Frank Chambers is a con artist and a bum who is unable to remain in the same city long enough to settle down. His wanderings have gotten him into trouble with the law at many of his stops and finally he is looking to start anew, or so he has us believe. Outside of Los Angeles, he stops at Nick Papadakis' roadside restaurant, and enjoys it so much, that Papadakis offers him a job. The real reason Chambers desires employment: Papadakis' lusty wife Cora, who Chambers is determined to have for himself.

It turns out that Cora is as much of a scamp as Frank is. The two were meant for each other and they develop one crazy scam after another in an attempt to get Nick out of the picture. Papadakis is a hard working Greek immigrant who is determined to achieve the American dream. Even his roadside stop is a melding of Greek and American culture, and one feels sorry for him in his role in this story. Yet, Nick's plight matters little to Frank and Cora as they work hard to get him out of the picture and cash in on his success. The novella reads fast to see where these hare brained schemes lead the couple.

The protagonists end up in and out of trouble with the police as they work to get both Nick out of the way and the cops off their tale. In the interim there are many steamy bedroom scenes for which this novella was originally banned. Between the bedroom moments and run ins with the cops, Cain has created a memorable story that will remain as a classic in noir literature. It was a fast, fun read for an afternoon, and a solid 4 stars.

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

When desire is caged it often lashes out...this story illustrates the violence that can be caged in the human heart for years - trapping any hope of happiness even when set free.

Jason Koivu says

Don't you love it when something you've heard about for ages turns out to be really good, but in a delightfully different way than expected? ...What do you mean, "no"? Go to hell!

I've been laboring under the misapprehension that this was a play about a killer mail carrier. Maybe that's because I grew up in a time when the phrase "going postal" was coined. (In a sidebar: Isn't it great how the English language is still evolving to incorporate new words and phrases?!) My mother had just recently

joined the ranks of those crazy bastards and as the years progressed her bouts with pms turned our house into the Rumble in the Jungle once a month, so I readily expected her to go fully postal. Anyway, I'm getting sidetracked. It turns out the title is just allegorical!

The Postman Always Rings Twice is a taut noir about a drifter who thinks he's the sharpest knife in the draw. He snatches up a job in one of those highwayside nothings that you can still find out there in the California desert near the Arizona border. The drifter latches on to the wife of the goodly Greek gas station/diner owner. The wife hasn't realized her western dreams. The drifter is always looking for some easy scratch. A plot is hatched and nothing goes as you think it will.

That's the beauty of this aging novel: the surprises it still holds after all these years. After all the pulp crime dramas churned out for decade upon decade now, *The Postman Always Ring Twice* can still ring yer bell, toots.

David says

Adjust your expectations because there are neither postmen nor ringings (of any frequency) in this novel. Even though I didn't much care for the 1946 Lana Turner-John Garfield film adaptation, I decided to read this because the new cover was visually appealing. Score one for judging a book by its cover! Suck it, wise saying! This nasty little noir features rotten people doing rotten things, like hatching murder plots, trapping pumas in the jungles of Nicaragua, and opening beer gardens. Cora is the regulation femme fatale, a sleazy strumpet manning the griddle at a roadside diner that's just far enough from L.A. to be exactly nowhere. Then Frank Chambers the drifter blows in and falls for this lowdown dame (and by 'falls for' I mean wants to bite her lips until he draws blood), but—wouldn't you know it?—Cora's got an oily Greek husband who's standing in the way of their nonstop fuckathon and (wink, wink) rosy future together. Divorce maybe? Nah, that's for amateurs. How's about murder? But don't fret. As with everything in life, Hume Cronyn shows up and saves the day. For a while, at least. Until later, when Cora's swelling, 100 meter buoy-like bosoms bob on the surface of the Pacific Ocean presaging inevitable tragedy.

David Gustafson says

After my huge disappointment with Dashiell Hammett's "The Thin Man," I knew I could find the antidote with a re-read of James M. Cain's masterpiece, "The Postman Always Rings Twice." Thin is thin and noir is noir and Cain's first person novella stands out as the noirest of them all.

Since we know the perps from the beginning, this is never a whodunnit, not even a how-did-they-finally-get-caught mystery novel. This is Cain's search among the ruins of lust, betrayal, suspicion, confession, love and forgiveness that clutter two human hearts in love with each other before and after they kill another, rather generous human being.

Cain's portraits of Frank the drifter and Cora, the hash house waitress, are as finely etched as any one of Rembrandt's masterpieces that stare back at us from behind those riveting eyes, waiting to have a word with us after all these centuries.

Cain's story was inspired by the real-life murderers Ruth Snyder and her married lover, Judd Gray. They knocked off her husband Albert for his insurance money providing some bonus material that Cain would also use again in "Double Indemnity."

