

NAXOS
AudioBooks

**CLASSIC
FICTION**

Charlotte Brontë
Villette

Read by **Mandy Weston**



NA690312D

1	Chapter One – Breton	3:44
2	That same evening at nine o'clock...	5:47
3	Chapter Two – Paulina	6:28
4	Chapter Three – The Playmates	6:09
5	She had scarce been at Breton two months...	4:01
6	Chapter Four – Miss Marchmont	3:54
7	'Raise me. I feel young tonight...'	4:50
8	Chapter Five – Turning a New Leaf	2:43
9	Chapter Six – London	3:37
10	Whether this particular young lady...	5:10
11	Chapter Seven – Villette	5:33
12	On I went, hurrying fast...	5:50
13	Chapter Eight – Madame Beck	5:32
14	I was one day sitting upstairs...	6:48
15	Chapter Nine – Isidore	6:49
16	Chapter Ten – Dr John	6:37
17	Chapter Eleven – The Portress's Cabinet	6:47
18	Chapter Twelve – The Casket	5:39
19	All at once, quick rang the bell...	4:05
20	Chapter Thirteen – A Sneeze Out of Season	5:03

21	I had learnt something from the above scene.	3:37
22	Chapter Fourteen – The Fête	3:06
23	The great day arrived...	6:09
24	In an instant we were out of doors...	4:42
25	No sooner was the play over...	4:35
26	I believe I could have picked out...	3:29
27	Somehow I could not avoid returning...	3:23
28	Chapter Fifteen – The Long Vacation	5:46
29	The cretin being gone...	6:38
30	Chapter Sixteen – Auld Lang Syne	3:57
31	Reader, I felt alarmed...	4:28
32	'Sit down, sit down,' said my conductress.	4:28
33	Chapter Seventeen – La Terrasse	7:05
34	Chapter Eighteen – We Quarrel	6:09
35	Chapter Nineteen – Cleopatra	3:12
36	Suddenly, a light tap visited my shoulder.	3:54
37	Chapter Twenty – The Concert	3:27
38	We alighted under a portico...	5:02
39	On the concert I need not dwell...	3:20
40	The concert over, the Lottery...	5:18

41	Chapter Twenty-one – Reaction	6:24
42	After breakfast my custom was to withdraw...	3:55
43	I stole from the room...	3:53
44	Chapter Twenty-two – The Letter	3:46
45	A warm hand, taking my cold fingers...	3:42
46	Chapter Twenty-three – Vashti	4:58
47	Towards midnight, when the deepening tragedy...	6:44
48	Chapter Twenty-four – M. De Bassompierre	5:15
49	The keen, still cold of the morning...	4:37
50	Chapter Twenty-five – The Little Countess	3:17
51	Next day, when we were all assembled...	4:27
52	But she had other moods besides...	4:48
53	Chapter Twenty-six – A Burial	3:36
54	At seven o'clock the moon rose.	3:24
55	Paulina Mary sought my frequent presence...	4:42
56	Our German mistress, Fräulein Anna Braun...	3:34
57	Chapter Twenty-seven – The Hôtel Crécy	5:03
58	At dinner that day...	5:01
59	Chapter Twenty-eight – The Watchguard	3:46
60	After all this amiability...	5:39

61	Chapter Twenty-nine – Monsieur’s Fête	3:52
62	At last there issued forth a voice...	4:11
63	Yet with a strange evanescent anger...	6:29
64	Chapter Thirty – M. Paul	3:28
65	‘Women of intellect’ was his next theme.	3:54
66	Chapter Thirty-one – The Dryad	4:21
67	‘Goodnight’ left my lips in sound...	5:56
68	Chapter Thirty-two – The First Letter	6:49
69	Chapter Thirty-three – M. Paul Keeps His Promise	3:53
70	The meal over, the party were free...	4:30
71	Chapter Thirty-four – Malevola	5:48
72	Leaving Madame Walraven’s inhospitable salon...	6:26
73	Perhaps the musing fit...	4:14
74	Chapter Thirty-five – Fraternity	5:42
75	After school that day...	5:13
76	Chapter Thirty-six – The Apple of Discord	6:19
77	You have not yet read the brochure...	7:07
78	Chapter Thirty-seven – Sunshine	5:04
79	The room was now darkening...	4:34
80	Chapter Thirty-eight – Cloud	3:50

81	The last day broke.	4:16
82	All that evening I waited...	4:55
83	Quiet Rue Fossette!	3:10
84	The swaying tide swept this way...	5:15
85	Chapter Thirty-nine – Old and New Acquaintances	4:53
86	We have looked at the city belle...	5:44
87	Chapter Forty – The Happy Pair	5:46
88	Chapter Forty-one – Faubourg Clothilde	5:56
89	Chapter Forty-two – Finis	3:37

Total time: 7:15:19

Cover picture: Lost in Thought, 1864 (oil on canvas), Marcus Stone
Courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library

Charlotte Brontë

Villette

Villette was the third of Charlotte Brontë's novels to be published in her lifetime. In the following year, 1854, she finally accepted an offer of marriage from Arthur Nicholls and married in June. But owing to a combination of tuberculosis, complications arising from pregnancy and maybe even typhus, she died in March 1855, just short of her thirty-ninth birthday.

