

THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE IN *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE*

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# *THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE*

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### 1. Introduction

James Mallahan Cain was an American journalist and novelist who is still considered to be the flagship author of noir literature. His highly-acclaimed oeuvre ranges from moderate successes such as *Serenade* (1937) and *Rainbow's End* (1975) to major literary accomplishments like *Double Indemnity* (1936), *Mildred Place* (1941) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), the former three turned into major motion pictures with great success. By exploring outlawed and taboo topics such as sex, murder, crime, and corruption during the social tensions of the Great Depression in the U. S., he earned the title of “tough writer *par excellence*.” In fact, his works were banned in Boston and Canada because of the explosive display of sex and violence which were simply unthinkable for the era. However, this controversial and outrageous approach to literature also helped him lay the foundation for this dark and somber genre, which would be later called noir or crime fiction.

His widely-respected novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, which continues to be regarded as one of the best crime novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, allowed him to reach the pinnacle of his career and to establish himself as a noir author next to remarkable writers such as Raymond Chandler, Jim Thompson, Dashiell Hammett and others. This literary masterpiece, which earned Cain admiration and respect worldwide, tells the story of Frank and Cora, a cold-blooded duo who plot the assassination of Cora's husband (Nick Papadakis) just so they can keep their sexually-driven romance alive. The stark honesty of the narration, the erotic passion between the main characters, and the unabashed violence throughout the novel make for a decadent ride into a sordid, hopeless world of self-destruction. *Postman* would also set the tone for future novels that would only enlarge Cain's success and subsequently carve the essentials of noir fiction as a literary movement.

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The focus of this essay is to explore the dark side of human nature which is portrayed by the characters of Frank and Cora in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. In order to do so, the novel will be analyzed by drawing on *New Criticism* as an approach. In this respect, a close reading will be done with the hopes of finding how all the elements of the novel work at unison to build up the core theme of the novel. Therefore; for this monograph, the subjects of sex, success, betrayal and love and how these interact within the novel will be explored in order to identify how these elements drive the characters to their most depraved moral perspective.

### 2. James M. Cain

James Mallahan Cain was born in July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1892 to an Irish family in Annapolis, Maryland. His father, James William Cain, was an English professor who taught at St. John's College in Annapolis and was president of Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland. His mother, Rose Mallahan, was a professional opera singer. His upbringing took place in the heart of a very traditionalistic Catholic family. However, from a very early age Cain decided to stop attending masses. By doing so, he wanted to distance himself from religion since he did not believe a single word of the whole “mumbo – jumbo” the preacher used to feed to people. At thirteen, he walked away from Church, never to return.

The early school years proved tough for Cain. He regularly skipped classes and could not find his place among other children, later defining himself a “social inept”. Young Cain tried selling insurance, inspecting roads, teaching, and even singing before graduating from Washington College as well from John Hopkin's University where he earned a Master's Degree in Drama.

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In 1917, John M Cain began his career as a journalist and started writing as a police reporter for *The Baltimore American*. There, he would meet H. L. Mencken, who would later become his lifelong friend as well as his mentor. After improving his craft at *The Baltimore American*, he would join one of the best papers in the U. S. at the time, *The Baltimore Sun*. Not long after, the turmoil of war led Cain to be drafted to battle on World War I, where he did not put the pen down. He edited *The Lorraine Cross*, which became one of the most successful publications of the American Expeditionary Forces.

Cain would rejoin *The Baltimore Sun* after surviving the war in 1919. Upon his return, he would marry his childhood sweetheart, Mary Clough, only to divorce her three years later. An abrupt end for a problematic and complicated relationship and a forecast for his future ones. In 1923, he decided to leave *The Sun* to go back to Annapolis, so he could follow his father's steps becoming an English and Math teacher at St. John's College. From 1924 to 1931, John Cain wrote editorials for multiple papers including *The New York World*, *The Nation*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *American Mercury*, and *Saturday Evening Post*. The recollection of his writings during this period of time can be found in *Our Government* (1930), a collection of his most sarcastic views on politics and society in the form of essays. But it was his first piece of fiction, which he sold to his friend Mencken at *The American Mercury*, that would help him develop the taste for hopeless and dark crime stories. *Pastorale* is the story of a gruesome murder committed by two people who cannot live with the outcome of their crime. This success would set Cain on the path of writing fiction.

In 1931, the interest of Hollywood producers took Cain to California, where he would attempt to write movie screenplays with no success at all. Reluctant to leave sunny California, he would work as a free-lancer writing articles, editorials and short stories mainly about politics. In

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1933, Cain wrote the short story: *The Baby in The Ice Box*, which was also published by Mencken at *The American Mercury*. This time, Cain managed to get the attention of well-known publisher Alfred A. Knopf, who would encourage Cain to venture into the novel-writing process.

Cain's first novel entitled *The Postman Always Rings Twice* would hit the shelves in 1934, becoming a great success, but not without provoking a storm of controversy due to the raw and explicit depictions of sex and murder. This piece would be banned in Canada and in Boston; however, it would later be represented in theatrical plays around the world and would also be turned into a successful motion picture which was released in 1946. *Postman* would establish Cain as a remarkable crime fiction author and would also be the beginning of a very fructuous season for Cain as a novelist. In the following years Cain would write and publish *Double Indemnity* (1936), *Serenade* (1937) and *Mildred Pierce* (1941). All of them were very successful and popular novels that would establish Cain as an authority in crime fiction as well as to institute the parameters that would give life to the noir literature movement.

By 1947, Cain and his wife at the time decided to go back to Maryland where he bought what would later be known as his last home. During the next 29 years he wrote as many as nine more novels out of which only three were published. Unfortunately, none of them had the success and acknowledgement of his previous work. Cain died at the age of 85 of a heart attack on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1977, in University Park, Maryland.

