describe her current projects, that some kinds of change have come on quite suddenly. “Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, and then a few things at once,” is how she describes her career trajectory so far.

The “few things” include a screenplay for Amazon Studios, an adaptation of Nafissa Thompson-Spires’s short story “Wash Clean the Bones.” As Nwandu’s first paid studio-writing job, the project has meant learning the industry ropes, on top of adjusting from the stage to the screen. She has another screenplay in the works, as well as a TV show in development with Annapurna Pictures, both in the early stages. And then there are the plays: yet another commission, this one for “a fairly large institution” in the theater world. Meanwhile, she is working through rewrites of her newest play, Tavalu or The Saddest Song, for its forthcoming premiere at Manhattan’s Vineyard Theater.

Graduating from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts with an M.F.A. in playwriting on the brink of the 2008 financial crisis was her stark awakening to the economic realities of theater; Pass Over marked the light at the end of a long tunnel. The play was first performed in 2017 by Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre Company and ignited some controversy and excitement. It earned a second run, at Lincoln Center, for its forthcoming premiere at Manhattan’s Vineyard Theater.

Harvard University citizens. Illuminating History: A Retrospective of Seven Decades (W.W. Norton, $28.95) contains five of his razor-sharp portraits of “small, strange, obscure, but illuminating documents or individuals,” extending from each “datum” to “its meaning for the world at large.” Harvardians may value even more having the texts of his Memorial Minutes for fellow giants Samuel Eliot Morison and Oscar Handlin (see The College Pump, page 64). Historians will value his epilogue on his scholarship, “The Elusive Past.” All readers will cherish the unusually warm, personal introduction, “Entering the Past,” from which this excerpt comes—explaining an education that “began in an addiction I had somehow acquired to reading.”

My parents were complicit in this addiction, and they had an expert to advise them. Hartford’s biggest and best bookstore, which once had sold books to Mark Twain, was then owned by a friend of theirs, Israel Witkower, an émigré from Vienna.

He knew about books of all kinds, in several languages, and visiting his store, with its deep central corridor crowded with books, its alcoves, and its jumbled bargain basement, was an adventure. History was of no special interest, but I recall two books…that I read before high school and that I later realized were historical in essence. I read and reread them, and I never forgot them. One was a big coffee-table book with a deeply embossed purple cover, published, I think by the Collier’s magazine company, largely consisting of close-up photos of the great men and events of the early twentieth century. The pages were printed in the brownish, “rotogravure” process, but to me they were vivid, and the commentary was readable. The faces of the presidents and other celebrities were intriguing. But it was the battle scenes of World War I that mainly gripped my imagination…The comments were innocuous, but the scenes were fearful and unforgettable. The other book of those pre-high-school years that was so memorable and implicitly historical contained a series of comparisons on facing pages of towns in England and in New England that bore the same names. Thus there were photos with comment on the towns of Biddeford, Devon, and Biddeford, Maine; of Bath, Somerset, and Bath, Maine; of Portsmouth, Hampshire, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire; of Newhaven, Sussex, and New Haven, Connecticut; and of Hartford, Hertfordshire, and my own town, Hartford, Connecticut. It was