

Contextualizing Gender
Prof. Rashmi Gaur
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture - 30
Bodies that Matter II


Welcome to this module friends. In this module, we are looking at the final chapters of Butler's 'Bodies that Matter'. In this critical work, she examines how gender is an identity that follows multiple foundations such as race and class. In the first part she refers to Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle and Plato and modern thinkers like Luce Irigaray to trace the limitations in existing approaches to sex and gender.

By acknowledging the plurality of identities among human subjects, Butler attempts to identify the role of language in the representation of gender. She demonstrates this by analyzing certain literary texts in the second part of 'Bodies that Matter.' Through her analysis of Willa Cather's fiction, Butler looks at how name can be a site of identification as well as an occasion for cross identification.

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"Dangerous Crossing": Willa Cather's Masculine Names

- In this chapter, Butler is looking at how a 'name' can be a site of identification as well as an occasion for cross-identification.
- She asks, "does, the name, which is understood as the linguistic token which designate sex, only work to cover its fictiveness?" (p. 97).
- Butler studies the novels written by Willa Cather where the name designates a gender uncertainty.
- Cather's fiction produces a crisis in the configuration of sexed morphology. These texts can be read as an unravelling of the symbolic on its own impossible demands.



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Butler asks the question, "does the name which is understood as the linguistic token which designates sex only work to cover its fictiveness?". Butler studies the novels written by Willa Cather where the name designates a gender uncertainty. Cather's fiction


produces a crisis in the configuration of sexed morphology. These texts can be read as an unravelling of the symbolic on its own impossible demands.

Butler attempts to understand what is the distinction between the name and the bodily ego. She is trying to expose a crisis in differentiability, where the unstable status of the bodily ego troubles the name.


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Willa Cather

- Willa Cather (1873-1947) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning American writer who gained acclaim for her novels portraying the settlers and frontier life on the American plains.
- Butler attests she was also a woman who had lesbian relationships throughout her life.
- Butler engages in a rereading of her work to extract themes of cross-identification in terms of names and naming.



Willa Cather
Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica



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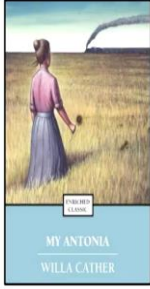
Willa Cather is a Pulitzer Prize-winning American writer who gained acclaim for her novels portraying the settlers and frontier life on the American plains. Butler attests that she was also a woman who had lesbian relationships throughout her life. Butler engages in a rereading of her works to extract themes of cross-identification in terms of names and naming. Butler does not necessarily view Cather's own sexuality as the seminal point for analysis of her work.

Instead, she explores how Cather's work provides an opportunity to bring lesbian sexual identity to the forefront in spite of its history of suppression in both real life and literature. In Willa Cather's novel 'My Antonia', Butler identifies the use of names and how they can be studied as a site, where the dynamic of identification is at play.


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Willa Cather's *My Antonia* (1918)

- My Antonia is considered as Cather's first masterpiece and it is praised for its depiction of American West and its people.
- The title refers to Antonia, a young woman immigrant to the western prairies of the US.
- Cather's novel includes an unusual transfer of names.
- Cather begins the novel by narrating in the first-person 'I', but then gradually transfers this narrative "authority" to the male voice of Jim Burden.



Source: Simon & Schuster



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‘My Antonia’ was published in 1918 and it is considered as Cather’s first masterpiece and is praised for its depiction of American West and its people. The title refers to Antonia, a young woman immigrant to the western prairies of the US. Cather’s novel includes an unusual transfer of names.

She begins the novel by narrating in the first-person ‘I’, but then gradually transfers this narrative ‘authority’ to the male voice of Jim Burden. Cather makes a number of comments concerning her views on women’s rights and also there are many disguised sexual metaphors in the text.

