Contrary to the typical American middle-schooler stereotype, I enjoyed most of my assigned reading assignments. *The Giver* was a revelation, *The Phantom Tollbooth* was awe-inspiring, and "The Lady or the Tiger" had me captivated for hours. But, of all my middle school reading assignments, the one I loved most was *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

I loved everything about the book. As a skinny scarecrow of a child, I could relate to Scout, the tomboyish protagonist of the novel. I enjoyed seeing things through her eyes and experiencing her adventures with Gem and Dill. However, my favorite character in the novel—perhaps my favorite character in all of literature—was her father, Atticus Finch. Atticus was the indisputable hero of the story in my eyes. He defended Tom Robinson, the black field hand, even though doing so exposed his family to ridicule and anger from the white community. He was the strong moral figure who spoke out against racism when no one else was willing to acknowledge it. He taught me that I could not understand someone without considering their point of view, or in his words, "climb into [their] skin and walk around in it" (Lee, "To Kill" 30). He helped me understand that people are fundamentally good and should be treated with respect, despite differences in opinion or view. He motivated me to stand up for my beliefs, even when they were unpopular. I maintained a high opinion of Atticus Finch throughout high school and into college, and my high opinion would have gone on unchallenged if not for Harper Lee's untimely sequel, *Go Set a Watchman*.

Harper Lee's novel was released in July 2015, more than a half century after *Mockingbird* was first published. The book followed a grown-up Scout as she returned to her childhood town to visit her ailing father, Atticus. I disliked the book for many reasons. I did not like the voice of the grown Scout—now known almost exclusively as Jean Louise. I did not like how Jem had died of a heart attack a year before the events of the book or that he was essentially

replaced by Hank, a childhood friend that never appeared in *Mockingbird*. However, the element

of the novel that upset me most was the new portrayal of Atticus as a racist. The novel reveals

that Atticus is a former Klan member who remembers his defense of Robinson with "an

instinctive distaste" (Lee, "Go Set"). In Lee's new novel, Atticus claims that the "Negroes down

here are still in their childhood as a people." He only agrees to defend a black man in order to

keep the Black American civil rights organization N.A.A.C.P. out of the Maycomb courts. This

man seems a far cry from the Atticus in the last novel, who once said to his daughter: "I do my

best to love everybody" (Lee, "To Kill" 107). As I turned through the pages, I found myself

feeling, like Jean Louise, "cheated (…) in a way that inexpressible" (Lee, "Go Set"). However,

my feelings of betrayal were not directed at Atticus, but at the author, Harper Lee.

After reading the novel, I turned to the internet to look at reviews on Lee's new novel and

found that the highly anticipated book was surrounded by controversy from the beginning. Lee

was 88 years old when the book was published as well as "95 percent blind, profoundly deaf, and

bound to a wheelchair" (Garber). Furthermore, *Watchman* was not even technically a sequel. The

novel was actually written before *Mockingbird* was published and rejected for publication. While

reading reviews, I noticed that two distinct opinions were reiterated. Some readers rallied behind

Lee, claiming that understanding how Lee had envisioned Scout's—and Atticus's—later life was

vitally important to their understanding of *Mockingbird*. Other readers believed that, since

Mockingbird and the characters within the novel had become a cultural phenomenon, Lee no

longer had the right to publish or even vocalize anything to drastically alter the general

perception of the novel. These two groups represent a clash of beliefs: one side proclaiming that

art is more important than artist and the other placing the artist ahead of the created artwork in

importance. In this paper, I will outline my process of researching this dissonance and will

discuss two solutions— the reader and author accepting books like *Mockingbird* as a phenomenon, or the reader and writer creating a dialogue based on mutual respect—that can ultimately help to resolve this dissonance.

I began my research by finding different schools of literary theory that best exemplified a particular side of the argument. As I researched, I discovered that there have been quite a few schools of literary theory who have adhered to the principle that the artist is greater than the art he or she creates. One of these broad schools of theory is historicism. The term *historicism* has had an old and complicated history, having taken on many different meanings over time. Originally, when the German philosopher Karl Willhelm Fredrich Schlegal coined the word, it referred to a philosophy that emphasized the importance of history. When Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, another German philosopher, commented on historicism a few years later, he further developed the idea by suggesting that the history of human events both builds upon and reacts to events that have occurred before. Hegel argued that all human society and activities, including art and literature, is defined by its history (Leitch, "George," 438). Therefore, in order to understand a work of literature, one needed to understand the cultural milieu the novel was written in, as well as the forces that shaped the novel. Although the philosophy of historicism disappeared briefly around the late 19th and early 20th century in place of the New Criticism movement, the philosophy was revived in the 1950s under the name, New Historicism. Prominent literary theorists, like Stephen Greenblatt, are among the founders of the New Historicism movement.

