

Embodied VulnerAbilities in Literature and Film

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Embodying Gendered Precarity in Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* (2015) and *In the Pipeline* (2010)

Susana Nicolás Román

Introduction

Following Judith Butler (2009), precarity as a politically induced condition may activate forms of individual or collective resistance correlating with class, racial, and/or gender identities. In 2012, she designated *precarity* as “the dimension of politics” that “exposes our sociality” (148). This term encompasses the situations “in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (Butler 2009, 25). The condition of precarity indexes a vulnerability that emerges when people face the precarious conditions in which they live. Butler’s distinction between ontological and situational vulnerability, i.e., between the vulnerability that is a universal condition shared by all forms of life (precariousness) and the vulnerabilities that are embedded in specific structures of power (precarity), interestingly connects the two concepts by stating that “precarity exposes our sociality, the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency” (2012, 148).

Recently, vulnerability has been understood “as an ontological characteristic of social relations, as well as a ground for politics and ethics” (Bracke 2016, 69). This notion attempts to reconstruct an ethical condition of human life which addresses the question of social transformation. This chapter explores the concepts of precarity and vulnerability as critical instruments in their common questioning of social structures and transformative power (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016; Butler 2011, 2012). The representation of vulnerability in contemporary theater makes the intersection of these two conceptualizations more visible and exploratory for the audience due to the inherent correspondence between theater and the real world. The (in)visibility of gendered vulnerability has recently raised a productive debate by turning spectators into active participants in the process of acknowledging ethical agency and responsibility. Brené Brown (2012) states that vulnerability is shown to be the

catalyst for courage, compassion, and connection and is “the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences” (11). That encounter constitutes the audience as an embodied form of performed humanity beyond its mere aesthetic dimension. As Patrick Duggan (2017) explains, “theatre and performance bring ‘us’ (makers/thinkers/audiences) into an ethical relationship with one another, both with the ‘staged’ images and those represented in them, as well as with the concerns raised by those representations” (43). Exploiting the example of Gary Owen’s dramaturgy, this chapter contends that the literary structures in theatrical texts imagine the recognition of shared uncertainty as an elusive but potentially transformative feature of precarious living. It will be argued that cultural standards, social change, and the nature of individual-social relations are all significant aspects through which the plays explore gendered precarity and vulnerability issues by emphasizing the stage as the perfect location for these reflections.

This chapter therefore begins by outlining arguments about vulnerability and precarity, focusing in particular on the role of social responsibility articulated by a representative number of authors. The potential for resistance that I focus on is that the possibility of expanding the precarious *we* might produce a shared recognition of social vulnerability. In the second part of this chapter, I turn to two examples of contemporary British theater to argue that these texts illustrate and illuminate the complexity of precarity/vulnerability ambivalence displayed in the theoretical framework. Taken as a whole, the vulnerable characters analyzed in these plays will be examined as illustrations of precarity in contemporary British society.

Vulnerability, Precarity, and Theater

Vulnerability, gender, and precarity are susceptible to be reinforced by means of their co-construction. The countless fields of study, methodologies, and ways of using the concept of vulnerability vary to such an extent that it raises a critical question concerning the analytical power of the concept since almost anything or anyone can be defined as vulnerable (Herring 2016). Kate Brown (2017) distinguishes between approaches that focus on either innate vulnerability or situational vulnerability. The former tends to position certain groups of people in permanent risk situations, whereas situational vulnerability refers to the specific circumstances in which it occurs. In this line, vulnerability has been categorized either by particular characteristics of people, such as age, sex, or disability; or by situational aspects like social, economic, and living conditions (Virokannas, Liuski, and Kuronen, 2018).

In addition, both Peadar Kirby (2006) and Marie Christine Vikström (2006) considered vulnerability to be a multi-dimensional concept that

might contribute to capturing individual and structural aspects of poverty and the factors leading to it. Thus, Vikström related vulnerability to poverty and to environmental and socioeconomic factors concurring during an individual's life cycle. She saw vulnerability as a condition limiting individual agency and providing opportunities to act and negotiate as well. As Alyson Cole (2016) indicates, some vulnerability scholars embrace the "ambivalent potentiality" of vulnerability (Cavarero 2007; Gilson 2011) and reconceive vulnerability not only as "a condition that limits us, but one that can enable us" (Gilson 2011, 310). It is in this sense that Cole explains the importance of classifying the processes that stereotype victims. Hence, the analysis of depictions of vulnerability in the selected plays will help elucidate the distinction or opposition between passive victims and active vulnerable subjects.

