

HERNANI

HUGO



Heath's Modern Language Series

HERNANI

PAR
VICTOR HUGO

*REVISED EDITION WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES,
EXERCISES, AND VOCABULARY*

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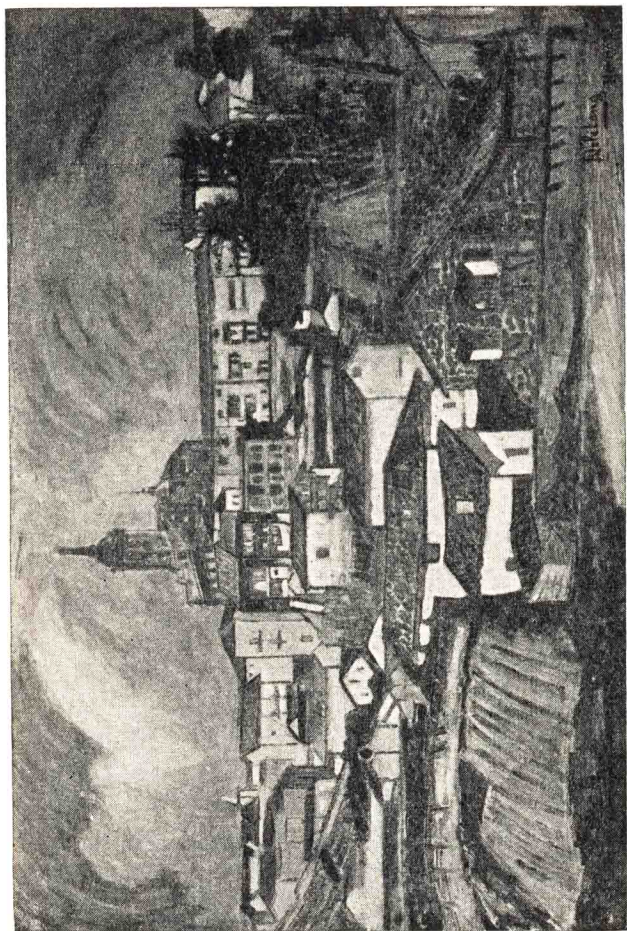
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VICTOR HUGO

Portrait du poète à vingt-sept ans

(Lithographie de Devéria, 1829)



VUE DU VILLAGE D'ERNANI
Tableau de Delétang (Musée Victor Hugo)

PREFACE

Hernani is probably more frequently read in American colleges than any other French play of its type. It is also extensively used in secondary schools. It is in order to make the late Professor Matzke's standard edition more readily available for this large body of readers that the present revised edition was undertaken. For this purpose a vocabulary, practical exercises, including suggestions for *explication de texte*, and illustrations have been added. An effort has also been made to keep the Introduction and Notes abreast of the advances of the past thirty-eight years. To this end the various editions that have appeared since that of Professor Matzke have been utilized, and other literature relating to the play and its author has been carefully consulted. However, Professor Matzke's excellent text, based on the *édition définitive*, as well as the characteristic portions of his editorial contributions, have been retained.

What the present editor has been able to accomplish is due in good part to the coöperation of his colleagues. He is particularly grateful for the assistance of Professor H. C. Lancaster; Professors Gilbert Chinard, Lewis Piaget Shanks, and Arthur Hamilton have also been helpful. Three of the editor's students, Mrs. Mary R. Richardson, Miss Emma Bach, and Mr. Richard A. Parker, have aided him in various ways. The general plan of the revision and many details of its execution are the result of suggestions of the editor's friend and former colleague, Dr. Alexander Green, of D. C. Heath and Company.

The frontispiece by Devéria and the illustrations by Michelena in the body of the play are reproduced by permission of L. Carteret from the edition of *Hernani* published by the Librairie L. Conquet (Paris, 1890).

D. S. B.

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INTRODUCTION¹

THE ROMANTIC DRAMA

THE year 1830 is in French a synonym for Romanticism, or the romantic. It sums up the entire movement which transformed not only literature and the drama, but music and art and many aspects of science and learning at the beginning of the last century. The choice of the date is due essentially to the fact that it is that of *Hernani*. Our play marks the decisive point of a great historic change. It is the object of the following discussion to make clear what this change was, in so far as it affected the drama.

