

The Tree Motif: a Myth Textual Reading of *Desolación* (1922) by Gabriela Mistral

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Resumen

In *Desolación* (1922), Gabriela Mistral's lyrical subject is characterised by abandonment, through the central image of the solitary tree. Critics connect the accent on desolateness with Mistral's biography: the longing for the homeland and the loss of a deceased lover. This article proposes a myth textual interpretation of Mistral's work, combining Julia Kristeva's concept of the genotext with a myth critical reading according to Gilbert Durand. The poetic self is connected with arboreal figures, such as the cross and the natural tree, and the archetypes of the Great Mother, the Son and the tree. They indicate the expectation of recovery, whether it is vegetal renovation or spiritual resurrection. Thus, the results of the analysis extend the accepted interpretation of *Desolación*: the lyrical subject is not content with thematizing loss but intertwines images that refer to vegetal and spiritual rebirth.

Key words: tree motif, *Desolación*, Gabriela Mistral, myth textuality, Messianic myth.

The present work is centred around the work of Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), the first Latin-American author to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1945. Mistral is known for her role as an educator, starting at an early age the teaching career that would bring her to various cities in Chile. In a later period, she travelled the word as an educative advisor and a visiting teacher.¹ Publicly representing the maternal teacher-figure, she explored in her work the theme of the mother-child relationship. However, in her first poetry collection *Desolación* Mistral also gives presence to a lyrical subject that is characterised by solitude. The image of the tree, standing solitarily in the midst of a desolate plain, is the central symbol of this abandonment. Critics connect the accent on desolation with Mistral's biography: the longing for the homeland and the mourning for a deceased lover.² In this context, the arboreal image takes on two forms: first, we see the natural trees situated in the Chilean landscape, paradise of the poet's youth. On the other hand, the image of the cross appears, symbol of the passion of Christ and associated with the suffering of the lyrical subject. I propose that an analysis of the symbolic nature of the tree will reveal that the

¹ Sánchez 2021, pg. 15-16.

² Girona 2021, Sánchez 2021.

arboreal image in *Desolación* is more than the personification of a solitary creature. Therefore, I will perform in this article a myth textual interpretation of Mistral's work, with an accent on the symbolic charge of the text. To begin, the introductory paragraph will give an illustration of the versatility of the tree image in mythical and literary tradition. Then, the myth textual approach will be executed according to the corresponding steps: adopting Julia Kristeva's ideas about the genotext, followed by a myth critical reading inspired by Gilbert Durand.³ The integration of the analysis results will lead to a conclusion.

The symbol of the tree

From the earliest cultural expressions, the tree appears to be a sacred element, acting as a vegetal object of veneration; trees are represented as the home of tree spirits or the place where they are embodied.⁴ Over time, the tree spirit dissociates from the tree and acquires a human form; that is, the arboreal phenomena transform into forest deities.⁵ These deities have many beneficial properties: they provide rain and light, promote the growth of crops, and encourage the multiplication of flocks and facilitate human conception.⁶ Nowadays, ancient tree idolatry persists in millenary customs, such as the celebration of the May tree, bonfires, and the traditional planting of a tree on the occasion of a child's birth.

Due to its predominant role in the thinking of ancient humankind, the tree was never absent in archaic sacred places, which constituted a microcosm, a centre of the world. The arboreal manifestation of the centre of the world is the *axis mundi*, or the world's axis, which is a phenomenon of continuous creation.⁷ This world tree or cosmic tree is represented in a variety of cosmogonic myths, in which the branches of the tree extend to the sky, while the roots are based in the underworld.⁸ In the realm of Latin America, indigenous cultures link the tree to cosmogony and the regenerative force of nature. The fallen tree is a metaphor for change and new events.⁹ An example of such a myth is *El árbol de la abundancia*, the tree of abundance, of the Colombian people of the Uitotos. It proposes the tree as the origin of the Amazon region. Of the union between a worm and a maiden that represents generating earth, comes a fertile tree that grows in such a way that it is necessary to cut it down to obtain food. The fallen tree trunk is the beginning of the Amazon river delta.¹⁰

³ Myth textuality is an innovative interpretation model, based on Kristeva's ideas about the genotext in combination with Gilbert Durand's myth criticism model. Vulkers 2024.

