"It was all a matter of hints and shades": Reconceptualizing Virginia Woolf's *Flush*

by

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Abstract

This thesis aims to reconceptualize Virginia Woolf's 1933 novel *Flush: A Biography*. The novel has been largely ignored by the intelligentsia due to its subject matter: a dog. Although various critics have attempted to salvage its status by reconstructing it as an allegory for feminism, politics, and class; and many have pondered whether the novel is truly the story about the eponymous character or Miss Barrett, his human companion, this text intends to reconceptualize the novel through the scope of feminist theory, Disability Studies, and Critical Animal Studies in order to demonstrate how the novel is a posthuman dual Bildungsroman. Other factors, such as Woolf's true motives when creating *Flush*, will also be considered. In the end, this reconceptualization aspires to create a new era of discourse regarding *Flush*, one which is inclusive and will confront its current status outside the canon.

Resumen

El propósito de este tesis es el reconceptualizar la novela *Flush: A Biography*, escrita por Virginia Woolf en el 1933. La intelectualidad no ha prestado mucha atención a la novela debido a su tema principal, el cual trata sobre un perro. Aunque varios críticos han intentado salvar su reputación al tratar de reedificar su propósito como una alegoría al feminismo, la política y las clases sociales; y otros mientras tanto intentan determinar si el propósito de la novela es relatar la historia de quien le da nombre a esta o el de su compañera, la Miss Barrett, este escrito da un nuevo concepto a la novela desde el ámbito del feminismo francés, la teoría de la discapacidad feminista y la crítica de estudios sobre animales para demostrar que la novela es un Bildungsroman dual post-humano. Factores adicionales, como los motivos de Woolf al crear *Flush,* también serán considerados. Al concluir, esta reconceptualización intentara crear una nueva era de discurso sobre *Flush*, la cual es inclusiva y confronta su estado actual fuera del canon literario.

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Chapter I – Introduction

To be part of the literary canon is a privilege that few women writers before 1950 have had the opportunity to be in, for "[a woman writer's] battle … is not against her [male] precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her" (Gilbert and Gubar 24). Virginia Woolf is among those privileged few women writers who have been able to surpass this prejudice, having revolutionized Modernism. Texts such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* have received worldwide critical acclaim plus mainstream success over the years. However, not all of Woolf's work is so appreciated, at least by the intelligentsia. One particular text that has remained critically disregarded is Woolf's 1933 novel *Flush: A Biography*, which is the story of the eponymous character, a dog and by association, his human companion Miss Barrett. The pair are based on the historical Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her dog Flush. The dismissal of the novel is odd since the novel was Woolf's most popular book at the time of its publication. Nevertheless, Woolf herself was apparently ashamed of it, considering it a waste of time, since "critics would like it for reasons which did her no credit; she would be admired as an elegant lady prattler" (Bell 409). Perhaps this is why the novel remains estranged, a peculiar fact considering its illustration of a variety of themes such as feminism, Disability Theory and Critical Animal Studies. Joanna Russ has argued that difference is characterized as inferior and is thus excluded from the canon (Warhol and Price Herndl 74). In this context, difference in the canon would be any themes that could be considered "Other," such as woman-centered and animal-centered topics. This may be a factor in *Flush*'s estrangement. It is time, however, to revise *Flush*. Adrienne Rich has described the revision of texts as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction … an act of survival"

(Gilbert and Gubar 24). *Flush* is long overdue for its reconceptualization, of being viewed from a new critical direction, especially considering its origins.

Flush was reportedly written under two conditions, as "something light and easy and untroubling" in contrast to *The Years*, and as a "joke" for Woolf's friend Lytton Strachey. On December 19th, she wrote: "Yes, today I have written myself to the verge of total extinction. Praised be I can stop and wallow in coolness and downs and let the wheels of my mind—how I beg them to do this—cool and slow and stop altogether. I shall take up *Flush* again, to cool myself" (*A Writer's Diary* 184). Later on, in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, Woolf wrote: "I was so tired after the Waves, that I lay in the garden and read the Browning love letters, and the figure of their dog made me laugh so I couldn't resist making him a Life. I wanted to play a joke on Lytton—it was to parody him" (*Letters* 161-62). Woolf's trivialization of *Flush* as a mere joke is now infamous—the novel has been called a "trifle" by her own nephew Quentin Bell, and a "trivial potboiler, unworthy of its author's position as a major modernist innovator" by the intelligentsia (Smith 348).

However, in an article titled "Flush and the Literary Canon: Oh where oh where has that little dog gone?" Pamela L. Caughie promotes the concept of viewing the novel as an allegorical work, for the text "can be read as an allegory of canon-formation" since "Flush's life tells [the reader] much about ways of valuing" (49). The particular thing about Flush and his value is that it is "contextual and variable" (Caughie 50). The same could be said of the novel. Comparing and contrasting the naturalness of canine aristocracy with the seemingly phony human one, "Woolf could be seen as advocating some standard measurement of value for literature" (Caughie 50). While this argument may be considered to be too difficult to prove, it does demonstrate how a novel that is often trivialized as silly and frivolous does contain value after

all. However, the reader must be cognizant that while Woolf herself may have described the novel as a joke, she initially saw its literary value, particularly in how it presented a different way of writing, especially in the biographical sphere. Caughie notes:

> Woolf's earliest references to the book make no mention of Lytton Strachey or relaxation but focus instead on two very different motivations. In her first diary entry on Flush (August 16, 1931), Woolf writes: "It is a good idea I think to write biographies; to make them use my powers of representation reality accuracy; & to use my novels simply to express the general, the poetic. Flush is serving this purpose." (*Diary* 40; Caughie 52-3)

A month later, in a letter to Vita Sackville-West, Woolf revealed another motivating factor behind *Flush*: to sell. Perhaps this is another reason the intelligentsia largely ignores *Flush*, as the novel was written with mainstream success in mind. However, as the reader can see from the very first mention of *Flush* in her diary, a year before the now infamous joke reference, Woolf did have a critical goal in writing the novel. That it happens to be about a dog's perspective of Miss Barrett should not lessen its value, especially when taking Woolf's remarks in her famous essay "Modern Fiction" into consideration.

As said before, *Flush* depicts a multitude of themes, such as class, feminism, disability theory and critical animal studies. Perhaps the reason it is devalued lies in the fact that even though it explores such great themes, it is ultimately the biography of a dog. Thus, the general response towards *Flush* is, as Russ has said of texts by women in the canon, "She wrote it, but look what she wrote about" (97). Moreover, Julia Penelope has pointed out that some critics may devalue a text thinking that it is not challenging enough at first glance (Russ 111), which is why a reconceptualization of the novel is much needed. In reconceptualizing *Flush*, there is not only

the possibility of giving the text its long overdue value, but in reevaluating what canonicity entails. Taking into consideration the conclusion of "Modern Fiction," Woolf herself would approve:

> …there is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing — no "method", no experiment, even of the wildest — is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence. "The proper stuff of fiction" does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss. And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured. ("Modern Fiction" 2092)

Flush can call into question the idea of objectivity and standards—what and for whom a text is good (Russ 112). In order to justify a reconceptualization of *Flush* further, criticism on the novel must be considered. The novel has garnered little critical attention but it is usually viewed through two poles of characterization: as a feminist allegory and as the biography of a dog. Susan Squier's "*Flush*'s Journey from Imprisonment to Freedom" is a feminist perspective of the novel, demonstrating how it could be read as a calling out of the patriarchy for its marginalization of women, especially since "Flush's biography contains several important parallels between his experience and that of the woman writer," both Miss Barrett and Woolf (Squier 124). This is evident in how Flush's "social position as a house pet parallels [Miss Barrett's] as a woman in Victorian society" (Squier 124). Squier observes, for example, how the men in Miss Barrett's life seem to dictate what should and will happen when Flush is kidnapped, while completely disregarding her own and Flush's feelings on the matter, noting that "both Flush and his mistress are equally subject to the wills of the men around them" (131). Taking this

into account, Squier argues that the novel must be taken seriously, particularly from a feminist standpoint.

Craig Smith, however, has some reservations on viewing *Flush* through a feminist lens. In "Across the Widest Gulf: Nonhuman Subjectivity in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*," he claims that viewing the novel as a feminist allegory "has had the unfortunate effect of implying that *Flush* may be accepted as a serious object of study only to the extent that it may be represented as being not really about a dog," arguing that such an approach has an "anthropocentric bias" (349). While Smith's claim may have some validity, the reader cannot simply discard the implicit feminist connotations embedded in the text, especially being cognizant of Woolf's own explicitly stated views on women in the Victorian patriarchy, as seen in *A Room of One's Own*, particularly in the story of Shakespeare's sister. Woolf has always been for women making their mark in writing. This is especially relevant since Flush's mistress is a writer herself. Moreover, as previously noted, there is a parallel between Miss Barrett's existence as a woman and Flush's existence as a companion.

Nevertheless, this thesis will consider Smith's argument for regarding *Flush* as more than a feminist allegory, especially when taking into account Bell's own comments on Woolf's motivations for writing the novel:

> [Woolf] was fascinated by all animals but her affection was odd and remote. She wanted to know what her dog was feeling—but then she wanted to know what everyone was feeling, and perhaps the dogs were no more inscrutable than most humans. Flush is not so much a book by a dog lover as a book by someone who could love to be a dog. (410)

Accordingly, Smith notes that the novel "represents Woolf's attempt to exercise modernist literary techniques in the mapping of a canine subjectivity, as an experiment worth performing for its own sake" (349).

As the reader can see, criticism on *Flush* has been about finding its value. Thus, for reconceptualizing *Flush*, the following questions will be addressed:

- What is the purpose of the novel's point of view being from that of a dog?
- Does Flush somehow mirror Miss Barrett and vice versa?
- How does *Flush* demonstrate class and the Victorian patriarchy?
- Are there ways in which *Flush* demonstrates intersectionality?
- What does Miss Barrett's room signify? Moreover, what are the politics of place in *Flush*?
- How does Miss Barrett's disability challenge and/or reinforce stereotypes of women with disabilities in literature?
- In what ways is speaking, or the lack of it, used as a plot device in the novel?
- Does Flush have agency?

Chapter II – Methodology

In order to answer the questions outlined in the introduction, the following three methodologies will be of great service in findings the novel's overdue rightful place in the literary canon: feminism, disability theory, and critical animal studies.

Feminism

Flush is most commonly considered as a feminist allegory but research on it is miniscule. As such, I propose to view the text through the lens of feminism, particularly French feminism, as exemplified by the theories of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. Kristeva has claimed that women have the semiotic *chora*,

> Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. (25)

To consider *Flush* through this concept will be extremely enlightening, considering that Miss Barrett and Flush generally do not speak, at least verbally, especially when they are in her room. Miss Barrett's lack of loquaciousness is influenced by several factors, such as her being alone and also having the heavy presence of her father, which sometimes rattles her. The silence may be considered peculiar since Miss Barrett is a writer. This leads to the writing style of the novel,

which is Woolf's distinct free indirect discourse. Toril Moi has noted that for Kristeva, there is a "*specific practice of writing* that is itself 'revolutionary,'" and that the techniques Woolf uses in her novels "[indicate] a similar break with symbolic language" (11). As such, the writing style of the novel will be considered in addition to Miss Barrett being a writer herself, especially in light of the fact that Irigaray has argued for a *parler femme*, a woman's language "to facilitate access to new conceptual models that will provide women with images of their transcendence as embodied beings and thereby demonstrate each woman's potential to access and unconditionally reflect the divine" (Tilghman 40). The concept of *parler femme* is thus immensely illuminating for *Flush,* for even though there is little dialogue in the novel, the *parler femme* permeates.

Cixous' legendary essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" will also be useful because of its concept of *écriture féminine*. Considering *Flush* through this concept, in addition to the *chora* and the *parler femme*, will aid in exploring whether women and animals have deeper insight into seeing and experiencing than a traditional masculine vision. Moreover, the essay is also significant because of its discussion of the gaze, which is quite ubiquitous in the story, especially when it comes to the relationship between Miss Barrett and her father. Miss Barrett personifies the Angel of the House, an ideal of Victorian literature, in which the woman is perfect, pure, and submissive to the man. Miss Barrett's father puts her in this position with his gaze. However, the gaze is not exclusive to her father. Miss Barrett can challenge it, which sometimes makes *her* the beholder of the gaze. For instance, when deconstructing the use of the gaze in *Wuthering Heights*, Beth Newman deduced that the novel as a genre

> suggests strongly that the male-headed bourgeois family is unthinkable without surveillance to keep the sexuality of its subordinate members in line and its property in the right hands. But the novel also reveals that such surveillance can destroy the relations

> it is installed to maintain and that the controlling gaze can never be *wholly* in control. (457)

This deduction can be applied to the familial relationships in *Flush*. Miss Barrett is a domestic carceral, trapped by the gaze of her father when he comes to visit, but there are times at which she can break free from the gaze. The consideration of the kidnapping of *Flush* will illustrate this idea.

Disability Theory

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir noted that women are "defined and differentiated with reference to man … she is the incidental, the inessential … she is the Other" (xvi). This concept can be applied to people with disabilities, who are made out to be the Other by able-bodied persons.

> The feminist interrogation of gender since Simone de Beauvoir (1974) has revealed how women are assigned a cluster of ascriptions, like Aristotle's, that mark us as Other. What is less widely recognized, however, is that this collection of interrelated characterizations is precisely the same set of supposed attributes affixed to people with disabilities. (Garland-Thomson 19)

Miss Barrett has a mysterious disability[1] which keeps her bedridden, and doubly marginalized, for she is not only a woman but a woman with a disability. Exploring this side of the story can yield a better understanding of not only what it means to be a woman with a disability but what it means for others (such as Flush, and Miss Barrett's father) too. As such, I propose to consider

[1] The disability may have been hypokalemic periodic paralysis, a muscle disorder.

the text specifically through Feminist Disability Theory. What Feminist Disability Theory does is examine the intersectionality between disability and gender, thereby transforming each field. Examining *Flush* through this perspective is especially enlightening because on the one hand, Miss Barrett is a woman with a disability therefore she must be doomed to erasure, especially considering her father's treatment of her, reducing her to the role of Angel of the House. On the other hand, her disability does not stop her from being a romantic heroine or having sexual agency, as evidenced by her love story with Robert Browning. Garland-Thomson has noted that "cultural stereotypes imagine disabled women as asexual, unfit to reproduce, overly dependent, unattractive—as generally removed from the sphere of true womanhood and feminine beauty" (30). As one can see, Miss Barrett can complicate stereotypes of disability, but she can also appear to reinforce them. However, one must read carefully. While locked in her room as the Angel of the House, Miss Barrett is depressed seemingly because of her disability, but really because of the situation that her disability causes. Julia Kristeva's comments on people with depression may demonstrate an eerily accurate picture of what Miss Barrett goes through, particularly when she is locked in her room with Flush:

> According to classic psychoanalytic theory (Abraham, Freud, and Melanie Klein), depression, like mourning, conceals an aggressiveness of the depressed person with respect to the object of mourning. 'I love that object,' is what that person seems to say about the lost object, 'but even more so I hate it; because I love it, and in order not to lose it, I imbed it in myself; but because I hate it, that other within myself is a bad self, I am bad, I am non-existent, I shall kill myself.' The complaint against oneself would therefore be a complaint against another, and putting oneself to death but a tragic disguise for massacring another. (qtd. by Beardsworth 99)

That Miss Barrett's representation as a woman with a disability is so varied and multifaceted makes the novel significant for disability studies, since it could be considered an accurate portrayal of a woman with a disability. What is especially surprising and meaningful is that Miss Barrett's disability is not reduced to entertainment for able-bodied persons, as the latter tend to do to the former—Woolf in no way makes Miss Barrett the Other in literature, as is usually done. For example, Susan Sontag has said that "looking at photographs of human pain is bad if our interest in them affirms that 'This is not happening to *me*'" (Garland-Thomson 200). This is why Woolf's portrayal of Miss Barrett is a powerful representation of disability: she merely presents her as she is: an average woman who happens to have a disability. This is in sharp contrast to other portrayals of disability in literature which contain problematic stereotypes, such as William Shakespeare's eponymous character from *Richard III* and Tiny Tim from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Even though Miss Barrett is a central character, the way her disability is depicted by Woolf is significant because it is a fairly accurate representation of an upper-class woman with a disability. As such, considering *Flush* through the perspective of Feminist Disability Theory is more than valid.

Critical Animal Studies

In reconceptualizing *Flush*, Critical Animal Studies is of the utmost importance not only because the central character is a dog, but because his role in the story can be perceived in various different ways, as the novel explores how non-human subjectivity is allied to a feminine perspective. In order to demonstrate how this can occur, *Flush* will be considered from the perspective of ecofeminism. Considering Flush from this perspective will yield fruitful results, since women and nonhuman animals are wholly connected in the sense that they are

marginalized in favor of Man. In a patriarchal society, both women and animals are cut up and distributed for the consumption of Man:

> The categories "woman" and "animal" serve the same symbolic function in patriarchal society. Their construction as dominated, submissive "other" … has sustained human male dominance. The role of women and animals in postindustrial society is to serve/be served up; women and animals are the used. Whether created as ideological icons to justify and preserve the superiority of men or captured as servants to provide and for comfort, the connection women and animals share is present in both theory and practice. (Gruen 61)

This is evident in the story, especially when regarding Miss Barrett's relationship with her father, and how Flush follows her lead; plus how Flush becomes an object of money during the kidnapping. There is also the issue of the gaze between Flush and Miss Barrett. At times, one is the beholder of the gaze. At others, they merely mirror each other. Flush himself, however egalitarian his relationship with Miss Barrett may seem, is usually in the hold of the gaze, even though the novel is from his point of view. He challenges it, however, especially with his reaction to Miss Barrett's romantic interest, Robert Browning.

When Flush relents on his attack due to Miss Barrett's disapproval, however, one can question their problematic relationship. Their relationship may appear to be egalitarian at times since they mirror each other so often but in the end, Flush is a dog and Miss Barrett is his owner. Flush's function in Miss Barrett's life is to make her happy; give her strength. Does this mean Flush does not have agency, as evidenced by the loss he feels when he realizes he is to live in the room for an indefinite amount of time? Flush lives a good life as Miss Barrett's pet but he loses

many things along the way. The work of Luce Irigaray, one of the pioneers of French feminism, would be quite valuable in examining this.