The later seventeenth century was the period of the classic

¹ BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE. — Victor Hugo was born at Besançon, February 26, 1802, the son of a major who was later to become a general. He was educated partly in Madrid. In 1819 he received a prize for poetry; Louis XVIII pensioned him for his *Odes* (1822), after which he married Adèle Foucher. In 1827 the preface of *Cromwell*, an unacted drama, marked him as the leader of the Romanticists. At first a royalist, he became a liberal, with Bonapartist and then Orleanist leanings. *Les Orientales*, a collection of poems, and *Marion Delorme* (1829), a play, are followed by *Hernani* (1830), the novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) and the lyrics *Feuilles d'automne* (1831). Among other plays, he wrote *Le Roi s'amuse* (1832), *Lucrèce Borgia* (1833), *Ruy Blas* (1838); the *Burgraves* failed on the stage in 1843. Louis-Philippe made Hugo a peer of France (1845). After the revolution of 1848 he became a republican. He turned against Napoleon III in 1852, and fled to Brussels and then to Jersey and Guernsey. *Les Châtiments* (1853), *Les Contemplations* (1856), and the greatest modern French epic, *La Légende des Siècles* (1859, additions in 1877, 1883), are poetic products of his exile, as also the novels *Les Misérables* (1862), *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (1866), *L'Homme qui rit* (1869). He returned to France in 1870. *Quatre-vingt-treize* (1874) and *L'Art d'être grand-père* (1877) are among his later works. He died amid national mourning in 1885.

French tragedy. The ideas of that time, as formulated by Boileau in his *Art poétique* (1674), restricted the tragic dramatist very narrowly. As regards matter, his subjects were usually chosen from antiquity and biblical or legendary history. His characters, moreover, were to be persons of the highest rank, — kings and emperors and dignitaries. As regards form, he was to abstain strictly from “confusing literary kinds” by mingling the tragic and the comic. These requirements would give his play uniformity of tone; the ‘unities’ would give it compactness of structure. These unities were those of time, restricting the time of the events represented to twenty-four hours; of place, limiting them to one locality; and of action, forbidding more than one main plot. The play so planned was to be written in alexandrine verse of a definite type (see below, p. xx). Its vocabulary was restricted to the so-called *style noble*, avoiding expressions considered vulgar and undignified, its characters and its scenery all presented the same general appearance, that of the France of that day, and little effort was made to discriminate between the ideas and habits of life characteristic of antiquity and those of the time of Louis XIV.

Plays of this kind could not continue to be produced indefinitely. Men were bound to react against their conventionality. The eighteenth century consequently brought about certain changes, which were not, however, very far-reaching in scope. The themes of tragedies were occasionally chosen from the Middle Ages as well as from ancient times. Moreover, alongside the tragedy there grew up plays which represented a compromise between the tragedy and the comedy; these dramas, called *tragédies bourgeoises* or *comédies larmoyantes* by their originator, La Chaussée (1692–1754), were serious plays which resembled the seventeenth century comedy in that their subjects were chosen, not from the life of the aristocracy, but from that of people of the middle classes. These plays were in prose. Some effort was made, particularly by Voltaire,

to have the scenery and costumes resemble those of the periods represented.

Voltaire also made an effort to change the entire purpose of the tragedy. The seventeenth century had made of it essentially a study of the psychology of distinguished characters in difficult situations. He made of it a vehicle for his ideas of progress and humanity, a means of inculcating his philosophy. The Romanticists, "liberals in literature," to adapt Hugo's phrase, wished to continue such use of the drama for the edification of men by presenting characters as types and symbols and by teaching moral lessons. *Hernani*, for instance, is the type of an outlaw, the symbol of rebellion against authority; the soliloquy of Charles V (Act IV, scene 2) is intended to teach political wisdom. Such pedagogical ambitions, however, did not prevent the romantic writers, as *Hernani* illustrates, from presenting for the most part subjects of wild and unrestrained passion.

Romanticism, indeed, was in many ways a movement of revolt. In no respect was this fact more evident than as regards the ideas of the tragedy previously discussed. Romantic practice, as seen on the stage, and romantic theory, as set forth in Hugo's famous sixty-four page preface to *Cromwell* (1827), rejected them almost entirely. Instead of plays dealing with Greece and Rome, we have dramas treating of the Middle Ages or of the earlier modern period. By the side of or instead of kings and queens, there are characters of lower rank — *Hernani* is an outlaw, Ruy Blas a lackey.

