

The Character of Olivia

Olivia, like Viola, is gifted with beauty and intelligence. But Olivia can afford to be a mistress of her desires and passions, while Viola, in her distressful situation, has to subdue her desires and play second fiddle. Olivia has beauty, power and wealth. She resolves to do something and does it without flinching. But she is more swayed by passion and personal whim than by reason. It is equally evident in the two instances. She declares to remain inviolate / veiled banishing pleasurable indulgence because of her brother's death. But within three days of it, she indulges in fancy and light; talks with her clown. And to crown it all, she obstinately pursues her intention to marry Cesario.

Olivia, in the play, is an ordinary lady possessed of beauty, power and wealth. She is even tempered and manages well her estate. She is tolerant and considerate in her attitude to her uncle, Sir Toby as well as to Malvolio. She rejects as naught Malvolio's conception of life and doesn't react sharply when he foolishly behaves before ~~her~~ her in parti-coloured dress and cross-gartered legs. But Shakespeare exposes her inner weakness as we witness her in her encounter with Cesario. The seed of passion germinates and her ridiculous

insistence to woo Cesario explodes her sham gravity. The conversation where she courts her attention reveals an aspect of Viola's personality — her native wit and sense of realism. In contrast, Olivia's remarks look selfish, too love-sick and absurd. Even in the last scene, her forcible marriage with Sebastian on a mistaken notion that it is Cesario shows her hasty impatience.

Turner holds that 'she seems unfeeling and unduly obdurate in repelling Orsino in his love-sick suit.' But Olivia does not hate Orsino. Her estimate of him is good enough; he is a man of refinement and taste, educated and cultured. But despite all his merits, she cannot love him. In fact, Shakespeare's intention in this play is to show the strange and unpredictable impulses/motions of love. She resolutely resists Orsino's approach. The underlying reason is that love is not induced by logic or arguments of propriety. It is a dark and nameless passion that seeks its partner. Orsino doesn't fit her, but Cesario maddens her. The consequence looks ridiculous and undignified.

The manner of her marriage with Sebastian also is regarded ~~as~~ inapt by critics.

But other opinions also run amuck — such is the case with her — looks no opposition,

She has all the resources to actualise her desire. Naturally, the comic and ridiculous aspect of her obduracy gets priority in the dramatist's scale of value. She commits the error and is forced to eat the humble pie as soon as her reality about Cesario dawns on her.