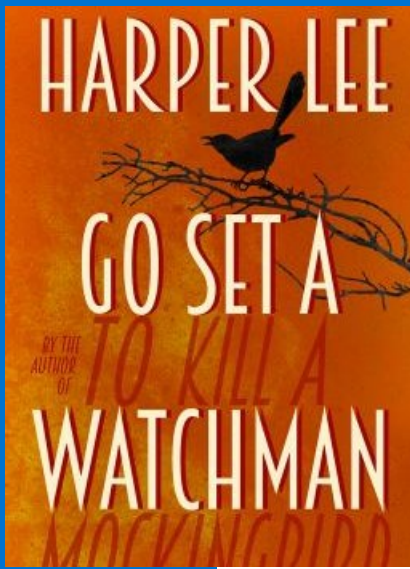


# Go Set a Watchman



## Author Background

### Harper Lee

- Born 28 April 1926, Monroeville, Alabama
- Died 19 February 2016, Monroeville, Alabama

Nelle Harper Lee was born and raised in Monroeville, Alabama. Lee's mother, Frances Cunningham (Finch), was a homemaker and her father, Amasa Coleman Lee, practiced law, served in the Alabama State Legislature and was the editor and proprietor of the *Monroe Journal*. A.C. Lee once defended two black men, a father and son, accused of murdering a white storekeeper; both clients were hanged. The character of Atticus Finch is often said to be based in part on Harper Lee's father.

In the late 1940s, Lee attended the University of Alabama where she studied law and wrote for the university newspaper, but did not complete a degree. In 1949, Lee moved to New York City—working as an airline reservation agent and writing fiction in her spare time. Having written several stories, Lee found an agent in November 1956. The following month, friends gave Lee the gift of one year's wages to enable her the freedom to concentrate on her writing.

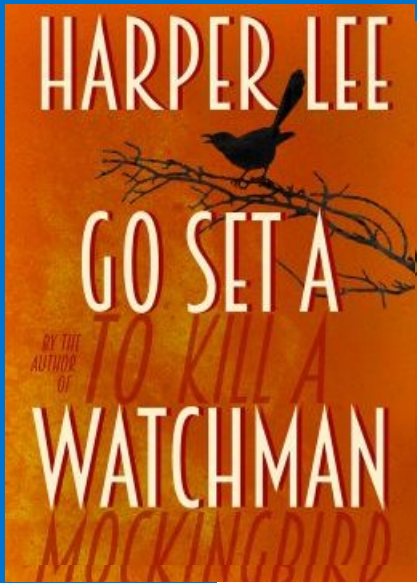
In 1957, Lee delivered the manuscript for *Go Set a Watchman* to her agent. Subsequently purchased by publisher J. B. Lippincott, the novel came into the hands of literary editor Tay Hohoff who later recalled: "[T]he spark of the true writer flashed in every line". With Hohoff's encouragement, the manuscript for *Watchman* was revised until it evolved into the classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Published in July 1960, *Mockingbird* was an immediate bestseller and won great critical acclaim, including the 1961 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. In *Mockingbird*, Scout's friend, Dill, was inspired by Lee's childhood friend and neighbour, Truman Capote. After completing *Mockingbird*, Lee accompanied Capote to Holcomb, Kansas, to assist him in researching an article on a small town's response to the murder of a farming family. Capote expanded the material into his bestseller, *In Cold Blood*, published in 1966.

From the time of the publication of *Mockingbird* until her death in 2016, Lee granted almost no requests for interviews or public appearances and, with the exception of a few short essays, published nothing further until 2015. The decision to publish *Watchman* in 2015 sparked controversy. There was debate over the elderly Lee's involvement (or rather her possible lack of involvement) in the decision to publish *Watchman* so long after the novel was written. However, an investigation by the State of Alabama into Lee's competence to consent to publication found that claims of coercion and elder abuse were unfounded. In a statement released by her attorney, Lee was said to have supported the novel's publication.

Lee died in her sleep on the morning of 19 February 2016, aged 89.

Adapted from the Encyclopedia of Alabama and Wikipedia.

# Go Set a Watchman



## Book Summary

Harper Lee submitted the manuscript for *Go Set a Watchman* to her agent in 1957. The manuscript was subsequently purchased by publishing firm J.B. Lippincott where literary editor Tay Hohoff—although impressed by Lee’s talent—considered the manuscript not ready for publication. Hohoff encouraged Lee to revise the manuscript for *Watchman* which then evolved into the classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (published in 1960).