In this respect, as already seen in the *tragédie bourgeoise*, we have a combination of the practice of the seventeenth century comedy and tragedy. The new movement went much further in this direction, however. In the preface to *Cromwell*, indeed, Hugo finds the chief distinction between the classic and the romantic theater in that the latter has an element which he calls the 'grotesque.' By the grotesque he means the combination of the most opposite elements, such as is seen in

Shakespeare — the sublime and the ridiculous, the beautiful and the ugly, the tragic and the comic.

The poet is thus set free from the shackles of the old literary kinds. He is also to be liberated from the restraints of the unities, keeping only enough of them to avoid the formlessness of the melodrama. Those of time and place are thrown to the winds; action, though retained, is interpreted in practice to mean very little. Thus *Hernani* has at least three themes: (1. Who will gain the hand of doña Sol? (2. What is the destiny of Hernani? 3. Will don Carlos attain to the empire?

It is probably again with the idea of keeping such plays on a plane higher than that of the melodrama that Hugo prefers that they should be in verse. This verse should be 'free' and pass easily from tragedy to comedy. It should be able to hide its monotony by a 'free cæsura' and by the 'overflow' (*enjambement*) which lengthens or shortens it. Above all, it should be faithful to rhyme, that slave and queen (*esclave reine*), the highest grace of poetry.

Though the poet is to adhere to tradition to the extent of writing in verse, even so modified, he is to take nature and not his predecessors as his model. He is to try above all to be faithful to the truth. Hence he must study the centuries and chronicles, and strive to reproduce the reality of facts. He must set his characters in the atmosphere of their own times, as shown in such things as language, costume, scenery, manners and customs (*couleur locale*). [The language of the drama, for example, should be much nearer to that of actual life than that of the classic tragedy, with its pale and stilted paraphrases.] The poet should have free choice within the wide range of the French vocabulary, choosing those words that best suit his purpose. According to Hugo's principles, Alfred de Vigny's version of *Othello* should not have been hissed off the French stage, as it was in 1829, because it called a handkerchief a *mouchoir*!

HERNANI

The foregoing statement outlines the principles underlying the romantic drama. Let us next consider their application in *Hernani*. What are we to think of the latter as a play? The question is by no means easy, for critics are still far from being of one mind about it, as well as about Hugo's work in general. The answer here given rests upon an effort to consider the matter without pretention to originality and without prejudice.

As regards the plot of the play, it is improbable to the point of absurdity. The events succeed each other without logical necessity, at the whim of the poet. The characters, it has been said, spend their time in saving the lives of people whom they wish to see dead! Hernani, an outlaw, perishes rather than break his word, when the obligation to keep it is open to question! The whole of Act V, containing the vengeance of don Ruy Gomez, is an unnecessary addition, leaving a painful impression, as the action has already attained a satisfactory end in the fourth act. Despite these defects, there are striking situations, however, and the half-mad plot holds the interest even of those who smile at it. It is hardly open to question that a large part of those who go to see it — and a hundred years have not staled its popularity — do so because they are attracted by the wildly adventurous story.

The characters are no less open to criticism than the plot. They are extraordinary, fantastic creatures, constructed largely on Hugo's characteristic system of antithesis. Hernani combines the lawlessness of a bandit and the generosity of a duke; the profligate and selfish king becomes the philosophizing and magnanimous emperor; don Ruy Gomez, devoted to the ideal of honor, commits an act of the meanest jealousy. Beings of this kind, conceived as embodiments of the theory of the 'grotesque' mentioned above, succeed in being grotesque to a regrettable degree.

Such are the results of Hugo's modification of the older technique as regards content. He was much more fortunate in his changes in form, particularly as regards his verse. A technical discussion of his innovations is given below (p. xxi); in this connection only his verse as poetry is considered. Here is the real reason for the success of the play among the cultivated. The magnificent movement of its alexandrines and their glorious diction impress us as they have impressed generation after generation. If the American schoolboy voluntarily learns these verses by heart, it is in part because he instinctively realizes that they rest upon solid foundations. The scene of the portraits calls up visions of grandeur and chivalry, because Victor Hugo saw such visions when he was a schoolboy in Madrid. The soliloquy of Charles V (Act IV, scene 2) is grandiose (even though it verges on the bombastic), because it voices Hugo's sincere admiration for the incomparable achievements of Napoleon Bonaparte. The love scenes between *Hernani* and doña Sol are full of beauty and the springtime, because they echo phrases in the letters which Hugo wrote to his betrothed. Whatever the dryasdust and the doctrinaire may find to carp at in Hugo's lyrics, they will live as the utterance of emotion deeply felt and nobly expressed.