⁴ Frazer 1996, pg. 131-139.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 141.

⁶ Frazer 1996, pg. 142.

⁷ Campbell 2008, pg. 32.

⁸ There are many examples of such a mythical narrative: chapter fifteen of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Hindu sacred text, refers to the banyan tree whose branches and roots intertwine; in the *Edda*, of Norse mythology, the cosmic tree Yggdrasil is found, the perennial ash tree whose branches and roots unite nine different worlds.

⁹ Heyden 1993, pg. 217.

¹⁰ «Tumbado,/ el tronco inmenso formó el gran Amazonas,/ sus ramazones/ la red casi infinita de los ríos,/ y frutos y semillas regados por doquiera/ dieron origen a la selva inmensa,/ sustento de los hombres y las bestias». Urbina Rangel 1999, pg. 26-7.

Many studies place the origin of the cosmic tree image, found in Oriental and Hebrew mythologies, in the Sumerian-Akkadian cultures of the Ancient Middle East, where the tree initially was revered as the integral generator of life.¹¹ From this tradition, the well-known episode of the *Gilgamesh* epos emerges, in which a magical plant is described, symbol of continuous (re)creation and of immortality. From the same root also arises the biblical *Genesis* story, about the Garden of Eden where the Tree of Life was found. Due to the confluence of two variants of the same motif, *Genesis* also represents the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, symbol of the sapiential tendency, which refers to acquisition of human wisdom.¹² Buddhism contemplates a comparable phenomenon, the Bodhi Tree; according to the legend of Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama sat under this tree, where he achieved spiritual enlightenment after a period of meditation.¹³ Meanwhile, the Hindu text *Bhagavad Gita* links the leaves of the world tree to the Vedic hymns, that is, to the words of spiritual knowledge.¹⁴ In both cases, the tree is connected to wisdom and a specific language of reflection. However, biblical wisdom is not theory, but knowledge «for making decisions, transcending instincts, penetrating the secrets of the world, and having the power to imitate the works of God, that is, creativity».¹⁵

While the Old Testament represents the tree in situations of revelation or prophecy, in the New Testament the tree becomes the cross. In this way, a relationship is manifested between the resurrection of Christ, the cross, and the tree, the symbol of recreated life.

In Christian iconography the Cross was symbolized as the Tree of Life, being the emblem of the victory of Christ triumphing over death. As the Fall of man was attributed to the Tree of Knowledge in Eden so the Tree of the Cross was equated with the Tree of Life as the means of redemption and resurrection.¹⁶

Within the vast array of mythical manifestations, the representation of the tree as the image of the mystical union between the human being and divinity is found in a variety of civilisations and cultures. The image of the tree is found in Oriental mysticism of Hindu origin; the Tree of Life surges as the symbolic key to Jewish mysticism; from the presence of Muslim culture, arboreal symbolism also converges with the Christian mysticism of the Iberian Peninsula. Regarding the tree in the context of mysticism, it is important to note that the arboreal image adopts various aspects, in line with the diversity of interpretations of the concept ‘mysticism’. Generally, it refers to a highly personal and incommunicable experience about the union with divinity or a cosmic entity; this sense of union emerges after a journey that includes asceticism, contemplation, or

¹¹ James 1968, pg. 241.

¹² Londoño 2018, pg. 173.

¹³ Campbell 2008, pg. 25.

¹⁴ It is a tree whose leaves are Vedic hymns; the English translation refers to ‘scriptures’. Moreover, «the limbs of this tree spread above and below. Sense objects grow on the limbs as buds; the roots hanging down bind us to the action of the world». Easwaran 2007, pg. 232.

¹⁵ My translation MV. Londoño 2018, pg. 173.