### 3. Antecedents

Even though he is acknowledged as one of the most important authors that gave life to the noir or crime literary movement, James M Cain was never fond of being labeled by a distinct writing style, nor did he enjoy being asked about his literary influences. The way he saw it, it

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was impossible to conceive of one's writings being the product of someone else's. He went over this perception multiple times and even included a brief paragraph in the preface of his book *The Butterfly*: "I belong to no school, hard-boiled or otherwise, and I believe these so-called schools exist mainly in the imagination of critics, and have little correspondence in reality anywhere else... a writer cannot write by peeping over his shoulder at somebody else, any more than a woman can have a baby by watching some other woman have one..." (Cain, 1946, Preface to *The Butterfly*). By distancing himself from the literary establishment, Cain always appealed to real life experiences that contributed to his writing style rather than calling out names of famous and successful writers or movements. For instance, when asked about his writing style being "tough" Cain always managed to simplify this literary concept to what he thought was merely a vulgar approach to language. That is to say, the way people talked on the street, that was what fascinated him, not being knowledgeable about what other writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, to whom he was so constantly compared, were writing. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Cain would reveal that his fascination for the vulgate version of people might as well come from the impeccable English that was spoken at home. Regarding this, Cain would say:

"I tried to write as people talk. That was one of the first arguments I ever had with my father—my father was all hell for people talking as they *should* talk. I, the incipient novelist, even as a boy, was fascinated by the way people *do* talk. The first man I ever sat at the feet of who enchanted me not only by what he told me but how he talked, was Ike Newton, who put in the brick walk over at Washington College. . . . The way he'd use language! I'd go home and talk about it, to my mother's utter horror, and to my father's horror, too. . . . My childhood was nothing but one long lesson: not "preventative" but

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“preventive”; not “sort of a” but “a sort of”; not “those kind” but “that kind” or “those kinds.” Jesus Christ, on and on and on. (*The Paris Review*, James M. Cain, *The Art of Fiction* No 69. Issue 73, Spring Summer 1978).

Clearly, the way Cain was brought up and the reality he encountered outside would have a decisive effect on the way the characters he developed expressed themselves in his novels. This attitude towards language along with the irreverence and obviousness, as he would call it later, that characterized him made both critics and educated readers box him into the noir-literary current. However, Cain would also find a simple and rational explanation to his so-called hard-boiled style. On an interview for the radio station WNYC in which he discussed the creation of *The American Authors Association* among other things, he would claim his style derived sometimes from the common knowledge of obviousness: “I specialize a little in obviousness. Some of my books are about things that everybody knows, but nobody ever admits. My first novel for example, was about a woman who didn’t love her husband and wished he was dead. This is utterly obvious, but I did kick quite a lot of excitement... I figure there were a lot of ladies who secretly had the same idea” (James M. Cain, *Popular Novelist, Argues to Strengthen Author’s Rights*, 1946. WNYC Radio).

Other influences on Cain’s writing come directly from the people he worked with and the different kind of jobs he held over the years. One example is his experience working with insurance companies. This professional area, as well as its lingo, would make it to two of Cain’s greatest achievements, *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Journalism would also become a major influence on Cain’s style. His work for several different newspapers led Cain to meet H.L. Mencken, who helped him burnish his reporting style at *The Baltimore Sun*. Not only would Mencken’s guidance be of major importance but also Cain’s experience as

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a reporter on stories on topics such as crime, coal field battles in West Virginia, and economic conflict. It was his investigation of social problems that led him to write *Our Government* (1930), a collection of essays that tackle issues such as politics and society with his sharp-edged satirical comments.

However, the person who probably made the biggest contribution to James Cain's signature style was his longtime friend and Hollywood scriptwriter Vincent Lawrence. As Cain told *The Paris Review*, "The big influence in how I wrote *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was this strange guy, Vincent Lawrence, who had more effect on my writing than anyone else. He had a device which he thought was so important—the "love rack" he called it. What he meant by the "love rack" was the poetic situation whereby the audience felt the love between the characters" (*The Paris Review*, Issue 73, Spring Summer 1978). This "love rack" device, which also described the ups and downs of the romantic relationship, would be later identified as a recurrent rhetorical device Cain used often in his work. Cain would use it in his own way to mean a love story between a man and a woman (and sometimes even between two women, as is the case in *Mildred Pierce*) in which one individual becomes subjugated to please the stronger character's desires and ambitions. After uniting in criminal or erotic complicity, they end up turning against each other to conclude in a disastrous outcome as resolution. This trademark would later be associated to the hopelessness and self-destructive features inherent in Noir Literature.

Despite Cain's resistance to being associated with any literary school, he is widely-regarded as one of the most important authors that gave life to the noir movement. In fact, some critics go as far as to call him the very pioneer, who not only touched off the beginnings of noir literature next to authors like Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler, but someone who contributed to

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the establishment of the literary and rhetoric features that make up the movement itself. Cain is a remarkable author, whose controversial and stark style made an impact on the twentieth century literary world.

### 4. Theoretical Framework

The Noir Fiction literary movement or Noir Narrative is the name given to a contemporary mode of literature that results from the characteristics seen in the crime and detective fiction; specifically, the “classical detective” fiction and the “hardboiled” crime fiction. The classical detective story is characterized by a story line built around a mystery or puzzle (the murder) that needs to be figured out. In order to solve said mystery, it is crucial to find out who the murderer is, even though there seems to be little to no evidence available to the detective. In this type of literature, someone has committed a crime, and this is the enigma to solve. Some of the most relevant authors related to this specific genre are Edgar Allan Poe, who essentially started detective fiction in 1841 with Monsieur Auguste Dupin in *The Murders of Morgue Street*, as well as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who obtained vast success and popularity with his famous detective character, Sherlock Holmes, in works like *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), *The Sign of The Four* (1890) or *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902).

On the other hand, “hardboiled” crime fiction is a type of narrative that is known for its raw depictions of violence and sex. The term “hardboiled” generates from the colloquial phrase that refers to an egg that has been boiled to the point that it is completely firm. Just like the egg, the “hardboiled” detective is shown as a strong and firm character. Someone with a tough attitude whenever facing danger and violence in the process of solving the mystery. This genre made use of most characteristics from “classical detective” fiction: the suspense, the fast pace

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rhythm of the narrative, the anxiety effect of wanting to solve the case, the intensity of the action and violence as well as the heroism of the characters. In addition to this, some of the most “hardboiled” recognized authors like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler would also add features such as the struggle between good and evil, ambition, power and corruption.

