

MYSTICISM AND SYMBOLISM IN TONI MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE AND SONG OF SOLOMON: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

*This study presents a comparative literary analysis of Toni Morrison's **The Bluest Eye** and **Song of Solomon**, focusing on the interrelated roles of mysticism and symbolism in shaping the thematic, psychological, and philosophical dimensions of the two novels. While existing scholarship has extensively explored Morrison's treatment of identity, race, gender, trauma, and memory, comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining mysticism and symbolism as complementary narrative strategies within a single analytical framework. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how Morrison integrates mystical consciousness with symbolic representation to portray the protagonists' quests for identity, self-understanding, and spiritual transformation. Employing a qualitative comparative research design, the study is based on close textual analysis. It is guided by an integrated theoretical framework that combines Archetypal Criticism, Myth Criticism, and Literary Symbolism. The findings reveal that **The Bluest Eye** presents mysticism primarily as an inward psychological experience characterised by longing, illusion, and emotional fragmentation. At the same time, its symbolic system exposes the destructive consequences of internalised ideals and alienated selfhood. In contrast, **Song of Solomon** portrays mysticism as a transformative journey grounded in ancestral memory, folklore, myth, and spiritual awakening, with its symbolic network emphasising freedom, cultural continuity, reconciliation, and self-realisation. The comparative analysis demonstrates that Morrison employs mysticism and symbolism not as isolated literary devices but as interconnected*

narrative mechanisms through which she explores identity, memory, human consciousness, and existential renewal. By synthesising these two critical perspectives, the study contributes a fresh interpretative approach to Morrison scholarship and highlights the enduring significance of her symbolic imagination and mystical vision in contemporary literary studies.

Keyword: Toni Morrison; **The Bluest Eye**; **Song of Solomon**; **Mysticism**; **Symbolism**; **Comparative Literature**; **Identity**; **Archetypal Criticism**

1.INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison occupies a distinguished position in contemporary American literature for her profound exploration of identity, memory, spirituality, and the complexities of human existence. Through a distinctive narrative style that intertwines realism with mythic imagination, Morrison constructs literary worlds in which symbolism and mysticism function not merely as artistic embellishments but as essential narrative strategies for expressing psychological depth and existential inquiry. Her novels invite readers to move beyond the literal level of events and engage with symbolic patterns that illuminate the struggles of individuals seeking identity, dignity, and spiritual wholeness. Among her most celebrated works, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Song of Solomon* (1977) offer particularly rich opportunities for examining how mystical elements and symbolic representations shape both character development and thematic meaning. Although these novels differ significantly in narrative structure and character trajectories, they share a common concern with the search for identity and the quest for self-understanding. *The Bluest Eye* presents the

tragic experiences of Pecola Breedlove, whose longing for blue eyes symbolizes an unattainable ideal that ultimately destroys her sense of self. The narrative reveals how external standards of beauty become internalized, producing psychological alienation and spiritual fragmentation. By contrast, *Song of Solomon* follows Milkman Dead's gradual journey toward maturity, self-discovery, and reconciliation with his ancestral heritage. Through folklore, mythic flight, dreams, and ancestral memory, the novel transforms the protagonist's personal quest into a broader spiritual journey that culminates in self-realization.

Mysticism in Morrison's fiction extends beyond conventional religious experience. Rather than presenting mystical experience as detached from everyday life, Morrison incorporates dreams, intuition, ancestral presence, folklore, and symbolic visions into ordinary human experience. These elements create multiple layers of meaning that encourage readers to interpret the novels through psychological, philosophical, and symbolic perspectives. Mystical experience in Morrison's fiction frequently functions as a mode of understanding reality that transcends rational explanation while remaining deeply connected to human suffering, memory, and hope.

Similarly, symbolism constitutes one of Morrison's most powerful artistic techniques. Objects, names, colours, natural elements, songs, and recurring images acquire meanings that evolve throughout the narratives. In *The Bluest Eye*, symbols such as blue eyes, marigolds, seasonal cycles, mirrors, and Shirley Temple collectively represent unattainable ideals, fractured identity, innocence, and social exclusion. In *Song of Solomon*, symbols including flight, gold, names, Pilate's earring, the peacock, and Solomon's song embody freedom, transformation, memory, material desire, and spiritual liberation. These symbols do not operate independently; rather, they interact with mystical motifs to deepen the philosophical significance of the narratives.

Existing scholarship has examined Morrison's treatment of identity, race, trauma, gender, mythology, and community from diverse critical perspectives. Harris (1980) demonstrates the structural importance of myth in *Song of Solomon*, while Lee (1982) interprets the motif of flight as an expression of spiritual transcendence. Studies by Ogunyemi (1977), Cormier-Hamilton (1994), Bouson (2000), Kubitschek (1998), Bryce (1992), and Peterson (1997) explore themes of identity, trauma,

psychological development, and communal relationships in Morrison's fiction. More recent scholarship by David (2023), Wajiran and Septiani (2023), Wajiran (2024), and Wajiran and Apriyani (2025) continues to examine Morrison's representation of identity, race, and gender within contemporary critical discourse. While these studies contribute significantly to Morrison scholarship, relatively limited attention has been devoted to a comparative investigation of how mysticism and symbolism function together as complementary literary strategies across *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*. This study seeks to address that gap by analysing the interconnected role of mystical imagination and symbolic representation in shaping Morrison's artistic vision.

The present study adopts a comparative literary approach to examine the relationship between mysticism and symbolism in the selected novels. Rather than treating these concepts as separate analytical categories, the study argues that Morrison integrates mystical consciousness and symbolic expression to portray the inner transformation of her characters. In *The Bluest Eye*, symbolism primarily reflects psychological disintegration and the consequences of internalized ideals, whereas in *Song of Solomon* symbolic and mystical elements facilitate spiritual awakening and the recovery of selfhood. A comparative reading therefore reveals both continuity and development in Morrison's literary craftsmanship.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it seeks to identify the major mystical elements employed in *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*. Second, it analyses the symbolic patterns through which Morrison constructs themes of identity, alienation, memory, and transformation. Third, it compares the artistic functions of mysticism and symbolism in both novels to demonstrate how these narrative strategies contribute to the philosophical and aesthetic unity of Morrison's fiction.

This research is significant because it offers a focused comparative analysis of two major novels through the combined perspectives of mysticism and symbolism. By synthesizing insights from existing scholarship while advancing an integrated interpretative framework, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of Morrison's narrative artistry. It also highlights the continuing relevance of symbolic and mystical interpretation within contemporary literary criticism and

demonstrates how Morrison's fiction transcends historical specificity to engage universal questions concerning identity, human consciousness, suffering, and spiritual renewal.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews existing scholarship on Morrison's novels, with particular attention to studies addressing symbolism, myth, identity, spirituality, and narrative technique. This is followed by the theoretical framework and research methodology. The subsequent sections present a comparative textual analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*, focusing on mystical motifs and symbolic structures before concluding with the principal findings and implications of the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Toni Morrison's literary works have generated extensive scholarly interest due to their profound engagement with identity, memory, spirituality, symbolism, gender, and community. Over the past four decades, researchers have examined her novels from diverse critical perspectives, including feminist criticism, psychoanalysis, myth criticism, postcolonial studies, trauma theory, and cultural studies. While these studies have significantly advanced the understanding of Morrison's literary artistry, relatively few have explored the interrelationship between mysticism and symbolism through a comparative analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*. This review critically examines existing scholarship under four major thematic areas: myth and mysticism, symbolism and narrative technique, identity and psychological transformation, and contemporary perspectives on Morrison's literary contributions.

One of the earliest and most influential studies on Morrison's symbolic imagination is Harris (1980), who argues that myth provides the structural foundation of *Song of Solomon*. Harris demonstrates that Morrison integrates African folklore, biblical traditions, and classical myth to construct a narrative that transcends ordinary realism. According to Harris, the legend of Solomon's flight functions not merely as a cultural memory but as a symbolic framework through which the protagonist's journey toward self-discovery is interpreted. This study establishes mythology as an organizing principle in the novel and remains an essential contribution to Morrison scholarship.

Similarly, Lee (1982) investigates the symbolism of flight in *Song of Solomon* and interprets it as a multidimensional metaphor representing liberation, transcendence, and spiritual awakening. Lee argues that the act of flight symbolizes freedom from material limitations while simultaneously reflecting the recovery of ancestral identity. Rather than depicting flight as an impossible fantasy, Morrison transforms it into a symbolic expression of psychological and spiritual transformation. Lee's analysis highlights the intimate relationship between myth and symbolism in Morrison's narrative structure.

Bryce (1992) broadens the discussion by examining Morrison's novels as explorations of the individual's search for self and place within the community. Bryce contends that Morrison consistently portrays identity as a dynamic process shaped through collective memory, family relationships, and cultural heritage. The study emphasizes that personal fulfillment cannot be achieved through isolation but emerges through meaningful engagement with one's historical and communal roots. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the contrasting developmental journeys of Pecola Breedlove and Milkman Dead.

