RETHINKING THE HUMANITIES
IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERTEXUALITY AND ADAPTATIONS
WITHIN THE DIASPORIC CONSTRUCT

Saint E. T. Gbilekaa
Department of Theatre Arts, University of Abuja, Abuja.
stgbilekaa@gmail.com

Olympus G. Ejue Ph.D
Department of Theatre Arts, University of Abuja, Abuja.
olympusflex@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Drastic socio/political and economic changes in the world have perhaps led to global mass migration, transcontinental transport or scattering of people away from their established or ancestral homeland. This obviously explains the vitality that has characterized the creative impetus of intertextuality and adaptation mechanics used by certain Nigerian diaspora dramatists over the years as group identity formation and social pattern of identity politics and cultural belonging in expressing universal human concerns. The question however is; has the adaptation of classical or historical plays to the dawn of modern play texts by Nigerian diaspora dramatists reinforced the Nigerian culture? The condition is foregrounded on the mind-set of most literary critics, who now seek to know where ‘home’ actually is, or what ‘rights’ and/or ‘entitlements’ an indigene-settler within the diasporic framework can celebrate in terms of human diversity or uniformity as they provide an insight into a world that is different from their own. It is this conceptual and cross platform reflections on themes and context within the diasporic construct of trans-textual adaptation, cultural citizenship vis-à-vis national or global idea of developing culture across borders that the paper attempted to interrogate. Using adaptation theory as its framework, the paper adopts a qualitative method of investigation. It is assumed that, the likes of Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, J.P. Clark, Femi Osofisan, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Athol Fugard, Efua Sutherland and a host of others had adapted foreign play texts in order to engender socio/political interrelatedness based on their diasporic experiences and worldviews. The paper, therefore, concludes that; Diaspora formations have actually influenced theatre practice in Nigeria nay Africa through play-texts adaptation paradigms as vehicles that can be supportive of constructing peaceful societies.

KEYWORDS: Intertextuality, Diasporic construct, Adaptation, Dramatist, Inter-relatedness, Context.
INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that adaptation in playwriting goes beyond mere satisfying of one’s literary spirit or state of changing an old idea to fit a new environment, culture or different conditions. Some African playwrights had and are still channeling their creative energies towards transposing certain Western play texts to reveal African aesthetics, occupation and culture. It has been a trend by playwrights from the post colonies to adapt certain foremost European plays with the intent to invent a new human image to foreground the postcolonial environment. Indeed, adaptations as an artistic concept within the African context exist as a dynamic flux that is constantly created to re-emphasize earlier themes or re-invent them by injecting fresh interpolations to achieve newer insights or give a sense of communality and other African performance aesthetics. Along these lines, Edde Iji has the following to say about adaptation:

…adaptation, like its other adjunct, is a process or recharging or rebranding of ideas, themes, plot structure, characterization, language and other rhythms of action in a literary work as a consumer product in gestalt. In other words, adaptation, like translation and transposition, which could be an integral essence of the exercise, can be regarded as a reincarnation of its immediate and remote version (2004, 21-22).

That is to say that those adaptations are a recreation of an extant artistic work, a play, novel, poem or ballad that is given fresh breath and chord within a new and different socio-cultural milieu. It is indeed “a literary cloning of the thematic and other essences” (2004, 22) of an existing work that has captured the fancy and admiration of the adaptor.

However, when one considers the narratives of adapting Western play texts, there is the tendency for one to see a strong affiliation between classical forms of playwriting and that of some Nigerian playwrights, especially the first and second generation playwrights. Arguably, this is characterized by the dual heritage and the kind of training received by these Africans in European languages and Western dramatic classical traditions. Indeed, most of the popular playwriting tradition in the classical times used ritual as structure, plot or content to make important dramatic statements.

