

Dracula's Literary Ancestors Revealed

Vampire Grooms and Spectre Brides

The Marriage of French
and British Gothic Literature

1789-1897

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Author of

The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption

Marquette Fiction

**Vampire Grooms and Spectre Brides:
The Marriage of French and British Gothic Literature, 1789-1897**

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“This is, moreover, the tendency of our age, and the law of radiance of the French Revolution; books must cease to be exclusively French, Italian, German, Spanish, or English, and become European, I say more, human, if they are to correspond to the enlargement of civilization.”

— Victor Hugo,
Letter to M. Daelli, publisher of the
Italian translation of *Les Misérables*,
October 18, 1862

Contents

A Note on the Text	i
Introduction	iii
Chapter 1: Vampire Invasion.....	1
Mrs. Radcliffe and the Gothic Novel.....	2
Sir Walter Scott and the Historical Novel.....	10
John Polidori's <i>The Vampyre</i>	17
Conclusion	27
Chapter 2: Historicizing the Gothic and Gothicizing History	29
Sir Walter Scott's <i>Ivanhoe</i>	30
Victor Hugo's <i>Notre-Dame de Paris</i>	35
William Harrison Ainsworth's Early Gothic Novels.....	50
<i>Rookwood</i>	51
<i>The Tower of London</i>	57
Chapter 3: City Mysteries	71
Eugène Sue's <i>The Mysteries of Paris</i>	72
Paul Féval's <i>Les Mystères de Londres</i>	80
George W. M. Reynolds' <i>The Mysteries of London</i>	92
Alexandre Dumas' <i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i>	105
Conclusion	116
Chapter 4: Wandering Jews	119
The Wandering Jew's Origins	120
Matthew Lewis' <i>The Monk</i>	123
William Harrison Ainsworth's "The Spectre Bride"	128
George Croly's <i>Salathiel</i>	131
Edgar Quinet's <i>Ahasvérus</i>	152
Eugène Sue's <i>The Wandering Jew</i>	161
Sue's <i>The Mysteries of the People</i> and Reynolds' <i>The Mysteries of the Court of London</i>	177
Alexandre Dumas' <i>Isaac Laquedem</i>	179
Paul Féval's <i>The Wandering Jew's Daughter</i>	188
Conclusion	192
Chapter 5: Secret Societies	193
Sir Walter Scott's <i>Anne of Geierstein</i>	197
George W. M. Reynolds' <i>Faust</i>	207
George W. M. Reynolds' <i>Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf</i>	211
Bram Stoker's <i>Powers of Darkness (The Swedish Dracula)</i>	221

Chapter 6: The French Revolution Revised.....	237
Edward Bulwer-Lytton's <i>Zanoni</i>	238
Alexandre Dumas' Marie Antoinette Novels	249
<i>Joseph Balsamo</i>	254
<i>The Mesmerist's Victim</i>	261
<i>The Queen's Necklace</i>	262
<i>The Storming of the Bastille</i>	263
<i>The Hero of the People</i>	265
<i>The Royal Life Guard</i>	268
<i>The Countess de Charny</i>	268
Dumas' <i>Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge</i> and Dickens'	
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	270
Other Sources for <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	276
Rosicrucian Immortality and Christian Redemption in	
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	283
Conclusion	300
Chapter 7: The Road to <i>Dracula</i>	301
Polidori's <i>The Vampyre</i> and Its Imitators.....	302
Cyprien Bérard's <i>Lord Ruthwen ou les vampires</i>	304
Charles Nodier's <i>The Vampire</i>	308
J. R. Planché's <i>The Vampire and Der Vampyr</i>	310
Alexandre Dumas' <i>The Vampire</i>	315
Dion Boucicault's <i>The Vampire and The Phantom</i>	319
Jules Dornay's <i>Douglas Le Vampire</i>	322
Gilbert and Sullivan's <i>Ruddigore</i>	325
Other Vampire Texts Between <i>The Vampyre</i> and <i>Dracula</i>	329
Uriah Derick D'Arcy's "The Black Vampyre"	330
Étienne-Léon de Lamothe-Langon's <i>The Virgin Vampire</i>	334
Elizabeth Caroline Grey's "The Skeleton Count, or	
The Vampire Mistress"	343
Théophile Gautier's "Clarimonde"	346
Alexandre Dumas' <i>The Thousand and One Ghosts</i>	350
George W. M. Reynolds' <i>The Necromancer</i>	354
Angelo de Sorr's <i>The Vampires of London</i>	358
Pierre-Alexis Ponson du Terrail's Vampire Novels.....	363
<i>The Vampire and the Devil's Son</i>	364
<i>The Immortal Woman</i>	366
Léon Gozlan's <i>The Vampire of the Val-de-Grâce</i>	369
Paul Féval's Vampire Novels	373
<i>The Vampire Countess</i>	373

<i>Knightshade</i>	376
<i>Vampire City</i>	377
Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's <i>Carmilla</i>	383
Marie Nizet's <i>Captain Vampire</i>	388
Anonymous' <i>The Vampire: or, Detective Brand's Greatest Case</i>	394
Jules Verne's <i>The Carpathian Castle</i>	397
Florence Marryat's <i>The Blood of the Vampire</i>	403
Vampire Short Stories	408
Karl von Wachsmann's "The Mysterious Stranger"	408
William Gilbert's "The Last Lords of Gardonal"	413
Guy de Maupassant's "The Horla"	413
Julian Hawthorne's "Ken's Mystery"	415
Eric Stenbock's "The Sad Story of a Vampire"	417
Mary E. Braddon's "Good Lady Ducayne"	420
Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i>	421
Afterword.....	457
Acknowledgments	461
Bibliography	463
Endnotes.....	487
Index	503
About the Author	517
Books by Tyler R. Tichelaar	519

A Note on the Text

I HAVE OPTED THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK to provide both French and English titles for works originally written in French upon first reference and then have used the English title after that for ease of reading for those not proficient in French. One exception is I have retained the French title of Paul Féval's *Les Mystères de Londres* to prevent it being confused with George W. M. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London*. Also, some English titles are not literal translations from the French; for example, *Notre-Dame de Paris* is commonly translated into English as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. In such cases, I have noted the name changes.

I have relied upon ebook editions for many of the main texts. This decision has its advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantage is that not all ebooks incorporate page numbers. When this was the case, I have only been able to reference the chapter from which a quote was taken. I trust readers will still be able to find the passages easily. In my opinion, ebooks are the new best friend of the scholar because they are easily searchable and allow the copying and pasting of text to ensure no errors are made in retyping. Anyone who wants to find a quoted passage can easily do so with an ebook. I wish ebooks had existed when I wrote my first Gothic study, *The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption*, because it would have saved me countless hours trying to find a passage I had handwritten in a

notebook and then forgotten to write the page number beside. Ebooks also allow for searches to find key words of interest. Plus, they take up less space, are more environmentally friendly, and cost less. I encourage academics to embrace ebooks.