When focusing on gender, different authors identify the significance of women's social and cultural position in producing vulnerability. Numerous studies of poverty and social participation regard women in a vulnerable position and at risk of social exclusion, particularly in impoverished environments (Lombe and Sherraden 2008; Trani et al. 2010). Thus, vulnerability has been seen as being related to women's general weaker and less protected economic situation. However, vulnerability has been recently discussed in relation to tangible social and economic situations or as individual experiences, particularly in contexts of cultural discourses connected to women and femininity. In this way, vulnerability frames the conjunction between poverty and gender inequality as part of the complex picture of the interpretation of the term.

Following Guy Standing's (2011) definition in *The Precariat*, precarity is identified as a labor market phenomenon that appears at a specific post-Fordist moment largely associated with changing economic landscapes and intensifying trajectories of neoliberalism, globalization, and mobility. Within this configuration, precarity "is conceived as both a condition and as a possible point of mobilisation among those experiencing precarity" (Waite 2009, 416). It thus allows a new political subjectivity of contemporary social transformation (Berardi 2009; Bright 2016; Standing 2011, 2014) to be constituted and a new political force, the precariat, to be announced. In this discussion, I turn to the work of Butler, whose writings on precarious life are increasingly influencing the discipline of theater studies. Firstly, it is relevant to consider Butler's thought about the ideological reflection of dominant social structures. By assuming the potential of necessary conditions, Butler comprises the political demand to address austerity to be directed toward the responsible institutions (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016).

In a similar vein, Isabell Lorey (2015) approaches precarity and precarization as instruments of hegemonic domination that might

reconfigure new ways of maintaining human lives based on shared precariousness and that might emphasize reshaping alliances of resistance. Butler's and Lorey's examination of precarity considers the interconnection between political and affective encounters by introducing the "affective politics of the performative", i.e., "[w]e only act when we are moved to act, and we are moved by something that affects us from the outside, from elsewhere, from the lives of others, imposing a surfeit that we act from and upon" (Butler 2012, 136). This dynamic reaction might be promisingly activated from the stage by recognizing a shared state of vulnerability and assuming the urgency to act.

Marissia Fragkou (2019) acknowledges the dynamic resurgence of politics in British theater representing precarity as an addressed zeitgeist. She approaches precarity as a theatrical trope which carries the potential to reactivate the capacity of audiences to understand identity politics and responsibility for the lives of others. This study claims for the relevance of contemporary plays to examine precarity and its nexus with political, affective, and vulnerable intersections. Mireia Aragay and Martin Middeke (2017) also discussed that contemporary British theater epitomizes its present prospects to the full by reflecting upon the category and the episteme of precariousness, and by turning spectators into active participants in the process of negotiating ethical agency.

The tendency to connect precarity and performance explicitly was evident in 2013 after the premiere of playwright Chris Dunkley's *The Precariat*, a play deeply influenced by the emergence of this social phenomenon that even included a short preface written by Standing himself, the well-known market economist who coined the term. Yet, the connection between these sociopolitical situations and contemporary theater is not new in the British context. The political drama of the 1960s or the more recent *in-yer-face* theater of the 1990s demonstrates the particular emphasis on the association of politics and plays in Great Britain. Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) understands that theater may render "visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception" by deliberately adhering to the relevant concerns of the contemporary time (185).

Lastly, this chapter engages with the newly gained ontological depth of vulnerability that might enable active responses toward others by fostering resistance and agency in the very vulnerable bodies. This transforming notion of vulnerability in a new critical frame can serve as a strategic position to resist the structural oppression of vulnerable subjects (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016; Butler and Yancy 2020). Within this theoretical context, the selected plays will be explored over the overarching question of whether the theatrical agency offers any active response or political demand through the depiction of vulnerable subjects. The chapter offers a reflection on the thematization of vulnerability in precarious

societies by exploring the causes and consequences of the unbalanced welfare state through Owen's texts.

