

At least 2020 was a great year for books

Colette Bancroft
Tampa Bay Times

(TNS) — Americans are united on one thing: 2020 has been a terrible year.

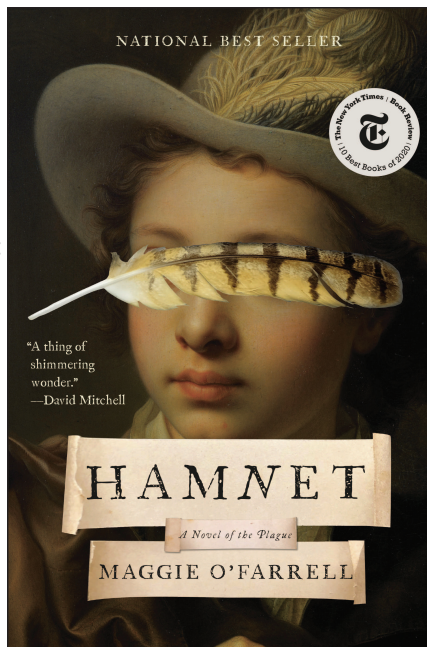
But there were some spots of sunshine in the past 12 dreary months, and one of them was this: It was a pretty terrific year for books.

Despite huge disruptions in the publishing industry that ranged from supply chain gridlock to the abrupt cancellation of thousands of author book tours, many wonderful new books were published and millions of readers welcomed them.

Spending more time at home meant that many of us had more time to read, and we took advantage of it. Book sales have risen all year. Final figures aren't available, but Publishers Weekly reports that print sales during the first week of December were 16.9 % above the same week in 2019.

Young adult and children's books have seen especially strong increases in 2020, but almost all categories and formats showed gains.

Another positive development came in response to the pandemic's impact on author book tours and book festivals. Many authors, bookstores and book fair organizers turned to virtual events, whether it was single-author book talks sponsored by bookstores or massive multi-author extravaganzas like the Miami Book Fair and the National Book Festival.



Fans could watch authors on Zoom, Facebook Live and other platforms, either as the event happened or, in many cases, afterward.

As a book reviewer, I saw no falling off in either the number or the quality of the books that came my way in 2020. As always, there were far more than I could possibly read.

So here is a list of not the best books of 2020, but the best that were covered by the Tampa Bay Times, most of them reviewed by me.

They're organized into eccentric categories, and I'm starting with a two-category winner (three if you count that it also has my favorite book cover of 2020) — Maggie O'Farrell's magnificent novel "Hamnet."

Best novel set during a plague

"Hamnet" by Maggie O'Farrell

Best memoir

"A Promised Land" by Barack Obama

Best book about a president who is not Barack Obama

"Squeeze Me" by Carl Hiaasen

Best comic novel

"Deacon King Kong" by James McBride

Best pub crawl novel

"Love" by Roddy Doyle

Best novel about millennials in love in the gig economy

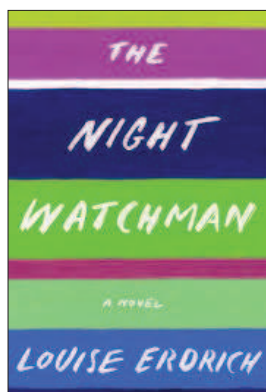
"True Love" by Sarah Gerard

Best historical novels

"The Cold Millions" by Jess Walter

"The Long Petal of the Sea" by Isabel Allende

"The Night Watchman" by Louise Erdrich



"The Book of Lost Names" by Kristin Harmel

"The Committee" by Sterling Watson

Best memoirs-in-essays by former journalists

"My Life as a Villainess" by Laura Lippman

"Where I Come From" by Rick Bragg

"Rules for the Southern Rulebreaker" by Katherine Snow Smith

Best book by the 2020 winner of the National Book Foundation's lifetime achievement award (tie)

"Trouble Is What I Do" by Walter Mosley

"The Awkward Black Man" by Walter Mosley



Walter Mosley

Best 40th novel by a national treasure

"A Private Cathedral" by James Lee Burke

Best 2020 book by Michael Connelly (tie)

"Fair Warning"

"The Law of Innocence"

Best book about family dysfunction, nonfiction division

"Hidden Valley Road" by Robert Kolker

Best books about family dysfunction, fiction division

"The Vanishing Half" by Brit Bennett

"Memorial" by Bryan Washington

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