Noir Fiction represents the evolution of crime and detective fiction. The use of the word “noir” in the term “noir narrative” derives directly from the French “film noir” as it was used to characterize some of the “darkest” Hollywood dramas, many of which were based on the works of “hardboiled” authors. The main characteristics of this genre are taken directly from the “classical” and “hardboiled” crime fiction. However, one very important distinguishing feature is the fact that the main character is usually not a detective, but a suspect, a victim or the perpetrator. This main character is in most cases closely connected to the crime. Another important attribute proper from noir literature is the use of sex in order to advance the plot as well as the constant emphasis and reference to it throughout the novel. Additionally, the main characters in *noir* are self-destructive individuals immersed in a world that evokes gloom and fatality. What is more, in *noir* literature the main concern lies in the reasons “why” a crime is committed rather than in “who” did it and “how” it was carried out, which were interests better attributed to early versions of the classical crime fiction genre.

This critical analysis of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* by James M Cain was developed using New Criticism as a literary analysis approach. The name of *New Criticism* was established by Ransom’s 1941 book *The New Criticism*, even though the term was being used around literary circles before this moment. This movement was born at Vanderbilt University, where a group of literature professionals developed a method of analysis wherein the features and problems associated to the biographical and subjective areas of the text could be avoided.

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This was done with the objective of moving away from the trends of previous critical schools so that they could focus critical attention on literature itself.

In the scope of literary analysis, *New Criticism* is located as an objective or formalist theory. These theories contemplate meaning coming exclusively from the art-object itself as well as from its formal components, instead of attributing meaning from the perspective of the audience or perceiver. That is to say, that the study of literature for New Critics is prominently the study of the text itself, not the culture or author that gave life to the text or the experience the audience has while reading it. In essence, New Critics prefer concentrating on the way a text operates as a literary work of art and the way its formal elements interact and create an internal organic being. Bearing this in mind, all psychological, cultural and philosophical trades that lay beyond the novel would be avoided in order to identify the way all the internal elements of the novel work at unison to build up the core theme of the novel.

### 5. The Dark Side of Human Nature in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*

In James M. Cain's *A Postman Always Rings Twice*, Frank Chambers, a hitch-hiking gipsy soul who finds pleasure in life's uncertainties somehow gets drawn into a spiral of decay by Cora Papadakis, an Iowan runaway who is a prisoner of her own life choices. These two characters take the reader through a journey of lust, betrayal, hatred, crime and an overall decadence that proves that human beings are selfish by nature and largely driven by their needs, wants and most primal desires. An emotional set that could only illustrate wild beings with little to no room for generous-disinterested love, loyalty and charity. This monograph will explore the moral construction of each of these characters, addressing aspects such as sex, the

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dynamics of ambition and success, the betrayal and the perception of love, all of them with the purpose of finding evidence that shows that every decision these characters make is motivated only by self-interest and self-satisfaction.

Indeed, one could say that the human being as a rational animal, but an animal after all, is in a constant search for self-satisfaction of his/her most pressing needs: sex and power. Sex shows up as a primal instinct and a tool manipulation in the novel. Frank embodies instinct whereas Cora portrays manipulation at first. From the beginning of the novel, sex is the primary force that draws Frank and Cora together. Though they come from two different worlds, they gravitate toward each other almost involuntarily. Sex is portrayed as an uncontrollable impulse that resembles primitive behavior. This proves fundamental to understanding these characters: because they rely so much on their most basic instincts, they end up crossing the line of what's socially and morally correct.

Certainly, sex is the principal motivator for Frank to start working at Twin Oaks Tavern. Even though he stops there primarily to search for a place to eat and put things in perspective, he also finds himself facing an opportunity to get close to with a woman whom he thinks is not exceptionally good-looking, but attractive enough to try, as he puts it: "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" (Cain, 1934, p.4). His aggressive desire consumes him: "I wanted that woman so bad I couldn't even keep anything in my stomach" (Cain, 1934, p.9).

What begins as a slight interest on Frank's part has quickly escalated to a wild yearning that affects all his decisions. His ardor mounts, clouding his most rational side. Suddenly, his actions are no longer based on satisfying all his basic needs but satisfying the most pressing

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one, sex. He schemes to win her confidence by bringing up sensitive topics such as her marriage with Nick and her background. Even though he has far more important things to be concerned about, such as earning money, he recklessly sets it aside to pursue his most primal instincts. This idea is reinforced by narrator's use of animal imagery: "She was snarling like a cougar. I liked her like that... From then on, I began to smell her again." (Cain, 1934, p.13).

However, it cannot be assumed that Frank operates in a rudimentary, simplistic way just because what he seeks is in essence to satisfy a basic need. On the contrary, he makes a throughout analysis of the situation so that he can come up with complex manipulation strategies that will get him closer to his goal. He manipulates both Nick and Cora. The former by tricking him into a false partnership that will allow him to be closer to Cora, and the latter by reminding her about the misfortune she faces every day by being with a man she does not love or even like, for that matter. He not only carefully plans each move, but he does so by keeping his feelings at bay. Getting emotionally involved is not part of his plan and expects the same from Cora. He does not show any sign of sympathy for Cora's unfortunate position. What is more, he finds out what makes Cora unhappy and uses it as a means to an end, as he clearly states at the very beginning of the book: "I had what I wanted. I had socked one in under her guard, and socked it in deep, so it hurt. From now on, it would be business between her and me" (Cain, 1934, p.7). He is never interested in actually helping Cora. He seems unable to show a hint of understanding and compassion towards her. His actions and ideas are solely motivated by his selfishness and libido.

Cora, on the other hand, does not seem to reveal such a strong sexual desire towards Frank. She keeps herself prudent and distant, at least initially. She tries not to show herself interested, at least not as much as Frank does. Nevertheless, she does not act reluctantly at the

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first opportunity of infidelity. Indeed, she surrenders completely to Frank and shows for the first time a rough side which had not yet been revealed to the reader. A side Frank says he loves to smell. A side full of animal imagery suggesting their need to satisfy their lust and libido just as beasts do. Frank says, “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 (Cain, 1932, p.11).