¹⁶ James 1968, pg. 244.

meditation.¹⁷ Because of the mystical experience's inexpressible nature, the mystic tends to use poetic language, employing a multitude of literary devices such as allegory and metaphor. Thus, when the mystical poet uses the image of the tree, they project the mystical experience into that image, so the tree acquires a defined aspect, adhering to divine and cosmic union. From the above, I arrive at the following characteristics:

... the tree image refers to cosmogony, anthropogony, and the cyclical growth of nature. Its meaning extends to the development of the human being, both physical and psychological, so the tree often takes on an anthropomorphic aspect. In mysticism, the arboreal image is connected to the spiritual union between human beings and the divine or cosmic entity; in Christianity, it adopts the aspect of the cross.¹⁸

In the poem «Himno al árbol», of Mistral's poetry collection *Ternura*, multiple examples of the aforementioned tree features can be found. In the following stanza, the fragment «Árbol hermano», meaning brother tree, refers to the anthropomorphism of the tree; its attachment to the earth, «clavado (...) en el suelo», combines with the forehead lifted to the sky, «elevado (...) al cielo», thus evoking the image of the *axis mundi* or world tree.¹⁹

Árbol hermano, que clavado
por garfios pardos en el suelo,
la clara frente has elevado
en una intense sed al cielo:²⁰

Other stanzas represent the tree's vigour, «tu cuerpo lleno de vigor», to propel spiritual and physical recovery, «gesto amparador»:

Árbol que donde quiera aliente
tu cuerpo lleno de vigor
asumes invariablemente
el mismo gesto amparador:
haz que a través de todo estado
-niñez, vejez, placer, dolor-

¹⁷ Frequently, forests gave rise to « contemplative stays where one can learn and understand, within and outside oneself, the reasons for tangible and intangible realities » (my translation MV). Gordi Serrat and Bruguera Barbany 2015, pg. 11.

¹⁸ Vulkers 2024, pg. 260-61.

¹⁹ Mistral 1973, pg. 97.

²⁰ *Id.*

asuma mi alma un invariado

y universal gesto de amor!²¹

Significantly, tree symbolism reappears in Mistral's poetry collections *Tala* (1938) and *Lagar* (1954). While the verb 'talar' refers to the felling or pruning of trees, Girona interprets the title of *Tala* as coming from the experience of loss, «organizado a partir de la experiencia de la pérdida».²² At the same time, the action of pruning as a trope for poetic creation is a recurring metaphor: the «Sonetos de la poda» in *Lagar* depict the action of pruning as creating true stanzas, «Como creo la estrofa verdadera», and giving life: «Más yo lo podo con amargo brío/ para darle el gesto como a un hijo mío/ hasta que se me vuelva criatura».²³ Lastly, in «Último Árbol», the epilogue in *Lagar*, the poetic self pronounces the wish for a tree as an ultimate place of rest, «en vez de umbrales de casas,/ quiero árbol de paradero»;²⁴ the Hindu image of the tree's leaves as an inspiration for dream and song also can be found:

Pero tal vez su follaje

ya va arropando mi sueño

y estoy, de muerta, cantando

debajo de él, sin saberlo.²⁵

Thus, an amalgama of tree elements can be found in Mistral's poetry, which prominently features love, religiousness and nature. According to Guillén de Nicolau, the three trends are united through mysticism by nature.²⁶ Similarly, Pomès mentions themes such as «nature, trees, landscape, and memories», represented through «the tone, not loyal to a narrow-minded belief, nor pantheist, but essentially, profoundly religious».²⁷ Sánchez refers to this amalgama as «la voz de la tierra al pie de la cruz de Cristo».²⁸ Within the predominance of nature, the prominent role of the tree in Mistral's imaginary is noted.²⁹ In the following paragraphs, the analysis will centre on the tree image in *Desolación*, to establish how the symbolic charge of the text affects the poetic subject's characterisation.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 98

²² Girona 2021, pg. 33.

²³ Mistral *Tala. Lagar*, pg. 303, 304.

²⁴ Mistral *Tala. Lagar*, pg. 407.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 408.

²⁶ Guillén de Nicolau 1973, pg. xxvii.

²⁷ My translation MV. Pomès 1963, pg. 41-42.

²⁸ Sánchez 2021, pg. 39.

