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NAXOS
AudioBooks

COMPLETE
CLASSICS
UNABRIDGED

Venetia

Georgette Heyer

Read by **Phyllida Nash**



1	Chapter 1	7:06
2	She was nine years...	9:48
3	He had risen, and walked...	7:13
4	Of a naturally serious...	7:35
5	'I have been neglecting...'	6:15
6	Chapter 2	8:53
7	And without indulging...	7:39
8	After she had been calling...	9:00
9	Startled she turned her head...	7:39
10	She put out her hands...	4:56
11	Chapter 3	6:26
12	'Old?' Venetia exclaimed...	8:37
13	Venetia would have...	6:16
14	The removal of his boots...	7:21
15	Chapter 4	8:57
16	Roused by his sister's...	8:59
17	'I am astonished...'	8:30
18	With a tact...	5:43
19	Chapter 5	6:26
20	But Damerel had come...	8:47

21	She was fairly well...	6:26
22	'I think, if you should...'	8:04
23	Damerel had moved...	6:15
24	Edward's countenance...	6:50
25	Chapter 6	7:55
26	'Is he? Well, if he...'	8:55
27	She was deeply shocked...	7:27
28	Had they supposed...	7:39
29	Chapter 7	8:12
30	Sir John had had it...	9:01
31	It had taken Damerel...	6:55
32	'Is that your notion...'	5:49
33	'I wish I might see him!'	6:20
34	Chapter 8	9:46
35	As for standing...	8:49
36	As he watched the...	8:32
37	She looked down at him...	6:19
38	It was not very encouraging...	6:46
39	Chapter 9	9:18
40	Damerel rode slowly...	8:08

41	Damerel had been...	7:30
42	It was only on very...	7:41
43	Chapter 10	6:08
44	It was not until...	7:28
45	Venetia smiled mischievously...	8:37
46	'Well, my dear...'	7:49
47	In this she was mistaken...	6:27
48	Chapter 11	8:22
49	'Don't you know?'	7:01
50	When Venetia presently...	8:32
51	The prayer was not answered...	5:53
52	'Lady Denny told me...'	5:18
53	Chapter 12	9:53
54	He began to look more...	8:03
55	She led Charlotte into...	8:39
56	'Let us go into the library...'	8:05
57	Chapter 13	9:32
58	Under this bracing...	8:41
59	'Oh, yes, I am very...'	7:42
60	'It is just the problem...'	6:40

61	His countenance had...	6:17
62	Listen to me...	9:47
63	Chapter 14	8:26
64	Aubrey gave a short laugh...	6:19
65	Venetia's visit was one merely...	6:50
66	She did not stay...	8:48
67	She made a gesture of...	7:10
68	Chapter 15	8:28
69	She lifted her face...	7:46
70	But only three people...	8:33
71	Chapter 16	6:34
72	She could not have been...	7:57
73	Nothing could persuade...	6:50
74	As it was Mrs Hendred's...	5:21
75	Chapter 17	8:45
76	She had never possessed...	8:57
77	She had not meant...	7:19
78	'Who told you ma'am...'	8:13
79	Mrs Hendred, emerging from...	7:05
80	Chapter 18	5:35

81	He had more influence...	5:06
82	Her attention was almost...	6:21
83	Venetia replied to this...	8:22
84	She heaved a gusty sigh...	7:26
85	'They don't live here now...'	8:13
86	Chapter 19	8:25
87	Recalled from her sudden...	7:54
88	'I think perhaps...'	8:33
89	Venetia reassured him...	8:43
90	Arrived at the top of the street...	7:22
91	Hardly had his step...	7:55
92	Chapter 20	7:50
93	Whatever qualms or doubts...	7:13
94	She was so hungry...	7:41
95	When Imber set apples...	7:05
96	Her laughter bubbled over...	5:09
97	Chapter 21	8:41
98	'Dear Sir, how can you...'	8:41
99	Accepting this blighting...	9:23

Total time: 12:36:36

Georgette Heyer

(1902–1974)

Venetia

The spectre of the Napoleonic Wars loomed large over the first decades of the nineteenth century. Even after the Treaty of Paris was signed on 20 November 1815 and military hostilities were brought to a close, an army of occupation remained in France until the end of 1818. The events of *Venetia* take place in the autumn of that year, and the soldiers' continued presence in France is an essential part of the historical backcloth of the novel. Venetia's brother, Conway, long overdue to return home to Yorkshire, is described as being a member of Lord Hill's staff. Rowland Hill, 1st Baron Hill (1772–1842), later Viscount Hill, is mentioned several times in the novel – he was the Duke of Wellington's second-in-command, and he stayed in France until the eventual withdrawal of troops.

As is often the case with Georgette Heyer's work, references such as these are woven so deftly into the fabric of the book that they pass almost unnoticed. Heyer's

knowledge of the Regency period was extensive, but she wore her erudition lightly. For example, the Russian Tsar Alexander I's (1777–1825) visit to England, which took place in June of 1814, is mentioned only fleetingly by Venetia, and yet it marked a pivotal moment in European history. Not only the Tsar, but King Frederick William III of Prussia (1770–1840), the eminent Austrian statesman Prince Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859) and a number of other well-known political and military figures gathered in London to celebrate the abdication of Napoleon on 11 April.