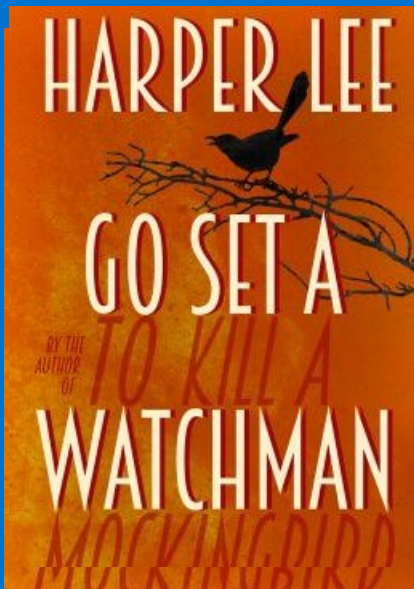
Hohoff later recalled: “After a couple of false starts, the story-line, interplay of characters, and fall of emphasis grew clearer, and with each revision — there were many minor changes as the story grew in strength and in her own vision of it — the true stature of the novel became evident.” In a 2015 statement about the evolution from *Watchman* to *Mockingbird*, Lee recalled simply “I was a first-time writer, so I did as I was told”.

Assumed to have been lost, the manuscript for *Watchman* was re-discovered in late 2014 and published in 2015. *Watchman* features many of the characters from *Mockingbird*— but is set some 20 years after the events of the Pulitzer Prize-winning classic. Returning home to Maycomb to visit her father, Jean Louise Finch—Scout—struggles with issues both personal and political, involving Atticus, society and the small Alabama town that shaped her.

Exploring how the characters from *Mockingbird* are adjusting to the turbulent events transforming mid-1950s America, *Watchman* casts a fascinating new light on Lee's enduring classic. Moving, funny and compelling, it stands as a magnificent novel in its own right.

Adapted from the publisher (Harper Collins) and Wikipedia.

# Go Set a Watchman

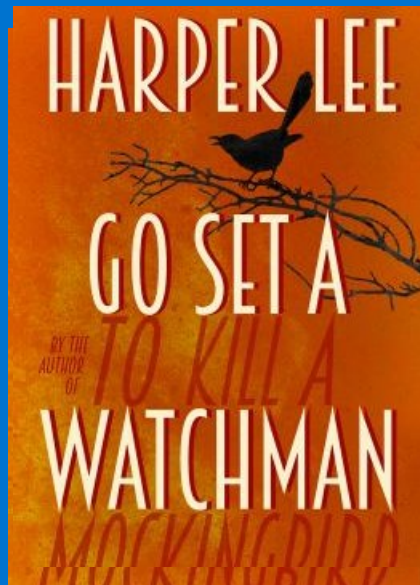


## Discussion Questions

1. Describe the Jean Louise Finch of *Go Set a Watchman*. How does Jean Louise conform—or not—to the ideal of womanhood in the 1950s? Compare her to Aunt Alexandra and the women of Maycomb. Compare the adult Jean Louise to her younger self.
2. Describe the relationship between Jean Louise and Atticus Finch at the beginning of the novel. How does Jean Louise react when she discovers that her father is a flawed human being? How does this discovery alter her sense of herself, her family, and the world?
3. *"Integrity, humor, and patience were the three words for Atticus Finch."* [Watchman, Ch. 9] By the end of *Go Set a Watchman*, do these three words still hold true? What words would you use to describe Atticus Finch? If you have read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, how would you compare the Atticus of the classic novel with the Atticus of *Watchman*?
4. Discuss Calpurnia's reaction to Jean Louise's visit? [Watchman, Ch. 12] Consider Calpurnia's response when Jean Louise asks her how she truly felt about her family?
5. Near the novel's end, Jean Louise questions herself: *"Everything I have ever taken for right and wrong these people have taught me—these same, these very people. So it's me, it's not them. Something has happened to me."* [Watchman, Ch. 13] Do you agree with Jean Louise? Has she changed—or is she truly the person who she was raised to be?
6. Late in the novel, Uncle Jack tells his niece, *"Every man's island, Jean Louise, every man's watchman, is his conscience."* What does he mean? Uncle Jack also calls Jean Louise a *"turnip-sized bigot"*. Do you agree?
7. One reviewer described reading *Go Set a Watchman* as marking the "end of innocence" for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and "its simple idealism"; the reviewer argued that we will never "read *Mockingbird* in the same way again" nor "see Atticus in the same light". Do you agree? Has reading *Watchman* changed your feelings about *Mockingbird* and Atticus Finch?
8. *Just for fun....* In 1956, Lee's friends gave her the Christmas gift of one year's salary with the note: *"You have one year off from your job to write whatever you please. Merry Christmas."* Given such a gift from your generous friends, what would you write or, alternatively, what dream would you pursue? (Answer carefully, wealthy friends may be listening!)

