**Part I: Preliminary Information**

**Title:** Creating Empathy: How Sensory Stimulation in Theatre Advances Audience Understanding of Holocaust Historiography

**Names:** Jaclyn Kanter (Susanne Shawyer)

**Abstract:**

The story of the Holocaust is embedded in the world’s historical narrative. However, little is written about homosexual persecution in the Holocaust, so stories of gay men incarcerated in camps have become a niche aspect of Holocaust studies. As an artist and scholar, I question how theatre can be used to provoke empathy and understanding among audiences regarding a less visible topic within the written history of the Holocaust. I will produce Martin Sherman’s play *Bent*, a fictional account of homosexual persecution in the Holocaust, utilizing Theatre of Cruelty methodology to create an intimate and sensory stimulating theatrical environment. Through creative use of sounds, smells, and scenic elements, the production will construct a shared empathy among audience members and onstage performers. The crafted historical, psychological, and theatrical experience will expand on the current Holocaust historiographical narrative and give 21st century audience members a greater understanding of the persecution of minorities.

**Personal Statement:**

In third grade, I played a munchkin in a community theatre’s production of *The Wizard of Oz*. I fell in love with theatre—I loved learning the choreography and songs, adored watching the older kids perform with what I thought was immaculate perfection, and, most of all, reveled in the community of performers, technicians, and directors. Where else could I go to learn how to dance, act, and sing while spending time with my best friends and countless mentors?

I’ve since decided that performance is not for me, but I still love the sense of community and pride that theatre produces. College has only furthered my love for the art, all while I’ve developed a more profound understanding of the ways in which performance can spark positive social change. As a Theatrical Design and Production major, I have been involved with productions that highlight narratives of prejudice, racism, and sexism, among other relevant topics. I was the assistant stage manager for this fall’s production of *Parade*, which chronicled Leo Frank’s trial, conviction, pardoning, and eventual lynching after he was wrongly accused of murdering a child. The production explored themes of racism and anti-Semitism in a southern town and consequently became a topic of conversation across campus. Audience members who were deeply moved by Leo Frank’s story engaged me in discussion for weeks to follow. This revealed a new type of community: a community formed on a common empathetic response to storytelling.

In addition to theatre, the Elon College Fellows program has stimulated my academic college career by helping me grow into a more interdisciplinary learner. My freshmen Winter Term course, “Paths of Inquiry in the Arts and Sciences,” explored the three distinct branches of the Arts and Sciences and how to conduct scholarly studies in different academic disciplines. The class included a week long trip to Washington, D.C., where we visited museums, congressional sites, and other locations of personal and professional interest. For example, I revisited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where I walked through the strategic exhibits and learned about the psychological influences of the Nazi party on the German people that allowed for the incarceration of the Jewish population. I also visited the Supreme Court and U.S. Capitol, extending my appreciation for political systems by watching both sites function professionally. The trip taught me to remain open-minded in my academic studies, sparking my interest in including disciplinary methods from multiple branches of the arts and sciences into my own area of study.

The Lumen Prize will provide me with the resources to create an interdisciplinary campus community, much like the community that drew me to theatre so many years ago. I will be able to collaborate with professors, students, and other engaged learners, which will both benefit my project and continue to further my growth as an interdisciplinary scholar-artist-citizen. I will strive to utilize this community to showcase how the arts can effectively communicate social change across disciplines, as I have learned that theatre is a useful platform in connecting people from so many different areas of life. This is much needed in today’s social climate, where stratification between those who are different from each other seems to become more prevalent each day. The Lumen Prize will help me to discover how to best utilize a campus community in order to stimulate positive conversion and, consequently, enhance my own understanding of the association between art and social change.

**Part II: Project Description**

**Focus:**

In modern Holocaust studies, the majority of research documents the six million Jewish people that were systematically imprisoned and murdered in concentration camps. However, the literature regarding homosexual persecution is limited because the number of homosexual men sent to concentration camps was significantly smaller. Although 100,000 gay men were imprisoned, “between 5,000 and 15,000 were interned in concentration camps” (“Persecution of Homosexuals”). The gay community published fewer firsthand accounts after the liberation of the camps; only about 15 people came forward with stories, and most preferred to remain anonymous (Hammermieser 19). Those who did survive did not want to go public with their stories “because the legal and social stigma attached to homosexuality remained” in the years that followed the Nazi regime (Jenson 321).