Gary Owen's Dramaturgy

In recent years, several innovative young playwrights have depicted the contours of the vulnerable precariat as a newly emerging social class. Among these writers, Gary Owen stands as one of the most original voices in Welsh contemporary drama. In June 2015, he premiered his play *Violence and Son* at the Royal Court directed by Hamish Pirie, which earned the favor of critics and audiences alike. In the same year *Iphigenia in Splott* was first performed at the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff and received the Best New Play and the UK Theatre Award in 2016. A fiercely moral writer with a Philosophy degree, Owen finds inspiration in his real experiences that stretch between realism and imagination. Beyond autobiographical shades, this retelling of the Greek myth of Iphigenia subverts the depiction of the innocent classic heroine killed for the sake of her nation's war effort by making of her the spokeswoman of precarity in 21st-century England. In the form of experimental political drama, the play vindicates socioeconomic concerns that marginalize vulnerable elements of society, subverting the fatality of myths and its associated position of victimhood.

Some years before his tremendous success, Owen wrote *In the Pipeline* (2010), which articulates the sense of loss and belonging through three monologues delivered directly to the audience. In this play, he constructs characters that are fully rounded and diverse with their own distinctive language. Environmentalist shades capture the political implications in the closure of a power station and the consequences for its workers. The play explores emotions that recognize the dignity of human beings through an understated claim of resistance.

As fictional texts, *Iphigenia in Splott* and *In The Pipeline* are clearly part of what Simon During (2015) has described as "the contemporary literature of precarity," which he finds to be "a literature of inconclusive illuminations" used to imagine powerful connections between the characters and the real world (37). Owen immerses audiences in the experience of precarity and vulnerability through emotional appeals to identify with these others without normalizing the process.

Iphigenia in Splott, Effie and the Angry Lumpenprecariat

Iphigenia in Splott contemporarily revisits the Greek myth of Iphigenia in post-austerity Britain. Effie, the protagonist, is a left-behind, isolated

individual living in an industrialized and impoverished city in the south of Wales. She lives through a series of temporary jobs, home insecurity, and out of the health system benefits in the welfare state era. When she gets pregnant after a one-night stand of love with Lee, she acknowledges the impossibility to form a family with him since he is a married man, and conscientiously decides to sacrifice her future economic security by assuming single motherhood in precarious conditions. When her premature baby dies in an ill-equipped ambulance while they are being transferred from one hospital to another because there were not enough beds in special care, she is guaranteed several hundred thousand pounds in compensation. Effie's angry monologue reflects upon the need to fight against austerity social policies and to make society accountable for the well-being of the most vulnerable.

The entire play is cast as the expression of this singular female subject, which falls within Standing's (2012) definition of the detached *lumpenproletariat* as "victim of being in the precariat who have fallen out of even that group into social illnesses, drug addiction and chronic anomie, listless, passive, waiting to die" (589). The disintegration of this gendered subject's inner world is expressed by formal ruptures meant to disturb the audience. In doing this, Owen invites the spectators to participate in Effie's narrative of abuse by ultimately addressing epistemological problems and merging fictional plots with questions of ethical responsibility and political agency.

Effie's monologue (one hour-long on a bare stage) opens as she aims to agitate the audience and disdainfully challenge their prejudices: "Yeah I know it's a shock. / But you lot, every single one / You're in my debt. / And tonight—boys and girls, ladies and gents—/ I've come to collect" (Owen 2016, 1). Her accusations of passivity to the audience initiate the play by an implicit call for action not just poignantly attacking but as an "ethical solicitation" (Butler 2012, 135). This defiant and aggressive attitude holds up an unconventional mirror to the spectators, who are there to understand the precarious nature of her life conditions as intrinsically entwined with the political and social dynamics of the system.

In this play, Owen also advocates the important interdependency of social class and environmental precarity. On the play's front pages, there is a brief description of the precarious district the characters live in, which is intensified by Nan, Effie's grandmother, and her nostalgic recollection of the neighborhood's better times when she was younger: "Shops are gone, bingo hall burned, pubs closed, doctors shut, STAR centre getting pulled down and more flats thrown up" (Owen 2016, 250). This consideration suggests the proliferation of marginal social groups living in precarious conditions worsened by environmental degradation. After spending her

fateful night with Lee, Effie also reflects upon the neighborhood in the following terms:

All the massive factories like crashed spaceships, the metal mountains, train tracks from nowhere, cranes and pipes and chimney stacks, and it's scary, but a couple of gypsy ponies find me [...] When the fuck did that happen? It is the worst beach in the world, mind. Strips of metal, car wheels, half a toilet, whole walls crumpled onto the sand, concrete slabs cracked.

