

Gender and Sexuality week 8 – Oleanna (David Mamet)

- Background
 - Justice Thurgood Marshall announces his retirement from the US Supreme Court
 - Bush (Snr) nominates Clarence Thomas as his replacement
 - Immediately somewhat controversial, but likely to be confirmed
 - Anita Hill – professor of law from Oklahoma – testifies that Thomas had sexually harassed her during their time working at the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission
 - Interpreted by the media as a ‘he said, she said’ case
 - Thomas confirmed by the Senate 52-48
 - Significant increase in sexual harassment cases (6127 in 1991 – 15324 in 1996)
 - 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
 - “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
 - “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 film about Utopia
 - Brenda Murphy – “failed utopian dream of academia” – ‘*Oleanna*: Language and Power’ (*Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*)
- Socrates: Philosopher and Teacher
 - Lived in Athens 469-399 BC
 - *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*
 - Sentenced to death for “corrupting the young”
 - Disciple Plato founded the Academy – basis for much that would come later in the European universities
 - Botched Socratic Method in *Oleanna*
- Power without responsibility
- Clashes over purpose of education
- Clashes over interpretation