

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Anne Brontë
Agnes Grey

**THE
COMPLETE
CLASSICS**

UNABRIDGED

Read by **Rachel Bavidge**

**CLASSIC
FICTION**



NA612812D

1	Chapter 1: The Parsonage	5:06
2	I thought she must have been very happy...	5:02
3	Mary did not lament, but she brooded...	5:11
4	'Mary, mamma says I'm to help you...'	5:47
5	I was silenced for that day...	3:41
6	But some weeks more were yet to be devoted...	5:28
7	Chapter 2: First Lessons in The Art of Instruction	5:50
8	'You will find them not very far advanced...'	5:13
9	This was very shocking; but I hoped...	4:22
10	'But what would your mamma say?'	3:09
11	Chapter 3: A Few More Lessons	5:12
12	The beef was set before him...	4:41
13	Master Tom, not content with refusing...	4:29
14	The task of instruction...	5:01
15	With me, at her age...	5:28
16	When little Fanny came into the schoolroom...	4:56
17	Chapter 4: The Grandmamma	5:09
18	What must I do?	5:40
19	I confess I was somewhat troubled...	5:06
20	I remember one afternoon in spring...	3:32

21	After this, Mr. Bloomfield was continually looking...	3:10
22	Chapter 5: The Uncle	3:09
23	Mr. Robson likewise encouraged...	3:19
24	So saying – urged by a sense of duty...	4:14
25	But Mr. Robson and old Mrs. Bloomfield...	5:41
26	Chapter 6: The Parsonage Again	4:54
27	'I know I was sulky sometimes...'	3:37
28	The advertisement was quickly written...	4:59
29	Chapter 7: Horton Lodge	3:04
30	Miss Matilda, a strapping hoyden...	3:20
31	It was with a strange feeling of desolation...	4:23
32	Mrs. Murray was a handsome, dashing lady...	4:26
33	Miss Murray, otherwise Rosalie...	5:18
34	At sixteen, Miss Murray was something of a romp...	3:50
35	As a moral agent, Matilda was reckless...	5:01
36	A few more observations about Horton Lodge...	4:20
37	Often they would do their lessons in the open air...	4:11
38	Chapter 8: The Coming Out	6:00
39	Chapter 9: The Ball	4:35
40	'I have no doubt you looked very charming...'	5:55

41	Chapter 10: The Church	4:25
42	I did hear him preach, and was decidedly pleased...	4:30
43	'Well, Miss Grey, what do you think of him now?'	3:21
44	Chapter 11: The Cottagers	3:55
45	One bright day in the last week of February...	3:55
46	Accordingly, I finished the chapter...	4:25
47	'But then, you know, Miss Grey...'	5:36
48	'But next day, afore I'd gotten fettled up...'	4:30
49	'"It may seem a hard matter," says he...'	4:31
50	'Well, I'm very glad to see you so happy...'	3:03
51	In returning to the Lodge I felt very happy...	4:23
52	In stature he was a little, a very little...	1:39
53	Chapter 12: The Shower	5:39
54	'Miss Grey,' said he, half-jestingly....	3:34
55	Chapter 13: The Primroses	5:03
56	As my eyes wandered over the steep banks...	3:51
57	'It is so much that I think I could not live...'	5:12
58	'Now, come, Miss Murray, don't be foolish,' said I...	3:07
59	Chapter 14: The Rector	5:01
60	According to her prognostications...	4:41

61	'Oh, mamma's so tiresome!'	4:48
62	Three days passed away...	4:16
63	'Oh, SUCH news!'	5:19
64	""Pardon me, Miss Murray," said he...'	4:02
65	'Oh, THAT'S it, is it? I was wondering...'	3:36
66	Chapter 15: The Walk	4:07
67	At length I was called upon...	5:15
68	'But why do you say the only friends...?'	3:12
69	After a short pause in the conversation...	3:26
70	Chapter 16: The Substitution	4:15
71	'I would have sent the footman back for you...'	4:09
72	Chapter 17: Confessions	4:44
73	Now, therefore, let us return to Miss Murray.	4:44
74	'Why don't you tell him, at once...?'	5:23
75	All chance meetings on week-days...	5:07
76	When we are harassed by sorrows or anxieties...	5:06
77	Chapter 18: Mirth and Mourning	4:50
78	I walked home with Miss Matilda...	6:03
79	I was about to give the lady some idea...	5:44
80	'I was told,' said he...	5:00