Kubitschek (1998), in *Toni Morrison: A Critical Companion*, provides a comprehensive examination of Morrison's recurring literary techniques, narrative structures, and symbolic patterns. Kubitschek argues that Morrison's fiction resists simplistic interpretation because symbols frequently acquire multiple meanings depending upon narrative context. The study demonstrates how recurring motifs—including names, songs, dreams, natural imagery, and folklore—contribute to the philosophical depth of her novels. Kubitschek's work continues to serve as an important reference for understanding Morrison's symbolic complexity.

Peterson (1997), through a collection of theoretical essays, expands Morrison scholarship by introducing multiple critical approaches to her fiction. The volume illustrates how Morrison's narratives invite interdisciplinary interpretations that combine literary criticism, philosophy, history, psychology, and cultural analysis. Peterson's collection reinforces the view that Morrison's novels operate simultaneously on realistic, symbolic, and metaphysical levels, thereby encouraging readers to examine deeper layers of meaning beyond the immediate narrative.

Studies focusing on *The Bluest Eye* primarily investigate questions of identity, beauty, race, and psychological trauma. Ogunyemi (1977) examines the relationship between order and disorder in the novel, arguing that Morrison portrays social and psychological disintegration through fragmented narrative structures and symbolic contrasts. The study demonstrates how institutional oppression and distorted ideals contribute to the protagonist's gradual loss of identity.

Cormier-Hamilton (1994) further develops this discussion by analysing *The Bluest Eye* through the framework of Black naturalism. The study argues that Pecola Breedlove's tragic pursuit of blue eyes symbolizes the internalization of destructive social values that deny self-worth and cultural identity. Cormier-Hamilton concludes that Morrison critiques dominant standards of beauty while exposing the devastating psychological consequences of self-rejection. This interpretation remains one of the most significant analyses of symbolic identity formation in the novel.

Bouson (2000) approaches Morrison's fiction through the concepts of shame, trauma, and racial memory. According to Bouson, Morrison portrays psychological suffering not merely as an individual experience but as a consequence of historical and social oppression. By examining emotional wounds, silence, and memory, Bouson demonstrates how Morrison transforms trauma into a literary force that shapes both narrative structure and character development. The study provides valuable insight into the psychological dimensions of symbolism in Morrison's novels.

McQuail (2009) introduces the concept of scriptotherapy in *The Bluest Eye*, arguing that storytelling functions as a therapeutic process through which traumatic experiences are expressed and confronted. Comparing Morrison's novel with Maya Angelou's autobiography, McQuail emphasizes the restorative potential of narrative while illustrating the relationship between language, memory, and emotional healing. Although the study primarily focuses on trauma, it also reveals the symbolic significance of storytelling as a means of psychological reconstruction. Colson (2006) provides an accessible examination of the historical, cultural, and literary background of *The Bluest Eye*. The work explains Morrison's narrative techniques, principal themes, and character relationships, making it

a useful introductory source for understanding the novel's symbolic structure and thematic development.

Gender remains another central concern in Morrison scholarship. Fisher and Silber (2003) analyse women's experiences in literature through feminist perspectives and demonstrate how Morrison challenges patriarchal assumptions concerning gender, beauty, and identity. Their work contributes to understanding female subjectivity and symbolic representation within Morrison's fiction.

More recent scholarship has expanded Morrison studies by connecting her works with contemporary discussions of race, gender, and identity. David (2023) examines Morrison's concept of Black-centered imaginative history and argues that her narratives reconstruct historical experience through imaginative storytelling rather than conventional historical representation. The study highlights Morrison's ability to transform memory into a creative literary force, thereby strengthening interpretations of symbolism and narrative imagination. Similarly, Thapliyal (2023) analyses identity formation across Morrison's novels and concludes that self-discovery remains one of the author's most enduring literary concerns. The study demonstrates how Morrison portrays identity as an evolving process influenced by memory, family relationships, social structures, and personal experience.

Wajiran and Septiani (2023) investigate the subordination of Black communities in Morrison's fiction and argue that systemic discrimination profoundly influences character development and social relationships. Building upon this perspective, Wajiran (2024) compares *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Song of Solomon*, demonstrating how Morrison portrays Black women through narratives of resilience, suffering, and empowerment. Furthermore, Wajiran and Apriyani (2025) examine the continuing relevance of Morrison's representation of race, gender, and identity within contemporary society. These recent studies confirm the enduring significance of Morrison's literary vision while extending its relevance to present-day social and cultural discussions.

Collectively, the existing scholarship establishes Morrison as a novelist whose works are characterized by rich symbolism, mythic imagination, psychological depth, and philosophical inquiry. Scholars have extensively examined themes such as identity, race, trauma, memory, community, and gender, while also

recognising the importance of folklore and mythology in shaping her narratives. However, despite these valuable contributions, relatively little attention has been devoted to an integrated comparative study that examines how mysticism and symbolism function together as complementary literary strategies in *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*. Most existing studies analyse these concepts independently or focus on a single novel rather than investigating their interconnected role across Morrison's works.

The present study seeks to address this gap by undertaking a comparative analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*, demonstrating that mysticism and symbolism are not isolated narrative devices but mutually reinforcing elements that shape Morrison's representation of identity, psychological transformation, and spiritual growth. By synthesising existing scholarship while advancing an integrated interpretative framework, this study contributes a fresh perspective to contemporary Morrison criticism.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Despite the substantial body of scholarship devoted to Toni Morrison's fiction, several important gaps remain in the existing literature. Previous studies have predominantly focused on themes such as race, identity, gender, trauma, memory, community, and historical consciousness. Scholars including Harris (1980) and Lee (1982) have explored the mythic structure and symbolism of *Song of Solomon*, particularly the significance of flight, folklore, and ancestral memory. Likewise, Ogunyemi (1977), Cormier-Hamilton (1994), Bouson (2000), and McQuail (2009) have examined *The Bluest Eye* through the perspectives of psychological trauma, racial identity, social alienation, and narrative healing. More recent studies by David (2023), Thapliyal (2023), Wajiran (2024), and Wajiran and Apriyani (2025) have further expanded Morrison scholarship by analysing identity formation, gender, and the continuing relevance of her works within contemporary literary and social discourse.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into Morrison's narrative artistry, they generally examine symbolism, mythology, spirituality, and identity as independent areas of inquiry. Symbolism is frequently discussed as a literary technique, while myth and spirituality are often treated separately within cultural or

historical frameworks. Consequently, insufficient attention has been devoted to understanding how mystical consciousness and symbolic representation function together as complementary narrative strategies that shape the philosophical and psychological dimensions of Morrison's fiction.

Another noticeable limitation in the existing scholarship is the predominance of single-text analyses. Most researchers investigate either *The Bluest Eye* or *Song of Solomon* independently, emphasizing the unique thematic concerns of each novel. While such studies have significantly enriched Morrison criticism, they provide limited insight into the evolution of Morrison's literary imagination across different works. A comparative analysis of these two novels offers an opportunity to identify both continuity and transformation in Morrison's artistic treatment of mysticism and symbolism.

Furthermore, previous research has largely emphasized sociological and historical interpretations, concentrating on racial discrimination, gender inequality, cultural identity, and collective memory. Although these perspectives remain essential, they sometimes overshadow the philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of Morrison's fiction. Her novels are equally remarkable for their symbolic richness, spiritual imagination, and exploration of universal questions concerning selfhood, human consciousness, suffering, redemption, and transformation. Examining these dimensions together can provide a more comprehensive understanding of Morrison's literary craftsmanship.

The present study addresses these gaps by undertaking a comparative literary analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* through the integrated perspectives of mysticism and symbolism. Rather than treating these concepts as separate analytical categories, the study argues that Morrison employs mystical imagination and symbolic expression as interconnected literary devices that illuminate the inner journeys of her characters. In *The Bluest Eye*, mysticism and symbolism primarily reveal psychological fragmentation and the tragic consequences of unattainable ideals, whereas in *Song of Solomon* they facilitate spiritual awakening, ancestral reconnection, and personal transformation. By examining these complementary functions, the study provides a more holistic interpretation of Morrison's narrative techniques and contributes a fresh perspective to contemporary literary criticism.

