

VEGETAL SYMBOLS AND THE SEMIOTICS OF NATURE IN ELIADE'S THOUGHT

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Abstract. *The paper examines conceptualization of plants, trees, and the natural world as fundamental mediators between the sacred and the profane in Eliade's work, which are integral to the construction of cultural semiotics and mythic imagination. Mircea Eliade's extensive contributions to the phenomenology of religion and cultural semiotics encompass a sustained inquiry into the symbolic dimensions of nature, particularly vegetal imagery. Segal (2001) outlines theoretical approaches to myth, positioning Eliade's phenomenological approach within a broader comparative discourse. It is highly agreed upon that Eliade's view remains central to myth theory (Segal, 2001). By situating Eliade's thought within broader mythological and philosophical traditions, the paper elucidates how vegetal symbolism articulates the cyclical logic of life, death, and rebirth central to religious cosmologies. The paper further interrogates the epistemological and metaphysical implications of Eliade's approach, arguing that his treatment of natural symbolism constitutes not merely an interpretive motif but a profound theory of meaning-making rooted in sacred ontology. Through a close reading of his discussions of the cosmic tree, the symbolism of regeneration, and hierophanies within the natural environment, the study explores how Eliade positions vegetal life as a site of revelation and renewal. Nature, in Eliade's framework, emerges as a cosmic manuscript, a living, symbolic text authored by divine agency, wherein plants and trees function as semiotic nodes that render metaphysical realities perceptible to human consciousness. Methodologically, the analysis employs conceptual metaphor theory to uncover the cognitive and semiotic mechanisms through which Eliade transforms natural forms into vehicles of transcendence, thereby bridging phenomenological philosophy, conceptual metaphor analysis, and mythopoetic approaches.*

Keywords: *Conceptual analysis of Nature, vegetal symbolism, cultural semiotics, ecolinguistics, life sciences.*

INTRODUCTION

The Romanian historian of religious ideas Mircea Eliade developed one of the most influential frameworks in the phenomenology of religion, which is relevant to us for its treatment of nature and the plant world as a central dimension of human ontological experience. Eliade conceived vegetal and arboreal imagery not as peripheral metaphors, but as foundational for how the sacred is manifested in the world of the profane. He argued that trees, plants and vegetation function as hierophanies (manifestations of the sacred) by participating in a transcendent reality. In his view, "vegetation is the manifestation of living reality, of the life that renews itself periodically" (ELIADE, 2000, p. 324). Vegetal life articulates the cosmic structure of meaning: life-death-rebirth, axis mundi, centre and periphery, the myth of eternal return, and the sacred-profane dichotomy. The tree becomes a microcosm of the cosmos, roots plunging into the under-world, trunk on earth, branches ascending toward heaven and thus encoding a semiotic logic of orientation and constant renewal of life.

Vegetal symbolism, within Eliade's broader mythological and philosophical concerns related to cosmic renewal takes on a deeply ontological dimension. He does not treat plants and trees as merely decorative, but as semiotic nodes through which metaphysical reality becomes

perceptible to human consciousness. It functions as a metaphysical language that points to divine structures embedded in the cosmos. In this interpretative framework, nature becomes a cosmic manuscript, in which vegetal life is authored by the divine, and reading this manuscript is integral to religious cognition and the deeper understanding of life. Nature, and especially vegetation, becomes a language through which religious meaning is revealed, while natural elements such as plants become communicative signs of spiritual reality (ELIADE, 2000). Thus, nature occupies a central place in Eliade's analysis of religious symbols, serving as a medium for divine manifestation and a stage for ritual renewal.

The literature review section will draw parallels between ecosemiotics, mythological cultural analysis, and Eliade's sacred symbolism. The ecosemiotic approach conceptualizes nature as a system of signs, where ecological entities, processes, and interactions are not merely material phenomena but carriers of meaning. Within this framework, landscapes, plants, and other components of the natural world can be "read" as texts, with signs, signals, and symbols continuously produced, transmitted, and interpreted across multiple levels of ecological and cultural interaction (KULL, 2001). This perspective emphasizes the continuity between human cultural practices and environmental processes, suggesting that meaning-making extends beyond human cognition to encompass the broader ecological context. Organisms, ecosystems, and even abiotic elements are thus understood as participants in a semiotic network, in which significance emerges from relationships and interactions rather than existing solely within individual entities.

