

Hernani



A play in five acts
by Victor Hugo

Translated and adapted
by Pierre Bedard

Preface

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

On his way to *Les Miserables*, in 1830 a young Victor Hugo staged *Hernani* and unclogged a constipated French theatre. Using common terms like *mouchoire* (handkerchief), Hugo and his horde of romantics scandalized the classicists. Fights broke out at performances as the audience polarized between the young Hugo and the old guard of French theatre.

I began translating *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 is now a professor emeritus at UCSD and a the longtime theatre/arts critic for the *San Diego Reader*. Having just returned from a year abroad studying at the Faculte de Lettres in Poitiers, I needed a challenge. Dr. Saville was kind enough to oblige me. I continued to refine the draft into the 80's. What you find here is a scanned copy (in pdf) of the script. It is not searchable but it is bookmarked by Act and Scene.

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

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Enter DONA JOSEFA. A KNOCK sounds at a hidden door. A second KNOCK sounds.

DONA JOSEFA. Is it him? So soon?

Another KNOCK.

He's knocking at the right door.

Another KNOCK.

Quickly...I'll get it.

Enter DON CARLOS.

Good day, brave knight. What? You're not Senor Hernani! Guards! Help!

DON CARLOS. Two words more, maid, and you die. Good day indeed. Is this the house of Dona Sol, the niece and fiancée of the old Duke of Pastrana? He's a good old man, good enough, it seems, to be cheated. His niece receives a little knight, every night. He couldn't force a mustache on his face with makeup. This is where he comes, right? Am I correct if I assume that this is the place? Talk! Maybe you'll answer if I...

DONA JOSEFA. I thought two words would spell my end.

DON CARLOS. All I want from you, maid, is one word... yes...or no. Now tell me, is this the home of Dona Sol?

DONA JOSEFA. Yes it is. Why do you ask?

DON CARLOS. For no reason. The duke, her future husband, is not here?

DONA JOSEFA. Don Ruy Gomez is not here.

DON CARLOS. She's waiting for the young one, right?

DONA JOSEFA. Yes. He should be here at any moment.

DON CARLOS. What luck!

DONA JOSEFA. Isn't it, though?

DON CARLOS. Enough woman! So it's here that they meet, right?

DONA JOSEFA. Yes.

DON CARLOS. Hide me somewhere.

DONA JOSEFA. You?

DON CARLOS. Of course. Who else?

DONA JOSEFA. Why?

DON CARLOS. Never mind why, hide me.

DONA JOSEFA. Me hide you?

DON CARLOS. Yes. Here.

DONA JOSEFA. Never.

DON CARLOS pulls dagger and
purse from his belt.

DON CARLOS. Please, maid, be kind enough to choose
between this purse and dagger.

DONA JOSEFA. I'll take the purse.

DON CARLOS. An intelligent choice, maid.

DONA JOSEFA opens cupboard door.

DONA JOSEFA. In here.

DON CARLOS. This coffin?

DONA JOSEFA. Like it or lump it.

DON CARLOS. I will. Is this where you keep your
broom, witch?

DON CARLOS enters cupboard.

DONA JOSEFA. A man! In here!

DON CARLOS. Am I so different from the young knight,
maid?

DONA JOSEFA. Oh heavens, Dona Sol! Quick, shut the
door!

DONA JOSEFA closes cupboard door.

DON CARLOS. One more word from you, woman, and you die!

DONA JOSEFA. Oh my! Oh dear! Who is he? If only the master were home. Oh well, the other one should be here soon. This is his business, not mine. May the good Lord save us from a sure Hell. This could be worse, though. He could be a thief.

Enter DONA SOL .

DONA SOL. Josefa!

DONA JOSEFA. Madam?

DONA SOL. Oh! I fear some mishap. Hernani should be here. That must be him. Let him in before he knocks.

Enter HERNANI.

HERNANI. Dona Sol! Ah, finally, it's you. The voice that speaks to me is yours. Why does fate place my days so far away from yours? I need you desperately to help me forget all the others.

DONA SOL. My lord, your clothes are dripping. It must have rained hard.

HERNANI. If it did, I didn't notice.

DONA SOL. Take off your coat.

