



A Contemporary Theatre

A photograph of two men in a dark, moody setting. The man on the left is wearing a dark cap and a dark polo shirt with 'CKO-72 UNLIMITED' printed on it. The man on the right is wearing a dark beanie and a dark button-down shirt over a dark tank top. They are both looking towards the camera with slight smiles. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

PASS OVER

PLAY GUIDE | 2019

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THE PLAY

Synopsis

Inspired by Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* Antoinette Nwandu's *Pass Over* is the story of two young black men, Moses and Kitch, who are forever stuck in a cyclical existential conundrum: How do we get off this street corner and into paradise? They swap visions of the "promised land" imaging all the delights that await them there.

Enter a white man, Mister, startling Moses and Kitch with his preppy demeanor. Mister has lost his way while heading to his mother's house to bring her a basket of food. With his bottomless basket of delicious treats Mister is blissfully free and bursting with potential.

Mister leaves and shortly after Ossifer, a white Policeman, enters the scene. The exchange between Ossifer and Moses and Kitch is violent and disturbing. There is a brief power struggle between Ossifer and Moses but Moses, having lost his brother to a police shooting, eventually backs down. Moses and Kitch are once again left alone at the street corner.

Following Beckett's repetitive structure, Act Two begins similarly to the first but the conversations about the promise of freedom appear to weigh heavier on Moses now. His dialogue is preoccupied by his thoughts about incarceration and death as every day occurrences and commonalities for his community. Ossifer returns to the scene and there is once again a physical conflict. Moses, losing hope for a way out, confronts Ossifer despite knowing that it could cost him his life. This confrontation ends with the Ossifer leaving and Moses experiencing profound strength from his bold act of survival.

Before Moses can walk away Mister returns and in an instant, he shoots and kills Moses. "Another black fella was killed," Mister says in the end, "there are times that I I don't know resist or find myself resisting having to listen to to look at or acknowledge," leaving our audience to grapple with our own complacency in the face of violence.

From Director Tim Bond

"I am thrilled to direct this highly poetic, timely, and provocative play right now in Seattle. The tragic reality is that Black bodies continue to suffer the onslaught of racial violence not only from police brutality, but also from a resurgence of white supremacy, widespread gentrification, and privileged denial. This existential cycle remains a threat in this city, our nation, and the world. My hope is that an audience representing the mosaic of diverse cultures from all over Seattle will come to our production of *Pass Over* with open eyes, ears, and hearts."

The Characters

MOSES – black, male, late teens/early twenties. a young man from the ghetto. brokenhearted. courageous. angry. Sad but also a slave driver but also the prophesied leader of God's chosen people

KITCH – black, male, late teens/early twenties. a young man from the ghetto and Moses' best friend. jovial. loyal. kind. naïve. a lovely friend to have but also a slave but also one of God's chosen

MISTER – white, male, late twenties/early thirties. a man in a lightcolored suit. out of his element. earnest. wholesome. Terrified but also a plantation owner but also pharaoh's son

OSSIFER – white, male, late twenties/early thirties. an enforcer of the law. not from around here, but always around. pragmatic. intimidating. also terrified. the actor playing Mister should also play Ossifer but also a patroller but also a soldier in pharaoh's army

The Setting and Time

now. right now

but also 1855

but also 13th century BCE

a ghetto street. a lamppost. Night

but also a plantation

but also Egypt, a city built by slaves

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Biography



Antoinette Nwandu is a New York-based playwright.

In June of 2017, Steppenwolf presented the World Premiere of her play *Pass Over*, a mashup of the biblical Exodus story and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which sparked a national conversation about bias in the theater community.

Her play *Breach: a manifesto on race in america through the eyes of a black girl recovering from self-hate*, about a black woman forced to confront her self-loathing after unexpectedly getting pregnant, received a World Premiere at Victory Gardens in February 2018.

Antoinette is currently under commission from Echo Theater Company and Colt Coeur. Her work has been supported by The MacDowell Colony, The

Sundance Theater Lab, The Cherry Lane Mentor Project (mentor: Katori Hall), The Kennedy Center, P73, PlayPenn, Space on Ryder Farm, Southern Rep, The Flea, Naked Angels, Fire This Time, and The Movement Theater Company. She is an alum of the Ars Nova Play Group, the Naked Angels Issues PlayLab, and the Dramatists Guild Fellowship.

Honors include The Whiting Award, The Paula Vogel Playwriting Award, The Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award, The Negro Ensemble Company's Douglas Turner Ward Prize, and a Literary Fellowship at the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference. Antoinette's plays have been included on the 2016 and 2017 Kilroys lists, and she has been named a Ruby Prize finalist, PONY Fellowship finalist, Page73 Fellowship finalist, NBT's I Am Soul Fellowship finalist, and two-time Princess Grace Award semi-finalist.

Antoinette graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College with a bachelor's degree in English and holds a Master's of Science degree in Cultural Politics from The University of Edinburgh, and an MFA in Dramatic Writing from NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

Bio from playwright's website.