Besides historicism, another prevailing idea that supports the "artist over art" argument is the argument for authorial intent itself. In the 1950s, a group of critics known as "the Geneva School" emerged from German philosophy and Russian formalism. They argued that, in order to

understand a work of literature, one must analyze the work as a representation of authorial consciousness. According to these critics, literature was a material form of consciousness that should be explored, and a reader could only comprehend and form a full opinion a work through the author's life and worldview. Outside of the Geneva School, literary critic E.D Hirsh proposed supported respecting authorial intent as well, defending the principle that "a text means what its author meant" in his novel, *Validity in Interpretation* (1). Hirsh was very critical of the so-called "banishment of the author" (1). He claims that "once the author has been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle exists for judging the validity of an interpretation" (3), and maintains that "[t]o banish the original author as the determiner of meaning [is] to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation" (5).

Readers who adhere to historicism or pro-authorial intent beliefs consider a work of literature is a product of its era. They maintain that the only way to understand the work is to view it from the context of the consciousness of the author, as well as the original conditions, context, and discourse of the author's era. Therefore, these critics consider knowledge of the author's biography, social background, and the cultural milieu of the author's time vital in understanding any piece of literature. For example, if a historicist were to look at Mark Twain's classic novel, *Huckleberry Finn*, he or she would probably insist that, in order to understand *Huckleberry Finn*, readers must first understand Twain's intent, his background, and the cultural milieu of the time period in which the novel was written. When Twain was working on *Huckleberry Finn*, the hopefulness that followed the Civil War and the defeat of the Southern States was beginning to fade. The death of Abraham Lincoln and incompetent leadership of his successor, Andrew Johnson, had slowed Reconstruction efforts to reintegrate the South into the

country, and many of the slaves freed from the Civil War were still oppressed by Southern land owners. Historicists would argue that, without this information about the author and the context concerning the time period, Twain's novel would not be as impactful, and could potentially be misunderstood.

Another example of a pro-authorial intent approach to art and literature can be seen in J.R.R Tolkien and his *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. After the trilogy was released, many people interpreted Tolkien's work as an allegorical political statement about World War II. However, Tolkien denied all of these allegations, stating: "I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but one reside in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author" (Wagner). He insisted that he wanted the book to be read as a simple story, not overcomplicated by allegorical connections that readers may find. Many proponents of authorial intent would agree that, by looking at the intent of J.R.R. Tolkien's series, *The Lord of the Rings* can be put in the right context and the novel can be more fully appreciated for the story alone.

On the opposing side of the "artist over art" argument is the perception that a work of art is more important than the artist. I found that it was difficult to assign this group to a particular school of thought, but ultimately decided that the closest school of thought was the methodology of New Criticism, a part of a formalist movement in literary theory. This movement emerged as a response to historicism and other schools of thought in the United States that put emphasis on the history of a text and the author's biographical information. The New Critics argued that these approaches to studying literature distract from the meaning and structure of the poem or text, and believed that it was necessary to study the text itself rather than viewing it from the context of the author. They agreed with the post-structural notion that the author needed to be displaced as the absolute authority, and that the reader should play a larger role in interpreting a text. T.S.

Eliot, who is viewed as one of the progenitors of the New Criticism movement, commented in his book of essays *The Sacred Wood* that the poet is a mere medium when creating a work of art. He claims that it was "part of [a critic's] business to see literature steadily and to see it whole; and this is eminently to see it not as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time; to see the best work of our time and the best work of twenty-five hundred years ago with the same eyes" (xiv). In order to see a work of literature as truly timeless, Eliot asserts that the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of literature should be emphasized over the ideological content of the text or authorial intent. Fellow progenitors of New Criticism W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardley introduced the concept of intentional fallacy, or the fallacy of judging a literary work on the author's intentions or purposes rather than on personal response to the work itself. They argued that the text is the primary source and that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt 3).