Irigaray considers the compassion of animals, particularly the joy and strength they can bring humans. In "Animal Compassion," Irigaray tells of the potency a butterfly supplied her with when it came to rest on her body during a heated conversation with a friend. The butterfly gave her strength. She also tells of how rabbits have been a source of happiness for her. At what cost does this come, though? Irigaray notes animals "inhabit another world, a world that I do not know. Sometimes I can observe something in it, but I do not inhabit it from the inside - it remains foreign to me (195). It is only if she projects her "human imaginary onto them" that she can find any meaning (195). Viewing Flush through this perspective can be enlightening, because even though Flush and Miss Barrett are often quite similar, Woolf also highlights the differences between them, such as their divergence on the preference of sight and smell. By exploring their differences, the reader can deduce whether Flush has agency. However, in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway, coming from an ecofeminist posthumanist perspective, notes that "nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. And many people no longer feel the need for such a separation; indeed, many branches of feminist culture affirm the pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures" (153). The commentaries of Irigaray and Haraway raise questions on Flush's status as a companion animal, and his contextual privilege. Thus, considering these varying perspectives will be valuable in the reconceptualization of *Flush*.

Chapter III – Feminist *Flush*

In *Woman and the Demon*, Nina Auerbach wrote of the Angel of the House, "the selfless paragon all women were exhorted to be, enveloped in family life and seeking no identity beyond the roles of daughter, wife, and mother" (67-9). What must be noted, however, is that angels can fall, metamorphosing from the holy to the demonic. This transformation is a component of *Flush*, presented through Miss Barrett. The reader meets her in her room at the family mansion in Wimpole Street. Here Miss Barrett is a "domestic carceral," a term which Helena Michie described as a woman being kept imprisoned in the home with the erroneous idea that she would be safer, happier and healthier there (58). This is not so, as the reader will learn. As Flush is given to Miss Barrett by her friend Miss Mitford, a change occurs. In her isolation, the Angel of the House is shown to be cunning, with demonic capabilities, as she writes and plots. But there is more to Miss Barrett and her ability to write in the face of patriarchal ideology and home imprisonment. While the act of writing is central for it demonstrates her feminist nature, there are other significant events in the novel which illustrate her dynamism as an Angel of the House. In particular, there is her deliberate displacement of male authority.

Miss Barrett versus the Victorian Patriarchy

If writing is considered transgressive for a woman in a patriarchy, is speaking criminal? There is very little spoken conversation in *Flush*, yet what there is is powerful. This, however, does not mean that the silence in the novel should be devalued or overlooked. If anything, silence is just as powerful as the act of speaking in *Flush*, for as Auerbach has noted, "mystic powers of control" lurk behind a victim's silence (35). Unless with company, Miss Barrett is usually in silence in her room. The silence is a tool that serves to strengthen Miss Barrett; her fall towards

the demonic, her treachery against the Victorian patriarchy, begins with it. The reader can observe this with the introduction of her father, a stereotypical patriarch:

> …a step that was heavier, more deliberate and firmer than any other, stopped on the stair; solemnly a knock sounded that was no tap of enquiry but a demand for admittance; the door opened and in came the blackest, the most formidable of elderly men—Mr. Barrett himself. (*Flush* 51)

The introduction of Mr. Barrett highlights the silence that permeates the novel. The description of him literally disturbs the quiet, solidifying his status as ruler of the house. As he comes into Miss Barrett's room, his immediate inquiries over whether she has followed his rules and guidelines in terms of eating and the like demonstrate his controlling nature. Miss Barrett is under the rule of his gaze, which effectively silences her. The terrifying figure of her father is contrasted with his genuine paternal love and care, but it is constructed in a manner that appears to be conditional. Mr. Barrett loves his daughter with what he projects on and perceives of her; not as she is. This is exemplified by Flush's own reaction towards Mr. Barrett—"shivers of horror and terror" run down his spine as he knows he has to compartmentalize himself in Mr. Barrett's presence (*Flush* 51). He feels Mr. Barrett is a terrible force which one is powerless against, and at some point, Flush finds him on his knees praying at Miss Barrett's side. This patronizing act further solidifies Miss Barrett as the Angel of the House, reveled as a relic of Victorian ideals. Yet as noted before, angels fall and with the kidnapping of Flush, Miss Barrett falls heavily.

Her fall is not erratic or violent; it is precise, cautious and tenacious, as the reader will observe. Miss Barrett is walking with Flush and her maid Wilson on Wimpole Street.

Unfortunately, she had forgotten to leash Flush and he was stolen from her by Mr. Taylor's gang—

> If one forgot, as Miss Barrett forgot, one paid the penalty, as Miss Barrett was now to pay it. The terms upon which Wimpole Street lived cheek by jowl with St. Giles's were laid down. St. Giles's stole what St. Giles's could; Wimpole Street paid what Wimpole Street must. (*Flush* 89)

Wimpole Street stood for privilege, while Whitechapel was one of the worst slums in London. Woolf has juxtaposed the two places by informing the reader that Whitechapel was located behind Miss Barrett's bedroom, and it was there where "poverty and vice and misery had bred and seethed and propagated their kind for centuries without interference" (*Flush* 88). This is a side effect of patriarchal capitalism, which allows for very little social mobility unless one is a privileged white straight male with education and/or family money. Thus, those in Whitechapel are motivated to do whatever it takes for survival, and if that includes using dogs as a method of extortion, then so be it. The people of Wimpole Street, however, do not see it this way. Wimpole Street finds Whitechapel to be a victim of its own, and Wimpole Street must stay out of Whitechapel, and vice versa. This is not to be so. In the intermingling of these two streets, Woolf demonstrates the tyranny of patriarchy. As Flush is stolen, Woolf cleverly uses language to denote blame—if Miss Barrett forgot to leash her dog, then it is her fault he was stolen from her—not the transgressor for his decision to undertake a crime of opportunity. Woolf claims this is due to the terms, but who makes these terms? What exactly do they constitute? From the subtext of *Flush*, the reader can decipher that the terms are related to a contextual value.

As Pamela L. Caughie noted in "*Flush* and the Literary Canon: Oh Where Oh Where has that Little Dog Gone?," context is crucial in the novel. The value for Wimpole Street is to maintain a correct moral position, while the value for Whitechapel is monetary gain. Miss Barrett is to suffer between these two codes, her pain instigating a battle between herself, the male figures of her family, and even Mr. Browning, her romantic interest in the novel.

While Miss Barrett is very much willing to pay the ten pounds it would take to get Flush back to her, and her sister Arabel is supportive of her endeavor, Miss Barrett is barred from the task by the men in her life. As she gets home, she informs her brother Henry who goes to see Mr. Taylor, and is told that he must consult his "Society." When days pass and Miss Barrett still does not have Flush back, Miss Barrett finds out that her brother has lied to her—

> She summoned her brother Henry, and cross-examined him. She found out that he had tricked her. "The archfield" Taylor had come according to his promise the night before. He had stated his terms — six guineas for the Society and half a guinea for himself. But Henry, instead of telling her, had told Mr. Barrett, with the result, of course, that Mr. Barrett had ordered him not to pay, and to conceal the visit from his sister. Miss Barrett was "very vexed and angry." She bade her brother to go at once to Mr. Taylor and pay the money. Henry refused and "talked of Papa." But it was no use talking of Papa, she protested. While they talked of Papa, Flush would be killed. She made up her mind. If Henry would not go, she would go herself. (*Flush* 97-8)

The limitations imposed on Miss Barrett can be clearly observed here. She is effectively silenced as her brother consults their father instead of her and no one notifies her of their decision to leave Flush in the lurch. The Angel of the House is not allowed agency. When she does attempt to save

Flush on her own, the matter of the kidnapping becomes public and political. Wimpole Street demands that it must take a stance against Whitechapel. Outsiders contact the family, telling them it would be a sin for the ransom to be paid. Yet what of others who have paid before? Why is it sinful for Miss Barrett to pay? Does it relate to her gender? It may, as Miss Barrett's brother and father join forces against her, "capable of any treachery in the interests of their class" (*Flush* 98). The privileging of their social standing over Miss Barrett speaks volumes. Even Mr. Browning concurs with the males in her family, as he tells her that it would be a "lamentable weakness" to pay the ransom, for she would be "increasing the power of evil over right" (*Flush* 99-100). Caughie claims that Miss Barrett is "shoring up" and promoting "the tyranny of patriarchs" by paying the ransom in order to recover Flush, and while Wimpole Street certainly perceives it this way, it is an impossibility. Miss Barrett has no agency in a patriarchy. Paying the ransom is inconsequential in the large scheme of things for she is a woman. Although some women participate in the patriarchy, having internalized misogyny, women are not what construct and uphold the capitalist Victorian patriarchy—it is men. Thus, the actual implication behind the words of Miss Barrett's brother, her father and Mr. Browning is that the true evil would not necessarily be paying the ransom; it would be the act of going against their word—the Law of the Father. And so the Angel begins her descent, for she is "not to be intimidated" (*Flush* 100-1). She will not be silenced. While Wimpole Street and Whitechapel worry over their own values, Caughie notes that throughout it all, Miss Barrett worries over what will be "discarded in the process—Flush" (51). Her attachment to him makes her fearless of what the men in her family and Mr. Browning think, and she chooses to save him. Immediately, she is admonished by her brother who tells her "that in his opinion she might well be robbed and murdered if she did what she threatened" (*Flush* 102). This demonstrates the hypocrisy of her brother as he is

threatening her himself, instead of being supportive. Nevertheless, Miss Barrett goes on to Whitechapel with her maid Lily Wilson accompanying her.

The displacement of male authority continues as Woolf depicts sisterhood in the novel. In "Of Footnotes, Fanciers, and Fascism: Virginia Woolf's *Flush,*" Anna Snaith claims that while Mr. Barrett imprisons his daughter, Miss Barrett does the same to her maid Lily Wilson—"Wilson is the unsaid of *Flush*, below the text in a footnote, marginalized and boxed off" (620). She highlights in particular what occurs after Miss Barrett's confrontation with her brother, as Wilson is asked by Miss Barrett to call a cab in order to go to Whitechapel and rescue Flush. "All trembling but submissive, Wilson obeyed. The cab came. Miss Barrett told Wilson to get in. Wilson, though convinced that death awaited her, got in" (*Flush* 102). On the one hand, Snaith's claim has validity for the language that Woolf uses for this scene complicates the relationship between the women. On the other hand, Woolf has presented the importance of sisterhood. Hélène Cixous has noted the rarity of it because "men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs ("The Laugh" 248). In *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks echoes this line of thinking by noting how women have been socialized into competition with each other, to look upon one another with "jealousy, fear and hatred" in order to gain approval from the patriarchy (14). Although it may be argued that Wilson does not have the class standing or social privilege to say no to Miss Barrett, she is actually employed by Mr. Barrett. If he opposes the situation, then why does Wilson help Miss Barrett in this situation, even when she does not fully agree with it? What Woolf does here is break with the expectation of women typically written in relation to men—she creates solidarity and loyalty between the two women. Their partnership is noteworthy

because it demonstrates the success that women can accomplish when they band together, as opposed to when they are kept locked in a patriarchal mindset which seeks to influence women to attack and/or undermine other women. As her maid, Wilson does as Miss Barrett says, but Miss Barrett values Wilson, and vice versa. They refuse to be bullied into internalizing misogyny, to be forbidden from bonding or protecting each other's interests in the patriarchy. Wilson could very well betray Miss Barrett and go to her father, but she always stands with her.

The sisterhood continues with the pleasant business conversation that Miss Barrett has with Mrs. Taylor once she and Wilson make it to Whitechapel. Mr. Taylor is out, but Mrs. Taylor is cordial to Miss Barrett, even inviting her into her home to wait for him. Miss Barrett declines, asking for Mr. Taylor to bring back Flush to her. Wilson and Miss Barrett head back to Wimpole Street, and journey is a cause for reflection. Miss Barrett is very well aware of her privilege—although she recognizes that she has very little as a woman (and one with a disability, at that) in a patriarchy, she also knows she is not entirely without it. If it were not for her economic privilege, she could very well be in Whitechapel, where there "lived women like herself; while she lay on her sofa, reading, writing, they lived thus" (*Flush* 104). It should be noted that Wilson could be in Whitechapel too if it were not for her employment as Miss Barrett's maid. It is certainly problematic to construct Miss Barrett as Wilson's savior but again, this can be avoided by considering how the two women sincerely value one another, and play key roles in each other's lives. This will be further explored once the kidnapping of Flush is resolved.

When Mr. Taylor arrives at Wimpole Street, he does not bring Flush with him, but instead requests that six guineas be paid to him immediately and he will return the dog to Miss Barrett on his word of honor. She concedes but to her misfortune, as she is about to pay him,

Alfred Barrett sees Mr. Taylor and foils her plans by going on a tirade against him, calling him names. Mr. Taylor returns the insults, ultimately threatening Flush's death. Miss Barrett panics for Flush is her family. She attempts to go back to Whitechapel in order to save him, but her family stops her from doing so—"Her brothers, her sisters, all came round her threatening her, dissuading her, 'crying out against me for being 'quite mad' and obstinate and wilful — I was called as many names as Mr. Taylor'" (*Flush* 107). Her lack of agency is once again highlighted. The Angel of the House can only be glorified by her limitations, and Miss Barrett's decision to save Flush solidifies her fall to the demonic. Miss Barrett falls into the reanimation of the Angel of the House per Auerbach, with "revolutionary ardor and … dangerous mobility, for the angel's otherworldly power translates itself imperceptibly into a demonism that destroys all families and all houses" (4). The irony is that her family is the one who is on the offense—actively attacking Miss Barrett (allegedly for her own good) and constructing her as crazy and irrational. Even her sisters join in on the attack, having internalized misogyny. Yet Miss Barrett is relentless. Auerbach has noted that a somewhat similar creature to the Angel is the mermaid, "a creature of transformations and mysterious interrelations, able to kill and to regenerate but not to die, unfurling in secret her powers of mysterious, pre-Christian, pre-human dispensation" (7). Miss Barrett, who so often lived in silence, ruminating, demonstrates her mermaid-like capabilities as she undertakes the transgressive act of not only speaking up but calling out her family.

This act results in her family's realization of "the extent of her folly" (*Flush* 107). The use of the word folly here is indicative of the family's perception of Miss Barrett—they think her foolish and nonsensical. Her brother Septimus only concedes to save Flush if she is willing to head back to her room "in good humour" (*Flush* 107), patronizing Miss Barrett and framing her as deranged for wanting to save her dog. She manages to have Flush returned to her, but what

has happened with her family is irreparable. This is the defining event that Miss Barrett needed to experience in order to steel herself before leaving Wimpole Street.

Some weeks after the kidnapping, Miss Barrett changes her routine, dressing formally in the morning. Wilson is dressed as well. Flush notices that Miss Barrett is wearing a gold ring on her left hand, clearly an indication of her nuptials with Mr. Browning.[2] The ring is hidden since Miss Barrett is keeping the marriage from her family. Perhaps due to the conflicts she has endured with them, she is able to hide the marriage from them effortlessly. Only Wilson knows, further evidence of the power of their sisterhood. She could very well tell Mr. Barrett and the family of Miss Barrett's actions. However, Wilson chooses to cover for her, solidifying the importance of sisterhood in the novel. It is Wilson who aids Miss Barrett in escaping Wimpole Street as the pair join Mr. Browning in Italy.

Politics of Place

As noted in the previous section, Caughie has pointed out the importance of context in the novel when it comes to values. The values of Whitechapel contrast with those of Wimpole Street. Thus, the politics of place are vital to values, for privilege is contextual to location. In "Flush's Journey From Imprisonment to Freedom," Susan Merrill Squier notes that women were routinely marginalized in urban society, especially women with disabilities, and it was beneficial for men because the Angel of the House serves to highlight the alleged strength and virility of men (125). This would hold true on Wimpole Street and in Whitechapel, but it is a world of difference for Miss Barrett, because her economic standing provides her with a room of her own. While the room certainly has its limitations, it is nonetheless a room of her own. This is not to

[2] Once married, the narrator refers to Miss Barrett as Mrs. Browning in the novel. However, for the purpose of continuity, she will be referred to as Miss Barrett for the remainder of this thesis.

say that Miss Barrett is bound to this room, but rather to point out the complexities of her privilege. In retrospect, she has little, to be sure, yet she has more than a woman with or without her condition in Whitechapel. Starting with her nuptials, Miss Barrett is to discover that there is more in the world than the codependency of Whitechapel and Wimpole Street.

Caughie has claimed that Mr. Browning liberates Miss Barrett (51) but such a statement dismisses the complexities of Miss Barrett's liberation. Being from a wealthy family and with the privilege of a room of her own makes marriage for Miss Barrett optional rather than a necessity. Thus, any liberation she experiences from marriage to Mr. Browning is simply a bonus, for she already experienced a kind of liberation through writing. It was what sustained her in Wimpole Street. Once they move to Italy, Miss Barrett experiences a different kind of liberation, and while certainly related to her marriage and the separation from her father, it is largely attributed to space. Where there was darkness in her enclosed room, Italy is light and open. The odoriferous staleness of her room gives way to fresh air in Casa Guidi. The family mansion on Wimpole Street was full of relics such as bustles, giving it the air of a museum, while the Casa Guidi has an open concept which reflects the new possibilities and opportunities in Miss Barrett's life.

Much of Miss Barrett's liberation has to do with the independence that the culture of Italy allows her, for on "the streets of Pisa pretty women could walk alone" (*Flush* 123). Miss Barrett was silenced and controlled as the Angel of the House through various tactics, including the gaze, both in Whitechapel and Wimpole Street. In Italy, however, Miss Barrett is liberated from the threat of objectification and assault—she is free to explore her agency without judgment.

Miss Barrett is not the only one to evolve in Italy. Wilson does as well. The portrayal of Wilson on Wimpole Street and in Whitechapel was one of a dutiful woman with a stiff upper lip. Living in Italy, however, allows her to discover another side of herself. The carefree nature of the place allows her to let go of her inhibitions—she falls for a guard, Signor Righi. Later on, she is grateful she never married him when the family visits England. Nevertheless, the fact that Wilson had the privilege to explore her sexual agency in Italy is momentous, for it further demonstrates the politics of place.

