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EXTENDED ESSAY COVER

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Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: DANCE

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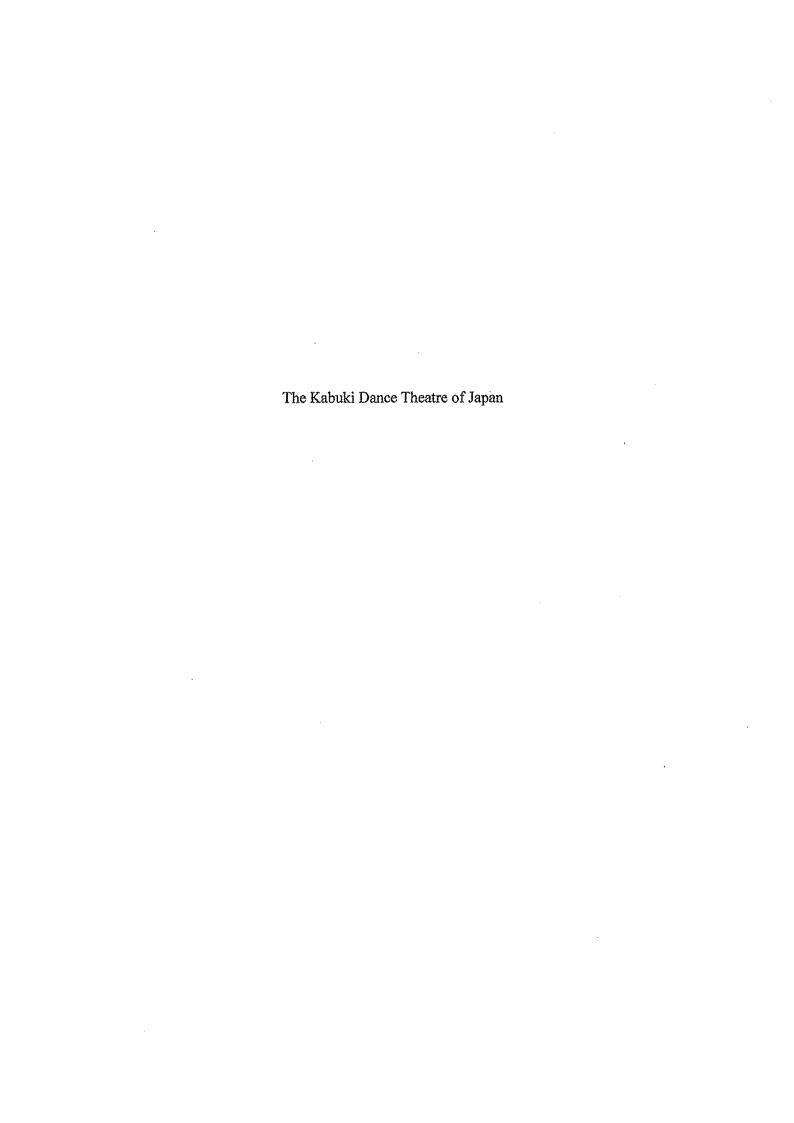
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Abstract

In the late fifteenth century, a unique dance tradition was developed in Japan. This tradition is known as Kabuki dance. Kabuki started out as a profound and elegant dance since the day it was discovered and it is still famous today, as it was during its discovery except that now it is worldwide known. Kabuki dance is not usually performed outside of Japan; except for special occasions, which means that most of the kabuki dances today are performed in Japan where it is culturally exhibited. In present day, it is known as Kabuki Dance Theater or Kabuki Theater where it is a play of actors mixed with dances that they performed to exhilarate the play. The play consisted of dances and plots that portray a story written by a play writer or portray historical events. What is taken into consideration is that modern Kabuki is greatly different from the early Kabuki during the 1600s. What are the differences between the sixteenth century Kabuki dance tradition and present day Kabuki dance Tradition? There are not many differences of the early Kabuki and present day beside the changes in music, visual art and set construction. Therefore, this essay will examine the changes of the kabuki dance from the 1600s to present day on sex roles, costume, set design, music, stages, body movements, and the effects that influenced the dance.