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My Antonia – Plot Summary

- Jim is a successful New York City lawyer and he is giving his acquaintance a memoir of his childhood in Nebraska with their mutual friend Antonia. Antonia is from a Bohemian immigrant family. This memoir on Jim's past makes up the bulk of the novel.
 - In their childhood, Jim and Antonia became great friends. Jim tutors Antonia to learn English, and they spend their time exploring new landscapes around them.
 - But their families moved separate ways. Jim graduates from Harvard and becomes a lawyer. Antonia gets engaged to a local boy, but he abandons her. She gives birth to a daughter.
- Twenty years later, both of them are now married, and reunite in Nebraska near their childhood home. They renew their old ties and Jim reflects in his familiar landscape, how his life has come to a full circle, and how much his past with Antonia has meant to him.



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The novel begins with a narration by Jim who is a successful New York City lawyer and is giving his acquaintance a memoir of his childhood in Nebraska with their mutual friend Antonia. Antonia is from a Bohemian immigrant family.

And this memoir on Jim's past makes up the bulk of the novel. In their childhood, Jim and Antonia became great friends. Jim tutors Antonia to learn English, and they spend their time exploring new landscapes around them. But their families moved separate ways.


Jim graduates from Harvard and becomes a lawyer. Antonia gets engaged to a local boy, but he abandons her and she gives birth to a daughter. Twenty years later, both of them are married and reunite in Nebraska near their childhood home. They renew their old ties and Jim reflects in his familiar landscape, how his life has come to a full circle, and how much his past with Antonia has meant to him.

In the novel, the character of Antonia speaks very little English and thus she has a hunger to establish precisely what names refer to. Cather chose a first-person narrator because she felt that novels depicting deep emotion were most effectively narrated by a character in this story.

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Butler on *My Antonia*

- Jim is for Butler a symbol of the law because, he is both a "legal counsel for one of the Western railways" and a buffer between the "true" first-person narrator and Cather's authorial voice.
- Butler sees this cross-identification between Cather and Jim as a process that "both enables and conceals the workings of desire" (Butler, 1993, p. 160).
- Antonia herself is also a representation of names and naming because she is "in a situation of linguistic exile and disorientation" as a Bohemian immigrant.
- This is the reason why she is more fascinated by how names work and whether they mean something.




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Butler treats Jim as a symbol of the law because, he is both a “legal counsel for one of the Western railways” and a buffer between the “true” first-person narrator and Cather’s authorial voice. Butler sees this cross-identification between Cather and Jim as a process that “both enables and conceals the workings of desire.”

Antonia herself is also a representation of names and naming because she is “in a situation of linguistic exile and disorientation” as a Bohemian immigrant. This is the reason why she is more fascinated by how names work and whether they mean something.

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- Butler examines the incident in which Jim attempts to kill a snake but, the snake resists and curls around Antonia's feet "like the letter W."
- Butler sees this "W" as a representation of the power of writing and more generally, of language or the symbolic.
- Butler goes on to discuss that the very act of naming itself can be seen as a social agreement or pact.
- Women must give up their name when they enter into a marital arrangement, which Antonia did in the novel.




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Women must give up their name when they enter into a marital agreement, which Antonia did in the novel. Butler regards us this practice as a naming structure which is rooted in the supremacy of the patriarchal and women concede a certain part of their identity. Butler says that the solidifying nature of language is something Jim cannot destroy like how representation of womanhood was dissimulated by Cather's narrator.

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- Jim renames the title of his writings from “Antonia” to “My Antonia”, giving Antonia's name the masculine possessive.
- Butler relates this act of Jim to the insistence on patronym in society, which is a name derived from that of a father or paternal ancestor.
- The name as patronym wields the power of subjectivation, that is the name secures and structures the subject.
- Cather also uses unorthodox naming conventions in her short story "Tommy the Unsentimental" (1896).
- This short story is about an androgynous girl from Nebraska who was given a boy's name.