She was the last of the six children born to Irish-born Reverend Patrick Brontë and his Cornish wife Maria. Within a few years of moving into Haworth Parsonage in Yorkshire, his wife and his two eldest daughters Maria and Elizabeth had died, the former of cancer (in 1821), the latter two of the scourge of the age – pulmonary tuberculosis (in 1825).

Somewhat later, within a devastatingly short period (1848–9), the second youngest child Emily and the very youngest Anne both succumbed to the same disease,

their elder brother, the fourth-born child Branwell, having already just died of chronic bronchitis and alcoholism.

It may scarcely be wondered at that Charlotte, who looked helplessly on as all her siblings perished, should have struggled with depression. The portrait of her by George Richmond, though somewhat idealized, shows a woman of sensitivity, fierce intelligence, considerable courage and determination, as the evidence of her letters testifies. Just as Emily, to some, appeared at times self-centred and unfriendly, so Charlotte sometimes came across as harsh, unbending and not always very forgiving, but some of this must have had something to do with the fact that the sisters were struggling to be artists in a society in which serious artistic endeavour was held to be the province of men.

The intellectual development of the Brontë daughters was considered as

important as that of the only boy, if largely because their future was all too likely to depend on an ability to teach, either in a school or as a governess, until or unless some eligible clergyman, clergyman's son or equivalent (for want of someone of higher social position and income) could be prevailed upon to relieve these unfortunate creatures of the necessity of earning a living in a society where women had hardly any opportunity of gaining status and retaining respectability other than through marriage.

Branwell and his sisters rapidly demonstrated their imaginative gifts and their childhood obsession with invented worlds is well known. That they should all have harboured artistic aspirations in early maturity and beyond is unsurprising in view of the intensity of their involvement in the fictional lands of Gondal and Angria.

In adult life the three daughters achieved publication and only Branwell has to be declared a failure (although he did have poems published individually). His ambitions came to nothing and the despair that arose from his difficulties

reduced him to a life of dissipation, opium addiction, and drunkenness.

By the time Charlotte came to begin work on her last novel, she had lost all the childhood companions with whom she had grown up, and who had stimulated each other's imaginations and aspirations. Mourning their deaths, wondering how soon it would be before she too became consumptive, and miserably lonely for all that she had other friends and correspondents among the literary world of the day, she began to write three chapters of what was eventually to grow into *Villette*, a novel that draws on her experiences as an English teacher in Belgium ten years before.

Charlotte and Emily had gone abroad originally to study, to gain further qualifications and to widen their horizons – although Emily, cripplingly shy and dedicated to her vocation as a writer, chafed against the restrictions of enforced study and teaching duties, and when she and her sister had to come home after their aunt died, she decided not to accompany Charlotte back to Belgium.

Under the tutelage of Monsieur Heger

at his *pensionnat* (girls' boarding school) in Brussels, Charlotte developed both as a writer and as a woman. She admired her (already married) mentor and eventually came to love him but there was no happy ending for her there and she finally decided she had to leave.

In Charlotte's autobiographically-based novel, her heroine Lucy Snowe, a lonely young orphan of very limited means, leaves England to go and teach abroad, though only on the boat does she learn of where she might find employment, namely, in the town of Villette, the fictitious 'great capital of the great kingdom of Labassecour'.

Arriving on the other side of the Channel, she is directed by a kindly English traveller to an inn where she might stay the night but, getting lost, finds herself by good chance at the very school she had been told of on the crossing. It is a *pensionnat* run by a Madame Beck, who takes Lucy on as a teacher purely on the word of M. Paul Emanuel, a schoolmaster of a rather domineering and fiery-tempered make-up and by some years Lucy's senior, who is credited by Mme

Beck with the capacity to read a person's character from her physiognomy.

Lucy wins the respect of her pupils but during the long vacation is left to fend for herself with only a servant and just one unfortunate pupil (who would nowadays be described as having 'special needs'). She breaks down, seeks help from a church priest, who is anxious to help by bringing her into the Catholic faith, and is eventually rescued by the traveller who had directed her to the inn.