Other post-structuralists—namely Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault—also echoed the belief that art transcended the author. In his popular essay "The Death of the Author," Barthes claimed: "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (1325). In other words, if the author exists with his text, he or she will determine the meaning of the text, and thus closes the text off for the reader. If the author is "dead," the reader is allowed to add meaning and personal experience to the text and keep the writing open to interpretation. Barthes argues that there is no such thing as authorial intent, because it is the language itself that speaks, not the author. By contrast, Foucault does not argue that the author should be completely done away with, like Barthes suggests. Rather, in his text "What is an Author?", Foucault states his belief that the author is a function of discourse. As a

function of discourse, the author is not a specific person; he or she "is an organizing device, permitting us to group certain texts" (1470). Furthermore, since the "author" represents many different concepts, Foucault insists that a text is not directly determined by an individual's background. Instead, a work of literature is based on the cultural conventions that exist within the text itself. Therefore, even though Barthes and Foucault's opinions may differ on the subject of the necessity of the author, both theorists agree, like the New Critics, that a work of art should transcend the artist in importance.

Although assigning readers who value art over artist to New Criticism or post-structuralism may explain some of their argument against historicism, there was another portion of the modern "art over artist" argument that was missing from both the New Critics' and the post-structuralists' theories. I turned to more colloquial sources, such as blog posts and book reviews, for information and discovered that, although some critics hold firmly to the opinions of Barthes or Wimsatt, a greater number of modern critics believe that the artist is justified in having some control over his or her text. However, this belief is contingent on an important stipulation: the artist can only have control over the text until and unless the work of art becomes a phenomenon. Many readers and critics argue that, once a work of literature or a movie becomes a phenomenon, the characters within the work take on lives of their own, and the author's intentions no longer dictate the actions of the character.

In order to understand this stipulation, it is important to specifically define how something becomes a phenomenon. From my personal observations, I argue that the criteria for a film or piece of literature becoming a phenomenon rests on two conditions: first, the work must come to life, and second, the work must engage in a dialectic. The first condition—the work must come to life—means that the work must have widespread popularity based on its own

merits rather than the author's. The audience has to care enough about the work that it can exist outside of its author and thus can transcend its author. An example of this is the *Sherlock Holmes* series. Sherlock Homes began as a fictional character within Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*. However, over time the character became so popular that it began to exist outside of Doyle's stories. In fact, in 2012 Sherlock Holmes was awarded the Guinness World Record for the most portrayed literary human character in film and television, appearing on screen over 250 times (Guinness). The character Sherlock Holmes has transcended his author and has, so to speak, come to life. A work must be timely in order to come to life, not just in the period in which it was written but afterwards as well. For example, Charles Dicken's *A Tale of Two Cities* was written during the mid-nineteenth century in England and is set a century previous, in the middle of the French Revolution. Since the novel shared many social parallels with life in London, the book contributed to the dialectic of the time and became immensely popular. If these social parallels only applied to nineteenth century England, the novel would have quickly fell into obscurity. However, the book's themes of social justice are still relevant in our day and still engages in the modern dialectic as well. Because of this, the book is seen as a phenomenon.

The second condition—the work must engage in a dialectic—refers to entering into a dialectic with the audience specifically. When a work of literature is created, the author typically describes who each character is and what basic characteristics each one has. However, the author cannot fully create a character in the limited space he or she is allowed. This connects to the Hegelian dialectic form of thesis-antithesis-synthesis: The thesis is the author's description within the novel; the antithesis is the reader observing the gaps in the description and not completely understanding the novel; and the synthesis is the reader filling in the gaps in

knowledge themselves to complete the novel. In the *Harry Potter* series, for example, J.K. Rowling creates the memorable character of Dumbledore. She describes the wizard as a kind, clever, and unconventional man who was physically "tall, thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt" (6). However, after the books were published, the audience was left to fill in the gaps themselves on who they thought Dumbledore was. When Rowling declared that Dumbledore was gay after the whole series was already published, many readers were angered by the news. Political reasons aside, this frustration was caused in part because Rowling's unpublished information about Dumbledore violated the dialectic that readers had with her books. The combination of a work coming to life and engaging in a dialectic has the power to make a mere novel or movie into a phenomenon.