Hugo's verse is infinitely better than his history. In its larger aspects it is hardly unfair to say, as has been said, that the Spain of *Hernani* is as far removed from that of Charles V as the Greece of Racine is from ancient Greece. Hugo himself was uneasy on this score. He took the trouble to insert in the newspapers, and have distributed at the performance of *Hernani*, a statement giving an excerpt from a Spanish chronicler unknown to Spanish bibliography, justifying his representation of the character of Charles V. The note likewise stated that the basis of the plot was historical. This statement is also unfounded, though the researches of the late Professor Matzke made it fairly probable that the prototype of *Hernani* was an impostor who in the year 1522 played a prom-

inent part in the insurrections at Valencia, and who claimed to be a son of the infante John, eldest son of Ferdinand and Isabella.

On the whole, then, the history of *Hernani* is as absurd as its plot. Nevertheless, the play does have a deceptive atmosphere of truth and reality. Despite its disregard of the facts, it gives us the illusion that we are in Spain in 1519. This result has been attained by the skilful use of local color. Hugo had, for example, a marvelous memory for words and names; his vocabulary and range of allusion are probably larger than those of any other French writer. This fact aided him mightily in collecting the expressions and proper names which he uses with such striking effect. He had, moreover, read a certain number of Spanish books and books on Spain, so that he had command of a considerable mass of more or less accurate information about the costume and the aspect and the manners of the country. Consequently one understands the judgment of a great Spanish scholar, the late Professor Morel-Fatio, who said that in *Ruy Blas* Hugo "a tantôt respecté, tantôt travesti l'histoire." A similar statement may be made about *Hernani*.

THE FIRST REPRESENTATION OF HERNANI
(February 25, 1830)

The play was finished in twenty-seven days, on the 24th of September, 1829. On the first of October it was read before a committee of the Théâtre français, and received by acclamation. The rôles were at once distributed, and the rehearsals begun. The poet was always present, counseling and criticizing. But hostility began to show itself very soon. Hugo tells the following incident as an example. Mlle Mars, who played the rôle of Doña Sol, was ill disposed towards the dramatic innovations which the play embodied, and had accepted her part merely from a feeling of jealousy, lest it might be played by

another. On one occasion she showed open opposition. When she had arrived at l. 1028,

Vous êtes mon lion superbe et généreux,

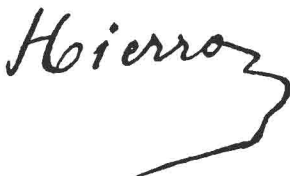
she stopped during several of the rehearsals, and asked Hugo to alter the line. She suggested to change the wording to

Vous êtes, mon seigneur, vaillant et généreux,

which would have rendered the verse flat, but faultless to the classic eye. Hugo answered that he would rather be hissed for a good verse than applauded for a poor one. She insisted, however, and not only recited the line in this altered form, but induced Hugo to incorporate it in the first two editions of the play. The original form of the line was restored only in the edition of 1836. When Mlle Mars pressed for further modifications, however, the poet asked her to give up her rôle, and she sullenly withdrew her objections. Opposition from without was not less aggressive. The rehearsals were secret, and the hostile newspapers employed every means in their power to obtain some knowledge of the play before its first public representation. The censor Brifaut, an unsuccessful playwright who was ill-disposed to *Hernani*, was largely responsible for divulging information which was employed in ridiculing the drama, and predisposing the public against it. Other sources of news about the play were persons who entered the theater by stealth, or listened at the doors, or individuals who secured fragments of the play from Hugo himself. Despite their machinations, however, the rehearsals progressed, and the first representation could be fixed for the 25th of February. But it had already become evident that a battle was to be fought, and that it would be a severe one. How great, therefore, was the astonishment when it became known that Hugo had refused the aid of the *claqueurs*.¹ These men, he said, would applaud

¹ A French theater possesses a body of hired *claqueurs* or applauders, whose office it is to assist a play to succeed.

