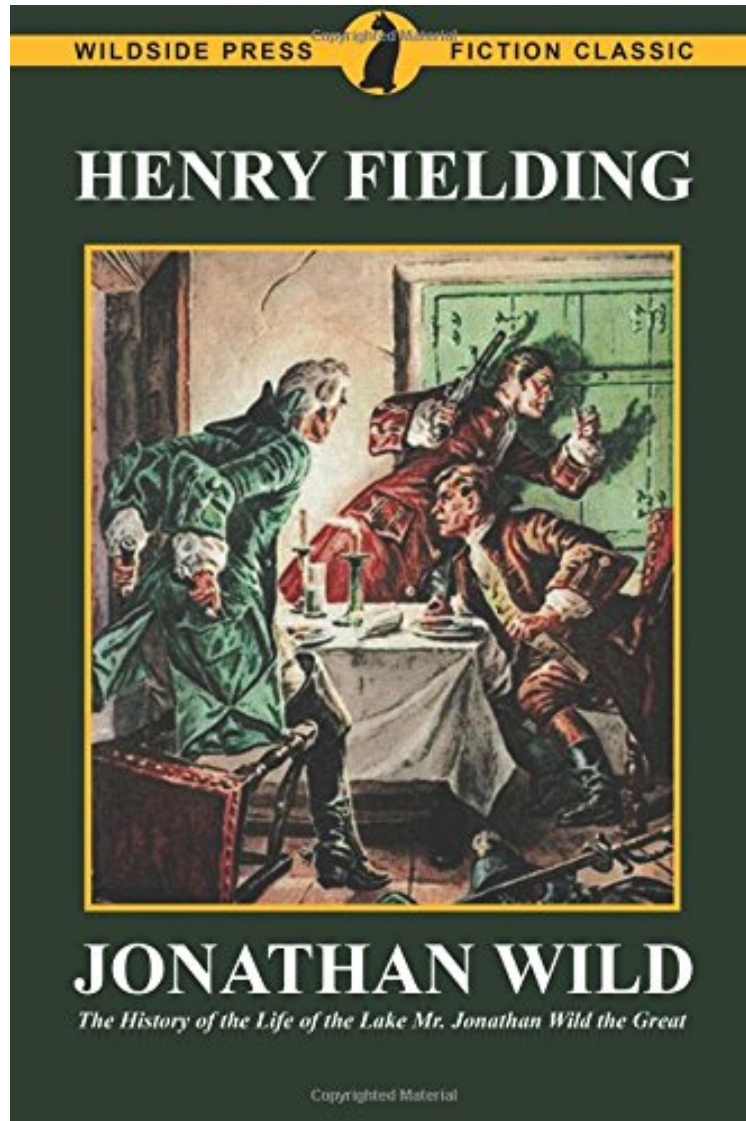


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Henry Fielding

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Henry Fielding : Jonathan Wild: The History of the Life of the Lake Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jonathan Wild: The History of the Life of the Lake Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Callous Cockney Crime Coconut Comes a CropperBy Bob

Newman On perusing a bookshelf in a Boston shop some 15 years past, my eye was taken by a paperback by one Henry Fielding and I was persuaded that though I had reached a fair age, I had not yet read anything by that august personage who had graced the curricula of so many English courses in my university days, which had been sadly terminated by the fact of the necessity of earning a living. Though I purchased this object of my fascination, it was not till recently that I actually did retrieve the volume from its dusty repose on an attic bookshelf and had recourse to reading it. Much to my surprise, it resembled such drab writings as "The Vicar of Wakefield" not in the least---those writings redolent of optimism and Pollyanna-like characters who insist on giving lectures on the goodness of Man while undergoing the tortures of the damned---but was admirably cynical and indeed not at all uneasy in the presence of sex, crime, and malfeasance in general, with which the book's "hero", Jonathan Wild, is blessed with an inordinate ability to partake of. The main character's rise and fall may be considered the main topic of the novel. While the reader is still forced to suffer a large portion of lecture and soliloquy thanks to the 18th century tendency to partake of such in every writing, big or small, the story itself is quite humorous and the reader may encounter there more than a diminutive speck of enjoyment, reaching the last page having observed that life, whether then or now in our less-insalubrious 21st century, is indeed much the same, the only difference being that debtors of those more abrupt times went to prison and the malfeasants of that era tended to end their short life spans at the end of a rope, while today, they serve but a short time in government rest homes and then return to their previous status of 'honored citizen'. The characters in Fielding's novel, written two hundred years before my entrance onto the world stage, emerge vividly, endowed with such amusing names as Heartfree, Tishy Snap, Bagshot, Fireblood, and Miss Straddle, and while some of their adventures and conversations may seem to modern readers somewhat contrived and relying perhaps overmuch on deus ex machina, they are not far removed from many a Hollywood production, whose very existence could not be imagined in the author's time. Keeping in mind the tribulations of modern readers, not used to such peregrinations of oratory during the course of novels, I would say that a devotion to English literature would better lead to enjoyment of such a work than a preference for modern style in which dialogue might be deemed more natural. Nevertheless I will end my overlong diatribe on JONATHAN WILD by saying that it was meant as a satire of a Robert Walpole, a corrupt "great man" in politics of the time, and of all such men who aspire to greatness, and I beg my readers' pardon for attempting to write a review in a style not my own, but wish to remind them that if they found it tedious they may also find the said novel a bit too much, but if, on the other hand, they found it amusing, they may very well find more than a small amount of pleasure in Fielding's work itself and join me in suggesting that for this novel, though I have kept the interests of the general reader in mind as I awarded the prize, three stars are not quite sufficient. 9 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Neglected morality tale of exquisite language By A Customer Henry Fielding's novel Jonathan Wild - out of print since 1982? Bummer. Jonathan Wild was a real organizer of a group of thieves (i.e., prigs), but Fielding invented considerable portions of this novel. Enraged by the acclaim given to dishonest but "great" men (that is, men who had achieved success for their benefit, while often doing harm to others), Fielding set out to chronicle, in the most flowery and euphemistic terms possible, the life and times of Jonathan Wild, Esq. As a foil, Thomas Heartfree, who is nearly ruined by Wild, is introduced. As characters, they are stick figures, but that is intentional. Fielding sets to battle ridiculous extremes of good and evil, with good emerging triumphant in the end. It might emerge as a tedious harangue on the virtues of a good life, but Fielding's skill as a writer makes this impossible. His elaborate sentences demand close attention, and their rewards are great. Intricate and well thought-out, they are fascinating in and of themselves. The story is witty, well-balanced, and constantly amusing. The morality and writing of the story have aged well, the former largely because of the latter, and Jonathan Wild is a quite good, though most likely minor, narrative of infamy and saintliness.

Jonathan Wild (1682 or 1683 – 1725) was a London underworld figure notable for operating on both sides of the law, posing as a public-spirited crimefighter entitled the "Thief-Taker General." He exploited a strong public demand for action during a major London crime wave in the absence of any effective police force. As a powerful gang-leader himself, he became a master manipulator of legal systems, collecting rewards offered for valuables which he had stolen himself, bribing prison-guards to release his colleagues, and blackmailing any who crossed him. He was hanged at Tyburn before a massive crowd. Wild was featured in novels, poems, and plays, some of them noting parallels between Wild and the contemporaneous Prime Minister Walpole (who was known as "The Great Corrupter"). Among the most famous recountings of his life is the one by Henry Fielding, which is notable as a classic satire and ranked among Fielding's best works. This edition includes an introduction by Dr. G. H. Maynard, Ph.D., of Harvard University.