²⁹ Pomès 1963, Conde 1970, Guillon Barrett 1975.

Genotextual analysis

Let us begin with the first of the three-part procedure, the genotextual analysis. Kristeva's theory builds on the concept of the *chora*, the initial phase of connection with the maternal body.³⁰ The traumatic separation from this state of fluid non-being sets in motion the process of individuation.³¹ The lifelong desire persists to relive the irrational level of the *chora*, alternated with the predominance of rationality. The same coexistence of pre-rational and rational also appears in texts. So the genotext, the text layer that is connected to the irrationality of the *chora*, erupts in the structured and grammatical character of the literary text.³² The traces of the genotext appear first and foremost through compulsive repetitiveness.³³

Now, how can we recognise the traces of the genotext? To begin, through repetitive textual expressions that revolve around the primordial trauma: experiencing rupture and wanting to restore the initial union. Mistral evokes the painful separation from her homeland with memories of her land of ambrosia and of gold, «mi tierra de ambrosia» and «tierras de oro».³⁴ That is, by representing a paradisiacal landscape. The reference to the homeland, which is linked to the world of childhood, coincides with an accent on the longing for the maternal body: attracting the nearness of the mother, through her explicit presence in the text. The impression of being motherless and without a homeland returns in references to orphanhood and to exile. The representation of longing fits into the accumulation of images that allude to division and loss: from them emerges melancholy, seen by Kristeva as «the sign of a wounded primitive self, incomplete, empty».³⁵ In *Desolación*, suggestions of such a primitive wound are abundant: verbs like to split, to break, and to nail; tools that pierce such as the hook and the dagger; direct references to the wound and the sore. The recurrence of the word «surco», meaning furrow, is also noted. On the one hand, it is connected to the bodily wound, like in the verses «surco en la carne» and «Los surcos de tu rostro».³⁶ On the other hand, it can be taken as a wound in the land and is obviously connected to the cultivation of wheat. The extreme expression of the wounded appearance is found in the figure of Christ. The image of the open side, the prototypical wound of Christ, is transferred to other figures, like fallen trees and the lyrical subject itself. A persuasive image, in this sense, is the omnipresence of references to the mouth and the lips. While at first glance they are linked to the primary interaction of suckling and the intimacy between lovers, in Mistral's poetic universe the mouth also is a wound, as can be seen in the verses that compare Christ's wounded side to opened lips. Therefore, there is an intermingling of the need to return to the initial state, connected to the mother's body, and the thematization of pain and loss, not only through the absence of the homeland and the mother figure, but also from the identification with the suffering of Christ. I interpret such an alternation as the continuous thematization of the archaic rupture.

³⁰ Kristeva 1974, pg. 27.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 41.

³² *Ibid.*, pg. 21.

³³ Kristeva 1975, pg. 7.

³⁴ Mistral *Desolación*, pg. 64, 153.

³⁵ Kristeva 1980, pg. 21.

³⁶ Mistral *Desolación*, pg. 55, 59.

Considering the primordial scission as the first boundary experience, the constant return to the exploration of frontiers is the second sign of the genotext.³⁷ I concentrate on one aspect of this extension of boundaries, the questioning of the distinction between the self and others. This can be done through identification and personification. Girona observes in Mistral's work the filiation to an all-female, cultural environment:

It is necessary to note the symbolic filiation to which the author often subscribes: that of the biblical matriarchy. (...) Read in sequence, these names operate as indications of various identities that point to the same thing. They all belong to the cultural universe of mother and daughters and suggest a dispersion of the self in a constellation of elusive identities, an heiress (...) that remembers the adhesion to the lost mother.³⁸

But there are more forms of identity merging in *Desolación*. Clearly, the strong implication with the figure of Christ stands out. For example, the poem with the title «Nocturno» evokes a lyrical subject sold for a kiss in the «noche del Huerto», night of the Garden.³⁹ The exclamation «Padre Nuestro que estás en los cielos,/ ¡porqué te has olvidado de mí!» is very striking in this context.⁴⁰ A similar identification occurs in the poem «Canto del Justo», where the poetic subject compares Christ's body parts with her own:

Brazos de mi Cristo,
brazos extendidos
sin ningún rechazo:
¡desde que os he visto
existe mi abrazo!⁴¹

Obviously, there is an accumulation of references to the Passion of Christ.