In the Greek mythology, for example, where most Nigerian playwrights have adapted plays from, there is a strong reliance on culture as the basic creative impulse and the medium for the dissemination of information and knowledge. This assertion presupposes that; African playwrights in the diaspora have consciously or unconsciously mainstreamed their idea of theatre as an existential proposition with intrinsic meaning or purpose for the African psyche. In other words,
the ability to translocate the Greek mythology or any other, at the same time, bridges the multicultural divide in the adapting process and this localizes or globalizes the adapting playwrights’ intent and vision, more so, when there are parallels and similitudes in culture. The adapting playwright’s intention in this case should reflect a distinctive creative effort devoid of the attributes of one (adapting playwright) who is simply just rebranding from the original. To strengthen this claim, Amonyeze in a discourse bordering on adaptation process asserts that, the playwright: “…chooses a style that will best embody his artistic intention with the result that the end result is a creative entity not a copycat work” (2013, 1). This is to say that; while a play adapter relies essentially on the original text, he must exude a high sense of resourcefulness. It is this resourcefulness that the adapting playwright would reshape or reactivate the original text from its socio-cultural context to suit the existential essences of the people vis-à-vis their indigenous dramatic forms and their socio-cultural politics.

Significantly therefore, to engage in play adaptation by any playwright, the task of writing must be taken as an exercise done with a lot of synthesis, profundity and imaginative ability. This is not far from the fact that; playwriting generally “is like a good pot of soup, the correct ingredients and the correct quantity must be put in or else one stands the risk of spoiling the broth” Yerima, (2003, 100). Such a charge is to provide an accessible overview of the reasons for trans-textual adaptation in playwriting and at the same time, gauging how some rules and myths are employed and their consequent effect on a new environment. Importantly as Edde Iji has again noted:

…adaptation is a reshaping, retuning, adjusting or readjusting, redesigning, rejuvenation, reactivation or renovation of an original text from its native culture and environment to suit its reception or consumption by an audience of a totally different time, culture and environment (2014, 24).

It is of course important to note that such adaptations could be intra-cultural or inter-cultural. Over the years, play adaptation, intertextualities, new traditional patterns of individual and community identity have emerged as powerful tools for cultural belonging, religion and identity. With Nigeria as a multicultural society, most Nigerian playwrights have tried to marry their society’s migratory experiences with their diasporic encounters. This could be more revealing in the evaluation accorded Wole Soyinka’s A Dance of the Forest by the Swedish Academy when they announced Soyinka as the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. The Swedish Academy identified a link between Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Soyinka’s A Dance of the Forest, due to both plays inclusion of spirits, ghost and gods. They highlighted amongst other things, the worsening cases of cultural bastardization, poverty and exploitation in the Third World. It is clear that the process or the state of changing to fit a new environment or
different conditions have continued to trend in the Nigerian theatrical space.

The essence of this work therefore, is to probe the vision, consciousness and essence of adaptations by Nigerian playwrights of diasporic experiences. Nigeria is particularly a striking case in point where the diaspora experiences have continued to raise fundamental questions. Who does the adapter owe allegiance to? What are his/her rights as a playwright to refract and reshape his diasporic experience and identity? How does this style of appropriating ideas and ideals through diaspora formations foster nation building and global peace and understanding? Such and other similar questions are what the paper attempts to interrogate.

Regrettably however, we as a people from developing nations most times, appear to be confused about knowing ourselves and discovering how and what is around our vast cosmos. Therefore, until African playwrights begin to encourage the translation of English vocabulary into African phraseology to suite indigenous aesthetics, their dramaturgy will continue to be perceived from within the hegemonic hold of the European and American theatres. There should be a total confrontation of the issues of Western colonial structures in replacement of African cultural re-definition and self-reclamation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is the need to have a conceptual clarification on how the adaptation theory through the relationships between texts is most appropriate to espouse the arguments in the paper. Adaptation theory is a cultural phenomenon of development through which other cultures can become fitted into other environments. It is also a process that sought to see how humans and/or cultural ecology would diminish global inequities and produce more interpretative statements than is typical of most study of humankind, which has remained rooted in the humanities. Corrigan (2017, 24) avows that adaptation concentrates on three perspectives – as a process, as a product and as an act of reception. In all of these, he maintains that: “as a process, adaptation often describes how one or more entities are reconfigured or adjusted through their engagement with or relationship to one or more other texts or objects”. In the same vein, Hutcheon, (2006, 54) reminds us that adaptation as a process of creation, “…always involves both (re)interpretation and then (re)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective”.

