

## Chapter Six

### Style and Techniques

Toni Morrison's fiction displays an extensive concern with the erasure of African cultural consciousness and cultural history, and the persisting cultural illness which this erasure precipitates. The cultivated lack of cultural historical consciousness, and the displacement of peoplehood which it engenders, is a central theme in several of Morrison's novels.

- Judylyn Ryan

Toni Morrison uses the element of aesthetics in her novels. Her novels focus on political, cultural, and racial elements. Morrison endeavors to use the aesthetic element in her writing to show black misery and desolation. In the words of Marc C. Conner,

Toni Morrison's writing emerges from a complex array of aesthetic and cultural traditions, yet the overwhelming tendency in Morrison scholarship—a tendency fostered by Morrison herself—has been to ignore or even to deny diverse influences. The great anxiety in Morrison scholarship, and unquestionably in Morrison's own critical writings, is the question of originality, of indebtedness. (11)

Many writers and novelists would agree that Morrison is of the view that the novels must evolve, and can. Morrison's deep insight into her own writing is evident in her essay entitled, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." In the article, she also speaks about the different groups of readers of her fiction, who may have different perceptions on her writing. Toni Morrison says,

... My sense of the novel is that it has always functioned for the class or the group that wrote it. The history of the novel as a form began when there was a new class, a middle class, to read it; it was an art form that they needed. The lower class didn't need novels at that time because they had an art form already: they had songs, and dances, and ceremony, and gossip, and celebrations... (340)

Morrison has accomplished considerably in the way of her narrative style with most of her novels and has earned tribute from readers for them. Morrison has endeavored to use a unique and different narrative style in each one of them rather than simply following an older tradition. Each of Morrison's novels is different from her other novels in structure, its total effect and artistic craft. She has summarized the techniques of writing aptly in an interview with Nellie McKay, and has shown her sensitivity towards the craft of writing novels. She says, According to Morrison a writer does not always write in the ways other wish. Morrison handles elements within a story frame efficiently. She says that her writing is evolutionary – growing into a pair of young girls black adult women, and meeting with problems as such.

An author's style is what defines his or her work. Morrison's writing style is easily discernible due to her distinctive use of language. The most prominent technique she uses is switching the voice of narration throughout her stories for a change of perspective. Some of her most frequently used techniques are the use of well-expressed comparisons, significant historical references, and diverse sentence structure.

Morrison is generally known for her use of extraordinary, effective comparisons that give further account to the details she presents. More precisely, she uses similes in her writing to help the reader associate the content with alternate images and

experiences. One example for this is seen in *Song of Solomon* at Hagar's funeral as Pilate whispers "My baby girl" and Morrison describes the atmosphere of the church: "Words tossed like stones into a silent canyon" (SS 317). Another instance in which Morrison uses an inimitable comparison happens in *The Bluest Eye* when Pecola Breedlove lies wakeful at night, snooping to her mom and dad fight, "the unquarreled evening hung like the first note of a dirge in sullenly expectant air" (TBE 41). Yet another metaphor is seen in *Jazz* when Violet describes her attraction to the city, "Daylight slants like a razor cutting the buildings in half" (JZ 7).

The other vital trademark of Morrison's work is her frequent use of significant references to history. These provide background information about the period of time in which the novels are written. Besides this, they shed light on the historical roots from which the story emerges. This in turn adds more depth to the stories and makes them more realistic. For instance, *Song of Solomon* contains a lot of magical realism. Yet, Morrison also grounds the plot with concrete examples of history, such as when Milkman questions Susan Byrd about his grandfather's past, "'Did Jake have to register at the Freedman's Bureau before he left the state?' 'Everybody did. Everybody who had been slaves, that is'" (SS 322). This gives the readers precise information about the Macon Dead's (Jake's) past. Further, it also reminds them the period of time in which the story takes place by including a reference to the Freedman's Bureau. The Freedmen's Bureau Bill established the Freedmen's Bureau on March 3, 1865, and was initiated by President Abraham Lincoln. It was intended to last for one year after the end of the Civil War. The Freedmen's Bureau was a significant agency of early Reconstruction, supporting freedmen in the South. Another indication of the historical implications of period of time surface in *The Bluest Eye* is through what Pecola as a child has learnt from her parents about the outside world. She says, "Outdoors, we

knew, was the real terror of life. The threat of being outdoors surfaced frequently in those days” (*TBE* 17). This proves an instinctive fear, of being an outsider or excluded, that people of that period would have experienced. Therefore, historical citations are certainly a major element in Morrison’s formula for success.