HERNANI. Dona Sol, my love, tell me. When at night you sleep, calm pure and innocent...when a happy slumber cracks your mouth and places its finger on your eyes, does an angel tell you how sweet you are to the forgotten one that all push aside and abandon?

DONA SOL. You are very late tonight, my lord. Tell me if you are cold.

HERNANI. I burn near you! Ah! When a jealous love boils in my head and a storm swells my heart, what does it matter what a cloud decides to throw down on me?

DONA SOL. Come now, give me your coat, and the sword.

HERNANI. No. This is my other friend, innocent and true. Your uncle, Dona Sol, the old Duke, your future husband, is he here?

DONA SOL. No, he is not. This hour is ours.

HERNANI. This hour and that is all. For us, no more than an hour. After that, what does it matter? We must forget or die. Angel, an hour with you is worth a lifetime, an eternity.

DONA SOL. Hernani!

HERNANI. The old man's absence brings joy to my heart. Like a trembling thief, kicking down your door, I steal you for an hour and listen to your song, for only one hour. But I am happy, envied for losing my life for the theft of one hour.

DONA SOL. Calm yourself, Hernani. Josefa, please, go dry his coat.

Exit DONA JOSEFA.

Come here.

HERNANI. So, the Duke is not here?

DONA SOL. Oh! How big you are!

HERNANI. He is not here.

DONA SOL. Let's forget the Duke.

HERNANI. Think of him, madam. You are to marry the old man. He loves you. Didn't he steal a kiss from you the other day? And you ask me not to think about him?

DONA SOL. Is that what's depressing you? An uncle's kiss? On the forehead? A kiss from my father couldn't have been more harmless.

HERNANI. No. It was a lover's kiss, from a husband-to-be, a jealous man. Soon you'll be his. Have you thought about that? He's senile. He thinks he needs a wife to lead him to the end of the road. He doesn't see himself marrying death soon while he holds your hand. The fool throws himself between us without fear. I wish he'd see a gravedigger and show what he's made of. Who arranged this marriage, anyway? I hope you're being forced into it.

DONA SOL. Some say the King wants it.

HERNANI. The King! My father died, condemned by his father. And though we have all aged since the day he hung, my hate, for the now dead King, and for his son, for his widow, for all his blood, is fresher than ever. My father is no longer of this world, but still, as a child, I swore to avenge his death by killing his son. I search for you everywhere, Carlos, King of the Castilles. Hate rules between our two families. My father fought for thirty years. Thirty years, only to lie dead in vain. Peace shall never come. So it is you, Carlos, who wants to violate my love. All the better. Another reason to number your days.

DONA SOL. You frighten me!

HERNANI. Now that I am banished from the kingdom, it is time that I frighten myself. The man you are to marry, your uncle, Ruy de Silva, the Duke of Pastrana, a count and a cousin of the Castillian kings, is a very old man. His gold and jewelry will make up for his lack of youth. You will shine with the best of royalty. You may even be envied. Your rank, your pride, glory and riches may even put to shame the greatest of queens. So that, my love, is the present situation. I, Hernani, have nothing! As a child, I ran through the woods barefoot, foraging for my food. Maybe the past casts a shadow of some illustrious coat-of-arms, dulled by spilt blood or some other dishonor. While I've waited for the day that my family will rise again from the grave, the jealous heavens have yielded nothing, nothing but air, light and water...a dowry that is man's natural right. Now, you must choose between the Duke and me. One of us must deliver you. Either you marry him... or you follow me.

DONA SOL. I shall follow you.

HERNANI. So you can live with me and my rude companions? Men so condemned that the executioner knows them by name? Men whose hearts and steel never dull? Men who have unavenged blood as their reason for being? Will you command them? How well do you know me? I am hunted throughout Spain. Old Catalonia, my mother, receives me alone in her forests, cliffs and summits, where only an eagle can find me. I grew up with her hill people, a free and serious people, though poor in the material sense of trinkets and baubles. Tomorrow, if I were to sound my horn in their mountains, three thousand of their brave would come to my call, and you would shudder, dear. Think again. Do you want to follow me into the woods, to the mountains, roving from coast to coast with a mob of men, aware of the lot of them at all times? Their eyes, their voices, their every step...their smell? Sleeping on the grass, drinking from streams and listening to bullets whistle past while nursing our child? Is this the life you want to live? Do you want to be always on the move, hunted and banished from your land? Are you willing to follow me to my father's fate at the hands of an executioner?