While Wilson and Miss Barrett's positive experiences in Italy are certainly influenced by the men in their lives, it must be reiterated that the men do not liberate them. Mr. Browning does not control or mold Miss Barrett. If anything, he is merely a player on the stage of Miss Barrett's life. He may have some influence, such as when she wears "a cap made of some thin bright silk that her husband liked," but he does not control her (*Flush* 128). Her metamorphosis in Italy is more influenced by her escape from England. The same goes for Wilson. Thus, by considering the relationship of the two women throughout the novel, one can observe how the pair play a key role in each other's liberation, solidified in Italy.

After several years in Italy, the family travels to England after the death of Mr. Barrett. The lightheartedness of Italy gives way to the customs of Victorian civility. Miss Barrett seems to enclose in herself as she visits the family mansion in Wimpole Street with Flush creeping upstairs "stealthily, as silently as once before they had come down" and seeing that "nothing had been changed. Nothing had happened all these years (*Flush* 149). For Miss Barrett to go back to England is imperative because it contrasts her life in Italy. The lack of change in Wimpole Street could have been her demise. Had Miss Barrett remained in the house, nothing for her would have changed. She would not have had the opportunities she had in Italy for growth and experience.

Motherhood and Domesticity

Before her visit back to Wimpole Street, Miss Barrett had a child. From her arrival in Italy, Miss Barrett metamorphosed from the Angel of the House to a vibrant woman with a vigorous appetite for life—

> She was a different person altogether. Now, for instance, instead of sipping a thimbleful of port and complaining of the headache, she tossed off a tumbler of Chianti and slept the sounder. There was a flowering branch of oranges on the dinner-table instead of one denuded, sour, yellow fruit. Then instead of driving in a barouche landau to Regent's Park she pulled on her thick boots and scrambled over rocks. Instead of sitting in a carriage and rumbling along Oxford Street, they rattled off in a ramshackle fly to the borders of a lake and looked at mountains; and when she was tired she did not hail another cab; she sat on a stone and watched the lizards. She delighted in the sun; she delighted in the cold. (*Flush* 122)

Miss Barrett's life in Italy has a faster pace than her life in England; she is always on the move. Things begin to change as she becomes pregnant. Her approach to life changes; things slow down. However, she does not revert back to the Angel of the House through pregnancy nor is she forced into the role of domestic carceral again. To demonstrate this, the reader may consider the perspective of French feminism, which has reclaimed maternity. Cixous claims that "begetting a child doesn't mean that the woman or the man must fall ineluctably into patterns" and that society must move away from the idea that "the child is the death of his parents" ("The Laugh" 261). This is demonstrated with Miss Barrett, who is happy with the change in her life because in this instance, she has a choice. It is worth mentioning, however, how Woolf describes the birth—

Miss Barrett suddenly becomes "two people" (*Flush* 134). This hints at a possible loss of identity for Miss Barrett, for the structure of patriarchy relegates women to a reproductive role and by having a child, Miss Barrett would be known as a mother before anything else. However, Miss Barrett is a writer, and because the act of writing gives her agency as she takes back her body, she complicates and challenges traditional concepts of motherhood and identity. She may have a child, but she is still her own person.

***Flush* and French Feminism**

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf noted that Samuel Taylor Coleridge claimed that "a great mind is androgynous" (2143). The application of this theory to writing would ideally produce transcendent creativity, as Woolf did. But as Elaine Showalter noted in *A Literature of their Own*, Woolf used androgyny as a myth "that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition" (264). This was especially true in her texts from the 1920s. Showalter noted that by the 1930s, Woolf was writing from a more inherent feminine perspective. This likely had much to do with Woolf's research on Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and her dog. The critical ignorance of Barrett Browning's textual significance and the focus on her as a celebrity (particularly due to her elopement with Robert Browning) had such an effect on Woolf that it largely influenced her to focus on the inherently feminine in writing. It is a complete departure from the masculine, as *Flush* is. *Flush* is a text written by a woman about another woman writer, written in the erratic style of free indirect discourse, and its leads are a woman and dog who do not engage in a violent adventure that suddenly leads to epiphany. Rather, they discover each other and therefore themselves. Thus with *Flush*, Woolf not only broke the mold—she broke her own mold as she explored the complexities of woman in Victorian society.

Regardless of which language one may refer to, language is contextual, gendered, and privileged towards men. Historically, the language of men is passed down from generation to generation. The writing of women remains on the sidelines. Woolf has been the exception to this rule, perhaps due to the androgyny in her writing. *Flush*, however, is concretely feminine, and thus overlooked as a frivolity. An error, considering that *Flush* explores the intricacies of language, both written and spoken. *Flush* is the very champion of what French feminists termed *écriture féminine* (literally "feminine writing")[3] and *parler femme* (literally "to speak woman"). Thus, *Flush* is a text far ahead of its time. Regardless, Sandra Gilbert has argued that "the words of Cixous, and, say, Luce Irigaray often seem almost immoderately theoretical, even mystical, in their straining to imagine a female language…. Woolf is (isn't she?) too practical for such imaginings to illuminate hers" (209). *Flush* contests Gilbert's argument and could even be helmed as a precursor to French feminism. Woolf has regularly been positioned as the Mother of All Feminism, but Woolf is only mother to a *certain* kind of feminism, one that is typically white, upper-middle-class, and therefore privileged. Woolf's examination of issues of class, gender and language parallels those of French feminism which, like Woolf's ideas, came about as a direct reaction to patriarchy. Thus, although there is no explicit connection between the French feminists and Woolf herself, there is a strong similarity in their philosophy.

French feminism is largely centered on the politics of language. It is an attempt to conceptualize women's language. But who are those women, particularly if writing comes from

[3] In *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, Ellen G. Friedman affirmed that *écriture féminine* "is non-hierarchical, nonlinear, polyphonic, open-ended, and has multiple climaxes. Writing *l'écriture feminine* means inscribing the female body in texts. It follows a pattern of female sexual pleasure and is distinct from the linear, single-climax pattern of traditional narratives Cixous associates with male sexuality. ... For Cixous, *l'écriture feminine* has no particular gendered signature and may be written by anyone. Although she advocates a future in which women will practice this writing, her examples come mainly from male modernists such as James Joyce. In Cixous' economy, whether male or female, the writer who disrupts the forms of conventional narrative disrupts the dominant social structure these forms iterate and opens a space for the culturally repressed, for the feminine to erupt into consciousness" (155).

the body? If gender can be considered fluid and non-binary, if there is more than the masculine/feminine pole, how is a woman's language defined when the question of woman and gender in general is being reconceptualized? Moreover, how do people of color, persons with disabilities and queer individuals fit into the discourse? Gilbert and Gubar have noted that Woolf's writing contains characters which "experience themselves as alienated from the 'ordinary' sense of language" (530) and that she also offers them "the amazing grace of fantastic new languages." The languages differ according to gender, class and circumstance, as Woolf explores these issues by addressing depression, sexuality and privilege in various texts. Likewise, Irigaray posits that women have access to more than one mode of language, and continuously ("That Sex" 101). If this theory is true, then each woman's language is as particular and unique as herself.

Finding Miss Barrett's language in *Flush* is an interesting prospect due to the scarcity of spoken language. This is partly due to the perspective of the novel coming from a dog, who it is made clear at various times does not understand human language. Moreover, there are large periods of silence. However, the novel is told by an omniscient narrator, and much of the spoken language in the novel, such as Miss Barrett's showdown with her family, is not vocalized—instead it is paraphrased through events for the reader by the narrator. Irigaray tells us that women have language and access to plurality, but that it has been historically denied to them. The manner in which the conflict between Miss Barrett and her family is written reflects this argument. However, Miss Barrett simultaneously challenges it because she is a woman writer with a disability. For her, writing the body is revolutionary. Likewise, as Jane Marcus has shown, Woolf "raided the patriarchy and trespassed on male territory, returning to share her spoils with other women: women's words, the feminine sentence, and finally the appropriate female form"

(xiv). These things become meta in *Flush* as Woolf has Miss Barrett in her room *not* resting as she seemingly should be, but rather plotting and writing.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous noted that women are otherworldly—they are comprised of not only one world, but several worlds. Women's imagination is infinite. Miss Barrett, in her dark, ivy-shaded room, is a cornucopia of "luminous torrents," just as Cixous was (246). This is especially apparent as Miss Barrett goes through the writing process—a taxing task which seems to inspire guilt and melancholia. After a morning's bout of writing, she philosophizes on the particulars of writing:

> She was lying, thinking; she had forgotten Flush altogether, and her thoughts were so sad that the tears fell upon the pillow. Then suddenly a hairy head was pressed against her; large bright eyes shone in hers; and she started. Was it Flush, or was it Pan? Was she no longer an invalid in Wimpole Street, but a Greek nymph in some dim grove in Arcady? And did the bearded god himself press his lips to hers? For a moment she was transformed; she was a nymph and Flush was Pan. The sun burnt and love blazed. (*Flush* 46)

With this scene the reader can understand how Miss Barrett internally struggles as she writes. Cixous has suggested that women usually write in secret, and they punish themselves for the act (246). Somehow the act of writing is wrong; it is a transgression against the patriarchy. Miss Barrett transcends her status as a domestic carceral, exploring the various worlds and luminous torrents inside her by deconstructing the "funny desire stirring inside her" (Cixous 246). Like an addict, the writing process consumes her as she spends hours writing, and suddenly becoming overwhelmed with emotion; her eyes watering with tears. This demonstrates how the writing

process for Miss Barrett is not only a criminal act that allows her to take back her body, but an act in which she is given an outlet for catharsis.

Woolf portrays Miss Barrett as slightly hysterical when writing, a bold choice in an era where hysteria was a woman's curse. French feminism, however, heralds women's language as one intrinsically hysterical, and through this perspective the reader would be able to appreciate Woolf's portrayal of Miss Barrett as one that reclaims hysteria. In the novel, Miss Barrett's slight hysteria during the writing process is presented in a manner that mirrors the Kristevan *chora*. This effectively demonstrates that Woolf has trespassed on male territory, as she turned the issue of hysteria around, one that pigeonholes women into a prefixed patriarchal identity, and constructed it as a positive effect of the writing process, just as French feminism has attempted to reclaim hysteria.

Juxtaposed with Miss Barrett's seeming hysteria when writing is the ubiquitous silence in the novel. The silence is paired with a sense of restlessness through the writing style of the novel and the narrator's voice. With the silence, Woolf further demonstrates Miss Barrett's estrangement and ostracization from society. Perhaps this is a factor in why, as previously noted, Miss Barrett's conversations are generally not shown but rather told, contributing to the perception of silence in the novel. Again, this is most evident during the showdown with Miss Barrett's family—her pleas are merely glossed over, whereas her family's insults towards her are better detailed, effectively demonstrating Irigaray's deduction that the silencing of a woman is an action that indicates "I don't understand what you're doing so I reject it, we reject it" (*Je, Tu, Nous* 52) and also her affirmation that "silence itself is related to the discourse being spoken" (*Je, Tu, Nous* 34). It is this reaction which gives way to the discovery of the *parler femme* and *écriture féminine* in the novel.

The *parler femme* is not immediately evident in the novel for it is written in the English language, which is not gendered as French is. Instead, the *parler femme* shines through Woolf's writing as she constructs the feminine subjects as positive, of value, and not as an object of the masculine, but rather an independent body which happens to be feminine. This is what makes *Flush* a threat to the canon as it is known, for it destabilizes traditional concepts of plot and language. The novel is a product of the concept of writing the body, not only Miss Barrett's but Woolf's. Woolf had previously struggled with her womanhood; through the novel, however, she channels the joys of femininity. Any sort of liberation she may have experienced during this period is tied to language, for writing as woman allowed her to take back her body.

Taking this into account, the novel must also be considered from the concept of *écriture féminine*, as it calls for the value of experience. As noted before, there is little spoken language in the novel, with the narrator usually glossing over conversations. Instead, there is emphasis on experience, as Miss Barrett undergoes a transformation, becoming a fully-formed woman at the end of the novel. What maintains her womanhood is her writing as her independence is denied to her during her stay at the family mansion. The experience of this hardship is what illuminates her success at the end of the novel. Miss Barrett starts out the Angel, pigeonholed into a position of submission. In her room, she ruminates and eventually comes out demonic, mermaid-like; a woman with agency.

Chapter IV – From Invisible to Invincible: The Disabled Miss Barrett as Heroine

Texts that include characters with disabilities who are accurately and respectfully portrayed are generally rare in literature, for disability is typically Othered, relegated to the role of a laughingstock, such as Martin and Mary Doul from J.M. Synge's "The Well of the Saints," a messiah, as seen in T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" and/or background in the tapestry of a main abled character's life, such as Robert from Raymond Carver's "Cathedral." Characters with disabilities are thus techniques, meant to advance a plot, as Leonard Kriegel noted in "The Cripple in Literature." Surprisingly, there has been no significant criticism on *Flush* through the perspective of disability studies; typically critics mention that Miss Barrett is an invalid but do not investigate further, even though it is an exception to such ubiquitous disability tropes since Miss Barrett's disability is realistically portrayed by Woolf.

Miss Barrett's disability is never specified in the novel, perhaps because the real Elizabeth Barrett Browning's disability was unknown at the time. She suffered from a chronic illness that included symptoms such as "intolerable weakness … palpitations of the heart … intense response to heat and cold and illness … [and] months of inanition" (Buchanan 480). Her illness first appeared at the age of 13 but doctors were stumped as to what it could be. Anthropologist Anne Buchanan has noted how biographers have conjectured over time that Barrett Browning might have had some of these disabilities: "anorexia nervosa; neurasthenia; tuberculosis; pertussis; an encephalomyelitis; non-paralytic poliomyelitis; paralytic scoliosis, or the lifetime effects of injuries to her spine from falling from her horse in early adolescence; opium addiction; and mental illness, including anxiety and agoraphobia" (480). Buchanan has proposed that Barrett Browning's disability was in fact hypokalemic periodic paralysis, a muscle disorder which would cause blood levels of potassium to fall, as potassium is trapped in muscle

cells. The disorder was discovered thirteen years after Barrett Browning's passing, towards the end of the nineteenth century. The disease is easily triggered, which would account for the segregation of both the real and fictional Miss Barrett, exiled in her room at the family mansion on Wimpole Street.

Ruth Hubbard has noted that people with disabilities have often stressed that it is "far easier to cope with the physical aspects of a disability than with the discrimination and oppression they encounter because of it" (107). With *Flush*, Woolf characterizes this testimonial by portraying Miss Barrett's disability insightfully, demonstrating how the main issue is not the disability itself, but the reactions of those surrounding Miss Barrett.

The Sickroom

Scenes involving a sickroom are plentiful in Victorian literature. In *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, Miriam Bailin describes them, at their most typical, as serving

> as a kind of forcing ground of the self—a conventional rite of passage issuing in personal, moral, or social recuperation. The scenes are precipitated by or fortuitously linked to moments of crisis during which the sufferers … have become separated from the social roles and norms by which they previously defined themselves. (5)

In *Flush*, there are scenes at the beginning of the novel which employ this device, but it must be noted that any grounding of the self which Miss Barrett experiences is a side effect of her isolation. It is the cause of the sickroom and disability, not an effect. In her room, Miss Barrett has continuously to strengthen herself in order to deal with her father and her loneliness. She stops short of a crisis because she is a writer; the stimulation of writing keeps her as grounded

and focused as possible, even though it sometimes overwhelms her. For example, Flush would observe Miss Barrett writing for hours "and her eyes would suddenly fill with tears" (*Flush* 44-5). There is also the scene in which Miss Barrett believes Flush is Pan and they are in Arcady, as outlined in the previous chapter. Susannah B. Mintz has noted that the erasure of women writers with disabilities is significant to writing, for "disability has tended to be stigmatized as a sign of failure and inadequacy, or ignored altogether as a meaningful component of identity" (69). Accordingly, if the act of writing for a woman is one of taking back the body, then the act of writing for a woman with a disability, a woman deemed invisible—even by traditional feminist theory, which has largely centered its efforts on white middle-class able-bodied women—complicates the concept of taking back the body, because what is the body for her? Disability critics have attempted to deduce the answer to what is the body for a woman with a disability by applying Judith Butler's theories to Disability Studies, arguing it is a social construct. In "Disability in Theory: From Social Constructionism to the New Realism of the Body," Tobin Siebers notes that

> Disability offers a challenge to the representation of the body—this is often said. Usually, it means that the disabled body provides insight into the fact that all bodies are socially constructed—that social attitudes and institutions determine far greater than biological fact the representation of the body's reality. (737)

Siebers argues that "different bodies require and create new modes of representation" (738). Taking this into account, for a woman with a disability to write is not simply an act of taking back the body, a body which has been restrained by medical and ableist modes of thinking, but rather *defining* the disabled body. Drawing attention to Lennard J. Davis' claim in *Enforcing Normalcy* that the "body is seen as a site of *jouissance*, a native ground of pleasure … the

nightmare of that body is the one that is deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken, diseased" (5), Siebers points out that the disabled body is never truly addressed. One can therefore understand how the act of writing for Miss Barrett is a demand for visibility. This is important because it is writing that sustains Miss Barrett in the sickroom.