Although linguistic logistics are mandatory for an author’s style, sentence structure is also an extremely important element to include in the process. Morrison is also too good at this task. Morrison includes a wide variety of different types of sentences, which makes her writing elegant and sinuous. One type she frequently insets into her writing is balanced sentences. This is exemplified in *Song of Solomon* when Milkman contemplates the relationship between Corinthians and her mysterious lover, “He thought it was funny, sweet, and a little sad” (*SS* 209). Another unique technique that Morrison uses as her style is by applying periodic and inverted sentences in her novels. This technique is seen in *The Bluest Eye* when Junior’s mother comes home to discover her precious cat dead and spots Pecola. At this instance she says, “Up over the hump of the cat’s back she looked” (*TBE* 91). Morrison includes these types of sentences just to break the flow of monotonous and repetitive reading. She creates lively sentences that are actually quite unexpected. Besides this Morrison persuades the reader by manipulating sentence length and wording to express the tone or emotion she is trying to convey. Morrison also uses the same idea of using sentences with no verbs. This appears in *The Bluest Eye* when Cholly is relieved that the banquet after his Aunt Jimmy’s funeral has finally come. She says, “Laughter, relief, a steep hunger for food” (*TBE* 143). Even without the assistance of complete sentences, the reader has no problems to simply follow what is going on. Morrison readily expresses her skill in sentence usage very often throughout her works, and the quality of these sentences reflects her overall skill as an author.

Morrison's novels are branded with watchfully constructed prose in which regular words are placed in relief, so as to produce lyrical phrases. This elicits sharp emotional responses from her readers. Morrison's extraordinary, mythological characters are compelled by their own moral visions to struggle, in order to understand truths, which are larger than those held by the individual self. Her themes are broad. They are good and evil, love and hate, friendship, beauty and ugliness, death and so on. Morrison's novels mirror her longing to draw on the people, places, language, values, cultural traditions and politics that have molded her own life and that of Afro-American people.

Magic Realism is a literary movement linked with a style of writing or technique that integrates magical or supernatural events into realistic narrative without questioning the implausibility of these events. Facts and fantasy are blended together by making live experience appear extraordinary. The magical realist writers contribute to a re-envisioning of Latin-American culture as lively and complex. The fusion of fact and fantasy is intended to question the nature of reality as well as call attention to the act of creation. Morrison uses magical elements in real-life historical settings. Valerie Smith is an American academic administrator and scholar of Afro-American literature and culture. She is the current President of Swarthmore College. Morrison remarked to Valerie Smith, "I would have been dependent on so-called scientific data to explain hopelessly unscientific things and also I would have relied on information that even subsequent objectivity has proved to be fraudulent" (Beutel 84). Her novels, too, would have been bereft of their unique blend of fantasy and reality, myth and history, folklore and legend. The supernatural and empirical reality are so intertwined in Morrison's novels such that the "seen" and the "unseen" often elide one another. The effect of these ghosts and of Morrison's supernatural themes is the effect of gothic literature.

Once when Morrison was asked about the haunting theme in her novels, she exclaimed that she was happy about it. She says, "I am very happy to hear that my books haunt" (Mc Kay 418). Toni Morrison's works are haunting for most readers, with their disturbing and unforgettable characters and events. The haunting is more of a ghostly sort. Ghosts, such as the horsemen of *Tar Baby* and character of Beloved exist very well in her fictional world. However, they are also often real, notable, and central to the stories as living characters. They continue to feel pain and desire and allow Morrison a means of giving the dead voice in remembering the forgotten. The impact of these ghosts and ghostly themes is disquieting, unsettling, and even subversive.

