

Misogyny; a women's voice in 1930's and a women's voice of today - To Kill a Mockingbird x Judge Brett Kavanaugh case

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In the 1930s women did not have a voice. Thirty years later, we would believe that women have gained some respect in society. In 2018, are women's voices still yet to be heard? In the novel written by Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mayella Ewell breaks society's rules and values. She kisses a black man and her father decides to accuse him of raping her. Mayella experiences sexism and has no voice in this case as a woman. In a similar case today, Christine Ford resolved to denounce Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh (recently nominated to the Supreme Court of the United States) of raping her during their high school days. In this case, Ford has memories of being raped and now has to face a case with a male whom is dominant in society and backed up with political power. The similarity between these two cases is the misogyny component behind each version.

According to Julia Ernest in her essay about *Women in Litigation Literature*, Mayella Ewell was a victim of a brutal society with women and was exonerated. She compares other critiques about the book that present Mayella as a primary "malefactor" and goes deeply making a contrast in her analysis. The character was fighting with a 1930's sexist society, was a victim of domestic violence, and sexually abused by her father. Ernest demonstrates many reasons why Mayella could not have a voice in this time. "Some of forces bearing down on Mayella include class, gender, race, history, morality as well as a familial, social and legal dynamics." (Ernest 1021). The article indicates Mayella was wrongly charged by society, the lawyer, her father, and the law.

Bob Ewell controlled his daughter frequently through the many forms of abuse while the laws in the 1930's did not protect women from violence. Women were property of men and any abuse was treated as a private matter by the law. Indeed, Mayella lived like a prisoner with no friends and had no one to care about her conditions. She was tortured by her own father in a blind eyed society.

Moreover, the author of the article makes a statement that contributes to the underlying issues we still face today, "In today's society and legal system, I would hope that such a charge would no longer be made, but I am afraid that this sentiment may still be a bit too optimistic." (Ernest 1028-1029). These issues among women still occur as shown in the Ford case. She decided to tell her story about the rape after 30 years. In her declaration, she said that she was always too frightened but decided to expose her version of her history because of her moral duty as an American citizen. Imagine a girl in the 1980's and how society would react toward a woman who told the truth about a rape. Although the laws of today have evolved and changed to some extent compared to those of the 1930's, the practice of a sexist society continues today. Julia Ernest also reminds us of the patterns of how law treated rape cases in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, incest was ignored, woman must be beaten until her limit for this to be treated as a rape, and the veracity of women testimonies not being considered. She states, "The novel seems to perpetuate the assumption that women in general cannot be trusted when it comes to allegations of sexual assault." (Ernets 1041). We can see this in both cases of Mayella and Ford, two woman who both struggle with the legal system and are overlooked by society.

In *The Cross-Examination of Mayella Ewell*, Richard McAdams points out Mayella's obscure life as a white lower-class woman. He identifies the significance of empathy and imagination among the author. She was a lonely woman with no friends

and Tom's lawyer understood her feelings and used them to make the jury see her as a liar. Although Atticus was heard and believed upon by many, the jury still chose Mayella's testimony and put Tom in jail. Tom being put in jail did not solve the main issues of Mayella. Tom and Mayella were both at the margins of society. Besides the racism history in the book, the parallel tragedy certainly is Mayella's miserable life and the absence of faith. Each question Atticus asked Mayella in the Court was not to help her or to take her away from her violent home but instead was to save Tom. The black man was later murdered in jail and Mayella was still in her tragic life. In relation to the source, McAdams reiterates, "Atticus has just exposed Mayella as a perjurer, a woman beaten by her father, a violator of the racial taboo of her community, and one who saved money to be alone with the man who immediately rejected her" (McAdams). The ability of the reader to understand Mayella's conditions and experiences should reveal that she lived in a hopeless world as well as a hopeless society where women did not have a voice.

