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**The Political Drama
Of Howard Brenton**

C19V UP

**A Thesis Submitted to the
Department of English
Faculty of Arts
Ain Shams University**

By

Abeer Nasr Abd El Wahed

In Fulfilment

*Of The Requirements of the Degree of
Master of Arts*

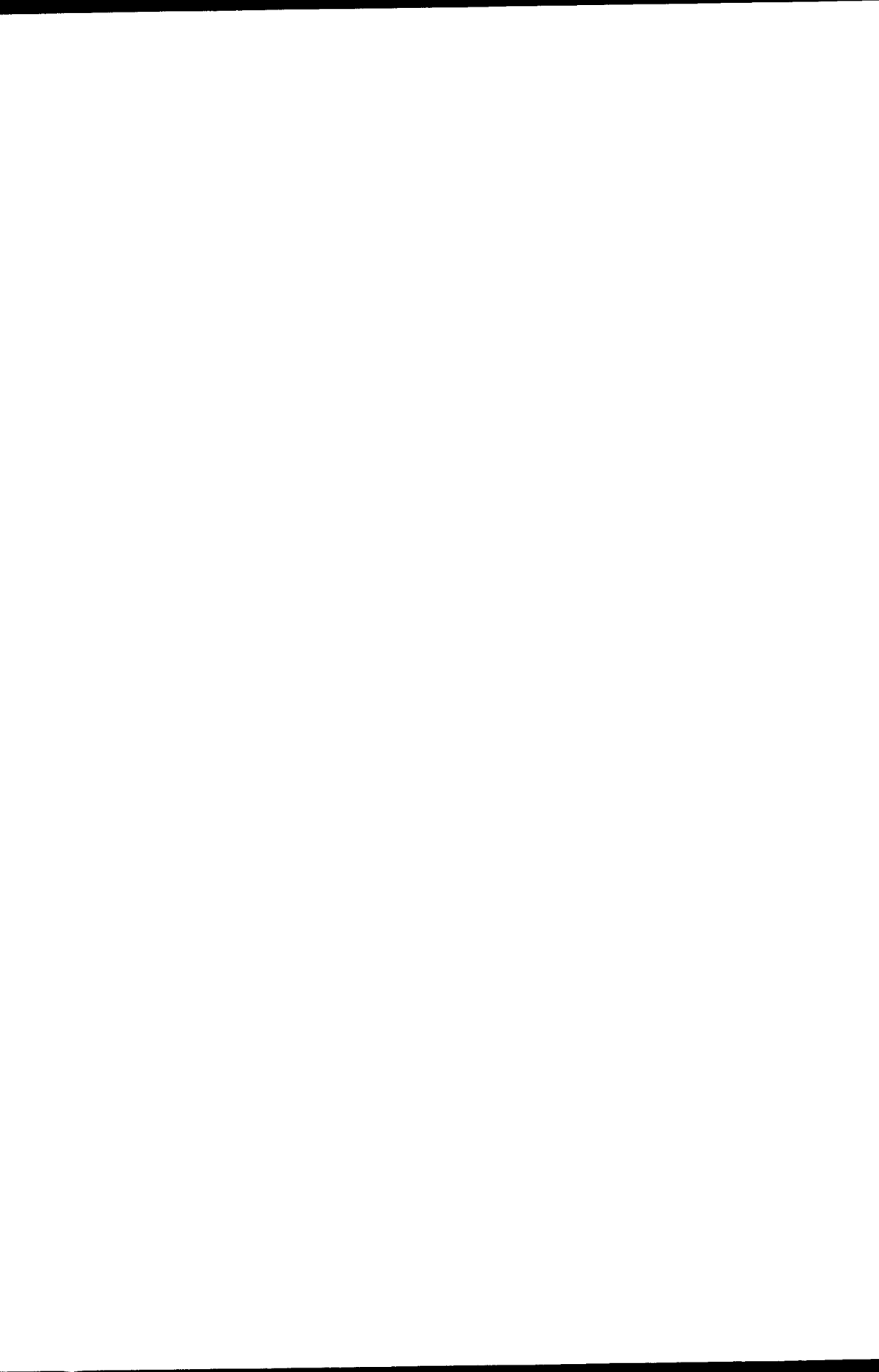
Under the Supervision of

Professor Abdalla Abdel Hafez Metwalli

And

Dr. Mustafa Riad

2002



DEDICATION

*To those who put me "on the right track" and made
this work possible, I dedicate my thesis.*

Acknowledgements

*I would like to thank **Professor Abdalla Metwalli** for his help and encouragement that had a great effect in the improvement of this work.*

*I would like also to thank **Dr. Mustafa Riad** for his help, advice and providing me with material that was very beneficial to this work.*

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PREFACE

Of all the new playwrights, Howard Brenton occupies a distinguished position. His roots are firmly in the fringe. What made Brenton a so called fringe writer as he ironically identifies, was the poverty of means, i.e. very little money was available. Thirty shillings was the average budget for each play. Brenton began to associate himself with a group whose aims were very much for developing Fringe movement. They made a complete departure from traditional forms, and their target audience at least attempted to cross class boundaries. Working circumstances like these offered Brenton a complete exciting freedom of ideas and of methods of approach.

It was in 1968, that Brenton joined the Portable Theatre. He has brought the shock tactics of the fringe into mainstream theatres, so his plays written for the Portable Theatre aim to shock and disturb. Brenton does not accept the basis of society at all. He supports revolution rather than evolution. In a word, he revolutionized theatre. His plays do not respect hallowed social taboos on open discussion of sex, religion and the establishment.

On one hand it was the body of Brenton's work that was at once intensive and diversified that placed Brenton in the forefront of the new writings. On the other hand, it prevented him from being accepted by the establishment. Actually, the greatest difficulty that any researcher has to face is the rare of criticism. When the writer of the thesis was in London, struggling to find references or books about Brenton, there was an incident that she has often remembered. After a long time of search, she asked a Blackwell Librarian to check any references about Brenton. He raised his bushy eyebrows in surprise and answered: "Howard Brenton. Why

Howard Brenton ?!" He went on saying how shocking the plays were and how out of favour with the establishment he was.

It is not surprising then that John Bull, and Richard Boon's books about Brenton have been a valuable source of the study of his work. They both concentrate on the full length stage plays, they discuss his best known work, and represent his central preoccupations as a dramatist. Their greatest debt of gratitude is to Brenton himself as he has been most generous in allowing them access to draft and unpublished work.

The writer divides the thesis into three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter One mainly deals with criminal violence as a symptom of social injustice, which is explicitly explored in three of his plays, *Revenge* 1969, *Christie in Love* 1969, and *Gum and Goo*, 1969. Chapter Two studies Brenton's political drama staged during the seventies. In this chapter, there is a discussion of *Magnificence* 1973, *The Churchill Play* 1974, and *Weapons of Happiness* 1976. This chapter deals with Brenton's dramatic and political perspectives. Chapter Three deals with Brenton's recycling and adaptation. In his recycling Brenton takes liberties with the Shakespearian text to drive home his re-interpretation of the play in the light of his convictions and his own cultural and social background. He took the basic structure of Shakespeare plays and transposed it into a contemporary version of Britain.

This study deals with plays written by Brenton from 1969 to 1984, as this period proves to be the richest in his dramatic career. The writer of the thesis is looking ahead for other researches about Brenton, as he is surely the most prolific of all the contemporary dramatists. In a word the thesis is only a step on the way.