

# 3 “Go back to India if you hate my people so much”: Consequences of Troubling the “Canon” in American Academia

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I am a 5 ft 2", 120 lb theatre artist-scholar from India. In the Fall of 2010, with a Master's in English literature and a dream to pursue higher education in Theatre and Performance Studies, I arrived in America to earn my PhD. I spent the first few years in America adjusting to new cultural and academic norms. My papers came back with comments to “write in active voice,” a suggestion I repeat now as an instructor. I spent a long time thinking about “voice.” What is this “voice?” Being raised and indoctrinated in an urban Indian education system, handed down by the British, I learnt that formal essays are written in passive voice. In switching from passive to active voice, I discovered that the performance lies in taking responsibility for the “voice”—I learnt to write with more authority, clarity, and directionality.

What constitutes the academic voice? Do I adopt a certain voice to perform academia? Apart from the written voice, what about my physical, audible voice? The voice that carries through words that resonate in a classroom and (hopefully) reaches my students?

## Scene 1

In my first year as a South Asian professor in American academia, I am employed as a Visiting Assistant Professor in a Research 1 institution in the American South, to teach survey theatre history courses to undergraduate students. I have been mandated to use the *Wadsworth Anthology of Drama, Sixth Edition* (Worthen 2010). There are seven sections in this almost 1900-page volume—Theater of Classical Europe: Athens and Rome; The Theater of Classical Japan; The Theater of Medieval and Renaissance England; Early Modern Europe; Modern Europe; The United States; and World Stages. The only two sections housing non-Western texts, Theater of Classical Japan and World Stages, together have 14 plays (the former including only two), while the rest of the sections with European and American plays have 51 plays together (three plays by Shakespeare alone in the third section). Such unequal and irregular organization in an anthology of plays and critical texts does three things:

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First, the anthology doubly marginalizes the non-Western content, by not only thematically, but also visually, Othering it. When an expansive volume of theatre history includes 65 plays, out of which only 14 can be considered non-Western, or extra-canonical, the anthology establishes a certain kind of “polar imagination” (Schwarz 1992: 155), while also performing an illusion of inclusion. Daniel R. Schwarz explains and opposes the tendency of American academia to imagine a polarity between a hegemonic cultural pattern (including primarily white Western culture) and anything falling outside the realm (often categorized as “cultural” studies). This imagined oppositional relationality is what Schwarz terms “polar imagination.”

Second, the functionality of this anthology, adopted as a textbook for undergraduate education in an R1 institution in America, lays a problematic claim to authority and credibility, as the production of knowledge systems is interconnected with the reproduction of culture—“[e]ducation systems legitimate the canon by producing ‘aware consumers’ as well as ‘sacralizing commentaries’”(Holderness 2014: 77).

Third, such polarization of knowledge systems, minimizing the importance of non-Western theatre while prioritizing and sacralizing Western white theatre, establishes BIPOC scholars and their scholarships as marginal to the central “canonical” knowledge. As an Indian first-generation immigrant scholar, teaching the established “canon” marginalizes my presence and my positionality even in my classroom, not only theoretically and conceptually, but physically as well. How many plays that we read from the anthology have characters looking like me, life experiences relatable to a person of color? How many characters that we analyze in our classrooms can someone like me embody on stage? With such lack of representation, or exoticized and skewed representation, of BIPOC stories and characters in academia, in our classrooms, on stage, and in the media, we further perpetuate that sense of shame and insufficiency, along with a need to accept and conform to white culture’s beliefs about racial minorities in the form of internalized racism, which is “theorized to reinforce inequalities at cultural and institutionalized levels in that affected individuals unknowingly behave in accordance with dominant narratives (e.g., inferiority of racial minorities) that reinforce their own oppression” (Choi et al. 2017: 53). On the other hand, my invisibility and absence from American mainstream stages, canons, classrooms, curriculum, and media representations, ironically, render me hypervisible while simultaneously diminishing my credibility.

In my exploration of these scenes in American academia, I have realized that one cannot think of the canon in isolation. If we are to engage with the canon, we ought to engage with histories of colonialism and establishment of dominant cultures through a rigorous engagement with critical revisionist historiography. De-canonization is directly associated with decolonization. The Latin, Anglo-French, and Middle English roots of the word “canon” being associated uncomfortably with the Christian church (“a regulation or

dogma decreed by a church council;" "an authoritative list of books accepted as Holy Scripture") (*Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "canon"), the term carries the load of the oppressive histories of sacral hegemonic forces responsible for large-scale "epistemic violence" (Spivak 1994: 76).