In relation to religious and mythological studies, this understanding of nature aligns closely with Mircea Eliade's conception of the natural world as a sacred domain. Eliade interprets trees, plants, and other natural phenomena as hierophanies, *i.e.* manifestations of the sacred within the profane, through which humans perceive transcendent realities. From an ecosemiotic perspective, these manifestations may be seen as natural signs embedded with interpretive potential, providing a bridge between material and symbolic dimensions. By situating ecological and cultural processes within a shared semiotic framework, ecosemiotics offers a holistic approach for understanding how the natural environment operates simultaneously as a dynamic ecosystem, a communicative system, and a repository of cultural and spiritual meaning. This approach foregrounds the interdependence of humans and their environment, highlighting the ways in which ecological knowledge, symbolic interpretation, and mythopoetic imagination are mutually constitutive.

From an ecolinguistic point of view, recent scholarship has shown that traditional cultures had a more reverential approach to nature as they embody ecological principles in practice (DEOPA & RINALDO, 2023). From this perspective, the sense of the sacred which has been lost should as a result of modern secularisation can be regained in order to address the growing environmental crisis. As a remedy, Taylor (2010) proposes "dark green religion" as an emerging spiritual orientation rooted in ecological consciousness. As a result, it would follow that a new nature spirituality would foster a healing planetary ethics (TAYLOR, 2010). Also, Deopa & Rinaldo (2023) argue that sacred ecology within traditional religions carries measurable environmental impacts.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology drawing on textual exegesis, conceptual metaphor analysis and semiotic-phenomenological framing. The approach can be summarised in three interlocking strands subsumed by cultural semiotic analysis. The paper performs a textual exegesis of Eliade's corpus, aiming to explore how trees, plants, and

vegetation represent not merely background scenery but fundamental mythic structures in Eliade's thought.

Given the theoretical nature of this study, the data consist of Eliade's texts, secondary literature and selected mythological/ritual case-studies. The analysis proceeds by: (1) mapping vegetal motifs in Eliade's corpus; (2) coding those motifs in terms of metaphor-categories (e.g., renewal, axis, hierophany, cosmos); (3) interpreting how these metaphors function semiotically to mediate sacred/profane distinction and religious experience; (4) situating findings in comparative context and reflecting on the epistemological implications (e.g., how vegetal mediation changes the ontology of the sacred).

Our interdisciplinary framework for analyzing symbolic meaning and conceptual metaphor in language related to nature and vegetation draws upon semiotics, ecolinguistics, and conceptual analysis. This study also aims to engage students' cultural competence in decoding meaningful content related to their specific interests within the Life and Natural Sciences, which constitute the core material for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses (DRAGOESCU URLICA & STEFANOVIĆ, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The paper aims to (1) trace how Eliade conceptualises plants, trees and vegetation as mediators between sacred and profane; (2) situate this conceptualisation within global mythological and philosophical traditions (for example, cosmic tree myths, vegetation cults, axis mundi imagery); (3) interrogate the epistemological and metaphysical implications of his approach (i.e., what does it mean for religious experience, ontology, and human consciousness when vegetation is treated as a semiotic mediator of transcendence); and (4) employ conceptual metaphor theory and semiotic frameworks to unpack the cognitive and experiential mechanisms by which vegetal imagery becomes a vehicle of transcendence in Eliade's thought.

Moreover, by interpreting vegetal motifs through conceptual metaphor theory (plants = life; tree = cosmos; root = origin; branch = relatedness of species) and semiotic analysis, this study seeks to show how Eliade's vegetal imagery operationalises meaning-making in mythopoetic and phenomenological registers. Thus, the vegetal world is not simply "symbolic" in a decorative sense, but constitutes a theory of meaning-making rooted in sacred ontology. By foregrounding vegetal life, rather than only mountains, water, etc., as prime locus of religious symbolisation, Eliade invites us to rethink the materiality of the sacred. Vegetation becomes not an inert backdrop but an active agent: it encodes the rhythm of life, death, regeneration; it functions as an axis that links realms; it provides a stage for ritual renewal (for instance agricultural rituals or seasonal ones).

