

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Charlotte Brontë
Villette

THE
COMPLETE
CLASSICS

UNABRIDGED

Read by **Mandy Weston**

CLASSIC
FICTION



1	Chapter 1 Bretton	6:26
2	That same evening at nine o'clock...	5:26
3	On going to bed an hour afterwards...	4:43
4	Chapter 2 Paulina	5:16
5	Mr. Home was a stern-featured...	5:09
6	Graham was at that time...	5:18
7	Chapter 3 The Playmates	4:40
8	Graham – not failing in his way...	4:37
9	It happened that Graham was not...	4:47
10	It was sufficiently comical...	4:58
11	Graham forgot his impatience...	5:22
12	With these words she gathered Graham...	4:57
13	Her lip trembled...	4:38
14	When I thought she could listen to me...	3:57
15	Chapter 4 Miss Marchmont	7:02
16	Two hot, close rooms thus became my world...	4:54
17	'I love Memory to-night,' she said.	5:39
18	'What is the matter?' I demanded.	4:39
19	Chapter 5 Turning a New Leaf	5:42
20	I stored up this piece of casual information.	5:28
21	Chapter 6 London	4:53
22	My state of mind, and all accompanying...	6:37

23	Towards morning her discourse ran...	5:22
24	She stared, then carelessly ran on...	5:09
25	I was not sick till long after...	5:09
26	Chapter 7 Vilette	5:35
27	I had hoped we might reach Vilette...	5:00
28	He tore a leaf from his pocket-book...	4:53
29	A quarter of an hour passed...	6:21
30	Chapter 8 Madame Beck	5:50
31	Her duty done – I felt that...	4:52
32	When attired, Madame Beck...	5:29
33	As Madame Beck ruled...	3:37
34	Behind the house was a large garden...	6:25
35	'Dites donc,' said Madame sternly.	4:48
36	It seems that three titled belles...	4:29
37	Chapter 9 Isidore	5:20
38	By degrees, as I acquired fluency...	6:00
39	Finding that she carried the thing...	5:07
40	I viewed her from top to toe.	5:12
41	'That will do, Miss Fanshawe.'	4:45
42	Chapter 10 Dr. John	5:04
43	It appeared she did not find...	5:51
44	No sooner did Fifine emerge...	5:53

45	Chapter 11 The Portress's Cabinet	5:32
46	Had she, indeed, floating visions...	4:43
47	But while I pondered...	5:25
48	Chapter 12 The Casket	5:25
49	From the first I was tempted...	5:07
50	To-night, I was not so mutinous...	6:12
51	'I wish I did know whom...'	3:55
52	He stood looking down...	4:07
53	Chapter 13 A Sneeze Out of Season	4:54
54	When I vanished...	5:02
55	On revisiting my drawers...	5:18
56	'Le marmot n'a rien, n'est-ce pas?'	4:40
57	He instantly tore the billet...	4:36
58	Chapter 14 The Fête	5:18
59	About this time...	5:32
60	The day preceding Madame's fête...	5:37
61	Being dressed at least a couple...	5:18
62	A thousand objections rushed...	5:01
63	In this exercise the afternoon passed...	5:27
64	In an instant we were out of doors...	5:40
65	St. Pierre sneered again...	5:28
66	No sooner was the play over...	5:17

67	Madame knew something of the world;	5:20
68	'I suppose you are nobody's daughter...'	5:44
69	The answer Dr. John would have given...	5:04
70	'I may, perhaps, look after her a little;'	3:48
71	'I cut short these confidences somewhat...'	3:12
72	Chapter 15 The Long Vacation	5:06
73	'I hesitate,' said he,	4:01
74	My heart almost died within me;	4:56
75	The cretin being gone...	6:02
76	One evening – and I was not delirious...	4:54
77	Of course, I had not expected he would be...	6:03
78	Chapter 16 Auld Lang Syne	5:20
79	Where was I?	5:18
80	Reader; I felt alarmed!	5:40
81	'Do you like it, Polly?' I asked.	5:30
82	'Do let me go down-stairs, madam.'	6:26
83	To say anything on the subject...	4:24
84	For my part, I just ventured to inquire...	4:00
85	Chapter 17 La Terrasse	5:51
86	She left me, and I lay in bed...	5:34
87	'What did Madame Beck mean...'	5:04
88	'Lucy, you ought to travel for about...'	5:37