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Cather also uses unorthodox naming conventions in a short story ‘Tommy the Unsentimental’ which was published in 1896. This short story is about an androgynous girl from Nebraska who was given a boy’s name. Androgyny as a gender term was first formulated and introduced by American psychologist Sandra Bem in the early 1970s. Androgyny refers to mixed biological sex characteristics in humans.



It often denotes intersex people. It is an attributional term used to describe an individual who possesses similar levels of feminine and masculine psychological attributes or characteristics. Regarding gender identity, androgynous individuals may refer to themselves as non binary gender queer or gender neutral.

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“Tommy the Unsentimental” by Willa Cather

- The central character Tommy Shirley is a young woman. But her real name is Theodosia, and the name Tommy comes from her father Thomas Shirley.
- Butler sees the masculine name for the female protagonist as an "inversion against that of the sentimental novel and its association with femininity" (p. 111).
- Butler explains the history of the name "Tom" and how it has come to mean many things from a racialized character such as Uncle Tom to the word 'tomboy'.
- The fluidity in naming illustrates that a name can at times "fail to stabilize identity."




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The central character Tommy Shirley in this story is a young woman, but her real name is Theodosia and the name Tommy comes from her father Thomas Shirley. Butler sees the masculine name for the female protagonist as an “inversion against that of the sentimental novel and its association with femininity”. Butler explains the history of the name ‘Tom’ and how it has come to mean many things from a racialized character such as Uncle Tom to the word ‘tomboy’.

The fluidity in naming illustrates that a name can at times “fail to stabilize identity”. In the short story the tomboyish character of Tommy inverts many patronymic expectations by placing the masculine name first. Butler also notes the use of un-gendered voices and indefinite pronoun in the beginning and conclusion of this story.

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- A central tension between Tommy and another female character Jessica permeates Cather's short story.
- When Tommy "gives the girl away" by helping Jessica marry a man, this act can be seen as a means by which the protagonist resists the feminine norm.
- Butler sees this tension as a possibly repressed homosexual attraction.
- Butler uses Eve Sedgwick's phrase "brutal suppression" to denote the sacrifice of desire, taking place in the short story.
- "Tommy" becomes a name that refers to no identity, but to an appropriation produced by the prohibition on homosexuality.



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'Tommy' becomes a name that refers to no identity, but to an appropriation produced by the prohibition on homosexuality. For Butler, Cather's work allows for a space to question whether name succeed in fully describing all the nuances of the very bodies they are meant to describe.

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Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge

- In this chapter, Butler examines the intersection between "feminism, psychoanalysis, and race studies" (p. 122).
- She notes that sexual difference is a framework from which other types of differences, like that of race, can be derived.
- Race and sexuality are constructed together according to Butler, and this construction is grounded in taboos against homosexuality.
- Butler conducts a critical study of the novel *Passing* by Nella Larsen to examine the themes of race and sex.



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In her chapter on Nella Larsen's Psychoanalytic Challenge, Butler examines the intersection between "feminism, psychoanalysis in race studies". She notes that sexual difference is a framework from which other types of differences, like that of race can be derived.


Race and sexuality are constructed together according to Butler, and this construction is grounded in taboos against homosexuality. Butler conducts a critical study of the novel passing by Nella Larsen to examine the themes of race and sex.

Through this chapter, Butler is attempting to explain if sexual difference constitutes an autonomous sphere of relations, which is more fundamental than other forms of difference like race or class.


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Nella Larsen (1891-1964)

- Nella Larsen is an American novelist who is famous for two major novels in early 20th century: *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929).
- Her works were revived in the late 20th century when debates around the issues of racial and sexual study started to emerge.
- She is an important figure in American modernism and a leading novelist of the Harlem Renaissance.