Frank Kermode assigns to canonicity the quality and condition of "perpetual modernity" (Kermode 1985: 62), arguing that the classics gain their place in the canon because of their ability to interact and engage with the "modern" at all times. George Hunter further contends that in the context of theatre, an art form dependent on immediacy and the present, the actors carry the relevance of the text through their interpretive mediation, and therefore converse between the past text and the present performance, diffusing the sacral quality of the text. Engaging with Kermode's claim of canon being opinion that becomes knowledge, he explains,

Historians of style can only operate by continually reinventing the past their sense of style creates for them. But if we are to *use* the past thus created, and communicate it to a public, we must allow sufficient distance between that past and our own present so that perspective, dialogue, "conversation" become possible. It is here, it seems to me, that "knowledge" is relevant, for only knowledge can provide the stable framework of agreed norms that permits cultural conversation to take place [...] [K]nowledge can perhaps extend the lifetime of opinion by providing a basis for widely shared talk—and what we can go on talking about we have an interest in still believing. (Hunter 1991: 86)

Even though Hunter destabilizes the fixity of the canonical text by introducing the concept of relevance, there is still a presumption of an objective and neutral "knowledge," and a conversation among a seemingly homogenous "we" with shared interests. When knowledge systems alone become the instruments of control and hegemony, how can under-represented (or even erased) knowledge systems stand a chance of prolonging an opinion? The only way forward is to recognize the uneven terrain of knowledge production and the inequity in the recognition of knowledge systems that prolong opinions, which are further limited by those dominant structures of power. In essence, unless we exit this vicious cycle of knowledge and power production associated with the very idea of a canon, it is remarkably challenging for generative conversations around inclusion to be possible.

Kermode further elaborates that "the work of preservation and defense is carried on by many voices co-operating, however unwillingly [and if I may I add, *coercively*], to one end, and not by a central authority resisting its challenges" (Kermode 1985: 79). The work of preservation, defense, or even destabilization (as envisioned by Hunter) of a canon, therefore, necessarily is embedded in the history of erasures and exclusions of voices. Here, "voices"

are not only literal and physical but also metaphorical and figurative. As a woman-of-color scholar in American academia, in order to continue the work of preserving the canon, already established in a white, heteronormative, male, Christian, colonial power structure with “voices [that are heard] cooperating” and dissenting voices muted, I have to not only adopt a voice of authority recognized by the canon but also suppress my own voice that is discordant with traditionally accepted canonicity. But no matter how much I rehearse the performance of authority and knowledge, the optics of a short brown woman disrupts the correlations and expected associations between knowledge, power, race, and gender.

## Scene 2

Before I walk into my classroom, I spend a few minutes checking my clothes, my shoes, my hair, and I practice a short walk—do I look tall enough, authoritative enough, knowledgeable enough, academic enough? Do I smile too much? Should I change the pitch of my voice and appear more somber? I even practice a couple of voice warmup exercises to speak in a lower register. A part of the preparation for the academic job market, and eventually, working in academia, involved buying blazers—a friend suggested that a blazer makes everyone look “professorial.” I rehearse my “professorial” self while walking through the corridors leading to my classroom. After each class, committee meeting, or college meet-up, I review my performance.

In their chapter, “They See Us, but They Don’t Really See Us,” Jessica Lavariega Monforti and Melissa R. Michelson review this simultaneity of invisibility and hypervisibility of women-of-color (WOC) in academia. They observe (adding their voices to other scholars’ reports such as Constantine et al. 2008) that,

[f]aculty of underrepresented backgrounds are also more likely to have to be especially careful about their tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and dress in the classroom because these choices can have direct consequences for perceived levels of competence. (Monforti and Michelson 2020: 62)

From being mocked for my “accent” while teaching, to students and colleagues mispronouncing my name and asking me where I am from, to unsolicited advice on teaching, grading, and designing my syllabus from students and colleagues expecting justification for my pedagogical choices, and eventually to outright aggressive and racist rhetoric in teaching evaluations, I have become accustomed to my knowledge, authority, and legitimacy being questioned.