The Language of the Play

A Note About the Language in this Play from the Playwright

The language and style of *Pass Over* is intentionally heightened, calculatedly rhythmic, and playfully human. There is a kind of poetry and energy that is written into the words that Moses and Kitch use, which invites the audience to fully understand these characters and the world they inhabit. Even in the punctuation and structure of the words on the page, Antoinette Nwandu gives an indication that the words are meant to find their musicality and should flow from the actors with an openness that expresses the dynamic of a rich community.

KITCH. i know
we ain't no kinda family
man
i know
you ain't my brotha
but
but'choo my nigga tho
you got plans
mean i got plans right wit'chu
moses
moses
i got plans right wit'chuand get'cho goddamn house in order

In particular, the repetitive use of the n-word is something that may be most striking about the script itself. The word is used 255 times over the course of the 94-page play. Because this word holds within it such a historically complex history, we wanted to share some ways to contextualize why this word, used in this way, from these characters is so important to the story of who Mose and Kitch. The playwright also offers the following note on page one of the *Pass Over* script:

Let me be crystal clear: Aside from the actors saying lines of dialogue while in character, this play is in no way shape or form an invitation for anyone to use the n-word. Not during table work, not during talkbacks, not during after-work drinks. If you're running the room, then set the tone straight away. All you have to say is something like, when you want to talk about the n-word, say "the n-word." Everyone will know what you mean! And then make sure everyone does exactly that.

Pass Over, written by Antoinette Nwandu, Samuel French, 2018



In Defense of a Loaded Word

By Ta-Nehisi Coates

Nov. 23, 2013

If you could choose one word to represent the centuries of bondage, the decades of terrorism, the long days of mass rape, the totality of white violence that birthed the black race in America, it would be “n—.”

To read the entire op-ed from The New York Times, ***click here.***

In Defense of a Loaded Word, written by Ta-Nehisi Coates, The New York Times, Nov. 23, 2013

CULTURAL CONTEXT

What's *Godot* All About

Antoinette Nwandu's *Pass Over* is a 21st century riff on one of the most famous absurdist plays of all time, Samuel Beckett's post-war classic *Waiting for Godot*. *Pass Over* borrows from *Godot*'s abstract form and circuitous humor to explore the experience of two young black men on a street corner in America. But what is *Waiting for Godot* really all about?

As the title suggests, it is a play about waiting—two men waiting for a third who never appears. 'And if he comes?' one of Beckett's tramps asks the other near the end of the play. 'We'll be saved', the other replies. However, the nature of what that salvation could be, along with so much else, remains undefined for both the characters and audience, leaving it an open-ended idea. *Godot* is a modern meditation on existentialism, a journey through the need to continue to connect and persevere despite the circumstance of living with so much uncertainty.



Written in 1949, *Waiting for Godot* has been translated into multiple languages, presented with every casting swap imaginable, and is one of the most produced plays of the last century. It's universalized humanity, aided by its unspecified time and place, have allowed the play to have deep resonance with every social or political issue since it was written. Whether its setting be Sarajevo, London, Zimbabwe, or Wall Street, the play finds a way to connect to the prevailing political climate or current crisis through its taut simplicity and relative openness. The play becomes a vessel for all the audiences concerns and hopes. Who is Godot? Whatever you want them to be. Sir Tom Stoppard said of *Godot*, "The play is a universal metaphor precisely because it wasn't designed as being a metaphor for anything in particular. The true subject matter of *Waiting for Godot* is that it's about two tramps waiting for somebody. '

In *Pass Over* Moses and Kitch are not only stuck in the existential conundrum of living, like Vladimir and Estragon in *Godot*, but of surviving in a world that continues to displace and devalue their lives. By adopting the cyclical framework of *Godot*, Antoinette Nwandu allows us to tap not into a metaphor but into the profound real-world absurdity of being a young black man in America and still finding the radical optimism to thrive.

Photo of Patrick Stewart & Ian MacLellan in Waiting for Godot. Photo by Geraint Lewis.

What is the Passover Story?

by Dara Lind

Aug 5, 2015

The Passover story is from the Biblical book of Exodus, which discusses the ancient Hebrews' enslavement in Egypt and how they were freed. It's the central story of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) and reflects some of the biggest themes in Jewish history: foreign oppression and the longing for freedom; the sense that Jews are a protected and resilient people