(Owen 2016, 229–270)

Along the play, Effie experiences the four As identified by Standing in the precariat model, i.e., anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation. Her frustration at the seemingly blocked avenues for advancing a meaningful life along with a sense of deprivation fully intertwines her character in a taxonomy of constant anger, persistent anxiety, and situational vulnerability. Peter Simonsen (2021) points out that her fury at the beginning of the play undergoes a transformation near its tragic conclusion from revolt to anger at the very end. By depicting Effie's precarity as the consequence of her relationship with other characters, Owen, like Butler (2009), seems to acknowledge that as human beings, we are contingent on the other and to each other. Effie's situation of anomie does not derive from her sole responsibility. Being a single mother, jobless, and unprotected, the protagonist finds herself recognized in the very assignation to a subordinate position. When she realizes the impossibility of forming a family, she feels alienated from others and finds herself trapped again in the recognition of her own self and consequent vulnerability. As Butler (1997) suggests:

it is not simply that one requires the recognition of the other and that a form of recognition is conferred through subordination, but rather that one is dependent on power for one's very formation, that that formation is impossible without dependency, and that the posture of the adult subject consists precisely in the denial and re-enactment of this dependency.

(9)

Effie's deviation from traditional families reinforces her impossibility to identify with narratives of normalcy, thus anxiously pursuing places and relationships in which she finds herself empowered through a sense of belonging. As Dorothy Bottrell (2009) explains, "young people forge resilient identities by challenging labels of disorder and seeking positive relationships and health resources within available contexts" (325). Aware

of her impossibility to fit, Effie decides to protect Lee's family, his daughter in particular, recognizing the vulnerable other as well: "And every step away from him hurts but I can take it. So I do take it. For that little girl" (Owen 2016, 283). At this point in the story, Effie appears as a woman who precariously stands between visibility and invisibility, presence and absence. She remains as an evanescent figure retreating from her initial impulse and transcending her own personal interests for the benefit of others. As she decides to have the baby, she experiences this decision as transformative, which might help her out of her vulnerable condition. She then proceeds through resistance, assuming the agential position advocated by Butler (2009). Yet, although it is possible to identify the potentiality of empowered vulnerability in Effie's response, the promising realization of a better life is unfortunately unveiled impossible as the events in the play unfold.

Effie's lament that "[n]othing good can come from living like this" does not only voice her individual economic or social precarity but the effects that the degradation of the health system have for the gendered vulnerable. One of the most interesting critiques in Owen's play denounces the inferior position of the marginalized precariat in their access to the assistance and resources of the British National Health System. The play discusses hospital negligence openly, and depicts economic compensation as a comfortable solution regarding social responsibility. Stingingly, Effie addresses the audience:

Your baby gets sick, she gets well / Because of me. Your mum gets ill /
She gets healed because of me and still: / You see me, first pissed thing
wandering home / And all you think is, stupid slag / Nasty skank.
(Owen 2016, 306)

So, when Effie declines the compensation, she does not do it for the benefit of the good, but rather as a performance of how her empowered constructive anger rejects the system's attempt to buy her silence and compliance (Simonsen 2021).

In a recent interview, Owen criticizes austerity and the short-term costs of this governmental economic plan for the precariat: "People [in Splott] are very, very dependent on public services—libraries, community centres, Sure Start—and all these things are being threatened. People really need the state, and the state is withdrawing" (quoted in Trueman 2016). This neediness on the state might also favor the negative stigmatization of these people as dependent on the state asked to surrender their autonomy. As discussed above, the austere conditions of the most vulnerable in Owen's play might be interpreted as the ultimate materialization of institutionalized economy constraining possibilities for individuals' autonomy.

Yet, the theatrical space of the play reconfigures Butler's notion of precariousness and becomes an instance of ethical responsibility in the light of precarity. Effie's experience indirectly addresses the "task for politics" signaling the nexus between vulnerability and precarity that Butler (2012) advocated. In a similar vein, Fineman's (2010) thought on a more collective and institutionally shared notion of responsibility is also explored in *Iphigenia in Splott* by reinterpreting dependency and placing some obligation on state and market institutions.