For example, in his *The Sacred and the Profane* (2000), Eliade notes that "the tree came to express everything that religious man regards as pre-eminently real and sacred ... life, youth, immortality, wisdom." By situating the tree within the broader context of sacred geography and mythology, he demonstrates how this natural element serves as a bridge between the human and the divine, the temporal and the eternal. The tree, in Eliade's framework, becomes a living metaphor for the cyclical nature of existence and the perennial quest for spiritual transcendence. This perspective aligns with contemporary ecosemiotic approaches that view nature as a semiotic system, where elements like trees function as signs conveying deeper meanings to those who engage with the natural world, recognizing it as a text rich with metaphysical significance.

In *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Eliade (1996) undertakes a systematic exploration of recurrent religious archetypes, emphasizing the prominence of vegetal

symbolism within the comparative morphology of the sacred. He identifies in vegetal imagery, including trees, plants, flowers, and cyclical patterns of growth and decay, a paradigmatic expression of the sacred's generative dynamism. For Eliade, vegetation operates as a symbolic manifestation of the cosmos itself: an organic embodiment of vitality, fertility, and the perpetual rhythm of renewal that governs both nature and religious imagination. The "tree of life" and the "cosmic tree" emerge as central archetypes across mythological systems, functioning as vertical axes that unite the cosmic realms, thereby materializing the sacred order within empirical reality (ELIADE, 1996; MILLER, 2000). Within this phenomenological framework, vegetal symbols constitute hierophanies: concrete instances in which the sacred discloses itself through the living processes of nature.

By tracing these symbolic recurrences, Eliade advances a comparative hermeneutics that interprets vegetal life as a medium of divine revelation and as an ontological sign of cosmic regeneration. His analysis reveals that vegetal archetypes do not merely signify natural fertility but articulate a metaphysical logic of transformation, continuity, and transcendence. Subsequent theological and ecological thinkers such as Keller (2007) and Taylor (2010) extend this insight by situating Eliade's vegetal metaphors within eco-theological discourse, where nature is reimagined as a dynamic and self-articulating expression of divinity rather than inert matter. In this interpretive context, Eliade's focus on vegetal symbolism anticipates contemporary understandings of the sacred as immanent within ecological processes. Thus, the recurrence of vegetal archetypes across religious traditions underscores their dual epistemological and ontological roles: they serve as cognitive schemas for perceiving the sacred and as living metaphors for the cyclical perpetuation of life itself (ELIADE, 1996; BARRETT, 2023; MENDOZA, 2023).

In recent scholarship, the vegetal dimension of religious symbolism has regained attention, not only in the study of myth and ritual but also in critical plant studies and eco-theology. For instance, the vegetal roots of religion approach argues that plants do not simply represent, but also enact meaning in religious systems. Derwael (2023) examines half-human, half-vegetal imagery in Eastern mosaics as expressions of metamorphic symbolism. The hybridity of vegetal-human forms conveys spiritual transformation (DERWAELE, 2023). This paper engages with these developments, using them as both complement and critique of Eliade's framework. We hypothesize that his theory allows for an agency of vegetation and that it does not remain on a symbolic level, but has the potential to become performative.

Along the same lines, Berkes (2017) examines how indigenous knowledge systems perceive natural elements, including plants, as integral to both ecological and spiritual realms. He argues that these systems embody a holistic understanding where nature is not only a physical environment but also a semiotic and sacred space. Similarly, Ryan (2016) explores how contemporary botanical poetry reflects the sacred dimensions of plants, suggesting that literary expressions can reveal the semiotic roles of vegetation in cultural contexts. By analyzing poetic depictions of plants, the author highlights how literature functions as a semiotic medium, revealing the ways in which human societies encode, interpret, and communicate ecological conceptualizations and spiritual significance through vegetal imagery (RYAN, 2016).