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INTRODUCTION

Kabuki dance began rapidly changing in the sixteenth century where the roles of dancing and acting dramatically switched from women to men. What caused this dance tradition to continually evolve to the form of theatre it is today from the sixteenth century and how is this style different from the earlier kabuki dance theater? Even though Kabuki has changed greatly, it is still one of the most celebrated dances in Japan today because of the combination of movement, acting, and music that it contains.

Kabuki has existed for over 400 years. Today's Kabuki mainly refers to a combination of music dance, and drama that is performed on stage. Before the dance was formed, the word Kabuki was used as part of everyday speech in Japan with a different meaning until it actually became the name of a dance. The word kabuki was derived from the verb kabuku—'to incline', 'to tilt,' 'to lean to one side'— which signified 'unusual' and 'unconventional' in relation particularly to certain social trends of the time that were disapproved of as excessively unorthodox. These trends are considered to be involved in extravagances in dress and behavior, which is why kabuki also connoted 'fashionable' and 'faddish,' even 'avant-garde'. And more interesting, Kabuki dance tradition was also first formed before the Kabuki Theater was established which entails how this particular dance tradition grew.

Background on Kabuki

The beginning of Kabuki dates back to the early sixteenth hundreds. The founder of Kabuki was a woman named Izumo no Okuni. She was known as the ironworker and a skilled Maiko (geisha) in the service of the shrine at Izumo. At first her dance was just a dance of worship in praise of Amida, which is a Japanese mythology, but her physical beauty astounded and collaborated with her dance that it soon become an idea of performance art. "...[In] 1596, [Okuni] was seen by Sanzaburo, who from Nagoya had been sent by his family to be trained for the priesthood in the Kennin Temple, one of the famous Five Temples, in Kyoto." He found Okuni's dance as a unique style that could be more improved to a level of extravagances and later on he dedicated his time to teach her to dance to the music of his own composition. As long as it could be recalled, the dance that Okuni performed did not came to be acknowledged by others until 1603 where she performed at Shijogawa, in the city of Kyoto.

The Existence of Kabuki dance tradition

Okuni's dance style was not a dance she made up on her own; in fact, other dance forms and performances that she observed inspired her like the dance theatre Noh. She created her own style of dance, which became known as a tradition in Japan, and became famous as a result. "The popularity of the teahouses and bathhouses (both a type of bordello) at that time is reflected in the Kabuki dances of Okuni in which she would appear in the guise of a male customer, fantastically attired, at such establishment." She

would appear with a crucifix dangling from her waist or neck as an accessory that was considered as a part of the early Kabuki. Okuni soon gathered about her a group of players, which included women, children, men in the garb of women, and Sanzaburo himself presenting *Kyogen* as interludes. "By 1603-1604 Okuni had reached the height of her popularity, and had established stages in various parts of the city. Her plays were addressed primarily to the common people; but she soon attracted the attention of the nobility, and was invited to play at the residence of the shogun." This was the beginning of Kabuki recognition in both common people and high-class people.

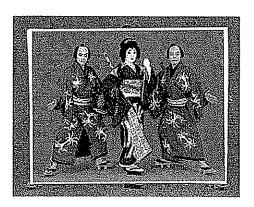
BODY

Before the existence of Okuni's Kabuki, wood-doll theatre was set as the public entertainment. It was referred that the wood-doll theatre and their form of moments also inspired Okuni. The Kabuki dance performances, pushed into the background by the rise of the ningyo shibai, which was the establishment of a theatre in 1684 by a famous joruri singer, Takemoto Gidayu, as the popular theatre, depended more and more on its rival and almost became a puppet theatre by influence, for it was not only supplied with themes for plays, but borrowed a great deal of the doll theatre's technique of production. Kabuki borrowed a great deal of the doll theatre technique because of the kabuki actor who used and adapted the movement and gestures of the dolls in their own performances on stage. Kabuki than began to merge with the doll theatre into changes and developed during the process of depending on the doll theatre.