I have used both endnotes and footnotes. Endnotes solely list sources of information and can be ignored by the reader unless the reader wishes to know the source. I have avoided using *Ibid.* and listed the full source for each item because in ebooks the endnotes may come up as showing just the individual note, so it is not always easy to see the notes that come before it. Footnotes do contain additional information about the text, and I encourage readers to read them.

Introduction

“his trousers here, his towels there, and his
French novels everywhere.”

— Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*

THE ABOVE QUOTE FROM WILKIE COLLINS' 1868 masterpiece¹ testifies that young gentlemen in England at the time were reading French novels, and yet the influence of French literature has been all but ignored by most scholars of British Gothic literature. This omission is surprising given that French novels were read in England by a wide audience in the nineteenth century as British literature of the period itself testifies. Besides the reference in Collins' *The Moonstone*, in Anthony Trollope's *The Small House at Allington* (1864), we are told of the Earl de Courcy that “He always breakfasted alone, and after breakfast found in a French novel and a cigar what solace those innocent recreations were still able to afford him.”² In the last chapter of *Barchester Towers* (1857), Trollope references three contemporary French authors as he attempts to complete his story, “What novelist, what Fielding, what Scott, what George Sand, or Sue, or Dumas can impart an interest to the last chapter of his fictitious history?”³ Mary E. Braddon, best remembered for *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), writes in her short story “Good Lady Ducayne” (1896) of a young companion paid to read to the title character, but because the companion's French is not good, the French maid instead reads French works to Lady Ducayne: “When she is tired of my reading she orders Francine, her maid, to read a French

novel to her, and I hear her chuckle and groan now and then, as if she were more interested in those books than in Dickens or Scott."⁴ Furthermore, in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the lawyer Robert Audley is emphatically associated with reading French novels to the point of neglecting his work, and in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Pendennis* (1848-50), a student's quarters are described as, "While there was quite an infantine law library clad in skins of fresh new born calf, there was a tolerably large collection of classical books which he could not read, and of English and French works of poetry and fiction which he read a great deal too much."⁵

Countless books have been written on nineteenth-century British Gothic literature, including my previous book *The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption*. Possibly, books have also been written on nineteenth-century French Gothic literature that are not accessible to an English-speaking audience since they were written in French, although the study of the Gothic does not yet seem to have become popular among academics in France.⁶ Even some significant nineteenth-century French Gothic novels have not been translated into English, and some of those that have been translated have suffered from being abridged. As a result, many students of the Gothic, myself included until recently, have been unfamiliar with the incredible influence that French and British Gothic novelists of this period had upon one another.

In scholarly works, if influence between French and British literature is mentioned, it is usually done so in passing and rarely detailed. To the best of my knowledge, no one to date has written a full study of how British and French Gothic texts influenced each other. The most thorough study I have found of English literature's influence on French novels has been Eric Partridge's *The French Romantics' Knowledge of English Literature*, which was published in 1924, and as thorough as it is, it only briefly mentions a few Gothic novels and quotes extensively in French, which makes it inaccessible to many readers. M. G. Devonshire's *The English Novel in France* (1929) similarly extensively discusses

how English literature influenced French literature from 1830-70, but also makes little mention of Gothic fiction beyond Radcliffe and Lewis. Neither Partridge nor Devonshire mention Polidori or vampire fiction at all. Many other critics have discussed the specific influence of an individual work upon an author or work, but none have broadly discussed such influences upon the Gothic novel throughout the nineteenth century.

A misconception also appears to exist that British Victorians did not read French literature, thinking it too risqué. The above examples prove that is largely untrue. While some Victorians did hold that viewpoint, the extent of it has been heavily exaggerated. In his Preface to *The Modern Literature of France* (1839), George W. M. Reynolds, one of the most prolific British Victorian Gothic novelists, addressed this issue by stating that the journals of the day expressed as much dislike for anything French as they did during the Napoleonic Wars. He also disputed an article written three years earlier in the *Quarterly Review* that suggested the 1830 insurrection in France resulted from “the depraved taste of the nation with regard to literature, a proposition no less ridiculous than unfounded.”⁷ He goes on to argue that the divorce, licentiousness, and murders that take place in France cannot be attributed to its literature and that the British are just as guilty if not more so of such behaviors. Then he argues that the sense of freedom that resulted from the 1830 revolution is precisely what has led to an increase of high quality literature in France.* Consequently, his study reviews only French literature written after 1830. Most remarkably, with every author Reynolds discusses, he translates passages from works not yet known in England as examples of the French authors' writing styles.

*One of the giants of French Romanticism, Charles Nodier, would agree with him on this point. In his essay “Du fantastique en littérature” in the *Revue de Paris* in 1830, Nodier argued that: “the fantastique requires a virginal imagination and beliefs that secondary literatures lack, and which are only reproduced therein following revolutions whose passage renews everything.” (Quoted in Stableford, “Introduction,” *Weird Fiction in France*, p. 6.)

Despite Reynolds' arguments and efforts, it is hard to know how many people listened to him. While some prejudice toward French literature doubtless remained, Juliette Atkinson has revealed in her 2013 article "The London Library and the Circulation of French Fiction in the 1840s" that circulation records from the London Library and other British libraries prove early British Victorians were reading French literature. Furthermore, Alexander Hugh Jordan, in an article discussing the influence of Carlyle upon Eugène Sue, remarks:

As Juliette Atkinson has recently noted, the assumption that the Victorians rejected contemporary French literature as "immoral" has proven stubbornly persistent, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary (391-93). In fact, the productions of leading French novelists met with a wide-ranging and enthusiastic response in Britain, not least through the medium of English translations. For instance, between 1842 and 1847, no less than seven of George Sand's novels made their way to Britain (Bensimon 200-01). Moreover, thanks to the endeavours of Berry Palmer Chevasco [in *Mysterymania*], we now possess a near-exhaustive study of the British reception of Eugène Sue, and particularly of his *Mystères de Paris*. As Chevasco points out, in 1844 and 1845 alone, thirteen separate editions of Sue's novels appeared in Britain (80).⁸

Consequently, a convincing argument can be made not only that the British read French literature, but that British authors were influenced by their French contemporaries and vice versa. In fact, the influence of British authors on French authors is better documented, at least among studies written in English. Literary historian Maurice Lévy has documented more than one hundred English Gothic novels translated into French by the 1820s.⁹ Regardless, much work remains to be done to understand the influences that extended in both directions among British and

French Gothic novelists from the time of the French Revolution through the nineteenth century.

Vampire Grooms and Spectre Brides: The Marriage of French and British Gothic Literature seeks to help fill the void of documenting the influence that both nations' Gothic literature had upon one another. While no study can fully display the depth of influence individual works had upon each other, I hope this book will inspire a revision of Gothic studies with the understanding that there is no isolated British or French Gothic tradition, but rather a tradition that crosses national boundaries. I am also fully aware that the French and British novels I will discuss influenced other nations' literatures and were influenced by them. For example, it is well known that German Gothic works had a significant influence upon British and French Gothic works, especially in the days of the Gothic's infancy. However, to create a manageable survey, I will focus, with a few exceptions, on British and French texts.

