



James Mallahan Cain was an American author and journalist. Cain vehemently opposed labeling, but he is usually associated with the hardboiled school of American crime fiction and is seen as one of the creators of the roman noir. Several of his crime novels inspired successful movies.

James M. Cain

AMERICAN NOVELIST

WRITTEN BY:

- [The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica](#)

Alternative Title: James Mallahan Cain

James M. Cain, in full **James Mallahan Cain**, (born July 1, 1892, [Annapolis, Maryland](#), U.S.—died October 27, 1977, University Park, Maryland), novelist whose violent, sexually obsessed, and relentlessly paced melodramas epitomized the “[hard-boiled](#)” school of writing that flourished in the United States in the 1930s and ’40s. He was ranked with [Dashiell Hammett](#) and [Raymond Chandler](#) as one of the masters of the genre. Three classics of the American screen were made from his novels: *[Double Indemnity](#)* (1936; film 1944), *Mildred Pierce* (1941; film 1945, TV miniseries 2011), and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934; stage version 1936, films 1946, 1981). Cain graduated from Washington College, Chestertown, Maryland, in 1910 and edited an army paper while serving overseas during [World War I](#). After returning to Washington College for a [master’s degree](#), he worked as a newspaperman in Baltimore on the *American* and then on *The Sun*. He was a professor of [journalism](#) at St. John’s College, Annapolis, from 1923 to 1924 and an editorial writer on the *World* in [New York City](#) from 1924 to 1931. For a short time he was the managing editor of *The New Yorker*.

Cain’s first novel, *[The Postman Always Rings Twice](#)*, published when he was 42 years old, was a spectacular success. Its sordid milieu, characters who seek to gain their

ends through violence, and taut, fast-paced prose set the pattern for most of his later books. [Serenade](#) (1937) was daring for its period in its presentation of a bisexual hero. *Three of a Kind* (1943) contained the short novels *Sinful Woman*, *Double Indemnity*, and *The Embezzler*. His books continued to appear after World War II—among them *The Butterfly* (1947), *The Moth* (1948), *The Root of His Evil* (1954), *The Magician's Wife* (1965), and *Rainbow's End* (1975)—but none approached the success of his earlier works.

Posthumously published works include *Cloud 9* (1984) and *The Enchanted Isle* (1985). *The Cocktail Waitress*, compiled from a number of manuscripts, was published in 2012. The novel chronicles the vicissitudes of a young widow who becomes entangled with two men she meets while working as a server at a high-end lounge.

NOTABLE WORKS

- [“Double Indemnity”](#)
- [“The Postman Always Rings Twice”](#)
- [“Mildred Pierce”](#)
- [“Serenade”](#)

Movies

[Mildred Pierce](#)

[The Postman Always Ri...](#)

[Double Indemnity](#)

[The Postman Always Ri...](#)

[Butterfly](#)

This is the preface to Double Indemnity written by the author.

I make no conscious effort to be tough, or *hard-boiled*, or grim, or any of the things I am usually called. I merely try to write as the character would write, and I never forget that the average man, from the fields, the streets, the bars, the offices, and even the gutters of his country, has acquired a vividness of speech that goes beyond anything I could invent, and that if I stick to this heritage, this *logos* of the American countryside, I shall attain a maximum of effectiveness with very little effort.

A Note from Dr. Nieter

Literary Terminology:

At this point we need to have a discussion regarding how to read literature. It is important to consider several factors while reading all the assigned literature.

The title of this novella Double Indemnity is very important. It is out of date today, but it is important for you to understand the meaning of the title so please find out what it means.

The genre of this novella is a *roman noir*, from the French, also a film noir.

Setting, characters, theme, motivations, all play a role in this reading. It is important to identify the protagonist, the anti-hero, *the femme fatal*, and be aware that not all literature follow the exact definitions of these terms. This author likes to blur the lines.

It is also important to pay attention to the details of the setting, the stories within the novella. Nothing is an accident in this piece. As you read, it is easy to become engrossed in the story and then, when it comes to the writing assignments, have to return to the text because it has been read as entertainment. Enjoy, but pay attention!.