Yolanda Flores Neimann observes,

Existing academic structures facilitate different realities and rules of the game for members of historically underrepresented groups as compared to those of their white, heterosexual colleagues. These disparate realities create shaky ground for women of color and provide evidence that no matter how hard they work, how many degrees they possess, what titles they earn, or what levels and/or positions they acquire, they are still vulnerable to malevolent experiences as faculty members. The more -isms associated with their identities, the more personally directed is the antagonism and the more oppressive is the unchallenged, status-quo environment. (Neimann 2012: 448)

While a part of my navigation of such “presumed incompetence” has been to perform the image of the white male professor, another part has resisted it simultaneously, treading a fine line between conformism and resistance. My forms of resistance have been similar to the “intellectual judo move” that my former PhD cohort member Dr. Myrton Running Wolf explains:

I think of the “intellectual judo move” [as effective], which is to use the power of the archive against it. To topple it on its head, to subvert it. I don’t think it’s an either-or—we teach to the canon, or we teach against the canon. How do we take the canon, reinvestigate it, so that we enable and empower our students to flip that on its head to move forward in another way, to where we can give them the skills to master the canon, so that you can disrupt the canon. (2020)

While I perform the “white male professor,” wearing my blazer and adjusting my voice, I reinforce my non-whiteness and advocacy for dismantling the existing power structures by including WOC playwrights in the syllabus and adding images of Artists and Academics of Color on my PowerPoint presentations, therefore destabilizing the image and monotone of whiteness.

I fracture my own performances—one day, I wear my neatly ironed blazer, the next day, I appear in my salwar kameez. I *obey* by indicating the Wadsworth anthology as “required text” on my syllabus, while simultaneously designing assignments that require students to find plays from the same time period, but outside of the anthology. In addition to teaching Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, I teach *A Tempest* by Aimé Césaire. I ask my students to investigate not only *what* is in the syllabus, but *why* it is in it, and how we now look at those texts that are not included. I encourage them to look at not only historical documentation and archival work, but the gaps, fissures, and limitations of the archive. What happens to plays that never get printed? to oral culture? What are the problematics of studying history with a linear perspective, assuming that print culture is an evolved form of oral culture, English an evolved

form of language, and that someone without an American accent deserves to be mocked? In a way, I am in a double bind—while I teach my students to question, if not disrupt, existing power structures, my authority as “the bearer of knowledge” is questioned and disrupted continuously because of my own subjectivity.

This questioning is shaped and determined by race, gender, color, and nationality. In Neimann’s words,

The challenges these authors [and academics of color] have faced are grounded largely in the quadruple threat of racism, sexism, homophobia, and class-based subordination. This combination of “isms” can be lethal to their careers, bodies, and spirits in the culture of the predominantly white, male, heterosexual, and upper-middle-/upper-class academy. (Neimann 2012: 446)

I argue that the canon is a residue of the assumed dominance of “the culture of the predominantly white, male, heterosexual, and upper-middle-/upper-class academy.” In order for us to rethink the canon, it is not enough to view the canon only as a collection of texts and ideas, but also as a reinforcement of cultural superiority. We need to reexamine the culture of preservation and defense of the traditions and practices that support the canon.

### Scene 3

Building on Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas on “familiarization” (Bourdieu 1996: 159–160), Holderness elaborates on how a “gradual process of ‘conscious or unconscious inculcation’ leads people into accepting an established hierarchy of authors as ‘self-evident’” (Holderness 2014: 77). Therefore, naturally, the question of familiarization leads to questions of habit and indoctrination. One needs to unlearn *habits* in order to dismantle the canon.

As a first step, how about we break the habit of using the term “canon” itself? The word, as I have established already, has uncomfortable associations with Christianity and Empire. To dismantle the hegemony of the canon, we need different terms, or perhaps, no terms at all. I am, in no way, suggesting a complete negation of the works of literature that we have considered canonical for so long, but proposing that we change our frames of thinking about them. Instead of thinking of certain texts as falling within the canon, how can we think of materials that *matter* instead, in the present, but also in the past, contextualized in history? I suggest we look at the historical and socio-political significance of the works in question, and arrange materials in survey classes according to topics rather than historical movements relating only to Europe and America. Even that process, I recognize, entails selection and, therefore, a kind of exclusion.