Nella Larsen
Source: Carl Vetchen, 1928



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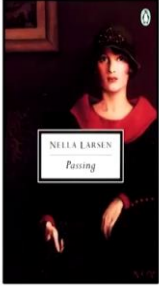
Nella Larsen is an American novelist who is famous for two major novels in early 20th century: ‘Quicksand,’ which was published in 1928 and ‘Passing,’ which was published in 1929. Her works were revived in the late 20th century when debates around the issues of racial and sexual studies started to emerge. She is an important figure in American modernism and a leading novelist of the Harlem Renaissance.

Nella Larsen’s works are viewed as strong depictions that accurately represent mixed race individuals and their struggles with identity. She portrayed how life was for many confused, fraught individuals especially females during the Harlem Renaissance.


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Passing by Nella Larsen

- Larsen's novel *Passing* was published in 1929.
- Set primarily in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City in the 1920s, the story centers on the reunion of two childhood friends Clare and Irene.



Source: Penguin Books




IIT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE | 13

Larsen's novel 'Passing' was published in 1929, set primarily in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City in the 1920s, this story centers on the reunion of two friends Clare and Irene. The title of the novel refers to the practice of racial passing and it is a key element of the plot. Racial passing occurs when a person classified as a member of a particular racial group is accepted or 'passes' as a member of another racial group.

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- Racial passing occurs when a person classified as a member of a racial group is accepted or "passes" as a member of another.
- In the novel, Clare attempts to pass 'as white' for her husband, and this becomes a catalyst for the tragic events in the story.
- The phenomenon of racial passing was very common in the 1920s. Clare has married a prejudiced, but wealthy white man.
- Larsen's exploration of race in this novel is influenced by her own mixed racial heritage.
- The novel was adapted into a film in 2021, and filmmaker Rebecca Hall directed it.

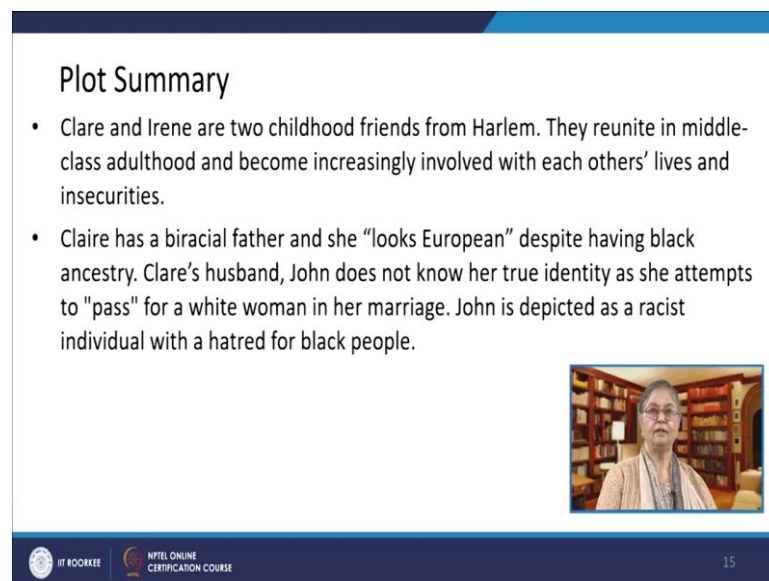


IIT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE | 14

In this novel, Clare attempts to pass as white for her husband and this becomes a catalyst for the tragic events in this story. The phenomenon of racial passing was very common in the 1920s. Clare has married a prejudiced, but wealthy white man. Larsen's exploration of race in this novel is influenced by her own mixed racial heritage.


The novel was adapted into a film in 2021 and filmmaker Rebecca Hall had directed it. The film adaptation was premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival and later the OTT platform Netflix also acquired the distribution rights for this film. The plot is based on the story of Clare and Irene, two friends from Harlem.

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Plot Summary

- Clare and Irene are two childhood friends from Harlem. They reunite in middle-class adulthood and become increasingly involved with each others' lives and insecurities.
- Claire has a biracial father and she "looks European" despite having black ancestry. Clare's husband, John does not know her true identity as she attempts to "pass" for a white woman in her marriage. John is depicted as a racist individual with a hatred for black people.




IT ROORKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 15

Clare and Irene reunite in middleclass adulthood and become increasingly involved with each other's lives and insecurities. Clare has a biracial father and she "looks European" despite having black ancestry. Clare's husband, John does not know her true identity in terms of race as she attempts to pass for a white woman in her marriage. John is depicted as a racist individual with a hatred for black people.

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- Irene's own marriage has become increasingly fraught, and she is convinced that her husband Brian is having an affair with her friend Clare. She considers exposing Claire's secret to John, which will end their marriage.
- The novel ends with a party setting where John is made aware of his wife's deception. Claire standing by an open window, falls out of the top floor and is pronounced dead. Whether she has fallen accidentally or was pushed by someone is unclear.
- The book ends with Irene's fragmented anguish at Clare's death.



IT ROORKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 16


Irene's own marriage has become increasingly fraught, and she is convinced that her husband Brian is having an affair with a friend Clare. She considers exposing Claire's secret to John which will end their marriage.

The novel ends with a party sitting where John is made aware of his wife's deception. Claire standing by an open window, falls out of the top floor and is pronounced dead. Whether she has fallen accidentally or was pushed by someone is not clear. The book ends with Irene's fragmented anguish at Clare's death.

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Butler on Nella Larsen's *Passing*

- Butler sees the novel's central conflict grounded in not only race but in sexual orientation and identity as well.
- Clare's courage and power in passing for white is so coveted by Irene that Irene also begins to covet Clare sexually.
- Butler sees this "passing ... that appears to eroticize Clare" as a way in which "black" is replaced or covered by "ivory" of her skin.
- Though it is only a mirage, Butler sees Clare's "whiteness" as freedom and false supremacy that also has the power to seduce.




IT ROORKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 17

Butler sees the novel central conflict grounded in not only race, but also in sexual orientation and identity. Clare's courage and power in passing for white is so, coveted by Irene that she also begins to covet Clare sexually. Butler sees this "passing that appears to eroticize Clare" as a way in which 'black' is replaced or covered by 'ivory' of her skin.

Though it is only a mirage, Butler sees Clare's "whiteness" as freedom and false supremacy that also has the power to seduce. The muted status of homosexuality within this text in terms of the relationship between Clare and Irene is important in Butler's view. Butler notes that the lesbian desire in the novel is what is almost spoken, but is never fully revealed. This type of muted or under covered desire mirrors the muted nature of the racial identity of Clare.

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- Clare's white husband John perceives his wife's racial identity in a very different way from Irene according to Butler.
- He views his white masculinity in opposition to "blackness."
- Thus, when Clare is "outed" for her true racial identity, his own masculinity is threatened which leads to his rage.
- Butler sees Clare's death at the end of the novel as an example of "the social and psychic state of killing judgements" (p. 127).
- Butler observes that John's reaction and relationship to "blackness" is paradoxical.



IT KOOKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 18


Clare's white husband perceives his wife's racial identity in a very different way from Irene according to Butler. He views his white masculinity in opposition to "blackness." Thus, when Clare is "outed" for her true racial identity, his own masculinity is threatened which leads to his rage. Butler sees Clare's death at the end of the novel as an example of "the social and psychic state of killing judgements."

Butler observes that John's reaction and relationship to "blackness" is paradoxical. On the one hand, he is a racist and claims that he would never associate with African-Americans. On the other hand, he must place himself in contrast or in opposition to an

African-American to preserve his own beliefs about masculinity and whiteness. In the novel, Clare is judged for her racial identity and this judgmental behavior of her husband ultimately leads to her death.

