
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Modernist Bildungsroman: Nonhuman Narrative and Multispecies Community in Virginia Woolf's *Flush*

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| ABSTRACT

In 1933, Virginia Woolf published *Flush: A Biography*, an experimental novel in animal narrative that records the life story of Elizabeth Browning's pet dog. It receives scant scholarship, and critics treat it as serious work only to the extent that it is not concerned about dogs. It is the progress in animal studies that inspires more scholars to re-evaluate *Flush* as a biography of a dog. In this respect, this paper explores Woolf's response to the form that *Flush* adopts, *Bildungsroman*, by the use of Gregory Castle's theory of modernist *Bildungsroman*. Through a close reading of *Flush*, this paper attempts to investigate the author's modernist canine presentation that parts with the tradition of *Bildung*. The present paper starts with an introduction to the relationship between modernism and the genre of *Bildungsroman*. Then, this paper continues to examine the author's experiments in narrative and socialization that differentiate *Flush* from the tradition of canine *Bildung*. The nonhuman subjectivity demonstrated in the narrative of the cocker spaniel critiques the anthropocentrism that shapes the characters in animal biography. Additionally, the rejection of the hierarchy of breed and the dog's embracing his identity as a mongrel embody Woolf's pursuit of freedom in the autonomous *Bildung* plot.

| KEYWORDS

Virginia Woolf; *Flush*; modernist *Bildungsroman*.

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1. Introduction

1933 witnessed Virginia Woolf's publication of *Flush: A Biography*, an experiment in genre *Bildungsroman* that depicts the life story of Elizabeth Browning's cocker spaniel, a particular dog breed that shares a long-history pedigree. Serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the novel became the most popular work in her lifetime (Herman, 2014). However, early critics generally dismissed it as a trivial work that was unworthy of Woolf's prominent place within the modernist canon (Kendall-Morwick, 2014). As Smith (2002) notes, the subsequent reading of the book as a feminist allegory indicates 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" (p.349). With more critical attention paid to animal studies inspired by Smith's essay in 2002, a number of researchers have joined him in re-evaluating *Flush* "as it declares itself to be: the biography of a dog" (Smith, 2002, p.359). On the basis of a series of historical events and correspondence between the Brownings, the writer gives shape to the canine biography by appropriating the form of *Bildungsroman*, a system involving "a biographical narrative, problems of socialization, the influence of mentors and 'instrumental' women, [and] the problem of vocation" (Castle, 2006, p.4). It recounts the vicissitudes of Barrett Browning's companion Flush from birth to death, detailing Flush's *Bildung* process from his restrained aristocrat-like days in Wimpole Street to carefree half-stray life in Italy. However, Woolf's narrative of the dog's self-education fails to follow the generic demands of classical *Bildungsroman*. According to Castle (2006), the failure represents both "a recuperation and revision of the Enlightenment concept of aesthetico-spiritual *Bildung*" (p.27). In this respect, the present paper intends to discuss the modernist's response to the *Bildungsroman*, Virginia Woolf's *Flush* in particular. By employing Gregory Castle's theory of Modernist *Bildungsroman*, it concentrates on analyzing how the failure in *Flush* rehabilitates and critiques the

"rationalized and bureaucratized *Bildung* in the nineteenth century" (Castle, 2006, p.27). It shows that Woolf's experimentation in genre challenges the anthropocentrism that predominately underlies the *Bildung* tradition as well as the endeavor to seek freedom in autonomous self-formation.

Anticipating the publication of *Flush* in 1933, Virginia Woolf expressed her fear of being identified as a "lady-prattler" in experimenting with canine biography (Herman, 2014, p.548). Though the work was selected as an alternative in The-Book-of-the-Month-Club and became an international bestseller, her worries were largely verified. In his report on the massive success of *Flush* across America and Britain, Leonard Woolf (1967) remarked that the author never took the book seriously, which resulted in early critics' quoting the entry of Virginia Woolf's diary as evidence against the artistic value in *Flush* (Smith, 2002). In retrospect, the reputation of *Flush* suffers from Woolf's own comments as well, in which she states that it is "a silly book" and that it is "by way of a joke" (Herman, 2014, p.549). In his investigation into Woolf's letters and diaries, Smith (2002) found that her comments were distorted in many early reviews, and in a letter responding to a reader, her allusion to Milton may actually reflect a "lofty design" (p.359). After the misreading of letters and diaries from selective quotations, scholars begin to reconsider the book as a serious project only to the extent that it is not the biography of a dog. The animal protagonist in *Flush* is subjected to humans, and Elizabeth is subjected to the patriarchal society. As Squier (1985) argues, *Flush* marks a return to the theme of *A Room of One's Own*, which operates as "a stand-in for women writers" (p.124). Building on Squier, Snaith (2002) visits more characters in *Flush*, contending that it is not about the lives readers are familiar with and calls for attention to lives that have never been narrated, represented, and valued. However, the feminist reading of *Flush* still escapes the complexity of researching why Woolf, as a female writer constantly wary of being labeled as a "lady-prattler," experimented with producing the canine biography (Herman, 2014, p.548).