Although most of the issues connected with adaptation as a theory are methodological ones; hence its manifestation is shared between conquering and conquered cultures through which playwrights can transpose culture and ideas. The paper states how adaptation as a concept is guided by culture and ideas and how that has helped in improving the quality of life within the ambience of the human race. The adaptation theory which involves migration to or survival within a new environment and context is a cultural cross-fertilization and culture communication. It evolves a
process or state of changing to fit a new environment or different conditions or the resulting change. We observed that the art of adapting plays goes beyond the simple idea of one playwright taking another playwright’s play and transforming it in order to bring the adapted version nearer to a new atmosphere and culture.

In the strictest sense, adaptation theory also known as survival theory is an idea in which Charles Darwin from two of his predecessors treated with craft into his theory of natural selection. Natural selection strives to explain how things can change; how traits that increase suitability to environment and behavior are passed from generation to generation hence, adaptation in itself explains why these things change. This process of natural selection reveals individual variation in appearance and behavior due to differential survival and reproduction. Using the adaptation theory therefore, we realize that adaptation constitutes the driving force upon which playwrights can modify and migrate cultures to survive in their (playwrights) natural environments. In other words, these playwrights would have had inherited traits that would help them survive and reproduce a given condition and culture. Again, using the adaptation theory, which is also a playwriting principle, one is able to clarify how playwrights have been able to communicate across cultures.

IMPERATIVES OF INTERTEXTUALITIES IN NIGERIAN PLAY-TEXTS

There will always exist some sort of complex interrelationship between an adapted-text and its original, especially as the original is the basis for which the creation or interpretation of that original text is done. Thus, certain rubrics and principles governing the conduct of adapting plays must be considered. A ready example is the need to consider the sensibilities of the audience for which a play is being adapted. From the point of view of the limits of intertextuality, Okwori, (2004, 154) reminds us that: “...tension continues to exist between the text and other forms of signification whereas in reality the text is secondary, a material record, at times intensely selected and filtered from the primary authentic work”. Suffice to say that, the dramatist in this regard must have an appropriate masterly form and style that would express a command and identity to influence the will of another, rather than a mere statement of adaptation as it were. The playwright adapting must have an anticipation of what and how he intends to realize the plot and characters therein in the old play. There is no doubt that as a dramatist, one is usually subsumed in the translation or reconstruction of an older ideology which he/she might be trying to change or re-emphasize.

In every society, culturally unique ways of thinking about the world unite people in their behavior. Anthropologists often refer to the body of ideas that people share as ideology. Ideology can be broken down into at least three specific
categories: beliefs, values, and ideals. People’s beliefs give them an understanding of how the world works and how they should respond to the actions of others and their environments. Particular beliefs often tie in closely with the daily concerns of domestic life, such as making a living, health and sickness, happiness and sadness, interpersonal relationships, and death. People’s values tell them the differences between right and wrong or good and bad. Ideals serve as models for what people hope to achieve in life. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2011, 204)

In the light of the foregoing, ideological underpinnings definitely share a relationship whether old or new in the lives of a people whose intention is to either change or further the course of such ideology. Universally, there are some common ideas as regards the concept of justice, fair play, the belief in gods and other ideologies that define our common existence as human beings. Dramatists for instance are instruments of history hence they (dramatists) strive to artistically articulate and transport the dynamics of a particular belief-system of another culture into most times theirs, by way of adaptation as it were. In this regards, the ordering primary principle of variation becomes a fundamental issue as people tend to evaluate the level of tilt and/or intensity of transposition of the images and ideas from the original society and culture to the new. This is the issue that the diasporic dramatist must pay attention to, because he/she cannot extricate himself/herself from the cultural values of his/her original source or the new which is his/her own. That being the case, the adapting dramatist needs to domesticate information as it were with a lot of local flavor, penchant and style. It becomes significant therefore, that in deploying the African philosophy on matters of Black Consciousness, Omotoso (2013, 62) argues that; “A high premium should also be placed on details regarding identity-the mix of actors, image characters, and relationships occurring within communication process”.