The Change of Sex Roles

One differences between today's Kabuki and the earlier Kabuki is that in the earlier kabuki, woman performed the dance. Kabuki dance was first called *Onna Kabuki*, because Okuni, the founder of kabuki, was a woman (*onna*); although, as her religious chants gave place to popular folk songs, she wore the garments of men and acted the part of one who frequented teahouses. After Kabuki became popular, Okuni begin to lead her own group of actors and dancers of women, children, and men in the garb of women to present kabuki. ⁸ However, this brought social danger because the women became

prostitutes and they were banned from performing Kabuki in 1629. Since women were banned, the women's kabuki soon became played by boys' Kabuki who was considered as "wakashu", but in 1652, young boys were also banned on the ground of immorality meaning sexual relationship with the same sex. This later on leads to the men taking the role, which is still considered today. However, the attentions were given to matters of costume and scenery, which appeared to have retained their full measure of popular favor. Men who dressed themselves up like the women kabuki played Onni kabuki and since men were taking the role, Onni Kabuki became known as Wakashu Kabuki. It is also considered that the women's role is called oyama and men's role is called tachiyaku. Male impersonators are also known as onnagata. The men who are to play the onnagata part were required to have a strong powerful voice and must have the ability to pitch their voices to sound like a woman.



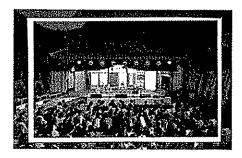
Influence on the Changes of Stage and Music

The art of the Kabuki performance today is slightly different from the earlier kabuki because the designs of stages and the effect of music have slightly changed. This created a more amusing atmosphere for the performance of Kabuki. As shown on the

picture below, the background of the stages have beautiful scenery for the play and the dances:14



Here's a picture of the early kabuki stages, which the audience have to sit outdoor:



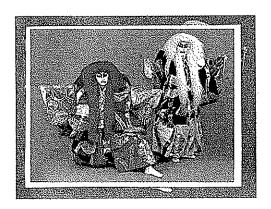
Although the stages and music had changed, the earlier play and today's play are substantially dramatic and moving and stayed unchanged. ¹⁵ In the Edo period, which is also known as Tukugawa period (1603-1867), Kabuki theater, which were towers erected on the roof were mainly where kabuki dances/plays was performed and limited to four each in Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo. However, these towers no longer exist except for the Kabuki-za in Tokyo and the Minami-za in Kyoto, which were not completely covered that the performance had to be cancelled during bad weathers. Getting a better place for the play was hard to find, but it did not discourage the kabuki dancers/actors to stop. "It was not until the Kyoho era (1716-36) that all kabuki theaters were completely covered."

The Kabuki staged back in the earlier time was modeled like the Noh Theater, which was a theater similar to kabuki except the fact that it was developed before Kabuki. 16 "The stage is wider, and the rear of the auditorium was closer to the stage, than in a typical Western theater; this brings more people close to the action, which tends to be dispersed across the entire width of the performing area." 17

Colors role in Kabuki and Changes of Customs Designs

What today's Kabuki and the earlier Kabuki shared in common and stayed unchanged was that it expresses the dance and acting tradition in strong, basic colors such as red, black, and green, not in the sober and restrained hues of classical Japanese art. ¹⁸
The color makes Kabuki performances seems emotional and outstanding. The curtain of the stage changes indicating the time of the day the play is addressing. "Until Kabuki, the people of Japan had never seen theater of such color, glamour, excitement and general extraordinariness. Perhaps it is why other countries' theater cannot excel the kabuki drama. ¹⁹ Costume, make-up and sets are generally unchanged during the development because it is a requirement for the kabuki actors as they are to portray whichever character they are playing. In fact both Kabuki uses props, which are mainly sword, and folding fans. The folding fan, also known as ogi, is used to employ the dances with an extraordinary gesture. Other props are structured animals or just background pictures, which gives out an almost realistic feeling of the play. ²⁰ It is widely known today that because of the use of make-up props, etc., in kabuki made it a pictorial beauty in the world. ²¹ The appearance was mostly considered. A part of costumes, tabi, which is a kind

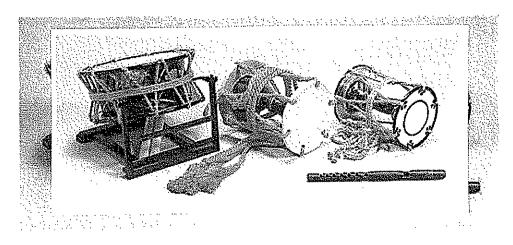
of sock, are extremely important to the actor and it is especially made to fit them. ²² The kind of clothing that the performer wears are Kimono, which is elaborated with beautiful fabricated design or stripe design on the kimono for men. ²³ After WWII, artist begins to change the designs of Kimono and costumes to make it more fashion. It came into new inventive designs such as stripes and checks in indigo and other natural tones. ²⁴ Other costume could be of how the actors are required to wear or a formal dress Kamishimo, which is a Samurai's costume. Stylist wigs is also necessary for the kabuki plays. ²⁵ The wigs are as shown on the picture below: ²⁶