The title of this book reflects the frequent attempts by male vampire characters, usually based upon John Polidori's vampire Lord Ruthven, to force a woman to marry him so she can become his victim. William H. Ainsworth's short story "The Spectre Bride" is also referenced in the title. It refers to a bride who, surprisingly, is not supernatural but forced to marry a supernatural being. The word "marriage" in this book's subtitle is perfect to describe the relationship between French and British Gothic because it goes beyond the idea of simple influence to a partnership. I believe in many cases the French and British Gothic writers were conscious that they were writing within the same Gothic tradition and being influenced by one another's work. Proof of that influence will be provided in every chapter of this book and, hopefully, readers will be convinced by the book's conclusion of my argument for this incredible shared influence that crossed national and language barriers.

Before diving further into our subject, it is best to define a few terms. By French Gothic, I am referring specifically to novels,

plays, and short stories written within the boundaries of France. Similarly, by British, I mean works produced within Great Britain. I have chosen not to use the term English because it is less encompassing and could refer solely to England, while British would include works produced in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England. I have also opted to use British rather than English so it is not confused with works written in English by people outside of Great Britain, such as in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, or Australia. Only works produced within the national boundaries of Great Britain and France between 1789 and 1897 will be discussed in detail, with the exception of two American vampire works and the Swedish translation of *Dracula*.

Secondly, by using the term Gothic, I am referring to texts that include supernatural beings and occurrences, also known as the masculine Gothic, which includes works by Matthew Lewis, Alexandre Dumas, Bram Stoker, and others. I am also referring to texts where supernatural beings or events are believed to be occurring, even though they turn out to have rational explanations; this school is known as the feminine Gothic and is represented primarily by the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe, although male authors like Pierre-Alexis Ponson du Terrail and Jules Verne also fit into this category.* By Gothic, I am also referring to works that are devoid of anything supernatural but still have a Gothic atmosphere, specifically crime-related novels, which arose out of the “mystery” aspect of earlier Gothic literature. Such works include the city mysteries novels of Eugène Sue, Paul Féval, and George W. M. Reynolds.

The bulk of the works discussed in this book belong to what I consider the Second Golden Age of the Gothic. As is well known, the Gothic novel began with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, but its Golden Age really began in the 1790s when the terrors of the French Revolution resulted

* The terms masculine and feminine Gothic were first coined by Kate Ellis in *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (1989).

in a flood of Gothic novels that reflected people's fears played out in a fictional form and set in the past because the present horrors were too terrifying to contemplate. This period ranges roughly from 1789-1820 and includes the works of Mrs. Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). The Second Gothic Golden Age began about a dozen years later. The year 1818 is a key year for the Gothic because two Gothic parody novels, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey*, were published that year, announcing if not causing the Gothic's death knell for the next decade. Parodies are always a sign that genres are popular but have also begun to decline in quality or influence.

The Gothic craze fell off in the 1820s with few notable works. Not until Victor Hugo published *Notre-Dame de Paris* in 1831 (translated into English in 1833 by Frederic Shoberl as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*) and William Harrison Ainsworth published *Rookwood* in 1834 did the Gothic regain its popularity. This Second Gothic Golden Age would run through the 1850s, at which time crime fiction, the child of the Gothic, superseded it in popularity along with sensational Victorian novels. However, the Gothic would remain popular throughout the nineteenth century, and following the 1897 publication of *Dracula*, and the subsequent film versions of that novel that made horror a staple of modern cinema, the Gothic has become immortal in a way many of its characters who sought the elixir of life never could have foreseen.

This Second Gothic Golden Age is when the influences of French and British Gothic literature were strongest upon each other, and it is that mutual influence I wish to highlight in this book. The nineteenth century was a period when authors in France and Great Britain largely spoke each other's language and read each other's books, often in their original language, but also in translation. Today, I suspect people are less bilingual than they were then. As an American, I studied French in school, but I cannot

speaking it fluently or even reading it without it being a somewhat painstaking task. I suspect many literary scholars (despite most PhD programs requiring one or two foreign languages) and most general readers would say the same. Consequently, we must rely upon translations and the decisions of publishers and translators about which works will be translated. I hope *Vampire Grooms and Spectre Brides* will bring attention to the incredible influence that British and French authors of this period had upon each other. This literary marriage has long been overlooked largely because of translation barriers, so I wish my work to inspire further scholarship and interest.

I also hope this book will bring more attention to many significant writers of nineteenth-century Gothic literature who have largely been ignored until recent years. While Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Alexandre Dumas are, if not household names, known by most lovers of books, authors like George W. M. Reynolds, William Harrison Ainsworth, Eugène Sue, and Paul Féval are unknown to most readers. These authors were in many ways just as remarkable as their better-known contemporaries. In fact, Reynolds and Ainsworth's novels are said to have outsold those of Dickens, and as much as I love Dickens, both Reynolds and Ainsworth, in my opinion, surpassed Dickens in their plotting and pacing skills, if not in their character development or overall philosophical outlook. Similarly, the imaginations of the French authors of this period knew no bounds and their fantastic works deserve to be read today. Reading Sue's *The Wandering Jew* or Féval's *Vampire City* are incredible treats more readers should experience.

Nineteenth-century French and British Gothic is as capable today of teaching and entertaining us as it was for its original readers, for the twenty-first century is for us just as traumatic and terrorizing, if in different ways, as the nineteenth century was for our ancestors. By exploring such fears and the works they inspired, not only do we better understand Gothic literature, but we better understand the tastes, concerns, hopes, and dreams of

our nineteenth-century ancestors, and in understanding them, we can understand more about ourselves because we are living their legacy.

Tyler R. Tichelaar
Marquette, Michigan
Halloween 2022

Index

Book titles are listed under the names of their authors with the exception of those with anonymous authors. French titles are primarily listed by their English title.