Mrs. Snyder's trial captivated the entire country. Gray testified that it took her seven attempts before she finally succeeded in killing Albert. Apparently, Albert was not a very suspicious sort of victim.

With all of the coast-to-coast publicity, Ruth Snyder would receive over a hundred marriage proposals before her execution in the electric chair that was stealthily captured by a New York Daily News photographer just as the current surged through her body. Her face had been masked to shield the finer people in attendance from any queasy, eye-popping memories. Front page stuff! The raw stuff that noir is made of! Adultery, money, murder and execution.

By the time "The Postman Always Rings Twice" was published, the American audience was properly primed and ready to shell out a little dough for this short read. Ruth Snyder's quivering body was still twitching in their minds and ever since its publication, this has been ranked at the top of the noir totem pole. Rightly so. This is underclass literature at its finest rather than ordinary crime fiction.

I have seen both movies and much prefer the John Garfield version to the Jack Nicholson one. I hold the minority opinion that Nicholson, like John Wayne, is a one-dimensional actor basically playing himself in all of his roles. Nicholson's performance as Frank pales in comparison to Garfield and let us be honest here, Jessica Lange "just ain't no Lana Turner" whether she is playing Cora or anyone else.

Enjoy this masterpiece and then watch the 1946 movie.

Trudi says

Stealing a man's wife, that's nothing, but stealing his car, that's larceny. ~*The Postman Always Rings Twice*

If Noir can be said to have a cold, black heart it's *Postman* that provided the juice to electroshock it into a beating, breathing existence. It is without a doubt one of the most important crime novels of the 20th century (of any century really) and has gone on to influence entire generations of writers and filmmakers. As a debut, it shocked, titillated and disgusted, banned upon publication in Boston and in Canada. Before I even knew anything about this book, or the films that were based on it, I *adored* that title. To this day, it remains one of my favourites.

What Cain accomplishes in just a mere 100 pages is impressive. He finds the voice of the common man, and the dark and dangerous shortcut to greed, lust, and violence. More than anything, Cain understands how easily man is corrupted, how easily he can *corrupt* others, like an infection. And I use "man" here in the generic sense encompassing both genders, because when it comes to villains and black hearts, Cain is an equal opportunist.

Entire books and dissertations have been written about Cain's women – the good, the bad, the rampant sexism, the alleged misogyny – *whatever*. Cain's characters don't bleed political correctness that's obvious – what they are is a symbol of their time and circumstances – hewed from harshness, beacons of egocentrism,

proprietors of antisocialism. The women like to be smacked around a little (it helps get them in the mood), and the men are only too willing to oblige the ladies in that regard. Men aren't asking for what ought to be freely given, and should it be denied to them, why... they'll just take it anyway, won't they?

Based on all of this, *Postman* easily garners five stars, so why am I only giving it four? My only hesitation stems from this: I just didn't *enjoy* it as much as *Double Indemnity*. Neither Frank nor Cora drew me in to quite the same extent that Walter and Phyllis did – the former are cold, dislikable and a bit icky, whereas the latter duo are fascinating in their terribleness and villainy. They are even *sympathetic* in their own messed up way ... whereas Frank and Cora felt like reptiles crawling on their bellies, sniffing for a blood meal. Plus, Phyllis is simply an awe-inspiring, terrifying creation – a walking, talking sociopath before the term was even widely known. She is quiet, sexy, subtle and *deranged* -- I love her.

Having said that, *Postman* is lean and mean hard-boiled pulp fiction and you gotta respect that. It's not shy about going for the jugular with *absolutely no foreplay*. But Cain doesn't need it, requiring so little time and so few words to get the reader foaming at the mouth -- when he's ready to go, so are you. This is a must-read, but you know that already.

Kemper says

Talk about false advertising. I read this thinking it was a manual for postal employees that I could use to study for civil service exam. But it was just a story about some guy who starts sleeping with another man's wife and then they decide to kill the husband. It was a pretty good book, but I flunked the test when there weren't any questions about plotting a homicide. Oh, and that Kevin Costner movie didn't help either.