Music

Music also played a great deal in kabuki performances, which gives the feeling of the dances. However, modern Kabuki music is fairly different from the earlier Kabuki because of the use of western's music. Although this is being done, it created an even more amazing effect to the kabuki drama. "The Shamisen appears in the text of Kabuki Songs dated not later than 1658." The samisen is an instrument that has three strings and when the string is pluck, it produces a drumming sound in addition to the string

affect and the sound could not be adjusted to a higher volume.²⁸ Shamisen was in fact mostly one of the main music that was needed for the kabuki performances for it plays an entirely soothing rhythm that flows peacefully which grab the profoundly with the kabuki dances today. The four other main type of Kabuki Music is called Gidayu, nagauta, tokiwazu and kiyomoto but the other types are heard on special occasions, shinnaibushi and katobushi.²⁹ Some other kabuki music are called, debayashi, which is a music performed onstage and kagebayashi, which is performed offstage, out of sight; these are two main category of a kabuki music called hayashi.³⁰ One innovation in twentieth-century nagauata created, which was an accurate notation system.³¹ Another special type of sound effect found in *kabuki* is the dramatic crack of two wooden blocks (*hyoshigi*) struck together or against a wooden board, which is shown below on the picture.³²



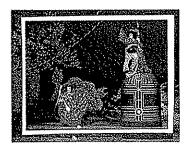
Shibyoshi

Four musical instruments, large hand drum (Otsuzumi), small hand drum (Kotsuzumi), floor drum
(Shimedaiko), flute (Nohkan)

© Nihonhaiyukyokai/Aoki Shinji

Kabuki Play

The many plays of present day and in the earlier Kabuki are both traditionally or written by famous kabuki play writer. In the early Kabuki, a play could be depicting historical facts or of warriors and nobles such as feudal lords but no in present day, the play could be based on a famous play written by someone. The play could also be random story plots. Another thing that the early kabuki and present day Kabuki shared in common is that it present many of the plays, which portray lives of tragedies adapted from history or tales. Evidently most of the plays are heavy tragedies relieved only by monetary flashes of comedy. And many of the Kabuki plays are mostly adapted from noh and Kyogen dramas. And stage sets for these plays were also adapted from the Noh Theater, which was also a very well known dance theatre. However, there are plays that are written for Kabuki Theater of original ideas and one of these plays are called kagotsurube which is also used in present day Kabuki theatre. In feudal times, kabuki actors, while popular among the general masses, held a very low social status, which held a great impact on their talents. Today however, Kabuki actors are able to gain popularity, they have been elected to membership in the Academy of Art of Japan and live a much easier life. 33 The picture below is a picture of a traditional temple-bell play with dancing.34



Present Day And The Early Kabuki Performances

Modern Kabuki, including the earlier Kabuki dance tradition, is considered magnificent with the effects of surroundings, colors, and background stage, to make the drama interesting, however since fashion in present day is more advances, Modern kabuki is far more elegant in terms of stage effects, costumes, and music. In the early Kabuki, performances could be easily told through movements since it is very simple. But in Modern Kabuki, the performance could be hard to tell whether the dance is portraying a story by the way of the gestures and background color or props, but when understood, it's is strikingly amazing. 35 "When kabuki performer stomps down wooden runway to make a spectacular exit from the stage, an attendant beats wooden blocks against a board to accentuate the impact as each foot makes contact with the floor. Most kabuki drama started early in the morning till dusk, which is a long run throughout the day and sometimes without break. Kabuki made no rigid distinction between dance and dramas because it is associated with words, music, spectacle, and movements, altogether into unidentified passion theatrical conventions. 36 Since some plays are too long, it was required to be cut to suit the time limit and the number of kabuki actors, which is to make the play easier to approach so it wont be of any problem to the audience and the performers. ³⁷ The performers, rather than the plays themselves, have always been the focus of kabuki because it was entertaining to watch how the performer moves about.³⁸ Sometimes the plot or the storyline of the play doesn't interest some audience but the dance rather is more of the point why some people attended the play.