A

Adam and Eve, 158, 219, 244, 256, 297-9

Adey, More, 420

Ainsworth, William Harrison, vii, ix, x, 25, 29, 35, 50-69, 73, 92, 103, 128-31, 279, 321, 357, 399, 439

Ainsworth's Magazine, 58, 105

Auriol, or The Elixir of Life, 357

The Combat of the Thirty (trans.), 59

Crotchet Castle, 29, 63-4

Guy Fawkes, 62-3

Old Saint Paul's, 73

Rookwood, ix, 25, 51-8, 321, 399, 439

Sir John Chiverton, 50

"The Spectre Bride," vii, 128-131, 357

The Tower of London, 35, 51, 57-69, 279

American Civil War, 12

Anti-Catholicism, 5, 61-3, 68, 172, 178, 191, 220, 447

Apocalypse, 248, 297

Arabian Nights, The, 109, 113, 305, 331, 333, 350, 366, 376-7

Austen, Jane,

Northanger Abbey, ix, 9n, 362, 377

B

Ballantyne, James, 10

Balzac, Honoré de, 9, 14-5, 38, 54, 93, 143

Le Dernier Chouan, 14

L'Héritière de Birague, 9

Melmoth Reconciled, 143n

The Human Comedy, 14

Barnes, Djuna

Nightwood, 459

Bastille, 38, 66, 74, 112, 253, 263-5, 278-9, 281-3, 286-90, 293

Báthory, Elizabeth, 374

Batman, 33, 75-6, 79, 394

Beaucharnais, Prince Eugène, 173

Bérard, Cyprien

Lord Ruthwen ou les vampires, 19, 23, 304-8, 331, 335, 339, 345, 379, 432, 438-9, 442, 444, 449

Berry, Duchesse de, 14

Bible, The, 21, 45, 185, 435

Blake, William, 153

Blake, George, 425

Blanc, Louis, 271

Blood transfusions, 227, 395, 420-1, 445-6, 453, 455

Bocage, Paul, 74, 351

Bonaparte, Josephine, 173

Bonaparte, Napoleon, 13, 84, 106, 165, 186, 250, 260, 267, 269, 305, 335, 341, 375

Borgias, The, 107, 209-11, 396

Boucicault, Dion, 25-6, 267, 275-6, 319-22, 326, 329, 354, 371, 396, 435, 442, 444, 449

The Corsican Brothers, 267, 275n, 319, 449

Geneviève; or the Reign of Terror, 275-6, 319

- The Phantom*, 25-6, 321-2, 354, 396, 444
- The Vampire*, 25-6, 319-22, 326, 329, 354, 371, 435, 442, 444
- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, iii, 420-1
 "Good Lady Ducayne," iii, 420-1, 446
- Lady Audley's Secret*, iii-iv, 99, 420
- Bride of the Isles, The* (1820, anonymous), 23, 313
- British Empire, 80-1, 83-4, 87, 91, 234-5, 424
- Brontë, Charlotte, 56-7
Jane Eyre, 56, 147, 151, 393, 400
Tales of Angria, 56
- Brontë, Emily, 56-7, 115
Wuthering Heights, 56-7, 115
- Brown, Charles Brockden
Wieland, 396
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer, 378
- Bulwer-Lytton, Edward, 43n, 66, 103, 176, 196, 236-49, 251, 259, 261, 266, 269, 276, 280, 284, 289, 299, 300, 444, 512, 514
Paul Clifford, 238
The Haunted and the Haunters, 239
The Parisians, 239
Zanoni, 43n, 66, 196, 236-49, 251, 261, 266, 270, 276, 283-4, 293-4, 299, 300
Zicci, 239
- Burke and Hare, 89, 97
- Burnett, Frances Hodgson
Little Lord Fauntleroy, 57-8, 69
- Burney, Fanny
The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties, 30-2
- Byron, Lord, 1-2, 16, 18-20, 23, 109-10, 147, 173, 216, 303-5, 313n, 331, 382
Don Juan, 216
- "The Giaour," 331
- Manfred*, 109
- as literary vampire source, 1-2, 18-20, 109-10, 303-5, 313n, 382
- Byronic hero, 11, 18-9, 21, 109
- C
- Cagliostro, 109, 231, 251, 253, 259, 261-70, 272, 300
- Caine, Hal, 175
- Calmet, Dom Augustin, 341, 381
- Calvino, Italo, 457
- Captain Vanderdecken, 357, 440
- Carlyle, Thomas, vi, 249, 251, 274, 276-7, 279-80, 285, 288, 297
The French Revolution: A History, 251, 274, 276, 280, 288, 297
Sartor Resartus, 251n
- Carmouche, Pierre-Frédéric-Adolphe, 23-4
- Carpathian Mountains, 24, 314-5, 323, 325, 351, 391, 397-8, 403, 409-10, 412, 429
- Catholicism (see also Anti-Catholicism), 5-6, 21, 49, 51-2, 61-8, 82, 159, 160, 166, 171-2, 178, 191-2, 220, 230, 258, 307, 350, 447-8
- Charles X, 40
- Chateaubriand, François-René de, 271
- Christianity 41, 49-50, 78, 93, 116, 119-21, 124, 127, 159, 171, 173, 177, 181-2, 185, 187-8, 194, 196, 199, 219-20, 229-30, 240-2, 246, 283-4, 296-7, 299, 384n
- Christie, Agatha, 72
- City Mysteries, viii, 27, 71-117, 161, 238, 277-8, 368, 397, 434, 441
- Clairmont, Claire, 2
- Cleopatra, 110, 184, 186, 262, 439
- Colburn, Henry, 18, 139
- Cody, William F. "Buffalo Bill," 443

- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor
 "Christabel," 31, 306, 344, 346, 383-5
 "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," 127, 136, 433, 440
- Collins, Wilkie
The Moonstone, iii
The Frozen Deep, 280
The Woman in White, 99, 176, 415, 426, 436, 444
- Comte de Saint-Germain, 109
- Conspiracy theories, 108, 117, 193-4, 196-7, 238, 269
- Cooper, James Fenimore, 11, 13, 17, 73
The Pilot, 73
- Cousin de Grainville, Jean-Baptiste
The Last Man, 153
- Creation, The (biblical), 154, 168, 185-6, 285, 289, 340
- Croly, George, 131-53, 159, 187, 448
Marston, 131
Salathiel, 131-53, 159, 174, 436
- Cruikshank, George, 35, 60, 65
- D**
- D'Arcy, Uriah Derick
 "The Black Vampyre," 22-3, 330-5, 342, 395, 406
- Defauconpret, Auguste, 13
- Der Vampyr* (Lindpaintner & Heigel), 24
- Der Vampyr* (Lyser), 24
- Der Vampyr* (Marschner & Wohlbrück), 24, 26, 313, 432
- Der Vampyr* (Planché), 24, 310-5, 351, 410, 428-9
- Der Vampyr* (Ritter), 24
- Dickens, Charles, iv, x, 50, 57, 66, 72-3, 75, 77, 80, 89, 92, 94, 96, 99, 103-4, 112, 196, 236-8, 249, 251, 264-5, 269-300, 319, 343, 372, 428, 432, 442, 452, 455
Bleak House, 99, 104, 278, 343
The Cricket on the Hearth, 276
Master Humphrey's Clock, 94
The Mystery of Edwin Drood, 292
Oliver Twist, 75
Our Mutual Friend, 99, 278
The Pickwick Papers, 94
A Tale of Two Cities, 66, 88, 96, 104, 112, 116, 147, 196, 237-8, 249, 251, 264-5, 270-300, 319, 372, 428, 432, 442, 452
The Only Way (play of *A Tale of Two Cities*), 452
- Dillion, Valentine Blake, 425
- Dornay, Jules
Douglas Le Vampire, 26, 322-5, 440, 442
- Doyle, Arthur Conan, 72, 224
- Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, 379, 382, 443
- Dumas, Alexandre, iii, viii, x, 9, 12, 14-7, 25-6, 54-6, 66, 72, 91, 93-4, 103-17, 160, 167, 179-88, 190-1, 197, 211, 215, 231n, 236-8, 249-80, 300, 315-9, 321, 329, 340, 350-4, 363, 366, 378, 392, 398, 410, 429, 434, 440, 445, 447, 449, 455, 461
Andrée de Taverney (see *The Mesmerist's Victim*)
Ange Pitou (see *The Storming of the Bastille*)
Angèline, 94
The Castle of Eppstein, 9
Celebrated Crimes, 215
Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge, 253, 263, 269-76, 279, 319
Christine, 271