The novel *Song of Solomon* includes many traditional Gothic features such as the rotting mansion occupied by the unnaturally aged Circe, the ghost of Milkman's grandfather, who appears regularly to mourn over his wife to their daughter. Circe is designated as a witch from the main character Milkman Dead's childhood. The other characters Milkman's aunt Pilate and even the Milkman's search through the wilderness and dark of night for self, family and home gives a gothic theme to the novel. Milkman joins the hunt in the woods near Shalimar, Virginia. There he hears a sound resembling a woman crying. He then learns that the sound is an echo from Ryna's Gulch. According to local wisdom, the continuing sound is the mourning of his great-grandmother for her husband, Solomon, who has left her to fly back to Africa. It is the central song that is heard throughout the novel, sung by Pilate and the children of Shalimar; "Oh Solomon don't leave me here"(SS 47) Ryna, who lives still as an echo in the woods, is echoed even beyond that in the song. In *The Bluest Eye* the magic realism is seen abundantly. Magic is seen in the failure of marigolds to bloom and the acceptance by some members of the community in Soaphead Church's powers.

Soaphead is a sham mystic in the novel. Hence, Morrison's style combines these unrealistic elements with a realistic presentation of life and characters.

*Beloved* is Morrison's most overtly Gothic novel, controlled by a haunted house, a haunted family and community even. The haunting is manifested in echo in the disembodied voices that float around the house at 124 Bluestone Road. The voices from the house and the voice from the character Beloved incorporate a collective memory of slave-ship experience. They are like the echoes of the dead, illustrating the power of voice, particularly feminine voice, to transcend and surpass body and time. The connection they provide between past and present allows the possibility for a beginning of restoration. *Beloved* makes clear that the past cannot simply be jolted down and forgotten without terrible results. The stranger woman, Beloved in the novel is thought to be the dead child of Sethe who has returned now in flesh. The stranger's name and her baby-like characteristics such as the soft skin, longing for sweets, and her weak command of language may point to the reader that she may be the dead child.

In the novel *Beloved*, once Denver asks Beloved, what it is like in the dark place from where she has come. Beloved replies that when, she is there she is small and curled up. And the situation is such that it was hot and crowded with lots of other people, and some of them are already dead. Then she goes on to describe a bridge and water. This may imply to the reader that the ghostly character Beloved may represent the thousands of dead African people during their journey in the middle passage. The conversation goes like this: When Denver asks about Beloved's name, she replies that in the dark she was named "Beloved." Denver questions her further as to how she got in there. Beloved promptly replies, "I wait; then I got on the bridge. I stay there in the dark, in the daytime, in the dark, in the daytime. It was a long time." (*BD* 88). Beloved

also says that there was no room to move in ... Heaps. Many people are down there. Some is dead. Through this conversation, Morrison highlights the fatal atrocities of the blacks in the "Slave Ships."

Morrison herself said in an interview that the ghostly character Beloved may very well be the haunting representation of the millions of dead slaves during their voyage from Africa. Morrison says,

[Beloved] is spirit on one hand, literally she is what Sethe thinks she is, her child returned to her from the dead. And she must function like that in the text. She is also another kind of dead which is not spiritual but flesh, which is, a survivor from the true, factual slave ship... both things are possible, and there's evidence in the text that both things could be approached, because the language of both experiences – death and the Middle Passage – is the same. (Darling 247)

Critic Susan Corey has similar views. She says, Beloved represents, "the physical embodiment of Sethe's murdered daughter, as well as those thousands who died during the middle passage" (37). Moreover, the first page of the novel, which usually plays host to a dedication of sorts, is inscribed with the ominous "Sixty Million and more." The words refer to the estimated number of Africans who died in the Middle Passage between Africa and North America. The slave trade was notorious for its dirty, congested ships, into whose cellars Africans were forced to lie for periods of up to twelve weeks. Millions of Africans died during the voyage and many died in the ships. The dead slaves may represent the ghostly character in the novel *Beloved*.

The epigraph of the novel, *Beloved* is also unique. It is a passage from the Bible (Romans 9:25) and a statement by Hosea quoted by Paul in a sermon on the ultimate

sovereignty of God. “We do not know,” claims Paul, “whom the Lord has chosen to save.” Thus, until the final judgment, the Lord may call a person “beloved, which was not beloved.” The context, however, serves only as a background--perhaps to evoke the uncertainty of human life. In the foreground, is the comparison of the past and present of the quote and the naming of someone beloved who was not beloved and as well as the religious overtones.