Nevertheless, in her examination of the Victorian sickroom, Bailin also claims that "so desirable are the conditions within the sickroom walls that characters are wont to express a desire to be or to remain sick in order to have access to its benefits" (6). It must be noted that Bailin has no intention of trivializing the hardships of disability, but instead means to highlight the comforts of the sickroom. If this is true for certain stories, then it demonstrates how portrayals of disability are consistently faulty and problematic, subscribing to the thought that sickness is a choice; that people with disabilities are lazy. Buchanan has pointed out that biographer Margaret Foster alleged that the real Barrett Browning would "'escape into illness' [because it] was her way of dealing with the frustration of being an intelligent woman in Victorian England, or a reaction to the exceptional sternness of her widowed, religiously strict father" (480). *Flush*, however, does not follow this line of thinking, although Woolf recognizes that the sickroom or rather, Miss Barret's disability coupled with her economic privilege, protects her from the apparent dreadfulness of Whitechapel, one of the poorest areas in London—

> As far as an invalid could walk or a bath-chair could trundle nothing met the eye but an agreeable prospect of four-storeyed houses, plate-glass windows and mahogany doors. Even a carriage and pair, in the course of an afternoon's airing, need not, if the coachman were discreet, leave the limits of decorum and respectability. But if you were not an invalid, if you did not possess a carriage and pair, if you were — and many people were — active and able-bodied and fond of walking, then you might see sights and hear

> language and smell smells, not a stone's throw from Wimpole Street, that threw doubts upon the solidity even of Wimpole Street itself. (*Flush* 85-6)

It would be rare to see a wealthy woman with a disability in Whitechapel, and so it is not only the sickroom and Miss Barrett's disability that shelter her from the slum, but her affluence. If it were not for her wealth, Miss Barrett could very well be in Whitechapel. Taking this into account, the reader can see how disability is influenced by money. Regardless, Woolf posits that the sickroom is nonetheless horrendous, despite its apparent protections, by presenting it through the perspective of Flush, who notes that the room is dark, haunting, and akin to a mausoleum, especially due to its smell:

> But again it was the smell of the room that overpowered him. Only a scholar who has descended step by step into a mausoleum and there finds himself in a crypt, crusted with fungus, slimy with mould, exuding sour smells of decay and antiquity, while half-obliterated marble busts gleam in mid-air and all is dimly seen by the light of the small swinging lamp which he holds, and dips and turns, glancing now here, now there — only the sensations of such an explorer into the buried vaults of a ruined city can compare with the riot of emotions that flooded Flush's nerves as he stood for the first time in an invalid's bedroom, in Wimpole Street, and smelt eau de cologne. (*Flush* 27-8)

By likening Miss Barrett's sickroom to a tomb, Woolf deviates from traditional perspectives of the sickroom which construct it as a place of comfort—instead it is a place of horror and abjection, and it is especially evident as Flush comes face-to-face with Miss Barrett for the first time and sees that "hers was the pale worn face of an invalid, cut off from air, light, freedom" (*Flush* 31).

Miss Barrett rarely goes out, for doing so would apparently be taxing to her health, especially if she did have hypokalemic periodic paralysis. When she is allowed to go out, it is a process where she must be "veiled and muffled" (*Flush* 36) and the weather must be favorable. The reader can see that even when Miss Barrett is allowed to set foot out of the family mansion, she is still systematically imprisoned in her clothing. Although she may be covered in order to protect her from the weather, which could very well trigger an episode, Woolf has constructed Miss Barrett's disability as a mystery, and so the possibilities of what Miss Barrett may have are vast. Thus, this raises the question of whether she is covered for her own benefit or that of the public, as Hubbard has noted that "people shun persons who have disabilities and isolate them so they will not have to see them. They fear them as though the disability were contagious" (107). Yet *Flush* slightly deviates from the idea that people with disabilities are to be feared because Miss Barrett does receive guests occasionally, yet simultaneously reinforces it because Miss Barrett cloaks her illness when visitors come:

> Once or twice a week Flush was aware that something more important was about to happen. The bed would be carefully disguised as a sofa. The armchair would be drawn up beside it; Miss Barrett herself would be wrapped becomingly in Indian shawls; the toilet things would be scrupulously hidden under the busts of Chaucer and Homer. (*Flush* 48)

Miss Barrett must keep up decorum and not allow others to see her in a state of vulnerability. Not only is the room changed to appear as if it is not a sickroom at all, but Miss Barrett herself becomes an actress—she "laughed, expostulated, exclaimed, sighed too, and laughed again," but she would sink "back very white, very tired on her pillows" once her visitors left (*Flush* 49-50). On the one hand, this could be because her visitors would stay for hours at a time. On the other hand, they stay because Miss Barrett plays the part of a happy and healthy host. Taking this into

account, the reader can see how people with disabilities are thus actors, continuously having to conceal and mask their disabilities in order to pass as "normal" and therefore not make the able-bodied uncomfortable. Because Miss Barrett's guests tend to stay for hours, the reader can surmise that she has become quite the experienced actress over time.

When fall approaches, Miss Barrett must settle "down to a life of complete seclusion in her bedroom" (*Flush* 40). The language used by the narrator to describe her time in the room is again parallel to incarceration, as "she could not go out. She was chained to the sofa" (*Flush* 43). The environment becomes a cage, giving way to Miss Barrett's depression. It is this depression which causes her to lose her appetite; she and Flush have a pact where he consumes her food for her secretly, thereby fooling the family when it comes to her health, even though she may be deteriorating.

> She gave a little sigh when she saw the plump mutton chop, or the wing of partridge or chicken that had been sent up for her dinner. So long as Wilson was in the room she fiddled about with her knife and fork. But directly the door was shut and they were alone, she made a sign. She held up her fork. A whole chicken's wing was impaled upon it. Flush advanced. Miss Barrett nodded. Very gently, very cleverly, without spilling a crumb, Flush removed the wing; swallowed it down and left no trace behind. Half a rice pudding clotted with thick cream went the same way. Nothing could have been neater, more effective than Flush's co-operation.[4] (*Flush* 50)

Her lack of appetite is construed as exhaustion from the visit, but the manner in which Woolf wrote this scene indicates Flush had been eating Miss Barrett's food on her behalf for quite some

[4] The anthropomorphization of Flush by Miss Barrett in this situation will be explored in the following chapter.

time. Thus, her lack of appetite could be considered a side effect of her disability. Certainly if Woolf had known that Elizabeth Barrett Browning had hypokalemic periodic paralysis, she might have specified that certain foods which stimulated glucose could worsen her condition, and that would sufficiently explain her lack of appetite, although it must be noted that hunger is also a trigger for the disorder. But because neither Woolf nor anyone else knew the reality of her disability, the reader is free to explore the possibilities of what the fictional Miss Barrett's disability could be. The indication of a lack of appetite would thus suggest anorexia nervosa (although it could certainly be a side effect of another disability, such as depression). Anorexia nervosa sometimes occurs when a person feels "deficient in their sense of identity, autonomy and control. In many ways they feel and behave as if they had no independent rights, that neither their body nor their actions are self-directed, or not even their own" (Bruch 39). Perhaps this is one of the reasons Miss Barrett refuses to eat—it is a way to establish some control of her own, for her disability renders her unequal and thus at the machinations of others, particularly her father. As Miss Barrett writes to Mr. Horne, "And then came the failure in my health . . . and then the enforced exile to Torquay . . . which gave a nightmare to my life for ever, and robbed it of more than I can speak of here" (*Flush* 45). Miss Barrett may not be able to speak of it, but the reader can easily deduce her meaning by considering that her life was that of a "bird in its cage" (*Flush* 57). She rarely left the family home and when she did, it was only for a short time and with assistance.

One could certainly parallel Miss Barrett's life at this point to the experiences her author had gone through. For instance, Woolf herself suffered from anorexia nervosa. She had become quite vulnerable after her mother's passing and Elaine Showalter has noted that Woolf's anorexia began during her adolescence, coinciding with her menstruation. Moreover, her half-brother

George had begun molesting her. Her anorexia continued on-and-off throughout her life (268-9). Consequently, Woolf's anorexia could certainly be construed as a method of control in an arena where she felt powerless, akin to Miss Barrett's. Woolf's mental illnesses are thus enlightening to the construction of *Flush*—Woolf portrays disability so insightfully because she herself has various ones. For example, she would hear voices, "her pulse raced—it raced so fast as to be almost unbearable. She became painfully excitable and nervous and then intolerably depressed. She became terrified of people, blushed scarlet if spoken to and was unable to face a stranger in the street" (Bell 47). The family doctor, Dr. Seton, "put a stop to all lessons, ordered a simple life and prescribed outdoor exercise; she was to be out of doors four hours a day and it was one of half-sister Stella's self-imposed duties to take her for walks or for rides on the tops of buses" (Bell 47).

The parallels between Woolf and Miss Barrett again raise the question of how the concept of taking back the body through writing would work for a woman with a disability. Woolf and Miss Barrett are inextricably linked as Woolf has Miss Barrett taking back her body through writing. Woolf thus succeeds in taking back her own body through writing Miss Barrett's story. The connection between their experiences again demonstrates how writing for a woman with a disability is a defining act: a demand for visibility. Miss Barrett reflects this with her vivacious nature—although she is unable to do much because of her disability, the rest of her family, including seven brothers and two sisters, seem to favor staying at home. Their willingness to stay at home while Miss Barrett would rather go out serves to highlight the intricacies of her spirit—she is not cut from the same cloth as her family, and her disability will not own her, but rather highlight how headstrong she is.

The Heroine

People with disabilities are often thought of as incapable, needy, worthless, and dependent. As a result, persons with disabilities allegedly cannot assume positions of power and agency. Woolf challenges this notion through Miss Barrett because her narrative is one of taking back the body, of becoming visible and invincible, not only through writing, but through a love story. On the one hand, there is the love story between Miss Barrett and Flush, which will be extensively covered in the following chapter. On the other hand, there is the love story between Miss Barrett and Mr. Browning, which will be examined here.

The love story between Miss Barrett and Mr. Browning is a powerful narrative because people with disabilities are sometimes thought to be hypersexual or, more often, asexual and unlovable. In "Disability, Sex Radicalism, and Political Agency," an essay by Abby Wilkerson on disability, sexual versus political agency and queerness, she affirms that sexuality has "especially serious implications for those whose bodies are perceived as failing outside a fairly narrow and rigid form" (193). She then goes on to note how a straight couple living in an institution for the epileptic requested to marry and were told they could, but were banned from having sex. The struggle for women's romantic and sexual agency is more unique—for instance, Wilkerson recounts how "women with spinal cord injuries report being denied birth control by their doctors in a manner suggesting their sexual lives are over" (194). Wilkerson also recalls the perspective of Ann, a woman with a damaged spinal cord since infancy, who

> recognizes medical authority to reflect and reinforce cultural norms when she reviews the medical literature on sexuality in women with spinal problems and states, 'I … find most of it is inadequate, condescending, restricted to the traditional middle class married view of sex, [and] still inherently male oriented (how to please the almighty male).' (194)

Although these are specific and extreme cases, the reader can observe how women with disabilities in particular are devalued and exiled because they are not useful to the patriarchy unless they can cater to the male gaze. Moreover, Wilkerson notes how in *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, Sandra Lee Bartky "demonstrates how shame as a condition of women's subjectivity … consists in socially imposed *feelings* of inadequacy that are likely to be in direct contract to women's conscious beliefs about themselves" (207). Bartky claims that "under conditions of oppression, the oppressed must struggle not only against more visible disadvantages but against guilt and shame as well" (97). Thus, in order to contextualize Miss Barrett as a whistleblower of stereotypes in disability, one must understand the complexities of shame and guilt that women, particularly those with disabilities, are made to feel. Women with disabilities do not fit the "norm"; instead, they are threats to able-bodied society, especially since all persons are temporarily abled. Therefore, through the rigid cultural norms of the abled, Miss Barrett is supposed to remain in the abjection of the sickroom. However, in all of her disabled glory, she becomes a champion of sexual and romantic agency. Wilkerson defines sexual agency as not just "the capacity to choose, engage in, or refuse sex acts, but … a more profound good that is in many ways socially based, involving not only a sense of oneself as a sexual being but also a larger social dimension in which others recognize and respect one's identity" (195). Through her love story with Mr. Browning, Miss Barrett achieves this respect. What Woolf does with Mr. Browning is to dismantle not only the claim that people with disabilities cannot be loved, but also the allegation that people cannot love or be loved until they love themselves first. To put it simply, a patriarchal and capitalist society hails independence—it is every man for himself, so to speak, but the truth of the matter is that all human beings rely on each other in vast and different ways, with or without a disability. Woolf

demonstrates that dependence is not shameful but rather recuperative for all involved. Here I am not referring solely to Miss Barrett and Mr. Browning but also to Wilson and Flush in particular. Their relationships intersect in ways that are beneficial to each. For instance, in the previous chapter, the sisterhood between Wilson and Miss Barrett was examined. Wilson sometimes plays the role of caretaker for Miss Barrett, and it is that which causes the veil of formality to vanish, as the two women become family. A similar situation transpires between Miss Barrett and Flush which, again, will be examined in the next chapter.

Mr. Browning, however, is quite the force in Miss Barrett's life. He breaks up the monotony and awakens something in her. From the moment his first letter arrives, the reader can see that Miss Barrett is going through a change. It intensifies as they meet in person, and over time Flush notices significant changes in his mistress—along with a "vigor" and "excitement" in her voice, "her cheeks were bright as he had never seen them bright; her great eyes blazed as he had never seen them blaze" (*Flush* 64). Miss Barrett regains her appetite and lust for life, and "then she did what she had not done for many a long day — she actually walked on her own feet as far as the gate at Devonshire Place with her sister" (*Flush* 66). This begs the question, is Woolf trivializing Miss Barrett's disability? Did she simply need someone to love her so that she would be "fixed"? What is curious is that Miss Barrett's anorexia does not afflict her any longer; she begins eating again. However, as aforementioned, people with disabilities have noted that it is harder to cope with culture and society's reaction to their disabilities than with the actual disability. If the reader considers this perspective, then Miss Barrett's sudden robust health can be contextualized. Mr. Browning does strengthen Miss Barrett, but he is not necessarily her savior. As outlined in the previous chapter, while he certainly has some influence on her transformation and liberation, ultimately she comes into her own by realizing her worth,

particularly through the act of writing. She had been working towards her health slowly but surely before Mr. Browning came along. Moreover, if Mr. Browning were to be her savior, then the negative perception of the idea would be diminished nonetheless by recalling that women with disabilities have been institutionally denied romantic and sexual agency, as Wilkerson has noted, having been constructed as damaged and defective by culture and society. To be wanted, to be truly seen by Mr. Browning is a powerful catalyst for Miss Barrett's alteration. Nevertheless, it is only one of various factors, for writing, Wilson and Flush are also great influences, as outlined beforehand.

Flush does, perhaps, bring more of an impact to Miss Barrett's life than Mr. Browning, as seen in the events that transpired after his kidnapping. Although Mr. Browning is a boost in Miss Barrett's life, it is ultimately Flush that propels her. There is extensive evidence that dogs can serve as therapy for people with disabilities,[5] being not only a calming and grounding influence but also becoming family, and Flush is certainly that for Miss Barrett. It is through Flush that she finds her potency, and battles against her family for his freedom from the kidnapping. In the previous chapter, the struggle between Miss Barrett and her family when Flush is kidnapped was outlined extensively—her family refused to aid her in recovering Flush because paying the ransom to Mr. Taylor would be sacrilege for by paying it, she would be propelling further crimes and turn Wimpole Street into the victim of Whitechapel. But how would this narrative be possible, if Miss Barrett is a woman with a disability? The reader must consider Kenny Fries' words in *Starting Out: The Disability Experience from the Inside Out*, where he tells how people with disabilities have been "silenced by those who did not want to hear what we had to say" (1). Thus, Miss Barrett's decision to stand up to her family and the act of speaking back to them and

[5] "Animal-Assisted Therapy: An In-Depth Look" by Katherine Connor and Julie Miller offers a review of the literature on this subject.

even to Mr. Browning is, in fact, radical and dangerous for her. By attempting to save Flush, she is literally risking her life, for women with disabilities are often derailed and locked up. The understanding of this issue aids the reader in contextualizing Miss Barrett's family's reaction to her speaking back—as noted in the previous chapter, her own brother told her "that in his opinion she might well be robbed and murdered if she did what she threatened" (*Flush* 102). He is very well threatening her and her safety by relying on a culture of violence to do the bidding for him because she, as a woman, disabled and thus ineligible for agency, refuses to do as he says. As outlined in the previous chapter, the entire family later joins in on the assault: "Her brothers, her sisters, all came round her threatening her, dissuading her, 'crying out against me for being 'quite mad' and obstinate and wilful — I was called as many names as Mr. Taylor'" (*Flush* 107). Miss Barrett is thus erased and marginalized by her very own family, constructed as crazy and at risk for being sequestered. Nonetheless, Miss Barrett remains calm and reasonable in the face of this atrocity, continuously practical and cautious about the situation, thereby upsetting the social construction that people with disabilities are incompetent, uneducated, and unable to make sound judgments. Flush is a tether that brings Miss Barrett to the forefront, demanding to be seen and heard. Through the grounding that Flush inspires in her, Miss Barrett proves that having a disability does not mean that a person is "less than." Perhaps this is why when she visited Whitechapel in order to converse with Mr. Taylor and left after speaking to his wife, Miss Barrett philosophized on the fact that there "lived women like herself" (*Flush* 104). With these words, Woolf is likely hinting at women with disabilities—while Miss Barrett does at least have some comfort on Wimpole Street because of her economic privilege, the women of Whitechapel must endure poverty, no access to medical care, and thus triple the erasure and marginalization.

After being married for some time and living in Italy, Miss Barrett finds out she is pregnant. Women with disabilities are typically policed as unfit when it comes to motherhood—going back to Wilkerson, she has pointed out the denial of birth control by doctors to women with disabilities because they would not need it anymore (194). The implication is that not only are women with disabilities meant to be asexual, but that they must not have children. They must not reproduce, lest they bring a child with a disability into the world. This not only brings up the issue of forced abortion on women with disabilities but as Wilkerson notes, "many people with disabilities, whether physical or cognitive, have been and continue to be sterilized without their consent, or under less than fully voluntary conditions … Feminists as well as disability … activists have not only opposed coercive sterilization as a violation of individual rights, but have also expressed their uneasiness with the genocidal implications of the practice" (203). The knowledge of this act of violence frames Miss Barrett's pregnancy as remarkable. For her, having a child is an act of healing, centering, and autonomy. This is not to glorify motherhood but it is an empowering experience for Miss Barrett, especially because Woolf does not demonstrate her as incapable; she is neither restricted nor questioned about becoming a mother in the novel. Instead, the pregnancy is treated like any other and the reader sees how Miss Barrett and her child are connected when Flush examines how Miss Barrett "had become two people" (*Flush* 134). This observation by Flush solidifies the bond between Miss Barrett and her child, demonstrating that she can and will be a more than capable mother, regardless of her disability.

Miss Barrett was never happy in the abjection of the sickroom on Wimpole Street. However, in Casa Guidi, things change. Her arrival in Italy and her relationships with Flush, Wilson and Mr. Browning have allowed her to explore what it means to have sexual and romantic agency, to be a woman and not an object, to be a mother, and to be a writer. In Italy,

everything is on Miss Barrett's terms. This realization thus constructs Miss Barrett as a champion of disability in literature—she not only takes back the body by defining it, but she transforms herself from invisibility into an invincible heroine.