- The Corsican Brothers*, 262, 267, 275n, 319, 449
- The Count of Monte Cristo*, 56, 59, 66, 72, 89, 91, 105-17, 171, 180, 187, 278, 316, 434, 438, 443
- The Countess de Charny*, 253, 268-70, 272
- Henri III et sa cour*, 17
- The Hero of the People*, 253, 262-3, 265-8
- Isaac Laquedem*, 179-88, 190, 211, 459
- Joseph Balsamo*, 251-61, 270
- The Man in the Iron Mask*, 278-9
- Mes Mémoires*, 17
- The Mesmerist's Victim*, 253, 261-2, 266, 449
- The Mouth of Hell*, 9
- The Pale Lady* (see *The Thousand and One Ghosts*)
- The Queen's Necklace*, 253, 262-3
- The Royal Life Guard*, 253, 268
- The Storming of the Bastille*, 263-5
- Souvenirs de 1830 à 1842*, 17
- The Thousand and One Ghosts*, 316, 340, 350-4, 410, 429, 447
- The Three Musketeers*, 186-7, 249, 378
- The Vampire*, 25, 315-9, 351, 354, 363, 398, 429, 440, 447
- Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, 279
- The Wolf Leader*, 434
- Urbain Grandier*, 262, 449
- E**
- Edgeworth, Maria, 31, 426
- The Absentee*, 426
- Belinda*, 426
- Castle Rackrent*, 426
- Harrington*, 31
- Edinburgh, 12, 89, 322
- Existentialism, 36, 41-2, 49, 55
- F**
- Faber, Henry, 18
- Fantasmagoriana*, 2
- Faust, Johann Georg, 207n
- Faustian pact (see also Satanic pact), 25, 48, 111, 327
- Felix* (French opera), 7
- Féval, Paul, i, viii, x, 4, 6, 56, 72, 74, 80-91, 96-8, 100, 105-6, 108-9, 115-7, 119, 160, 188-92, 196, 233-5, 271, 278, 308, 350, 359, 363, 373-83, 424-6, 429, 432, 434-5, 441, 443-4, 448-50, 455
- Bel Demonio*, 90
- Les Compagnons du Silence*, 90
- Dramas of Death*, 373
- Les Habits Noirs (The Black Coats)*, 90, 381
- Jean Diable*, 90
- Jerusalem Street*, 90
- Knightshade*, 373, 376-7, 381, 450
- The Love Nest*, 373
- Les Mystères de Londres*, i, 56, 80-91, 96, 98, 105-6, 115-7, 196, 233-5, 278, 359, 373, 377, 424-6, 432, 434-5, 448, 450-1
- The Mysteries of London, or The Gentlemen of the Night* (play), 89-90
- Le Quittance de Minuit (The Midnight Rent)*, 90-1
- Vampire City*, x, 4, 373, 377-83, 443-4, 449, 450
- The Vampire Countess*, 350, 373-5, 377, 383, 397, 429
- The Wandering Jew's Daughter*, 119, 188-92, 373-4, 377
- The White Wolf*, 105
- Fitzball, Edmund
- The Flying Dutchman: or the Phantom Ship*, 136
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott

- The Great Gatsby*, 116
 Flood, The (biblical), 285
 Flying Dutchman, 136, 176, 440
 Follies-Dramatiques, 5
 Forster, John, 271, 277
 Franco-Prussian War, 180
 Freemasons, 21, 108, 194, 224, 292
 French Revolution, vii-viii, 5-7, 13, 21, 29, 65-6, 71, 108, 157, 160, 177-8, 190, 193-6, 231n, 236-300, 305
- G**
- Galitzin, Princess, 13
 Galland, Antoine, 376
 Garden of Eden, 215-6, 244, 246, 285, 295, 297, 349
 Gautier, Théophile, 16, 271, 308, 346-50, 353, 363
 "Clarimonde," 308, 346-50, 353, 363
 Gavarni, 5
 Genlis, Madame de, 16
 George III, 178
 Gerard, Emily
 The Land Beyond the Forest, 427
 German literature, vii, 2, 22, 24, 54-5, 123, 313-4, 325, 408-13, 459
 Gilbert and Sullivan
 Ruddigore, 22, 26, 325-9, 413, 430
 Gilbert, William
 "The Last Lords of Gardonal," 413
 The Wizard of the Mountain, 413
 Gilbert, W. S., 430
 Glasgow, 12
 Glisic, Milovan
 After Ninety Years, 350
 Godwin, William
 St. Leon, 43n, 109, 127, 239-41, 248
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 19, 123, 207
 Faust, 207
 Sorrows of Young Werther, 123
 Gotham, 394
 Gozlan, Léon
 "Another Soul Sold to the Devil," 369
 "The Black Morocco-Leather Wallet," 369
 "The Madwoman in No. 16"
 The Mysterious Neighborhood, 369
 The Vampire of the Val-de-Grâce, 26, 369-72, 446
 Granville, Lord, 13
 Grey, Elizabeth Caroline
 "The Skeleton Count, or The Vampire Mistress," 343-6, 388, 403, 450
 Guillotine, 65, 190, 194, 246-7, 262, 266-7, 269-70, 273-6, 283, 294, 296-7, 299
- H**
- Haggard, H. Rider
 She, 233, 393
 Haining, Peter (and literary fraud), 345-6
 Harvey, Martin, 452
 Hawthorne, Julian, 415-7, 439
 David Poindexter's Disappearance, 416
 "Ken's Mystery," 415-7, 439
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 415
 Heigel, Cäsar Max
 Der Vampyr, 24
 Henry VIII, 64-5, 355-6
 Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, 224
 Hoffman, E. T. A., 54
 Holy Vehme, 198, 200, 202-10
 Home Rule (Ireland), 235, 424-5
 Hugo, Victor, ix-x, 9, 12, 14-6, 35-51, 54-55, 57-62, 65, 68, 72, 78-9, 93, 103-4,

