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Wikipedia's Sexism Toward Female Novelists

By AMANDA FILIPACCHI

I JUST noticed something strange on Wikipedia. It appears that gradually, over time, editors have begun the process of moving women, one by one, alphabetically, from the “American Novelists” category to the “American Women Novelists” subcategory. So far, female authors whose last names begin with A or B have been most affected, although many others have, too.

The intention appears to be to create a list of “American Novelists” on Wikipedia that is made up almost entirely of men. The category lists 3,837 authors, and the first few hundred of them are mainly men. The explanation at the top of the page is that the list of “American Novelists” is [too long](#), and therefore the novelists have to be put in subcategories whenever possible.

Too bad there isn't a subcategory for “American Men Novelists.”

People who go to Wikipedia to get ideas for whom to hire, or honor, or read, and look at that list of “American Novelists” for inspiration, might not even notice that the first page of it includes far more men than women. They might simply use that list without thinking twice about it. It's probably small, easily fixable things like this that make it harder and slower for women to gain equality in the literary world.

Here's the page on American Novelists, if you're curious to take a look:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:American_novelists

And here's the page on American Women Novelists:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:American_women_novelists

I looked up a few female novelists. You can see the categories they're in at the bottom of their pages. It appears that many female novelists, like Harper Lee, Anne Rice, Amy Tan, Donna Tartt and some 300 others, have been relegated to the ranks of “American Women Novelists” only, and no longer appear in the category “American Novelists.” back in the “history” of these women's pages, you can see that they used to category “American Novelists,” but that they were recently bumped down. on Wikipedia, however — no matter how small or obscure they are — all ge



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category “American Novelists.” It seems as though no one noticed.

I did more investigating and found other familiar names that had been switched from the “American Novelists” to the “American Women Novelists” category: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ayn Rand, Ann Beattie, Djuna Barnes, Emily Barton, Jennifer Belle, Aimee Bender, Amy Bloom, Judy Blume, Alice Adams, Louisa May Alcott, V. C. Andrews, Mary Higgins Clark — and, upsetting to me: myself.

Some lucky female novelists, mostly the ones who are further down in the alphabet, haven’t been gotten to yet and are still in the big category “American Novelists.” Some are in both categories. But probably not for long.

I also noticed that Edwidge Danticat was plucked from “Haitian Novelists” and dumped into “Haitian Women Novelists.” So it seems, at least, that women from different countries are treated the same. It’s just too bad they’re not treated the same as men.

I belong to an e-mail group of published female writers called WOM (it stands for Word of Mouth). Some of the members are extremely well known. On Tuesday morning, when I made my discovery of this sexism on Wikipedia, I sent them an e-mail about it. I have since then been deluged with scandalized responses from these female authors. Word is spreading at a phenomenal rate, on Facebook and elsewhere. Already, changes are being made to the category “American Novelists.” A couple of female authors have started appearing on the first page, when yesterday there were only men.

Wikipedia is created and edited by its users. Hopefully, those users are starting to get the point.

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