In the Pipeline, Joan and the Precariat Dreamer

Originally a radio play, *In the Pipeline* is structured around the monologues of three characters—Andrew, Dai, and Joan—who are caught in the path of a massive liquid gas line in the port of Milford Haven, located in the countryside of west Wales. This powerful piece of theater engages the audience with its characters and their problems by exposing the consequences of corporate business decisions for ordinary people. These monologues also unveil the specific forms of vulnerability experienced by these different characters: Andrew reveals his insecurity in dealing with others, especially women; Dai displays the trauma he suffers due to the loss of his livelihood and the vanishing chance of getting another job at his age; and Joan experiences the loss of her identity out of the environment in which she was born. Despite their differences, the characters share a common feeling of encapsulation and social alienation that can be traced back to the decisions of the company owners and the representatives of the British local government in the area.

In the Pipeline covers the perpetuation of insecure working and living conditions by illustrating the effects of precarity and the process of social change in a clear argument about the link between precarious jobs and social inequalities. It has been argued that the exclusion from working life might be seen "as [a sign] of an exclusion process," ultimately deriving into "resignation, feelings of injustice, loss of belonging and integration into a reliable context" (Tschöll 2014, 85). In this scenario, precarity is inextricably connected to environmental echoes and the conditions of industrial capitalism, which Owen's play describes through the precarious situation of not only the local population, but also of the total transformation of the idyllic Welsh environment with the building of a gas plant.

Todd (2008) has pointed out that it is not affluence, but insecurity what has shaped the precarious lives of the working class in Britain since the 1960s. As the working classes are filtered out of the education system, jobs rather than long careers are a more likely temporal issue. Unconsciously reprising the affective repertoire of their collective past while at the same time being severed from any conscious memory of it, the characters in this

play seem unable to contextualize the sense of estrangement in which their history and geography apparently strands them. While their responses to their individual and collective situation range from fury to bucolic evasion, their reactions seem to support the idea that local communities were delayed in a kind of compulsive, melancholic attachment to un-mourned trauma, and that any sense of futurity has been abandoned. Dai's statement, "[w]e were gonna have to sell ourselves," draws heavily upon a near dystopian future epitomizing a sort of Hobbesian state. *In the Pipeline* elaborates the recognition of precarity as a lived experience of class, which according to Skegg (2011) conditions the possibilities for the production of personhood and their emergence from the legitimation—conceptually, symbolically, and legally—of capital through property relations (499). Interestingly, Skegg (2011) criticizes the correlation between “habits of precarity” and “legitimation” (583) in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Indeed, the characters in the play exemplify these concepts and acknowledge a condition of existential precarity by representing dispossessed subjects who respond through acceptance rather than resistance. The stories depicted can be interpreted as representations of the complex condition of contemporary precarity, as Butler (2012) and Lorey (2015) understand it: a condition implying the painful experience of socio-ontological vulnerability and the possibility of forming connections with others who are similarly insecure. Even if the monologues seem to be structured independently, the re-imagining of moments of connection and mutual vulnerability suggests the ambivalent potential of experiencing precarity (Hogg and Simonsen 2020). The shared experience of these characters might provide a strategy to overcome the uncertainty inherent to these situations and articulate new forms of resistance.

Owen also addresses environmental issues in his understanding of shared vulnerability. Joan, the only female character in the play, captures this environmental questioning with a dreamy approach. In the following excerpt, the connection between labor and environmental precarity lays the ground for rethinking the concepts of community and identity: “Then when you woke, you'd look around you, and recognize the land, but not recognize how everything looked” (Owen 2016, 37).

In contrast with the aggressive vindications exploited by Effie in *Iphigenia in Splott*, this play makes a poetic depiction of the contemporary economic policies as the haunting executor of negative environmental changes. Owen's poetic space triggers the search of spectators for new ethical paradigms through reflection about the social situation. In line with Butler's vision (2012), Joan experiences the combination of both ontological and situational vulnerability as power structures (gas industries and capitalist globalization) extend the innate vulnerable condition (Brown 2017) of Joan's life and ultimately embrace an expansive understanding of

the concept of vulnerability. Joan's monologue closes with the idea to make the audience reflect upon the correspondence between individual and institutional responsibility. Yet, she also embodies the potentially resistant subject displaying her capacity to adapt by reconfiguring apparent weakness into strength. For Joan, poetry and imagination are structures of resistance and adaptation to the unexpected situation. As the only female voice in the play, she attempts to grasp the recognition of her identity against the uncontrolled events of her life through evoking reveries. The transitions between reality and dreams are delineated as a potential act of resistance to overcome her vulnerability.