Questions 1-7 adapted from the publisher (Harper Collins); Q8 based on quote found on Wikipedia.

# Go Set a Watchman



## Reviews

In the end, this is the most shocking aspect of Lee's novel, published 55 years after she was advised to discard it and focus on the children's story instead - that we will never be able to read *Mockingbird* in the same way again, and never see Atticus in the same light again. It is the end of innocence for that novel, and its simple idealism.

Arifa Akbar, *Independent (UK)*

Jean Louise's arguments with her father are ugly, intense, shocking to read because we had vested so much in their relationship. But we should not be so surprised.... The Atticus of *Mockingbird* was an advocate for justice, a man of principles, but no Civil Rights activist. ... He is, in short, a classic Southern gentleman liberal – not a firebrand, and never was. We just preferred to see him as a saint because it made us feel good.

The book's faults are not those Lee has been charged with – basically, that in tarnishing Atticus she has killed our Bambi. .... They are the infelicities of a first-time writer, before she developed the suppleness and easy style that delighted us in *Mockingbird*. There's a dialectic heaviness, a clumsiness, to the race debates between Jean Louise and Atticus that bog down the later chapters. The way-we-were stories do go on....The flaws pale, though, when you look at Lee's achievement in turning the first book into the luminous second. The characters of Scout and ... Atticus too, chime true. This is how they would have aged; this is how the fault-lines would have opened up. But she worked backwards, cutting to their essence in *Mockingbird*, transforming the darkness and intermittent clunkiness of *Watchman* into something universal and heart-lifting.

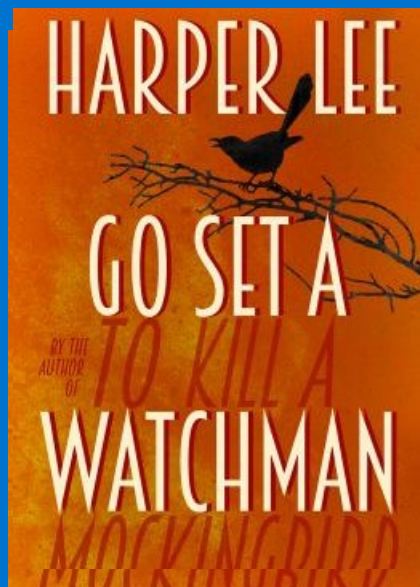
Jennifer Byrne, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

One of the emotional through-lines in both *Mockingbird* and *Watchman* is a plea for empathy — as Atticus puts it in *Mockingbird* to Scout: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view.” The difference is that *Mockingbird* suggested that we should have compassion for outsiders like Boo and Tom Robinson, while *Watchman* asks us to have understanding for a bigot named Atticus.

Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times*



# Go Set a Watchman



## Reviews (continued)

The differences between *Watchman*, the first draft, and *Mockingbird*, the American classic, are fascinating. In the former, Atticus Finch is a crotchety, small-town, southern racist; in the latter, he becomes the Atticus the world knows and loves, the saintly symbol of decency and justice. But it's the liberation of his daughter, Scout, which is really stunning. In *Watchman*, the third-person voice is conventional and uninvolved. In *Mockingbird*, we hear six-year-old Scout remembering the childhood days that will change her forever. In igniting that spark, Lee executes a narrative sleight of hand of genius, retaining an adult perspective while simultaneously carrying Scout's story in the voice of the child. There are other subtle improvements. In *Watchman*, Lee's picture of the deep south is raw, partisan and often clunky. In *Mockingbird*, her vision of a skewed white society is rendered with sympathy. .... Once the dust has settled, *Watchman* will be seen for what it is: a literary curiosity and a fascinating illustration of the mysterious pathways of the creative imagination. *Watchman* is also an apt reminder of Lee's imaginative wellspring: the traumatic history of the American south.

Robert McCrum, *The Guardian* (Australia)

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. ... The finished book that has now emerged ... has not a single prefatory sentence to explain its pedigree or its history or the strange circumstance that seems to have brought it to print after all this time, as though complete novels with beloved characters suddenly appeared from aging and reclusive and apparently ailing writers every week of the year. .... [T]he book as a book barely makes sense if you don't know "Mockingbird". If "Watchman" is a first novel, even in draft, it is unlike any first novel this reader is aware of: very short on the kind of autobiographical single-mindedness that first novels usually present, and which "Mockingbird" is filled with, and very long on the kind of discursive matter that novelists will take up when their opinions begin to count.

Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker*