

- 1) How do the Romans conceive of femininity and masculinity? What do they admire in men and women?
- 2) How do the Egyptians conceive of femininity and masculinity? What do they admire in men and women?
- 3) Do the events of the play complicate these definitions, over time? Are there contradictions within the play's language and representations which are resolved?
- 4) What, if anything, can you extrapolate from the play about Shakespeare's attitudes? What does he admire in female characters? In male characters? To what extent is his judgment of characters gendered? To what extent do other factors (social status, profession, ethnicity, historical context) complicate such judgment? How do we decide?
- 5) At the end of chapter three of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's narrator writes:

the mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent, like Shakespeare's mind, I conjectured, looking at the book which lay open at *Antony and Cleopatra*. There must be no obstacle in it, no foreign matter unconsumed.

For though we say that we know nothing about Shakespeare's state of mind, even as we say that, we are saying something about Shakespeare's state of mind...his grudges and spites and antipathies are hidden from us. We are not held up by some 'revelation' which reminds us of the writer. All desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance was fired out of him and consumed. Therefore his poetry flows from him free and unimpeded. If ever a human being got his work expressed completely, it was Shakespeare. If ever a mind was incandescent, unimpeded...it was Shakespeare's mind. (56-7)

Earlier, she remarks, "What was Shakespeare's state of mind, for instance, when he wrote *Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*? It was certainly the state of mind most favourable to poetry that there has ever existed"(51).

Why do you think Woolf chooses to mention *Antony and Cleopatra* specifically? Now that you have read the play, do you better understand the concepts here? Do you agree with her appraisal?

- 6) In chapter five, Woolf writes

Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. Cleopatra did not like Octavia. And how completely *Antony and Cleopatra* would have been altered had she done so!...the whole thing is simplified, conventionalised, if one dared say it, absurdly. Cleopatra's only feeling about Octavia is one of jealousy. Is she taller than I am? How does she do her hair? The play, perhaps, required no more. But how

interesting it would have been if the relationship between the two women had been more complicated. All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. (82)

How does this modify her earlier comments, and what do you think of these?

When you read *Mrs. Dalloway*, reflect back on Woolf's comments about and use of the play here (written later).

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