Instead of thinking of the canon and canonicity in their representativeness, we may focus on the loopholes of representation, the holes of history, and what Robert Dale Parker identifies as representing “unrepresentativeness itself” (Parker 1993: 105). He goes on to explain:

The point is not to prescribe some particular set of principles for selecting texts but exactly the opposite: it is to argue against the adequacy, the representative sufficiency, of any principle of selecting texts, and thus to argue only for making each system—for we will still have our systems, and a great many of them—not only represent what it systemizes but also advertise the limits of its own systematicity. (Parker 1993: 106)

As educators, it is not enough to only impart knowledge—it is crucial for us to provoke critical thinking and encourage a pursuit of meta-knowledge. What can we understand from not only the texts represented in the syllabus but those excluded, especially in survey courses? What are the consequences of unsettling what Bourdieu recognizes as “the market of symbolic goods” (Bourdieu 1984)?

#### **Scene 4**

An advocate of polyvocality as an essential tool for cultural examination, I initiated a conversation around canonicity with some of my colleagues. In order to understand the canon from the perspective of a theatre practitioner with broad experience in Filipino, Canadian, and American education systems and industry, I spoke with Prof. Chari Arespachaga, who is currently working in American academia as an Assistant Professor of Performance.

**Sukanya Chakrabarti:** In your experience as a theatre scholar, practitioner, academic, teacher, what would you define as the “canon?” If you were to design a syllabus that would disrupt that idea of the canon, what would it include?

**Chari Arespachaga:** Such a hard question! Because it presumes right away that we need a canon. To me, it is problematic just because it makes the canon a fixed point. Of course, we need to read about the Greeks, know our Shakespeare, but we need to be mindful of what we are neglecting or ignoring, or maybe we are not actively ignoring, just not knowing about. How do we keep the canon expanding so it keeps up with the new ways theatre can be done? And how do we include knowledge and storytelling and performance traditions that have nothing to do with a beginning, middle, and end? I think those are the things we all should be thinking about. Because we’ve not really fully addressed that, and we’re also still obligated to churn out students who are ready to audition because they have a Classical monologue, [or] a comic monologue—it’s also rebalancing because we need to prepare the

students for the industry. They still need to know a Golden Age music theatre song to walk into an audition room, right?

**Chakrabarti:** I recognize how big that is in terms of envisioning change not only in academia, but also envisioning a change in the theatre industry, in the publishing industry ...

**Arespachoga:** And ... where will that change start ...? Because it is already problematic that certain things are upheld as a canon. And then who defines that canon? And where did that even come from?

**Chakrabarti:** It also becomes problematic for us to rethink the canon, when we, “we” as in right now I’m talking about you and I ... who are coming from a history of colonial context ...

**Arespachoga:** But we were educated on the canon! The go-to first titles in my head are Shakespeare, and all of the Western canon.

**Chakrabarti:** If we were to design a new Introduction to Theater and Performance Studies course for incoming Freshmen, what happens if we don’t include what we recognize as the canon? What if we don’t include *Oedipus* or Shakespeare?

**Arespachoga:** I think that’s a great idea! What is the purpose of introducing a student to theatre now? So if you are introducing students to theatre as it is now, maybe that should be the guiding thought. Or, if the purpose of introducing new students to theatre is to imagine the ways theatre might be, then you necessarily have to depart from the canon. But it’s also hard, because you have to balance not just how they can imagine how theatre can be, but also for them to discover what they can be doing in that landscape that they’re imagining, right? It’s also difficult because our definitions of a good skill set are also based on our education. But I think that’s a great idea to ... mindfully depart from the canon. Maybe we don’t need to be reading *Oedipus* in this class, or in every class that we go to.

*One of the key points that came out of my conversation with Prof. Arespachoga was also the starting point for my conversation with my graduate school cohort, Dr. Joy Brooke Fairfield and Dr. Myrton Running Wolf, both of whom are academics in our broader field of theatre, performance, and cultural and media studies—the idea of intellectual lineage, and how an adherence to the lineage that we are fed as students becomes part of the preservation of the canon and existing power structures.*

**Joy Brooke Fairfield:** I think it’s important to be upfront with students, and ourselves, about what our intellectual and artistic lineages are. Because we are completely shaped by those lineages. We are often fed just one, or two, or three, or four cultural histories, and there are infinite. Some of them are more canonized than others. Some of them have a greater attrition of power, and [some others have more] access to wealth and resources, legal systems built up



around [...] them. Canons are important so far as people who are teaching must acknowledge what they have been fed, as they are teaching, feeding the next generation. To not do that is dishonest. Diversifying who is in charge of teaching and what lineages are being introduced pedagogically will help shift the canon.