After my research was complete on the two arguments, I concluded that one possible solution to this clash of beliefs is to conclude that if a book like *Mockingbird* becomes a phenomenon, readers can simply ignore or discard any additional information the author adds. The information added in *Watchman* does not have to change how *Mockingbird* is taught to children in middle and high schools, and the perception of Atticus does not have to be influenced by anything that Harper Lee later published. However, this is contingent on whether or not *Mockingbird* is truly a phenomenon. We can establish this by seeing if *Mockingbird* meets the two previously established conditions of a phenomenon.

The emotional response of the readers towards *Mockingbird* demonstrates that the book meets the first of the conditions—the work must come to life. Since the book was published in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement, and was accepted by both Northerners and Southerners alike, many readers began to think of Atticus as more than just a book character: he

became to some a very real figure who helped them confront racism. Some people can even trace

their decision to become a lawyer back to reading about Atticus's defense of Tom in

Mockingbird. The 1962 movie adaption of *Mockingbird* further brought the work to life. In fact,

Gregory Peck's performance of Atticus Finch was so acclaimed that Peck became almost

synonymous with the character of Finch. When Peck died, an obituary was published in *The*

Journal of Blacks in Higher Education under the title "The Death of Atticus Finch." In this short

article, Atticus is referred to in realistic terms as "the courageous small town attorney who

battled racism and bigotry" ("The Death"). Through the movie adaption and the emotional

response of the audience, the novel came to life.

Just as *Mockingbird* comes to life, it also engages in a dialectic with readers. When

Harper Lee created Atticus's character, there were some gaps—such as the character's political

opinion towards Black Americans—that the audience filled in themselves. Audiences decided

that Atticus's defense of Tom Robinson and his comments, such as "whenever a white man does

that [cheats] to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes

from, that white man is trash" (Lee 224), indicated that Atticus disapproved all forms of racism

and was actively trying to fight unfair treatment of Black Americans. The backlash against

Watchman is in part because many readers already had this dialectic with the novel and felt their

expectation for Atticus's character were being violated. Although Harper Lee may not like or

agree with this reaction, it demonstrates how *Mockingbird* has become a phenomenon that

transcends the opinions or intentions of Lee herself. Therefore, under this solution, since

Mockingbird adequately meets both of the criteria of a phenomenon, *Mockingbird* is beyond the

reach of Lee, and the sequel *Watchman* does not affect the general perception of the characters.

Ideally, if this solution was used over a long period of time, authors with books that have become

a phenomenon would choose to leave their book alone and not insert their own intentions simply because they want to make a political statement or increase revenue.

Although the first solution may initially be the most popular to readers, it is not an entirely plausible solution to stop authors from commenting on their own novels. As long as the author is alive, it is almost guaranteed that he or she will express new opinions about the book or will try to make more money off their book by providing readers with more information after their series is completed. Therefore, there is a need for another solution that is more compromising than the last.

The second solution is for both the reader and the author to have mutual respect for one another. This point was mentioned by Joanne Harris, an English author best known for her award-winning novel *Chocolat*. When speaking at a literature festival in Manchester, Harris called for readers and author to "disseminate their opinion . . . [and] allow a potential dialogue to exist between readers and creators" (qtd. in Shaffi). She insisted that this show of mutual respect would "allow readers to get in touch with the authors of work they have enjoyed . . . [and would] allow writers to understand where and how they might have gone wrong, and how they can improve and grow."

An example of why this kind of mutual respect is necessary can be seen in the recent Twitter confrontation between S.E. Hinton, the author of *The Outsiders*, and her fans. One fan asked Hinton if there were any romantic feelings between two of the main characters in her book, Johnny and Dallas. Hinton replied in the negative and asked where the text supporting this claim was. Later, she backs up her assertion by stating: "I have no problem with anyone being gay. [I am a] longtime supporter of LGBT rights. . . . No, they are not gay. I wrote them, I ought to know" (qtd. in Schuab). Many fans responded angrily at Hinton's response, accusing her of

making LGBT youth feel "unsafe." Some even went so far as to burn their copies of Hinton's book.

