

Script Analysis for Stage Design

Name: _____ Molly Cornell _____ Date: _____ 08/26/2020 _____

Play: _____ *Pass Over* _____ Playwright _____ Antoinette Nwandu _____

(use more space than this sheet allows, type your responses)

PERSONAL REACTION

How does this play resonate in your world now?

To read this play, just the day following Jacob Blake being shot in Wisconsin, was overwhelming. This is truly the world we live in. The Black Lives Matter movement is happening on what feels to be a global scale, Loyola students are on day five of protests to cut ties with CPD, and continuous disregard for black bodies in the United States all feel relevant to the world of this play, and vice versa. It's fascinating to compare the resonance to *Waiting for Godot*, because it feels like both are incredibly relevant for the two main issues in the US today: BLM and COVID-19. As I was typing my response, I was about to say that *Pass Over* resonated more in 2020, but my fingers suddenly pictured the confusion, absurd reality, and unreliability of politically controlling figures in our government and how clearly they reflect Godot. Of course, the gag of *Waiting for Godot* is that they aren't waiting for god, because god isn't real and will never come, and it feels that way with Trump's handling of COVID. We are waiting for a leader that only continues to let us down, because he isn't a leader at all. Not in any sense but physical. So, to see *Pass Over* articulate the other side of 2020 is truly a beautifully horrifying thing.

What 5 moments leap to mind a day after reading the play? Why?

- The moment that continues to haunt my brain is the correction from "Mister" to "Master" while they are enjoying the picnic he brought. That one word carries the weight of hundreds of years of oppression. He didn't elaborate, there was no polite correction; just the reminder of a power dynamic that changes the entire interaction.

- The first interaction with Ossifer replays over and over because we are so conditioned in society to automatically worry when a white officer confronts two black men. Even more so, the casualness of the n-word. How we continue to debate who "gets" to say that word. How Ossifer didn't give it a second thought.

- The scene where they can't find the cake made me angry. It made me angry because I think about all the BIPOC who are gaslighted, taken advantage of, and disrespected so casually. Even more so, how when the same scene occurs in *Waiting for Godot*, I don't think twice. And yet. Why is this gaslighting so normal?

- It breaks my heart that Moses' line where he explains how they were going to get off the curb to make something of themselves is when he got shot. How Mister had been in the

scene barely 5 lines and yet he has the audacity to shoot Moses. How he thinks he has the right to kill a man for just being there.

- The last thing I think about is how it's not Moses or Kitch who have the last line of the play, but Mister does. How he silenced a man, invades his space, delivers the most disappointing final monologue, and then just moves onto the next topic. It's a perfect reflection of the US, especially the media. Just onto the next story.

Does this play resonate with something in your personal life now?

As a white woman, I cannot begin to understand or truly fathom what it's like to be black in the United States, and what it means to be a black man in the eyes of law enforcement and other white men. George Floyd is the closest to home. I have friends who knew him. It happened down the street from where my brother works. Moreover, the cherry-picking of news coverage that was happening on a national/global level. Other places didn't hear about the buses of white supremacists and KKK coming into the city. They didn't hear about how the peaceful protests ended before dark and the terror began after. To have been there during that time changed my life. I always supported BLM before then, but it brought it closer to home.

Does this play resonate with something in your past?

Not necessarily. It only really brought back memories of reading *Waiting for Godot* last year, and how much easier it was to follow *Pass Over*. I think I liked *Pass Over* a lot more, for that reason and others.

Does this play resonate with something in your family history?

Not this one.

As an audience member what would excite you the most?

I think the connections to a canonical work are exciting when you understand the allusions, but the revamping of the story into a reflection of modern societal issues is really exciting. The subtle humor in interactions between Moses and Kitch were also fun.

As an audience member what would confuse/ upset/ disturb you the most?

For the same reason it is exciting, the connection to 2020 is at the same time incredibly disheartening and upsetting. Why is this a narrative that exists at all? This is not a story Nwandu should have to tell, but it is so important that she did.

What don't you understand about this play? What are your big questions?

I actually don't think I have any questions at this point!

Is there something outside this play that you instantly wanted to look up while reading it? (an old family photo? A historical detail? A poem? A painter?)

I was mostly just thinking about the scenes from *Waiting for Godot* that Mark made us watch, trying to remember the plot of *Godot*, BLM, and *Blindspotting*, which is a moving starring Daveed Diggs that I watched for the first time this summer that felt incredibly relevant.

As a designer what excites you the most about this play?

As a designer, and getting to put on my lighting cap for this show, I am most excited about the room to lean into the absurdist roots. There are moments that leave realism, and I'm looking forward to exploring how we can illuminate that.



What is the purpose of the Title?

The significance of the title is two-fold. First, Kitch and Moses directly mention the act of “passing over,” where they will get off the street and make something of themselves. What they are going to do is unclear, but there are moments throughout the play when they express real determination to get going. While mentioned in the first act, this idea further comes into play when Mister confronts them on the street. Here, when he asks what they’re doing, Moses introduces the pair and is halfway through telling Mister that he and Kitch are getting off the street when Mister shoots him before he can finish. He is unable to get off the street and break their cycle; Moses is unable to pass over.

In the realm of biblical allusions, *Pass Over* is a direct reference to the Jewish holiday Passover. Passover is a remembrance of the Exodus of the Jews from Egyptian slavery, where God passed over the houses of Israelites during the final of the ten plagues on Egypt. Before it occurred, God spoke to Moses and said to put lamb’s blood on their doors so he would pass over their houses and not kill the firstborn child. Through this act, the enslaved were able to follow Moses on their journey to freedom. When comparing this to the plot of the play, the allusion is shockingly clear. When Ossifer, a symbol for the enforcer of slavery, confronts Moses and Kitch, the plague takes control and halts Ossifer from inflicting any more damage on Moses and Kitch. The plague passes over the pair, and Moses is able to purge the evil from Ossifer’s body, where he finally sees the two as men, not enslaved people.

What is the Period and Locale ? Its Relevance, both to us, and to an audience when it was written?

I’m not sure if it is a typo or not, but on page 5 of *Pass Over*, the “setting” describes the time period and the “time” describes the setting. Either way, Nwandu articulates that the time and place are now on a ghetto street at night, but also 1855 on a plantation, but also 13th century BCE Egypt in a city built by slaves. Here, Nwandu is highlighting not only the multiplicity in each character's relationship to each other, but also the continued repetition of history. While Egypt, Antebellum US, and now are only three specific times when extreme racial prejudice were present against a minority population, the wide expanse of time only emphasizes how over the course of 1400 years, not much has progressed.

What background information contributes to our understanding of the play?

I think it is really important to remember that while the play was published in 2018, Nwandu spent five years prior developing the work. It’s not a coincidence that BLM started in 2013, too. As black men continue to be villainized by the criminal “justice” system, the Black Lives Matter movement demands that society reevaluates how black Americans are viewed and valued in the United States. Most specifically, grew out of the acquittal of George

Zimmerman, who murdered teen Trayvon Martin 17 months earlier. Understanding the context of this play is incredibly important to finding the significance of the work.

What do I need to to go research in more depth?

The biggest thing I need to research is the biblical references throughout the play. I got the big ones, but some of the specifics of Exodus are unclear to me.