DONA SOL. I will follow.

HERNANI. The old Duke is rich and prosperous. There is no stain on his father's name. He offers you treasures, titles, happiness.

DONA SOL. We'll leave tomorrow. Please, Hernani. Don't blame me for my audacity. Are you my downfall or my savior? It does not matter, I am your slave. Listen. Go where you will, I will follow. Whether you stay or leave, I am yours. Why? I only wish I knew. I need to see you again and again. I need to have you all the time. When you leave, and the sound of your step disappears into the night, my heart stops. When you leave me, I sense something missing. But, when the footsteps I long for ring in my ears, they remind me that I am alive. My soul lives again.

HERNANI. Angel!

DONA SOL. At midnight, tomorrow, bring your escort. Knock three times beneath my window. Go. I'll stay brave.

HERNANI. Now, do you know who I am? Do you realize...

DONA SOL. My lord, what does it matter? I will follow.

HERNANI. No! Since you wish to follow me, woman, you must know what name, what station in life, what soul, what destiny is hidden in Hernani, the shepherd. Do you really want a criminal? Do you want a marked man?

Enter DON CARLOS from the cupboard.

DON CARLOS. Are you through with your life's story? Do you think that it's comfortable in here?

HERNANI. (places hand on sword) Who is this man?

DONA SOL. Heavens! Help!

HERNANI. Quiet, Dona Sol! You might open some jealous eyes. When I am close, call for no one's help but mine. What are you doing here?

DON CARLOS. It is quite apparent that I am not on my Sunday stroll.

HERNANI. Who laughs after such an insult, may not live to laugh again.

DON CARLOS. To each their time. Let us be frank, sir. You love madam and her dark eyes. Your own reflect in hers every night. That is all very well. I love madam also. I needed to know who it was I saw at her window every night while I waited at the door.

HERNANI. For honor's sake, you may exit by my usual entrance, sir!

DON CARLOS. We shall see. I now offer my love to madam. Better yet, let's share. I see enough love for the two of us. So tonight, I came in by surprise, hid myself, and listened, trying to keep quiet in that hole. I only managed to suffocate myself. Oh, and I wrinkled my vest, dear me...so I came out.

HERNANI. My sword is as uncomfortable as you were. It dearly wants out.

DON CARLOS. As you please, sir.

HERNANI. (drawing his sword) En garde!

DONA SOL. Hernani!

DON CARLOS. (drawing his sword) Calm yourself, madame.

HERNANI. Tell me your name.

DON CARLOS. Your name, sir!

HERNANI. My name is for another who will one day hear it as he feels my dagger searching out his heart in his breast.

DON CARLOS. What is his name, then?

HERNANI. What does it matter now? En garde! Defend yourself!

HERNANI and DON CARLOS cross swords. A KNOCK sounds at the main door.

DONA SOL. My God! Someone's knocking!

Enter DONA JOSEFA.

HERNANI. Who's knocking?

DONA JOSEFA. Madam! It's the Duke!

DONA SOL. The Duke! All is lost! Oh my!

DONA JOSEFA. Oh! The unknown one decided to fight!
What a scene! What a scandal!

HERNANI and DON CARLOS sheath their
swords. Another KNOCK sounds.

HERNANI. What can we do?

VOICE. Dona Sol! Dona Sol! Open up!

HERNANI. Don't open it.

DONA JOSEFA. St-Jacques save us!

HERNANI. Let's hide.

DON CARLOS. In the cupboard?

HERNANI. Get in. We shall survive.

DON CARLOS. Are you sure it's not too large for the both
of us?

HERNANI. (motioning to the small door) Let's go this way.

DON CARLOS. Good night, then. I shall remain here.

HERNANI. Your blood shall pay for this, sir. What if
I barricade the door?

DON CARLOS. Open the door.

HERNANI. What is he saying?

DON CARLOS. Let him in, I tell you!

KNOCKING continues. DONA JOSEFA
opens the door.

DONA SOL. This is surely the end!

Enter DON RUY GOMEZ with valets.

