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Twelfth Night

TWELFTH NIGHT

Illyria, a continent where the sea throws Viola and which appears far away because it is ignored, a legendary country where the burning wind of passion blows, a kingdom of music, of pleasure and of ruthless desire . . .

The story that unfolds there, relentlessly, is the story of the phases of a devouring heavenly body, the peripeteia of love, its birth, its burn, the heartbeat it imprints on the heart, on the body, on the soul, the wound it inscribes forever on man. Those led there by fate will get to know the savagery of love, and, as in the greatest tales: They will endure tests, undergo rites, perform rituals and mandatory figures of pleasure and pain.

Twelfth Night or *What You Will* bewilders less by its distance in time or in space than by the depth of the place where desires take birth within man, this Wonderland, these interior Indies which, for the imagination, take after the legendary, the magic, the infancy, the nightmare. In this deep world, contrary to what one might think, there is no double meaning, no ambiguity within the characters, and their desires have the clarity of dreams.

The text is the image of a tarn (small mountain lake), the limpidity of which, far from denying its depth, makes this depth, in fact, more real and more dizzying. The poet, "this sleeper who has the eyes of his soul open" (Victor Hugo) brings out the unconscious. Fairy tales and nightmares come close, and, in this inexorable story where laughter itself can only spring forth from drama, the voluble heart and body

tell about themselves without restraint; they play the variations of impassioned love, of happiness and sorrow, of rapture or tears. Whether their passion is love or joke, they all constantly poke up the fire of pleasure, they crackle, they consume themselves without saving anything. With the impudence of children playing in a frenzied and grave bacchanale, they tell with force the paradise they glimpsed at, their "ocean-wide appetite," the danger and the tear of loving.

Ariane Mnouchkine

THE PLOT

Sebastian and Viola, twin brother and sister, are separated in a shipwreck off the coast of Illyria. Each believes the other has drowned. Viola disguises herself as a boy and becomes employed as a page named Cesario in the court of Duke Orsino. Orsino is in love with the Countess Olivia, and he sends his page Cesario (Viola) to her in order to present his amorous case. Olivia is in mourning for a dead brother, and refuses to see any suitors. Even so, she is so taken with the grace and eloquence of the Duke's page that she falls passionately in love with the "boy." In the Countess's household are a melancholy steward, Malvolio; Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch; his foppish friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek; and a clown named Feste. Aguecheek is a foolish knight who pays Sir Toby to advance his own case with Olivia.

In the meantime, Sebastian (whom Viola thinks has drowned) arrives in Illyria with Antonio, a sea captain. Using Malvolio as a courier, Olivia sends Cesario a ring that "he" supposedly left with her.