

Monsters Within Us

by Bill Herbst

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[I had intended this week to post the final part of my quartet of commentaries about the astrology of America's Chart in 2020, but I've decided to put that off for a week. Instead, I'll insert this rather long commentary, which will serve to set up next week's post on gender and power.]

Monsters exist. They are real — not always, but all too often. Unlike the Hollywood versions of movie monsters, whether in fantasies from the 1950s of irradiated insects grown gargantuan or visions from the 1980s and beyond of reptilian/arthropod aliens from outer space, most of the monsters that beset us occur in human form. Of these, the most disturbing (and perhaps, in the final analysis, the most harmful) are the invisible monsters that live within each of us. They are part of the human psyche, a legacy of both our biological heritage and our cultural history.

The recent national spectacle played out in the Senate Judiciary Committee's confirmation hearings for the new Supreme Court Associate Justice provided yet another very public demonstration of the monsters within us. Readers know the set up: the hearings were almost concluded when allegations surfaced by Professor Christine Blasey Ford against nominee Judge Brett Kavanaugh. Blasey Ford maintained that Kavanaugh had sexually assaulted her 36 years ago, when they were both in high school.

Kavanaugh has now been confirmed by the Senate and will take his lifetime seat as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, so this whole confirmation kerfuffle — at least the event itself, although not the issues raised — may soon fade from the headlines of a warp speed news cycle (especially with the midterm elections now a mere month away), but I think the media melodrama is still fresh enough to warrant at least this one commentary.

The allegations of sexual misconduct harkened back eerily to the Senate hearings in 1991 involving then-Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, which gave Americans a chance to assess whether any progress has been made in our culture concerning gender equality and the seriousness of sexual abuse during the intervening 27 years. Viewed only from the judicial outcome — in both cases, the accused nominee was confirmed — we might conclude that no progress has occurred. Judging progress in such primal arenas

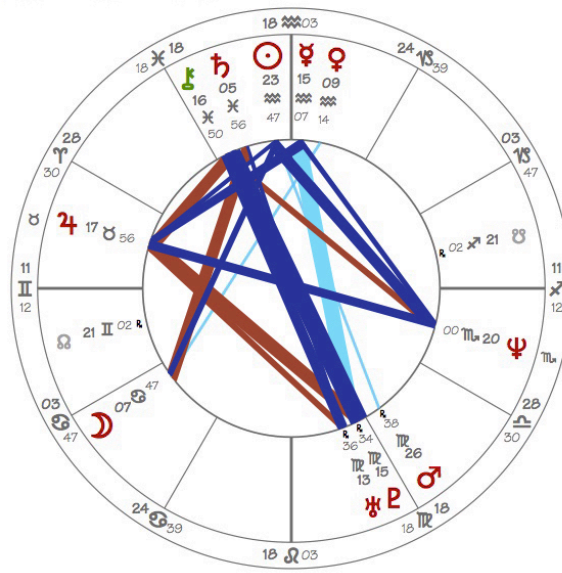
is complicated, however. The America of 2018 is not the America of 1991, and the future may be different from the past.

Millions of Americans watched the televised day-long Senate testimony concerning Ford's allegations and Kavanaugh's defense on Thursday, September 27th. The spectacle was Reality TV at its worst, as befits the sorry state of our politics.

Before I weigh in on the media spectacle and political sham of the past two weeks, let's take a quick look at the astrology of the two principals. Below are the solar charts of Brett Kavanaugh and Christine Blasey Ford.

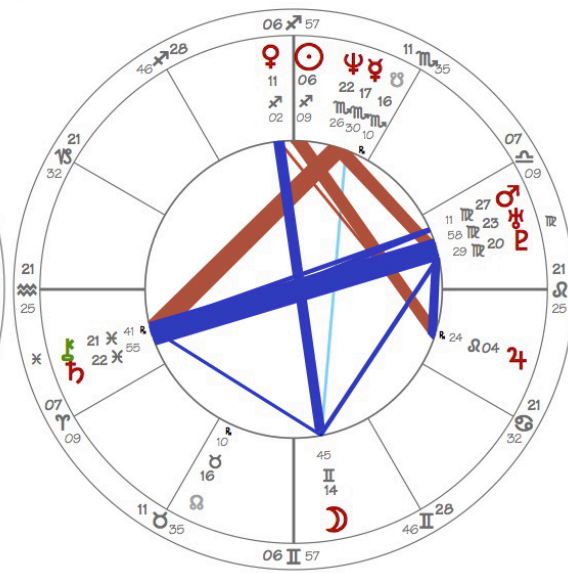
Brett Kavanaugh

Solar Chart (no known birth time)
Friday, February 12, 1965
12:00:00 PM EST
Washington, District of Columbia
Tropical Placidus True Node



