



A great man

In the following passage Jonathan Wild acquires an unexpected grandeur of a special kind.

Further conferences between the Count and Mr Wild, with other matters of the GREAT kind.

Henry Fielding
*The History of the Life
of the Late Mr Jonathan
Wild the Great*
(1743)

Book One, Chapter VI

The Count missed his money the next morning, and very well knew who had it; but, as he knew **likewise** how fruitless would be any **complaint**, he chose to pass it by without mentioning it. Indeed it may appear strange to some readers that these gentlemen, who knew each other to be thieves, should never once give the least hint¹ of this knowledge in all their discourse together, but, on the contrary, should have the words honesty, honour, and friendship as often in their mouths as any other men. This, I say, may appear strange to some; but those who have lived long in cities, courts, gaols², or such places, will perhaps be able to solve the seeming³ absurdity.

When our two friends met the next morning the Count (who, though he did not agree with the whole of his friend's doctrine, was, however, highly pleased with his argument) began to bewail⁴ the misfortune of his captivity, and the backwardness⁵ of friends to assist each other in their necessities; but what vexed⁶ him, he said, most, was the cruelty of the **fair**: for he intrusted Wild with the secret⁷ of his having had an intrigue with Miss Theodosia, the elder of the Miss Snaps, ever since his confinement⁸, though he could not prevail with her to set him at liberty. Wild answered, with a smile, 'It was no wonder a woman should wish to confine her lover where she might be sure of having him entirely to herself;' but added, he believed he could tell him a method of certainly procuring his escape. The Count eagerly besought⁹ him to acquaint him with it¹⁰. Wild told him bribery¹¹ was the surest means, and advised him to **apply** to the maid. The Count thanked him, but returned, 'That he had not a farthing¹² left besides one guinea, which he had then given her to change.' To which Wild said, 'He must make it up with promises, which he supposed he was courtier¹³ enough to know how to put off¹⁴.' The Count greatly applauded the advice, and said he hoped he should be able in time to persuade him to **condescend** to be a great man, for which he was so perfectly well qualified.

This method being concluded on, the two friends sat down to cards, a circumstance which I should not have mentioned but for the sake of observing the prodigious force of habit; for though the Count knew if he won ever so much of Mr Wild he should not receive a shilling, yet could he not **refrain from** packing the cards; nor could Wild keep his hands out of his friend's pockets, though he knew there was nothing in them.

When the maid came home the Count began to put it to her; offered her all he had, and promised mountains in future; but all in vain— the maid's honesty was **impregnable**. She said, 'She would not break her trust for the whole world; no, not if she could gain a hundred pound by it.' Upon which Wild stepping up¹⁵ and telling her 'She need not fear losing her place, for it would never be found out; that they could throw a pair of sheets into the street, by which it might appear he got out at a window; that he himself would swear¹⁶ he saw him descending; that the money would be so much gains in her pocket; that, besides his promises, which she might depend on being performed, she would receive from him twenty shillings and nine-pence in ready money (for she had only laid out three-pence in plain Spanish); and lastly, that, besides his honour, the Count should leave a pair of gold buttons (which afterwards turned out to be brass¹⁷) of great value, in her hands, as a further **pawn**.'

The maid still remained inflexible, till Wild offered to lend his friend a guinea more, and to deposit it immediately in her hands. This reinforcement bore down the poor girl's resolution, and she faithfully promised to open the door to the Count that evening.

- 1 hint. Accenno.
- 2 gaols. Prigioni.
- 3 seeming. Apparente.
- 4 to bewail. Lamentare.
- 5 backwardness. Riluttanza.
- 6 vexed. Infastidiva.
- 7 intrusted ... secret. Confidò a Wild il segreto.
- 8 confinement. Segregazione.
- 9 besought. Supplicò.
- 10 to acquaint ... it. Di informarlo di ciò.
- 11 bribery. Corruzione.
- 12 a farthing. Un centesimo.
- 13 courtier. Gentiluomo.
- 14 to put off. Rimandare.
- 15 stepping up. Facendosi avanti.
- 16 would swear. Avrebbe giurato.
- 17 brass. Ottone.



Thus did our young hero not only lend his rhetoric, which few people care to do without a fee¹⁸, but his money too (a sum which many a good man would have made fifty excuses before he would have parted with), to his friend, and procured him his liberty.

But it would be highly derogatory from the GREAT character of Wild, should the reader imagine he lent such a sum to a friend without the least view of serving himself. As, therefore, the reader may easily **account for** it in a manner more advantageous to our hero's reputation, by concluding that he had some interested view in the Count's enlargement, we hope he will judge with charity, especially as the sequel makes it not only reasonable but necessary to suppose he had some such view.

A long intimacy and friendship subsisted between the Count and Mr Wild, who, being by the advice of the Count dressed in good **cloths**, was by him introduced into the best company. They constantly frequented the assemblies, auctions¹⁹, gaming-tables, and play-houses; at which last they saw two acts every night, and then retired without paying.

18 fee. Compenso.

19 auctions. Aste pubbliche.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the text and match the highlighted words in the text with their Italian translation.

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|----|------------------------|
| 1 | vicenda | 6 | abbassarsi a |
| 2 | stoffe | 7 | pegno |
| 3 | inespugnabile | 8 | fare richiesta |
| 4 | rendersi conto di | 9 | reclamo |
| 5 | evitare di | 10 | allo stesso modo |

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ the first three paragraphs of the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 Who are the protagonists of the text?
- 2 What did the Count find missing? Who had it?
- 3 What did the two characters share?
- 4 What did the two gentlemen generally speak about?
- 5 Who complained about the misfortune of his captivity?
- 6 What did the Count reveal to Wild?
- 7 How could the Count escape according to Wild?
- 8 What did the two start doing?
- 9 What could not Wild help doing?

3 READ the rest of the text and make notes on what the narrator tells us about

- 1 the maid's honesty;
- 2 what Wild decided to do;
- 3 Wild's charity;
- 4 what existed between the Count and Wild;
- 5 what they used to do together.



➤ **COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT**

4 CONSIDER the way this episode is told and state

- 1 what the dominant narrative mode is;
- 2 whether the narrator is internal or external to the story;
- 3 who the narrator is addressing;
- 4 who the pronouns 'I' and 'we' stand for.

5 FOCUS on the two characters.

- 1 They are presented mainly through
 - A description and physical appearance.
 - B actions, thoughts and feelings.
- 2 Which words and phrases point out Wild's real nature?
- 3 Why is he said to be a 'GREAT character'?
- 4 What is the traditional connotation of the word 'great'? What meaning does it acquire in this text?
- 5 What is the Count a symbol of?
- 6 What does the narrator establish between Wild and the Count?

6 STATE the dominant quality of the language used in this passage. Choose from the list, then answer the question below.

- A Argumentative.
- B Ironical.
- C Subjective.

What is the aim of this language?

7 IDENTIFY the theme of the text.

8 REFER to the presentation of Mr Wild and try to explain

- 1 why Fielding preferred a third-person, omniscient and obtrusive narrator;
- 2 what the aim of the author was.

➤ **COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE AGE**

9 COMPARE Fielding's attitude to his public with that of Defoe (→ 3.10), Swift (→ 3.11) and Richardson (→ Text Bank 21).