Gender and Sexuality week 8 – Oleanna (David Mamet)

• Background
  o Justice Thurgood Marshall announces his retirement from the US Supreme Court
  o Bush (Snr) nominates Clarence Thomas as his replacement
  o Immediately somewhat controversial, but likely to be confirmed
  o Anita Hill – professor of law from Oklahoma – testifies that Thomas had sexually harassed her during their time working at the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission
  o Interpreted by the media as a ‘he said, she said’ case
  o Thomas confirmed by the Senate 52-48
  o Significant increase in sexual harassment cases (6127 in 1991 – 15324 in 1996)
  o 1992 declared the ‘Year of the Woman’ when record numbers of women ran for office in the Senate (11) and won (5) along with 24 new women in the House
  o “The first draft [of Oleanna], he [Mamet] said, was written some eight months before the Thomas-Hill hearings, but it was the hearings that led him to pull it out of a drawer and work on it again” – Bruce Weber, ‘Mamet: Hearings Prompted “Oleanna”’, Chicago Tribune, November 12, 1992

• Initial reactions
  o “The first night when David Suchet beat [Lia Williams] up, the men in the audience really gave her a rough time, and cheered” – Harold Pinter to Mel Gussow, Conversations with Harold Pinter, London: Nick Hern, 1994, pp.148-9

• Oleanna – a folk song about Utoipa
  o Brenda Murphy – “failed utopian dream of academia” – ‘Oleanna: Language and Power’ (Cambridge Companion to David Mamet)

• Socrates: Philosopher and Teacher
  o Lived in Athens 469-399 BC
  o Symposium and Phaedrus
  o Sentenced to death for “corrupting the young”
  o Disciple Plato founded the Academy – basis for much that would come later in the European universities
  o Botched Socratic Method in Oleanna

• Power without responsibility
• Clashes over purpose of education
• Clashes over interpretation