Previous attempts to approach the text as a feminist allegory, as Smith (2002) notes, have exerted an unfortunate impact on suggesting *Flush* be seriously treated "only to the extent that it may be represented as being not really about a dog" (p.360). With more attention being paid to animal studies, a myriad of scholars joined Smith in re-evaluating *Flush: A Biography* as it purports itself to be. To date, other critics have explored Woolf's engagement with major issues such as biography as a genre, non-human experience, and ableism. For example, Smith (2002) exposes non-human subjectivity by explicating the dog's different perceptions towards the same environment humans encounter. Additionally, Kendall-Morwick (2014) highlights the role of *Bildungsroman*, offering a critique of anthropocentrism in literary production. In this respect, Williams (2020) asserts that deep ableism exists in human-centric values. Overall, overseas studies regarding *Flush* tend to be interdisciplinary. Though critics paid attention to the form the text adopts, *Bildungsroman*, little discussion has been made on surveying Woolf's modernist consciousness in its form. In summary, it is my contention to follow the vein of Smith's study by concentrating on what *Flush* declares itself to be: a biography. In particular, I attempt to intervene in such readings by suggesting what Kendall-Morwick (2014) and others have pinpointed: the form of *Flush* showcases Woolf's modernist experimentation and critique.

2. Reading *Flush* as a Modernist Bildungsroman

As Kendall-Morwick (2014) and others note, Woolf uses the form of *Bildungsroman* in the canine biography *Flush*. In a time when the genre of *Bildungsroman* is considered "an exhausted form," Castle (2006) contends that modernists like Virginia Woolf broke down with the traditional form, thus giving the *Bildungsroman* "a new purpose" (p.5). In order to better comprehend the relationship between modernism and the genre, a closer look at the history of *Bildungsroman* and *Bildung* is highly necessary. As Castle (2006) notes, the history of the *Bildungsroman* is "the history of a genre in crisis" (p.30). The classical *Bildungsroman* attracts abundant academic attention, yet any attempt to make a definition seems more elusive than illuminating. Moreover, the complicated status of the genre evolves into a research topic in its own right regarding aesthetics in its discipline (Ever, 2013). Despite numerous complications pertaining to the definition, it is safe to understand *Bildungsroman* to be a series of biographical narratives of development with a young hero on the cusp of maturity, resolving his inner conflicts, seeking his vocation on the way to discovering the personal identity, eventually achieving a harmonious unity with society (Castle, 2006). As Ever (2013) notes, the term *Bildungsroman* was coined by Karl Morgenstern in 1810 and applied to the first study of the genre in *Versuch über den Roman* (Essay on the Novel). After a few years, Christoph Martin Wieland published the novel *Die Geschichte des Agathon*, which was widely recognized as the first *Bildungsroman*. However, it was not until the 1970s that the term *Bildungsroman* became widespread with Dilthey's reference to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796) in his *Experience and Poetry* (1906) (Sun, 2014). It is suggested by Castle (2006) that Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* should be regarded as the prototype of the classical *Bildungsroman*, where the protagonist abandons the promising and comfortable future as a bourgeois businessman in pursuit of a risky and yet intrinsically rewarding life. The novel details Wilhelm Meister, a young man with a bourgeois background, constantly resisting pressure from his family and friends to embark on a business journey. Following his heart for theater, he joined a company preparing for the show *Hamlet*, but finally, he found that he was not suitable for the stage. The concentration on development and "inner culture" is what makes Goethe's *Bildungsroman* stand out from other biographical forms (Castle, 2006, p.36).

