

## = Love in Several Masques =

Love in Several Masques , a play by Henry Fielding , was first performed on 16 February 1728 at the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane . The moderately received play comically depicts three lovers trying to pursue their individual beloveds . The beloveds require their lovers to meet their various demands , which serves as a means for Fielding to introduce his personal feelings on morality and virtue . In addition , Fielding introduces criticism of women and society in general .

The play marks Fielding 's early approach to theatre and how he begins to create his own take on tradition 18th @-@ century theatre conventions . Critics have emphasised little beyond how the play serves as Fielding 's first play among many . The possible sources of the play including a possible failed pursuit of a lover by Fielding , or the beginnings of Fielding 's reliance on the topic of gender , identity , and social ethics .

## = = Background = =

Love in Several Masques was Fielding 's first play . It was advertised on 15 January 1728 in the London Evening Post and first ran on 16 February 1728 at the Theatre Royal . Performances were held on 17 , 19 and 20 February , with the third night being the author 's benefit . The play was never revived . The cast included four members among some of the most talented of the Theatre Royal actors . Although it only ran for four nights , this was a great feat because John Gay 's popular The Beggar 's Opera was performed during the same time and dominated the theatrical community during its run . It was first printed on 23 February 1728 by John Watts , and a Dublin edition appeared in 1728 . The play was later collected by John Watts in the 1742 and 1745 Dramatick Works and by Andrew Millar in the 1755 edition of Fielding 's works . It was later translated and printed in German as Lieb unter verschiedenen Larven in 1759 .

Most of the information on the play and its run is known because of Fielding 's preface in the printed edition of the play . The printed Love in Several Masques is dedicated " To the Right Honourable the Lady Mary Wortley Montague " , his cousin . It is probable that she read the original draft of the play , which is alluded to in the dedication . Information on her reading the draft comes from a letter written in approximately September 1727 . In the letter , Fielding writes :

I have presum 'd to send your Ladyship a Copy of the Play which you did me the Honor of reading three Acts of last spring : and hope it may meet as light a Censure from your Ladyship 's Judgment as then : for while your Goodness permits me ( what I esteem the greatest and indeed only Happiness of my Life ) to offer my unworthy Performances to your Perusal , it will be entirely from your Sentence that they will be regarded or disesteem 'd by Me .

The play was completed during September 1727 and it was listed in the British Journal of 23 September 1727 as being scheduled . There is little information on Fielding 's editing of the work , and none to support that anyone suggested corrections except Anne Oldfield , who he thanked in the Preface for supplying corrections . The prologue , dedication , and preface were probably composed during January or February 1728 , with the dedication and preface most likely composed between the last nights of the show , 20 and 21 February , and its publication , 23 February .

## = = Cast = =

The cast according to the original printed billing :

Wisemore ? lover of Lady Matchless , played by John Mills

Merital ? lover of Helena , played by Robert Wilks

Malvil ? lover of Vermilia , played by Bridgwater

Lord Formal ? rival to Wisemore , played by Griffin

Rattle ? fop and rival to Merital , played by Colley Cibber

Sir Apish Simple ? rival to Malvil , played by Josias Miller

Lady Matchless ? played by Anne Oldfield

Vermilia ? played by Mrs Porter

Helena ? played by Mrs Booth

Sir Positive Trap ? husband of Lady Trap , care taker of Helena , played by John Harper

Lady Trap ? played by Mrs. Moor

Catchit ? maid to Lady Trap , played by Mrs. Mills

Prologue spoken by John Mills

Epilogue spoken by Miss Robinson , child actress

= = Plot = =

The plot is traditional in regards to Restoration theatre and includes three female characters , three respectable males , three non @-@ respectable males , and three side characters . Each respectable male meets their female counterpart three times , and each has a parallel incident with letters and an unmasking . The primary plot of the play deals with Wisemore and his pursuit of Lady Matchless . With the help of his friend Merital , Wisemore is able to overcome other lovers and various struggles in order to prove his worth to Matchless and win her love .

A secondary plot involves Merital and his desire to marry a woman named Helena , cousin to Matchless . He is kept from doing so externally by her uncle , Sir Positive Trap , by the workings of her aunt , and internally by themselves . Against her uncles wishes , Helena and Merital elope . Although Trap is angered by this , Lady Matchless steps in and defends the marriage by saying that she too will marry like her cousin . The play ends with a song about beauty , virtue , and lovers .

= = = Preface = = =

The printed version of the play included a self @-@ conscious preface :

I believe few plays have ever adventured into the world under greater disadvantage than this . First , as it succeeded a comedy which , for the continued space of twenty @-@ eight nights , received as great ( and as just ) applauses , as ever were bestowed on the English Theatre . And secondly , as it is co @-@ temporary with an entertainment which engrosses the whole talk and admiration of the town . These were difficulties which seemed rather to require the superior force of a Wycherley , or a Congreve , than of a raw and unexperienced pen ; for I believe I may boast that none ever appeared so early upon the stage . However , such was the candour of the audience , the play was received with greater satisfaction than I should have promised myself from its merit , had it even preceded the Provoked Husband .