GOMEZ. Men! In my niece's company? At this time of night? Come! All of you! We need some light here. We need some noise. By St. John of Avila, madam, I believe we are three here, that's two too many. And what are we doing here, my two young knights? Was it so long ago that the Cid and Bernard, those two giants of Spain and the world, would go about the Castilles honoring the elderly and protecting the honor of our women? These men found their iron and steel lighter than your velvet, they respected the greybeards. The honor of their houses made them kneel at church. They betrayed no one! If these men wanted a woman, they would take a virgin, in broad daylight, their sword, axe or lance in hand. Those who left their movements for the night, those who went about, stealing the honor of our women, were seen as vile by the Cid, and were brought to their knees, disgraced by the flat of his sword. If only I were young! I would do it now! I look back to the men of yesteryear and pity the so-called men of today. What are you here for, gentlemen? Did you come to laugh at me? An ancient soldier? Will people now laugh as I pass by? If they do, you will not be among the chuckling crowd. That I guarantee!

HERNANI. Duke!

GOMEZ. Silence! You youngsters have everything. Your swords, rings, lances, the hunt, the festivals, dogs, falcons, songs to sing at night under some nymph's balcony, silks, the balls...you have all the joys of youth. You depress me. Has boredom set in so soon in your lives? You need toys, so you take an old man. Listen, children. You have broken this toy. Someday, someday when you too are old, it will come back to you. God will see to that. Now, follow me.

HERNANI. My lord Duke...

GOMEZ. Follow me! Now! Is this your warped idea of a joke, sirs? I hold a treasure in my house, the honor of a girl, of a woman...the honor of a whole household. The girl I love is my niece. We shall soon exchange rings. She is chaste, pure, sacred to all men. I leave the house for an hour and two gigolos slide in. By touching her you stain our women. You have no honor!

GOMEZ rips off his gold collar.

Here! Walk on this! Crush it! Dishonor me!

GOMEZ throws down his hat.

GOMEZ. Tear out my hair, one by one. Tomorrow, you two can strut into town and brag that you've soiled the white hair of a noble head.

DONA SOL. My lord...

GOMEZ. Servants! Help me! Fetch my dagger, knife, and hatchet! You two! Follow me!

DON CARLOS. Duke, I am not here to steal your bride-to-be. I come to tell you of the death of Maximilian, the Holy Roman Emperor.

GOMEZ. What are you saying?

GOMEZ recognizes CARLOS.

My God! The King!

DONA SOL. The King!

HERNANI. The King of Spain!

DON CARLOS. Yes, I am Carlos. Are you mad, Duke? I was just informed that my grandfather lies dead. I came in haste to tell you myself. After all, you are a trusted, admired subject, and I need your counsel. I tried to come incognito, but all of this noise!

GOMEZ. Why was I not let in when I first knocked?

DON CARLOS. Lest you forget, Duke, you came with an armed escort! I did not travel through the night to enlighten your pages with state secrets.

GOMEZ. Your highness, forgive me, it appeared that...

DON CARLOS. Good Duke, I make you governor of Figueroa...but who will I choose to govern you?

GOMEZ. Forgive me...

DON CARLOS. Enough! Not one more word from you on the subject. The Emperor is dead.

GOMEZ. Your grandfather is dead?

DON CARLOS. Given that my grandfather was Emperor, yes, he is dead, Duke. You see me before you in the deepest of sorrows.

GOMEZ. Who is to succeed him?

DON CARLOS. A Duke of Saxony has presented himself. Francois the First of France is also in the running.

GOMEZ. Where will the Electors assemble?

DON CARLOS. I think they have chosen Aix-la-Chappelle, though they may meet in Spire, or in Frankfurt.

GOMEZ. Has our exalted king given a thought to the Empire?

DON CARLOS. I assure you, Duke, that he always has.

GOMEZ. It is almost your right, sire.

DON CARLOS. I know.

GOMEZ. Your father was Archduke of Austria, and the title held by your dearly departed grandfather, I hope, shall soon be yours.

DON CARLOS. I am also the Bourgeois of Ghent.

GOMEZ. In my youth, I saw your grandfather. Sometimes, sometimes, I wade again and again through my century. Everyone is dead now. Your grandfather was a powerful and magnificent Emperor.

DON CARLOS. Rome awaits me.

