

# Critical analysis of sous les arbres essay sample

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Sous Les Arbres is the 17th poem in the second half of the book “ L’ me en Fleur”. “ L’ me en Fleur” is the second book of Victor Hugo’s “ Les Contemplations”. Sous Les Abres is the title of the 17th poem while the poems which come directly before it and after aren’t titled. The poem is 24 lines long, consisting of 6 stanzas written in 4 line quatrains. It is written in alexandrines arranged in “ rime croisées” throughout the 6 quatrains, with an ABAB style of rhyme. Hugo’s use of the Caesura defies the common practice of breaking the Alexandrine line into two units of six syllables called a hemistich, instead using the caesura at a much greater frequency throughout the poem to create the effects of imbalance and asymmetry while allowing greater expression and emphasis. The opening quatrain establishes the location of the poem.

The poem takes place in a forest, where a man and women deeply in love are walking through admiring the nature and world around them. The season the poem is set in is summer, a particularly romantic and suitable setting for the poem due to it’s warmth and the beauty of nature as the surrounding world is in full bloom. The opening quatrain sets the main themes of the poem which are love and nature. Like many of Hugo’s poems, the opening stanzas set the theme and location of the poem while he develops the actions of the poem from third stanza onwards. The third stanza further emphasises the theme of nature in the beginning of the stanza while the final lines brings the poem back to the theme of love. In the fourth stanza, she tells him of her love for him. The fifth stanza combines the themes of love and nature into one. During the sixth stanza as night falls she

establishes her full loyalty to him through her love using the metaphor of a dog.

The poem opens with a one sentence stanza (lines 1-4) written in an alexandrine with the caesura having an irregular form. The caesurae appear seven times throughout the stanza instead of the regular four. The opening three lines all contain an irregular placement of the caesura, while the final line is a classical alexandrine. The second line locates the couple, in a placid forest being disturbed by the dances. In this line, the dances are a metaphor for the wind agitating the otherwise still trees. The stanza has a relatively positive tone, although their actions such as walking and speaking are interrupted by stopping “ S’arretaient” “ S’interrompaient” this does not effect their understanding of each other. Hugo uses alliteration to emphasis the four verbs through the repetition of the “ r” in either the first or second syllable of the verbs. In the last line, their souls whispering is a metaphor for the couple having a deep understanding of each other, even in moments where they do not physically communicate.

The second stanza opens with the use of metonymy and personification. The metonymy being the 2 hearts “ ces deux coeurs” representing the couple while the personification occurs in the form of the smiling creation “ la creation au sourire innocent”. Hugo again uses the caesura in irregular placements throughout the stanza keeping the meter the same but the rhythm varied. To place emphasis on the verbs Hugo places the caesura after the majority of the verbs within the stanza. In this stanza, the theme of love is matched to the theme of nature as the couple become one with

nature “ Disaient á chaque fleur quelque chose”. This stanza exhibits an ambiguous tone as it features both positive and negative imagery such as the positive smiling creation and the drops into the shadows, a word synonymous with negativity, darkness and the unknown.

The third stanza differs from the 2 previous stanzas in that there is no use of the caesura. Instead Hugo uses enjambment allowing the first line run onto the second line without punctuation to separate the two. Rime riche can be seen in the third stanza through the rhyming of the words “ Corbeille” and “ Abeille” in the first and third lines of the stanza. In the second line we see the personification of summer as it brings her flowers, happiness and beautiful days. This ties in the themes of nature and happiness. Hugo uses the simile of a bee to describe her love for the flowers and her naming of the flowers. As a bee would intimately know the surrounding flowers due to it’s necessity for sustenance, she knows the surrounding flowers due to her need of nature. Hugo interrupts this depiction of the surrounding nature by her request to speak about their love in the final line.

The opening line of the fourth stanza is per usual an alexandrine but the quotation marks break the line into three sections of four syllables with the caesura placing emphasis on the end of each four syllable period. Hugo uses the caesura here to emphasise her love for him “ Je suis en haut, je suis en bas”. Her watching over him from both above and below him is an image for her love being like a protective spirit such as a guardian angel excuse the cliché. The male’s response is weak in comparison, asking the names of the surrounding plants after such a significant outpouring by his lover. Hugo

uses Rime Faible in this stanza as a suitable method of rhyme for the males disappointing and thin response.

In comparison to his disappointing response in the fourth stanza the first two lines of the fifth stanza are entirely different. Again the themes of nature and love combine “ il savourait ces fleurs et cette femme.” In the first two lines we see the assonance of the “ o” sound “ O champs!” “ O bois!” “ ô prés!” and also the ou sound “ il savourait” “ où tout”. The “ o” assonance here emphasising locations within nature while the “ ou” assonance emphasising the more human aspect of the stanza, his savouring of nature assembling into one. Hugo inverts the final two lines to emphasise the significance of the woman to the man. Using the scent of the flowers as a depiction of his soul, while the woman’s soul is his own great scent. As they are in love and the man has part of the woman’s soul, the great scent is a metaphor for the woman being a great addition to his being.

The final stanza closes the poem as night is falling around the couple. In the first line there is the alliteration of the “ n” sound “ nuit” “ tronc” “ chêne” “ noir”. The assonance of the “ n” sound joins together the darkness of nightfall and that of the black oak tree they are reclining on. Hugo uses two similes in the final stanza, the star and the dog. She says to her lover that her prayer is always in the sky like a star “ Ma prière toujours dans vos ciuex comme un astre” and that her love like a dog will always be at his feet “ Et mon amour toujours comme un chien à tes pieds”. The star and the dog can also be considered symbols. The star being a symbol for guidance, stars being used for navigation during darkness. While the dog is a symbol for

loyalty, a clichéd term but true being that “ dog is man’s best friend”, continually loyal to their owner. Hugo uses rime riche in the final stanza as the end of the poem exceeds the reader’s initial expectations of such an outpouring of emotion.

As demonstrated it is clear the poem is centred on the theme of love with the theme of nature used heavily to compliment this theme. The main action taking place in the poem is the couples’ walk through the forest as they admire the surrounding world while also discussing their feelings for each other. As Hugo didn’t date the poem other than it being written in June some year during the 19th century it can’t be clearly associated with a certain occurrence in his life but as the book “ L’me en fluer” is based upon his relationship with his mistress Juliette Drouet so it can be assumed the poem is reliving a walk they shared, the poem hence being a pathetic fallacy. “ Sous Les Arbres” fits in well with the rest of “ L’me en fluer” due to it’s themes of Love and Nature. Like much of his work Hugo uses irregular rhythm throughout the poem due to the displaced caesura. The techniques Hugo uses combined with the themes of love and nature make this poem a very good example of Hugo’s romantic poetics overall as it is typical to much of his work within “ Les contemplations”.