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- Butler explains that female African American writers have historically excluded African American women's sexuality.
- "Queering" is a term used in the novel to describe the breaking of boundaries between racial and sexual norms.
- In Irene's insistence that Clare and Brian are having an affair, she deflects her own desire for Clare onto her husband. Butler sees this deflection as a "delusional jealousy" in which Irene is really grieving for her desire for Clare, which she can never realize.
- Butler explains that the entrance of these social norms into the psyche can be greatly detrimental and "lead to suicide", which is one possible interpretation for the conclusion of *Passing*.



IT ROORKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 19


Butler explains that female African-American writers have historically excluded African-American women's sexuality. "Queering" is a term used in the novel to describe the breaking of boundaries between racial and sexual norms. In Irene's insistence that Clare and Brian are having an affair, she deflects her own desire for Clare onto her husband. Butler sees this deflection as a "delusional jealousy" in which Irene is really grieving for her desire for Clare, which she can never realize.

Butler explains that the entrance of these social norms into the psyche can be greatly detrimental and "lead to suicide", which is one possible interpretation for the conclusion of 'Passing'. Through her reading of Nella Larsen's 'Passing,' Butler shows how socially imposed racial and gender prohibitions are appropriated within the human psyche.


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Arguing with the Real

- In this chapter, Butler examines the work of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek (born 1949).
- His theory of identity categories is based on the symbolic realm of Lacan, where ideas take meaning from symbols in language.
- Butler also reflects on political mobilizations that take place within a framework of symbolization.



Slavoj Zizek
Source: Verso Books




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In this chapter, Butler examines the work of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek. His theory of identity categories is based on the symbolic realm of Lacan, where ideas take meaning from symbols in language.

Butler also reflects on political mobilizations that take place within a framework of symbolization. Butler says that she does not subscribe to the view that performativity is the efficient expression of human will in language. She seeks to recast performativity as a specific modality of power as discourse.

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- Butler sees symbolization as somewhat limiting. Zizek also points out that there are limits to "political signifiers" because they do not precisely describe what they seek to name.
- However, Butler explains that within this space of inadequacy, there exists a space for "rearticulation."
- This potential can lead to "new subject-positions, new political signifiers, and new linkages to become the rallying points for politicization" (p. 140).
- Butler believes that language involves the loss of the real referent. Zizek's theories suggest a possibility to return to this referent which is not possible.

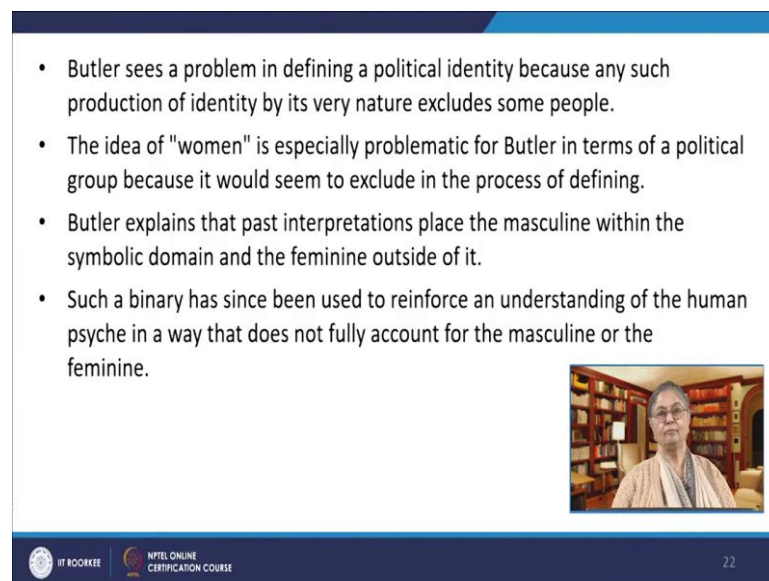


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Butler sees symbolization as somewhat limiting. Zizek also points out that there are limits to “political signifiers” because they do not precisely describe what they seek to name. However, Butler explains that within this space of inadequacy, there exists a space for “rearticulation.” This potential can lead to “new subject-positions”, new political signifiers and new linkages to become the rallying points for politicization.