GOMEZ. He was valiant...firm in thought and deed. He was never a tyrant. His good head supported a heavy crown. It must be painful to be so young and immersed in anguish for the dead.

DON CARLOS. The Pope wants Sicily back, which I now have. An Emperor, by law, cannot hold Sicily. If he makes me Emperor I'll give him Naples, too. Once I get the eagle on my coat-of-arms, we'll see if he can clip my wings!

GOMEZ. What a joy for your grandfather to look down from Heaven to see you on his throne, your head supporting the crown. You mourn him well, sire.

DON CARLOS. The Pope is a shrewd man, but what is Sicily? An island supported by the rest of my kingdom. A tattered rock, holding on weakly to Spain, lagging behind. "What will you do, my son?" he'll say. "With this hunchbacked island in the Empire, dragging you down? Your Empire needs to be tailored. Quick, bring me some scissors and a patch or two. We'll fix what ails you!" And I will, with good fortune. For Sicily and a few other trinkets, I'll have the Holy Empire.

GOMEZ. Console yourself, highness. Heaven is an empire of just, dead men. Your grandfather is safe.

DON CARLOS. Francois is an ambitious man. He made an eye for the Empire at my grandfather's last breath. Isn't he satisfied ruling France? France is a good piece of real estate. You'd think he has enough on his hands. My grandfather would tell King Louis of France, "If I was God the Father, and I had two sons, I would make the eldest Jesus Christ and the youngest King of France." Do you think Francois has a chance?

GOMEZ. He knows how to win.

DON CARLOS. But everything would have to change! The law excludes foreigners from the Holy Office.

GOMEZ. Are you eligible as King of Spain.

DON CARLOS. No. But as the Bourgeois of Ghent, I am.

GOMEZ. The last campaign Francois waged heighten his chances.

DON CARLOS. The eagle which may hatch on my coat-of-arms can also deploy its wings.

GOMEZ. Does your highness know Latin?

DON CARLOS. Very little.

GOMEZ. The German nobility love to be spoken to in Latin.

DON CARLOS. They can content themselves with a refined Spanish. Believe your King, Duke. When the voice is loud, it matters little in what language it speaks. I must leave now for Flanders. Your King, dear Gomez, will return an Emperor. The King of France is now scheming. I have no time to waste if I wish to take the election.

GOMEZ. You leave us lord, without purging Aragon of its bandits? They are teeming in the hills.

DON CARLOS. I've ordered the Duke of Arcos to exterminate the lot.

GOMEZ. Did you also order their chief to let himself be killed?

DON CARLOS. What? Who is this chief? What is his name?

GOMEZ. I don't know, but they say he is a rude fellow.

DON CARLOS. He'll not be too rude dead. I have it from good sources that he is in Galicia. A few of my militia should put him out of business for good.

GOMEZ. Then the news must be false that he is in the immediate area.

DON CARLOS. Yes, it must be. Tonight, Duke, you will lodge me.

GOMEZ. (bowing) Thank you, your highness! Valets! Come, make our royal guest comfortable.

DONA SOL. (aside to HERNANI) Tomorrow at midnight. By my window. Be there. Knock three times.

HERNANI. Tomorrow then.

DON CARLOS. (aside) Tomorrow! Lady, since you must take your leave, I offer you my hand.

HERNANI. (aside) I'll offer him my dagger!

DON CARLOS. (aside) Our mystery man seems trapped. (taking HERNANI aside) I gave you the honor of crossing swords with me. I suspect you for a thousand reasons. But, I, King Carlos, find treason repugnant. Go. I condescend to let you escape.

GOMEZ. Who is this, lord?

DON CARLOS. He's part of my contingent. He's leaving now. Show me your fine accomadations, Duke.

ALL exit save HERNANI.

HERNANI. Yes, King. I am part of you contingent. Night and day, step by step, I'll follow you, dagger in hand. My honor follows the destiny of your honor. So, now I am your rival in love. For an instant, I hesitated between loving and hating you. In loving her, I forgot my hatred, my driving force. I'm glad you've come to me. You've saved me the trouble of hunting you down. Never will a palace dog be as diligent as I in following you steps. I ask not for favors. I ask for blood. My dagger shall speak for me in due time. Go where you please, I will follow. My vengeance will guide my dagger to your heart. Without a sound, it will find its mark. May the Lord God save you.