- 116, 159, 163, 165n, 169, 185, 193,
250, 271, 279, 372, 436
The Demon Dwarf (Hans of Iceland
trans), 35
Hans of Iceland, 35, 65
Hernani, 38
Les Misérables, 36, 78-9, 116, 163,
169, 193, 372, 436
Marie Tudor, 55, 58-9
Notre-Dame de Paris, i, ix, 9, 15-6,
35-51, 54-5, 59-62, 65, 68, 106,
165n, 169, 250, 279, 435-6, 439
- Hungary (Austro-Hungarian
Empire), 101, 313-5, 323, 325, 335,
338-41, 392
- Hypnotism (see also Mesmerism),
21, 79, 107, 109, 176n, 252, 266, 348,
392, 410, 414, 421, 433, 449
- I**
- Illuminati, 194
- Inquisition, 5, 32, 66-7, 169, 200, 217,
219-20, 246, 266n
- Insanity (see also Madness), 65, 101,
165, 176, 231, 233, 361-2, 366, 415,
438, 443-5
- Irish Death Coach, 431
- Irish National League, 425
- Irving, Laurence, 438
- Irving, Sir Henry, 175-6, 267, 319,
397, 423-4, 435, 437-8, 440, 443, 449,
452
- Irving, Washington, 128, 394
"The Specter Bridegroom," 128
- J**
- James, G. P. R.
*The Jacquereie, or the Lady and the
Page*, 279
- Janin, Jules
"The Orphan," 97
- Jesuits, 52, 160, 163-4, 166-73, 177-8, 196
- Jones, John Paul, 254
- Jouffroy, Achille de, 23-4
- K**
- Karloff, Boris, 69
- Keats, John
"La Belle Dame Sans Merci," 417
- Kempis, Thomas à
The Imitation of Christ, 171
- Kock, Paul de
La Barbier de Paris, 9
- L**
- Laclos, Pierre Ambroise François
Choderlos de
Les Liaisons Dangereuses, 13
- Ladvoat, Pierre-François, 19, 304
- Lafayette, Madame de
La Princesse de Clèves, 10
- Lake Geneva, 2
- Lamartine, Alphonse de, 93, 159, 271
- Lamb, Lady Caroline
Glenarvon, 1, 17-18, 302, 424
- Lamothe-Langon, Étienne-Léon de
The Mysterious Hermit of the Tomb, 8
The Virgin Vampire, 308, 315, 334-43,
364, 397, 408
- Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan, 426
Carmilla, 301, 330, 340, 346, 350,
363, 381-8, 396, 407-8, 417-8, 429,
439
In a Glass Darkly, 383
- Lecroix, Paul, 54
- Lee, Sophia
The Recess, 10, 64
- Leroux, Gaston
The Phantom of the Opera, 45, 459
- Lewis, Matthew,
The Monk, v, viii-ix, 3, 5-8, 36, 54,
120, 123-8, 152, 165n, 347, 357, 433,
435, 448

- Lindpaintner, Peter Joseph von,
Der Vampyr, 24
- London Library, vi
- Lord Ruthven depictions, vii, 1, 18-27, 36, 82, 86, 103, 109-10, 128, 130, 188, 195, 235, 302-13, 316-9, 321-2, 325-30, 334-5, 351, 354-5, 360-1, 371, 421, 428, 432-4, 438-40, 442, 444-5, 447, 449, 455
- Louis XVI, 176n, 259, 263, 265-6, 269, 272, 279, 287-8
- Lovecraft, H. P., 415
- Lyon, James
Kiss of the Butterfly, 350
- Lyser, Johann Peter
Der Vampyr, 24
- M**
- Macready, William, 271
- Madness (see also Insanity), 8, 43, 46, 50, 78, 107, 113, 213, 225, 231, 286-7, 310, 318, 324, 327-8, 361, 365, 395, 397, 415, 445
- Maquet, Auguste, 25-6, 315-6
- Mark of Cain, 45-6, 83, 124, 133, 145, 181-3, 235, 291-2, 338, 435, 448
- Marlowe, Christopher
Doctor Faustus, 207
- Marryat, Captain Frederick, 403
The Naval Officer, 73
The Phantom Ship, 136, 357, 434, 440
- Marryat, Florence
The Blood of the Vampire, 334, 395, 403-8
- Marschner, Heinrich
Der Vampyr, 24, 26, 313-4, 432
- Martineau, Harriet, 248
- Marx, Karl, 12, 173
- Mathias, Thomas James
The Pursuits of Literature, 237
- Maturin, Charles, 8, 54, 426
- Bertram, 308
- Melmoth the Wanderer*, ix, 32, 66, 127, 143-4, 195, 200, 215, 220, 239-40, 246, 248, 357, 426, 430, 433, 446
- The Milesian Chief*, 426
- The Wild Irish Boy*, 426
- Maupassant, Guy de
 "The Horla," 413-5, 426, 445
- Maurier, George du
Peter Ibbetson, 348
Trilby, 107, 433
- Méliès, George
The Haunted Castle, 434
- Mérimée, Prosper, 15, 93, 368
Chronique du Règne de Charles IX, 15
Mateo Falcone, 93
- Mesmerism (see also Hypnotism), 23, 79, 98, 107, 147, 176n, 252, 261-2, 264, 266, 268, 321, 324, 348, 362, 385, 389, 410, 431, 433, 449
- Michelet, Jules, 160-1
- Milton, John, 147
Paradise Lost, 196, 245, 285, 287, 289, 427
- Mirbel, Madame de, 13
- Moncrieff, W. T.
The Vampire, 23
- Mount Vesuvius, 210-1
- Multatuli (Edward Douwes Dekker)
Max Havelaar, 11, 174, 459
- N**
- Napoleon Bonaparte (see Bonaparte, Napoleon)
- Napoleon III (Louis Napoleon), 180, 185, 188, 270, 273
- Napoleonic Wars, v, 84, 121, 131, 163, 335, 341
- Naturalism, 49
- New Slains Castle, 430

New York City, 12, 74, 257, 322, 330,
394-6, 416

Newgate, 85

Newgate novels, 51, 55, 238

Nizet, Marie

Captain Vampire, 331, 388-94

Noah's Ark, 209-10

Nodier, Charles, v, 13-5, 23-4, 35, 47,
93, 304-5, 308-10, 315-6, 324, 329,
415, 446

Bertram ou le Pirate, 308

Le Monstre et le Magicien, 308

Le Peintre de Salzbourg, 308

Les Proscrits, 308

The Vampire, 23-4, 47, 308-10, 313,
315-6, 324, 329, 415, 446

O

O'Brien, Fitzjames

"What Was It?", 426

O'Connell, Daniel, 82, 90-1

Oaths, 12, 21, 24, 38, 129, 136, 195,
204-5, 304, 309, 313-4, 319, 324, 349,
352, 445-7

One Thousand and One Nights (see
Arabian Nights)