Taking all of these things into account, the reader can see how Miss Barrett is one of few accurately portrayed characters with a disability in literature. Woolf has constructed the story not as one of a disabled woman, but of a woman who happens to have a disability. Significantly, Woolf consistently highlights that the main issue with Miss Barrett's disability is not the disability itself but culture and society's reaction to it. Consequently, what Woolf does is de-normalize the so-called normal, upsetting the notion that Miss Barrett is somehow defective for her disability. She thus effectively demonstrates how people with disabilities can have full, happy lives as long as they are granted the same respect, autonomy, and legitimacy as anyone else. Therefore, Miss Barrett is a step in the right direction for characters with disabilities in literature.

Chapter V – Flush is *Flush*

According to Kevin Morrison in "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Dog Days," the real Miss Barrett suffered from depression due to the passing of her brother Edward, to whom she referred as Bro. Knowing this, Miss Mitford gave her Flush in the hopes that he would aid her in the healing process—"if not anything as insulting as distraction, an outlet for her distress, [and] some tangible comfort" (93). Miss Mitford was correct, for Flush brought a great deal of joy and love to and out of Miss Barrett. In many ways, he was to her what Bro used to be. Yet Flush "is often figured by biographers as bestowing physical affection on and generating much amusement for Barrett" (Morrison 94). The impact of Flush is often trivialized because he is a dog. Morrison posits it is because "in classical psychoanalysis theory, adult attachments to a love object are understood to be normal when they are between two culturally sanctioned subject positions: male and female" (94). This is largely due to anthropocentric domination, and the construction of psychoanalysis theory coming from a heteronormative and heterosexist standpoint. Thus, as Ruth Vanita noted in "The Uses of Allusion in *Flush*," the novel "illuminates a kind of love which, because it is not granted social recognition and legitimacy, faces tremendous odds" (256).

Morrison argues that Flush is not a stand-in object for the relationship between Miss Mitford and Miss Barrett, or the lack of Bro; rather, Flush is a dog who must be appreciated in his own right. While Morrison calls for respect for the historical Flush, in "Across the Widest Gulf," Craig Smith, as previously noted, has suggested that *Flush* should be respected for what it is: a novel about a dog. Taking this into account, the reader must consider the perspective of the beloved red cocker spaniel.

The Little Dog That Could

Flush begins with the historical outline of the cocker spaniel, which is the breed of the eponymous character. The reader quickly learns that Flush is a dog of high class and privilege, for a spaniel's place is with royalty; it is "a dog of value and reputation" (*Flush* 13). The reader is also schooled by the narrator on the differences between humans and canines—"But if we are thus led to assume that the Spaniels followed human example, and looked up to Greyhounds as their superiors and considered Hounds beneath them, we have to admit that their aristocracy was founded on better reasons than ours" (*Flush* 14). The narrator outlines the stark differences between humans and canines by highlighting the fact that the aristocracy of dogs consists of a rigid set of rules regarding their looks. Humans, however, have no such rules regarding looks. Instead, human aristocracy is comprised of monetary privilege; a "coat of arms" (*Flush* 15). The narrator criticizes this fact by stressing that one can buy such privilege, for "once make good your claim to sixteen quarterings, prove your right to a coronet, and then you are not only born they say, but nobly born into the bargain" (*Flush* 15). The reader can thus see the difference between canine and human aristocracy, for the former is consistent, whereas the latter can be altered, and so thus the narrator claims that the "Judges of the Spaniel Club judged better" (*Flush* 16). But who are the judges of the Spaniel Club? Is it dogs themselves who create such a hierarchy or is it an extension of the patriarchy, seeking to control nature? In "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice," Janis Birkeland has described ecofeminism as "a value system, a social movement, and a practice, but … also …a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction" (18). The anthropocentric nature of patriarchy thus may be the reason that "the definition and segregation of canine breeds [in Victorian England] was bound up in the attempts of the rising middle class to define itself by maintaining strict distinctions of identity" (Smith 353). In "Flush and the Literary Canon,"

Pamela L. Caughie, supports this by noting “breeding comes about from the desire to preserve the purity of the ‘family’ (whether canine, human, or literary), that is, common ancestors and right alliances” (49). This, of course, is problematic, and the narrator knows it for although she initially heralded the judges of the Spaniel Club, she points out that spaniels who do not meet the standard of the club are discouraged from breeding, “cut off from the privileges and emoluments of his kind” with the judges laying down the law and imposing “penalties and privileges which ensure that the law shall be obeyed” (*Flush* 15). In her introduction to *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, Carol J. Adams has claimed that humans can be parasitic in their need to rule over nature, which would run “itself very well, even better, without humans” (21). Adams calls the abuse and exploitation of nature by men a “dualistic concept of reality as split between soulless matter and transcendent male consciousness” (21). The narrator of *Flush* echoes these words by criticizing the patriarchy for its control of animals as the fact that dogs are selectively bred and prized to satisfy the wishes of the judges is problematical because it serves only one purpose for men: playing god.

Although men control nature by playing god, they also (terribly) control their own destinies. In a mixture of satire and resentment, the narrator criticizes humans for their reification of privilege. Take, for instance, the matter of the Midfords/Mitfords. The Midfords are the family that owns Flush. Dr. Midford chose to start spelling is name with a T instead—Mitford. Just the simple change of a letter allowed him to claim “descent from the Northumberland family of the Mitfords of Bertram Castle” (*Flush* 16). Despite the fact that Dr. Mitford can manipulate his cultural and societal standing, the narrator jokes that he does not fit the physical requirements for the Spaniel club and this is his downfall—“he was utterly selfish, recklessly extravagant, worldly, insincere and addicted to gambling. He wasted his own fortune, his wife’s fortune, and

his daughter's earnings. He deserted them in his prosperity and sponged upon them in his infirmity" (*Flush* 17). What the narrator does here is disparage the idea that humans, particularly men, can control and manipulate nature to their own benefit, deciding the criteria for what can and cannot live, when they themselves are the purveyors of their own catastrophes. Who are men to rule over nature if they cannot effectively handle themselves, seeing as there are no guidelines for humans? The narrator stresses the fact that nothing would stop a man such as Dr. Mitford from marrying up, living long, having a child and many dogs. Such things would affect dogs, however, and this is how Flush is bred from the ancestor Tray, "a red cocker spaniel of merit" (*Flush* 18). Flush exudes such fineness that Dr. Mitford refuses to sell him—"nothing here but what would meet with the approval of the Spaniel Club … Flush was a pure-bred Cocker of the red variety marked by all the characteristic excellences of his kind" (*Flush* 18). His worth is directly proportional to his looks, and his value is outstanding. Although Dr. Mitford will not sell him, the fact that Flush could potentially be sold indicates to the reader that he and other dogs are thought of as property, which men could trade for profit. Carol Adams and Marjorie Procter-Smith, in "Taking Life or 'Taking on Life'?" assert that "most animals cannot fight collectively against human oppression, and the lack of struggle cannot be taken as absence of resistance or acceptance of domination" (309). Woolf explores this problem as the novel progresses (particularly with the dognapping), for dogs are subject to the whims of their owners, just as Miss Mitford is subject to her father's misjudgments. The family's fall on "evil days" means they no longer have the economic privilege their name would imply (*Flush* 18). Nevertheless, Flush is seemingly happy, even though he did not have "any of those luxuries, rainproof kennels, cement walks, a maid or boy attached to his person, that would now be accorded a dog of his rank" (*Flush* 19). This, however, is a social and cultural construct imposed on dogs by humans. Flush

does not know or care for the difference, for “he throve; he enjoyed with all the vivacity of his temperament most of the pleasures and some of the licences natural to his youth and sex” (*Flush* 19). Significantly, Smith maintains that “human companions are not the center of a dog's psyche” (353). What is important to Flush is smell. He can do without all the apparent privileges a dog of his breeding is allegedly purported to need as long as he has his sense of smell, which even makes him forget Miss Mitford.

Flush becomes a father when he is still a puppy. Here, Woolf takes the opportunity to compare the consequences that would transpire if a man and woman had sex and children outside of marriage, versus dogs,

> Such conduct in a man even, in the year 1842, would have called for some excuse from a biographer; in a woman no excuse could have availed; her name must have been blotted in ignominy from the page. But the moral code of dogs, whether better or worse, is certainly different from ours, and there was nothing in Flush’s conduct in this respect that requires a veil now, or unfitted him for the society of the purest and the chastest in the land then. (*Flush* 21)

This comparison is important because women and animals have been historically grouped together as inferior beings. Birkeland notes the negative impact of this association, asserting that it demonstrates how “things are only valued to the extent that they are useful to Man” (24). Because he is male and comes from a privileged line, Flush is discouraged from mating with dogs that are not of his pedigree, as his value would drop. However, he does not suffer the consequences a woman would if she had a child out of wedlock, for at least he has proven his manhood.

Dr. Pusey is interested in purchasing Flush from Miss Mitford, a tempting offer considering the hard times she is experiencing, but she refuses to sell him. For her, Flush is rare in his capacity of human compassion. Even when he is overtaken by his instincts regarding scents out in the wild, Flush fights back against them when Miss Mitford calls for him. Miss Mitford thus sees that Flush is special in his altruistic capacities. Selling him is unthinkable but giving him to her friend Miss Barrett is only fitting for "Flush was worthy of Miss Barrett; Miss Barrett was worthy of Flush" (*Flush* 23). In this act, the reader can see the impact of ecofeminism in the novel. In "A Feminist Philosophical Perspective on Ecofeminist Spiritualities," Karen J. Warren claims that the key to dismantling oppression is by rejecting domination of all beings (123-124). Miss Mitford's disinclination to barter Flush, to give him to Miss Barrett instead, is a refusal to be an accomplice in the command of animals.

"There was a likeness between them"

In her *Companion Species Manifesto*, Donna Haraway blurs the lines between humans and animals, particularly dogs. She claims that humans and canines are entirely capable of a stable, loving relationship, as long as both parties work at it—particularly the human, who must concede that if they have a dog, the dog owns them in return: "Both dog and handler have to be able to take the initiative and to respond obediently to the other" (62). June Dwyer, however, challenges Haraway's affirmations in "A Non-Companion Species Manifesto" by claiming that "most animals don't care about us nearly as much as we care about them" (73). She alleges that there is an imbalance in relationships between humans and other species, as the reciprocity is unequal. The relationship that develops between Miss Barrett and Flush illustrates these two claims.

Flush is taken to Wimpole Street, where Miss Barrett lives, by Miss Mitford who leads him, as described by Alison Booth in "The Scent of a Narrative," "like a surreal pilgrim" (11). Woolf once again explores the politics of place as Flush moves from the Mitfords' working cottage in Three Mile Cross to the Barretts' home in Wimpole Street—"the effect upon Flush must have been overwhelming in the extreme" (*Flush* 25). There is a striking contrast between the two places as the cottage in Three Mile Cross was coming apart; things were frayed, bare and cheap. The narrator stresses the difference by describing the profligacy in the Barretts' home. Nonetheless, although the narrator conjectures that Flush may have been affected by his surroundings, what truly captures his attention, as usual, are the scents in the house. Throughout the novel, the narrator stresses that what truly matters to Flush is scent, not sight. Flush is unable to become accustomed to scents; he is highly sensitive to them. This tidbit of information is important for the reader to know because it highlights Flush's eventual loyalty to Miss Barrett, even in the face of the unpleasant odor in her room. As outlined in previous chapters, the smell in Miss Barrett's room is overpoweringly disagreeable, to say the least, and Flush is left in it. Miss Mitford leaves Flush in the room and thus changes his life irreparably—

> For one instant he paused, bewildered, unstrung. Then with a pounce as of clawed tigers memory fell upon him. He felt himself alone — deserted. He rushed to the door. It was shut. He pawed, he listened. He heard footsteps descending. … panic seized upon him. Door after door shut in his face as Miss Mitford went downstairs; they shut on freedom; on fields; on hares; on grass; on his adored, his venerated mistress — on the dear old woman who had washed him and beaten him and fed him from her own plate when she had none too much to eat herself — on all he had known of happiness and love and

> human goodness! There! The front door slammed. He was alone. She had deserted him. (*Flush* 29-30)

Flush cannot understand what is happening. All he knows at this point is anxiety at Miss Mitford's departure. He does not realize the woman has been struggling to support both him and herself. He does know, however, that this change will be drastic. Thus, he howls in misery, believing himself alone in the darkness forever. Suddenly Miss Barrett calls him, and he runs to her. As they see each other for the first time, the narrator asserts that "there was a likeness between them" even though "between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog" (*Flush* 31). Taking this into account, "the promise of a Platonic completion of lost halves cannot be realized in this scene" (Smith 354). Nevertheless, the narrator conjectures that the pair could very well complete each other, filling the parts that were missing in one another and so thus "their long gaze results in a revelation not of identity but of relationship" (Smith 354). This is not a far-fetched thought, as Luce Irigaray has suggested in "Animal Compassion" where she claims that birds are "our friends. But also our guides … scouts … angels in some respect. They accompany persons who are alone, comfort them, restoring their health and their courage. Birds do more. Birds lead one's becoming" (197). With the progression of the novel, the reader can see that Flush certainly does this for Miss Barrett, as he internalizes her feelings. Whether Miss Barrett returns Flush's compassion is to be explored, for she seems to expect his unconditional love without cause. Haraway has declared that the expectation of unconditional love from companion animals is a mistake, and the reader will soon see why.

Flush spends the summer at Miss Barrett's feet, except for the rare exceptions that she can go out and he accompanies her. Again, what governs him is his sense of smell, and also his

instinctual need to explore. With Miss Mitford in Three Mile Cross, Flush was allowed to run free frequently. However, since becoming Miss Barrett's companion, Flush is leashed and thus restricted—"Miss Barrett held him tight, or he would have rushed to destruction" (*Flush* 37). Even when Miss Barrett walks him to Regent's Park, Flush finds himself constricted and thus confused. With Miss Mitford, he had something resembling freedom but with Miss Barrett, having become a society dog, Flush is to follow the unspoken rules of decency. Even though he yearns to roam, "now a heavy weight jerked at his throat; he was thrown back on his haunches" (*Flush* 38). Flush thus begins questioning his existence; he ponders why he is a prisoner with Miss Barrett. While this is Flush's perspective of his relationship with Miss Barrett, she is on another sphere anthropomorphizing him, believing him to be loving and self-sacrificing for her, while he believes he is being punished for an unknown crime. The reader can therefore see the problem in their relationship, as the pair are on entirely different levels.

When Flush sees men in shiny black top hats navigating Regent's Park, he suddenly becomes grateful for the "protection of the chain," gladly accepting it (*Flush* 38). Why is this? As Flush's feelings become merged with that of Miss Barrett, does his sudden fear have anything to do with patriarchy? Does Flush know, as Lori Gruen has affirmed in "Dismantling Oppression" where she explores the problematic relationships that humans and animals have, that dogs such as him are "pawns in a power dynamic by which man asserts his superiority" (74)? Nevertheless, he becomes accustomed to his new reality, knowing he must be led on a chain, particularly in Regent's Park. Flush has thus quickly deduced the politics of place in Regent's Park, and will soon figure out his own contextual privilege.

The dogs of Wimpole Street have privilege according to their breeding. Back in Three Mile Cross, Flush would play and interact with all kinds of dogs without a second thought. In

Wimpole Street, however, he begins to realize that there is a difference between him and other dogs as he overhears humans comparing various dogs' worth based on their physicality. He becomes curious, inspecting himself in the mirror. Miss Barrett once again anthropomorphizes him, assuming he was "meditating the difference between appearance and reality" (*Flush* 40). Flush, however, was gauging his worth, and he comes to realize he is a dog of privilege. At this point, the reader must consider the differing realities between Miss Barrett and Flush. She continuously anthropomorphizes him, regarding him to be a higher being. The narrator, however, continuously dashes the reader's hopes by highlighting Flush's vanity. In this way, Woolf demonstrates the complex relationship human beings have with animals. They are only respected up to a point. The idea that they may be conscious and sentient beings is unthinkable to many humans, as Smith puts forth,

> Descartes formulated modern anthropocentrism in his distinction between humans, who by virtue of reason are aware of their experience, and nonhuman animals, which he claims are effectively machines lacking in significant self-awareness. Descartes's followers took this view to its logical conclusion, insisting that nonhuman animals are incapable of even such basic experiences as physical pleasure or pain. (349)

Nonetheless, Charles Darwin "challenged the Cartesian divide by pointedly studying human and animal consciousness as points in a continuum of experience" (Smith 350). His findings have been long debated. Meanwhile, Adams and Procter-Smith have pointed out that "for many, consciousness is what defines us as human. To have consciousness means, precisely, to know oneself as more than 'animal.' … If we recognize that animals have consciousness, we lose one of the central demarcations that define us as human and not animal" (297). This anthropocentrism may be why, even though Miss Barrett inherently knows that Flush is a

conscious and sentient being, there is still a divide between them. Thus, through *Flush*, what Woolf suggests is that animals can have consciousness, but that theirs may differ from humans, as exemplified by Flush's valuing of smell and Miss Barrett's prizing of sight. Woolf does not construct the consciousness of animals in a negative light, but rather celebrates the differences between humans and animals. This is why Woolf has been heralded as a proto-ecofeminist (Scott 8).

These differences, however, do cause some discord between Miss Barrett and Flush. In Three Mile Cross, Flush was free to roam about, but because he is bound to Miss Barrett now and she is unable to go out anytime, Flush mirrors her incapacitation as he must give up his airings. He can only go outside when Wilson allows him to, but he loses interest in going as he becomes attached to Miss Barrett. Smith points out that Woolf glosses over the consequences of Flush's refusal to walk due to "cultural inhibitions in writing about the body" but notes that for Miss Barrett and Flush, it "must surely have been a major difficulty in the stuffy, overfurnished back bedroom" (355).

Nevertheless, with the passing of time, Flush's attachment to Miss Barrett deepens, as she becomes his master. This begs the question, is it problematic that Flush is essentially owned by a woman? The answer is complicated. Flush is meant to provide joy and love to Miss Barrett and he must sacrifice himself extensively for this goal, but Miss Barrett does provide Flush with certain comforts. Moreover, because both Miss Barrett and Flush have been relegated to the position of Other due to their supposed inferiorities, their relationship is not so unequal as it may sometimes seem, especially as they slowly but surely become family. They work hard to understand one another, which as aforementioned, Haraway has described as the key to a good relationship between humans and animals. They thus upset the concept of ownership for despite

the fact that Flush would rather be out of Miss Barrett's room and into the wild, "when she laid her hand on his collar, he could not deny that another feeling, urgent, contradictory, disagreeable—he did not know what to call it or why he obeyed it—restrained him" (*Flush* 42). Flush internalizes Miss Barrett's feelings:

> Between them, Flush felt more and more strongly, as the weeks wore on, was a bond, an uncomfortable yet thrilling tightness; so that if his pleasure was her pain, then his pleasure was pleasure no longer but three parts pain. The truth of this was proved every day. Somebody opened the door and whistled him to come. Why should he not go out? He longed for air and exercise; his limbs were cramped with lying on the sofa. He had never grown altogether used to the smell of eau de cologne. But no—though the door stood open, he would not leave Miss Barrett. (*Flush* 43).