Evidently, Cora completely succumbs to her most savage side, not only fueling this passionate bond but accepting a violent and harsh approach to it that appeals to Frank. Nevertheless, as it will later be revealed, sex would only prove to be an opportunity to move her agenda forward. Cora guides the whole situation in a way that she hopes will work out for her benefit. She identifies and understands the fact that Frank can be easily manipulated through sex and sees in him an opportunity to change her miserable life. She is haunted by her poor upbringing back in Des Moines, Iowa, tormented by her past life in L.A, and feels like a prisoner in her own house with her husband. She longs for a better life away from Nick, a life in which she can make her own choices. Cora is shown as a complex character who makes use of whatever is at hand as long as she can fulfill her goals. Masaya Jaber writes that Cora is a strong-willed, murderous woman who exploits Frank’s ardor for criminal ends. Cora’s relationship to Frank, though enmeshed in the cycle of sex and violence that characterizes Cain’s narratives in general, is bound to the connectedness between economic discourse (Cora’s ambition) and sexual discourse (her sexual charm and appeal which she uses to control Frank), and this connection forms the locus of her agency. (Jaber, M. (2011).

Cora desires much more than committing a crime for the sake of it; she wants to move upwards on the social ladder. Crime is then slowly transformed from an unspeakable act to just

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a means to an end. This stands in contrast to the traditional *Femme Fatale* which has been portrayed a thousand times before and that stands as a flagship of the *Noir Genre*.

One such example of manipulation from Cora is observed from the very beginning of the novel, as follows: “I can’t go on like this, Frank. I can’t stand it. And I’ve got to get drunk with you, Frank. You know what I mean? Drunk. And I hate that Greek.” (Cain, 1934, p.14). Cora persists on manipulating Frank by telling him how her life has been filled with sorrow and anguish in order to later characterize him as her savior, the liberator and protector of her wounded soul. She presents an image of someone who has been submitted to horrible things throughout a lifetime so that when she finally reveals her true intentions, she can still be perceived as a victim and not as a hideous criminal with a dark plan. Furthermore, Cora suggests the crime to Frank without even directly mentioning it. Yet, she is undoubtedly the mastermind behind the murder.

Gradually, Cora steps up her manipulation game. She knows well Frank is willing to do a lot of things as long as she pleases him sexually. Although, she recognizes she is going to need to offer something much more appealing to him to be able to ask for her ultimate desire. She then understands she does not have much to offer but her lust, her “love” and half the loot once the crime has been committed: Do you love me so much that not anything matters?” she asks. Frank responds, “They hang you for that.” “Not if do it right,” Cora says. “You’re smart, Frank.” (Cain, 1934, p. 16). Cora continues to praise Frank throughout the novel only to persuade him to grant her wish. She also keeps bringing up the topic of love and how much Frank needs to show her what he truly feels about her. It is not clear whether Frank somehow succumbs into this corrupt endeavor because of what he can get out of it, because he is only

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concerned with his momentary desire for her, or because he actually believes everything she says about them being in love and sharing a life together.

It is reasonable to think both these characters try their best to take advantage of sex in their own way. They have different approaches to it; nevertheless, these paths somehow converge in a cocktail of crime, desire, lust and sin once the atrocious goal is achieved. Just minutes after the murder, Frank and Cora seem to descend into madness:

“I hauled off and hit her in the eye as hard as I could. She went down. She was right down there at my feet, her eyes shining, her breasts trembling, drawn up in tight points, and pointing right at me. She was down there, and the breath was roaring in the back of my throat like I was some kind of animal—Yes! Yes, Frank, yes! —Next thing I knew, I was down there with her... hell could have opened for me then, and it wouldn't have made any difference. I had to have her, if I hung for it. I had her (Cain, 1934, p.46).

This scene represents the climax of Frank and Cora's hard work. They both build their way up until this moment. They are completely delighted to finally realize their ambition. Now they celebrate by surrendering themselves to their most savage impulses. No doubt, Frank and Cora as an enterprise would not have succeeded without sex.

However, they soon realize that the frantic emotional ride they get out of sex is something that is not going to last forever. Once sex has reached the sensorial limit for Frank and Cora, the decline in their relationship reveals other areas of their lives in which they do not align in the same way. For instance, there is a struggle when it comes to their perspectives of life in the future. There is a duality of success that does not let them move forwards in synchrony as they expected. Frank is portrayed early on in the novel as a drifter whose biggest accomplishment is the ability to maintain a reckless and independent life. He is described as

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someone who always makes his own decisions and who has been a “tramp” for so long that he has become really skillful at it. He is proud of himself and of his way of life. He feels as if he had beaten the system by not fitting in. “I’m talking about the road,” he says. “It’s fun, Cora. And nobody knows it better than I do. I know every twist and turn it’s got. And I know how to work it, too. Isn’t that what we want? Just to be a pair of tramps, like we really are?” (Cain, 1934, p.15).

Frank is convinced that he will make Cora appreciate his way of life. He feels empowered by his mastery of the road and tries to use it to convince Cora to run away with him. Cora seems skeptical of the idea of fleeing; however, she does not want to rule it out right away as she knows this would upset Frank and potentially make him leave her. This difference leads them to their first failed attempt at starting a life together and to the first time they realize their life expectations do not align. “I told you I wasn’t really a bum, Frank. I don’t feel like no gipsy. I don’t feel like nothing, only ashamed, that I’m out here asking for a ride...Goodbye, Frank. I’m going back” (Cain, 1934, p. 30).

This disagreement about their future life together is the first of many. With each dispute, Frank draws further away from Cora and changes his perception of her rather rapidly. Thus, what started as an uncontrollable and fierce attraction slowly fades into a feeling of restraint and disdain, something that had never been part of his free-spirited life. These somber feelings seize Frank in such a way he is no longer as captivated as he was at the beginning. In fact, he starts longing for something or someone else that reminds him he is still free. When Cora goes to visit her sick mother in Iowa, he finds the opportunity: “I put her on the train, and going back to the parking lot I felt funny, like I was made of gas and would float off

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somewhere. I felt free. For a week, anyway, I wouldn't have to wrangle, or fight off dreams, or nurse a woman back to a good humor with a bottle of liquor (Cain, 1934, p. 91,92).

Clearly, Frank now perceives some resemblance between the way he feels about Cora now and the way Cora felt about Nick: as an emotional prisoner. This is a turning point for him since it is the first time he starts to question the whole situation with Cora, so with the hopes of escaping from it, he falls back into his old gypsy habits. He decides to take a little trip with someone who truly makes him feel back on the road, back in his element. He now feels that having a future with Cora will take more than a frantic desire for her. It would take a dramatic change in his life, one that he is not willing to make. At least not yet.