**Chakrabarti:** That's exactly what my biggest challenge has been. I did a Bachelor's and a Master's in English literature, which is taught in a post-colonial context, but of course it is very Euro-American. Having said that, I'm also bred by my cultural specificity, and that informs what I gain from the world and what I want to impart to the world. And I think that has been my biggest challenge coming to the West. Because, in our PhD list of required readings—the list of 120 plays or something—nothing was non-Western, nothing from the Global South.<sup>1</sup> But what do I say to somebody who says “but you are in America. You are physically located in American academia, you ought to be obviously thinking about canon from that perspective.”

**Fairfield:** Why are we speaking in English? You should be studying the literature of the place you are in, you should be studying the literature of indigenous California. Central Valley. So then there's no reason why you should have to have read all of those British plays, Euro-white American plays.

**Chakrabarti:** And also, canon assumes the knowledge of printed text. What happens to oral cultures? How are we to think of canon if we want to include something that is oral and non-textual?

**Myrton Running Wolf:** I looked up one definition: “The body of rules, principles, or standards, accepted as axiomatic and universally binding in a field of study or art” (*Dictionary.com*, s.v. “canon”). Who is making the rules? Who defines the principles? Who sets the standards? ... And the dominant culture takes on the idea that the canon is common sense. That the idea of canon is not only intuitive but also righteous. They have the sense [...] this is the right way of being, and if you don't know that, you are somehow outside of what is considered right, or you are primitive. So, when you [question that], they were like, “Because we say so.” “You are coming here to our country, our territory, these are the standards we go by, these are the rules and principles we operate by.” The reason why I speak English is because of the boarding school assimilation period, right? That “we are here to retrain you in the Western way of being.” There was a proverb which was “Kill the Indian, and save the man.” Again, that idea of righteousness. Save the person, the individual, teaching him how to exist in these Euro-American ways of being. It truly is like “Well, once you're elevated in your thinking, you're going to see that the Western canon is the most powerful, most righteous, and highest gold standard that there is, and you should know that coming in. Because otherwise, if you don't, then get out of here.” Which is really an aggressive move. It's not

benign ... it is an indictment of the individual and the culture you are coming from.

**Chakrabarti:** The one response that I repeatedly get is that “Well, there is only so much you can teach in a semester. And something has to give.” And “something has to give” will always be those plays that are not considered important enough to be part of the canon. I think it is a vicious cycle that until we recognize something as part of the canon, we won’t even allow it to exist.

**Running Wolf:** We also have to think in terms of historiography. We have to think about the way that history has been shaped and formed ... If you asked me, “what are the live performance traditions for the Blackfeet?” I wouldn’t be able to tell you. Not because it’s not there. Because it has been erased and marginalized and has been eradicated from our ways of thinking and being. But that doesn’t mean it didn’t exist, that they don’t have as much of a claim on truth as anything else ...

**Fairfield:** Reading the “important plays” and deciding on the “important plays” is for me a disciplinary residue of the fact that Theatre Studies came out of English literature, this colonial academic system which we all know has a bunch of historical violence baked into it. Part of breaking the canon is about the form too. It cannot be that the most important plays are the ones that have been written the longest time ago, as you said, and performed the most number of times. Because if it’s just the historical popularity contest, we all know who is in charge of the popularity machine since the dawn of European colonialism. It just makes me think of our whole field ... Getting away from texts and textual superiority has to be part of the project.

**Running Wolf:** Do you think that changing the canon changes society and changes the field? If we change the canon, if we update the canon to feature half non-Western stuff, would that change the field itself? The practice? Would that change our colleagues? Or would they be like “Eh, it’s a good experiment.”

**Chakrabarti:** I think it goes back to the idea of habit—academic habit, industry habit, habit as practitioners, and it also goes back to the idea of what we choose to prioritize and the intellectual lineage. Because if we redefine the canon for our students, they are at least aware that there is a whole world of theatre outside of the American theatre industry. It brings some equity in knowledge systems. If that becomes a habit in academia, that becomes a habit as intellectual lineage, to a large extent.

I invite my students to ask the question, why is this play in the syllabus? Why is it in the anthology? To question the predominance of print culture or raise questions of inclusion, of history, or historicity. But, in doing that, I also face resistance, as I already mentioned to you.