89	Chapter 18 We Quarrel	5:46
90	To one who had named him 'slave,'	5:13
91	'Ginevra!' He thought her so fair...	5:34
92	Chapter 19 The Cleopatra	5:14
93	His mother possessed a good development...	5:10
94	It seemed to me that an original and good...	5:14
95	M. Paul's hair was shorn close as raven down.	5:32
96	'How did you get on with Marie Broc?'	6:43
97	Chapter 20 The Concert	4:56
98	By this time we had got into...	5:13
99	Observing that Dr. John's attention...	5:49
100	I knew another of these seraphs...	5:11
101	'Ginevra saw you, I think?'	5:33
102	The concert over, the Lottery...	4:20
103	We did not easily regain our seats...	5:28
104	And yet he had neither forgiven...	3:40
105	'I am so: just as Rhadamanthus...'	3:33
106	Chapter 21 Reaction	5:14
107	'If,' muttered she, 'if he should write'	5:15
108	Ere long the bell rang its <i>réveillée</i> ...	5:50
109	I had time to bathe my eyes...	5:55
110	'Go to your practising,' said I	5:01

111	A fortnight passed;	5:56
112	When I re-entered the schoolroom...	6:40
113	Chapter 22 The Letter	5:21
114	Say what you will, reader...	5:11
115	He asked me, smiling,	6:20
116	'They will not come here,' I answered;	5:56
117	Chapter 23 Vashti	6:02
118	'Mademoiselle Lucy!' cried Rosine...	4:59
119	The theatre was full...	5:17
120	Vashti was not good, I was told;	5:23
121	And Dr. John? Reader, I see him yet...	5:14
122	'Where is Harriet? I wish Harriet...'	5:37
123	Chapter 24 M. De Bassompierre	5:13
124	I suppose animals kept in cages...	5:24
125	Soured and listless, Miss Fanshawe was...	4:52
126	I opened the billet: by this time...	5:53
127	The keen, still cold of the morning...	5:40
128	'Ah! And you remember the old time...'	5:48
129	Chapter 25 The Little Countess	5:44
130	'Your ladyship wishes for the tankard?'	3:39
131	Next day, when we were all assembled...	5:05
132	His fair little daughter did not take...	5:27

133	Mrs. Bretton asked Mr. Home...	5:24
134	Paulina Mary cast once or twice...	5:30
135	Chapter 26 A Burial	5:20
136	Welcome I endeavoured to make it.	5:46
137	Well, I cleared away the ivy...	6:44
138	As to Mary de Bassompierre...	5:32
139	The light in which M. de Bassompierre...	5:33
140	The young Countess was a little proud...	6:25
141	Chapter 27 The Hotel Crécy	5:27
142	'Do – do tell me who you are?'	5:32
143	I do not think his audience...	3:50
144	Another listener and observer there was...	6:16
145	He had assumed a bantering air...	5:10
146	'I quite well recall it.'	5:10
147	Having sought my shawl...	6:34
148	Chapter 28 The Watchguard	5:16
149	Not being quite tall enough...	5:20
150	Still gently railing at me...	5:30
150	'Vous ne voulez pas...'	6:38
152	I would have looked up at him...	5:13
153	Chapter 29 Monsieur's Fête	5:22
154	Breakfast being over and mass attended...	5:35

155	'Monsieur,' said Mademoiselle St. Pierre.	5:20
156	The class was struck of a heap.	5:19
157	But now at last I had him:	5:05
158	'You will be like me, Monsieur.'	4:59
159	Chapter 30 M. Paul	5:13
160	When the pang and peril...	5:22
161	Once, upon his preferring...	5:33
162	'Women of intellect' was his next theme:	4:03
163	I knew what the result of such...	4:22
164	Chapter 31 The Dryad	6:00
165	'Courage, Lucy Snowe!'	5:27
166	This idea of 'keeping down'...	5:19
167	'It pleased me when you took them...'	4:11
168	'Why do you shrink and speak so faintly?'	4:18
169	Chapter 32 The First Letter	5:18
170	'Papa had letters from him once...'	5:08
171	'It is true I little respect women...'	5:28
172	'Life,' she went on...	5:34
173	Chapter 33 M. Paul Keeps His Promise	5:48
174	And now we were in the country...	5:20
175	Mindful always of his religion...	3:30
176	When hot noon arrived...	4:18