Under this second solution, neither Hinton or her fans are completely justified in their response. Hinton—and authors like Hinton—need to understand that fans are free to interpret books however they want once the book becomes a phenomenon. They also need to be sensitive to the fact that many people are invested in their stories and characters, by not manipulating perceptions of character in order to simply further their personal agendas. To both demonstrate her views and show respect for her readers, Harris created and shared a writer's manifesto, including points such as "I promise to not to sell out" and "I will not limit my audience to just one group or demographic" (qtd. in Shaffi). The readers, on the other hand, must respect that a novel—phenomenon or not—is created by an author, and that the author has as much right to his or her opinion of the novel as the reader does. A problem that is becoming increasingly prevalent among readers is the "fan-fiction" mindset. Readers becomes so attached with their perceptions of characters that they become completely closed off to any other perception. This mindset is a result of the breaking down of barriers between the author and reader, which has "created a false sense of entitlement" for readers (qtd. in Shaffi). This entitlement causes readers to fall under the impression that artists and writers "exist to primarily to serve the public, to be available day and night, and to cater for the personal needs of everyone who contacts them." People in general have a tendency to label things as their own as a way to contextualize information; however, if this tendency forms into "fan-fiction" mindset, it can cause close-mindedness and a lack of respect. The author and the reader should be able to have a dialogue with one another, where both can differ in opinion without the other becoming immediately offended. Therefore, in the case of *Watchman*, readers – myself included – must acknowledge that Harper Lee's perception

of Atticus as a racist is valid, even if some readers think that it misrepresents the true personality of the character.

Unfortunately, both of my solutions are limited. Due to the recent release of the novel, *Go Set a Watchman* lacks scholarly critical sources, and I was not able to collect as much information on the book as I would have liked to. Furthermore, I could not find as many articles and scholarly sources for the second solution, concerning authors and readers having mutual respect. A research question I would like to address in the future is the meaning of "mutual respect" actually means, and what specifically readers and authors can do to demonstrate that kind of respect for one another. The next step of my research will be to explore more material about historicism, as well gather more concrete information about what makes something a phenomenon. I still think that that my two solutions— the reader and author accepting books like *Mockingbird* as a phenomenon, and the reader and writer creating a dialogue based on mutual respect—could help to settle the dissonance between art and artist, if instigated; however, I hope that as I continue to research this issue, I will discover more about the argument over art and artist and will be able to come to a more complete understanding of more possible solutions of how to mend the clash of beliefs.

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, W.W. Norton & Co., 2001, pp. 1-20.

Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited

    by Vincent B. Leitch, W.W. Norton & Co., 2001, pp. 1-20.

Garber, Megan. "Harper Lee: The Sadness of a Sequel." *The Atlantic*, 3 Feb. 2016,

    www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/02/the...harper-lee/385132/. Accessed

    28 Nov. 2016.

Guinness World Records News. "Sherlock Holmes Awarded Title for Most Portrayed Literary

    Human Character in Film and TV." *Guinness World Records*, 14 May 2012,

    www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2012/5/sherlock-holmes-awarded-title-for-most-

    portrayed-literary-human-character-in-film-tv-41743/. Accessed by 07 Dec. 2016.

Hirsch, E.D., Jr. *Validity in Interpretation*. Yale UP, 1967.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Grand Central, 1988.

Lee, Harper. *Go Set a Watchman*. HarperCollins, 2015.

Leitch, Vincent B. "George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)." *The Norton Anthology of*

    Theory and Criticism, W.W. Norton & Co., 2010, pp. 536–540.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic, 1998.

Schuab, Michael. "'The Outsiders' Author S.E. Hinton is in Hot Water with Gay-Rights

    Supporters." *Los Angeles Times,* 19 Oct. 2016, www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-

    jc-outsiders-gay-20161019-snap-story.html. Accessed 5 Nov. 2016.

Shaffi, Sarah. "Harris Calls for 'Mutual Respect' Between Authors and Readers." *The*

    Bookseller, 20 Oct. 2015, www.thebookseller.com/news/harris-calls-mutual-respect-

    between-authors-and-readers-314772. Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

"The Death of Atticus Finch." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 40, 2003, pp. 20.

    JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3134002. Accessed 3 Nov. 2016.

Wagner, Richard. "Allegory and Symbolism: Deciphering the Chronicles." *C.S. Lewis & Narnia*

    for Dummies, Wiley, 2005, www.books.google.com/books?isbn=1118070046.

Wimsatt, William K., Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Verbal Icon:*

    Studies in the Meaning of Poetry. U of Kentucky, 1954, pp. 3–18.