This may have been what Ola Rotimi had in mind when adapting Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. The Yoruba Nigerian culture which he adapted the play to shares many similarities with Greek culture. The Greek, like the Yorubas have several deities. As Wole Soyinka has noted with Ogun, the Yoruba god of creativity:

Ogun, for his part, is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues. Nor is that all. Transcending even today, the distorted myths of his terrorist reputation, traditional poetry records him as ‘protector of orphans’, ‘roof over the homeless’, ‘terrible guardian of the sacred oath’… (1988, 22)
Thus, his play *The Gods Are not to Blame*, did not only like the Greeks make the gods to take active part in human affairs, emphasizing the theme of predestination, but goes beyond that to interrogate human relationships in a pluralistic and multicultural Nigeria where there is mutual distrust and the obvious absence of friendship for one another among ethnic nationalities.

This is to say that the adaptation of a text by another playwright is given fresh breath and life when that interpretation is brought to bear on unique societal variables in a given environment. For example, Wole Soyinka’s adaptation of Brecht’s *The Three Penny Opera* which in itself is an adaptation of John Gays *The Beggars Opera* is given a new interpretation within the framework of a Nigerian socio-cultural and political milieu during the Gowon military era. Soyinka captures the mis-governance, tyranny, the squander-mania, the greed, obscenity and the hypocrisy among several other failures of the ruling elites and the vulgar life of the nouveau riche in Nigeria in the 70s. Soyinka infused in the play sardonic and satiric language and character portrayal to lampoon his targets and make them look ridiculous in their over-indulgencies just like Brecht and John Gay did in their plays. Hagher’s *Mulkin Mata* which is an adaptation of Aristophanes Lysistrata and Harrisons and Simmons adaptation of the same play lays more emphasis on sex strike by the rampaging women to score political points. While Hagher’s play involves the gamut of African women organizing a coup de-tat to tease out some political demands through denial of sex from their men folk, Harrison and Simmon’s *Aikin Mata* is localized within the Hausa setting of Northern Nigeria, but also using sex as a weapon.

Furthermore, Asigbo’s adaptation of Aristophanes *The Frog* into *War of the Tin Gods* throws up issues of national concern where all is not well with the human condition. The imperative here is that even though the narrative may be the same in thematic focus and preoccupation by the adapting playwrights, the material condition and the societal factors that have occasioned or birthed these adaptations may be remarkably different. Such plays as mentioned above therefore either deconstruct earlier ideological concerns or themes of the original texts all together or give them a newer interpretation to correspond with a different socio-cultural environment but squarely dwelling on human dilemma and relationships.

Within this framework therefore, play adapters must strive to engage a process that can perceive the technical knowledge of the original playwright in order to creatively situate that same knowledge to the indigenous knowledge of the people he has as his target audience. This is because, “in consequence, general solutions manufactured from the outside are offered to problems which are highly localized. The practice of development work teaches us that problems are usually specific in their complexity to a particular time and place” Schuurman, (2004, 78).

From their training and cultural experiences, African playwrights must perceive the reality of the extraction from where they get their information with a view to making sure the conflict point in the adapted play is strong enough to keep its audience at the edge of their chairs. Besides, the adapting playwright must be sure that the people for whom he writes do benefit from such
trans-textual adaptation.

Timely artistic decisions ab initio must be arrived at in order to accommodate the sensitivities of the new audience for which the adapted play is meant for. This point is further emphasized in the words of Yerima, (2003, 124) when he says that: “The playwright intending to adapt a play must know that it is not only the experience of adaptation but the degree to which he creates his own vision of the original version that is the measure of his play’s worth”. Adapting Western plays by African playwrights therefore, must be done with a lot of craftsmanship and the intention of bringing the meaning of the adapted play nearer to the people’s culture and belief system. Again, Ahmed Yerima (2003, 125) attempts to trace Soyinka’s style of adapting Euripides’ Greek play—The Bacchae to remind us that:

Soyinka again excels in this kind of measured and adequate embellishments to include in an original work so that a playwright’s vision is added and yet, the basic plot and theme of the original work is not discarded but enhanced. In adding the Yoruba culture to Euripides’ Greek play The Bacchae, Soyinka builds in his own ideas of Yoruba religion, tragedy, ritual and power while at the same time explaining to his audience his awareness of the similarities and differences between Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, fertility and creation and Dionysus the Greek god of the same attributes.