Another important individuality in Morrison’s writing is that she offers no solutions to the problems, the characters face in the novel. The solution is left to the readers to contemplate over and understand the intricacies of the situation. Morrison also does not brand her characters as “good” or “bad.” This decision is also left to the discretion of the readers. She simply presents her characters in a more realistic way. She affirms that they are what they are and not anything more or less. She does not have a “hero” and a “villain” in her novels as anyone would anticipate. By doing this, the author runs an undercurrent tone of an ambiguous theme and an equivocal value of “Good” and “Evil.” This theme is readily evident in her novel *Sula*. In *Sula*, she makes the readers contemplate over good and evil. What appears to be evil may not be actually be evil and may very well become good in the end. Similarly, what appears as good may not be good in the end. Similarly, certain events in her novels are twisted in the way they are presented and may not conform to the reader’s anticipation. The author does not simplify the complex realities of the past or present. Instead, out of respect for the cultural knowledge that black people bring to life and living, she uses the power and majesty of her imagination to address them.

Morrison is an important element of the black and American literary tradition. The long black American tradition finds its full and intricate blossom in her art.

Morrison's novels are multi-voiced and multilayered. The confluence of two streams of narrative tradition is noticeable in her writing. The oral tradition of storytelling passed down over generations in her family and community is vivid in her novels. Narrative tradition relating to guardians of the history, which is far removed from the world of the middle-class novel, is also evident in her novels. Morrison comes from the rural and urban Afro-American tradition and her novels reach home, back to the blues. Afro-American literature is known for its enduring tradition of voicing pain, registering complaint and console. The lyrical pressure of her prose is troubled and merciless. It soothes and heals the wounds of slavery. Her characters are all simple but they question the law of the land and the judgment of the witnessing readers.

Paul Gray has remarked in the *Time* magazine, "The debate about where Morrison ranks among the other American laureates will probably simmer for years... some reviewers have found Morrison's work overly deterministic, her characters pawns in the service of their creator's designs." Gray has quoted the essayist Stanley Crouch who commented that Morrison is "immensely talented. I just think she needs a new subject matter, the world she lives in, not this world of endless black victims." However, Gray also has noted:

For every pan, Morrison has received a surfeit of paeans: for her lyricism, for her ability to turn the mundane into the magical. In the Nobel sweepstakes at the moment, Morrison looks to be a lot closer to William Faulkner, whom many critics regard as this century's greatest American novelist, than to Buck and Steinbeck. (Gray n.p.)

In the book *Black Women Writers: A Critical Evaluation*, Darwin T. Turner has praised Morrison's verbal descriptions that take the reader deep into the soul of the

characters. He says, "... equally effective, however, is her art of narrating action in a lean prose that uses adjectives cautiously while creating memorable vivid images" (qtd. in Evans 365). Jonathan Yardley, in the *Washington Post Book World*, notes that a principal feature of her novels is "the quality of Toni Morrison's prose... [The book's] real strength lies in Morrison's writing, which at times has the resonance of poetry and is precise, vivid and controlled throughout." He says that Morrison "became this country's most famous literary novelist" (Yardley n.p.).

Morrison in her acceptance speech for the 1993 Nobel Prize said, "let language may be the measure of our lives." In response, the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy described Morrison's work: "She delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race. And she addresses us with the luster of poetry" (Grimes 2). Morrison also said in the Nobel Prize Lecture that, "it must not be a language that oppresses or manipulates, the policing languages of mastery," but that can "limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speaker, readers, and writers. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable. It must be free of the arrogance of absolute definition" (Morrison n.p.).

In 1996 Morrison received the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, and in her acceptance speech, *The Dancing Mind*, she continues to emphasize the necessary interconnectedness that occurs through reading and writing. The reader, she speaks of must come to terms with solitude, and the writer she met, risked her life in an attempt to put words beyond the control of a stifling government. Morrison says that writing signals independence but relies totally on an industry. It is more than a desire to watch other writers. She has to offer fruits of her own imaginative intelligence without fear.