Accordingly, the principal contribution of this research lies in its integrated comparative approach. It demonstrates that mysticism and symbolism are not merely decorative features of Morrison's fiction but constitute fundamental narrative mechanisms through which she explores identity, spirituality, memory, and human transformation. This perspective extends existing scholarship and offers a deeper appreciation of Morrison's artistic vision.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the representation of mystical elements in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*.
2. To identify and analyse the major symbols employed in both novels and evaluate their thematic significance.
3. To investigate how mysticism and symbolism contribute to the portrayal of identity, self-discovery, alienation, and spiritual transformation.
4. To compare Morrison's use of mystical and symbolic narrative techniques in *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*.
5. To demonstrate how the interaction between mysticism and symbolism enhances the philosophical depth and aesthetic structure of the selected novels.
6. To contribute to existing Morrison scholarship by providing an integrated comparative interpretation of mysticism and symbolism in the selected texts.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the major mystical elements represented in *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*?
2. Which symbols play the most significant role in communicating the central themes of the selected novels?

3. How do mysticism and symbolism interact to shape the psychological and spiritual development of the principal characters?
4. What similarities and differences exist in Morrison's use of mysticism and symbolism across the two novels?
5. How does a comparative analysis of these novels enhance our understanding of Morrison's literary philosophy and artistic technique?

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that combines Archetypal Criticism, Myth Criticism, and the theory of Literary Symbolism to examine the mystical and symbolic dimensions of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*. Since Morrison's fiction operates simultaneously on psychological, symbolic, mythical, and philosophical levels, a single theoretical perspective cannot adequately explain the complexity of her narrative techniques. By synthesising these complementary approaches, the study provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the interaction between mysticism and symbolism in the selected novels.

6.1 Archetypal Criticism

Archetypal Criticism, primarily developed from the analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung, proposes that literature contains recurring images, characters, and narrative patterns that originate in the collective unconscious. According to Jung, archetypes are universal symbolic forms inherited through human experience that repeatedly appear in myths, dreams, religious narratives, and literary texts. These archetypes transcend cultural and historical boundaries because they express fundamental aspects of human consciousness.

Jung identified several major archetypes, including the Self, the Shadow, the Persona, the Wise Old Figure, the Great Mother, the Hero, and the Journey. These archetypal patterns provide a useful framework for understanding the psychological development of literary characters and the symbolic meanings embedded within narratives. Rather than functioning merely as fictional personalities, Morrison's characters

frequently represent broader psychological conditions that reflect universal struggles involving identity, alienation, transformation, and self-realisation.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove may be interpreted as a tragic seeker whose desire for blue eyes symbolises an unattainable ideal of completeness. Her psychological fragmentation reflects the conflict between authentic identity and socially imposed ideals. Claudia MacTeer, in contrast, represents resistance to these destructive cultural values and preserves a more authentic sense of self. The symbolic conflict between these characters illustrates the struggle between illusion and reality that characterises the process of individuation.

Similarly, *Song of Solomon* presents Milkman Dead as a classic archetypal hero whose physical journey parallels an inward psychological quest. His gradual movement from ignorance to self-knowledge reflects the Jungian process of individuation, in which fragmented aspects of personality become integrated into a unified self. Pilate functions as the Wise Guide, leading Milkman toward spiritual understanding through ancestral wisdom rather than material success. Consequently, Jungian archetypes provide an effective means of interpreting Morrison's representation of psychological growth and spiritual transformation.

6.2 Myth Criticism

The second theoretical perspective employed in this study is Myth Criticism, particularly the work of Northrop Frye. Frye argues that literature develops through recurring mythic structures that organise narratives into recognisable patterns of quest, conflict, sacrifice, death, rebirth, and renewal. Myths therefore function as universal narrative frameworks that connect individual stories with collective human experience.

According to Frye, literary symbols acquire deeper significance when understood within broader mythological structures. Heroes, sacred journeys, transformation, flight, paradise, exile, and restoration are recurring motifs that appear across cultures and historical periods. These mythic patterns enable literary texts to express universal philosophical concerns while remaining rooted in specific cultural contexts.

This perspective is particularly relevant to *Song of Solomon*, where the legend of Solomon's flight forms the symbolic foundation of the narrative. The myth of

flight transcends literal interpretation and becomes a metaphor for freedom, spiritual liberation, and the recovery of ancestral identity. Milkman's journey resembles the traditional quest narrative, in which the hero undergoes trials that ultimately lead to self-discovery and spiritual renewal.

Although *The Bluest Eye* appears less overtly mythological, Morrison nevertheless employs mythic structures through symbolic oppositions involving innocence and corruption, hope and despair, life and spiritual death. The cyclical movement of the seasons, the recurring imagery of marigolds, and the symbolic desire for transformation all contribute to a mythic understanding of the novel's tragic narrative. Myth Criticism therefore enables the present study to interpret Morrison's symbolism not as isolated literary devices but as components of larger narrative structures.

6.3 Literary Symbolism

The third component of the theoretical framework is Literary Symbolism. Symbolism refers to the artistic technique through which concrete objects, colours, places, names, natural elements, and actions communicate meanings beyond their literal existence. Unlike simple metaphor, literary symbols often possess multiple layers of interpretation that develop throughout a narrative.

Morrison's fiction is characterised by an exceptionally rich symbolic vocabulary. Colours, flowers, birds, names, songs, dreams, mirrors, and natural landscapes repeatedly function as symbolic expressions of psychological states, moral conflicts, cultural memory, and spiritual experience. These symbols create connections between individual experiences and broader philosophical questions concerning identity, suffering, freedom, and redemption.

In *The Bluest Eye*, blue eyes symbolise the destructive pursuit of externally defined perfection, while marigolds represent innocence, hope, and the failure of emotional growth. Seasonal imagery reflects both the natural cycle of life and the gradual deterioration of Pecola's psychological condition. Similarly, mirrors become symbolic representations of self-perception and fractured identity.

In *Song of Solomon*, symbolism assumes an even broader philosophical dimension. Flight represents

liberation from material limitations and the rediscovery of ancestral heritage. Pilate's earring symbolises memory and spiritual continuity, while gold embodies the illusion of material fulfilment. The peacock illustrates the burden of excessive desire, and names throughout the novel function as symbolic markers of identity, history, and cultural inheritance. These recurring symbols reveal Morrison's capacity to transform ordinary objects into profound expressions of human experience.

6.4 Conceptual Integration of the Framework

Although Archetypal Criticism, Myth Criticism, and Literary Symbolism originate from different intellectual traditions, they complement one another within the present study. Archetypal Criticism explains the psychological development of Morrison's characters through universal patterns of human experience. Myth Criticism interprets the larger narrative structures that organise these experiences into meaningful journeys of transformation. Literary Symbolism provides the analytical tools for examining the recurring images and motifs through which Morrison communicates abstract philosophical ideas.

By integrating these perspectives, the study examines mysticism as a process of psychological and spiritual transformation expressed through symbolic language and mythic structures. This framework enables a comparative interpretation of *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*, demonstrating that Morrison employs mysticism and symbolism not merely as aesthetic devices but as interconnected narrative strategies for exploring identity, memory, suffering, self-realisation, and human transcendence.

Accordingly, the integrated theoretical framework serves as the analytical foundation for the textual interpretation presented in the subsequent sections of this paper. It facilitates a systematic examination of the selected novels while providing a coherent basis for comparing Morrison's artistic treatment of mysticism and symbolism.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a **qualitative comparative research design** to investigate the role of mysticism and symbolism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Song of Solomon* (1977). Qualitative literary research is particularly suitable for examining abstract concepts such as symbolism, mysticism, identity, and psychological transformation because these phenomena cannot be measured quantitatively. Instead, they require close textual interpretation, contextual analysis, and critical evaluation of literary meaning. The comparative approach enables the study to examine similarities and differences in Morrison's artistic treatment of mystical and symbolic elements across two major novels. Rather than analysing each novel independently, the research investigates how both texts employ comparable literary strategies while producing distinct thematic and philosophical outcomes. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of Morrison's evolving narrative techniques and contributes to a more comprehensive appreciation of her literary craftsmanship.

7.2 Research Method

This study employs the **comparative textual analysis method**, which combines close reading with interpretative literary criticism. Comparative textual analysis allows the researcher to examine recurring themes, narrative structures, symbolic motifs, and mystical elements across multiple literary works. The method focuses on identifying relationships between textual features rather than treating each novel as an isolated literary product.

Close reading serves as the principal analytical technique throughout the study. Individual passages, symbolic images, recurring motifs, character development, narrative patterns, and figurative language are carefully examined to reveal their contribution to the overall thematic structure of each novel. Through repeated reading and systematic interpretation, the study identifies how mystical experiences and symbolic representations function within Morrison's artistic vision.

7.3 Primary Sources

The primary sources of this research consist of the following novels by Toni Morrison:

- *The Bluest Eye* (1970)
- *Song of Solomon* (1977)

These novels were selected because they represent two distinct phases of Morrison's literary career while sharing common concerns related to identity, memory, spirituality, family, and self-discovery. Both texts contain rich symbolic structures and mystical motifs that make them particularly appropriate for a comparative literary investigation.

