Defining American literature is as difficult a task as it is broad. One way to look at it is that American literature is a vast understanding of political and cultural ideals of a certain time. When I think of early American literature, I’ve noticed the depictions and the lack of representation surrounding women. Not only are women depicted in certain lights by men, mind you, but also, women weren’t generally recognized as part of literary culture until the feminist movement. Harriet Jacobs had the opportunity to publish her narrative as a slave, with the help of her editor, Lydia Maria Child. Lydia Maria Child saw the importance of sharing Jacobs’ story. Also, the fact that the publisher is a woman is important because it calls for readers who can be sympathetic and understanding to the author’s plight. She is using her womanhood to relate to the readers. The publisher’s note before the novel states, “At her request, I have revised her manuscript; but such changes as I have made have been mainly for purposes of condensation and orderly arrangement.” She clearly notes that she hasn’t changed the telling of the story more than an editor would. This female editor’s choice is what supported giving the story a clear voice and is what more women are asking for everyday.

Generally, in literature, women are grossly misrepresented, especially by men. Similarly, the film and television industry represents women poorly. It is male-dominated and women aren’t presented well. Either female characters are transparent and poorly constructed or roles are more dominantly given to men. However, lately, there have been moves to create a more encompassing environment for women. While it is a move in the right direction, the film industry is doing it in all the wrong ways.

Lately, the film industry has been remaking original films to bring women to leading roles. The original Ghostbusters came out in 1984. Recently, a remake of the same blockbuster came out starring lead females as the Ghostbusters. The movie does seem to pass the bechdel test, making it a feminist text. This is groundbreaking, unfortunately, due to the shortage of feminist movies and television shows. However, regardless of the bechdel test, the film’s gender representation falls short because the director is male and isn’t capable of creating an educated depiction of women. As progressive as this film is intended to be, the movie loses credibility when a man is speaking for women. Similarly,
Ocean’s 11 was remade with female leads and called Ocean’s 8.

John Mulaney’s take on Ocean’s 8

Similar to the Ghostbusters remake, Ocean’s 8 is a remake of an original trilogy and was also directed by a male. As John Mulaney states, the film subscribes to female stereotypes due to the male director’s vision of what females talk about. What is supposed to be seen as a feminist film is really inadequate for truly empowering women.

As the film industry tries to represent women in all the wrong ways, it is always nice to find the little gems where women’s empowerment is successfully presented. The film Lady Bird, written and directed by Greta Gerwig, is an incredible film that depicts the authentic coming of age of a girl who goes by the name Lady Bird. Among the great acting, the director creates a persuasive story because of her feminine knowledge imparted in the film. In a sea of movies partial towards men, especially popular ones relating to superheroes and such, it is exciting to see the character Wonder Woman come to life. This film was a huge hit, the highest grossing film of 2017, and received many positive reactions. Similarly to Lady Bird, the director of Wonder Woman is a woman and understood the importance of the character’s depictions. Another movie that happens to have a good representation of women, despite the male director, is Star Wars: The Force Awakens. This is still a breakthrough, given the male-dominated landscape of all of the previous Star Wars films.

Women know women. American literature that is trying to represent women need to take certain steps in order to keep the integrity. When men try to take control of that role, things get lost in the process. Early American literature isn’t all encompassing. Most literary canons are written by men. The fact that a female, Harriet Jacobs, wrote Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and then a female, Lydia Maria Child, published it in 1853 is an accomplishment. In the present times, the portrayal of women aren’t quite accurate, especially with a male chauvinist industry. It is revolutionary when there is a well-represented film being made and especially when that film has a female authority to help keep the integrity. Literature and art with insufficient or poor representation of women can impair women’s progress in life.