This attitude of the adapting playwright is simply to bring in his own ideas and thematic concern in order to engender meanings to the African audience and Nigeria in particular. In other words, an adapting playwright must be near accurate interpretation as he pays attention to all relevant details in the original version in terms of what to include and what to edit in his new vision. The adapting playwright’s techniques for instance should be local and broad-based in order to enable him impose his own language, imageries, poetic vision and other artistic embellishments on the original play.

REFLECTIONS ON THEMES AND CONTEXTS

There is the need to reflect on the motive responsible for the re-contextualization of most European classical plays by African playwrights, given the different multicultural backgrounds that characterized the Nigerian theatre space for instance. How has the narrative of the classical plays being tempered with to suit the new life of the post Nigerian nay African peoples? This can engender quite a discourse considering that one can perceive some disparities in aesthetics between
an African rationality of what is a theatrical event from how a European theatre would conceive of it. In a more detailed consideration Irobi (cited in Diala, 2014, 205-206) captures it more succinctly thus:

This difference lies in ontology and social ideology. African and African diasporic communities, until recently, have always predicated themselves on the ethos of communality, while Europe and its diaspora have largely foregrounded an individualistic purview of life. Theatre in the African and African diasporic imaginary rotates around this ideal of community. Theatre is primarily an act of community by which a given group ritualizes and perpetuates its sense of identity, its values, history, performance and aesthetics and sense of spirituality as a basis for continuity.

It is this ritual imperative that Gotrick (as cited in Esiaba, 2009, 15) remarks that: “the African notion of entertainment is more complex than the West’s”. However, encountering most of the adapted plays reveal some sort of theatricals that have been structured within the context of a diasporic consciousness.

In other words, the adapter in the process of readjusting the original play redesigns the plot, the theme and the characters to suit his new environment. That is to say that within the cloning process, there is also a defined culture of originality whereby the adapter introduces his own brand. In this way, he may remain faithful to the genre and form or readjust them. He could in his adaptation like Rotimi, Soyinka and Osofisan maintain tragedy to tragedy or satiric comedy to satiric comedy as obtains in their adaptations of Oedipus Rex, The Bacchae of Euripides and Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf. On the other hand, the adapting playwright may pillory the original text and genre as found in Osofisan’s adaptation of Soyinka’s The Strong Breed (1964) into No More the Wasted Breed (1988) and J. P. Clarks The Raft (1964) into Another Raft (1988). The defining imperatives here maybe as a result of cultural differences, ideology and time.

Another important device in the adaptation discourse is the vehicle of communication. The choice of language as a means of communicating ideas, information, education and conscientization is very pertinent. As Iji (2014, 26) has rightly captured, in a good adaptation “…it may be difficult to neatly separate the techniques or principles of adaptation from the imperative of translation and transposition which are quite organically or intricately related; especially in respect of conveying, articulating or conveying meanings semiotically, rhythmically, poetically, or even prosaically, without diluting or exaggerating the flow of language, cadences and meaningful communication wherein the effects of the adaptation may be hinged. This is what Dapo
Adelugba says Ola Rotimi has achieved in *The Gods Are Not To Blame* where it is customary of him to through wise cracks, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, temper the English language with Yoruba phraseology to capture not only the nuances of their speech, but also, to domicile their philosophy and worldview.

Similarly, one can say that Soyinka in adapting and dramatizing John Gay’s *The Beggars Opera* into *Opera Wonyosi* has adopted the Yoruba operatic total theatre tradition, combining music, dance and dialogue into the plot structure. In this way, one can begin to talk about a Soyinka brand, and a Rotimi brand which is unique to their dramaturgy. It is also important to note that, even though the language of communication of most if not all adapted plays is English, the tone, rhythm, cadences and phraseology is un-mistakenly African. This is what would have made critics to term such usages sometimes as ‘Englibo’ and ‘Yorubanglish’ to mention but a few.

**SOCIO-POLITICAL EXPERIENCES AND INTER-RELATEDNESS**

Considering the inter-relatedness of cultures the world over, it would be pertinent to take along cultural codes, norms and contexts into how well intercultural interactions is experienced by these playwrights who have the proclivity in adapting classical plays. Undoubtedly, the literary propelling force of Aristotle and the Greeks came to be part of the list of the main topics taught in African schools. Interestingly, this is what has given direction to the development of African drama on the African continent. Interrogating the development of African drama therefore, has undoubtedly left Etherton (1982, 68) with the perception that:

> The influence of the Greeks on the development of African drama has been in two directions: (1) Greek plays have served as models for African plays; and (2) the theory of Aristotle has become a basis for dramatic criticism. An example of the former is the transposition by the Nigerian playwright, Ola Rotimi, *King Oedipus* by the Greek playwright, Sophocles, into a play in a Yoruba setting (but in English) called *The Gods are not to Blame*.