7.4 Secondary Sources

The secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, edited collections, and critical essays related to Toni Morrison's fiction, literary symbolism, myth criticism, archetypal criticism, and mysticism in literature. The review incorporates foundational studies by Harris (1980), Lee (1982), Bryce (1992), Kubitschek (1998), Peterson (1997), Ogunyemi (1977), Cormier-Hamilton (1994), Bouson (2000), McQuail (2009), together with recent contributions by David (2023), Thapliyal (2023), Wajiran (2024), and Wajiran and Apriyani (2025). These sources provide the scholarly context necessary to position the present study within existing Morrison criticism while identifying the research gap addressed by this investigation.

7.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an intensive reading of the selected novels. During the reading process, passages containing mystical imagery, symbolic objects, mythic references, dreams, folklore, religious motifs, and psychologically significant episodes were identified and classified according to their thematic relevance. Notes were systematically organised under recurring categories, including identity, alienation, memory, transformation, spirituality, symbolism, and self-realisation.

The secondary sources were examined to identify existing scholarly interpretations of these themes. Particular attention was given to points of agreement, disagreement, and areas where previous research had not explored the relationship between mysticism and symbolism in a comparative context. This process ensured that the analysis was grounded in established scholarship while allowing room for an original critical interpretation.

7.6 Analytical Framework

The analysis is guided by the integrated theoretical framework presented in the previous section. Archetypal Criticism is employed to examine the psychological development of characters through universal patterns of human experience. Myth Criticism is used to interpret recurring narrative structures and mythic motifs, while Literary Symbolism provides the analytical tools for examining recurring symbols, colours, objects, names, songs, and natural imagery.

The interpretation proceeds through four analytical stages:

1. Identification of mystical elements in each novel.
2. Examination of the major symbolic patterns and their narrative functions.
3. Comparative evaluation of similarities and differences between the selected texts.
4. Interpretation of how mysticism and symbolism collectively contribute to Morrison's exploration of identity, spirituality, and psychological transformation.

This multi-stage analytical procedure ensures a systematic and coherent interpretation of both novels.

7.7 Scope and Delimitation

The study is limited to a comparative analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon*. Although Morrison's broader literary corpus contains significant mystical and symbolic elements, novels such as *Beloved*, *Sula*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise* fall outside the scope of the present investigation. References to these works are made only when necessary to contextualise Morrison's literary style or to engage with existing scholarship.

Similarly, the study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive historical or sociological analysis of African American culture. Instead, its primary emphasis is on literary interpretation, focusing specifically on mysticism and symbolism as interconnected narrative strategies within the selected texts.

7.8 Reliability and Academic Rigor

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the study relies on multiple categories of scholarly sources, including

peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and edited critical collections. Interpretations are supported through close textual evidence from the primary novels and are evaluated in relation to established literary scholarship. The use of an integrated theoretical framework further strengthens the consistency and transparency of the analytical process.

Although literary interpretation inevitably involves critical judgment, the present study seeks to minimise subjectivity by grounding its arguments in textual evidence and by engaging with recognised scholarly perspectives. This methodological approach ensures that the findings are logically developed, academically rigorous, and capable of contributing meaningfully to contemporary Morrison studies.

8. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

8.1 *Mysticism in The Bluest Eye*

Although *The Bluest Eye* is generally regarded as a realist novel, its narrative is deeply infused with mystical dimensions that operate through psychological consciousness, symbolic imagination, dreams, and spiritual longing. Morrison does not employ mysticism in the conventional religious sense of miraculous events or supernatural intervention. Instead, she presents mysticism as an interior experience through which individuals attempt to transcend painful realities and search for meaning, acceptance, and wholeness. The mystical elements in the novel emerge through the characters' inner lives, their imaginative perceptions, and their desire to escape a fractured existence.

At the centre of this mystical experience stands Pecola Breedlove, whose longing for blue eyes becomes more than a desire for physical beauty. It develops into a symbolic and mystical quest for transformation. Pecola believes that possessing blue eyes will fundamentally alter her existence by making her visible, loved, and accepted. Her faith in this imagined transformation resembles a mystical belief in an unseen reality where suffering can be overcome through spiritual change. Morrison portrays this longing not as vanity but as a profound psychological response to rejection, humiliation, and emotional neglect. The blue eyes thus function as an imagined gateway to another reality in which Pecola hopes to recover dignity and self-worth.

From a Jungian perspective, Pecola's obsession reflects a fragmented process of individuation. Rather than integrating her authentic identity, she constructs an idealised self-based on an illusion imposed by external standards. Consequently, her mystical pursuit does not lead to self-realisation but to psychological disintegration. Morrison thereby reverses the traditional mystical journey: instead of achieving enlightenment, the protagonist becomes increasingly detached from reality. This inversion demonstrates that spiritual aspiration, when founded upon illusion rather than self-knowledge, may culminate in alienation rather than liberation.

The novel also presents mysticism through the relationship between imagination and reality. Pecola frequently retreats into an inner world where hope appears more attainable than in her external environment. This imaginative withdrawal functions as a protective psychological mechanism, enabling her to endure experiences of abuse, loneliness, and rejection. Morrison deliberately blurs the boundaries between objective reality and subjective perception, encouraging readers to recognise that the protagonist's inner world possesses its own emotional and symbolic truth. In this sense, mysticism becomes a literary expression of the human desire to transcend unbearable circumstances through imaginative consciousness.

Another significant mystical dimension is embodied in the character of Soaphead Church. Although he presents himself as a spiritual authority capable of mediating divine power, Morrison exposes the contradiction between authentic spirituality and false religious authority. Soaphead Church manipulates Pecola's desperation by convincing her that her prayer for blue eyes has been granted. His actions illustrate the corruption of spiritual belief when religious language is detached from ethical responsibility. Rather than guiding the protagonist toward truth, he reinforces her psychological illusion. Through this character, Morrison critiques superficial religiosity while emphasising the importance of genuine spiritual understanding.

Nature also contributes to the novel's mystical atmosphere. The recurring imagery of marigolds, changing seasons, sunlight, and the natural landscape reflects emotional and spiritual conditions rather than merely describing the physical environment. Claudia's belief that the marigolds failed to bloom because Pecola's child could not survive establishes an intimate

relationship between human experience and the natural world. Although this belief cannot be scientifically verified, it reflects a mystical perception in which nature participates in human suffering. Morrison thereby dissolves the conventional distinction between external reality and symbolic meaning, suggesting that spiritual truths may be expressed through natural phenomena. Dreams and imagination further strengthen the mystical quality of the narrative. Rather than presenting dreams solely as unconscious fantasies, Morrison employs them as symbolic spaces in which hidden fears, desires, and emotional conflicts become visible. Pecola's imagined conversations concerning her blue eyes reveal the gradual collapse of her psychological boundaries. These scenes illustrate how mystical imagination can function both as a source of emotional survival and as evidence of profound psychological fragmentation. Morrison's narrative strategy encourages readers to interpret these experiences symbolically rather than literally, thereby deepening the philosophical complexity of the novel. The novel's fragmented narrative structure also contributes to its mystical character. Different narrators, shifting perspectives, and non-linear chronology create an interpretative experience that requires readers to reconstruct meaning gradually. This narrative design resembles a symbolic journey in which truth is revealed through multiple voices rather than through a single authoritative perspective. Morrison's technique reflects the complexity of memory itself, where past and present continually interact to shape individual consciousness. Mysticism in *The Bluest Eye* is therefore inseparable from Morrison's exploration of identity. Every mystical image, symbolic desire, and imaginative vision ultimately reflects the protagonist's search for belonging and self-recognition. However, unlike traditional mystical narratives that culminate in enlightenment, Morrison presents a tragic inversion in which the quest for transcendence is obstructed by internalised ideals and psychological isolation. Pecola's imagined transformation never restores her humanity because it is founded upon an identity defined by external expectations rather than authentic self-awareness. From a comparative perspective, this representation of mysticism establishes an important foundation for understanding *Song of Solomon*. While *The Bluest Eye* portrays mysticism as an inward psychological struggle that ends in fragmentation, *Song of Solomon* will later demonstrate how mystical experience can become a

path toward ancestral memory, spiritual awakening, and self-discovery. The contrast between these novels reveals Morrison's evolving literary vision and her increasingly complex treatment of mysticism as a narrative mode.

In conclusion, mysticism in *The Bluest Eye* is expressed through psychological longing, symbolic transformation, imaginative consciousness, and the tension between illusion and reality. Morrison transforms ordinary experiences into profound explorations of the human spirit, demonstrating that mystical experience need not depend upon supernatural events but may arise from the deepest aspirations and vulnerabilities of the human mind. Through Pecola's tragic journey, the novel reveals both the power and the danger of spiritual longing when it becomes disconnected from authentic identity and genuine self-knowledge.