Plants operate as cultural symbols, whose forms, behaviors, and life cycles are imbued with metaphorical and ontological resonance. This study underscores the interpretive potential of literary engagement with nature, suggesting that texts can be read as "semiotic landscapes" in which the sacredness of flora is made perceptible, mirroring the ecosemiotic perspective that sees ecosystems and their components as texts capable of conveying layered meanings. By

linking literary analysis, cultural semiotics, and ecological thought, this approach highlights the complex interplay between natural symbolism, and the perception of sacredness in both historical and contemporary contexts.

These perspectives resonate with Eliade's view of nature as a sacred text. He posits that natural elements, particularly plants and trees, serve as hierophanies, *i.e.* manifestations of the sacred within the profane world. In this light, vegetal archetypes function as both cognitive frameworks for understanding the sacred and as metaphors for the cyclical processes of nature. Thus, the recurrence of vegetal symbols across religious traditions underscores their dual epistemological and ontological roles: they are cognitive schemas for perceiving the sacred and living metaphors for the cyclical perpetuation of life itself.

Moreover, recent approaches like ecosemiotics, cultural semiotics, and the ecology of language also refer to nature as a text which may be read or interpreted, as it is made up of sign or symbols, akin to linguistic ones. Maran (2007) elaborates on ecosemiotics as a practical methodology for analysis, introducing the concept of "nature-text" to describe the relationship between meaning and context in ecological systems. He discusses how natural environments can be interpreted as texts, with signs and meanings embedded in the landscape, emphasizing its relevance for studying contemporary culture-nature relations. From this point of view, ecosemiotics may be defined as the study of sign processes responsible for ecological phenomena, positioning nature itself as a semiotic system (MARAN, 2020). The author also discusses how the ecosemiotic view sees ecosystems as semiotic systems, with nature serving as a text that communicates meanings to those attuned to its signs (MARAN, 2014).

By the same token, Kull (2001) offers a comprehensive examination of the semiotic perspective within ecological studies, foregrounding the intricate interplay between natural and cultural systems. He conceptualizes ecosystems not merely as biological entities but as complex semiotic networks in which every component, *e.g.* organisms, physical structures, and environmental processes, functions as a carrier of meaning. By framing nature as a semiotic domain, Kull highlights how ecological interactions are embedded with interpretive significance, suggesting that the natural world operates as a communicative system in which signs, symbols, and signals are continuously produced, transmitted, and interpreted. This perspective underscores the continuity between human cultural practices and ecological processes, emphasizing that meaning-making extends beyond human cognition into the broader environmental context. Through this lens, ecosystems emerge as dynamic texts, where the interrelation of biotic and abiotic elements can be "read" and analyzed, thereby revealing the profound semiotic entanglement of nature and culture.

Other in-depth analyses of ecosemiotics investigate the intersection of cultural, biological, and evolutionary processes in the production and interpretation of signs within natural environments (NÖTH, 2001). Drawing upon C.S. Peirce's theory of continuity between matter and mind, the author foregrounds the idea that semiosis, *i.e.* the process of sign creation and interpretation, is not limited to human cognition but extends throughout the natural world. He argues that ecological entities and processes operate as meaningful systems in which organisms, landscapes, and environmental phenomena function as signs, each carrying informational and interpretive significance. By conceptualizing nature as a "text," Nöth emphasizes the interpretive potential of ecosystems, suggesting that their structures and processes can be "read" as communicative acts that encode biological, cultural, and cosmological meanings. This framework positions ecosemiotics as a transdisciplinary approach, bridging semiotic theory, ecology, and evolutionary biology, and offering a lens through which the natural world can be understood as an active participant in the generation of

meaning. Through this perspective, the study not only extends Peircean semiotic principles into ecological contexts but also reconfigures traditional understandings of the relationship between humans, culture, and the environment.