Although there was initially a world of difference between them, Flush accepts his fate and in doing so, mirrors Miss Barrett's incarceration, even though they still largely do not understand each other's inclinations, such as Flush's bewilderment at Miss Barrett's writing and her bafflement at Flush's sudden starts when he hears or smells something at a distance. While Miss Barrett is incarcerated because of patriarchal ideologies and her disability, Flush is incarcerated because he is now Miss Barrett's property or rather, her family. The complex power play may make the reader wonder if Flush is actually suffering from Stockholm syndrome. Because of Flush's complex position, Caughie has asked the following:

> And what if we consider the economic rather than the mirror relation between Barrett and her dog? After all, Flush may resemble his mistress not because their marginal positions are similar, not because he stands in for her, but because as personal property, Flush *is* his

> mistress, belongs to her, and thus takes on her characteristics and desires. In this sense, Flush resembles less the woman writer than the writer's servant, Wilson. (60-1)

Although Caughie's point is valid, both women and dogs are not privileged groups; they are usually at the mercy of the patriarchy. Miss Barrett thus should not be shamed for wanting a companion dog, especially when he was given to her not only as an act of friendship, but one of survival for both Miss Mitford and Flush since poverty had stricken the family, and Miss Mitford was even giving up her meals for Flush. Miss Barrett saves Flush and Flush returns the favor wholeheartedly. Their relationship becomes one of reciprocity, for even though they sometimes struggle to understand each other, they at least try. In fact, even though they cannot converse, they nonetheless become closer—Flush yearns for the ability to speak while Miss Barrett wonders what he would say. Although Flush cannot understand why Miss Barrett writes or what she writes about, his paws contract with the desire to take up the act himself, as he sees how important it is for her. Miss Barrett wonders at the capabilities of Flush's nose. They are thus amazed at each other, longing to understand one another.

Strangely enough, Woolf never addresses how Flush feels towards Miss Mitford as he becomes closer to Miss Barrett. Miss Mitford is one of Miss Barrett's regular visitors, and sometimes stays for hours at a time. When Miss Barrett has guests, Flush is generally disregarded, and displays an equal annoyance at all guests who stay longer to his liking, including Miss Mitford. Woolf never addresses whether Flush feels confused; if he wonders whether Miss Mitford will be taking him back. Instead, the reader is led to believe that Flush has fully detached from Miss Mitford and latched onto Miss Barrett, as he feels relief when Miss Mitford leaves. This, however, could be Flush's internalization of Miss Barrett's feelings rearing its head again, for he mirrors her exhaustion at their departure. Nonetheless, he is happy to eat

Miss Barrett's dinner for her when she does not want it. Although Miss Barrett assumes that Flush is doing her a favor, this is merely her anthropomorphizing him again—he eats her food because he wants it. Thus, even though they have undoubtedly become closer, they still continue to perceive each other differently. Nevertheless, they are still strongly united in their senses as, for example, Flush feels Miss Barrett's trepidation when her father is around.

Throughout this time, although Woolf has been highlighting their differences while also merging their personalities, she does separate them by referring to Miss Barrett as a "teacher" from whom Flush receives his "education." Although Flush is apparently naturally inclined to the bourgeois, he becomes more polished through Miss Barrett who

> did her best to refine and educate his powers still further. Once she took a harp from the window and asked him, as she laid it by his side, whether he thought that the harp, which made music, was itself alive? He looked and listened; pondered, it seemed, for a moment in doubt and then decided that it was not. Then she would make him stand with her in front of the looking-glass and ask him why he barked and trembled. Was not the little brown dog opposite himself? But what is "oneself"? Is it the thing people see? Or is it the thing one is? So Flush pondered that question too, and, unable to solve the problem of reality, pressed closer to Miss Barrett and kissed her "expressively." *That* was real at any rate. (*Flush* 55-6)

It must be noted that Miss Barrett is not training Flush, but rather making him edified. This scene may take the reader back to the question of consciousness in animals and whether they have worlds within them. Woolf continues to construct Flush as a being capable of logical thinking. He may not know the answers to Miss Barrett's queries, but he at least ponders them. Through

this edification, the pair bond intensely. Over time, Flush's education refines him to the point that he becomes pretentious, thereby raising the ire of Catiline, a Cuba bloodhound that lives in the house and attacks him for his pompousness. He looks to Miss Barrett for sympathy, and here their problems begin again. She dismisses him by proclaiming he is "no hero" (*Flush* 56). The reader can therefore see Miss Barrett's edification of Flush and even their bonding backfire, for Flush has come to rely on Miss Barrett to take care of him. He no longer feels he must defend himself when Miss Barrett is there for him. But Miss Barrett does not realize that and hurts his feelings in the process by ignoring him, unconscious of the fact that she has become his whole world. Indeed, their bond strengthens into a relationship, as sometimes Miss Barrett cannot stand Flush, whereas he sometimes he resents her. Nevertheless, they stay because they love each other.

> She was too just not to realize that it was for her that he had sacrificed his courage, as it was for her that he had sacrificed the sun and the air. This nervous sensibility had its drawbacks, no doubt — she was full of apologies when he flew at Mr. Kenyon and bit him for stumbling over the bell-pull; it was annoying when he moaned piteously all night because he was not allowed to sleep on her bed — when he refused to eat unless she fed him; but she took the blame and bore the inconvenience because, after all, Flush loved her. He had refused the air and the sun for her sake. … She loved Flush, and Flush was worthy of her love. (*Flush* 56-7)

As close as the pair becomes, as seemingly inseparable as they are, things change with the arrival of Mr. Browning.

Mr. Browning: Usurper

For Flush, Mr. Browning is a threat; a "usurper" (*Flush* 70). From the moment Mr. Browning's first letter to Miss Barrett arrives, Flush knows there is danger ahead, "menacing his safety and bidding him sleep no more" (*Flush* 59). At this point in time, Flush and Miss Barrett have been together for years and he has learned her habits and manners better than anyone else—he can tell that Miss Barrett is anxiously looking forward to more letters from Mr. Browning. Even though he cannot read her letters, "he knew just as well as if he could read every word, how strangely his mistress was agitated as she wrote; what contrary desires shook her" (*Flush* 62). Flush continues to internalize Miss Barrett's feelings, but he perceives them as "some terror – some horror – something that Miss Barrett dreaded" and so he must too (*Flush* 62).

The arrival of Mr. Browning confirms Flush's fears of an incoming horror, as Mr. Browning and Miss Barrett are enraptured with each other, and neither notices Flush. Flush, who was Miss Barrett's center, is now edged out by Mr. Browning. This ignites the jealousy of Flush, who notices that Miss Barrett even behaves differently after Mr. Browning leaves. Before, she used to be exhausted when guests departed. In contrast, when Mr. Browning leaves, Miss Barrett "still sat upright; her eyes still burnt; her cheeks still glowed; she seemed still to feel that Mr. Browning was with her" (*Flush* 65). Flush even believes that Miss Barrett's newfound strength comes from Mr. Browning. Meanwhile, Miss Barrett seems practically unaware of Flush's presence, and considers him foolish. Their relationship becomes passive-aggressive as Flush begins to wish he were anywhere but in Mr. Browning's presence; reverting to memories of the past. His resentment rises, especially when Mr. Browning "scrubbed his head in a brisk, spasmodic way, energetically, without sentiment, as he passed him" (*Flush* 69). Flush feels disrespected by Mr. Browning, who trivializes his presence. Worse still is Miss Barrett's disregard for him—"she was changing in every relation — in her feeling towards Flush himself.

She treated his advances more brusquely; she cut short his endearments laughingly; she made him feel that there was something petty, silly, affected, in his old affectionate ways" (*Flush* 70). Smith notes that the discord caused by Mr. Browning in Flush is "a painful struggle toward understanding" (355). Despite their closeness, there are still many things that Flush cannot understand about Miss Barrett. Thus, his anger at taking second place in her life escalates into violence, "he acts as any lover: he bites his rival" (Booth 11) while Mr. Browning is in mid-conversation with Miss Barrett. Mr. Browning simply pushes him away and Flush feels humiliated for he has failed and Miss Barrett later punishes him, claiming she will no longer love him. Miss Barrett shames Flush for his reaction to her abandonment of him. The drama continues to escalate with Flush feeling suicidal and eventually becoming so frustrated with his situation that he attempts to attack Mr. Browning again. He is punished severely for it by Wilson, who beats him. Flush is thus framed as disobedient by Wilson, Miss Barrett and her sister Arabella, who considers him naughty. Miss Barrett assumes that the attack "had been unprovoked; she credited Mr. Browning with all virtue, with all generosity; Flush had been beaten off by a servant, without a whip, because 'it was right.' There was no more to be said. Miss Barrett decided against him" (*Flush* 76-7). She refuses to meet his eyes.

Here, the reader must wonder if there is something more to Flush's hatred of Mr. Browning than simple jealousy. Is he afraid of being replaced and/or is it the intrusion of a middle-class man that unsettles him? After all, the historical Mr. Browning was rejected by Miss Barrett's family—her father and brothers complained "bitterly that Browning was living on his wife's money" (Ward 153). Flush may have been demonstrating the effects of a lack of exposure to different classes—pompousness. His pretentiousness is reinforced by Miss Barrett's efforts to refine him. Whatever the answer, Flush feels defeated. He thus begins to philosophize on his

situation, and realizes that by hurting Mr. Browning, he is effectively hurting Miss Barrett—"If he bit Mr. Browning he bit her too" (*Flush* 77). His emotions show, and Miss Barrett realizes how callous she has been, for "once he had roused her with a kiss, and she had thought that he was Pan. He had eaten chicken and rice pudding soaked in cream. He had given up the sunshine for her sake" (*Flush* 78). She forgives him, and Flush meets her halfway by eating cakes that Mr. Browning had brought for him, but which had gone sour since he refused to do anything with the man—"he would eat them now that they were stale, because they were offered by an enemy turned to friend, because they were symbols of hatred turned to love" (*Flush* 80). Through the battle with Mr. Browning, Woolf once again highlights the differences between Miss Barrett and Flush, while also demonstrating the efforts that they make for each other. She contextualizes Flush as a sentient being, worthy of love and respect. Unfortunately, society and culture do not necessarily see it this way.

The Dognapping

According to Booth, Flush always has "a price on his head" (11). Back in Three Mile Cross, the price on Flush's head was due to his breeding. On Wimpole Street, however, Caughie notes his monetary value is tied to the fact that

> he is the property of a lady. He is still of value, but the mark of value has changed: Flush's worth is now determined by his market price not by his markings. Flush's value, then, varies from context to context, in part because Flush is both a pure-bred (valuable in itself) and a commodity (valuable in what it can be exchanged for). That is, Flush is not just a good cocker spaniel with the right markings, he is an economic good-something to be bought, exchanged, stolen, ransomed. (50)

All the other dogs of Wimpole Street also have prices on their head, and that is why they must be led on chains. Mr. Taylor of Whitechapel and his men steal the dogs of the people of Wimpole Street, preying on their emotions, in order to make money. They are incredibly successful in their endeavors, so much so, that "the historical Flush was stolen three times" although Woolf condensed these events into one for the novel (Smith 356).

The one time that Flush is not leashed, he is stolen. In order to recover Flush, Miss Barrett is ordered to supply Mr. Taylor and his men 10 pounds. Refusal to do so would result in "a brown paper parcel … delivered … [to] Wimpole Street a few days later containing the head and paws of the dog" (*Flush* 89). Miss Barrett is, at least initially, "not seriously alarmed" (*Flush* 93). She is fairly blasé about the matter because she believes it can be easily resolved. However, as outlined in the two previous chapters, Miss Barrett begins to worry relentlessly about Flush, about his well-being and whether she can recover him as she battles not only Mr. Taylor, but her family. Miss Barrett's family views Flush as inconsequential and worse, replaceable. Their dismissal of Flush, and his pain, reveals how animals are largely seen as commodities, and not equal beings. Although Miss Barrett sometimes anthropomorphizes Flush, her family does the very exact opposite, not caring for his outcome. Flush, however, worries whether he will ever see Miss Barrett again:

> Flush was going through the most terrible experience of his life. He was bewildered in the extreme. One moment he was in Vere Street, among ribbons and laces; the next he was tumbled head over heels into a bag; jolted rapidly across streets, and at length was tumbled out — here. He found himself in complete darkness. He found himself in chillness and dampness. As his giddiness left him he made out a few shapes in a low dark room — broken chairs, a tumbled mattress. Then he was seized and tied tightly by the leg

> to some obstacle. Something sprawled on the floor — whether beast or human being, he could not tell. Great boots and draggled skirts kept stumbling in and out. Flies buzzed on scraps of old meat that were decaying on the floor. Children crawled out from dark corners and pinched his ears. He whined, and a heavy hand beat him over the head. He cowered down on the few inches of damp brick against the wall. Now he could see that the floor was crowded with animals of different kinds. Dogs tore and worried a festering bone that they had got between them. Their ribs stood out from their coats — they were half famished, dirty, diseased, uncombed, unbrushed; yet all of them, Flush could see, were dogs of the highest breeding, chained dogs, footmen's dogs, like himself. (*Flush* 90-1)

Here, Flush is at war. He does not know when or if he will ever go back home again, and the signs point to no, as he sees a dog lapping up contaminated water. This little act signals to the reader that Mr. Taylor is a steadfast man, willing to wait as long as needs in order to obtain money. Flush becomes so desperate waiting for his freedom that when the door of his prison is opened, he wonders if it could be Wilson, Mr. Browning or Miss Barrett. Yet Mr. Browning, the other men in Miss Barrett's life and Wimpole Street itself could not care less about Flush, denying Miss Barrett the agency to retrieve him. Touching on the issues of animal consumption, Lori Gruen has written that "animals can clearly be seen as pawns in a power dynamic by which man asserts his superiority" (74). Flush is a pawn for all involved in the kidnapping and worse still, disregarded, for he is merely viewed as transitory property. He is not family to any of the people who have involved themselves in this matter, except Miss Barrett. She has an epiphany, as she realizes what Flush truly is to her. She suddenly sees a difference between her and Flush's standing in society as she wonders, "But what would Mr. Browning have done if the banditti had

stolen her; had her in their power; threatened to cut off her ears and send them by post to New Cross?" (*Flush* 101). Perhaps Mr. Browning would fight for her, but only because they have a personal connection. The neighborhood might also rally for her considering Miss Barrett is from a privileged family. But what if she were not? Had she been from Whitechapel, her disappearance might have been ignored, just as Flush is by the people of Wimpole Street. Nonetheless, Miss Barrett is different, unafraid, and so she fights hard to recover Flush, risking herself, as

> she goes to Whitechapel and pays the ransom, thereby giving way to and shoring up tyranny, but also expressing a different value system. While Mr. Taylor, Mr. Barrett ,and Mr. Browning are all concerned with what might be gained—whether a sufficient monetary return or the correct moral position—Elizabeth Barrett is concerned with what might be discarded in the process—Flush. (Caughie 51)

Flush holds on to Miss Barrett's memory as a symbol of hope and survival while he waits to be recovered. However, he begins to show signs of disassociation, becoming nonchalant about whether he survives. This disassociation is only temporary and in itself a mode of survival, for when Flush is returned to Miss Barrett, he allows himself to release the emotions he repressed in the company of Mr. Taylor and his men.

As said before, Flush was at war when he was held for ransom by Mr. Taylor. This is verified by his behavior in the aftermath. He is like a shell-shocked soldier, depressed and afraid. He even fears the men in Miss Barrett's life, including Mr. Browning. It is curious that Flush inherently disliked Mr. Browning; he must have known that the man had anthropocentric inclinations, as Mr. Browning refused to support Miss Barrett in Flush's recovery. Flush now no

longer trusts him or anyone other than Miss Barrett, for "behind those smiling, friendly faces were treachery and cruelty and deceit. Their caresses were hollow" (*Flush* 109). He and Miss Barrett thus become closer than ever, seeking solace in each other. Although there were times that Miss Barrett rebuffed Flush and dismissed him, acting as if he were her property, she now views him equally, as her family. Yet everything is to change once again.

Escape to Italy

Flush's senses tingle, as he knows change is coming, just as he did when Mr. Browning's letters first arrived. At this point, the reader knows that there is a pattern with Flush every time change comes about: he initially dreads it, but soon sees it is for the best. For Flush, this change will be the emotional catharsis he desperately needs after the kidnapping ordeal. Miss Barrett, Flush and Wilson escape the shackles of Wimpole Street, joining Mr. Browning in Italy and thus "leaving tyrants and dog-stealers behind them" (*Flush* 117). Although Flush was again wary of Mr. Browning after the kidnapping, their relationship will eventually change for the better in Italy. In this country, everything metamorphoses—even the smells. Flush is captivated by them, but the scents are only the beginning. The house in Italy greatly differs from the sickroom, not only in terms of decoration, but in the glorious light, and the lively sounds. What is most striking for Flush, however, is the alteration of privilege—in England, he was highly prized under the rules of the Spaniel club. In Italy, though, Flush sees that the concept of ranking dogs is nonexistent for "as far as he could see, they were dogs merely" and Flush felt as if he were "a prince in exile … the sole aristocrat among a crowd of canaille … the only pure-bred cocker spaniel in the whole of Pisa" (*Flush* 120-1).