Although the number of incarcerated homosexual men was significantly smaller, a dangerous vernacular among Nazi officials and the party itself led to a profound mistreatment of the gay community. Richard Plant, author of *The Pink Triangle*, explores how Heinrich Himmler classified homosexuality as a disease, claiming that gay men were a dangerous threat to Germany’s prosperity because they could not reproduce (92). Nazi law expanded on Himmler’s ideology and thus created a social atmosphere that normalized persecution. Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code (1935) stated that “a male who commits lewd and lascivious acts with another male… shall be punished by imprisonment,” later expanding to include a potential loss of citizenship for those punished (Setterington 39, “Paragraph 175”). In 1940, Himmler declared that men arrested for homosexuality “must be transferred to a [concentration] camp after they have served their prison sentences” (Plant 117). Because of these attitudes towards homosexuality, Nazi officials subjected gay prisoners to cruel and often meaningless tasks in the camps, which is a narrative that Martin Sherman furthers in his play *Bent*.

*Bent* speaks to a modern audience about gay persecution in the Holocaust by showcasing the importance of human connection in the face of adversity. According to Kai Hammermeister, *Bent* could only appear as a prominent work after the gay liberation movement due to its themes of “pride, dignity, self-affirmation, and survival” (23). Before the 1970s liberation movement, it would have been nearly impossible to create a piece that handled romantic and sexual themes between two men without social and political repercussions (Hammermiester 20). *Bent* is not a primary account of LGBT victims and survivors of the Holocaust, but it does theatrically embody a niche aspect of history and provide a commentary on humanity. Since Holocaust survivors are growing older, younger generations will soon lose the ability for firsthand communication and will have to rely on the literature in order to maintain their sense of emotional understanding and personal connection to the victims.

It is also important to understand how the lack of survivors’ primary sources has played an important role in the creation of gay Holocaust fiction and general understandings of the Holocaust (Seifert, Hammermieser). As Seifert notes, the modern individual “cannot be expected to be knowledgeable” about homosexual persecution because of the wide array of conventional Holocaust content that focuses primarily on the Jewish experience (106). Museums offer an example of how sensory experiences bring a greater understanding to those who may lack a comprehensive knowledge of Holocaust history. Tourists are, by nature, “secondary witnesses to suffering” because their experience as a museum visitor does not directly parallel the victims’ experiences in camps (Reynolds 334). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum helps bridge this gap by “[creating] an ambiance of troubled times” through deliberate architecture and artifacts belonging to the victims (Anonymous 101). The entire museum constructs an overall atmosphere of discomfort and brings visitors closer to an empathetic understanding of the Holocaust. In thinking through my own visit to the museum, I am further intrigued by my research question: does the specific *manner* by which a Holocaust story is told in theatre give a heightened significance to a 21st century audience member who may be unaware of the exact details of gay persecution? To answer this, it will be beneficial to turn to Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty methodology to give the audience a greater perception of the sheer atrocity of Holocaust events as portrayed in *Bent*.

Theatre of Cruelty, initially devised by Antonin Artaud in the 1930s, strives to redefine an audience’s passive relationship to the theatre (Jannarone 195). In practice, Artaud’s theory proposes to deliberately construct each work to create a sensory experience unlike past theatrical events (Artaud). It is important to note that Theatre of Cruelty does not include actual physical/psychological cruelty for performer or audience member; the ‘cruelty’ in question seeks to utilize theatrical stimulation to provoke a deep emotional response. Theatre practitioners accomplish Artaud’s theory through deliberate, stimulatory sound design. For example, Adrian Curtain, a Theatre of Cruelty commentator, explores how Artaud encourages the audience to step out of a role of passivity and “participate with his soul and his nerves” by both hearing *and* feeling the vibrations of particular sound effects (252). My production of *Bent* will have multiple opportunities to translate this theory into sounds, environments, and other sensory images to give audience members a deeper emotional understanding of the Holocaust.