Modern technological societies usually mobilize static responses to the aggressions exerted by the system. Thus, it is extremely difficult to resist said aggressions, especially for workers who are forced to bear the most intense consequences of precarious insecurity. Interestingly, Joan resists despite her fragility and vulnerability by yearning for a more natural world. At the end of the play, the audience is invited to apprehend the call for collective understanding in contrast to Joan's isolation: "No people to stop, and look around, and see how beautiful it is. It seems such a waste" (Owen 2016, 42). Joan's vulnerability is exacerbated by her feeling of loneliness as part of the performative account of a passive, non-agential society.

In the Pipeline is a highly intertextual play in which both cultural memory and collective identities are presented in an ambivalent aesthetic framework: individually and communally oriented. Hence, Owen puts forth structural oppression, in line with Nixon (2011), as the cause of the unequal distribution of vulnerability, which in turn is attached to uncertain life conditions and forms of environmental precarity. Joan's approach to the circumstances is not to drift vaguely, but intensely, by way of poetical dreams and creativity encountering disappointment and validating fantasy as a life-sustaining defense against the attritions of ordinary labor precarity. For her, the reconfiguration of security and stability seem only possible in her world of daydreams.

Conclusion

While human vulnerability is universal, all human beings are positioned differently toward it. Individual understanding of vulnerability varies not only according to the experiences that each person lives but also according to the quantity of resources we manage and the transformative potential we adhere to. This consideration offers the nexus between precarity studies and vulnerability issues underlying the present chapter. Owen's texts fall into the category of dramaturgy that both thematizes vulnerability and incorporates it into the fabric of the poetics of the plays—*analogons* of

real ordinary lives in a precarious world by openly depicting causes and consequences of the unbalanced welfare state. In these plays, the gendered precariat and the vulnerable speak up of their struggling moments to demand that the audience unites around one collective set of goals or to activate alternative individual strategies to create social change.

Owen meditates on the kind of interactions produced between the state and individuals and its (failing) responsibility to recognize them. In this idea thus lies the precariousness and the vulnerability of being and existence, but also the fundamental ethical responsibility for the other that is inscribed into community as Being-with (Aragay and Middeke 2017). Human beings exist in a cohabited frame that cannot ethically assume the privilege of some groups over others. When analyzing vulnerability, attention should be turned toward vulnerable life situations, social processes, society, and its institutions, including social work and the entire welfare service system (Fineman 2010; Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016). What I find most important engages with the focus on the social processes that generate vulnerability and state responsibility. On this basis, the plays analyzed portray that “vulnerability analysis must consider both individual position and institutional relationships” (Fineman 2010, 269).

The examples of Effie and Joan on stage dramatize the circumstances of the vulnerable in the vindication that the state must be more supportive and eliminate the disruptions of inequality. These texts acknowledge that groups of people are still overly privileged while others are disadvantaged with few or no opportunities for a better life. The audience is then asked to apprehend the realities displayed in the texts and the subsequent ability to respond to precarious situations through resistance and adaptation. Thus, *Iphigenia in Splott* and *In the Pipeline* transgress and painfully renegotiate certain moral boundaries “where *responsibility* meets *response-ability*” (Lehmann 2006, 185; emphasis in the original). Gendered and other social forms of precarity do not require the sole assistance of the state but of “a society able to define what normative and legal limitations will apply to both methods and modes of individual accumulation” (Fineman 2013, 19). Within this discursive context, the selected plays have been examined because they epitomize vulnerable characters in precarious societies prompting any response of resistance from the audience. This analysis reads Owen’s plays as depictions of “vulnerable subjects” compelling governmental and legal responsiveness as both ethical and political subjects (Fineman 2013). Effie and Joan do not illustrate passive women but exemplify inequality in a society that systematically constitutionalizes vulnerability. Formally, the use of long monologues displayed in the plays forcefully transmits the feeling of isolation of the characters. Ultimately, the two plays foreground the distinctive verbalization and recognition of the shared vulnerability under an intrinsically precarious society to

advocate the necessity of (re)structuring social bonds of mutual cohabitation and responsibility.

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