Similarly, Cora has her own struggle regarding her views on success and what she has to go through with Frank every day. It is necessary to go back in time in order to understand why Cora thinks the way she does in relation to her future. As is presented at the beginning of the novel, Cora comes from a very poor background. Winning a beauty contest provided a way out from her under-privileged upbringing back in Des Moines, Iowa. At an early age, she did not hesitate to leave everything behind to pursue a brighter future. While this shows how deplorable conditions might have been for her back in her hometown, it also shows lots of courage and determination on her part. Even though things did not turn out the way she wanted, since she ends up in a "hash house" instead of a movie set, she knows very well that going back to Iowa is not an option.

Cora is a driven woman who does not let hardship and misfortune drive her into misery. On the contrary, she somehow finds a way out of a cul-de-sac no matter how grim and tangled things might be. In fact, that is the reason she becomes Nick's wife. Nick is nothing but a path out of the hash house and into an improved lifestyle. Even though living with Nick is not what

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she truly desires, it is a step up the social ladder. Hence, her annoyance every time Frank tries to pull her into a gypsy life:

“It won’t do, Frank. That road, it don’t lead anywhere but to the hash house. The hash house for me, and some job like it for you. A lousy parking lot job, where you wear a smock. I’d cry if I saw you in a smock, Frank” (Cain, 1934, p. 16).

Because of this, Cora changes her mind about escaping with Frank while Nick is in the hospital. ““Goodbye, Frank,” she says. ‘I’m going back.’ She kept tugging at the hatbox. I tried to hold on to it, anyway to carry it back for her, but she got it. She started back with it. She had looked nice when she started out, with a little blue suit and blue hat, but now she looked all battered, and her shoes were dusty, and she couldn’t even walk right from crying. All of a sudden, I found out I was crying too (Cain, 1934, p. 30.).

Cora’s inability to appreciate the road life hurts Frank deeply. Even after going through the trial and almost losing everything they had fought for, Cora sticks with the idea of resuming her life back at *Twin Oaks Tavern*, only this time as the owner. This is a confirmation of her cold-blooded approach to life. She does not mind going back to the place where everything is a reminder of the ghastly crime she committed. What is more, she insists on persuading Frank to join her in this insolent and shameless picture. She is only concerned with making a good living and making a name for herself. “Listen Frank,” she says, “you’ve been trying to make a bum out of me ever since you’ve known me, but you’re not going to do it. I told you, I’m not a bum. I want to be something. We stay here. We’re not going away. We take out the beer license. We amount to something” (Cain, 1934, p.91.).

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This is yet another demonstration of the selfishness of both characters. They stick to their choices tenaciously. Neither is willing to compromise. This stubbornness is what drives them to the edge. It calls into question their repeated proclamations of love.

In fact, it is this major struggle based on each characters' selfishness what sets the ground for major problems in the future. The relationship has been weakened by being subjected to each characters' own demons. This could only lead them, in addition to the selfishness, stubbornness and general uneasiness of the relationship, to the element of betrayal. This one, present at all levels and in different parts of the novel, will prove to be another pillar of the plot. Cora is ready to move on with her life and in order to do so the element of treason seems essential to her objective. It is the idea of betrayal that steadily resides within her head that causes her to act in the first place. Nick is from this point on condemned to be lied to and misled until his own death.

Once the crime has been committed, Frank and Cora really need to demonstrate to each other what they are made of and what they are willing to do to succeed together. As a matter of fact, just as everything unfolds the night of the murder, the first thing Cora does to ensure her success is to appeal to Frank's sentimentalism. Continuing her manipulation, she says, "There's just one thing. We've got to be in love. If we love each other, then nothing matters. I'll be the first one to say it. I love you, Frank" (Cain, 1934, p. 48). Clearly, Cora wants to be sure Frank is not going to give up on her now that the stakes are at the highest. Their lives are at risk and it is up to them to get out of this alive. Mayssa Jaber (2011) points out how Cora uses love to control Frank: "Here we can see how Cain sets up the 'love rack': the trap of Frank's passion for Cora that leads to murder and later to destruction. Not only is she willing to fool him in order to incite him to commit the crime on her behalf, but her callous flippancy suggests she

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has no compunction about the act of murder itself. Frank's hesitation is clearly balanced against Cora's determination, a balance that is shown even more clearly during the trial (p. 85).

However, despite Cora's efforts to safeguard her interests, Frank is the first to engage in betrayal. Even though he claims to be a "tramp" who has dealt with law enforcement many times before, he cracks easily when put to the test: "Boy, it's still you or her," the detective tells him. "If you didn't have anything to do with this, you better sign this thing. Because if you don't, then I'll know. And so will the jury, and so will the judge, and so will the guy that springs the trap..." "I signed," Frank recounts. "There was so much sweat on my hand the guy had to blot it off the paper. (Cain, 1934, p.64.).

This first display of betrayal on Frank's part serves as a trigger for Cora to turn against him completely and confirms once more how little they truly care for each other. Although they promise to endure whatever comes their way, they easily abandon their promise and even hurt each other deeply as soon as they are faced with the gravity of the situation. It only takes the initial betrayal to make the whole enterprise tumble down. They both believe they are on their own and each has to look out for his own self-interest. Luckily for them, Katz manages to get them out of this legal dilemma by resorting to a deception of his own, a hoax to be served up deftly to everyone in the court room, including Frank and Cora.

The concept of betrayal broadens further, in that it affects not only Frank and Cora's relationship but also the legal proceedings in the courtroom. During the trial there is another clash that, though lightly explored, has a major impact on Frank and Cora's fate as well as to portray how little human beings care for one another. Katz and Sackett pull strings in their own struggle to succeed. They understand what the case is all about and the real-life consequences of what Frank and Cora's actions have had on Nick Papadakis. However, they only care about

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trampling on one another. The duality of their relationship is skillfully characterized: “Sackett and I are enemies. We’re the friendliest enemies that ever were. He’d sell his soul to the devil to put something over me, and I’d do the same for him. We even put up a bet on it. We bet \$100” (Cain, 1934, p 76). This telling and raw depiction of their relationship confirms that betrayal is a powerful tool inside the court they do not hesitate to use. This is a serious situation, given that even when Katz has the opportunity to bring justice to this case, he is more concerned with defeating his contender by manipulating everybody in scene. This illustrates that the corrupt and deceitful behavior goes beyond the characters and has its foundation in the institutions and corporations behind them. Frank and Cora are exonerated because of the conflict between three different insurance companies. The final ruling is made only by taking into account profit and losses. “So those two companies on the liability policies, the ones that had their chin hanging out for a wallop from you, they chipped in \$5.000 a piece to pay the Pacific States Accident Policy, and the Pacific States Accident agreed to pay up and shut up, and the whole thing didn’t take over a half hour (Cain, 1934, p 80.).