Christine Blasey Ford

Solar Chart (no known birth time)
Monday, November 28, 1966
12:00:00 PM PST
Palo Alto, California
Tropical Placidus True Node



These are called "solar" rather than "natal" charts because no birth times are publicly available for either individual. Solar charts are typically erected for the known date and place of birth at either sunrise or noon — the charts displayed are calculated for noon. The lack of accurate birth times is a serious limitation on the custom-tailored personal information such charts can provide (since they apply to every person born on that day/month/year), but some revelations stand out nonetheless.

In 1982, at their respective ages of 17 and 15, neither Kavanaugh nor Blasey Ford had yet activated their first Saturn-Sun cycles. This means that, from a psychological or spiritual perspective, even as adolescents they were still effectively children and not yet responsible for themselves or their actions. Blasey Ford "came of age" at about 22, while Kavanaugh didn't even begin the journey into responsible adulthood until he was 28.

The Mars positions in both charts — symbolizing desire, assertion, and the archetype of masculinity — are extremely close. Both are in late Virgo, less than a single degree apart in the zodiac. (Mars takes just over two years to make one complete circuit around the Sun and through the twelve signs), and the two-year difference in age between Kavanaugh and Blasey Ford just happens to be almost precisely one Mars cycle apart.)

The closeness of the respective Mars placements is more significant because Blasey Ford's natal Saturn is opposite her natal Mars, implying various difficulties with assertiveness and sex, both within herself and in her interactions with masculine force in the world. Since Kavanaugh's Mars is so close, her Saturn is also opposite *his* Mars. Kavanaugh becomes symbolically an agent of the male aggression Blasey Ford fears in herself and in men.

In 1982, when the alleged assault occurred at an unsupervised house party, transiting Neptune in Sagittarius was square Mars in both charts. Oh my. Neptune exaggerates whatever it contacts in charts, in this case the desire and aggression of Mars, blurring clear reality into a dream-like fantasy. Neptune is also linked with drug-induced altered states, particularly alcohol.

So, there they were, two young people in the full flower of physical adolescence, replete with raging hormones, yet still psychologically immature, acting under the influence of alcohol and the lack of boundaries so characteristic of Neptune-Mars periods. Wow. That's a dangerous mix.

The astrology here doesn't confirm that an attempted rape actually happened, but it does link the two adolescents symbolically in a potentially confusing melodrama that might have been a drunken attempt at conquest for Kavanaugh and a nightmare of terror for Blasey Ford. And now, 36 years later, the episode has returned to haunt them both.

Also, the resulting Ford-Kavanaugh public debacle is just about the perfect expression of the current Venus retrograde now underway from early Scorpio back into late Libra. I'll write more about that in a future commentary.

OK, let me turn to the ridiculous and embarrassing events of the past week in the U.S. Senate, specifically from Thursday through Saturday.

The results of Thursday's Judicial Committee Hearing were illuminating, but not particularly consequential, since Kavanaugh's confirmation was, if not entirely a foregone conclusion, pretty much a certainty. With Republicans in control, it was clear from the start that nothing Kavanaugh said or did would be a factor in swaying them from confirming him. The Republicans in the White House and Senate had no interest in pursuing anything about Kavanaugh's testimony (including his previous lies and refusals to answer questions) and were in fact determined to make sure that no serious investigation into Blasey Ford's

allegations (nor those of two other accusers) or the nominee's past be conducted.

