

**NAXOS**
AudioBooks

**CLASSIC
FICTION**

Georgette Heyer
Venetia

Read by **Richard Armitage**



NA437912D

1	One	6:27
2	Three years later Venetia was still awaiting...	5:17
3	Two gentlemen of marked dissimilarity...	6:41
4	Two	7:02
5	A few hundred yards down the lane...	5:48
6	'Well, fair trespasser, you are justly served...'	6:35
7	Three	5:48
8	But when a week crept by without a sign...	5:38
9	Four	7:05
10	'I call you mysterious because –' he paused...	6:48
11	Five	4:47
12	His arrival at the Priory almost coincided...	5:44
13	Six	5:14
14	He had been listening to her in amusement...	6:57
15	Seven	5:12
16	They were fast friends...	4:47
17	Eight	5:29
18	She knelt on the edge of the loft...	6:48

19	Nine	4:48
20	Damerel rode slowly back to the Priory...	4:44
21	Ten	6:50
22	It was a very troubled lady who was driven back...	7:13
23	Eleven	7:37
24	Mrs Scorrier was perfectly ready to talk...	8:02
25	Twelve	4:53
26	Damerel, alighting from his horse...	4:44
27	Thirteen	5:59
28	'It is just the problem of where to go...'	6:22
29	Fourteen	6:38
30	By this time two circumstances had been made plain...	7:02
31	Fifteen	7:01
32	He was holding open the door...	7:26
33	Sixteen	7:29
34	Seventeen	5:44
35	Mrs Hendred received the news...	6:07
36	'Good God!' Venetia said blankly.	6:06

37	Eighteen	5:55
38	As this sibilant command was endorsed...	5:13
39	Venetia said slowly: 'So that was why Papa...'	5:43
40	Nineteen	7:11
41	'I help you?' Lady Steeple laughed...	7:39
42	Arrived at the top of the street, Venetia stopped...	7:32
43	Twenty	7:04
44	'Marston, has he been getting foxed often?'	6:53
45	Twenty-One	6:20
46	Accepting this blighting announcement with equanimity...	6:13

Total time: 4:49:05

Georgette Heyer

(1902–1974)

Venetia

The spectre of the Napoleonic Wars loomed large over the first decades of the 19th 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 17th-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



Richard Armitage trained at LAMDA. He is best known for his appearances in the television series *Spooks*, *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Robin Hood* and *North and South*. His theatre credits include *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Macbeth* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has also featured on BBC Radio 4's *The Ted Hughes Letters*. He has read *Sylvester* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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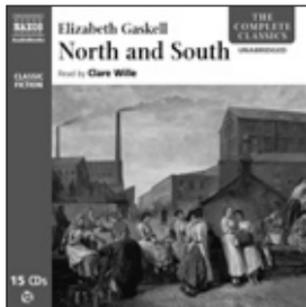
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Georgette Heyer Venetia

Read by **Richard Armitage**

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.

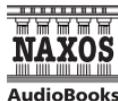
But when she meets the dashing, dangerous rake Lord Damerel, her well-ordered life is turned upside down, and she embarks upon a relationship with him that scandalises and horrifies the whole community. Has she found her soul-mate, or is she playing with fire?



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**Total time
9:12:32**