

Vulnerability as potential: The search for agency in Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk* (2016).

Departing from Agamben's idea of potentiality, I propose to explore this notion in connection to the critical term of vulnerability. Although the notion of vulnerability has a more negative initial connotation than potentiality, I believe both critical terms share the idea of transformation, breaking out and agency.

The notion of vulnerability has been traditionally defined as weakness, danger or psychological and physical exposure. However, more contemporary critical approaches have underlined the positive angle that vulnerability also encloses. In *Vulnerability in Resistance* (2016), Leticia Sabsay, Zeynep Gambetti and Judith Butler explore, as the latter previously did in *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2004), how vulnerability is not simply a passive condition for the subject, but one that can be used as a tool to both resist and regain power.

Exploring vulnerability in its most positive form, my paper will try to portray how vulnerability works in the ethical arena, particularly in the Levinasian ethics of alterity. I hope to show how vulnerability can influence the approach towards the Other, helping the subject to move towards more ethical encounters once vulnerability has been embraced and assumed as part of oneself.

In order to do so, I will analyse Deborah Levy's *Hot Milk* (2016), a novel in which the ideas of vulnerability, the quest for agency and freedom are contained in the character of Sofia and her difficult relationship with her paralysed and complaining mother. In the summer they spend in Almeria, looking for a last chance to cure Rose's legs, Sofia will be aware of her own vulnerability and will approach others as never before.