Apparently, the dark side of human nature is already so embedded in the characters’ fabric that transgressing any moral criteria seems only natural. There is no weight given to how to proceed morally, but only to how much profit opportunity there is. This applies to Katz, who is not guided by morality. As a result, the success Katz achieves with the final ruling is the outcome of an elaborate scheme he executes magnificently.

After the trial, life continues to be hard for Frank and Cora. Having pretty much gotten away with murder thanks to Katz’ skill and wit proves to not be enough. Cora is shaken by the whole ordeal during the trial. She is disappointed not only about Frank’s behavior but also her own. She reflects on the scope of the betrayal and whether they can recover from it. She thinks

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they had truly grasped something real and powerful that later was lost forever because of their lack of will to carry through with their original plan, or so she claims. She contents herself with the fact that they are back home in one piece, but she cannot hide her melancholy and bitterness. At this point, it is problematic to conclude whether Cora is sincerely emotionally affected by this or if this is just a way to start her next move without Frank being a part of it.

Frank, on the other hand, tries to concentrate a bit more on the bright side, which is the fact that they are alive, that they get away with their crime and that they even got a large amount of money out of it. Nevertheless, Frank and Cora know that now, since their partnership is pretty much finished, they both need to start making plans to prosper on their own. A transgression has been committed, promises have been broken, and trusts have been torn down. Despite achieving what they planned for months, they now find themselves in a never-ending distrust. Their criminal agenda has made them accomplices but at the same time they have also become the only person that can send the other to the gallows. By betraying one another during the trial they reveal their true colors. The vicious and immoral bond they create the night of the murder is now dissolved as a result of their own fears and will to survive.

From now on paranoia takes over. One such example is Frank's impulse to abandon everything immediately and start fresh somewhere else: "I wanted her a long way from Sackett. I was afraid if she got sore at me for something, she'd go off her nut and spill it like she had that other time, after the arraignment. I didn't trust her for a minute" (Cain, 1934, p 88). Clearly, things have changed dramatically for Frank. Not only he knows now that Cora is volatile, but he has also changed his perception towards her. She does not spark in him the same flame she used to and her whole persona does not represent the woman whom he so passionately desired: "I ripped all her clothes off. She twisted and turned, slow, so they would

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slip 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. (Cain, 1934, p. 87).

A clear contrast can be seen between the sex scene from the night of the murder and the one after they come back from the trial. Even though both moments are used as closure scenes for a certain cycle within the novel, they represent completely opposite feelings. The former might as well be described as a dancing blaze constantly being fed with fuel; the latter a smoky, suffocating fire. Frank understands then that his attraction to Cora is destined to disappear. As a matter of fact, it is at this point when he decides to be unfaithful to Cora.

As noted, after surviving the trial, Frank cheats Cora while she is with her mother back in Iowa. When he goes back to Cora after this trip with Madge Allen, it is not clear that this behavior can be attributed to his love for her, his greed for money waiting for him at the bank, or concern that Cora might turn him in. However, once Cora finds out about this affair, tensions rise once again, to the boiling point this time. The stakes are too high now and Cora knows it only takes a phone call to see Frank go down: "Don't worry. When the time comes to call up Mr. Sackett, I'll let you know. Just take it easy. You'll need all your strength" (Cain, 1934, p.16).

This mixture of distrust and vulnerability perturbs them deeply. It is clear now for both that they are capable of doing whatever it takes to prevail, even murder. They know their counterpart is actively planning the next move and trying to coexist in the same place knowing this is quite unbearable. Frank even confesses that he has been thinking of a way to get rid of

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her: “Because that’s just what I had been doing. Lying there beside her just straining to think of a way I could kill her” (Cain, 1934, p.108). Killing then makes a transition from their very last option to their first. Surviving at all cost is what truly matters. The betrayal has turned them into mortal enemies.

Finally, yet another example of this ruthless and selfish behavior is presented when Kennedy, having obtained Cora’s confession of the crime, approaches Frank with the purpose of blackmailing him for twenty-five grand. Again, this is a clear example of how each character tries to take advantage of any situation, regardless of anybody else’s well-being or the relationship behind them. It is the survival of the fittest at its best. Unfortunately, this situation does not end well for Kennedy since Frank and Cora manage to fight their way out of this dilemma by subjugating him resorting to the law of the jungle: “I beat him up again. When his face looked like raw beef, and he was blubbering like a kid in the last quarter of a football game, I quit” (Cain, 1934, p.101).

Evidently, in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, the element of betrayal is not exclusive to Frank and Cora. In fact, it is one of the elements that forms a foundation for the whole narrative. It spreads to every segment and at every level of the novel. All the characters resort to their fair share of deception and treachery to progress and achieve their own goals without considering what their actions mean to others. Nevertheless, it is the betrayal between Cora and Frank that stands out as an illustration of characters that lack a sense of humanity. They are individuals who have been deprived of the very thing that should make them human: a deep sense of caring for one another, the awareness that they are social by nature and that everything they do will somehow affect those around them.

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Yet, after so many illustrations of a lack of morale and the dark features of these characters, there are also many vivid depictions of raw emotion along the novel. Emotions that just like the drive of sex, lead Frank and Cora to do things that lay beyond their rational self. Even beyond their plans sometimes. Things that are beyond their control. Consequently, this leads one to ask whether or not all the emotions that have been so skillfully depicted are the result of a conscious scheme, or if at any given point there is room for authentic sentiment. As a matter of fact, the concept of love might as well be the most difficult notion to fully grasp in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Even though it is often claimed throughout the novel, it is hard to identify the real purpose behind these affective demonstrations. Sometimes these might sound like legitimate testimonies of love and affection. Other times, they come across as empty words. What's more, in most cases it appears that the speaker is appealing to the receptors' emotions rather than really expressing what he or she feels. As a result, identifying the intricacy of love and its effects in Frank and Cora's journey presents a challenge.