After the unprecedented denial to allow even a hearing throughout 2016 for moderate Merrick Garland, President Obama's nominee to fill the seat vacated by the death of Antonin Scalia, Republicans were dead set on completing their coup. First they filled the vacant Scalia seat with another conservative, Neil Gorsuch. Then, when Justice Anthony Kennedy suddenly retired, the Trump White House responded by nominating Brett Kavanaugh, an extreme conservative. Despite the Republicans' razor-thin majority in the Senate, nothing would stand in the way of confirming "their guy," which would guarantee a conservative majority on the Court, quite possibly for decades to come.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell — who has amply demonstrated that winning at any cost is all that matters to him — admitted the Republicans' game plan when he told a group of conservative supporters not to worry about Professor Ford's allegations against Kavanaugh, assuring them that the Repugs would "plow right through it and do our job" (meaning make sure that Kavanaugh was confirmed). Assuming that potentially wayward Republican Senators Jeff Flake, Susan Collins, and Lisa Murkowski could be kept in line, Kavanaugh's confirmation was a lock.

The positions of most Americans were plainly staked out long before the hearings, and the probability of many minds being changed was slim from the get-go. People interpreted the cockamamie proceedings of the various hearings through the preset filters of their own beliefs — from the initial questioning session, through the travesty of Ford vs. Kavanaugh, to the penultimate melodrama of Flake's "compromise" around what turned out to be the FBI's non-investigation, and finally the Senate's vote to confirm. As the hearings progressed, though, and despite the entrenched polarity of our politics, polling showed Kavanaugh's public approval shrinking steadily among Democrats, Independents, and women. By Saturday, when the final Senate vote confirmed Kavanaugh, a majority of the country was up in arms.

What I saw on Thursday was two individuals struggling with their own inner demons. Well, let me qualify that. I saw *one* person — Christine Blasey Ford — struggling with all her might and courage to remain composed against the onslaught of her monster within. I saw the *other* person — Brett Kavanaugh — capitulate to his inner monster. Throughout his career as a judge, through various confirmation hearings, Kavanaugh has presented himself as a sanctified choir boy. I don't know whether or not he actually believes that. It is characteristic of many people, especially politicians, on the Christian Conservative Right to present themselves with an overly pious sheen.

Kavanaugh continued his performance of that choir boy persona through the initial rounds of the current hearings. In the final round, however, following

allegations against him by three women of sexual assault, Kavanaugh ditched the “nice guy” image he had so carefully cultivated and instead let his monster within out of its hidden cage to take over. I’ll expand on that momentarily.

Professor Christine Blasey Ford’s inner monster is similar to that of millions — probably billions — of women around the world. Fear is at the heart of her monster’s hold over her. Blasey Ford’s monster tells her that she is powerless to protect herself from harm, humiliation, and trauma at the hands of brute masculine force. In addition, her monster tells her that she might as well remain silent about the harm she’s suffered, since society will never believe her. Basically, no justice is possible.

All that fear has a strongly sexual component, of course, but it’s not limited to sexuality, *per se*. Despite her academic credentials, career success, and long history of inner work to heal her adolescent trauma, Blasey Ford remains fearful. She told us this by stating in the hearing that she was terrified about coming forward to share her story (and her demeanor reflected that statement), but that she regarded bearing witness as a public duty. In other words, Blasey Ford’s lifelong challenge is to be courageous in the face of wilting fear. The fact that she needs *two* front doors in her home is testimony to the continuing power of her inner demon to terrify her. She cannot vanquish her monster. All Blasey Ford can do is build in additional escape routes should the overt terror manifest again.

Judge Kavanaugh’s testimony showed me a very different picture of the relationship between a man and the monster within. From the minute the afternoon session began with Kavanaugh’s opening rant, I saw a man completely unaccustomed to being challenged. He appeared to be unhinged, alternating between belligerent rage and self-pitying tears. The combination was not attractive in the least.

Brett Kavanaugh’s inner demon doesn’t threaten or make him fearful. It attacks others with snarling aggression and stunning arrogance, threatening any and all presumed enemies, specifically those on the left of the political/cultural spectrum (Kavanaugh called the accusations against him a “left-wing conspiracy”). In taking off his choir-boy mask and revealing himself to still be the partisan political operative he was when helping Ken Starr to set up Bill Clinton’s impeachment, Kavanaugh didn’t struggle against his monster. He gave in to it completely and allowed the monster to take over.

Many people felt that the shocking shift in Kavanaugh’s public self-expression was, in effect, a performance for an audience of one, namely, President Trump. They opined that Kavanaugh had calculated that Trump would rally to his aggressive self-defense, including his refusal to answer questions and numerous displays of obvious disrespect for Democratic Senators. While that may be true *de facto*, I don’t believe that Kavanaugh’s transformation was a simple choice — cunning perhaps as a strategy, but not resonant with truth or humanity.

