

Hernani, Translated and Adapted by Pierre Bedard

By Victor Hugo

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Hernani is a significant 19th century French play of major historical import. When thinking of Hernani and its impact on French theatre and society, I think of Wells' Citizen Kane, Coppolla's Apocalypse Now, Scorcese's Taxi Driver, and (arguably) De Palma's Scarface … it's just that kind of play.

Hugo, who went on to pen Les Miserables, staged Hernani in 1830, unclogging a French Theatre constipated by Classicists like Racine and Corneille. Using common terms like mouchoire (handkerchief), Hugo and his loud horde of Romantics terrorized the Classicists. Fights broke out at performances as the audience polarized between the young Hugo and the old guard of French theatre. La Battaille d'Hernani on the 25th of February, 1830 is still studied in drama, theatre, and French literature programs worldwide.
I translated Hernani in 1979 as part of a special project at the University of California at San Diego under the direction of Dr. Jonathan Saville, who retired as a professor emeritus at UCSD and was a longtime theatre/arts critic for the San Diego Reader. Having just returned from a year abroad studying at the Faculté des Lettres in Poitiers, France, I needed a challenge. Dr. Saville was kind enough to oblige me. I continued to refine the draft into the 1980's.

This translation has been used by students and faculty at many schools, including the University of Chicago, Oakland University, Colgate, University of Georgia, University of Utah, University of Windsor, Lawrence University, University of Ottawa, University of Alberta, Rollins College, Mount Holyoke, University of Saskatchewan and others. In June 2004, I was proud to find out the translation was used by the English National Opera as a reference for their production of Verdi's opera, Ernani.

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