8.2 Symbolism in *The Bluest Eye*

Symbolism constitutes one of Toni Morrison's most sophisticated narrative techniques in *The Bluest Eye*. Rather than functioning as isolated literary devices, the novel's symbols operate as interconnected systems of meaning that reveal the psychological, emotional, and philosophical realities experienced by the characters. Morrison transforms ordinary objects, colours, flowers, seasons, places, and names into complex symbols that expose the tensions between appearance and reality, innocence and corruption, hope and despair, and identity and alienation. Through this symbolic network, the novel acquires a depth that extends beyond its immediate narrative, inviting readers to interpret the characters' experiences on multiple levels.

Among the most significant symbols in the novel are the **blue eyes**, which represent the destructive pursuit of an externally imposed ideal of beauty and acceptance. At the literal level, Pecola Breedlove longs for blue eyes because she believes they will make her beautiful and worthy of love. Symbolically, however, the blue eyes signify far more than physical appearance. They embody an imagined perfection that promises emotional security, social recognition, and personal fulfilment. Morrison demonstrates that Pecola's desire is not simply for a change in appearance but for a transformation of existence itself. She believes that acquiring blue eyes will

alter how others perceive her and, consequently, how she perceives herself.

From a symbolic perspective, blue eyes represent illusion rather than reality. They function as an unattainable ideal that gradually replaces Pecola's authentic identity with an imagined self. Instead of enabling self-discovery, the symbol produces psychological fragmentation because it encourages the rejection of one's own individuality. Morrison thus employs the blue eyes to critique the dangers of constructing identity through external standards rather than through self-acceptance. Within the broader context of the novel, the symbol illustrates how ideals become psychologically internalised, shaping perception and ultimately determining personal destiny. Closely connected to the symbolism of blue eyes is the recurring image of **mirrors**. Mirrors traditionally represent self-knowledge and introspection in literary texts; however, in *The Bluest Eye*, they often reflect uncertainty, dissatisfaction, and fractured identity. The act of looking into a mirror becomes an encounter with absence rather than recognition. Characters do not simply observe themselves; they evaluate themselves according to ideals that remain permanently beyond reach. Morrison thereby transforms the mirror into a symbol of divided consciousness, illustrating the conflict between authentic identity and socially constructed self-image.

Another central symbol is the **marigold**, which appears throughout the novel as an expression of innocence, hope, and renewal. Claudia's belief that the marigolds failed to bloom because Pecola's baby could not survive establishes a symbolic relationship between nature and human experience. Although there is no causal connection between these events, the narrative encourages readers to recognise the emotional truth embedded within Claudia's interpretation. The barren marigolds symbolise the failure of growth in an environment incapable of nurturing life, compassion, or justice. Morrison therefore employs natural imagery to express moral and emotional realities that transcend literal explanation.

The symbolism of the marigolds also reinforces the novel's tragic vision. Flowers conventionally signify life, fertility, and regeneration; however, Morrison reverses these associations by presenting their failure to bloom as evidence of emotional desolation and spiritual sterility. The unsuccessful cultivation of the flowers

parallels Pecola's inability to flourish within a society that denies her value. Consequently, the marigolds become one of the novel's most powerful symbols of unrealised potential and collective moral failure.

The **changing seasons** constitute another important symbolic pattern that organises the narrative. Rather than merely marking chronological time, the seasonal divisions reflect the emotional progression of the story. Traditionally, spring symbolises birth, summer represents vitality, autumn suggests maturity, and winter signifies decline or death. Morrison deliberately disrupts these conventional associations. Although the novel follows the cycle of the seasons, the anticipated renewal never fully materialises. Instead, each season reveals another stage in Pecola's psychological deterioration. The cyclical structure therefore suggests that suffering is embedded within the social environment rather than being an isolated individual experience.

Morrison further enriches the symbolic landscape through the figure of **Shirley Temple**, whose image represents culturally constructed ideals of innocence, femininity, and beauty. To many of the characters, Shirley Temple embodies perfection, happiness, and desirability. Pecola's admiration for her reveals the extent to which idealised images influence personal identity. Morrison employs this symbol to expose the distance between cultural fantasy and lived reality. Shirley Temple exists less as a historical figure than as a symbolic standard against which individuals measure themselves, often to their own psychological detriment. Similarly, the **Dick and Jane primer** that opens sections of the novel functions as an ironic symbol of the ideal American family. Its repetitive language, perfect domestic setting, and harmonious relationships sharply contrast with the experiences of the Breedlove family. Morrison deliberately juxtaposes these two worlds to reveal the gap between social ideals and the realities of poverty, emotional neglect, and familial disintegration. The increasingly fragmented presentation of the primer throughout the novel symbolises the breakdown of order and coherence, mirroring Pecola's psychological collapse. As the text becomes more difficult to read, readers experience symbolically the disintegration that characterises the protagonist's inner life.

The **Breedlove home** also possesses considerable symbolic significance. Rather than functioning simply as a physical residence, the house reflects emotional

confinement, instability, and the absence of security. Domestic space traditionally symbolises protection and belonging; however, Morrison transforms the home into a place associated with fear, violence, and alienation. The symbolic inversion of the home reinforces the novel's broader critique of environments that fail to nurture emotional and psychological development.

Another significant symbol appears in the character of **Soaphead Church**, whose name itself carries symbolic meaning. The combination of "Soaphead" and "Church" juxtaposes superficial cleanliness with institutional spirituality, suggesting the contradiction between external appearances and genuine moral integrity. Although he presents himself as a spiritual intermediary, his actions expose hypocrisy and ethical corruption. Morrison uses this symbolic figure to question the misuse of religious authority and to demonstrate how spiritual language can be manipulated to exploit vulnerable individuals.

The symbolic function of **names** throughout the novel further illustrates Morrison's narrative artistry. The surname "Breedlove" is deeply ironic because the family experiences persistent emotional neglect, conflict, and rejection. Rather than describing reality, the name symbolises the absence of the very qualities it appears to promise. This irony reflects Morrison's broader technique of using names as symbolic indicators of social, psychological, and philosophical conditions rather than merely as identifiers.

Collectively, these symbols form an interconnected network that structures the thematic development of the novel. The blue eyes, marigolds, mirrors, seasons, Dick and Jane primer, Shirley Temple, Soaphead Church, the Breedlove home, and symbolic names all contribute to Morrison's exploration of identity, illusion, suffering, and the search for belonging. None of these symbols functions independently; each acquires additional meaning through its relationship with the others, creating a complex symbolic system that deepens the emotional and philosophical resonance of the narrative. From a comparative perspective, the symbolism in *The Bluest Eye* primarily reveals fragmentation and loss. The dominant symbols depict unattainable ideals, broken identities, and environments that prevent personal growth. In contrast, as the subsequent analysis of *Song of Solomon* will demonstrate, Morrison's later novel reconfigures symbolism into a more affirmative mode in which flight, ancestral memory, names, and folklore

become symbols of liberation, continuity, and spiritual renewal. This transition reflects the evolution of Morrison's literary imagination from symbolic representations of psychological disintegration to symbols that facilitate reconciliation and self-discovery. In conclusion, symbolism in *The Bluest Eye* is fundamental to Morrison's artistic vision. Through an intricate network of recurring images and motifs, she transforms ordinary objects and experiences into profound reflections on identity, perception, suffering, and human vulnerability. The novel's symbols not only enrich its aesthetic complexity but also reveal the psychological and philosophical dimensions of its characters' lives, establishing symbolism as one of Morrison's most powerful narrative strategies.

8.3 Mysticism in *Song of Solomon*

Among Toni Morrison's novels, *Song of Solomon* offers one of the most profound explorations of mysticism as a literary and philosophical experience. Unlike *The Bluest Eye*, where mystical consciousness emerges primarily through psychological longing and imaginative escape, *Song of Solomon* presents mysticism as a transformative process that reconnects the individual with ancestral memory, cultural heritage, and spiritual identity. Morrison integrates folklore, myth, dreams, oral tradition, and symbolic journeys to construct a narrative in which mystical experience becomes a means of attaining self-knowledge and existential fulfilment.

The central figure of this mystical journey is Milkman Dead, whose development from emotional detachment to spiritual awareness constitutes the novel's primary narrative movement. At the beginning of the novel, Milkman experiences profound alienation from his family, his community, and even himself. His material comfort fails to provide psychological satisfaction, leaving him spiritually empty despite his privileged social position. Morrison deliberately presents this condition as the starting point of a mystical quest, suggesting that genuine transformation begins with an awareness of inner incompleteness.

From the perspective of Archetypal Criticism, Milkman's journey resembles the universal pattern of the hero's quest. His movement away from familiar surroundings, encounters with mentors, gradual acquisition of knowledge, and ultimate transformation reflect the archetypal process of individuation described by Carl

Jung. However, Morrison reshapes this traditional pattern by locating the source of enlightenment not in individual achievement but in the rediscovery of ancestral history. Milkman's transformation depends upon recovering forgotten stories, family memories, and cultural traditions that reveal the continuity between past and present. Mysticism in the novel therefore functions as a process of remembering rather than escaping reality.