Initially, Flush feels displaced as he loses his standing; he is merely another dog in Italy. This is a shock for him, as he had been taught to prize his breeding and privilege, thus “there was an element … of the snob in Flush” (*Flush* 121). Flush compensates for the sudden loss of privilege by acting as if he were the master. Because he perceived himself to be among peers in England, he could subdue his snobbish nature. In Italy, however, he views himself as superior, special and unique. His perception alters, however, with the realization that the laws of the Spaniel and Kennel clubs are nonexistent in Italy. At first, this gives him pause, but he becomes accepting of the lack of rules and guidelines, easily bonding with the dogs of Italy, to the point he considers them his comrades. What truly empowers Flush, however, is the “moment of liberation” he experiences as he realizes that just as there are no Spaniel and Kennel clubs in Italy, dogs do not need to be led on chains as they did in Regent’s Park for “he had no need of protection” anymore, as he did then (*Flush* 125). This liberation that Flush goes through may also be tied to the transformation of his relationship with Mr. Browning. Flush deeply resented the man in England for he signified change, but their rapport progresses, with Flush becoming increasingly comfortable:

> If Mr. Browning was late in going for his walk — he and Flush were the best of friends now — Flush boldly summoned him. He ‘stands up before him and barks in the most imperious manner possible,’ … So if Mr. Browning loitered, Flush stood up and barked; but if Mr. Browning preferred to stay at home and write, it did not matter. Flush was independent now. … Why should he wait? Off he ran by himself. He was his own master now. (*Flush* 125-6).

The two previous chapters demonstrated how Miss Barrett found autonomy and agency in Italy. Her relationship with Flush becomes “less emotional” and she no longer needs him the

way she used to, "to give her what her own experience lacked; she had found Pan for herself" (*Flush* 125-6). Flush was a therapy dog for Miss Barrett and having fulfilled his task, he too finds his own autonomy and agency in Italy. The alteration of their relationship is not diminished; rather, it is much more fruitful, for Flush and Miss Barrett are now on equal standing. Miss Barrett even lets Flush roam the streets of Florence by himself, fully trusting him to come back. On the one hand, this is because of the strength of their bond and on the other, it is because "fear was unknown in Florence; there were no dog-stealers here and, [Miss Barrett] may have sighed, there were no fathers" (*Flush* 126). This last line is significant, because even though the narrator may be referring to Miss Barrett's father, she may also be implying that Flush and Miss Barrett are at once free from the confines of a patriarchal culture that sought to dominate and exploit women and dogs. This is what allows both Miss Barrett and Flush to grow and explore their agencies.

One particular agency that Flush explores is his sexuality. Despite the fact that he had previously had sex and became a father before moving to Wimpole Street, Flush's sexual agency was repressed until his arrival in Italy. Once there, he discovers his sexuality. Woolf, however, cloaks this exploration in floral metaphors. Even though this may have been due to 1930s conservatism, the narrator's declaration that for Flush "it did not matter which" dog he had sex with, that for him "it was all the same," may be an indication that Flush was exploring his bisexuality, especially now that he is away from the Victorian patriarchy (*Flush* 127). To contextualize this claim, the reader may consider Sigurlaug Kristjánsdóttir's observation that Woolf felt dismay "after having watched her dog engage in sexual antics in the park" (18). She realized that her dog "received more toleration in public than she could ever hope for in her relationship with Vita Sackville-West" (18). Kristjánsdóttir adds that the two "women used

ambiguous language to express their feelings in their correspondence and diaries." Taking this into account, Woolf might have written of Flush's sexual escapades in allegories to imagine herself in such freedom.

Although "it cannot be doubted that [Miss Barrett] and Flush were reaching different conclusions in their voyages of discovery," they were still strongly as connected as ever (*Flush* 130-1). Flush begins to sense that another alteration is upon them as he watches Miss Barrett take up sewing. As usual, he feels a sense of dread. When Flush finds out that the thing to be feared is Miss Barrett's baby, all he feels is contempt. He was "torn with rage and jealousy and some deep disgust that he could not hide … he cowered away from the disgusting sight, the repulsive presence, wherever there was a shadowy sofa or a dark corner" (*Flush* 134). Flush steadfastly refuses to yield to the affections and treats that both Miss Barrett and Wilson offer him. Here, Woolf takes the opportunity to address the impact of the passage of time for canines, stressing that it is different for them than for humans. The depression that Flush falls into due to the baby is grave, for once again he feels the threat of being replaced, and it lasts half a year in human time. Nevertheless, Flush is an edified dog, taught expertly by Miss Barrett in philosophy and empathy. He ponders, undergoing a transformation similar to that when he swore to love Mr. Browning; "again he was rewarded" (*Flush* 135). Flush is incessantly presented with obstacles to his life and change is an invariable threat. He ordinarily reacts brusquely, but the love he feels for Miss Barrett is a compass. It guides him while he philosophizes, asking himself why he is angry, and how that anger hurts both him and Miss Barrett. When he finds the answers to these questions, he is rewarded with the revelation that change is not always necessarily bad, even though it is a true test for him considering that dogs need a stable routine in order to feel secure.

In this way, Flush demonstrates his capacity for compassion, what Miss Mitford had seen in him years ago.

Flush ends up benefiting from the birth of the baby in the end, "Did they not share something in common — did not the baby somehow resemble Flush in many ways? Did they not hold the same views, the same tastes?" (*Flush* 135). The assimilation of their identities is not surprising. For instance, in *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud has claimed that children feel little difference between themselves and animals,

> Children show no trace of the arrogance which urges adult civilized men to draw a hard-and-fast line between their own nature and that of all other animals. Children have no scruples over allowing animals to rank as their full equals. Uninhibited as they are in the avowal of their bodily needs, they no doubt feel themselves more akin to animals than to their elders, who may well be a puzzle to them. (126-7)

Moreover, Haraway has noted that "people love their dogs as children" (33). But to regard dogs in this way is, "even metaphorically, [demeaning to] dogs and children" (37). It creates an anthropocentric wall of separation, where it is complimentary for a dog to be compared to a human child, but the reverse is not. Nevertheless, Flush zoomorphizes the baby, and he could not be happier to have found one like himself, but the reader must wonder whether he is cursed to repeat the pain and joy he felt and sometimes still feels with Miss Barrett. He and the baby are connected in various ways, for example, in their appreciation for scents and disregard for sights. But what is to become of Flush once the baby grows older and learns human language, taking up writing, and reading? Will Flush's paws contract again, as they did when he watched Miss Barrett with her black stick, with the ache to write himself? In all likelihood, Flush will be left

behind. Woolf, however, makes a point of reminding the reader of Flush's capacity for compassion, and therein lies the answer to his future. He is doomed to feel great pain again, but also equal amounts of joy. This pattern which Flush must go through demonstrates the pure loyalty that dogs are capable of; they are self-sacrificing martyrs for those whom they adore.

Flush may find a sense of identity and belonging by sacrificing himself for the good of the family, but he winds up in a crisis when the ferocious fleas of Italy attach themselves to him. Miss Barrett and Mr. Browning attempt several methods to remove them to no avail, for the fleas of Italy are especially stubborn. In the end, Mr. Browning finds himself forced to remove Flush's coat. This is a great loss to Flush, who questions his uniqueness now that his coat has been removed. Flush felt a great pride to be a world-class cocker spaniel but who is he without his coat? Nobody. And although Flush had previously let go of his alleged privilege and considered the dogs of Italy his partners, it is this sudden loss of identity which truly frees Flush for "to be nothing — is that not, after all, the most satisfactory state in the whole world?" (*Flush* 143). For Flush, who has been burned by his status as a cocker spaniel and the companion animal of a privileged woman through the kidnapping ordeal, who has suffered the tides of change, jealousy, fear and even love, the state of being nothing is ideal. Flush's liberation in this respect may be influenced by the seminal haircut of Woolf's life, done in 1927, just before embarking on *Flush*. Susan Merrill Squier has pointed how Woolf celebrated "the greater convenience and lessened social anxiety … The shingling seems to have freed her from her social anxieties precisely because with it she renounced all claims to distinction, to beauty" (135). Woolf felt liberated of gender expectations and similarly, by losing his coat, Flush is thus not only liberated from the vicious fleas, but the constrictions of class. "All countries were equal to him now; all men were

his brothers" (*Flush* 145). This is the lesson he needs to learn for his return to England with Miss Barrett and the rest of the family.

Voyage to England and Back Again

If the reader peruses *Flush* carefully, they will have noted that the novel is comprised of one pattern: circularity. Flush is forever repeating the cycle of joy and pain, and as the novel nears its end, Flush must journey back to England one last time. The last time Flush had been in England, he was tormented by post-traumatic stress disorder. Italy allowed him to move on from the horror of the kidnapping. Thus, coming back to England is an opportunity to heal. It is not a happy journey, but it is a necessary one.

Even though it has been years since Flush was last at Wimpole Street, it is as if nothing had changed for him. "And then a sinister figure issued from the public-house at the corner. A man leered. With one spring Flush bolted indoors" (*Flush* 146). The visit back to England is triggering for Flush and he reverts back to being cautious, reserved, and afraid. His reaction is neither irrational nor uncalled for because despite the cholera spread and efforts of confinement, "the dogs of Wimpole Street had still to be led on chains" or risk being stolen (*Flush* 146).

Although Flush remains shell-shocked, he has no fear of venturing back to dog society, even though he is without his usual majestic coat. The fact that he no longer has his coat is treated as if it is an affliction that an able-bodied person ignores by the other dogs. But the issue of Flush's coat or lack thereof is nothing in comparison to what he sees has become of the dogs in London society—there is a morbid aspect to their personality and the narrator recounts that "it was common knowledge that Mrs. Carlyle's dog Nero had leapt from a top-storey window with the intention of committing suicide" (*Flush* 147). The narrator later reminds the reader of the

great differences between Flush's life in England and Italy by noting that various things, such as the confined spaces in England, "wrought on his temper and strained his nerves" (*Flush* 147). The lack of freedom is not just specific to the confined spaces—"It was impossible to run out of doors. The front door was always locked. He had to wait for somebody to lead him on a chain" (*Flush* 148). Taking these things into account, the reader can perhaps understand the morbidity that Flush encounters among the London society dogs. Their lives are not lives at all—they are comprised of waiting for *when* they can live, as their masters see fit. This is solidified by the visit to Reverend Charles Kingsley at Farnham. His place was not confined, such as the home on Wimpole Street, nor was it the complete opposite as Casa Guidi, sunny and harsh on the paws with the brick streets. Reverend Kingsley's place instead closely resembles a utopia for Flush—it is a big green space with "turf so fine that the paws bounced as they touched it" and pools of water (*Flush* 148). It reminds Flush of the old days at Three Mile Cross, for this is where he can lose his inhibitions, allowing his instincts to take over by running and hunting. Flush is satisfying his urges, and the fact that Farnham so closely resembles the wild may be all the indication one needs to understand how Flush and all other dogs, can never truly be mastered. They are their own sentient beings, and they need their own space for that.

"An old dog now"

The trip to England had taken its toll on Flush, who is now older and fatigued. He no longer runs about as he used to, but instead seeks comfort in the shade. Nevertheless, he still mingles with both the people and dogs of Italy, with the former kindly giving him treats and Flush relegating stories of his past adventures to the latter. His relationship with Miss Barrett once again alters as she becomes involved in the occult. She sees things that to Flush are not seemingly there and worse still, "Flush stood himself in front of her. She looked through him as

if he were not there. That was the cruellest look she had ever given him" (*Flush* 164). During this period, Miss Barrett is captivated by a table in the house randomly moving; she believes it signifies an ill-omen.

Flush leaves Miss Barrett and goes out into the streets, eventually falling asleep and dreaming. He sees his life running before him but, as Smith has astutely observed, "notably absent from the dream are any memories of Flush's life" with Miss Barrett (357).[6] This may lead the reader to believe that Miss Barrett has no significant hold on Flush, for dreams are believed often to reveal the centers of one's psyche. Suddenly, however, he wakes with a start and rushes back home to see her specifically. Their story then comes to an end—

> She bent down over him for a moment. Her face with its wide mouth and its great eyes and its heavy curls was still oddly like his. Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, each, perhaps, completed what was dormant in the other. But she was woman; he was dog. (*Flush* 169)

With this affirmation, Flush passes. The table lies still, and Miss Barrett realizes its movements were foreshadowing Flush's death. Flush himself must have known it was coming after his last dream, as he ran violently and steadfastly through the streets of Italy to see Miss Barrett one last time. By running to her, Flush demonstrates what canines are capable of. Haraway was thus sound to blur the lines between humans and canines. Flush may have been initially given to Miss Barrett as a stand-in for human company, and she may have erroneously expected unconditional love from him, but the pair settle their differences by being understanding towards each other, compassionate, and empathetic. Flush is thus posthuman; he exhibits the influential and

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[6] Smith suggests that this is an affirmation that the novel "has not been simply a secondary biography" of Miss Barrett (357). This statement will be examined in the following chapter.

impacting role that companion dogs can have in the lives of people, as he and Miss Barrett are inextricably linked for life. As Haraway has affirmed,

> Dogs, in their historical complexity, matter here. Dogs are not an alibi for other themes; dogs are fleshly material-semiotic presences in the body of technoscience. Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not just here to think with. They are here to live with. Partners in the crime of human evolution, they are in the garden from the get-go, wily as Coyote. (5)

Barks and Howls

Previously, linguistic aspects of the novel were examined through the lens of the French feminists. The novel breaks ground with its use of language; the lack of dialogue, the free indirect discourse, the fact that it is from the perspective of a dog. This begs the question, does Flush have language? Are his barks and howls significant in any way to the novel? If a woman's *jouissance* cannot be deciphered from the standpoint of a patriarchal language, then what happens to Flush's language? Because his barks and howls are not worded, thus seemingly disordered, they can be associated with the *parler femme* and *écriture féminine*, two terms which were outlined in the third chapter, "Feminist *Flush*," for his language is one which disrupts the so-called norm.

Flush's barks typically come from moments of excitement, such as when he runs at Three Mile Cross, or when he attacks Mr. Browning, demonstrating a primal language which cannot be subjected to patriarchy, nor to the belief in human ownership of language. Flush's language is to remain his own. Flush also howls, particularly when he is in misery, such as when he was left in Miss Barrett's bedroom for the first time. Taking this into account, Flush's language is one that

comes from the body; he literally barks, growls and howls his body. Flush's language is thus a threat to patriarchy, an unworded warning to men.

Flush's Perspective

In this chapter, Flush's perspective in the novel has been extensively examined. Flush is sometimes professed to be an allegory, a stand-in for something and/or someone else. His canine status is one which continuously demotes him to the position of Other. This is due to humans' complex relationship with animals, largely influenced by Descartes. However, by considering Flush's perspective, the reader can see that Flush should not be diminished but rather taken seriously. His point of view is just as valid as that of anyone else. Thus, in the following chapter, Flush's gaze and its significance into the ties and themes of the novel will be explored.

Chapter VI – *Flush* as Bildungsroman

Craig Smith has criticized the fact that *Flush* is mostly critiqued as a feminist allegory, because this view demonstrates anthropocentric bias. However, I would argue that *Flush* as the story of a dog and *Flush* as an allegory for various theories, including feminist and disability, are not mutually exclusive. Taking into account that women and animals have been historically marginalized and used for profit by the patriarchy, it is not unreasonable to see how the novel can simultaneously be dissected through critical animal studies, feminist, and disability theory, especially since all of the themes in the novel are connected by Flush's gaze. Moreover, because the novel is a biography from his perspective, it could be considered a Bildungsroman—a coming-of-age story. In *The Columbia History of the British Novel*, John Bender et al. defined the novel specifically as one "in which a young person—usually male—learns first to roam beyond the limits of his society and then to come to terms with its demands, accommodating his identity to what is possible for adult life lived on society's terms" (435). Because Bildungsroman heroes are typically male and human, *Flush* has been neglected since it is considered to be the story of a dog, told through his gaze. However, now that it has been established that considering the novel as the biography of a dog and a feminist and disability allegory do not have to be mutually exclusive, it could be said that *Flush* is a dual Bildungsroman, as it explores both the lives of the eponymous character and Miss Barrett. Although Smith has claimed that Flush's dearth of dreams of Miss Barrett near the end of the novel affirm "that this book has not been simply a secondary biography of" Miss Barrett (357), the fact that Flush rushes to her as soon as he wakes solidifies her vital position in the novel.

It must be noted that *Flush* is not the first dual bildungsroman. Other popular dual Bildungsromans are Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the*

Floss. In "The Lost Brother, the Twin: Women Novelists and the Male-Female Double Bildungsroman," Charlotte Goodman has argued that Bildungsromans written by women differ than those from men, not only in their dual narrative, but in their construction. *Flush* certainly follows the traditional structure of a bildungsroman, as outlined by Marianne Hirsch in "The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions," but it also follows the tenets of the dual Bildungsroman that Goodman offers. Although Goodman is writing of human male-female Bildungsromans specifically, the reader will see how her words can be applied to the canine-human relationship. In order to demonstrate this, I will delineate how Hirsch's and Goodman's characteristics for the Bildungsroman and its dual version, respectively, work together in *Flush*.

Hirsch outlines the characteristics of the Bildungsroman, starting with the claim that "the novel of formation is a novel that focuses on one central character" (296). How can *Flush* be a dual Bildungsroman while still focusing on one central character, which is Flush himself? According to Goodman, there is no question of who the hero is in Bildungsromans written by men but the women novelists she considers "place virtually equal emphasis on both a male and a female protagonist in a given novel, contrasting thereby the 'education' of males and of females" (Goodman 30). In *Flush*, both Hirsch and Goodman's ideas are complicated, for the story is told through Flush's gaze which indicates his centrality, but his gaze is often beholding Miss Barrett, who thus becomes a central character as well. Nonetheless, she is still secondary to Flush. In "*The Mill on the Floss*, the Critics and the Bildungsroman," Susan Fraiman has examined George Eliot's novel as a Bildungsroman, and indicated that

> from the first moment one's attention, like the narrator's, is devoted to Maggie. Readers enter the Tulliver household because Maggie leads them there, and it is her interior life,

> more lovingly detailed than Tom's, that catches them up and carries them through. … But though Maggie may be more conspicuous, it is also true that any comfortable centrality is thrown off by Tom. Her narrative deposes but does not wholly displace his. Nor are the two balanced in some stable symmetry or amiable doubleness. They tend, rather, to pull each other off balance, to conflict with and contest each other. (141)

This interpretation of *The Mill on the Floss* by Fraiman can be applied to the construction of *Flush* as a complex Bildungsroman—the novel tracks Flush's life from beginning to end, his outlook and interior life are far more detailed than Miss Barrett's, and it is he in fact who brings the reader to Miss Barrett. Miss Barrett, however, upsets Flush's centrality in the novel. They are not equal in their representation in the novel, but both are nonetheless central.