What I saw was a man who has always been largely unaware of his monster within, in part because he has almost never before had to deal with the monster that hides his arrogance while he maintains the pose of humility. As a privileged, well-off white guy from the higher echelons of society, Kavanaugh has consistently moved forward toward greater social and career success with nary a setback. In his march toward power, he has consistently been told yes — until now. Blasey Ford's allegations ripped off Kavanaugh's boy scout mask of humility and dutiful fairness, as well as highlighting the many small lies and evasions of his previous testimony. In his subsequent and pathetic op-ed in the Wall Street Journal, Kavanaugh attempted to rationalize and justify his aggressive behavior, but stopped short of apologizing for it.

I believed Christine Blasey Ford and didn't buy Brett Kavanaugh's strident denials about excessive drinking or sexual assault, but we'll never know the truth for sure. What bothered me most, however, was not the likelihood that Kavanaugh was a reprehensible adolescent drunk and a gleeful sexual abuser, but instead that he struck me as a seriously unconscious adult who knows precious little about the depths of his own psyche and has done almost no inner work on himself. To use the 12-step ethos, Kavanaugh seems to me a person who has not engaged in a searching and fearless moral self-inventory, nor has he made amends to people he has harmed. That lack of maturity scares me even more than his plainly expressed hatred for those on the Left, his no-checks-and-balances belief in an all-powerful unitary Executive, his former odious support for torture as valid interrogation, and even his intention to make abortion illegal by overturning or gutting *Roe v. Wade*. All those stances are disqualifying from my perspective for any Supreme Court Justice, but they're almost a given in these political times. Finally, what bothers me most is that Kavanaugh seems not just a jerk, but a hopelessly unconscious jerk, which is a hundred times worse. I don't trust the guy as far as I can throw him.

Noted for particular scorn from me in this whole sorry circus are three Republican Senators: Lindsey Graham, Jeff Flake, and Susan Collins.

Lindsey Graham's frothing pit-bull verbal assault on Democrats during Thursday afternoon's Kavanaugh testimony was reprehensible, way over the top, and apparently part of his ambition to be appointed Attorney General should Trump fire Jeff Sessions in 2019. Graham is now Trump's new lap dog.

Jeff Flake's last-minute move to negotiate an FBI investigation into the allegations, which I knew would be nothing more than a sham white-wash for Kavanaugh (and it was), looked to me a lot less like a courageous act of pained conscience and more a convenient way to cover his own ass for an eventual yes vote (which he provided). Despite its bogus nature, that FBI "investigation" also served to spark renewed enthusiasm within the Republican voter base.

Finally, Susan Collins' hour-long speech on Friday before the Senate's cloture vote was one of the most disingenuous, specious, and self-serving pieces of political bullshit I've ever heard. Throughout the hearings, Collins equivocated about her intention, but I don't believe for a second that she ever seriously considered voting no, and Mitch McConnell knew it, or he wouldn't have called for the cloture vote.

Only two Senators deserve praise: Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who actually listened to her constituents and voted no, and Heidi Heitkamp of South Dakota, who voted no despite the probability that doing so will seal her loss in the upcoming election and end her time in the Senate. Real conscience is as rare as hen's teeth in this cynical political age.

Cementing the makeup of the U.S. Supreme Court as a bastion of right-wing ideology, cultural conservatism, and a rubber stamp favoring more power for the wealthy and corporations has been a primary Republican project over the past 30 years. Now they have achieved their goal. 100 million women are outraged, and America has been ravaged, with sobering long-term ramifications.

This was from the start of the confirmation hearings a battle that the humane side was likely to lose, but the way it came down was brutally egregious. However, the war for America's soul — whatever's currently left of it or any saner and more compassionate version we can create in the decades ahead — will go on. I know it seems paradoxical that we have to fight for compassion, but that's the state of affairs for America and all of humanity in the 21st century. Evolve or die.

Learning about the monsters that hide within our own egos is primary and ongoing work. We can't rid ourselves of our personal monsters, but we may be able to neutralize their toxic effects. Protecting ourselves from the monsters within others is more difficult, but equally necessary.