81	Chapter 19: The Letter	3:54
82	We were discussing these affairs...	3:31
83	Chapter 20: The Farewell	5:23
84	He paused a minute, as if in thought.	3:45
85	'Yes, Edward Weston, I could indeed be happy...'	4:33
86	Chapter 21: The School	5:46
87	I cannot say that I implicitly obeyed...	4:51
88	'We have been several days here already,' wrote she.	3:35
89	Chapter 22: The Visit	5:22
90	The drawing-room was certainly an imposing...	4:55
91	Again she brightened up...	3:56
92	As I was not rich enough to possess a watch...	3:56
93	Chapter 23: The Park	4:27
94	Of course, I pitied her exceedingly...	4:43
95	Chapter 24: The Sands	5:24
96	Presently, I heard a snuffling sound behind me...	4:40
97	He looked at me as he concluded...	3:46
98	Chapter 25: Conclusion	4:49
99	Ceremony was quickly dropped between us...	3:29
100	When we had got about half-way up the hill...	5:04

Total time: 7:34:11

Anne Brontë

(1820–1849)

Agnes Grey

Certain literary figures are archetypes of the literature they created. John Keats is one – young, idealistic, passionate and fated to die early, he pursued a life which furnished the myths of Romantic poetry as a whole. Wordsworth has greater claim to be the father of the Romantics, but the curmudgeonly reactionary that he became later in life doesn't fit the template of the public imagination. The fact that he lived so long doesn't really tally with what we imagine either: we want our artistic youths to be doomed as much as impassioned, their interior landscapes wild. For a particular kind of Gothic romance, there is one archetype (or perhaps three), in the form of the Brontës. Sisters Emily, Charlotte and Anne created some of the most evocative and powerful novels of their time, including *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant*

of Wildfell Hall and *Agnes Grey*. These works are fuelled by an angry response to oppressive social regulations, by vivid emotional engagement and by intense landscapes (interior as well as exterior). They have been read with a similarly ardent zeal ever since their publication, they are the foundation-blocks of several genres of fiction – and they are epitomised in the lives of their authors.

It might seem unjust to discuss an entire family rather than consider solely the life of *Agnes Grey's* author, but the closeness that Anne Brontë felt with her siblings gives the grouping rather more resonance than otherwise, at least in part. The Brontë family was based in Thornton, Yorkshire, but moved a few miles north-west to Haworth in 1820 when the father became the rector there. Patrick Brontë and his wife Maria had six children

between 1814 and 1820, but Maria died in 1821, and their two oldest daughters followed within six weeks of each other in 1825, both from the tuberculosis that would later kill the remaining children: Charlotte, born in 1816, died in 1855; brother Branwell (1817–1848), Emily (1818–1848) and Anne (1820 –1849). The only member of the family to have survived to anything like old age was the father, who outlived all his children and died in 1861, thanks in part, perhaps, to a huge cravat he wore to stave off bronchial infection. Neither he nor his wife thought to impose it on their children, however. It is possible that the wretched conditions at the clerical boarding school to which their older girls were sent may have contributed to the two deaths.

Bound by the loss of those so close to them, and living in a relatively isolated spot bordering moorland both glorious and bleak, the four remaining children became more than brother and sisters: they were best friends, the mirror of each of their imaginations. And their imaginations were powerful. They read as much as they could find at home

and in the district's libraries, constructed comprehensive fantasy worlds, and then wrote about these adventures themselves in verse or in notebooks; all the girls were almost compulsive writers. They also tried to find a way to earn some money for the household, either as teachers and tutors or as governesses. At the time, working in education was considered almost the only acceptable form of employment for respectable women, but the social status was little above that of a servant, and the treatment of the sisters at the hands of the complacently snobbish formed the inspiration for much of the satire (and real pain, too) that lies at the heart of *Agnes Grey*.