Morrison writes with both first and third person point of view in her novels. She blends them both in a unique way that it gives a good picture about the characters. The point of view in *The Bluest Eye* is dominated by first person (“I”) through the mind of Claudia MacTeer. The mind of Claudia sometime narrates as a nine-year-old child and at times as an adult. The instances in which Morrison uses the adult Claudia as narrator serve as points of reflection for Claudia. A third person, omniscient, anonymous narrator also exists in the novel to make the reading more interesting. The omniscient narrator presents to us the childhoods and early adulthoods of Cholly and Pauline. This provides a means for the reader to appreciate the path, which has taken Cholly and Pauline to such depths of self-loathing. Similarly, the novel *Beloved* is written with a combination of first and third person standpoint. The story switches from one character’s viewpoint to the other providing a fuller picture of the events.

*Sula* is told from the point of view of a wise, omniscient narrator, who sees into all the characters’ hearts and minds with tolerance and acceptance. Besides this, the use of varied points of view allows the reader to see all the sides of any event and understand the complexity of what really happened. Dreadful events are depicted, but the narrator completely avoids making judgments about them. The events are simply presented and the narrator does not give any opinion with regard to the events. The reader perceives all the various ways in which the characters respond to the events and the reader is allowed to come to an independent determination of what these things mean and whether they are good or evil. In *Sula* she has used other techniques such as realistic dialect. By using dialect speech, Morrison allows the readers to hear the characters as real people. Morrison shows their social class, education, and attitudes without having to overtly discuss these aspects. She also has used a prologue before the starting of the story. It is to be noted that other novels of Morrison lack such prologue.

Morrison strongly uses irony to build a dramatic plot. The place “Sweet Home” in *Beloved* is not sweet at all for the slaves. The girl who calls herself Beloved shows up worn and ragged. In the novel *The Bluest Eye* Pecola becomes impregnated by her father Cholly. Pecola gets abused and victimized by her own father. The irony is that the community does not identify her as a victim. They talk badly about Pecola. They mock her. She is a helpless child, but no one helps her. The title of certain novels is ironical. For example the title *The Bluest Eye* and *Tar Baby* are opposite of each other. The struggle of the women characters in Morrison’s novels for emancipation and empowerment and their ultimate failure is ironical.

Similarly, Morrison uses many symbols in her novels. Sethe in *Beloved* loses control of her bladder, symbolizing childbirth, as if to say that Beloved has been reborn in this new stranger. When the ghost that haunts the house on 124 Bluestone Road, shakes the house at the first sign of Paul D’s affection, the act foreshadows trouble for Sethe and Paul D’s relationship. When Beloved comes into the family, she manipulates and tries to drive them apart. Boy, the family’s dog, is nowhere to be found after Beloved’s appearance. It is naturally thought that animals have a greater sense of the supernatural things. Denver confirms and foreshadows a ghostly presence by saying “he won’t be back [the dog]... I just know” (*BD* 66).

The most obvious symbols found in *The Bluest Eye* are the popular female film stars of the 1940s who are mentioned throughout the novel. They are Jean Harlow, Greta Garbo, Ginger Rogers, and especially Shirley Temple. These women represent the standard of ideal beauty held up by white society, a standard that ultimately destroys Pecola. The other important symbols operate in the novel are the marigolds, the seasons and the “Dick and Jane” reader.

Morrison uses clips from the Dick and Jane reader symbolically in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. The book opens with three passages from the Dick and Jane reader. This was the textbook that was used to teach every child to read from the 1940s through the 1960s. According to critic Phyllis R. Klotman, the three versions of the reader presented on the first page of *The Bluest Eye* represent the three lifestyles presented in the novel (Klotman 123). The text of the first version is the standard text, with accurate capitalization and punctuation. This represents the ideal white family, which is represented in the novel by the Fishers' family. The second version contains the same words as the first, but contains no punctuation or capitalization. This version represents the MacTeer family, which is stable and loving but economically less a family like the Fishers. The final version, however, is completely incoherent, containing no punctuation or capitalization, not even spaces between words. This version, of course, represents the dysfunctional Breedlove family.