Against this conceptual background, the study conducts a close reading of key texts by Eliade in which vegetal and arboreal imagery are central (e.g., *The Sacred and the Profane*, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, *Myth of the Eternal Return*). Particular attention is paid to his treatment of the cosmic tree, vegetation cults, hierophany of plants and the sacred-profane distinction. This exegesis aims to identify recurring motifs (e.g., tree = cosmic axis, plant life = renewal) and to map their role within Eliade's broader ontological schema. Secondary scholarship on Eliade's vegetal symbolism and tree imagery in Romanian folklore contexts, is also surveyed to provide historical and cultural grounding. Vegetation is portrayed as a veil between realms: the mundane and the divine or the underworld. The blooming flower or ancient tree is not only a living being, but a portal into sacred time, or axis mundi in symbolic miniature. The natural world becomes a stage on which hierophanies unfold and plants function as thresholds, allowing entry into sacred space. The sacred tree is both symbol and mediator or bridge between two realms, that which is seen and the unseen.

One of Eliade's foundational concepts is "hierophany", the manifestation of the sacred in the mundane (ELIADE, 2000). Eliade coined the term to describe moments when the sacred becomes visible in the mundane. In this framework, trees, springs, and groves are sacred because they represent points of contact between the human and divine. Plants and trees often serve as such mediums, revealing divine presence. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade (2000) emphasizes how archaic humans perceived certain places and natural elements as sacred due to their connection to cosmic realities and phenomena. Natural elements, especially trees, springs, or stones, act as thresholds between dimensions.

Secondly, building on the findings of the textual reading, the study employs semiotic analysis and conceptual metaphor theory (originating in cognitive linguistics (LAKOFF & JOHNSON, 1980; LAKOFF, 2014) to unpack how vegetal imagery functions cognitively within Eliade's symbolic architecture. For example, how the metaphor of "plant life" for cyclical renewal or "tree" for the entire cosmos as deeper structures meaning, or how root-branch imagery signifies origin-extension relationships in religious space/time. In parallel, a semiotic framework is used to see vegetal forms as signs (signifier and signified) within Eliade's religious schema: the plant is a sign of the sacred; the tree a sign of cosmic structure; the cycle of vegetation stands for the idea of eternal return. In this way, the vegetal world becomes a network of semiotic nodes that render metaphysical realities perceptible. This methodological strand also engages with recent work in critical plant studies, which challenge reductive "representation" models and propose that vegetal life may play more active, performative roles in meaning-making.

Thirdly, the study draws a comparative-phenomenological contextualisation as it situates Eliade's vegetal symbolism within comparative mythological and philosophical traditions, for example, the widespread motif of the cosmic tree and vegetation cults in ancient agrarian societies. This involves mapping similarities and differences, exploring how vegetal symbolism articulates the cyclical logic of life, death and rebirth across cultures, and how Eliade appropriates or transforms those motifs. The phenomenological dimension arises in reflecting on how religious consciousness engages nature: how for "religious man" (in Eliade's sense) vegetation is not inert but charged with meaning, how ritual renewal echoes vegetal renewal, how nature opens itself as sacred.

To operationalise the comparative dimension, the study draws on recent empirical and theoretical studies (for example, on plants as symbols of power in iconography, or on religious symbolism and the experience of life as meaningful) to situate Eliade's work in current scholarship. For instance, Barrett (2023) examines how religious symbolism enhances the experience of life as meaningful and religious symbolism shapes human perception of meaning.

Perhaps the most enduring vegetal symbol in Eliade's corpus is the tree as the axis mundi, the world axis or the world center (ELIADE, 1996). The tree stands as the vertical connector between the underworld, the earth, and the heavens, symbolizing spiritual ascent and cosmic structure. Religious architecture and ritual often replicate this symbolic pattern, which is one of the most persistent archetypes pervading the majority of world mythologies. In myths across cultures, the tree becomes a ladder to heaven, a spine of the cosmos, or a pillar of light to be climbed in ascension endeavors. Examples include Yggdrasil in Norse mythology and the Ashvattha in Indian cosmology. Eliade interprets these myths as symbolic expressions of cosmic order, as this metaphorical structure anchors the universe, guiding ritual action and existential orientation in an upward direction. For Eliade, the tree symbolizes vertical transcendence, encapsulating human potential for spiritual ascent. The tree also functions as a spinal cord of the universe, a living axis upon which the world turns and through which revelation is transmitted.