177	Chapter 34 Malevola	5:31
178	The expression of her face...	5:13
179	Down washed the rain...	5:38
180	The hero of his tale...	5:57
181	'I, daughter, am Père Silas.'	5:57
182	Chapter 35 Fraternity	5:40
183	Having partially collected...	5:32
184	They would not yet let me go...	5:51
185	'I am judged,' said he.	6:38
186	'True; I remember now.'	6:08
187	Chapter 36 The Apple of Discord	4:55
188	The orange-trees, and several plants...	5:25
189	I opened it. What was it?	5:18
190	Through the glass door...	5:12
191	(After a pause:) 'Allons donc!'	5:02
192	I found that Père Silas...	4:52
193	It will not be. God is not with Rome...	5:27
194	Chapter 37 Sunshine	5:07
195	'Lucy, what do you mean?' said she	5:26
196	I made no answer.	4:57
197	'Ah, sir! did you observe her.	5:17
198	She shuddered.	5:12

199	He turned, and waited till I said 'Amen!'	5:14
200	Not long after, perhaps a fortnight...	4:46
201	Chapter 38 Cloud	5:03
202	That girl would have had a right to hate me...	4:21
203	What quiet lessons I had	5:43
204	'Proceed,' said Madame;	5:39
205	All that evening I waited...	5:03
206	This was the sole flash-eliciting...	4:58
207	The drug wrought.	5:09
208	Quiet Rue Fossette!	5:18
209	While looking up at the image...	5:34
210	Strange to say, this man knew me...	6:58
211	Three fine tall trees growing close...	5:28
212	Chapter 39 Old and New Acquaintance	5:09
213	'Justine Marie!' What was this?	5:11
214	We have looked at the city belle...	5:01
215	Still, hint and raillery flew thick...	5:35
216	These oil-twinkling streets are very still...	5:42
217	Chapter 40 The Happy Pair	5:21
218	'Do you begin to comprehend...'	4:50
219	In winding up Mistress Fanshawe's memoirs...	4:48
220	Chapter 41 Faubourg Clotilde	5:25

221	'Paul, Paul!' said a woman's hurried voice...	5:09
222	The route he took was by the boulevards...	5:08
223	Opening an inner door...	5:19
224	'The trouble!' I cried...	4:23
225	This was true enough:	4:49
226	I spoke. All escaped from my lips.	4:07
227	Chapter 42 Finis	5:32
228	And now the three years are past...	3:09

Total time: 20:04:14

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, but owing to a combination of tuberculosis, complications arising from pregnancy and maybe even typhus, she died, just short of her thirty-ninth birthday.

She was the third 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 (1821), the latter two of the scourge of the age, pulmonary tuberculosis (1825).

Somewhat later, within a devastatingly short period (1848–9), Emily, the second youngest child, and Anne, the very youngest, 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 coming to nothing and his despair arising from his difficulties reducing him to a life of dissolution, 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 in spite of having 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, crippingly 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 who is Lucy's senior by some years, and 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 unloveable. 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 and 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 (particularly in the climactic park scene in chapter 38). 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 and such moments as the description of Lucy's arrival in Labassecour and her nightmarish wanderings in the city of Villette in the hours of darkness.

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 received *My Sister in this House*. She has also adapted and produced Emile Zola's *Therese 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, and recently a recording of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*.

Cover picture: A woman sewing in an interior by Hammershoi, Vilhelm (1864–1916)
courtesy The Bridgeman Art Library

Charlotte Brontë

Villette

Read by **Mandy Weston**

Now considered by many to be Charlotte Brontë's best novel, though unlikely to eclipse *Jane Eyre* in fame and popularity, *Villette* is largely concerned with the experiences of Lucy Snowe in a girls' boarding school in a fictionalised Belgium. Lucy flees unhappiness in England only to find more abroad. Her love for Dr John unrequited, she slowly realises that a deeper attachment is growing between her and her irascible domineering mentor and colleague, M. Paul Emanuel. The promise of fulfilment and the realisation of love with a man with whom she might live on something like equal terms hangs in the balance in a story that dwells on powerful emotions without ever lapsing into sentimentality.

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