Another aspect is the anthropomorphic image of the tree in Mistral's work. The tree, endowed with arms and eyes and subject to human anxiety, interacts with the poetic subject in conversation and emotion; an example of this interaction is the embrace with the thorn as a sister in a knot of despair.

³⁷ Kristeva 1975, pg. 7.

³⁸ Girona 2021, pg. 40.

³⁹ Mistral *Desolación*, pg. 116.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 115.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 67

Le he abrazado como una hermana,
 cual si Agar abrazara a Job,
 en un nudo que no es ternura
 ¡porque es más desesperación!⁴²

From the solitude emanating from the arboreal image, the explicit identification between the human being and the tree emerges, like in the verses that compare the soul of a woman to a splendid oak. Besides the tree, the cross also adopts an anthropomorphic aspect, depicted with open arms. The cross is even likened to Christ, with its extended arms that urge the lyrical subject to embrace. There is, thus, a tripartite conglomerate of tree-elements with which the lyrical subject identifies: tree-cross-Christ.

Resuming, according to the genotextual procedure, the personified arboreal image is interpreted as an allusion to the lyrical subject's initial wound. The tree of nature, impulse for reminiscence, pertains to the range of references to solitude. Identification with the other, which usually relates to the exploration of the individual boundaries, establishes in *Desolación* the connection with arboreal models, namely the crucified Christ and the natural tree.

Myth critical procedure

From the genotextual analysis surges the dominant impression of *Desolación* as the continuous thematization of loss. Furthermore, there is also the tendency to ambiguity, the oscillation between the accent on rupture and the desire for restoration of the initial state of union. To expand this interpretation, I will now perform the second of the three-step procedure, myth critical analysis. This procedure is inspired by Gilbert Durand's *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (1960) and its categorisation of the images used by humans. I will use the renovated version of Durand's system, beginning the analysis by situating the redundant images in the categories of the imaginary: polemic, centric, and rhythmic.⁴³ Establishing the mythemes leads subsequently to a connection to ancient myth.

The main key of solitude and pain promotes the emergence of three central figures. Although not directly connected with the tree-image, it is worth considering the mother figure as the first omnipresent image. According to the characteristics corporeality and intimacy, the motherly woman connects to the centric category.⁴⁴ However, in *Desolación* the mother figure predominantly adheres to telluric fertility. There are numerous allusions to the maternal through images that convey the culture of wheat and the actions of mowing and sprouting. References to body parts that are associated with motherhood, like the breast and the lap, are compared with

⁴² *Ibid.*, pg. 158.

⁴³ Vulkers 2024, pg. 119.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

tilling the land, and with a granary.

De sol a sol voy por las rutas
y en el regazo olor a frutas
se me acoda el recental:
¡tanto trascienden mis abiertas
entrañas a grutas, y a huertas,
a cuenco tibio de panal!⁴⁵

The text transfers, therefore, the image of the mother, represented through the features of corporeality and intimacy, to the realm of the Great Mother, female figure and goddess of fertility. Situated in the rhythmic category, this earthly femininity implies the vegetal alternation of life and death. In line with this alternation, the so-called «agro-lunar drama», rhythmic figures that represent a return to life are found in the same category, according to the similar scheme of death followed by resurrection.⁴⁶

I include in this tendency the examples of the repeated efforts to promote the union after death with the beloved. Within the framework of such an inclination, the second central figure, that of the Son, makes its appearance. In contrast to the connotation of the child, dependent on physical maternity, the Son is transfigured towards the archetype that traditionally is situated next to the celestial goddess.⁴⁷ It occurs in mythical texts as the typical mediator, the Saviour characterised by the Passion and resurrection. Evidently, we recognise in such an image the Judeo-Christian figures of the Messiah and of Christ. As we have seen, in the poetic landscape of *Desolación* the representation of Christ acts primarily as an emphasis on suffering. The biblical references, like the title of the poem «Gotas de hiel», meaning drops of bile, and the allusions to the Via Crucis and the Passion of the Christ, reinforce the sensation of agony. At the same time, however, the poetic subject invokes Christ as an intermediary, to end her suffering and to mediate for the beloved's salvation. In the «Poema del hijo», poem of the son, the images of a desired child and those of Christ are intertwined: the child not only adopts the features of Christ, but also acts as an intermediary between the lyrical subject and the deceased beloved. In the same stanza, the child-Christ figure is described as a shaken tree, extending its buds to the sky.