One of the most significant mystical motifs is the legend of Solomon's flight. Throughout the novel, the story of Solomon transcends historical narrative and acquires the characteristics of a sacred myth. Flight is not merely a miraculous event but a symbolic expression of spiritual freedom and transcendence. Morrison intentionally leaves the legend open to multiple interpretations, allowing readers to understand it simultaneously as folklore, myth, collective memory, and spiritual metaphor. This ambiguity strengthens the mystical atmosphere of the novel by suggesting that truth may exist beyond the limits of empirical verification.

The symbolism of flight also transforms Milkman's understanding of identity. Initially, he interprets life through material success and personal ambition. As he gradually uncovers his family's history, flight acquires a deeper significance, representing liberation from ignorance, emotional isolation, and inherited limitations. Unlike Pecola's imagined transformation in *The Bluest Eye*, which results in psychological fragmentation, Milkman's mystical journey culminates in integration and self-realisation. Morrison thus contrasts two different forms of transcendence: one founded upon illusion and the other grounded in historical memory and authentic self-discovery.

Dreams and intuitive experiences further reinforce the mystical character of the narrative. Morrison frequently blurs the boundaries between memory, imagination, and spiritual perception, creating moments in which ordinary reality appears inseparable from deeper symbolic truths. Rather than functioning simply as psychological fantasies, dreams become vehicles through which hidden knowledge is revealed. They encourage both the protagonist and the reader to perceive reality through symbolic rather than purely rational modes of understanding.

The novel's treatment of ancestry represents another essential dimension of its mystical vision. Morrison portrays ancestors not as distant historical figures but as

living presences whose influence continues to shape contemporary existence. Family stories, oral traditions, songs, and remembered names become sacred forms of knowledge transmitted across generations. This ancestral continuity challenges linear conceptions of time by suggesting that the past remains dynamically present within individual consciousness. Consequently, mysticism in *Song of Solomon* is deeply connected with memory, inheritance, and cultural continuity.

Pilate Dead occupies a unique position within this mystical framework. She embodies spiritual wisdom, compassion, and intuitive knowledge while existing outside conventional social expectations. Significantly, Pilate lives without concern for material wealth or social status, yet she possesses profound insight into human relationships and moral responsibility. Her guidance enables Milkman to reinterpret his family history and recognise values that had previously remained invisible to him. From an archetypal perspective, Pilate functions as the Wise Guide whose role is to lead the hero beyond superficial appearances toward deeper understanding. Morrison presents her as a figure whose authority derives not from institutional religion but from lived experience, memory, and ethical integrity.

The significance of names also contributes to the novel's mystical atmosphere. Throughout *Song of Solomon*, names function as repositories of history, identity, and cultural memory. Morrison demonstrates that recovering the meaning of names is equivalent to recovering forgotten aspects of personal and collective identity. Milkman's gradual understanding of his family's names parallels his spiritual awakening, illustrating that language itself possesses transformative power. Names are therefore not arbitrary labels but symbolic expressions of historical continuity and existential belonging.

Songs and oral traditions further reinforce the mystical structure of the narrative. The children's song concerning Solomon initially appears to be a simple folk rhyme; however, as the novel progresses, it gradually reveals itself as a symbolic archive preserving historical truth. Morrison demonstrates that oral tradition can communicate knowledge inaccessible through written records. The song functions simultaneously as memory, history, prophecy, and spiritual testimony, illustrating the enduring power of collective storytelling within human communities.

Nature also assumes profound mystical significance throughout the novel. Forests, rivers, mountains, birds, and open landscapes repeatedly accompany moments of self-discovery and spiritual reflection. Rather than serving merely as descriptive settings, these natural environments become symbolic spaces where ordinary social structures lose their authority and deeper forms of knowledge emerge. Morrison's representation of nature recalls traditional mystical literature, in which communion with the natural world facilitates contemplation, renewal, and transcendence.

The relationship between life and death likewise contributes to the novel's mystical vision. Morrison refuses to portray death solely as biological termination; instead, it frequently signifies transition, continuity, and spiritual presence. Characters remain connected across generations through memory, storytelling, and symbolic inheritance, suggesting that human existence extends beyond physical mortality. This conception of continuity strengthens the novel's emphasis upon ancestral identity and reinforces its broader philosophical exploration of human interconnectedness.

Morrison's narrative structure itself enhances the mystical quality of the novel. Temporal shifts, multiple perspectives, embedded stories, and gradual revelation encourage readers to participate actively in reconstructing meaning. The narrative resembles a spiritual pilgrimage in which understanding emerges progressively rather than immediately. Each episode contributes another layer to the protagonist's evolving consciousness, reflecting the gradual nature of mystical enlightenment.

A significant feature distinguishing *Song of Solomon* from *The Bluest Eye* is the outcome of the mystical journey. Whereas Pecola's search for transformation culminates in psychological isolation, Milkman's journey results in expanded consciousness and reconciliation with his ancestral heritage. This difference illustrates Morrison's evolving literary vision. Mysticism in *Song of Solomon* does not reject reality but deepens the protagonist's engagement with it by revealing hidden dimensions of history, identity, and community.

Ultimately, Morrison presents mysticism as a dynamic process through which fragmented identity is reconstructed. Spiritual awakening arises not through miraculous intervention but through attentive listening, remembrance, self-examination, and acceptance of one's historical inheritance. The novel suggests that

genuine freedom is achieved only when individuals recognise their connection to those who came before them and understand themselves as participants in an ongoing cultural and spiritual tradition.

In conclusion, *Song of Solomon* transforms mysticism into a comprehensive philosophy of human existence. Through myth, folklore, ancestral memory, dreams, songs, names, and symbolic journeys, Morrison demonstrates that spiritual knowledge emerges through the recovery of forgotten histories and the reconciliation of the individual with the collective past. This mystical vision represents one of the defining achievements of the novel and establishes it as a profound exploration of identity, transformation, and transcendence. The following section examines how Morrison reinforces these themes through an equally intricate system of literary symbols.

8.4 Symbolism in *Song of Solomon*

Symbolism occupies a central position in *Song of Solomon*, where Toni Morrison constructs an intricate network of images, objects, names, songs, and natural elements that communicate meanings beyond their literal significance. Unlike *The Bluest Eye*, in which symbolism predominantly reflects psychological fragmentation and unattainable ideals, the symbols in *Song of Solomon* function primarily as vehicles of memory, liberation, self-discovery, and spiritual renewal. Morrison transforms ordinary experiences into symbolic expressions of philosophical ideas, demonstrating that identity is inseparable from history, ancestry, and collective memory.

The most dominant and enduring symbol in the novel is **flight**. From the opening scene, in which Robert Smith attempts to fly from the roof of Mercy Hospital, to the novel's concluding image of Milkman's leap toward Guitar, flight recurs as a complex and evolving symbol. On one level, it signifies escape from oppression, fear, and material limitations. On another, it represents the possibility of spiritual transcendence and the recovery of ancestral identity. The legend of Solomon's flight provides the symbolic centre of the narrative, suggesting that freedom is not merely physical movement but an inward transformation achieved through self-knowledge and historical awareness.

Unlike conventional literary representations of flight as simple liberation, Morrison invests the symbol with

moral and emotional complexity. Flight can signify both freedom and abandonment, illustrating that every act of departure has consequences for those left behind. Solomon's legendary flight frees him from bondage but separates him from his family, creating a tension between personal liberation and communal responsibility. By preserving this ambiguity, Morrison encourages readers to consider freedom not as an absolute ideal but as an ethical choice shaped by human relationships.

A second significant symbol is **gold**, which initially appears to represent wealth, security, and success. Milkman's early search for gold reflects his materialistic understanding of happiness and fulfilment. As the narrative progresses, however, Morrison gradually dismantles this illusion. The physical treasure proves less valuable than the historical and spiritual knowledge discovered during the journey. Gold therefore functions as a symbol of misplaced desire, illustrating the limitations of material ambition when separated from cultural memory and personal identity. The protagonist's gradual abandonment of material aspirations marks an essential stage in his spiritual maturation.

Closely connected with this idea is the symbol of the **peacock**, one of the novel's most memorable images. During Milkman's search for the hidden gold, he encounters a peacock whose magnificent tail prevents it from flying. Morrison employs this striking image to demonstrate that excessive attachment to material possessions hinders spiritual freedom. The peacock's beauty becomes a burden rather than an advantage because it limits its ability to ascend. Symbolically, the bird reflects Milkman's own condition at this stage of the narrative, where material desire obstructs psychological growth and self-realisation. Only by relinquishing unnecessary burdens can genuine freedom become possible.