Producing *Bent* will serve as an interdisciplinary outlook on a lesser-known narrative of the Holocaust, consequently linking theatre, history, museum studies, the psychology of sound, and sexuality studies. The proposed Theatre of Cruelty methods will not alter *Bent* as a text, but instead enhance the audience’s sensory perception of the world through sound, scent, and scenic elements. Ideally, this project will fill a gap on the research of techniques to create a more empathetic theatrical experience and serve as a unique expansion of current Holocaust historiography.

**Scholarly Process:**

In my first semester as a Lumen Scholar, I will study the literature devoted to the Nazi Party’s beliefs on homosexuality and the acts that they took to further preserve their perception of a “superior race” (Plant 83). I am aware of a few books and articles that contextualize the subject at hand, but I plan on searching academic databases and libraries (including the library at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) to fully understand the academic literature. In addition to academic sources, I will also look at the presentation of Holocaust historiography in order to grasp how museums construct empathy to tell stories and, ultimately, utilize this information along with sensory stimulation while artistic directing *Bent*. The contextual and historiographical research will ensure that my production will expand upon the current Holocaust narrative as efficiently as possible.

While Holocaust research will serve as my dramaturgical basis of the show, I will use Theatre of Cruelty techniques to craft the sound design, scenic elements, audience configuration, and additional design aspects. This will require careful study of Antonin Artaud and accompanying scholars to understand how I can utilize the theory in actual theatrical practice. In addition, I will study the psychology and effectiveness of sound and smell to understand how to efficiently manipulate sensory stimulation. Topics of relevant research may include ASMR, or autonomous sensory meridian response, which utilizes specific sounds to stimulate tingling sensations in individuals. Artistically staging *Bent* will also include a close collaboration with actors and designers in order to achieve the overarching goal.

**Proposed Products:**

My research will culminate with a fully realized student production of *Bent*. Rehearsals will begin over Winter Term in 2019 and continue halfway into spring semester, with the final project culminating in late February or early March. In addition, I would like to create a symposium of small exhibits to correspond with performances— ideally, the audience members will attend the symposium following a performance to learn about the multiple aspects of the research process. The symposium will showcase topics such as the history of homosexual persecution in the Holocaust, an explanation of Theatre of Cruelty, and cast and creative reactions to the process as a whole. Faculty and student resources, such as designers and actors, will also be present after the performances to answer any additional questions audience members may have. During the symposium, audience members will complete a short exit survey that explores their reactions to the show, which will be analyzed in a final academic paper.

While this project will focus on homosexual persecution, it is vastly important to remember the six million Jewish individuals who were murdered in the Holocaust. Due to this, I believe it is important for the cast of *Bent* to gain an interdisciplinary view of the events of the Holocaust outside of the show’s parameters. I would like to take the cast to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C to help shape their understanding of the Holocaust and how our show expands upon museum-constructed empathy. After this trip, I plan on talking to each member of the cast about their experience at the museum, and I will include a synopsis of these conversations in my research symposium.

**Part III: Feasibility**

**Feasibility Statement:**

I will consistently work towards my goal to produce a fully staged production of *Bent* throughout my two final years of study. Proper contextualization will ensue careful consideration of books, academic articles, and archived information. I have allotted time and funds to spend at the archival library in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in order to conduct independent research. In addition, the Elon Performing Arts Department has a rich history of supporting student shows; I have taken the necessary precautions with faculty members to ensure that I will be able to secure a space to rehearse and ultimately perform the production. I have also spoken to fellow Design and Production students who have expressed an interest in being on the creative team, and I will confirm that the designers are in place by the end of next year.

*Bent* will require a more deliberate design to ensure that the Theatre of Cruelty methods are implemented properly. Unlike other student shows, *Bent* will be a heightened sensory experience, so the audience configuration and scenic, sound, and lighting design will all be extensively planned in order to produce the most efficient effect. Given the technology and resources that are available to students, this may be a difficult task. If awarded the Lumen Prize, I will work closely with all faculty members to ensure that *Bent* will have the support it needs to achieve the research goal, whether this is a greater sense of faculty mentoring or ensuring that all technical aspects needed for the show are well planned out before the production process begins.