**Running Wolf:** Can you repeat that [student feedback]? Because that was mind-blowing that you got that.

**Chakrabarti:** Yes, let me read it out to you:

*Plays were boring and seemed like communist propaganda. I know for a fact that during the last 200 years not everyone was pushing this faggot shit in literature. Only play that should remain in the syllabus is Death of a Salesman, not because it is any good or because the message is worth wasting any brain power on (man sad in NY, man kills self, everyone cry for this “very human story”), rather because it is a play that I had heard of before so it has some relevance to history whereas plays like Hungry Woman, M. Butterfly, and the boohoo apartheid plays were just about feeling bad for people who are faggots or would still be eating people if Europeans didn’t oppress them into knowing that is morally wrong.*

*Class sucked, boohoo people got colonized and aren’t grateful to the merciful white man who brought them plumbing, industry, literacy, etc. Shove this entire anti-white agenda up your fucking ass you durka durka retard. Go back to India if you hate my people so much.*

In these comments alone, we see how presumptions of a racial hierarchy are integrated with an entitlement to decide what works *should* be included in the syllabus. Their opinion is clearly formulated by the presumptions of white supremacy, and the narratives of coloniality, indicated by the “white savior” approach. The student also merits their own knowledge of a play reason enough to demand its inclusion in the syllabus. And what we include in the syllabus, or have included habitually in it for the past 200 years, determines whose stories get told.

We need to remember that theatre is not merely entertainment, that theatre history is not merely a school subject, but a shaper of education, society, and culture, that our students are not merely young adults in the academic bubble forever, but the future itself. They will decide how our culture will be shaped and history will be archived.

I am deeply impacted by repeated discrimination, persecution, stereotyping, and race-based violence—the presumed dominance of whiteness just as much as the presumed ignorance, guilt, insufficiency, criminality of the other. When we imagine destabilizing the canon, we reshuffle the way power has operated systemically in academia, industry, and culture. It is not merely a revision of academic curricula, but a rearrangement of power structures in our culture and society. It is essential not only that we question the canon, but also that we point toward the relationship that canonicity shares with colonialism and cultural hegemony. When Amy Cooper, a white woman, threatens Christian Cooper, a black man, saying she will call 911 to “tell them there’s an African American man threatening my life” (Harriot 2020), it serves as a “performative utterance” (Austin 1975). She recognizes not only the consequences of those utterances, but also their potency reinforced by historical repetition to become a

performance of race inequity, injustice, and violence in the social landscape of America.

By no means do I intend to compare the enormity of scale in police brutality and systemic racism to a student evaluation. Nonetheless, the impulses of presuming superiority/inferiority are shared in these instances. And these presumptions are historical *habits*, repeated and rehearsed, which manifest themselves in either minute acts of racism in the classroom, academia, industry, and curricular practices, covertly; or repeated occurrences of brutality and oppression, overtly. When students refuse to recognize knowledge in a brown body; when walking into a classroom feels like walking into a room full of eyes judging you not only for your knowledge (or presumed lack of it), but for the way you look, how you speak and what you wear; when the textbooks your brown body teaches reflect and reinstate value-placement by erasing or marginalizing you and your stories; when you spend all your energy and time preparing for class lectures, and yet it's not enough;<sup>2</sup> and when you, then, further internalize that lack of faith in your knowledge and question your own legitimacy; we see knowledge, power, gender, and race interact and intersect.

This is where I propose our approach toward what we choose to deem “of value” be reexamined, and *habits* be re-imagined and re-formed, not just by faculty of color, but by our white, cis-gendered, heteronormative, male colleagues as well. I propose that we interrogate all existing canons for survey-based theatre courses, identify the lacunae, and work toward equal distribution and representation of diverse plays. I suggest, instead of text-focused theatrical discussions, we make space for re-membering body-based, experiential, and ancestral knowledge systems. I also suggest that theatre departments review, revise, and redesign their curriculum and season-planning keeping social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in focus; hire more professors of color with diverse education and experiences, not as tokenism, not just to repeat and reiterate the canon by teaching it, but necessarily to interrupt and depart from it.

Perhaps, then, we will learn to trouble the existing narratives of entitlement and righteousness, of presumed hierarchy of knowledge based on the color of our skin. Perhaps, then, to envision and practice an expanded approach to theatre, I will not have to “go back to India,” after all.

## Notes

- 1 For the sake of accuracy, I would like to correct myself here. There were 141 plays in the list, out of which two were non-Western—Athol Fugard, Kani, and N'tshona, *The Island*; and Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavillion*.
- 2 In my conversation with Dr. Running Wolf, he mentioned a similar experience: “walking into the classroom seems like walking into my dissertation defense every time; I have 20 pages of notes, and we get to only 2 pages, but even that amount of work is not enough.”

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