Marigolds are mentioned twice in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Initially, it is mentioned at the beginning of the novel and then at its end. In Frieda and Claudia's minds, the fact that the marigolds, they plant do not grow results from the fact that Pecola is pregnant with Cholly's child. Although this take on the failure of the marigolds is an insightful one, Claudia herself makes a statement that leads the reader to a wider perception of the marigolds. After blaming herself and Frieda for the marigolds' failure, Claudia says, "It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding" (*TBE* 5). The unyielding earth is an appropriate parallel to the world in which Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda live, a world that scorns blackness and worships white beauty. Claudia and Frieda manage, through the love of their family, to survive, but Pecola is devastated and cannot thrive in such a world, just as the marigold seeds cannot survive in this particular soil.

In *Tar Baby*, the novel begins and ends in mystery. Son seems to be absconding from the ship, the H.M.S. Stor Koningsgarten. He swims toward freedom. He trespasses on a yacht. His anxiety and hunger, all the while knowing nothing at all about the kind of man he is or the conditions of his escape from the oddly named British ship is a mystery. At the end of the novel, Son's return to the island is clouded in mystery as to Therese advises him to join the blind slaves.

Morrison uses multiple approaches in her novels to get her views across. Morrison uses a mix of archetypal, formalistic, moral, psychological and socialistic approach in each of her novels. There is myth, psychological illness and a blend of morality and immorality in her novels. There is formalism and socialism in the way she stresses familial and communal integrity. Hence, her approach is multi-faceted and varied. "The community" in Morrison's novels is defined by personal relationships and not political relationships. Community is made up of family and neighbors. If one is black, one's community is expected to be black, but blackness does not identify or define it. Morrison said in an interview with Robert Stepto,

My tendency is to focus on neighborhoods and communities... And the community, the black community--I don't like to use that term because it came to mean something much different in the sixties and seventies, as though we had to forge one--but it had seemed to me that it was always there, only we called it the 'neighborhood' (Stepto 486).

Elaine Jordan is also of the same opinion about Toni Morrison. She says that Morrison's sociological approach is celebrated by her. She mentions, "Morrison celebrates communities; she also celebrates accepting love of the different one, the one on the edge, who lets 'us' know who we are..." (123). Barbara Christian in her essay,

“Layered Rhythms: Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison,” compares Morrison with Virginia Woolf. Morrison and Woolf faced many problems as women writers. They are from different cultures and times.

While Virginia had to —kill the angel in the house... you, Toni, had to —kill the mammy in the Big House. Virginia was responding to the fact that women were not expected to write, and when they did write, their tone —admitted that [they] were only women or protesting that [they] were as good as any man... When women wrote, they were still expected to write in specific ways about specific themes — that is, within the romance genre — about love, marriage, manners.... But you, Toni Morrison, could not in 1953, in spite of society’s stereotype of the black woman as a mammy, know about any African American women writers of any substance... (484)

Christian further comments on the feministic writing of Morrison. She says Morrison is a piercing intellect who lets her characters erupt. Christian remarks that Morrison’s work is fantastic realism. Morrison’s work is deeply rooted in history and mythology. There is something aboriginal about her characters. While Paule Marshal carefully sculpts her characters, Morrison lets hers erupt out of the wind, sometimes gently, often with force and horror.

Morrison’s literary mission involves tackling the national rifts of race, class, and gender as they are lived by individuals. A brief glimpse at some of the epigraphs of her novels explains the sort of the problems Morrison confronts in her work. Epigraph is a short excerpt or saying at the beginning of a book or chapter that is envisioned to suggest its theme. The epigraph of *Song of Solomon* is about a subject of liberating a

suppressed identity, “The fathers may soar / And the children may know their names.” *Tar Baby* acknowledges the intricacy of establishing a postcolonial harmony, “For it hath been declared / unto me of you, my brethren ... that there are contentions among you.” Solidarity is again very much obvious as Morrison dedicated *Beloved* to the “Sixty Million / and more.” Harmony also can be instituted well on the communal ground of past oppression. This is evident in the epigraph of *Beloved*, “I will call them my people, / which were not my people; / and her beloved, / which was not beloved.” The epigraph to the novel *Jazz* indicates that Morrison’s novels may be read as a description of divisions. Her novels are just a phenomenal attempt to historicize these descriptions of divisions.

The language and meaning used through the novels by Toni Morrison reflect on the times in a number of ways. Morrison gives a vivid picture by her language about the time, as the characters speak of particular events and fashions of the time. Hence, Morrison is a master of language and readily exercises her vocabulary. Her way of writing is unique and outstanding.