By noting that the story must be "representative [of an] individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order," Hirsch continues her outline of the bildungsroman (296). In "The Picaro's Journey to the Confessional: The Changing Image of the Hero in the German Bildungsroman," David H. Miles has posited that growth and development in the novel of formation takes place entirely inside a character's psyche. Hirsch has rebutted Miles' claim by asserting that "the Bildungsroman maintains a peculiar balance between the social and the personal and explores their interaction. It is this double focus that is its distinguishing feature" ("Defining Bildungsroman" 122). This dichotomy of the Bildungsroman is explored in *Flush*. Both its titular character and Miss Barrett live in a patriarchy where their marginalization is inextricably linked, as demonstrated in previous chapters. Although they both exhibit personal growth over time, Hirsch asserts that "the protagonist is an essentially *passive* character, a plaything of circumstance. Unable to control his destiny actively, he is someone who gives shape to events without actually causing them" (297). These words encapsulate Flush's life

for as a dog, he is subject to the whims of others as he is given to Miss Barrett by Miss Mitford, stolen by Mr. Taylor and his men, and transported to Italy with Miss Barrett. As for Miss Barrett, being a woman with a disability means she is to be at her father's mercy, to have Flush stolen from her because of her economic privilege; to be banned from recovering him by her family.

Hirsch asserts that "the hero's development is explored from various perspectives in the novel of formation which aims at the formation of a total personality, physical, emotional, intellectual and moral" (297). The edification of Flush by Miss Barrett and the obstacles or rather, cycles, which he must face metamorphose him into a wiser and thus higher being. Miss Barrett evolves as well, and the reader may consider the historical Miss Barrett in order to contextualize her fruition. In *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Marjorie Stone has constructed the historical Miss Barrett as a steadfast, unyielding woman. Although she was forbidden from writing by her doctors, "she was far too busy reading and writing" and "literally wrote herself back to life" (Stone 18-19). Sigurlaug Kristjánsdóttir adds to this discourse by noting that Flush was also forbidden from lying on her bed by her doctor, an order which Miss Barrett ignored (8). It is this persistence, however, that shaped the fictional Miss Barrett, turning her posthuman. Thus, the turning point of her life becoming the dognapping, as Smith notes:

> By putting her own life in jeopardy to save the life of her dog—one whom she has sometimes treated indifferently, not least in the incident that led to his dognapping—Miss Barrett discovers the fortitude that will later enable her to elope with Browning and find integrity as a human being. (356)

This observation by Smith is significant as Goodman notes that the male and female characters of a dual Bildungsroman are typically separated after having inhabited "a place somewhat

reminiscent of a prelapsarian mythic garden world where the male and female once existed as equals" (30). Flush and Miss Barrett may be considered equals in the sickroom, and although the place is one of horror, "Flush felt that he and Miss Barrett lived alone together in a cushioned and fire-lit cave" (*Flush* 41-2). When Mr. Browning comes into the picture, though, the sickroom is disrupted—"Now the cave was no longer firelit; it was dark and damp; Miss Barrett was outside" and Flush was by himself (*Flush* 64). They then become truly separated after Flush is stolen. When he and Miss Barrett reunite, however, and eventually move to Italy, their evolution is highlighted by what Goodman refers to as "a turning away from mature adult experience and a reaffirmation of the childhood world in which the male and the female protagonist were undivided" (30-1), as the pair become equal in the exploration of their agencies.

Hirsch continues outlining the characteristics of the Bildungsroman by affirming that "the novel of formation's concern is both *biographical* and *social*. Society is the novel's *antagonist* and is viewed as a school of life, a locus for experience. The spirit and values of the social order emerge through the fate of one representative individual" (297). While the biographical aspect of *Flush* is a given with its full title, the exploration of society is done through the dognapping. This section of the novel is telling, for it brings to the forefront the abuse that both women and animals must endure in a patriarchy. Ariel Salle encapsulates this issue by noting that there is a "parallel in men's thinking between their 'right' to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women, on the other" (qtd. by Birkeland 18). In the novel, this is done not only by Mr. Taylor and his gang, but by the Barrett family and even Mr. Browning. On the one hand, the stealing of Flush by Mr. Taylor and his gang demonstrates the callous nature that poverty breeds. On the other hand, the Barretts' and Mr. Browning's refusal to aid Miss Barrett in recovering Flush demonstrates the callous nature that privilege breeds. The men of Wimpole Street are

oppressors, and as Adams and Procter-Smith have observed, “only oppressors can deny the importance of suffering to the individuals who suffer or who respond to that suffering. The dangerous memory of this massive suffering of subjugated animals disrupts belief in human moral superiority over the other animals” (305). Flush and Miss Barrett must pay the price, as Miss Barrett becomes a pawn for Wimpole Street, just as Flush is a pawn for Whitechapel. Miss Barrett is put in an especially difficult position, for she is literally being bribed by the patriarchy. Mr. Taylor and his men expect Miss Barrett to pay because of her emotions towards Flush; her family and Mr. Browning refuse to have her pay because she would be continuing a cycle of crime. Although she is not addressing *Flush*, Birkeland has touched on the difficulties that arise with the exploitation of women and animals:

> We cannot end the exploitation of nature without ending human oppression, and vice versa. … We must expose the assumptions that support Patriarchy and disconnect our concept of masculinity from that of ‘power over’ others and the rejection and denigration of the ‘feminine.’ … We cannot change the nature of the system by playing Patriarchal ‘games.’ If we do, we are abetting those who are directly involved in human oppression and environmental exploitation. We must therefore withdraw power and energy from the Patriarchy. (19-20)

With these words, Birkeland demonstrates the impossible position that Miss Barrett has been put in with the kidnapping of Flush. To pay the ten pounds is to play into an oppressive hierarchy, but not to pay it is to risk losing the only true family she has ever known. But if the reader takes Birkeland’s words and applies them directly to the situation, they will understand that Miss Barrett is not to be blamed at all, for the stealing of dogs in Wimpole Street will not end without first diminishing human oppression, and vice versa. Miss Barrett’s paying ten pounds is

inconsequential in the larger scheme of things—it is the patriarchy of Wimpole Street which has the power and privilege to end the kidnappings of dogs and the oppression of Whitechapel, by helping the people of the slum. The wealthy and privileged, after all, are only so on the backs of poor and Othered figures.

The Bildungsroman also "portrays a search for a meaningful existence within society … Growth is a *gradual process* consisting of a number of encounters between subjective needs and an unbending social order. Since it entails the consideration of various alternatives, the growth process necessitates errors and the pursuit of false leads," according to Hirsch (297-98). In Flush, this is exemplified by the complicated relationship that he has with Mr. Browning. The gentleman initially brings out the worst of Flush, with the latter attacking the former twice, which brings to mind the words of Irigaray: "if so-called domestic animals have become aggressive, it is often by an artificial cultivation of their instincts. … a satisfied animal does not look for blood. Such comportment is human. When animals are subjected to people, do they feel constrained to imitate this behavior?" ("Animal Compassion" 198). Flush acts as if he were a jealous lover when he attacks Mr. Browning. Moreover, as noted in the previous chapter, "there was an element … of the snob in Flush", as he had been overtly refined by Miss Barrett and unexposed to different classes (*Flush* 121). He perceived Mr. Browning as a social climber because he was a middle-class man. Thus, when Mr. Browning brought him the cakes, he shunned them. But eventually, Flush realizes that by hurting Mr. Browning, he indirectly hurts Miss Barrett. To do so is unthinkable. Thus, Flush grows to feel affection for Mr. Browning, and therefore grows spiritually, emotionally, philosophically. As for Miss Barrett, again, it is the dognapping which truly brings about change for her. The disabled Angel of the House must

become calculating as she explores the few options she has in order to recover Flush. Once she takes action, she falls, emerging more lethal than ever before.

Hirsch maintains her outline of the Bildungsroman:

> It is the development of selfhood that is the primary concern of the novel of formation, the events that determine the life of the individual, rather than all the events of that life: this type of novel is a story of apprenticeship and not a full biography. *Its projected resolution is an accommodation to the existing society.* While each protagonist has the choice of accepting or rejecting this projected resolution, each novel ends with a precise stand on his part, with *his assessment of himself and his place in society*. (298)

In this respect, the novel certainly explores the importance of context during self-cultivation. Flush develops selfhood, particularly when he is in Italy, as he realizes the absence of Spaniel and Kennel Club laws. Moreover, once his coat is shorn off by Mr. Browning due to the advent of fleas, he becomes liberated, finding his true place in society. Miss Barrett, too, cultivates her selfhood in Italy. On Wimpole Street, she was stifled and confined in her room. In Italy, however, being a woman with a disability, writer, wife, and a mother are all experiences which aid her in the process of formulating her place in society. Once both Miss Barrett and Flush assess their place in society, they are more at peace than ever.

Hirsch notes that "the narrative point of view and voice, whether it be the first or the third person, is characterized by *irony* toward the inexperienced protagonist, rather than nostalgia for youth. There is always a distance between the perspective of the narrator and that of the protagonist" (298). This is very much true in the case of *Flush*, which is done in the third person, as the narrator often has a satirical tone in her wording. The narrator is omniscient (Bell has

claimed it is Woolf herself) and often makes light of the fact that although Miss Barrett and Flush may be similar in many ways, they also often misunderstand one another; particularly Miss Barrett as she anthropomorphizes Flush.

Hirsch declares that "the novel's other characters fulfill several fixed functions: *educators* serve as mediators and interpreters between the two confronting forces of self and society; *companions* serve as reflectors on the protagonist, standing for alternative goals and achievements" (298). Hirsch's definitions of educators and companions are merged in *Flush*. Both Flush and Miss Barrett are educators and companions. As outlined in the previous chapter, Miss Barrett takes on the role of a teacher, educating and refining Flush. She is certainly a mediator as she struggles to save Flush when he is stolen. Yet Flush is an educator too. He teaches Miss Barrett both strength and humility, as her sometimes blasé nature regarding Flush is no more after he is stolen. He is certainly a mediator in Miss Barrett's bedroom on Wimpole Street, as he becomes Pan for her and also eats her food. Moreover, while Flush is Miss Barrett's companion, having a "gradual but decisive effect … on [her that] is strikingly similar to accounts of the use of pets in psychotherapeutic treatments of hospital patients, nursing home residents, and prison inmates" (Smith 354), she is his companion as well, as evidenced by the mirroring of their selves.

Hirsch concludes the characteristics of the Bildungsroman by noting that "the novel of formation is conceived as a *didactic* novel, one which educates the reader by portraying the education of the protagonist" (298). This is done so through the gaze in *Flush*. It is ironic, for Flush does not care much for what he sees, but rather what he smells. Yet his gaze is significant for it is one of deduction. Flush sees the things that no one else sees, predominantly when it comes to Miss Barrett. He internalizes her fears and doubts, as demonstrated by his reaction

towards her father. He understands the struggle of her disability, as he refuses to go out without her because she cannot accompany him. He attempts to recognize why it is that Miss Barrett's eyes well up, or why she writes for hours. He knows when a big change is about to transpire.

Flush's gaze is therefore one of deduction, not compartmentalization or judgment as the human gaze can be. For example, Miss Mitford categorizes him as therapeutic; Mr. Taylor and his men view him as an economic good; Miss Barrett's family sees him as replaceable. Mr. Browning (at least initially), as evidenced by the cakes, sees him as one from whom he must gain approval and Miss Barrett viewed Flush as a never-ending source of unconditional love. As the reader can see, the human gaze is powerful, complicated, contextual and certainly diminishing. It is anthropocentric.

Although Miss Barrett and Miss Mitford sometimes anthropomorphize Flush, believing his gaze to be overtly sympathetic, Flush's gaze is always one of survival, chiefly on Wimpole Street. It is there where he learns the rules of the Spaniel and Kennel Clubs; the idea that dogs must always be led on chains. Flush is imprisoned by the rigid rules of Wimpole Street, just as Miss Barrett is incarcerated by ableism and sexism. Their lives run in tandem but as Caughie has noted, Flush's life is not one which necessarily mirrors *only* Miss Barrett, but rather "the lives that have never been narrated, the inscrutable and therefore unrepresentable, the discarded and therefore wasted," such as Wilson's (61). Although Caughie claims that Miss Barrett and Flush cannot mirror each other because she literally owns him, the reader must recall Haraway's suggestion for what comprises a healthy relationship between canine and human—mutual ownership. Moreover, Caughie may not have considered the impact of Miss Barrett's disability—an ethical representation of disability in fiction had never truly been presented before Miss Barrett. The reader must also consider that although Wilson is Miss Barrett's servant, the

two protect each other in innumerous ways. Not to place Miss Barrett as a savior but without her, where would Wilson be? And without Wilson, where would Miss Barrett be, as a woman with a disability? Wilson is, after all, a key component in Miss Barrett's escape to Italy. In this way, Caughie is correct in that *Flush* is a testimony to what has been discarded and wasted, for the novel demonstrates a narrative that deviates from the norm, exhibiting the power of sisterhood in a patriarchy. This is all displayed through Flush's gaze. As Flush observes and learns, so does the reader.

While Hirsch concluded her outline of the Bildungsroman by pointing out its didactic facets, Goodman claims that there is a pattern of circularity in the dual Bildungsroman. Typically, the male and female characters reunite after a period of separation. In *Flush*, Miss Barrett and the title character go through two major separations: Mr. Browning and the dognapping. Miss Barrett and Flush reunite stronger than ever after each obstacle. At the end of the novel, though, if the reader recalls, Flush had gone to the streets of Italy and dreamed of his past life. However, he did not dream of Miss Barrett. Regardless, he furiously ran to her as soon as he woke. Their reunion mirrors the first time they saw one another, as they realized their similarities and dichotomies— "Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, each, perhaps, completed what was dormant in the other. But she was woman; he was dog" (*Flush* 169). This scene, and the two previous reunions between Flush and Miss Barrett, mirrors Goodman's outline of the typical finale of a dual Bildungsroman:

> The male protagonist returns to the world of his childhood by embracing his female counterpart, allowing the male and the female halves of the divided self to be joined once again. As 'brother' and 'sister' are reunited at the end of each of these novels, the reader is made aware of the radically different kind of 'education' each has undergone. (43)

As the reader can see, *Flush* is a hybrid of the traditional Bildungsroman as outlined by Hirsch and the dual Bildungsroman proposed by Goodman. I would now argue that *Flush* is a posthuman Bildungsroman, as it demonstrates how humans and animals are interwoven, relying on and influencing one another. As Haraway notes, “flexibility and opportunism are the name of the game for both species, who shape each other throughout the still ongoing story of co-evolution” (29). Moreover, the posthuman nature of *Flush* is not unforeseen, considering Woolf’s relationship with her various dogs. In “The Wide-Reaching Influence of Flush,” Kristjánsdóttir argues that Woolf was tremendously influenced by her dogs; they played a vital role in the creation of *Flush*. The reader must now consider Woolf’s purpose when writing the novel. Critics often cite the idea that it was a joke, but Woolf had serious intentions in undertaking *Flush*. She may have seemed to have disregarded the novel, but as Smith notes,

> In her letters and diaries, Woolf habitually expressed self-doubt about her writing—from her book reviews to her novels. She typically expressed impatience and dissatisfaction with her current project and eagerness to move on to her next one. It is dangerous to rely on these passages to confirm one's own assessment of a given text. (358)

Smith goes on to note that Woolf wrote less “defensively to correspondents whom she did not suspect of being hostile,” taking a different tone and giving little indication Flush was a joke (358). He quotes her claim that “it was all a matter of hints and shades, and practically no one has seen what I was after” (*Letters* 236). And what exactly was Woolf after in *Flush*, besides exploring the biographical aspects of a novel? As Quentin Bell has written in his biography of Woolf:

> She was brought up with dogs in the home, she had always kept dogs and liked them; but she was not, in the fullest sense of the word, a dog lover … She nearly always had a dog, she took a dog with her when she went for a walk and did, up to a point, control the creature. … She was fascinated by all animals but her affection was odd and remote. She wanted to know what her dog was feeling—but then she wanted to know what everyone was feeling, and perhaps the dogs were no more inscrutable than most humans. *Flush* is not so much a book by a dog lover as a book by someone who would love to be a dog. In all her emotional relationships she pictured herself as an animal … *Flush* in fact was one of the routes which Virginia used, or at least examined, in order to escape from her own human corporeal existence. (409-10)

Flush was thus an experiment, one which Woolf was more than capable of undertaking, for she was "well positioned to make respectful, informed, and unsentimental observations, and to deploy anthropomorphic comparisons and metaphors in a sophisticated way" (Smith 352). Her "empathetic identification and curiosity, undistorted by any narcissistic greed for adulation, informs [the] text" (Smith 353). Kristjánsdóttir has argued that the novel was a catharsis for Woolf, and it might also have been a reason for her debasement of it. She notes that "there are no sources about Flush's imprisonment in Whitechapel, but Woolf manages nevertheless to capture the despondent atmosphere in a very insightful manner" (15). Kristjánsdóttir posits that Woolf was able to do this by channeling her childhood abuse. I would add that she likely also used her experience with mental illness, including anorexia, to inform Miss Barrett's disability, in addition to her liberating experience with short hair and her struggles with sexuality to contextualize Flush's freedom in Italy.

Nonetheless, Woolf was fully aware that by creating *Flush*, she risked losing her credibility, being constructed as a “lady-prattler” (Bell 409). This construction, however, says more about the hierarchy of criticism, shaped by patriarchy, than it says about Woolf. According to Kristjánsdóttir, “keeping a dog in Victorian and early 20th century England was mainly for the upper class’s frivolous display (lap-dogs) or leisure (sporting dogs)” (7). Thus, Woolf was ahead of her time by demonstrating Flush as a companion animal; this understanding aids in contextualizing why the novel was trivialized. *Flush* is disregarded because it is thought to be simple and easy due to its feminine components, yet as has been shown, the novel is complex, with several different strands and narrative techniques.

Flush has largely been discarded by the intelligentsia as inconsequential, trivial due to its subject matter, and thus unworthy of being canonized. But as the reader has seen, *Flush* is a story of merit. It is a pioneering text in its posthuman examination of an “underestimated relationship, namely that of a human and a pet” (Kristjánsdóttir 22). It expertly condenses class struggles and women’s issues, and presciently anticipates critical animal studies and disability theory while also breaking ground on the patriarchal limitations of language in a dual Bildungsroman. *Flush* must therefore be reconceptualized, with more research and literary criticism, for it is worthy of consideration and canonization. Moreover, by reconceptualizing and thus canonizing *Flush*, the precepts of valuing in literature will metamorphose.

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