Another powerful symbol is **Pilate's earring**, which contains a small piece of paper bearing her name. Although outwardly insignificant, the earring represents memory, identity, and continuity. Pilate carries her name physically throughout her life, symbolising her unwavering connection to her personal history despite social displacement and economic hardship. Morrison transforms this ordinary object into a profound representation of self-knowledge. Unlike other characters whose identities are fragmented or uncertain,

Pilate possesses a remarkable sense of inner stability because she remains faithful to her origins. The earring therefore symbolises the preservation of identity through memory rather than through external recognition.

The symbolism of **names** extends throughout the entire novel and constitutes one of Morrison's most sophisticated narrative strategies. Characters such as Milkman Dead, Pilate Dead, Macon Dead, Guitar Bains, and First Corinthians possess names that carry symbolic meanings beyond simple identification. These names preserve fragments of family history, social experience, irony, and cultural memory. Milkman's nickname reflects immaturity and emotional dependence, while Pilate's biblical name evokes spiritual leadership and moral strength despite its unconventional literary context. Morrison demonstrates that names embody stories, and recovering those stories becomes essential to understanding personal identity.

The family surname "**Dead**" is particularly significant. Although it originated through historical error, it evolves into a symbol of cultural displacement and historical rupture. The name represents the loss of ancestral continuity caused by slavery, forced migration, and bureaucratic misidentification. At the same time, Morrison transforms this apparently negative symbol into a reminder that identity can be reconstructed through memory and storytelling. Milkman's journey ultimately restores meaning to a name that initially appeared empty, illustrating that history may be recovered even after profound disruption.

The novel's title directs attention to another central symbol—**Solomon's song**. Initially presented as a seemingly simple children's rhyme, the song gradually reveals itself to be a repository of historical knowledge preserved through oral tradition. Morrison demonstrates that music functions as a living archive, transmitting memory across generations without reliance upon written documents. The song preserves the history of Solomon's flight, family relationships, and cultural identity long after official records have disappeared. Symbolically, it represents the enduring power of collective memory and the capacity of oral tradition to safeguard historical truth.

Milk also functions symbolically within the novel. Milkman's unusual childhood experience of prolonged breastfeeding gives rise to his nickname and signifies dependence, emotional immaturity, and delayed

psychological development. Throughout the narrative, the symbolism of milk evolves from nourishment to limitation. The protagonist's gradual movement beyond this dependency parallels his journey toward emotional independence and mature self-understanding. Morrison thereby employs an ordinary biological image to represent complex processes of psychological growth. Nature constitutes another important symbolic dimension of the novel. Birds, forests, rivers, mountains, and open landscapes repeatedly accompany moments of reflection and transformation. Birds, in particular, reinforce the symbolism of flight by representing aspiration, movement, and freedom. Forests function as spaces removed from social constraints, allowing characters to encounter forgotten aspects of themselves. Rivers suggest continuity and the flow of memory, while mountains symbolise elevation, perspective, and spiritual insight. Morrison's natural imagery consistently links external landscapes with internal states of consciousness.

The motif of **bones** likewise acquires symbolic significance. Human remains are not presented merely as physical remnants but as tangible connections between generations. The search for and proper recognition of ancestral remains reflects the broader effort to recover historical truth and honour familial memory. Through this symbolism, Morrison emphasises that reconciliation with the past requires acknowledgment rather than erasure. Memory, therefore, becomes both a moral responsibility and a source of spiritual renewal.

Another recurring symbol is the **journey itself**. Milkman's travels from Michigan to Pennsylvania and Virginia represent far more than geographical movement. The journey symbolises the gradual expansion of consciousness through experience, memory, and self-reflection. Each location contributes another layer to the protagonist's understanding of himself and his family history. Morrison employs the journey as a metaphor for the lifelong process of identity formation, suggesting that self-knowledge is achieved through continuous exploration rather than immediate revelation.

Collectively, these symbols create an integrated system through which Morrison explores freedom, memory, ancestry, identity, and spiritual transformation. Flight, gold, the peacock, Pilate's earring, names, Solomon's song, milk, natural landscapes, bones, and the journey

itself do not operate independently. Instead, they interact to form a coherent symbolic structure in which each symbol illuminates and reinforces the others. This interconnectedness demonstrates Morrison's exceptional ability to construct narratives whose philosophical meanings emerge gradually through recurring symbolic patterns.

When compared with *The Bluest Eye*, the symbolism of *Song of Solomon* reveals a significant evolution in Morrison's literary imagination. In the earlier novel, dominant symbols such as blue eyes, marigolds, mirrors, and the Dick and Jane primer expose fragmentation, alienation, and the destructive consequences of false ideals. By contrast, the symbols in *Song of Solomon* guide both characters and readers toward reconciliation, historical recovery, and spiritual liberation. Although both novels employ symbolism to explore identity, they differ fundamentally in symbolic direction: *The Bluest Eye* emphasises loss and disintegration, whereas *Song of Solomon* foregrounds restoration, continuity, and transcendence.

In conclusion, symbolism in *Song of Solomon* functions as the primary medium through which Morrison communicates the novel's philosophical vision. Every major symbol contributes to an interconnected narrative concerned with memory, identity, and the possibility of spiritual renewal. Through this carefully constructed symbolic network, Morrison demonstrates that genuine freedom arises not from the rejection of the past but from its understanding and acceptance. The novel therefore represents one of the most sophisticated examples of symbolic narrative in modern literature, confirming Morrison's mastery of literary symbolism as a means of exploring the complexities of human existence.

9. COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* demonstrates that Toni Morrison consistently employs mysticism and symbolism as interconnected literary strategies for exploring identity, human consciousness, and spiritual transformation. Although the two novels differ considerably in narrative structure, characterization, and thematic emphasis, they reveal a remarkable continuity in Morrison's artistic vision. In both works, mysticism and symbolism transcend decorative or stylistic functions, becoming fundamental

mechanisms through which Morrison investigates the psychological, philosophical, and existential dimensions of human experience.

One of the most significant similarities between the novels lies in Morrison's understanding of identity as a dynamic process rather than a fixed condition. In both narratives, the protagonists struggle to construct a meaningful sense of self within environments shaped by social expectations, personal suffering, and inherited cultural values. However, the trajectory of this struggle differs substantially. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove seeks identity through external validation, believing that physical transformation will provide emotional acceptance and social recognition. Her quest is directed outward, resulting in psychological fragmentation and the loss of authentic selfhood. In contrast, Milkman Dead gradually discovers that genuine identity emerges through self-examination, historical awareness, and reconciliation with ancestral memory. Morrison therefore presents two contrasting models of identity formation: one founded upon illusion and external approval, the other grounded in self-knowledge and cultural continuity.

The treatment of mysticism further illustrates this contrast. In *The Bluest Eye*, mystical consciousness is primarily psychological and introspective. Pecola's longing for blue eyes represents an inward attempt to transcend emotional suffering through imaginative transformation. Her mystical vision, however, is based upon unattainable ideals that separate her from reality rather than bringing her closer to it. Consequently, mysticism functions as a tragic expression of alienation. Conversely, *Song of Solomon* presents mysticism as an affirmative process of spiritual awakening. Through myths, dreams, folklore, songs, ancestral memory, and symbolic journeys, Milkman acquires a deeper understanding of himself and his place within a larger historical continuum. Morrison thus transforms mysticism from a vehicle of psychological escape into a pathway toward existential fulfilment.

The symbolic systems operating within the two novels likewise reveal both continuity and development in Morrison's literary imagination. In *The Bluest Eye*, symbols such as blue eyes, marigolds, mirrors, Shirley Temple, the Dick and Jane primer, and the Breedlove home predominantly represent absence, fragmentation, illusion, and emotional deprivation. These symbols expose the destructive consequences of internalized

ideals and social exclusion. Their cumulative effect is tragic, emphasizing psychological disintegration and the failure of emotional growth.

By contrast, *Song of Solomon* employs a symbolic network oriented toward restoration and transformation. Flight, Pilate's earring, Solomon's song, names, the peacock, gold, natural landscapes, and ancestral bones collectively symbolize liberation, memory, reconciliation, and spiritual renewal. Although some of these symbols initially suggest material ambition or personal uncertainty, they ultimately guide both the protagonist and the reader toward deeper philosophical understanding. Morrison therefore demonstrates a significant evolution in symbolic expression, moving from symbols of loss and fragmentation to symbols of continuity and regeneration.

Another important point of comparison concerns Morrison's representation of community. In *The Bluest Eye*, social relationships frequently reinforce emotional isolation and psychological vulnerability. Family members, neighbours, and broader social institutions often fail to provide the compassion necessary for healthy identity formation. Community, therefore, becomes a source of exclusion rather than belonging. In *Song of Solomon*, however, community functions as a repository of historical memory and collective wisdom. Oral traditions, family narratives, and shared cultural experiences enable Milkman to reconstruct his identity. Morrison suggests that individual fulfilment is inseparable from communal knowledge and ancestral continuity.