Influence on Kabuki

As soon as Kabuki dance tradition was acknowledged by society, it was improved to make the dance more alluring. During the beginning of the sixteenth century, Kabuki dance tradition began to change to adapt to new ideas. Ichikawa Danjuro IX is a supreme artist who influenced Kabuki with his character. He was a great actor who brought fort a new outburst of spirit on the Kabuki and did a great deal to change the social position of the actor and changed the place of the Kabuki theatre on a higher plane of respect. Beside Ichikawa Danjuro IX, there are others who influenced kabuki greatly. "Taisho [era (1912-26)] was an era in which further innovation in the theater were to the fore, innovations which gained the attention of a noted kabuki actor, Ichikawa Sadanji II (1880-1940), who introduced a considerably body of new style plays into the Kabuki repertoire". One of the huge effects on the Kabuki was the bombing in Tokyo where kabuki was mostly performed and took place. In May 1945, the bombing in Tokyo puts a hug effect on Kabuki, causing the style of life of the people to change and brought the Kabuki dance tradition into a newer stage with better ideas to make it more realistic. During the period WWII, the kabuki actors faced many difficulties, but they didn't give up on Kabuki and continued to practice Kabuki after recovery. One other major problem that also impacted Kabuki greatly was economic problems, which it prevented the Kabuki from being the theatre of the people. During that time, younger actors were unable to make their living by their profession because performing in Kabuki did not make a pleasant and comfortable living at that time. Although working as kabuki actors for a living was not in the slightest profitable, the actors did not give up because the man

in the street and the young actor were essential to kabuki because without them, Kabuki theatre can no longer exist.³⁹

The Development of Kabuki

The earlier kabuki was done almost without special effect such as extended sound; in fact it was not quite entertaining with its adverse effect so today in order for Kabuki actor to make enough for a living, they have to have more lucrative sources such as cinema. Kabuki continuously grows from strength to strength instead of falling back. Kabuki today is greatly known as a theatrical art that is a combination of music, dance, and drama. However in the early days, Kabuki was not well known internationally due to the fact that it was mostly performed in Japan and not anywhere else. Presently, it is played as an occasion for the company outing entertainment and parties such as birthday party, weddings etc. ⁴⁰ Present kabuki is highly considered as a classical forms of Dance Theater. But considering it as classical doesn't mean that it is somewhat old but rather by being endorsed by powerful forces in the society. ⁴¹ In the past, kabuki was played for the public, which could was affordable, but modern kabuki theatre in Japan is very expensive since it became so popular, an ordinary person cannot afford to buy a ticket to go see it. ⁴²

The dance style of Kabuki today is very elegant for the women's role, but for the men's role, the dances are more with stomp and heavy gestures. Voice is also provided as background music or a lead with the body movements. Before Kabuki became drastically changing, the movement was of a flow of gestures but kabuki today's dance form is quite similar to the body movement of ballet. [And] the "reality" that kabuki

offers is a theatrical construct, a selective assembly of images that have much in common with the carefully crafted movement sequences of ballet. The Kabuki drama is also kind of like the play of Shakespeare the way of it's appearance but kabuki have a more astounding feature. Kabuki actors make their performances so realistic as they convey sorrow by not just weeping but by showing tears. They also follow a rhythmical path with their gesture that gives out a very passionate and emotional touch/sense to the play.

Kabuki Dance Tradition Style

Kabuki and other Japanese dance were not performed in America until 1954. The first troop to performed was Azuma kabuki; the first trouped of bona fide Japanese dancers ever to appear in America, On February 18th 1954. Although Kabuki was known across countries and not performed yet in these countries, many spectators in New York mistakenly assume Azuma Tokuho, also a famous dancer, when they saw her performances, as the fabulous Kabuki when she was not. Azuma Kabuki, which derived form one of the dancer, Azuma Tokuho, gave out a great impression of Japanese dance due to its unique and beautiful style. Azuma Tokuho was the attraction of her group because of her mysterious and traditional style. Her dance almost resemblance Kabuki because of it's sense of control and elegant gesture that even words can't describe. In actuality, Kabuki dance is an intense dance that require energy and enthusiasm because the dance gestures are very dance and sometimes very smooth. The Kabuki performers did not put a limitation to time and spaces when they do their performances. They move

their body in a matter of ways that take up all the spaces they have while time is not the focus of the play. The gestures such as the feet pounding are part of dance that comes along with the music, which is still the same in present day.