Decía: ¡un hijo! como el árbol conmovido
de primavera alarga sus yemas hacia el cielo.
¡Un hijo con los ojos de Cristo engrandecidos,
la frente de estupor y los labios de anhelo!⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Mistral *Desolación*, pg. 147.

⁴⁶ Durand 1978, pg. 286.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 289.

⁴⁸ Mistral *Desolación*, pg. 134.

In this fragment emerges the third key image, that of the tree. Endowed with considerable versatility, the tree image can manifest in various contexts. On the one hand, represented with a human aspect, but situated in nature, the tree acquires a strong sense of abandonment and grief. Although the allusions to the tree also serve to outline the landscape, the poems about desolation express strong entwining of the human and the arboreal form. For example, in the poem «Árbol muerto»: against a backdrop of nature, linked to the landscape of the homeland, the solitary tree, dry, broken, and bitten by sores, depicts the separation from loved ones.

En el medio del llano,
un árbol seco su blasfemia alarga;
un árbol blanco, roto
y mordido de llagas,
en el que el viento, vuelto
mi desesperación, aúlla y pasa.⁴⁹

On the other hand, in the realm of Christianity, the tree adopts the aspect of the cross, also represented through the mention of its material, wood. In consistency with the predominance of the Christ figure, the cross occurs frequently in the poems in *Desolación*, in its entire form, or from material or partial references. The anthropomorphism of the cross is emphasised, the human form that extends to the manifestation of the tree itself. Notably, the poem «Tres árboles» evokes a scene similar to that of Mount Calvary: three forgotten trees, with blood on their split timber and an open side.

Tres árboles caídos
quedaron a la orilla del sendero.
El leñador los olvidó, (...)

El sol de ocaso pone
su sangre viva en los hendidos leños
¡y se llevan los vientos su fragancia
de su costado abierto!⁵⁰

The cross, the tree, and Christ merge in an action of renewal, by providing the poetic subject with substances that will be like fire, «me serán de fuego».⁵¹ These verses reveal the relationship between the archetype of the fire and resurrection, the renovating ability of wood. Thus, the text

⁴⁹ Mistral *Desolación*, pg. 155.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 156.

⁵¹ *Id.*

evokes a longing for reunion, be it even in death. However, it is a death that awaits resurrection, promoted by the predominance of the images of the rhythmic category: Christ, the cross, and the tree. The poems that exude tranquillity, like «Serenidad» and «Palabras serenas», announce the return to life. In this resurrection, due to the Passion of Christ, the poetic subject surges like a new-born from living waters.

Resuming, the image is conveyed of the solitary tree in the deserted plain and the natural tree that coincides with the Edenic state of the homeland. The references to the suffering of the crucified Christ accentuate the sense of abandonment and injury. The myth critical analysis establishes that, in seeking recovery from desolation, the poetic subject searches for the union with the mother-figure, represented through images of corporeality and intimacy, from the centric category. At the same time, since Mistral's maternity inclines towards the symbolism of vegetal fertility, the figure of the Great Mother predominates, the archetype inherent in the rhythmic category. The search for reunion extends towards a strong complicity with death, conceived as the beginning of rebirth. In line with the tendency to resurrection, the references recur to the Christ figure, sustained by the anthropomorphism of the images of the cross and the tree. I consider the triad Christ-cross-tree as the second axis of the rhythmic character of Mistral's imaginary.