Butler believes that language involves the loss of the real referent. Zizek’s theories suggest a possibility to return to this referent which is not possible. In Butler’s opinion, the real which is the realm prior to signifiers is not as strict opposite to the symbolic as Zizek claims.

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- Butler sees a problem in defining a political identity because any such production of identity by its very nature excludes some people.
- The idea of "women" is especially problematic for Butler in terms of a political group because it would seem to exclude in the process of defining.
- Butler explains that past interpretations place the masculine within the symbolic domain and the feminine outside of it.
- Such a binary has since been used to reinforce an understanding of the human psyche in a way that does not fully account for the masculine or the feminine.

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Such a binary has since been used to reinforce an understanding of the human psyche in a way that does not fully account for the masculine or the feminine. For example, the psycho analytic interpretations have viewed men as those who fear castration and women as those who fear not being castrated. So, such political identities are formed in terms of exclusion or hierarchies.

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- Butler views 'names' as important sites of subject formation.
- She cites an example from Christianity where naming at baptism is part of a "chain of communication" where a community agrees on a fixed referent.
- The community agrees to call the child by the same name, thus mutually agreeing to fix the name as a referent.
- Because names are typically patrilineal or from the father, Butler sees the very initiation of a person into the symbolic through naming as a patriarchal event.



Baptism
Source: Catholic News Agency




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Butler views 'names' as important sites of subject formation. She cites an example from Christianity where naming at baptism is part of a "chain of communication," where a community agrees on a fixed referent. The community agrees to call the child by the same name, thus mutually agreeing to fix the name as a referent. Butler sees the very initiation of a person into the symbolic through naming as a patriarchal event.

Butler sees baptism as a fixing of a referent to a person through an interpellation into a religious lineage. It is a naming that traces back to a patrilineage, the original naming that God the father performs on Adam. The fixing of the referent is thus a citation of an original fixing a reiteration of the divine process of naming, whereby naming the son inaugurates his existence within the divinely sanctioned community of men.

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- Similarly, women are not allowed to preserve their name for their life course and must surrender it upon marriage and take their husband's name.
- Butler regards this practice as a manifestation of “the power-differential between the sexes” (p.164).
- Names and signifiers including the political identities are “the sedimentation of prior signifiers”, according to Butler.




IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 24

Similarly, women are not allowed to preserve their name for their life course and must surrender it upon marriage and take their husband’s name. Butler regards this practice as a manifestation of “the power-differential between the sexes.” Names and signifiers including the political identities are “the sedimentation of prior signifiers”, in her opinion.

The name therefore supports and reinforce the identity of the object or person through a referent which is male-centered. Butler critically looks at this naming tradition to locate an inherent sense of inequality in power relations between the sexes.

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- Therefore, Butler argues that political signifiers must be analyzed and reworked to have a better clarity on its perception.
- In other words, a woman's political identity or any other political identity must be always interrogated and contested in terms of the limits of inclusion and exclusion.
- Butler concludes that political signifiers that seek to describe a group such as lesbians, transsexuals, or women do not accurately describe the group, but they sustain it by 'creating' the subjects they are said to describe.



IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 25


Butler argues, therefore, that political signifiers must be analyzed and reworked to have a better clarity on its perception. In other words, a woman's political identity or any other political identity must be always interrogated and contested in terms of the limits of inclusion and exclusion. Butler concludes that political signifiers that seek to describe a group such as lesbians, transsexuals, or women do not accurately describe the group, but they sustain it by 'creating' the subjects they are said to describe.

Numerous refusals on the part of women to accept the descriptions or definitions offered by the term ('woman') attest to the fact, that a particular political identifier cannot be comprehensive of a concept or a category. Butler also notes that if a particular term is questionable, it does not mean that we should not use it, but one should be constantly aware of the contingencies of these signifiers.