him but unwillingly, because they had their tastes as well as the members of the Academy, and their idols at the time were Delavigne and Scribe. A new art called for a new audience, and therefore he stated as his intention that he would invite the young poets, painters, architects, sculptors, musicians, and printers of Paris, to take the places of the hired applauders. Though this seemed at first a piece of folly, it was really a masterstroke of Hugo. Hardly had his intention become known, when the whole body of young men, of whom the romantic movement in every domain of art and literature was composed, came to offer their services. Théophile Gautier, for instance, then a painter of nineteen, asked his friend, the writer Gérard de Nerval, for tickets for his friends. Gérard gave him six, and asked him, "Can you answer for your men?" "By the skull from which Byron drank at Newstead Abbey," replied Gautier, "I answer for them!" As tickets of admission Hugo used small slips of red paper, which had stamped upon them in his own handwriting the Spanish word *Hierro* ("iron"), which is signed to Hugo's play *Marion Delorme* and appears in facsimile opposite the title-page of the first edition of *Hernani*. He chose this word, apparently, because *Hierro*, *despierta-te* ("iron, awake!") was the war-cry of the mediaeval Spanish raiders called *almogavares*.



The young men asked to be allowed to enter the theater before the audience. The permission was granted, but for fear of coming too late, they came too early. At one o'clock they gathered in the *rue de Richelieu*, a picturesque crowd, dressed in every way, except in that which was fashionable. It was the custom to wear periwigs; they wore their own hair, some of them in curls which extended down to their shoulders. In place of the traditional swallow-tail coat of the time, the vest of black silk, the starched necktie, and the very high standing col-

lar, which formed, as it were, blinders to the eye-glasses, they were dressed in satin or velvet coats and trousers of the most brilliant colors. The high silk hat was replaced by the soft felt hat, and those among them who were not rich enough to realize their dreams in regard to dress came in simple blouse. Théophile Gautier especially shocked the eyes of the classicists. He was dressed in a scarlet vest, or rather doublet laced behind, which he had especially designed for the occasion, pale-green trousers, black coat with velvet trimmings, and a gray overcoat lined with green satin. The idea, however, that his hair fell in long curls over his shoulders is a legend.

The crowd entered the theater about two o'clock in the afternoon, and many weary hours of waiting had therefore to be endured, before the curtain would rise, and the battle could begin. They distributed themselves carefully over the whole house, occupying the pit and all the hidden corners of the galleries, where an enemy of the new drama might hide. But the hours of waiting were long. They began by discussing the new drama and what they knew of it, then they ate the lunch which they had brought along, finally they sang ballads of Hugo and other songs, and amused themselves in other ways. At last the gas was lighted, and the public entered.

The classicists were shocked by the scene which they saw before them; a murmur of disapproval was heard all over the theater; and a tumult might have ensued, so great was the animosity between the two factions. Happily, the traditional three blows were heard behind the scene, and the curtain rose. Hardly had doña Josefa pronounced the two opening lines

*Serait-ce déjà lui? C'est bien à l'escalier
Dérobé,*

when the quarrel commenced. This daring overflow was against the rules, and hisses from the classicists and answers from the Romanticists filled the house. Line 463,

Est-il minuit? Minuit bientôt

produced a violent uproar. Hugo violated here all the classic traditions. Does a king, they cried, ask for the time of day like the meanest of common people? How much more natural and in better taste it would have been, to say

*Du haut de ma demeure,
Seigneur, l'airain enfin sonne la douzième heure.*

In similar manner, every scene was greeted with hoots and hisses on one side, and with the loudest applause on the other. But as the action progressed, the genius of the poet, and the beauties of the piece, gained upon the audience. In the second act, during the dialogue between don Carlos and Hernani, some of the boxes applauded, and the battle seemed won. Still, the danger was not yet passed. The picture-scene in the third act, of which the opposition had gained some information, had been parodied in the Vaudeville theater, and don Ruy Gomez had been represented as a *montreur d'ours*. At the sixth portrait murmurs were heard, at the eighth hisses and whistles, but the verse

J'en passe, et des meilleurs

saved the situation. The last portrait was greeted with applause. The success of the piece was assured by the monologue of Charles V in the fourth act, which was interrupted by bravo cries at almost every line, and ended with an interminable burst of applause.

Entering the dressing-room of Mlle Mars, the poet found her in an angry humor on account of the scanty applause with which her rôle had been received so far. In this mood she went on the stage at the beginning of the fifth act. But when she appeared dressed in the bridal costume of doña Sol, her success was instantaneous, the audience was now favorably disposed, and when she recited the beautiful dialogue with Hernani, so full of lyric beauty and pathos, she had no longer reason to envy the success of the male rôles of the play. The