Lucy falls in love with this good Samaritan, Dr John, but he is captivated first by the coquettish Ginevra Fanshawe and then by Paulina Home. These two women are already known to Lucy and both display contrasting forms of femininity that Lucy recognizes are attractive to men. Ginevra is a flirt, who abuses her power over men by taking pleasure in breaking their hearts. Paulina is the Victorian ideal: selfless, submissive, and sweet as a well-behaved child. Lucy is too acutely aware of what it is to suffer heartache to share any fellow feeling with the former, and too much her own woman to dissolve herself in passive conformity like the

latter. She despairs of ever finding a male companion with whom she can truly be herself and not be forced to play the role of the conventional woman of the times.

It has been pointed out that Lucy's surname reflects her apparent coldness. Lucy is far from cold-hearted but her deeper feelings are concealed under a weight of sorrow, despair and the fear that she is unlovable. The connotations of Paulina's surname are even more obvious. These are the three principal female figures of the novel (apart from Mme Beck) but there is another more mysterious female presence in the book: that of the spirit of a nun said to haunt the *pensionnat* (which had once been a convent). Lucy's encounters with this wraith help to lift the novel out of the mundane world of everyday affairs, darkening the tale and creating, for a time, a sense of grim foreboding.

Charlotte struggled to finish the second volume of *Villette*, but when her publisher reported that he was pleased with the work so far, she completed the third with almost effortless ease. Her anxieties had partly to do with the fact

that certain characters in the book were to an extent based on people she knew well. She asked that no author's name be attached to the title, but the publisher of *Jane Eyre* was hardly going to listen to such a request.

Her growing fame was a mixed blessing. Grateful though she was for the attention her work received, she found the focus on herself at times distressing and this informs the novel.

When *Villette* came before the public, there was a mixed reception. George Eliot declared that there was 'something almost preternatural in its power', but Charlotte's friend Harriet Martineau, herself a novelist, offered objections to the main character's obsession with love, as if to affirm what many men thought the case – namely, that women were governed by their emotions and knew no other serious interests. Charlotte was so hurt by Harriet's wilful misunderstanding of her purposes that their friendship was permanently ruptured.

Later critics, including Virginia Woolf, have concurred that in some ways *Villette* is a more successful and more interesting

work than the popular *Jane Eyre*. One must surely admire, for instance, the vivid creation of characters like Paulina and Ginevra.

Both *Jane Eyre* and her second novel *Shirley* were printed under the pseudonym of Currer Bell, fictitious brother to Ellis (Emily) and Acton (Anne). Such subterfuges were deemed necessary in order to secure a serious readership. Once it was known who Currer Bell really was, there was no avoiding the danger of being dismissed as a 'mere' woman writer.

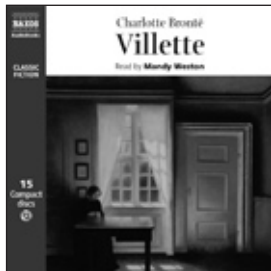
Charlotte was accused of coarseness in her writing by some Victorian critics and one wonders what exactly is meant by it. Was it at all to do with the notion that, not being a man, she inevitably lacked that subtlety and finesse that only a properly educated *male* writer could be master of?

Notes by Maurice West



Originally from Dorset, Mandy trained at the Guildford School of Acting. In 1995 she co-founded the Ansuz Theatre Company in London, producing and performing in several productions, including the critically well-received *My Sister in this House*. She has also adapted and produced Emile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* for theatre, playing the title role. She played Alice in Patrick Marber's award-winning play, *Closer*, at the RNT and London's West End. As well as appearing in TV and film, she has voiced many projects including the Queen Mother in *Her Reign in Colour* for ITV.

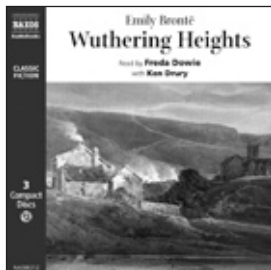
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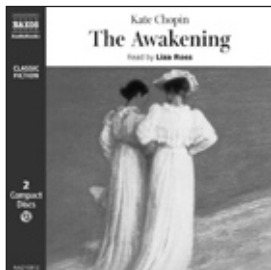
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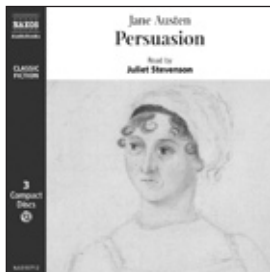
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Charlotte Brontë

Villette

Read by **Mandy Weston**

Written by the author of the ever-popular *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* is widely admired as Charlotte Brontë's finest work. The story follows the fortunes of a young teacher at a girls' school in the fictional town of Villette. Lucy Snowe – intelligent and independent – flees unhappiness in England only to find yet more abroad. Her search for love with a man with whom she might live on equal terms hangs in the balance in a story that dwells on powerful emotions without ever lapsing into sentimentality.



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Abridged by Maurice West
A Recordability Production.
Produced by John Tyeman. Edited by Malcolm Blackmoor

Total time
7:15:19