Carmen says

This book was not what I expected at all. A hobo walks into a diner and the diner owner, a Greek named Nick wants to hire him. The hobo would never agree except he learns the Greek has a really hot wife. He hits on her. Initially she resists, but then she gives in and they start an affair. Frank quickly learns that Cora hates her husband and finds him disgusting. She soon plants the idea in his mind that they should kill him. So they think of this elaborate plot in which she brains him when he's in the bath and claims he fell. The cops come at the wrong time and they revive Nick. He recovers in the hospital. He becomes happily fascinated with his accident, and makes a scrapbook about it. He now wants Cora to have his baby. So they try to kill him again, this time in a car accident. They set up witnesses, make sure Nick is drunk, etc. This time it works. Nick dies. Frank punches Cora in the face so that it looks like she got hurt. He gets hurt (broken arm). What they didn't know (or did Cora?) is that Nick had recently taken out a 10K life insurance policy. The police are suspicious. They turn on each other and confess against each other. But they get a great lawyer and he gets them off. Now they should be enjoying the money but they can't trust each other. He wants her to run off with him and live a hobo life, and she wants to keep the restaurant and add a beer garden. When her mom dies, she leaves for a week and he has an affair in Mexico with a big cat trainer. Cora comes back. A guy who is fired from the lawyer's office comes by and tries to blackmail them with their confession that he stole. Frank beats him up repeatedly and brutally and forces him to lure his cohorts there. They burn all the copies. Cora finds out about Frank's affair when the cat trainer stops by his house with a kitten. She is furious. Now Frank wants to kill Cora and Cora wants to turn Frank in. They seethe. But then Cora reveals that she is

pregnant. That makes Frank happy. Cora tries to leave – but he stops her and she says she couldn't anyway – she loves him. But he needs a chance to. She insists they go swimming so he can have a chance to drown her if he wants to. But he wants to get married. So they get married and go swimming. She goes out far, but he doesn't leave her – he loves her. She is having a little trouble breathing so they go to shore. He is rushing her to the hospital when he crashes into a tree and she is killed. The police arrest him and put him to death.
POINTLESS

Carol says

4+ Stars ANOTHER good one by Cain.....ANOTHER surprise ending.....

I *vaguely* remember the movie with Nicholson and Lange as being **hot** and **steamy**, but the words "we did plenty" is about as **hot** and **steamy** as it gets here in **THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE**.

Cain sure could write hard-boiled **crime** though, and **crime** is what you get plenty of in this 1934 classic!

Zoomed right through it!

Lawyer says

The Great Depression produced a remarkable cultural history. In 1934, the following books made their appearance: "Goodbye, Mr. Chips" by James Hilton, "Tender is the Night" by F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Thin Man" by Dashiell Hammett, "Murder in Three Acts" by Agatha Christie, and "The Postman Always Rings Twice" by James M. Cain. However, it was Cain and Hammett that tapped into the mean underbelly of the times. Read any of the remaining three and you'd be hard-pressed to believe that the world's economy was disintegrating.

Cain arguably gave birth to what would become American Noir. The term was not in existence when Cain's writings hit the shelves. We owe the classification of such works to the French who recognized the "Roman noir," or black novel. Hammett, with Sam Spade and the Continental Op, made the hard boiled private investigator a staple in American crime fiction.

I'm a big believer in historical context and its influence on literature. Consider the condition of the ordinary American in this period of American history.

Within three years of the crash of the market in 1929, 34,000,000 people lived in families with no bread winner. As banks failed, 9,000,000 savings accounts were wiped out. 273,000 families were evicted from their homes, leading to a massive emigration in search of employment. Over one million farms were foreclosed on between 1930 to 1934. Pile on the impact of thousands of farms literally blown away throughout the dustbowl, and suddenly America had a nomadic population of homeless in search of their next meal. An entire generation of teenagers and men barely across the line of adulthood began to ride the rails in search of work and opportunity. In New York, social workers reported that at least 25% of all children were malnourished. That figure rose to 75% in more rural areas.

James M. Cain came across the material for "The Postman Always Rings Twice," rather easily. Cain was a police reporter for The Baltimore American and subsequently covered labor unrest for "The Baltimore Sun." H.L. Mencken took notice of Cain and recognized him as one of the most accomplished writers in America. Following his stint as a journalist, Cain taught journalism for a few years at St. John's University, until he had a falling out with the university's administration and quit.

Cain produced three novels that form the core of what is now considered American Noir, with "Mildred Pierce" and the two most notable being "Postman" and "Double Indemnity." Both may have as their inspiration the 1927 murder trial of Ruth Brown Snyder and Henry Judd Gray, a corset salesman, and Snyder's lover. Snyder and Gray conspired to murder Snyder's husband and succeeded in doing so, although Snyder indicated she had attempted to poison or gas her husband on several failed attempts. Cain acknowledged that the Snyder case was a source for not only "Postman," but also, "Double Indemnity."

"Postman" is told in the first person by Frank Chambers, a drifter like many of those who road the rails during this time of aimless wandering. After getting kicked off a hay wagon on which he had hitched a ride, Chambers finds himself at the sandwich shop and filling station owned by Nick Papadakis, the Greek. Chambers immediately turns down the opportunity to work for Nick until he catches a glimpse of Nick's wife, Cora. "Then I saw her. She had been out back, in the kitchen, but she came in to gather up my dishes. Except for the shape, she really wasn't any ravaging beauty, but she had a sulky look to her, and her lips struck out in a way that made me want to mash them in for her."