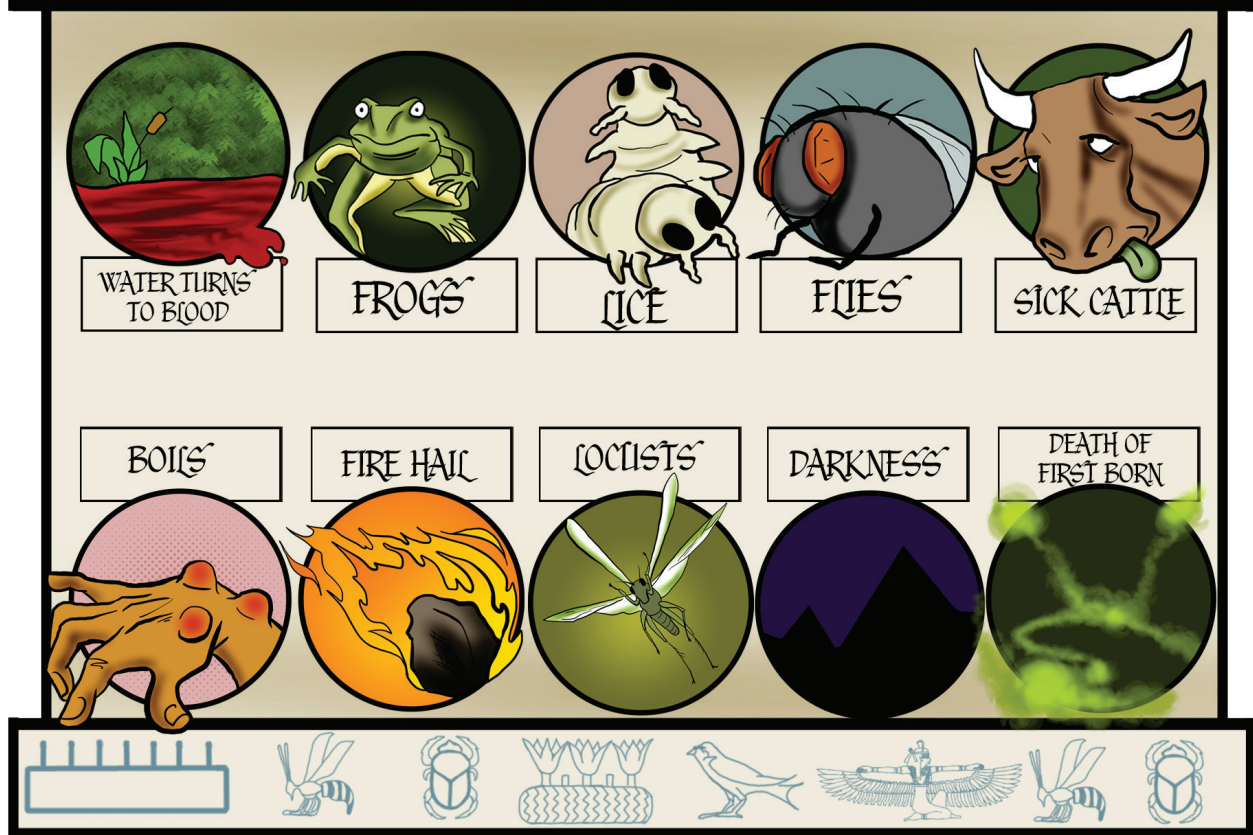


who will survive any adversity; and the contrast between living outside of Israel (in what's called the "diaspora") and living in the Jewish homeland. Those themes, and their contemporary resonance, are a big part of the Passover holiday today.

To read the entire article from Vox, [click here](#).

What is the Passover Story?, written by Dara Lind, VOX, 2014

The Ten Plagues of Egypt

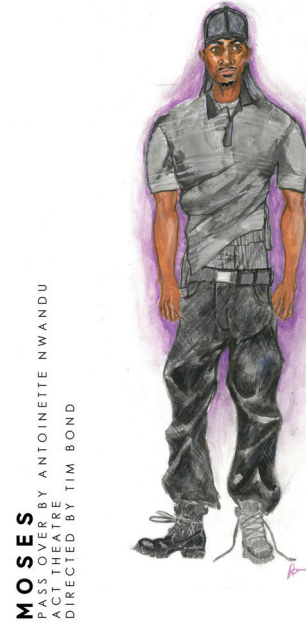
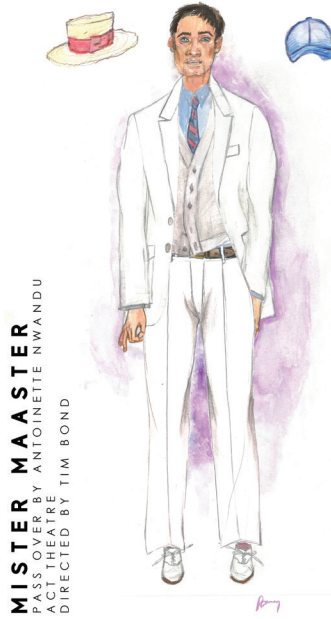


In the end of *Pass Over* Moses is able to defeat Ossifer by calling upon the plagues, which stop Ossifer in his tracks.

MOSES. you want all this to stop
these plagues
dat eat'cho whole damn life like locusts
stop killing us
stop killing us
stop killing us
thus sayeth my God
STOP KILLING US
and get'cho goddamn house in order

BUILDING ACT'S PRODUCTION

Early Sketches from the Costume Designer of Pass Over, Ricky German



Set Model from the Scenic Designer of Pass Over, Julia Welch