Anne had become a governess to the Ingham family in 1839, but the children were wildly misbehaved and unruly. Anne was given no assistance or support from the family, and had no right to discipline the children, who – unsurprisingly – took full advantage of their privileged position to undermine her; meanwhile the parents were convinced that the problem lay with the governess. After a few months she was dismissed, but the experience did not

go to waste. She became governess to the Robinsons, and a highlight of her time with them was the annual trip to Scarborough, a place Anne so loved that she wanted to build a school there, with her sisters. (She also died and was buried there.) But after five years her situation at the Robinsons was disrupted when it was discovered that Branwell – who had been called in as a tutor to one of the sons – had been having an affair with the wife. This not only put Anne out of a job, it led to Branwell's shift into drug and alcohol dependence which almost certainly hastened his death.

But within three years of this, the sisters had published a joint collection of poetry (the success lay in securing publication; only two copies were actually sold) and went on to produce *Jane Eyre*, *Agnes Grey*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. They adopted asexual pseudonyms to avoid yet more of the prejudices of the time (Anne's was Acton Bell) and, more significantly, they (and Anne particularly) wrote with as much fearless conviction as impassioned longing.

Anne was to deal with mental and

physical cruelty in a way that shocked her readers in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; her justification for doing so in the preface to the second edition is a call for the truth to be told irrespective of social censure. In *Agnes Grey* her depiction of the old rake, the upstart children, the hideous parents and the appalling conditions of the governess is all sharp, deeply true – and subversive. It was not considered proper at the time to highlight the shortcomings of the upper orders, especially if you were not one of them; and it was quite definitely considered outside the realm of the acceptable to depict 'vice and vicious characters' in the accurate detail that she did. Despite the severe criticism, Anne believed that the value of the book lay in its truth, and in its ability both to touch and to teach the reader.

Telling a dark truth can be done in infinite ways, of course. Anne's work has suffered from the long, doom-laden, post-Romantic shadows of her sisters, but she had a much finer and more subtle style. While the family's tragedies and her own early death cannot help but affect an overall view of her work, she is not a

footnote to the Brontë legend, and should not be seen as such. Her style was more direct, clear, immediate and bright; lighter but surer; more charming. George Moore described *Agnes Grey* as ‘the most perfect prose narrative in English letters’, pointing out the ease and simplicity with which the reader is brought into the story and introduced to the narrator. He went on to say that if Anne had lived ten years longer she would rank alongside or even above Jane Austen. The reality of her life and art is more complex and interesting than the myths of her family.

Notes by Roy McMillan



Rachel Bavidge was born in North Shields in Tyneside and moved to Oxford in her early teens. She has narrated numerous audiobooks and has completed six months as a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company. Her theatre credits include Mrs Boyle in *Whose Life is it Anyway?* (West End) and Margaret in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Theatre Royal, Bath), both directed by Peter Hall. Her television credits include *The Bill*, *Casualty*, *Doctors*, *The IT Crowd*, *Inspector Lynley*, *Wire in the Blood* and *Bad Girls*. She has also read the part of Marion Halcombe in *The Woman in White* and featured on *The Great Poets: Barrett Browning and Rossetti* for Naxos AudioBooks.

Credits

Produced by Roy McMillan
Edited by Joshua Brooks
Mastered by Malcolm Blackmoor

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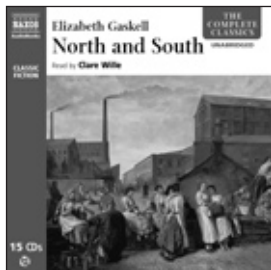
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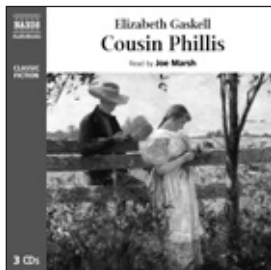
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Anne Brontë

Agnes Grey

Read by **Rachel Bavidge**

From its opening sentences *Agnes Grey* introduces a heroine who is honest, perceptive and charming. Unfortunately, the Bloomfields, who engage her as a governess, are rather less appealing, and the incarnation of the suppressed cruelties and hypocrisies of the Victorian age. When Agnes moves to a marginally less alarming family, one of her charges sets out to disrupt her only romantic hope.

Critical, satirical, direct, and honest, *Agnes Grey* is a fine reflection of its author.



Rachel Bavidge's theatre credits include Mrs Boyle in *Whose Life is it Anyway?* and Margaret in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Her television credits include *The IT Crowd*, *Wire in the Blood* and *Bad Girls*. She has featured on *The Great Poets: Barrett Browning and Rossetti* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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