It's sexual attraction between Frank and Cora that drives the plot of "Postman." More so, while Frank would have been content to run off with Cora and continue to drift along the road, Cora wants the brass ring. She wants Nick dead. And she wants the diner. Frank doesn't have any qualms about Cora's scheme.

While Cora is as fired by sex as Frank, greed fuels her motive even more. Nick was Cora's ticket out of long hours at a road side hash house. But she's ready to move up in the world, especially when Nick decides it's time to have a child.

Frank supplies the magazine article that describes that most deaths in the home are caused by accident. A quick blow to the head from the back while Nick is taking his Saturday night bath should do the trick. Poor Nick will appear to have drowned in his own tub. The attempt fails.

A second attempt, the method which will not be revealed here, succeeds. However, a determined District Attorney attempts to turn the two lovers against one another to make a case of murder. A slick defense attorney named Katz gets Cora off with a lesser charge of manslaughter and a slap on the wrist. Frank avoids any charge at all.

However, Cain won't allow two characters like Frank and Cora to escape unscathed. Justice has its own way of occurring. Neither Frank or Cora will reap the rewards of hapless Nick's death. There are no happy endings in "The Postman Rings Twice."

Cain's depiction of violence and eroticism shocked the sensibilities of many when "Postman" was published. Banned in Canada and Boston, the furor only drove sales of the short novel higher.

MGM immediately snatched up the film rights to "Postman," but current motion picture codes were considered too great a risk to filming at that time. MGM released "The Postman Always Rings Twice" in 1946, fully 12 years after the novel's publication. The film starred John Garfield as Frank and Lana Turner as Cora. In 1981, a second production starred Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange in the lead roles. Interesting

that Hollywood turned Cora from a dark brunette to a dazzling blonde.

The original title to Cain's novel was "Bar-B-Q." But Cain's publisher, Knopf, didn't like it. Cain changed his title to "The Postman Always Rings Twice." Don't be alarmed, should you read the novel and find no mention of a postman on any page. There is no postman.

There's been much discussion about the origin of the title. References to the Snyder murder case indicated that the murderess had instructed the postman to ring twice so she could intercept changes to her husband's insurance policies without him discovering it. More plausible is the interpretation given in the 1946 movie production. You may get away with something once, but you won't get away with it twice. If the postman doesn't catch you on the first ring, he'll catch you on the second. Cain has offered another explanation, claiming that after he had submitted a manuscript, he was filled with anxiety whenever the postman rang, to the degree that he would go to the back yard so he wouldn't hear the postman's ring at all.

Harold Strauss, writing of "The Postman Always Rings Twice" for the New York Times said, "Every so often a writer turns up who forces us to revalue our notions of the realistic manner, for, no less than reality itself, it is relative and inconstant, depending on the period, the fashion, the point of view. . . . [Cain's] story is a third as long as most novels, and its success is due entirely to one quality: Cain can get down to the primary impulses of greed and sex in fewer words than any writer we know of. He has exorcised all the inhibitions."— Books of the Century; New York Times review, February 1934

I found that, as many other things do, "Postman" gets better with age. When first shelving books upon joining goodreads, without much thought, I popped up a four star rating. With my second reading, I have to consider the impact of Cain on authors who would follow him. Nothing of the like had appeared prior to "Postman's" publication. That, as Strauss said, makes this a book of the century--any century.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Postman Always Rings Twice, James M.(Mallahan) Cain (1892 - 1977)

The Postman Always Rings Twice is a 1934 crime novel by James M. Cain. The novel was successful and notorious upon publication. It is regarded as one of the more important crime novels of the 20th century. Fast-moving and brief (only about 100 pages long, depending on the edition), the novel's mix of sexuality and violence was startling in its time and caused it to be banned in Boston. The story is narrated in the first person by Frank Chambers, a young drifter who stops at a rural California diner for a meal and ends up working there. The diner is operated by a beautiful young woman, Cora, and her much older husband, Nick Papadakis, sometimes called "the Greek". ...

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Duane says

In this 1934 classic of the crime noir genre, James Cain creates the crime couple of Frank and Cora, who in a few vivid scenes are seared into literary infamy. Even by today's standards the graphic portrayals of sex and violence combined will make you squirm. You don't have to be a fan of the genre to enjoy this novel. Relatively short, the writing is exceptional, making it a pleasure to read. 4.5 stars.

Fabian says

An astounding achievement of 20th century Feminism... Psych! It's just the opposite of that...

Taut, tense, and with a lightning-speed pace, this is a seminal work by Cain. Its also a bit elementary, less wordy than the similar noir "The Butterfly" though not as epic (or precious, or memorable) as (my favorite) "Mildred Pierce."
