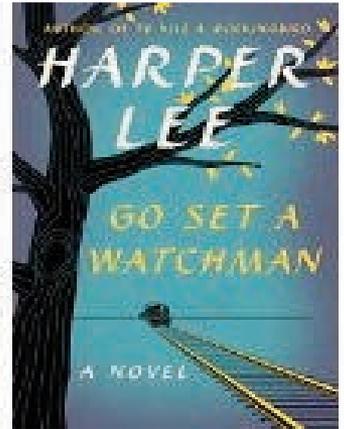


Books & Writers



The best-selling but certainly not the best book of the past year.

years ago as a ‘first draft’ for ‘Mockingbird’.

So, even though book buyers and much of the publishing community thought it was going to be great—it simply wasn’t. Like the 2015 film Jurassic World, it could never live up to its hype, much less the original film.

One final note about Harper Lee. While *Go Set a Watchman* was number one in 2015—Ms. Lee also held on to the number seven position, where the extraordinary *To Kill A Mockingbird* is still going strong half a century later—outselling current books like Kristin Hannah’s *The Nightingale* and Steven King’s *Finders Keepers*.

Still, I doubt *Go Set a Watchman* will be on anyone’s best seller list even next year, let alone fifty years from now.

P.S. Maybe the Super Bowl hype won’t be as bad as the hype around ‘Watchman’ (but with an underdog Hall of Famer going against the game’s Biggest Mouth, don’t bet on it.

Biggest Hype of 2015? Donald Trump? Cam Newton? Nope, it was the year’s best selling book

By David R. Altman
Books & Writers Editor

Sometimes things surprise you. Like Denver beating New England. Bernie tying Hillary. Ellijay beating Jasper.

According to *Publisher’s Weekly*, the best selling book of 2015 was another one of those hard-to-believe stories. It was not Paula Hawkins’ *The Girl on the Train* or John Grishman’s *Rogue Lawyer*. It wasn’t even Bill O’Reilly’s *Killing Reagan*, which sold 851,980 copies.

It was a book that was the most anticipated release of the past five years—Harper Lee’s *Go Set a Watchman*, which sold 1.6 million copies. If you were one of the people who pre-ordered that book you probably also placed a bet on the Patriots, right? I mean, it was a sure thing.

But, like hilly, split-named Ellijay winning out over beautiful Jasper in terms of economic growth, this book was a shocker. Not because people weren’t ready for it—but because they were so sure it would be another classic.

It had to be one of the greatest sales promotions in book publishing history. The world was hoping that the author of *To Kill a Mockingbird* would, fifty years after her classic was published, would bring us another unforgettable tale about the deep South.

But it was not to be. This book was not only hard to read—it was hard to follow. And it left us feeling that the South had been stereotyped even more harshly than it was in ‘*Mockingbird*’. The generation that reads about Atticus Finch now will no longer look at him as the unforgettably good character and hero of Ms. Lee’s first novel.

Go Set a Watchman, released last July, was actually written before ‘*Mockingbird*’ but the manuscript was supposedly “recovered” this past February. This news came courtesy of the P.T. Barnumesque lawyers who have been handling Ms. Lee’s affairs as she continues to reside, reportedly in ill health, in an Alabama assisted living home.

HarperCollins, who published the book, called it “...a historic literary event.” No one could argue that another Harper Lee book would be interesting, but that was assuming the book would be as good as the first one.

And it just wasn’t HarperCollins. *The Wall Street Journal* had a ‘sneak peak’ of the book—publishing its first chapter on July 10th, four days before the book’s release. *The New York Times* editorial page called it “...perhaps the most important novel on race to come out of the white South in decades.” Hmmm. Talk about

jumping on the bandwagon.

Some were suspicious of all the hype. *The New Yorker* wrote “not since Hemingway’s estate sent down seemingly completed novels from on high, long after the author’s death, has a publisher gone about so coolly exploiting a much loved name with a product of such mysterious provenance.”

Then the book emerges and Goodreads give it a 3.3 out of 5. National Public Radio called it “...a troubling confusion of a novel,” with the *The New Yorker* adding that “...if ‘*Mockingbird*’ did not exist, this book would never have been published.”

And all this while controversy churned about what the *New Republic* called the “suspicious” nature of ‘*Watchman*’s’ publication—a publication which came 3 months after Harper Lee’s caretaker sister passed away, and the fifty-year-old manuscript was suddenly found by Harper Lee’s lawyers.

Building up all that Super Bowl-type excitement and then having a mediocre product was something just short of a scam.

To be fair, we buyers were all willing participants, so I guess shame on us. Mostly, what a shame for Ms. Lee—whose reputation will not be tarnished by this mediocre book—a book that many believe was originally rejected 50-