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Critically Queer

- In the final chapter of *Bodies that Matter*, Butler examines the use of the term "queer" and how it has been reappropriated over time.
- She studies how this term has been in a "sign-chain" where its meaning and connotation are constantly evolving.
- Some people have sought to use the term "queer" to empower and embolden the homosexual identity. Despite its performative power, Butler points out that even in this term, there are few exclusionary elements.
- Butler does not advocate avoiding the term "queer" because it is "politically necessary to lay claim" to such a term in resisting homophobia.



IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE | 26


In the final chapter of 'Bodies that Matter', Butler examines the use of the term "queer" and how it has been reappropriated over time. She studies how this term has been in a "sign-chain" where its meaning and connotations are constantly evolving. Some people have sought to use the term "queer" to empower and embolden the homosexual identity. Despite its performative power, Butler points out that even in this term, there are few exclusionary elements.

She does not advocate avoiding the term "queer" because it is "politically necessary to lay claim" to such a term in resisting homophobia. The term queer initially had a derogatory meaning before the eighteenth century the word queer suggested one who exhibits socially inappropriate behavior. Butler notes, how this term which once implied degradation has been later refunctioned to signify new and an affirmative set of meanings.

In this chapter, she conducts a genealogical critique of the queer subject and makes her readers aware, how it is central to their understanding of contemporary queer politics.

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- Historically, the term “queer” has operated as one linguistic practice the purpose of which has been the shaming of the subject it names.
- She says, “[Now] the term queer emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability” (p. 172).
- The political deconstruction of “queer” ought not to paralyze the use of such terms, instead it should extend its range.
- So rather than abandoning all the words, she says it remains politically necessary to lay claim to words such as ‘women,’ ‘queer,’ ‘gay,’ and ‘lesbian’ (p. 174).



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Historically, the term “queer” has operated as one linguistic practice the purpose of which has been the shaming of the subject it names. She says, and I quote “the term queer emerges as an interpellation that raises a question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability.” Unquote. The political reconstruction of “queer” ought not to paralyze the use of such terms, instead it should extend its range.

So, rather than abandoning all the words, Butler says that it remains politically necessary to lay claim to words such as ‘women,’ ‘queer,’ ‘gay,’ and ‘lesbian’. Laying claim to such terms will be necessary to refute homophobic deployments in public policy and in private life.

The term ‘queer’ derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusations and insults. She notes the evolution of the term to highlight that today queer has become a site of collective contestation and also to suggest that politically it is effective and also accommodating.

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- To conclude we can say that in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler observes that performances of gender and sexual identity can be a theatrical hyperbole like drag and thus shatter social blindness to recognize homosexual identity.
- Gender is not innate but rather performed in Butler's understanding. However, such performances are not the totality of gender. They can also be allegories of an un-grievable loss of the object of desire.
- She does not imply that sexuality and gender are strictly and directly linked in the traditional sense.
- Butler concludes that gender must be disentangled from the heterosexual norm that links it to sexual identity.



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To conclude, we can say that in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler observes that performances of gender and sexual identity can be a theatrical hyperbole like drag and thus shatter social blindness to recognize homosexual identity. Gender is not innate, but rather performed in Butler's understanding. However, such performances are not the totality of gender. They can also be allegories of an un-grievable loss of the objective desire. She does not imply that sexuality and gender are strictly and directly linked in the traditional sense.

She concludes that gender must be disentangled from the heterosexual norm that links it to sexual identity. This disconnection can lead to new possibilities such as reconceptualization of kinship in terms of homosexuality and laying claim to words like queer. This marks the end of the first week of our discussion on Judith Butler. This week we have focused on her early works from the 1990s like 'Gender Trouble' and 'Bodies that Matter'.

In the coming weeks, we shall examine the recent developments in Butler's approach and her philosophical take on subjectivity while looking at her major critical works such as 'Undoing Gender.'

Thank you.

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