Orléanist Conspiracy, 223

P

Paccard, Jean-Edme, 5

Parnell, Charles, 425

Peacock, Thomas Love

Nightmare Abbey, ix, 377

Philips, Watt

The Dead Heart, 280

Planché, James Robinson

*The Recollections and Reflections of J.
R. Planché*, 313

The Vampire, or The Bride of the Isles,
23, 310-13

Der Vampyr, 24, 310-5, 323, 351, 410,

428-9

Poe, Edgar Allan, 162

"Berenice," 396

"The Fall of the House of Usher,"
400

"Morella," 396

Polidori, John

The Vampyre, v, vii, 1-2, 10, 17-23,
27, 29, 36, 72, 86, 109, 195, 235,
301-6, 308-10, 315, 322, 324, 329-
30, 342-3, 345, 365, 382-3, 392, 396,
412-3, 419, 430, 432, 446, 459

Ponson du Terrail, Pierre-Alexis, 8,
91, 308, 363-9, 376, 397, 399, 434

Rocambo (character), 91, 368

The Immortal Woman, 363, 366-8,
399

*The Inn in the Street of the Red
Children*, 368

The Miseries of London, 91, 368

*The Vampire and the Devil's Son (La
Baronne trépassée)*, 363-6, 397, 434

Porter, Jane, 115

The Scottish Chiefs, 10, 32

*Powers of Darkness (Icelandic Makt
Myrkranna)*, 221-2, 458

*Powers of Darkness (Swedish Mörkrets
Makter)*, viii, 197, 221-36, 301, 341,
407, 418, 430, 438, 454, 458

Price, Vincent, 69

Protestantism, 5, 61-3, 65, 67-8, 82,
164, 171, 177

Pushkin, Alexander Sergeyevich, 419

Q

Quinet, Edgar, 172, 180, 187

Ahasvérus, 152-62, 340

*Génie des religion (The Genius of
Religions)*, 160

Des Jésuites, 160-1

Tablets of the Wandering Jew, 153

R

- Racism, 174, 183, 223, 260, 340-1, 393, 395, 405, 454
- Radcliffe, Mrs. (Ann), v, viii-ix, 1-10, 16, 27, 32, 36, 40, 50-1, 53-4, 57-8, 66, 72, 101, 127, 165n, 195, 199-201, 278, 343, 357, 363, 373, 377-80, 396-7, 428, 432, 444, 455
- The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, 3
- The Italian*, 3, 5, 32, 36, 66, 127, 165n, 200, 343, 357
- The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1, 3-5, 9, 29, 101, 195, 278, 446
- The Romance of the Forest*, 3, 6, 40, 199, 278, 357, 428, 432
- A Sicilian Romance*, 3
- Radcliffe, Mary Anne
- Manfrone, or The One-Handed Monk*, 8n
- Redemption, 11, 75-8, 96-7, 99-100, 102, 106, 115, 119, 121, 158, 163, 168, 187, 210-1, 215, 218-9, 239, 244-5, 283-300, 343, 402, 447, 454-5
- Reims Cathedral, 40
- Reynolds, George W. M., i, v-vi, viii, x, 7-9, 25-6, 35, 37, 57, 72, 74, 80-1, 88-9, 91-105, 117, 177-9, 197, 207-220, 278, 354-8, 430, 433-4, 441, 448
- The Baroness*, 94
- The Errors of the Christian Religion Exposed*, 93
- Faust: A Romance of the Secret Tribunals*, 25, 103, 197, 207-12, 218, 354, 433
- The French Self Instructor*, 94
- Kenneth, a Romance of the Highlands*, 355
- Master Timothy's Bookcase*, 94
- May Middleton*, 355
- The Modern Literature of France*, v, 7, 35, 93, 97, 105
- The Mysteries of London*, i, 72, 74, 80-1, 88-9, 92-105, 207-8, 211, 278
- The Mysteries of the Court of London*, 81, 103, 177-9
- The Necromancer*, 25-6, 103, 207, 354-8, 428, 430, 433, 448
- The Parricide*, 94
- Pickwick Abroad*, 94
- Pickwick Married*, 94
- Robert Macaire*, 94
- Wagner, the Wehr-Wolf*, 103, 197, 207, 211-20, 358, 434, 448
- The Youthful Impostor*, 94
- Ricard, Auguste, 93
- Richardson, Samuel
- Clarissa*, 77
- Sir Charles Grandison*, 32
- Ritter, Heinrich Ludwig
- Der Vampyr*, 24
- Robespierre, Maximilien, 247-8, 260, 269
- Robin Hood, 34, 105
- Romania, 222-3, 233, 315, 323, 325, 334, 341, 388-94, 401, 403, 512, 514
- Romantic myth of consciousness, 245
- Romanticism, iv-v, 5, 10, 11n, 13, 35, 38-41, 73, 115, 123, 126, 152, 191, 196, 245, 249, 285, 315, 359, 361-2, 379-80, 398, 412, 417
- Rosencreutz, Christian, 42, 212, 217-8, 220
- Rosicrucians, 21, 32, 42, 43n, 107-8, 110, 123, 194-6, 212, 217-8, 224, 239-42, 248, 250, 261, 267, 270, 283-300, 357, 366, 374
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 259-61, 267
- Le Contrat Social*, 259
- Russo-Turkish War, 388, 392
- Rymer, James Malcolm
- The Black Monk*, 33-4
- Varney the Vampire*, 11n, 195, 210-1,

218, 301-2, 330, 332, 375, 382-3,
396, 441, 446

S

Sade, Marquis de, 6-8, 31, 165n

Crimes of Love, 7

An Essay on Novels, 6-7

Justine, 6-8, 31, 165n

Sand, George, iii, vi, 93

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 41

Satanic pact (see also Faustian pact),
11, 209

Sauval, Henri

*Histoire et recherches des antiquités de
la ville de Paris*, 42

Schiller, Friedrich, 16

Scotland, viii, 11, 31, 89, 306, 310-1,
313, 315, 321, 334, 360, 394, 430

Scott, Sir Walter, iii-iv, 3-4, 10-7, 27,
29-40, 50-1, 53-5, 57-8, 63-4, 72, 115,
136, 142-3, 177, 179, 197-207, 210,
250, 276, 378-9, 459

The Abbot, 39

Anne of Geierstein, 10, 30, 197-207,
210

The Black Dwarf, 35

The Bride of Lammermoor, 11

The Fortunes of Nigel, 39

Guy Mannering, 13

Ivanhoe, 10-4, 16-7, 30-5, 38, 72, 87,
147, 177, 179

Kenilworth, 11-2

Lives of the Novelists, 10, 378

Old Mortality, 14-5

Peeveril of the Peak, 37

Quentin Durward, 12, 14, 16, 36,
38-40

Waverley, 10-1, 14-5, 37

Waverley Novels, 14-6, 39

Woodstock, 10, 12

Places named for Scott, 12

Sir Walter Scott Monument
(Edinburgh), 12

Scribe, Eugène, 22, 24, 173, 271

Le Vampire, 22, 24

Second Coming, 30, 292, 297

Second sight, 262, 266-7, 380, 448-9

Secret societies, 21, 27, 117, 163, 171-
3, 193-236, 238, 254, 261, 269-70, 447

Seyfioglu, Ali Riza

Dracula in Istanbul, 458

Shakespeare, William, 16-7, 64, 115,
147, 202

Hamlet, 423

Henry VI, 202

Shelley, Mary, ix, 2, 29, 199, 308, 388,
407

Frankenstein, ix, 2, 11, 29, 88, 195-6,
199, 308, 325, 340, 343, 369, 388,
407, 421, 441

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 2

Prometheus Unbound, 153, 158

Shoberl, Frederic, ix, 35

Smart, Hawley, 394

Smith, Albert

The Marchioness of Brinvoilliers, 279

Smith, J. F.