He continued by thanking his cast , especially Anne Oldfield , for the effort that they put into their roles . This preface served as a model for Fielding 's later prefaces included in his novels , such as Joseph Andrews or Tom Jones .

= = Themes = =

Love in Several Masques is a traditional comic drama that incorporates morality . The theme of the play is the relationship of disguises and courtship with a discussion of the nature of love . Fielding focuses on men and how they deal with love and marriage . Also , the gentlemen must prove their worth before they can be justified in their marriage , which allows Fielding to describe the traits required in successful male suitors . The first act deals primarily with the gentlemen in order to establish a focus on their characteristics . Fielding 's first play serves as a representation for his belief in the relationship of morality and libertine beliefs and introduces character types that he would use throughout his plays and novels . However , all negative characteristics are very apparent to the audience , and those characters who are immoral are unable to accomplish their goals . The main characters are still decent individuals who are able to help another , even though they sometimes get in each other 's way . At no time is the audience able to believe that vice will conquer , which undermines part of the satire . Regardless , Harold Pagliaro is still able to conclude that " Fielding 's satire on the marriage market , however , is effective , if not biting . "

Wisemore 's character introduces feelings about the London community and criticises various

problems . However , his reflections are portrayed as both correct and lacking , and that he is focused only on the bad aspects of life . His ideas result from removing himself from society in preference to the company of classical books . Although he does not realise it , the play suggests that there are virtuous people . Merital , in response to Wisemore , believes that Wisemore 's philosophical inclinations are foolish . As the play later reveals , Wisemore 's views are only a mask to hide from his own feelings and views on love .

Wisemore is not the only one to serve as a means to comment on society ; the characters Vermilia and Lady Matchless are used to discuss the proper role of females within society by serving as housewives . The dialogue between the two reveals that females are only in control of the domestic sphere because men have allowed them to dominate in the area . This is not to suggest that Fielding supports the repression of females ; instead , women are used as a way to discuss the internal aspects of humans including both emotions and morality . However , feminist critic Jill Campbell points out that Fielding does mock women who abuse their relationship with the internal , emotions , and morality in order to dominate and assume power . Tiffany Potter , another feminist critic , sees gender within the play in a different light ; Merital 's actions and words show a moderate approach to females , and " Women are neither victims of deceitful men nor overdefensive virgins , but individuals who can choose to ' bestow ' their favours on a man who will ' enjoy ' them . "

The image of the masque within the play deals with hiding one 's identity . Fielding , like many other playwrights , focuses on how the masque genre deals with the social acceptability of altering identities within the format . However , Fielding extends the image to discuss society and those who impersonate social and gender roles that they do not fill . Fielding also has a problem with those who act viciously with license even though he is willing to accept some of the lesser libertine actions . Merital , for instance , is a sexual type of libertine and is treated differently than those like Sir Positive Trap , Lord Formal , and Sir Apish Simple who are criticised as being part of the corrupted order . Trap and Formal are part of old families , and their attachment to the age of their families and their attempts to use that to justify their beliefs over what is proper is ridiculed within the play . In particular , Merital is the one able to point out their flaws .

= = Critical response = =

Love in Several Masques was " neither a success nor a fiasco " , and Fielding writes in the preface , " the Play was received with greater Satisfaction than I should have promised myself from its Merit " . The play was later quoted in The Beauties of Fielding more than any of Fielding 's other plays , according to Thomas Lockwood , " because for anthology reading purposes it supplied far more extractably witty bits than other Fielding plays more representative or still holding the stage . "

Eighteenth and nineteenth century critics did little to discuss the play . David Erskine Baker simply lists the play in Companion to the Playhouse ( 1764 ) , Charles Dibdin 's History of the Stage ( 1800 ) makes a short comment on the dialogue , and John Genest said that the play was " moderate " in Some Account of the English Stage ( 1832 ) . A page is devoted to Love in Several Masques in Edwin Percy Whipple 's review of a collection of Fielding 's works , which calls the play " a well @-@ written imitation " that has " smart and glib rather than witty " dialogue even though it contains " affected similes and ingenious comparisons , which the author forces into his dialogue to make it seem brilliant . " Frederick Lawrence , in his Life of Henry Fielding ( 1855 ) , connected the play with those of Congreve and enjoyed some of the dialogue .

Twentieth century critics tend to range in opinions on the play . F. Homes Dudden argues that " The dialogue is smart ; the plot , though insufficiently compact , is fairly ingenious ; the characters [ ... ] are conventional comic types [ ... ] It deserved what in fact it achieved ? a qualified success . " Robert Hume believes that " The play is not , in truth , very good " , that " Fielding offers three minimally intertwined love plots " , and that the narrative is " clumsy " . However , Rivero believes that this characterisation is " unjust " and that the play deserves more merit . The play , as Rivero argues , " evinces what critics have identified as the quintessence of Fielding 's art : its clear moral purpose , its conspicuous moral tone . " Thomas Lockwood argues that the play " has been noticed mainly as it was Fielding 's first play , or else as the example of that imitation of Congrevean form

which supposedly marked his beginning in dramatic authorship . Beyond these impressions of the play , there is no real tradition of critical discussion . " Pagliaro , one of Fielding 's biographers , simply states that " By the standards of the day , the play neither failed nor succeeded , running four nights as it did . "