Venetia was published in 1958, when Heyer was at the height of her popularity. It bears all the hallmarks of her best romances, being witty, charming and brimming with historical insight. In the character of Venetia herself, Heyer created one of her most memorable heroines. Determined, intelligent and kind, Venetia is an independent, likeable protagonist.

Although not scholarly like her precocious brother Aubrey, she is clearly well-read, and her verbal sparring with Lord Damerel is permeated with literary references. Shakespeare, in particular, is repeatedly quoted by both Venetia and Damerel, and their ability to communicate in this manner indicates the affinity and understanding between them.

Their very first interchange illustrates this point. Damerel's words 'But beauty's self she is', spoken just before he kisses her, hint at his intentions. The full poem – an anonymous seventeenth-century verse – is as follows:

*My Love in her attire doth show her wit,
It doth so well become her;
For every season she hath dressings fit,
For Winter, Spring, and Summer.
No beauty she doth miss
When all her robes are on;
But beauty's self she is
When all her robes are gone.*

Venetia's response is equally improper, although unintentionally so. She insults Damerel with Iago's words from Shakespeare's *Othello*, when he refers to

Cassio as 'a pestilent complete knave'. When Venetia remembers the context she is embarrassed, because Iago continues with 'and the woman hath found him already', by which he means that Desdemona has already committed adultery with Cassio. Damerel says that he does not know this quotation, but moments later he quotes from the same play ('My reputation, Iago, my reputation!'), indicating that he recognises it after all. He then makes a similar mistake in describing Venetia's lips by quoting from Thomas Campion's poem 'There Is a Garden in Her Face' – as she points out, the line 'They look like rosebuds filled with snow' is followed by the admonition 'Yet them nor peer nor prince can buy'. By the time they part, they have already fallen into the informal, bantering way of speaking to each other that persists throughout the novel.

Near the end of the book, when Venetia returns to the Priory to persuade Damerel to marry her, she again uses her knowledge of Shakespeare to charm him, paraphrasing Viola's depiction of unrequited love in *Twelfth Night*: 'I warn you, love, that if you cast me out I shall build me a willow cabin at your gates – and very likely die of an inflammation of the lungs, for November is

not the month for building willow cabins! Venetia's humour playfully undercuts the romantic passion of the original words ('Make me a willow cabin at your gate, / And call upon my soul within the house'). Damerel, too, finds himself inspired to poetry by Venetia, comparing her to the celebrated beauty Lady Venetia Digby (1600–1633), who was immortalised by Ben Jonson in his poem 'Eupheme', and described by John Aubrey as a 'beautiful, desirable creature'. Twice, Damerel uses Aubrey's words to describe Venetia, and also quotes from Jonson's poem, saying: 'Sweet Mind, then speak yourself.'

Literature is often a prominent theme in Georgette Heyer's novels. She inherited a love of books from her father, George Heyer; and two of her closest childhood friends, Carola Oman and Joanna Cannan, with whom she spent many hours discussing literature, both grew up to be authors. Heyer herself showed promise from an early age, writing her first book, entitled *The Black Moth*, at the age of 17. It was published, with George Heyer's help, in 1921, initiating a steady stream of novels. In 1926 Heyer had her first major success with *These Old Shades*. By this time

she had been married for a year to a young mining engineer named Ronald Rougier, and had already published five books.

From 1932 until her death in 1974 Heyer produced novels at the extraordinary rate of almost one a year, spawning a new literary genre – the Regency romance. Yet despite her undeniable success, she was frequently beset by financial problems. In the 1950s and 60s her limited liability company Heron Enterprises found themselves in trouble with the tax authorities, and a large chunk of the profits from books written around this time went towards paying back money to the Treasury. Plagiarism also became a problem – from the 1950s onwards several other writers traded on her popularity by writing novels using names, phrases and events from her books. She was even accused by some of her fans of publishing sub-standard work under a pseudonym. Although Heyer sought legal advice on several occasions, she never chose to sue.

Venetia is a product of these troubled years, yet no trace of them is left in the novel, which sparkles with all the energy, intelligence and wit of her finest work.

Notes by Caroline Waight



Award winning **Phyllida Nash** has performed on stage in leading roles nationally, in London, New York and Toronto as well as on TV and BBC Radio 4 – roles ranging from Portia in *Julius Caesar* to Christopher Robin in *Winnie the Pooh*. Phyllida is at her happiest behind a microphone, whether broadcasting on Radio 4, voicing a film or narrating audiobooks – over a hundred and counting.

Whether it be an Indian Maharanee, a Greek fugitive, a Scottish detective, a French Countess or an American cat, Phyllida thoroughly enjoys playing the wide – and sometimes eccentric – variety of characters and accents that may appear in a story.

Credits

Produced by David Bell and edited by Ken Barton in association with Alec Reid Recordings for BeeAudio Ltd.

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Georgette Heyer

Venetia

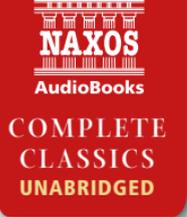
Read by **Phyllida Nash**

Venetia Lanyon, beautiful, intelligent and independent, lives in comfortable seclusion in rural Yorkshire with her precocious brother Aubrey. Her future seems safe and predictable: either marriage to the respectable but dull Edward Yardley, or a life of peaceful spinsterhood. But when she meets the dashing, dangerous rake Lord Damerel, her well-ordered life is turned upside down, and she embarks upon a relationship with him that scandalises and horrifies the whole community. Has she found her soul-mate, or is she playing with fire?



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