First of all, it takes a while for the concept of love to make its first appearance in the novel. As a matter of fact, once it does, it only seems to show up as a pretext rather than a real sentiment, since it is very clear that Frank and Cora's relationship is based on pretty much everything but love. However, they soon find themselves talking openly about the possibility of being together and how this devotion they have is going to get them through the dark times ahead. Everything unfolds swiftly, and these characters make a quick turn from simply enjoying themselves in bed to promising one another a life together. It is this rapidness that causes the reader to suspect the sincerity of these proclamations. Thus, the initial role of love in the novel can only be interpreted as theatricality hiding the characters' true intentions. Cora's

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desire to get rid of Nick, and Frank's sexual attraction to Cora stand out as obvious motivators for this brisk "love."

However, despite Frank and Cora's initial practical approach to the concept of love, there is a change during the rising action of the novel. The line between pretending to be and actually falling in love starts to get blurry for Frank. There are some subtle moments that seem to reveal a small shift on the way he perceives Cora: "I kissed them, but not hard. They were soft little kisses. I had never thought about them before" (Cain, 1934, p. 13), "I kissed her. Her eyes were shining up at me like two blue stars. It was like being in church" (Cain, 1934, p.17). These scenes suggest stirrings of sincere affection on Frank's part and can be used as evidence that Cora's strategies to manipulate Frank are to some extent working. Nevertheless, it cannot be asserted that Frank has completely lost control over his agenda. Whether he consciously or subconsciously starts to succumb to Cora's allurements and to what extent, might be too difficult to tell at this point. Additionally, the fact that Frank narrates the novel also deprives the reader from an insight on Cora's emotional being, which could be similar to his.

It is important to point out that, up until this moment, none of the characters has actually said anything explicit about love. They simply engage in romantic interactions in which they appear delighted to be with one another and seek to stay together without Nick being a problem. It can be assumed that both characters have their own reasons to not yet announce their "love." Not surprisingly, Frank is the first to express how he feels about Cora. Not long after Frank and Cora's failed attempt to flee from Twin Oaks Tavern, he finds himself returning after losing all his money on bets. This time, Cora is not glad to see him, or at least that is what she wants to portray at first. Nevertheless, she wastes no time. Clearly, she knows Frank's visit might be brief; therefore, she needs to take advantage of it by hitting him where it hurts him the

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most: "...What he's making that scrapbook for. It's to show to his children! And he wants one. He wants one right away!" (Cain, 1934, p. 38). A baby with Nick can definitely tear them apart for good and, bearing this in mind, she manages to strike Frank hard enough to touch off a reaction. An emotional one too: "Listen. Stall him on this kid stuff just a little while. Stall him, and we'll see if we can figure something out. I'm not much good, but I love you, Cora. I swear it" (Cain, 1934, p. 38). After this moment, it is very clear Frank is more involved than what he had actually planned. He has neither money nor a plan. Their first attempt to eliminate Nick did not work and now he is full of fear and doubt; yet, he does not give up. To the contrary, he begs Cora for time, so he can come up with something to avoid losing her to Nick. His determination can only mean one thing, he actually loves her.

On the other hand, Cora does not appear to love just yet. Although she tells Frank she loves him back, it feels more like she is just going along with the conversation to keep the façade going. She looks far more focused on making things happen at the right moment and at the right place instead of opening up to her lover. Actually, the very first time Cora says the words "I love you" willingly, is right after murdering Nick. This conspicuous situation fits perfectly with the *modus operandi* she has shown so far. It almost seems like she had been waiting just for the right moment to "declare" her passionate love towards Frank, only so she could keep things going according to plan. As mentioned, the possibility that Cora is becoming emotionally involved exists, along with the possibility that there may be some humanity within this cold-blooded character and that she truly wants everything to work out so she can be with Frank. However, her acts end up characterizing her more as a hard-hearted schemer rather than a being capable of love. In fact, she needs to wait until right after assassinating someone and

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right before going to trial for it to say that she loves Frank. Love has become her most powerful tool to pull Frank's strings. She knows this well and acts accordingly.

Up to this point, whatever progress made on *love* (real or feigned) is quickly shattered by the events that take place inside the courtroom. The betrayal is going to have a deep impact on both characters and the events that follow. The trial works as an emotional turning point for both Frank and Cora. Ironically, the roles seem to switch. Frank distances himself from his previous sentimental approach to Cora. He understands that they have failed each other and that most likely there is not a chance for reconciliation. They have made themselves to be untrustworthy and by doing so they have built a wall between them. From this point on Frank relies on his original long held views. He cares only about himself.

In contrast to Frank, Cora is emotionally shaken. She is devastated as a result of Frank's arrangement with Sacket. Again, it is hard to tell what hurts her the most: the fact that Frank did not live up to his promises of love and to his commitment of staying firm no matter what, or the disappointment of not having managed well enough to make Frank do as she wished. In any case, she seems genuinely unnerved by this. Furthermore, her pain and devastation begin to suggest a different image of her: a much more caring and vulnerable Cora is shown. Frank's selfish actions reveal to her that he did not really care for her. She even thinks she might have been used all along: "I see it now. I see why I had to drive the car. I see it, that other time, why it was me that had to do it, not you. Oh yes. I fell for you because you were smart. And now I find out you're smart. Ain't that funny? You fall for a guy because he's smart and then you find out he's smart" (Cain, 1934, p. 71). This alternative version of Frank seems to spark Cora's real interest. She is evidently affected by the fact that no matter how hard she tried to keep every

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single detail under control, she did not foresee Frank's betrayal. She has been caught off guard by the last person she thought could hurt her.

After the trial, Cora continues to show a susceptible version of herself. She tries to convince Frank to stay so they can open up the tavern and even suggests making some additions to it, in order to attract more customers. She wants to flourish right there in California and, the way she sees it, Frank is welcome to stay right by her side.