In close connection to the turning axis of the world, which enforces cyclical patterns, the symbolism of regeneration and eternal return are also conceptualized through vegetal metaphors. Vegetation exemplifies Eliade's idea of cyclical time, where nature endlessly returns to the same sacred moments through rites and seasonal patterns (ELIADE, 2005). Plants become the primary symbol of regeneration, not only biologically but spiritually and ritually. Vegetation cycles embody the principle of cyclical time and the myth of the eternal return, a fundamental belief that sacred history repeats itself through ritualistic re-enactment. Cyclical patterns of growth, death, and rebirth mirror the mythic structure of eternal return. Also, myths involving agricultural deities and rites related to the seasons embody the archetype of regeneration. The dying-and-rising god motif (e.g., Osiris, Tammuz, Dionysus) is closely linked to plant life and fertility, pointing to a sacred cosmology rooted in cyclical time (LINCOLN, 1991).

Agricultural rites and seasonal festivals mirror cosmic rhythms and serve as reenactments of mythical time. Seed and sprout are metaphors for initiation and rebirth. The buried seed dying to sprout anew mirrors the death-initiation motif. Plants thus function as living allegories of spiritual death and rebirth. The harvest is a sacred drama enacted each year. Plants are symbolic of ontological renewal and vegetation symbolizes ritual regeneration. The seed represents potential hidden in death; the sprout, rebirth; and the harvest, fulfillment. These vegetal metaphors reappear in myths of dying and rising gods (e.g., Dionysus, Osiris), where natural cycles parallel mythic drama (LINCOLN, 1991).

In traditional societies, sacred plants, especially those used in rituals of passage, act as tools of revelation in mystical experiences. Eliade emphasizes their role in inducing altered states and facilitating spiritual transformation (ELIADE, 2020). In shamanism and initiatory traditions, sacred plants (e.g., ayahuasca, peyote) are more than tools for spiritual transformation, they are mediators of divine knowledge and technologies of the sacred. Sacred plants become keys, ladders, and maps that unlock hidden realms. The vine may represent a path of descent, while the leaf may symbolize a cosmic blueprint. These metaphors underscore the plant's function as both guide and gateway to other dimensions (NARBY, 2016).

Eliade also considers plants in initiation rites, especially hallucinogenic or sacred flora (ELIADE, 2020). In shamanic traditions, entheogenic plants are tools of spiritual ascent and transformation. These vegetal hierophanies blur the boundary between the visible and invisible realms (NARBY, 2016). Plants are seen as guides or gateways, as vegetal and biological symbolism intersect in mythic consciousness; for instance, the vine becomes a serpent-path into the underworld or a map of spiritual terrain. Mythic serpent imagery is associated with biological structures such as the DNA code, suggesting ancient vegetal knowledge systems (NARBY, 2016).

In addition, sacred gardens represent paradisiacal origins of humankind and the ideal structure of the cosmos. These spaces, whether Eden or the Islamic garden, are microcosms of divine order (Eliade, 1996). They often function as the spatial equivalent of sacred time. Gardens, forests, and paradisiacal landscapes in general often appear in Eliade's analysis as symbols of primordial perfection and divine presence. They are utopian spaces or sacred microcosms structured according to cosmological principles. The sacred garden is also a center of the world, where divine-human communication begins. The garden is also seen as a microcosm and often functions as the mythic origin point. The myth of the lost paradise, the center of the world, is commonly situated in a luxuriant natural setting, pointing to the sacredness of untamed nature (ELIADE, 2005). Such places serve as models for ritual and mythical geography (SMITH, 1992). The garden is a womb, a cradle of creation illustrates our mythical origins. It is also a mirror of divine symmetry and harmony of an ordered cosmos. When humanity is cast away from the paradisiacal garden, it falls into flesh (liable to death) and into historical time. Eden becomes the metaphorical memory of sacred geography. The loss of paradise is a fall into chaos, symbolized by barren land or dying vegetation, which is also a metaphor for cosmic exile (KELLER, 2007).