Therefore, the symbolic analysis involves the following principal narrative lines, based on the predominance of the rhythmic category. In the first place, the thematization of abandonment, which entails the agony of complete decline, alternating with the search for physical intimacy. Second, the desire for reunion in death, in combination with the implication of an intermediary that promotes the overcoming of temporal mortality. I distinguish in such a constellation the intertwining of myths that emphasise temporality of death. On the one hand, I recognise Messianic myth, conceived as the Christian form of awaiting new life, through the intervention of the mediatory figure. The strong presence of the Messianic connects to the manifestation of the myth of Edenic loss, also apparent in Mistral's evocation of her paradisiacal homeland. This is sustained by the parallel emergence of the myth of the Great Mother, which represents the regular alternation of vegetation. Given the interaction between mother and daughter, I identify the relationship with the mythical figures Demeter and Persephone.

Confluence: myth textual interpretation

In closing, the conclusive myth textual step attends to the integration of the analysis results. Based on a close reading of the poems and a subsequent interpretation of the text's symbolic charge, I establish that the tree motif surges according to two main aspects. First, the tree that represents solitude, loss, and suffering, which comes in three forms: the natural tree, in the anthropomorphic appearance of the self's desertedness; the natural tree that represents the loss of the Edenic land of childhood; the cross, symbol of the suffering of the poetic subject. Second, the tree that stands for temporal renewal appears as: the natural tree referring to vegetal resurgence; the cross, symbol of Christ's resurrection. Thus, the ambiguity of the tree image stands out,

sustained by the results of the myth critical analysis, in parallel with those of the genotextual interpretation. For one thing, the images of separation appear, which I consider, in a genotextual sense, inherent in the accentuation of archaic rupture. At the same time, there is a strong tendency to oscillate between rupture and reunion, and the exploration of boundaries, consistent with the rhythmic category of the imaginary. In terms of identification, three archetypes resonate: the Great Mother, the Son and the tree. They all indicate the expectation of the recovery of what was lost, whether it is vegetal renovation or spiritual resurrection. Arboreal anthropomorphism predominates as well as the metaphoric use of the tree, conceived as an intermediary between the earth and the sky in a broad sense.

Thus, the arboreal image occurs in two ways: on the one hand, the tree of nature that appears separately or as a part of the landscape. In both cases it refers to rupture, emphasising the isolation of the poetic subject and the melancholic surge of memories of a paradisiacal childhood. On the other hand, the metaphor of the tree accentuates the ambiguity of the arboreal image, since it represents the continuous renovation of nature over time. This overcoming of the frontier between life and death is also connected to the cross, symbol of the spiritual resurrection in Christ. Significantly, the cross is an ambiguous symbol as well, since it is also strongly connected to the suffering of the lyrical subject. In line with its ambiguous value, the tree image is associated with Edenic and Messianic myth. They are two interconnected myths, representing initial rupture and the subsequent recovery of lost ground. The need for resurrection is underlined by a second mythical line that represents vegetal renovation: the accent on the mother-daughter relationship indicates the myth of Demeter and Persephone.

In conclusion, I return to the accepted interpretation of *Desolación*: the poetic universe of a lyrical subject submerged in complete abandon. Sánchez declares that the true character of Mistral's work, «la verdadera *Desolación*», resides in evoking harshness, isolation, infinite pain and death as atonement. Only in the epilogue titled «Voto» the possibility for hope appears.⁵² The myth textual analysis of the tree motif, based on the genotext and on the mythical connections, establishes otherwise. Throughout the whole text, Gabriela Mistral's lyrical subject is not content with thematizing loss but seeks the alternation of rupture and reunion. The intertwining of images of the rhythmic category refers to vegetal and spiritual rebirth. Thus, the myth textual procedure reveals a different and more in-depth characterisation of Mistral's poetic self. The poet's own closing words in the epilogue reflect the underlying perspective of *Desolación* in its totality: «subo hacia las mesetas espirituales donde una ancha luz caerá sobre mis días».⁵³

⁵² My translation MV. Sánchez 2021, pg. 31.

⁵³ «I rise towards the spiritual highlands where an ample light will fall over my days» (My translation MV). Mistral *Desolación*, pg. 177.

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