**Budget:**

* **Contextual Research Materials:** $100
* *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust*: $25.50
* *The World Must Know*: *The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:* $26.79
* *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade: $10.95*
* Additional books: $36.76
* **Winter 2018 Trip to Washington, D.C:** $1,000
* $300: Transportation (Train from Elon, N.C to Washington, D.C.)
* $300: Food
* $59.25: SmarTrip card for Metro transportation
* $340.75: Research books, photocopying, etc.

\*Housing will be provided through personal contacts.

* **Summer 2018 Trip to Europe**: $1,850
* $1,200: Round trip to Munich, Germany
* $200: Public transportation
* $800: Housing
* $40: Guided tours (Auschwitz, Dachau)
* $10: Entrance fee to Jewish Museum Berlin
* $350: Books, research materials, and additional information

\*$750 of this trip will come from the Elon College Fellows research stipend.

* **Winter 2019 Trip to Washington, D.C (cast day trip):** $ 1,000
* $250: Gas Money
* $750: Hotel

\*Museum entrance fee is free.

* **Production Budget:** $6,200
* Show Rights: $1,000
* $300: Licensing for 3 performances
* $200: Scripts
* $500: Deposit with Performing Arts Department to secure performance space
* Production: $5,200
  + $3,000: Scenic
  + $1,000: Costuming
  + $500: Lighting
  + $500: Props
  + $200: Sound

* **Symposium:** $350
* $200: Posters/Print material
* $150: Simple refreshments

* **Tuition\*:** $4,000
* $2,000: Junior Year
* $2,000: Senior Year
* **Unexpected costs:** $500

**Total:** $15,000

\*any unused funds will go towards Elon tuition.

**Timeline:**

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|  | **Proposed Experiences** | **Proposed Product(s)** |
| **Summer 2017** | -Internship Abroad in Dublin, Ireland | -Greater understanding of the professional theatrical industry outside of academia |
| **Fall 2017** | -2 hours of 499 research  -Contextual research regarding homosexual persecution in the Holocaust, Holocaust historiography, and other examples of Holocaust literature  -HST339: “A History of the Holocaust” or ENG259: “Literature of the Holocaust” | -Development of intellectual knowledge regarding the treatment of the gay community in Nazi Germany |
| **Winter 2018** | -2 hours of 499 research  -Visit to archival library at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to speak to experts and to further conduct research with extensive collection of sources | -Understanding of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and how it is structured to provoke empathetic responses  -Greater understanding of current Holocaust research (derived from speaking to professionals and visiting the archival library) |
| **Spring 2018** | -2 hours of 499 research  -Contextual research regarding Theatre of Cruelty methodology and how it can extend current Holocaust historiography | -Tie together theatrical, historical, and psychological elements of the project; identify the design factors that will work best in achieving research question |
| **Summer 2018** | -5 day trip to Europe to visit Dachau, Auschwitz, and relevant museums  -Continue to synthesize contextual research and fully establish how to utilize theatre of cruelty properly in *Bent* | -Greater understanding of how to design the scenic elements of *Bent* after visiting a physical concentration camp; understanding of Dachau construction  -Cross-cultural understanding of how museums construct empathy to best affect visitors  -Ability to bring knowledge of the actual sites back to the cast and creative team in order to create authenticity in the work |
| **Fall 2019** | -2 hours of 499 research  -Cast *Bent* (November 2019)  -Begin production meetings with design team to map out production process and various deadlines | -Complete all necessary pre-production paperwork: dramaturgical information, contact sheets, deadlines and budgetary information for designers  -Draft post-production surveys for audience members to complete: speak with a social science faculty member to ensure that surveying process is accurate and comprehensible |
| **Winter 2019** | **-**Trip to U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C with cast and creatives to talk to experts and experience the museum | -Interview transcripts of cast reactions to the Holocaust museum and how it changes their perception of the event  -Finalized versions of post-production surveys that gauge audience reactions regarding *Bent* and how/if the sensory stimulation enhanced their experiences  -Creation of posters with necessary information for symposium |
| **Spring 2019** | -Late February/early March: Public performances of *Bent* with accompanying symposium and audience surveys | -Symposium of various “exhibits” that showcase the creative process, contextual research, and relevant information  -Audience surveys regarding their reaction to the piece  -Finalized paper of findings; answer to initial research question |

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