Making a parallel with fictional heroes (the trusted ones) McAdams believes that Atticus failed. He believes Tom's lawyer felt grateful that Mayella violated social moral codes so that he could question her and bring light to the issues like racism that were more important than the issues of a woman at that time. He felt empathy and compassion for Tom Robinson. He and everyone of that time knew it was a lost cause for Tom but Atticus was able to highlight the truth behind the entire case. McAdams article elucidates sexism was an "ordinary" attitude in the 1930s. The arguments Tom's lawyer used to convince the jury was more than necessary to identify the opinionated pattern: "She was white, and she tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society is unspeakable: she kissed a black man...No code mattered to her before she broke it, but it came crashing down on her afterwards" (McAdams 589).

According to Molly Ball's recent article in *Time Magazine*, Brett Kavanaugh (nominee to the Supreme Court) fights to maintain his reliable image as a brilliant Judge and a champion of women. Christine Blasey Ford, as many other women, struggles for credibility proven by Ball's statement, "From the beginning the women were determined to be disruptive". Ford is a college professor in California and was in high school at the same time as Kavanaugh. After 36 years, on September 2018, she affirmed that the Judge was her aggressor when they were at a party in 1982. Today the rape accusation has postponed the Judge confirmation and both have been called to testify. He declares himself not guilty and denies the allegation. Ball makes a parallel to another case regarding Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas (also nominee to the Supreme Court) from 1991. Anita Hill was also a professor who fought with conservative forces like Ford. Anita lost her confrontation but instead set an example for women to understand their place in society. Ford's reasoning for sharing her history thirty six years later is because she felt hopeless, the same feeling Mayella felt eighty five years ago. Ford's chances to win this case are almost impossible as Kavanaugh has the White House reinforcement.

In agreement with Ball, society faces a new time where women protest about their pain and break terrified silences but still have no command. Ball states, "The men handled the disruptions quickly and quietly, with lawyers and payments and handshakes, with the grip of a policeman's fist and a gavel pounded on a desk. Until suddenly, there were too many to be contained" (Molly 25). Women continue to fight about their rights and face men in power and it is cases like these that justify our reasoning to continue our fights.

Fictional and reality stories are important to highlight the growing number of women who are struggling with many different issues as victims of molestation and

sexism, and most importantly, to encourage them to overcome. One of the worst stigmas for these girls is to not be believed. If their tragedies become public, other kind of problems appears. Depression, fear, and anxiety are some examples of the consequences faced by Mayella in 1933, as well as by Ford in 2018. In the fiction *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mayella, a nineteen years old girl, was beaten and raped by her father and had no life, no friends, no voice. Christine Blasey Ford faced her greater fear going into public with her version of the case after 36 years. Real world or a fable, each woman has the right to have a voice and show the world they are able to fight discrimination on the basis of gender.

The laws in America have been changing and women have been taking their places and power at home, at work, in politics. In the 1930's, women could already vote but men were in charge. The portrait of this era was that women could work but their salary was less than men's (almost like most of jobs nowadays). Some women were in higher positions as examples to the female world and it helped make a difference in each movement in history in favor of women, like suffragist and feminist. In 2018, women have all rights men have in the law but it is not the reality when many problems and scandals because of gender are frequently coming to light. Women are working hard but getting less salary. They are also occupying important positions like in the Supreme Court and in Secretary of State but are a very small portion comparing to the men in power. However, little by little, fight by fight, protests after protests these punished women will find their power and freedom.

Many women are still afraid when they face memories of violence from men in power, but their voice should be listened to around the world and surely takes place, and certainly their voices are the changing tools for women to also be in charge. In 1933, Mayella was afraid and terrified in the saga, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In 1991, Anita Hill

was petrified when decided to go against her employer. In 2018, Christine Blassey Ford was frightened to go public with her allegations versus Judge Brett Kavanaugh. Women malefactors could be fathers, relatives, colleagues, employers, etc. Each battle is a victory for these women even though the results are not at the expected time. The fact to have courage and expose themselves and their lives proves a big change in women's world. It can be counted as an evolution to the final objective. Although women are fearful to deal with some of the worst nightmares of their lives, every voice has helped in changing the overall status quo for women.

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