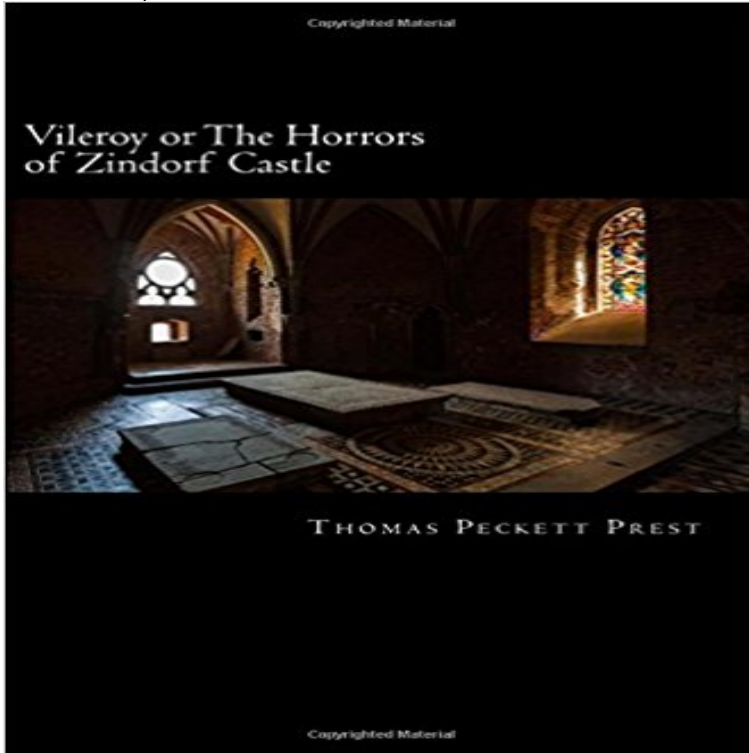


## Vileroy or The Horrors of Zindorf Castle: A Romance of Chivalry



Zindorff was wildly popular in the 1850s, outselling works by Dickens and Thackeray, but has now largely been forgotten. All the tropes of the early penny dreadful are here: a quintessential Gothic romance, replete with incidents of physical and psychological terror; remote, crumbling castles; seemingly supernatural events; a brooding, scheming villain; and a persecuted heroine. Who Wrote Vileroy? Experts agree that the Penny Dreadful classic Vileroy or The Horrors of Zindorf Castle was most likely penned by either one or both of the two authors who co-wrote *The String of Pearls*, one of the earliest Dreadfuls that saw the debut of *Sweeney Todd*. James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest produced installments of *Pearls* at a frantic pace, churning out eighteen long parts in less than five months between November 1846 and March 1847. It appeared in *The Peoples Periodical and Family Library* and like other Dreadfuls the author was not the star the sensational story was. Often these inexpensive serials weren't even credited to an individual, hence the difficulty in being definitive about the authorship of Vileroy. James Malcolm Rymer is the more famous name because of his still read *Varney The Vampire* (1847). The book is famous for being a Victorian novel that preceded the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). *Varney* was immensely popular in its time and Rymer briefly enjoyed a fame that would be hard for many authors today to comprehend. This was partly because the novel had only just started to take off as a popular form of mainstream entertainment. So in 1848, *Varney* wasn't just the latest vampire serial. It was the only vampire serial. Ever. Thomas Peckett Prest, the more likely author of Vileroy, is a more shadowy figure. His work has long since been out of print and today he has been largely forgotten. This despite being one of the creators of

Sweeney Todd as well as leaving behind (somewhere) an impressive output of work.

In addition to more lurid matter, Prest wrote a popular series of books lampooning Dickens. Money-for-hire writing such as Prest practised (with great success) was a viable option for literate men from the working class. They toiled on Grubb Street and gave rise to the term hack, meaning a writer who didn't have any discernible talent or skill but just wrote for money, hacking away at his desk. Rymer and Prest may have been hacks but their work was successful for a reason: they were good at what they did. Because they were paid a salary, does that make them any less talented than an author submitting manuscripts to a publisher? Read Vileroy and decide for yourself.

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