Along these lines, one is persuaded to believing that there exist some sorts of complex influence of Western culture in modern African dramaturgy. The reason is that most adapting playwrights still approach the Greek plays using the Aristotelian precept of criticism and theory rather than responding squarely to the original text for their benefit. Be that as it may, this still shows that, the experience of the Greek world could provide an insight to what can be an attempt to locate the quest and inter-relatedness for the formation of collective groups in Africa and their transition into
nationhood within the context of their dramatic inter-relatedness. In essence, intertextuality, socialization process and identity can be universal in terms of cultural values and interest. In other words, these adapting playwrights view human nature and the quest for wellbeing, socio-political anchorage, identity and spirituality as phenomena that can engender some level of cultural universality amongst societies. Indeed, they tend to be interpreting and engendering cultural perceptions of universal values and interests that would suit the ontological sensitivities of the African people within the diasporic construct. Perhaps it is what Bakut (2014, 10) refers to as ‘physiological-security’ where:

Issues relating to the pursuits of welfare, security, identity and factors relating to the spirituality of the tribes and their habitat (both at centrifugal and centripetal levels of aggregation) which had influenced the transitions and formation of collective aggregations and has remained the central factor in the location of loyalties and allegiances in the formation of nationhood, nationalism and the creation of statehood.

Bakut’s claim above presupposes that people will always have psychological need to identify and indeed search for a common theory of existence and inter-relatedness with others. With the benefit of hindsight of the experiences of colonialism therefore, African playwrights have absolutely aligned their socio-political experiences with the various peoples and histories within their diasporic terrain with a view to providing a new way of thinking about nationhood in Africa as a continent.

CONCLUSION

The task of adapting plays is not an easy one as adapting playwrights have continuously searched for paradigms that are indigenous to their cultures. An adapting playwright must strive to understand the thematic preoccupation of the original play and the intention(s) of its playwright before attempting to situate such a play in a different culture and people. There are semiotic and performative aesthetics and implications which differ from one geographical location to the other that should be taken into considerations. To this end, mention must be made of efforts by adapting playwrights to identify a language that is African, a language loaded with African phraseology and idioms with the view to weaving in new histories and expressions that are non-European. For that reason, Esiaba (2009, 23) in a discourse on adaptation and African performance aesthetics seems to place some of the playwrights in this category rightly, when he says that “their deconstructive impetus stems from a non-naturalistic purview of the world and of theatre practice and
playwriting”. This is indeed to discourage the undiluted “dependency upon colonizer’s language (which) creates a permanent presence of the colonizers among Africans” (cited in Omotoso, 2016, 116). This is germane in the sense that without a language the art of expressing one’s indigenous self can turn futile. Of course, Esiaba himself is an accused in his own court and cannot be seen to approbate and reprobate as he uses the English language in his drama. Be that as it may, language from the perspective of drama and adaptations should not only be limited to the spoken word. If these adapted plays are considered along these lines, it would be said that, the playwrights in this discourse have made good use of indigenous African artistic institutions and communicative devices in effectively conveying their messages.

Besides, an adapted play should be able to reflect and situate contemporary realities of the playwright’s target audience in a particular context. This is more so that African societies from the point of development are emerging and therefore the complexities found in developed countries where the plays are adapted may not be the same, hence the need to tamper with the realities in the adapted drama to conform with the social realities and complexities of a developing nation. With this in mind, he/she should be able to appropriate a classical text in a manner and style that would communicate needs in terms of a catastrophic past and pliable future.

Finally, one can say that, between the original play and the one being adapted, there is a common ground between the playwrights as it relates to the issues of the existential nature of humanity and the common challenges that confront life and survival generally. This human condition and how it can be surmounted has been the basic concern of art over the ages and would continue to be so in future.

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