The comparative analysis also highlights Morrison's distinctive treatment of time and memory. *The Bluest Eye* presents memory primarily as a source of unresolved trauma and emotional suffering. Past experiences repeatedly intrude upon the present, preventing psychological healing and reinforcing the characters' sense of hopelessness. In *Song of Solomon*, memory performs a fundamentally different function. Rather than imprisoning the individual within past experiences, memory becomes a source of liberation because it restores historical awareness and reconnects fragmented identities with ancestral origins. Morrison thus illustrates two contrasting possibilities: memory may either perpetuate suffering or facilitate personal transformation depending upon how it is understood and integrated.

From the perspective of the integrated theoretical framework adopted in this study, the comparative findings further demonstrate the complementary relationship between archetypal patterns, mythic structures, and literary symbolism. Archetypal Criticism reveals that both Pecola and Milkman undertake symbolic journeys of self-discovery; however, only Milkman's journey culminates in successful individuation. Myth Criticism explains the structural significance of legends, folklore, and quest narratives in *Song of Solomon*, while also illuminating the symbolic patterns underlying the tragic narrative of *The Bluest Eye*. Literary Symbolism provides the interpretative framework through which recurring images, colours, names, objects, and natural elements communicate philosophical meanings extending beyond their literal functions. The integration of these theoretical perspectives therefore confirms that mysticism and symbolism operate as mutually reinforcing narrative strategies throughout Morrison's fiction.

An equally significant observation emerging from this comparative study concerns Morrison's evolving literary philosophy. Although both novels examine suffering, identity, and human vulnerability, they differ in their conception of transformation. *The Bluest Eye* portrays a world in which destructive ideals overwhelm the individual's capacity for resistance, producing irreversible psychological consequences. *Song of Solomon*, while acknowledging similar experiences of suffering and displacement, offers the possibility of renewal through remembrance, reconciliation, and spiritual awakening. This progression suggests that Morrison's later fiction develops a more affirmative vision of human potential without diminishing the complexity of historical and personal pain.

The findings of this study also contribute to contemporary Morrison scholarship by demonstrating that mysticism and symbolism should not be examined as isolated literary devices. Instead, they function as interconnected systems that shape narrative structure, character development, thematic progression, and philosophical inquiry. Mysticism provides the experiential dimension through which characters encounter hidden truths, while symbolism supplies the artistic language that communicates these experiences to readers. Together, they create a multilayered narrative architecture in which psychological experience,

cultural memory, and spiritual transformation become inseparable.

Furthermore, the comparative approach adopted in this research extends existing scholarship by moving beyond single-text analysis. Previous studies have often concentrated on themes such as race, gender, trauma, identity, or mythology within individual novels. While these approaches remain valuable, the present study demonstrates that a comparative examination of *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* reveals broader patterns in Morrison's artistic development. Specifically, it highlights the evolution of her symbolic imagination from representations of psychological disintegration toward narratives of spiritual reconstruction and cultural recovery.

Overall, the comparative discussion confirms the central argument of this research: Morrison employs mysticism and symbolism as complementary narrative strategies to investigate the complexities of identity, memory, and human transformation. While *The Bluest Eye* illustrates the devastating consequences of constructing identity through illusion and external validation, *Song of Solomon* demonstrates the liberating potential of ancestral memory, spiritual awareness, and authentic self-discovery. Together, these novels reveal Morrison's extraordinary ability to integrate psychological realism with symbolic imagination, producing literary works of enduring philosophical and artistic significance.

10. CONCLUSION

The present study has undertaken a comparative analysis of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* with particular emphasis on the interconnected roles of mysticism and symbolism in shaping the thematic and philosophical dimensions of the two novels. By employing an integrated theoretical framework based on Archetypal Criticism, Myth Criticism, and Literary Symbolism, the study has demonstrated that Morrison's narrative artistry extends beyond realistic representation to encompass profound explorations of identity, memory, spirituality, and human transformation. Rather than functioning as isolated literary devices, mysticism and symbolism emerge as complementary narrative strategies through which Morrison constructs multilayered meanings that enrich both character development and thematic expression.

The analysis of *The Bluest Eye* reveals that mysticism operates primarily as an inward psychological experience shaped by longing, imagination, and the desire for self-transformation. Pecola Breedlove's pursuit of blue eyes represents a symbolic quest for acceptance and personal worth, yet her search is grounded in illusion rather than authentic self-recognition. Morrison employs mystical imagination to portray the tragic consequences of internalized ideals, demonstrating how distorted perceptions of beauty and identity lead to psychological fragmentation and emotional isolation. Simultaneously, the novel's symbolic network—including blue eyes, marigolds, mirrors, the Dick and Jane primer, Shirley Temple, and the Breedlove home—collectively illustrates the destructive effects of alienation, social exclusion, and the loss of selfhood.

In contrast, *Song of Solomon* presents mysticism as a transformative force that guides the protagonist toward self-knowledge and spiritual fulfilment. Through myths, folklore, dreams, ancestral memory, songs, and symbolic journeys, Morrison depicts Milkman Dead's gradual movement from emotional detachment to existential awareness. Mysticism in the novel is not associated with escape from reality but with a deeper engagement with personal history, communal memory, and cultural inheritance. The novel's symbolic system—centred on flight, Pilate's earring, names, gold, the peacock, Solomon's song, and natural landscapes—reinforces this process of spiritual awakening by illustrating that genuine freedom emerges through remembrance, reconciliation, and acceptance of one's historical identity.

The comparative discussion has shown that although both novels examine the universal quest for identity, they differ fundamentally in the direction of that journey. *The Bluest Eye* portrays a movement toward fragmentation and psychological disintegration, whereas *Song of Solomon* depicts a progression toward integration, renewal, and self-realisation. These contrasting trajectories illustrate the evolution of Morrison's literary imagination from narratives emphasising the destructive consequences of false ideals to narratives highlighting the restorative power of ancestral memory and spiritual consciousness. This evolution is reflected not only in the thematic concerns of the novels but also in Morrison's increasingly

sophisticated use of mystical and symbolic narrative techniques.

A major contribution of the present study lies in its integrated examination of mysticism and symbolism as mutually reinforcing components of Morrison's artistic vision. Previous scholarship has frequently investigated symbolism, mythology, identity, trauma, or spirituality independently or within the context of a single novel. By adopting a comparative approach, this research demonstrates that mysticism provides the experiential dimension through which characters encounter hidden truths, while symbolism functions as the artistic language that communicates these experiences to readers. The interaction between these two literary modes forms the foundation of Morrison's narrative architecture and offers a deeper understanding of her exploration of identity, memory, and human consciousness.

The findings further suggest that Morrison's novels transcend their immediate historical and social contexts by addressing enduring philosophical questions concerning selfhood, belonging, moral responsibility, suffering, and transformation. Although the selected novels emerge from specific cultural experiences, their symbolic richness and mystical imagination enable them to engage universal aspects of human existence. Morrison thereby establishes literature as a space where personal experience, collective memory, and spiritual reflection converge to illuminate the complexities of the human condition.

Despite these contributions, the present study is subject to certain limitations. The analysis is confined to two novels and therefore does not encompass the full range of mystical and symbolic patterns found throughout Morrison's literary corpus. Works such as *Beloved*, *Sula*, *Jazz*, *Paradise*, and *A Mercy* also contain significant mystical, mythological, and symbolic dimensions that remain beyond the scope of the present investigation. Furthermore, the study employs qualitative textual analysis and does not engage with reader-response theory, reception studies, digital humanities approaches, or computational methods of literary analysis, each of which could provide additional perspectives on Morrison's fiction.

Future research may therefore extend the present investigation by undertaking comparative studies involving Morrison's later novels or by examining the relationship between mysticism, symbolism, and

gender, memory, trauma, or ecological consciousness. Comparative analyses between Morrison and other twentieth-century novelists may also reveal broader developments in symbolic narrative traditions and modern literary mysticism. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Morrison's position within world literature and contemporary literary theory.

In conclusion, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Song of Solomon* demonstrate the extraordinary capacity of literature to explore the deepest dimensions of human existence through mystical imagination and symbolic expression. Morrison transforms ordinary experiences into profound reflections on identity, memory, suffering, and spiritual renewal, creating narratives that challenge readers to reconsider conventional understandings of selfhood and reality. By integrating mysticism with symbolism, she constructs a distinctive literary vision in which psychological experience, ancestral memory, and philosophical inquiry become inseparable. Consequently, Morrison's fiction continues to offer fertile ground for literary scholarship, reaffirming her status as one of the most innovative and influential novelists of contemporary literature.

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