In the movie, *Memoir of a Geisha*, the dance in which Sakura performed was similar to Kabuki. In fact, in the past, although women were not allowed to take part in kabuki play, some geisha still acted in Kabuki plays, which is not just with acting, but dancing as well. Suzushi Hanayagi and Suzusetsu Hanayagi are noted interpreters of Kabuki dance and Jiuta-mai (also is a form of Japanese dances tradition). The dance performed by Suzusetsu Hanayagi, a teacher and performer based in Osaka and Tokyo during the beginning/since years of year 2000, at the Asia Society's Lila Acheson Wallace Auditorium is intensely communication dance of the measured pain and delight of a woman looking back on a long, full life from a new distance. Her dance movements/gesture has meaning with which it referred to. "A bowed figure, she rose gradually to a standing position to suggest that life - almost to relive it, given Suzusetsu Hanayagi's artistry - through such minimal means as a spiraling of the body, some manipulation of a fan, a few stamps and turns and the extension of her arms." "49

The Kabuki dance today may consist of slow moving body gestures that follow the rhythm of the music played or sometimes just by how the performer performed.⁵⁰ Although many Kabuki performances consist of body movement/dance, many people do not consider it as a dance style. "While all kabuki can be likened to dance because of its emphasis on body movement, the Japanese have a special name for plays in which the narrative element is less important might be called pure dance." Unlike most of the modern dance today, the movement of the body in kabuki directed down from the waist

toward the floor. And with the heavy costume the kabuki dancers are to wear would make their feet concealed to the audiences. Today's kabuki plays are not classified as dance pieces although it is distinguished by varying styles of body movements. One of the most famous acting/dancing is Arogoto, or "rough stuff," which is a bravura style of acting that originated in Edo in the seventieth century, provided a profound attraction to Kabuki. "They speak their lines in a high-pitched, bombastic manner, the louder the better; at peak moments they shout out nonsense syllables". ⁵¹ Today's kabuki is followed up by the ideas of shouting and speaking, which intensify the movements and gestures.

CONCLUSION

Early Kabuki and present day Kabuki are both similar in the way of the body gestures since the foot stomping is still used; however, present day Kabuki performer are more flexible when they move their bodies since kabuki dances in modern day is more advanced. Another difference between modern Kabuki and the earlier kabuki of the early sixteenth century is that men play women roles in both acting and dancing. Even young boys were not allowed to be in kabuki because it was banned soon after the women were forbidden to take part. It's ironic that Okuni, the founder of Kabuki, was a female and yet female today were forbidden to act in kabuki. One other difference between today's Kabuki and earlier Kabuki is that the stages today make the kabuki performances more exciting than the earlier Kabuki because in the early kabuki, it was performed outdoors where the weather was a problem, so indoor became a new idea for Kabuki, making it known as kabuki dance theatre. Although WWII and revolution came, Kabuki did not came to an end when the conditions of Tokyo and other town fell into chaos. It continued to develop because the performer did not give up on it for it one of the most celebrated entertainments in Japan and grew to be even more popular today.

Endnotes

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         <sup>17</sup> Gerald Jonas, (Teacher's resource Guide) Dancing: The Pleasure, Power, and Art of
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<sup>39</sup> Scott, 40, 41, 42, 43.
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⁴⁰ Scott, 43, 43, 17, 43

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⁵⁰ Grauer ⁵¹ Jonas, 145, 146, 147.

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ASSESSMENT FORM (for examiner use only)

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		ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL First Second
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General assessment criteria	A Research question	2. 2
Refer to the general guidelines.	B Approach	2 3
	C Analysis/interpretation	3 4
	D Argument/evaluation	3 4
	E Conclusion	2
	F Abstract	2 2
	G Formal presentation	2 3
	H Holistic judgement	2 4
Subject assessment criteria	J	
Refer to the subject guidelines. Not all of the following criteria	K .	
will apply to all subjects; use only the criteria which apply to	L	2
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