***Mildred Pierce* meets *Strangers on a Train***

**Ann Boswell**

**1. We may know the titles *Mildred Pierce* and *Strangers on a Train* from the movies—both were adapted by Hollywood studios into now-classic films. But the novels that inspired these movies are also worth our attention: James M. Cain’s *Mildred Pierce* (1941) and Patricia Highsmith’s *Strangers on a Train* (1950) represent the best of American mid-20th-century storytelling. Let’s read them as a pair and explore how they complement each other. Along the way, we will enrich our understanding of perhaps the most American of all genres: the taut, obsessive, deceptive world of American *noir*.**

**2. Course Outline by Week**

Feb 3: Introduction/background to James M. Cain and Patricia Highsmith

Feb 10: *Mildred Pierce*, chapters 1-9

Feb 17:  *Mildred Pierce,* chapters 10-17

Feb 24: *Strangers on a Train,* chapters one to thirteen

Mar 3: *Strangers on a Train,* chapters fourteen to twenty-nine

Mar 10: *Strangers on a Train,* chapters thirty to forty-seven

Mar 17: *Mildred Pierce* and *Strangers on a Train* together

Mar 24: *Mildred Pierce* and *Strangers on a Train* on screen

**You can use any editions, but I will be using the following:**

**James M. Cain, *Mildred Pierce*. NY: Vintage Books, 1989.**

**ISBN: 0-679-72321-8**

**Patricia Highsmith, *Strangers on a Train*. NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001.**

**ISBN: 0-393-32198-3**

**Both texts are available and free online:**

***Mildred Pierce***

[**https://onlinereadfreenovel.com/james-m-cain/47006-mildred\_pierce.html**](https://onlinereadfreenovel.com/james-m-cain/47006-mildred_pierce.html)

***Strangers on a Train***

[**https://onlinereadfreenovel.com/patricia-highsmith/page,2,45359-strangers\_on\_a\_train.html**](https://onlinereadfreenovel.com/patricia-highsmith/page,2,45359-strangers_on_a_train.html)