

Character of OliviaDr. P. 2<sup>nd</sup> semester year 19

In the realm of characterisation, William Shakespeare is matchless. Olivia is the pivot of the play around which all other characters of Twelfth Night act and react. William Shakespeare has very finely delineated the character of Olivia. But his portrait of Olivia has usually been under-rated. The critics who used to talk about Shakespeare's heroines fell in deep love with Viola, and neglected the character of Olivia. To some critics, Olivia is a ridiculous character because she loves a lady of her own sex. She loves the same sex. But the delicacy of Shakespeare's handling steers the situation and contrives to show the gradual awakening of that noble nature which Orsino detects in her. We have still permission to laugh at her. The fool, reminding us that folly like the sunshine everywhere flits between Orsino's house and her hers. But when he is called the lady Olivia's fool, he makes one of his astonishing replies. This is true that his remark is double-edged for he is a man of bifocal vision. Her present exemption lies in her not having yet secured the husband she is seeking. But to him the fool now tells us that the lady Olivia has no folly, we are forcibly reminded that he began by proving her a fool. It seems clear that she is making progress. The comic artist only hints this with a lightness



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which the heavy hand of the critic inevitably destroys. When Olivia ceases to ~~mourn~~ <sup>mourn</sup> the dead and gives herself to the pursuit of the living, she is in a process to learn the wisdom of life.

To sum up, Olivia is a very fine character. Her role is praise worthy. On the score of above analysis, it is clear that Olivia is a fascinating character in the Shakespearean comedy of Twelfth Night. Much of the comedy in the play results from her action and behaviour before she is married to Sebastian.