Vegetal symbols are also featured in Eliade's fiction, which mirrors his scholarly work by embedding mythic structures in narrative form. Vegetal settings, such as forests and gardens, often serve as liminal spaces or thresholds between historical time and sacred time. These settings where ordinary time dissolves into sacred time enable existential transformation. In fictional narratives, Eliade often employs plant symbolism to mirror metaphysical and temporal themes. In *The Forbidden Forest (Noaptea de Sânziene)*, the forest acts as a liminal space where ordinary time collapses into sacred time. Moreover, it becomes a temporal vortex, a mythic envelope where history dissolves into eternity. Flowers like the Sânziene are metaphorical keys to femininity, lunar cycles, and vegetal rebirth. However, such elements of nature and vegetation do not merely behave as ornamental metaphors in Eliade's work, but as central vehicles for expressing the sacred, in analogy to mythological insights. Trees, plants, and sacred groves point to a primordial religiosity in which nature is alive and imbued with divine presence. Through myths like the cosmic tree, the garden of delights, and regenerative cycles of nature, Eliade portrays the vegetal world as a bridge between human consciousness and the sacred dimension.

The discussion has also considered contemporary engagements with Eliade's work and approach to mythological schemas related to nature. Critics have noted that Eliade's universalist approach or essentialist universalism, as illustrated by his discussion of vegetal symbols, risk abstraction by neglecting historical and cultural specificity. Yet his recognition of archetypal vegetal motifs remains relevant in ecological approaches and myth criticism. His structural insights into vegetal mythological archetypes remain influential. Recent scholarship explores how his models apply to ecological spirituality and postmodern myth criticism (TAYLOR, 2010; KELLER, 2007). What is more, modern eco-theology and myth criticism have

adopted Eliade's vegetal symbols as metaphors of interconnectedness, ecological resilience, and moral rootedness. The tree becomes a metaphor not just for cosmology, but for planetary ethics, and for the life sciences in general.

CONCLUSIONS

By focusing on vegetal imagery in Eliade's thought, this paper has provided a re-examination of one of the core yet sometimes overlooked dimensions of his work. It addressed conceptualizations of plants and trees serving as more than metaphor: they are mediating structures of religious experience, and thereby open up broader questions about ontology, cognition and mythic imagination.

By combining textual exegesis of Eliade, conceptual metaphor/semiotic analysis, and comparative mythological contextualisation, the methodology opens up a fresh lens on how vegetal life functions as mediator of the sacred in his work. In doing so, it contributes both to Eliade scholarship (by highlighting the vegetal dimension in new depth) and to the field of religious studies more broadly (by modelling how material nature can be approached as semiotic-phenomenological mediator of transcendence).

In conclusion, the paper demonstrates that Mircea Eliade's treatment of plants, trees, and the natural world extends beyond symbolic ornamentation to function as a central framework for understanding sacred reality. Vegetal imagery, within Eliade's thought, operates as a semiotic conduit, mediating between the sacred and profane and articulating fundamental cosmological cycles of life, death, and renewal. By integrating phenomenology, cultural semiotics, and conceptual metaphor theory, the study underscores how nature itself becomes a dynamic text of divine revelation, revealing the intricate interplay between human consciousness and mythic imagination. Eliade's vegetal symbolism thus emerges as a vital site for exploring the epistemological and metaphysical dimensions of meaning-making in religious and mythopoetic contexts.

Regarding the limitations of this study, it is important to acknowledge that Eliade's work is shaped by certain philosophical and cultural commitments, for example, his privileging of the "archaic" religious mentality, his conceptual separation of sacred and profane, and his largely universalizing posture. The study therefore remains reflexive about potential biases: it does not treat Eliade's vegetal symbolism as universally applicable without critique, but rather as a historically situated, theoretically rich vantage.

Furthermore, while conceptual metaphor theory is a useful methodological tool, its application to textual symbols involves interpretive judgement; as such, the study transparently sets out its coding and interpretive attempts. Eliade's mythological approach to plants and vegetation emphasizes the way nature mediates the sacred. By conceptualizing the vegetal world as symbolic of divine structures, re-enacting regeneration, cosmogenesis, and transcendence, he articulates a vision where myth and matter coalesce. Thus, vegetation in Eliade's work is a mythic grammar through which sacred truths are communicated and nature should not be regarded as a passive décor, but a mythically charged space and a symbolic text constantly pointing beyond itself for those who learn how to read it.

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