In contrast, Frank is more distant than ever before. He does not trust her at all and thinks of Cora as a liability he might need to get rid of. He wants to move out as soon as possible so he can start fresh somewhere else. He does not dare to leave her, though. This behavior of both characters exemplifies how they have become closely involved. They have overcome all their obstacles: the trial is over; *Twin Oaks Tavern* is pretty much theirs now and they got ten thousand grand they were definitely not expecting. Yet, they do not seem to conceive moving on with their lives without the other one. They could easily arrive at an arrangement that satisfies them both. Cora obviously knows that all that it would take to get rid of Frank is just to offer him some money, so he could leave and continue his gypsy road-life. She is sure he would accept it and she could continue with her business plan all by herself without any resistance. Alternatively, Frank could either kill Cora and escape with the money or find a way to get at least some of the money and escape. However, this is not the scenario. They try to stick together. It is almost as if the crime had joined them beyond what they had originally planned.

Furthermore, another piece of evidence that gives Cora's feelings away comes after the realization that Frank has been unfaithful to her. She fails to manage the situation and allows the hatred she feels to take control: "And the cat came back! It stepped on the fuse box and got

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killed, but here it is back! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Ain't that funny, how unlucky cats are for you?" (Cain, 1934, p. 105). Evidently, she is hurt and distraught. She loses control completely and starts to act erratically. Moreover, she even considers talking to Sackett about the crime, just so she can see Frank taken down: "Don't worry. When the time comes to call up Mr. Sackett, I'll let you know. Just take it easy. You'll need all your strength" (Cain, 1934, p.106). The fact that Cora is even considering the possibility of calling Mr. Sackett is very telling of her emotional state. If that call were to happen she knows very well that not only Frank but both of them would have to face the legal consequences of having murdered Nick. This irrational behavior can only be associated with someone who is deeply distraught and is acting on the basis of emotions only. This situation reveals that even though Cora has been directing some of the most well-crafted manipulative schemes, she has also failed at keeping herself emotionally unaffected. Her feelings play an important role now and, as a result, Cora will see her agenda changing to adjust to these new circumstances.

What is more, Cora has yet another detail to confess to Frank. Something so important that it changes her perception of life completely. Her new sentimental approach is not only influenced by her feelings towards Frank but also to the fact that she is pregnant with his baby. This is a major turning point for Cora as everything that has brought her to this moment seems irrelevant now. She has been altered in a way only women can understand. She is a mother now. All her ambitions, sorrows, plans, and disappointments vanish as a result of a new life coming through hers. Undeniably, her attention and attitude focus on what's best for the baby now and this includes Frank being a lovely father.

Nevertheless, she thinks he has yet to prove that he is willing to make the same commitment for her. Not long before, Frank had confessed that he had been thinking of a way

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to kill Cora as a response to her threats to call Sackett. This makes her feel uneasy and also convinces her that Frank might as well continue thinking about it: “I’m trying to say it, Frank. This is what I’m trying to say. I wanted to ruin you, and yet I couldn’t go to see Sackett. It wasn’t because you kept watching me. I could have run out of the house and got to him. It was because, like I told you. Well then, I’m rid of the devil, Frank. I know I’ll never call up Sackett, because I had my chance, and I had my reason, and I didn’t do it. So, the devil has left me. But has he left you?” (Cain, 1934, p. 110).

A baby is something Cora clearly feels is reason enough to change her ways, but she also wants Frank to confirm to her that he is also willing to do whatever it takes to leave their gloomy and dark past behind them, so they can move on together. Bizarrely enough, Cora thinks the only way to determine whether or not Frank is willing to change is by offering him the opportunity to kill her: “While you were thinking about a way to kill me Frank, I was thinking the same thing. Of a way you could kill me. You can kill me swimming. We’ll go way out, the way we did last time, and if you don’t want me to come back, you don’t have to let me. Nobody’ll ever know. It’ll be just one of those things that happen at the beach. Tomorrow morning we’ll go... 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” (Cain, 1934, p. 110).

Certainly, Cora has put herself in the most vulnerable position she could ever be and the only rational explanation for it is that she is frankly trying to find a way to start over. She wants Frank to fully comprehend that she wants to be with him and that is going to be up to him to come home to a family. Frank, convinced by the seriousness of the matter, tries his best to let Cora know how he feels about her: “She went ahead, and I swam after her. She kept going, and

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went a lot further out than she had before. Then she stopped, and I caught up with her. She swung up beside me, and took hold of my hand, and we looked at each other. She knew, then, that the devil was gone, that I loved her” (Cain, 1934, p. 110).

In summary, the concept of love proves malleable throughout the novel. Even though it starts as a fraud, it is clear that it evolves and erupts with vehemence. Both Frank and Cora live situations that make them realize that their feelings are out of their control, even though they have tried relentlessly to keep those at bay. Love proves that, like organic matter, it grows even under the harshest of conditions. Their dark journey somehow culminates in an opportunity to make things right. A hopeful path that promises better days ahead: “And with my ears ringing and the weight on my back and chest, it seemed to me that all the devilment, and meanness, and shiftlessness, and no-account stuff in my life had been pressed out and washed off, and I was all ready to start out with her again clean, and do like she said, have a new life” (Cain, 1934, p. 111). Even though they do not get to experience this love, there is enough evidence to be able to claim that *there is room for actual love in *The Postman Always Rings Twice**. Maybe a little too late, but authentic love, after all.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Unquestionably, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* works as a display of the human fabric which people try to conceal. It explores the dark side of human nature, a reminder of its primitive past that still lingers in the consciousness. Frank and Cora experience a series of stages that reflect what their inner, instinctive being demands at different points. What started as sexual desire and an urge for power quickly becomes the very thing that destroys their relationship as

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well as their partnership: selfishness and betrayal. Again, and again their decisions are motivated solely by their determination to succeed no matter the consequences. There is no such thing as solidarity or unselfish well-being in the novel. Each character has his/her own agenda to advance. Whereas the desire of Katz and Sackett's mutual vendetta, the Insurance Companies' usury, Kennedy's greed, Cora's desire to achieve greatness or Frank's sexual urges, it seems that every character in the novel has a clear objective that will later lead them down a morally-detached path, a path toward self-destruction. However, this animal-like behavior also shows glimmers of a sentimental side that, although lightly explored throughout the novel, plays a critical role to prove that human beings, while mostly attached to their inner selfish desires, can somehow show interest and love for someone else.

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