The Substance and the Shadow, 279,
283

Socialism, 73, 78, 117, 173, 178, 405

Society of Jesus (see Jesuits)

Sorr, Angelo de

The Vampires of London, 358-63, 376-
7, 445

Soulié, Frédéric, 8-9, 93

The Two Cadavers, 8

The Devil's Memoirs, 8-9

Spring-Heeled Jack, 346, 435

Stenbock, Eric

"The Sad Story of a Vampire," 398,
417-20, 429, 439

- Stendhal, 16, 368
- Stevenson, Robert Louis
 "The Body Snatcher," 96-7
Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 349, 395, 441
- Stoker, Bram, viii, 2, 24-5, 87, 110-1, 144-6, 153, 174-6, 221-4, 230-6, 267, 301-2, 319-20, 325, 329, 358, 361, 365, 373, 377-8, 381-3, 388-9, 391-3, 397-403, 408-10, 412-3, 415, 417, 419-55, 458-9
Dracula, viii-ix, 2, 24-5, 27, 48, 86-7, 89, 107, 110-1, 116, 119, 131, 144-6, 152-3, 175-6, 190, 195, 197, 221-33, 235-6, 266-7, 301-3, 305, 307-9, 311, 313, 315, 317, 319-25, 327, 329-31, 333-5, 337, 339-41, 343-5, 347, 349-51, 353, 355, 357-9, 361, 363, 365, 367, 369, 371, 373, 375, 377-83, 385, 387-395, 397-403, 405-13, 415, 417, 419-55, 457-9
 "Dracula's Guest," 383, 428-9
Famous Impostors, 144-5, 174-5, 231n
The Lady of the Shroud, 392
The Lair of the White Worm, 400
Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving, 319, 392, 416, 423, 437
Powers of Darkness (see separate entries)
The Primrose Path, 426
The Snake's Pass, 427
 comments on *Salathiel*, 144-6
 comments on Sue's *The Wandering Jew*, 174-6
 and French, 381-2, 422-3
 and Irish influences, 424-8
- Stoker, Florence, 329, 423, 425-6, 428, 430, 447
- Stoker, George, 392
- Styria, 383-5, 387, 398, 417, 419, 428-9
- Sue, Eugène, iii, vi, viii, x, 15, 52, 71-80, 89-90, 92-3, 100, 103-5, 113, 116-7, 145, 153, 160-80, 187, 190-1, 196, 230, 238, 271, 276-81, 283, 343, 357, 368, 375, 415, 436, 447, 459
Jean Cavalier, 15
Kernock le Pirate, 73
The Mysteries of Paris, 71-79, 104-5, 113, 163, 169, 173, 175, 177-8, 277, 434
The Mysteries of the People, 73, 177-9, 187, 238, 279-80
The Iron Trevet, or Jocelyn the Champion, 279
The Pocket Bible, 177
The Sword of Honor, 178, 280
The Wandering Jew, x, 52, 73, 153, 160-78, 196, 230, 357, 415, 443, 445, 459
- Superman, 33, 79
- Swedenborg, Emanuel, 107, 254
- T
- Tales of the Dead* (see *Fantasmagoriana*)
- Tarzan, 79
- Thackeray, William Makepeace, 1, 104
Pendennis, iv
Rebecca and Rowena, 11
Vanity Fair, 104
- Tower of London, The* (films), 69
- Theatre Doyen, 5
- Thierry, Augustin, 14
- Thompson, Richard
The Mysteries of Old St. Paul's, 73
- Tieck, Johann Ludwig, 54
- Tolstoy, Aleksey Konstantinovich
 "The Family of the Vourdalak"
 ("The Curse of the Vourdalak"), 419
- Tolstoy, Leo
War and Peace, 16

- Tower of Babel, 108
- Transylvania, 227, 232, 325, 341, 360, 391-3, 398, 400, 403, 409, 427, 429-30, 440, 450-1, 453, 512
- Trollope, Anthony, iii, 80, 103
Barchester Towers, iii
The Small House at Allington, iii
The Way We Live Now, 116, 343
- Trollope, Frances, 80
- Twain, Mark, 12
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, 12
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, 12
Life on the Mississippi, 12
- U**
- Upton, Smyth
The Last of the Vampires, 25, 322, 396
- V**
- Vambery, Arminius, 444
Vampire: or, Detective Brand's Greatest Case, *The* (anonymous), 394-7, 435
- Verne, Jules, viii, 91, 391-2, 397-403, 410, 430, 437, 444, 454
The Carpathian Castle, 391, 397-403, 430, 437, 444
The Mysterious Island, 91
Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, 91
- Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Comte de
Claire Lenoir, 368
- Volcanoes, 122, 137, 182, 210-1, 400
- W**
- Wachsmann, Karl von
 "Der Fremde" ("The Mysterious Stranger"), 325, 408-13, 430, 436
- Wagner, Richard
The Flying Dutchman, 136, 440
- Wallace, Lew, 115-6, 147-52, 153, 173-4
Ben-Hur, 115-6, 147, 151
The Prince of India, 116, 151-3, 173-4
 comments on *Salathiel*, 147-52
- Walpole, Horace, 9, 51, 54
The Castle of Otranto, viii, 29, 377
- Wandering Jew (depictions of), 21, 27, 30-2, 34, 45, 79, 83, 107, 109, 111-3, 116, 119-92, 287, 291-2, 313n, 348, 357, 373, 410, 433, 435, 448, 455
- Webster, Benjamin, 276, 280
- Wells, H. G.
The Island of Dr. Moreau, 407
- Wilde, Lady Jane, 425-7
Ancient Legends, 427
- Wilde, Oscar, 420, 425-6
- Wills, W. G.
Vanderdecken, 440
- Wohlbrück, Wilhelm August, 24
- Wood, Mrs. Henry
East Lynne, 99
- Y**
- Yeats, William Butler, 224
- Z**
- Zahed, Éliphas Lévi, 239
- Zola, Émile, 41
The Mysteries of Marseilles, 74