Medieval mystics and Pietists in the eighteenth century first adopted the concept of Bildung to refer to both the appearance of individual form and the process of giving form (Ever, 2013). Gradually, it was interpreted as the interaction between human and nature forces, stressing the inner-culture formation after the mid-eighteenth century (Mai, 2007). In addition, the Enlightenment endowed the concept of Bildung with a sense of morality, transforming self-formation into self-education in a rational manner (Gu, 2001). Nowadays, appropriate translations in English, such as "self-formation," "self-cultivation," and "self-development," to some extent stand as synonyms for Bildung, though they escape the emphasis on aesthetic education that classical Bildung tends to indicate. In his study of the ideal of Bildung, Castle (2006) categorizes two types: Goethean and Humboldtian ideals of aesthetico-spiritual Bildung. Castle (2006) also suggests that both men long for the harmonious development of inner culture, but "while Goethe advocated a mystical apprenticeship and induction into an elite, paternalistic society, Humboldtian favored a more pragmatic strategy of humanistic education and participation in a free and democratic nation"(p.48). These two types later became the two ideals that British writers followed in producing modernist Bildungsroman.

At the dawning of the twentieth century, critics like Moretti (1987) saw the English Bildungsroman as the exhaustion of the form, while in the single volume devoted to modernist Bildungsroman, Castle Gregory (2006) takes the opposite point and regards modernist's departure from classical Bildungsroman signals a new purpose. By approaching the genre in English and Irish contexts, including figures like Virginia Woolf, Castle's critique of Bildung presents it as "a part of a general modernist project of recuperation and revision of the Enlightenment concept of aesthetico-spiritual Bildung, which has been rationalized and bureaucratized in the course of the nineteenth century" (Castle, 2015, p.27). Though classical Bildungsroman's definition is in crisis, one can still discern the basic rudiments of the genre: "a biographical narrative, problems of socialization, the influence of mentors and 'instrumental' women, [and] the problem of vocation" (Castle, 2006, p.4). Castle argues that it is precisely the modernist's failure to conform to the rudiments of Bildungsroman that signals a successful resistance to the institutionalization of self-development (Bildung). In an effort to better understand what Castle calls failure, it is necessary to identify the Bildungsroman in English tradition spanning the nineteenth century. It is Goethe of Germany who invented the Bildungsroman, which concentrates on inner culture. Nevertheless, in France and England, the genre started to unleash its complete potential as a pragmatic ideological discourse (Castle, 2006). Building on the two ideals of Bildung, on the one hand, scholars such as Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold follow the Goethean path, favoring art, literature in particular, and it functions as religion in a secular age; on the other hand, John Stuart Mill follows Humboldtian path, desiring a form of individualism "firmly grounded in political realities" (Castle, 2006, p.48). In the nineteenth century, rigid social mobility heavily influenced the understanding of Bildung. Broadly speaking, the social framework in the nineteenth century for promising subject development became rather stable. As a result, the Bildung, originally dedicated to the formation centering on harmonious inner culture, turns into the formation of a subject substantially regarded in terms of productivity and viability in the workplace and in the consumer market (Castle, 2006). Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, the practice of Bildung demonstrated was further rationalized and normalized in Western culture. In the context where Bildung was rationalized, Castle (2006) contends that the modernist's parting with the generic demands of Bildungsroman marks a return to the Classical Bildung. But it is not an "innocent" recuperation of the Humboldtian concept of self-formation nor to the type tracing back to the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman. From his standpoint, Castle (2006) defines it not as an "absolute" but rather "a differential repetition in which the power relations between the subject and the society are represented as contingent and non-universal"(p.67). It is to say that the modernist's return to aesthetico-spiritual Bildung manifests their pursuit of the merits of aesthetic education and individual freedom within Bildung and the resistance to social norms imprinted by an advanced capitalist society.

Besides, modernist Bildungsroman harbors "a powerful sense of frustration" in the return to the classical Bildung. In Castle's investigation, he finds that the desire for the "autonomous self-formation" both "rescues a classical ideal of Bildung" and simultaneously subjects that ideal to "immanent critique," which leads to a new question of "the ideological subtexts concerning the nature and function of the subject and a new concern for the structure and goal of self-cultivation" (Castle, 2015, p.63). It is a device of alternatives to socially pragmatic Bildung where more issues like gender class are addressed. Therefore, it is this paralleling gesture of recuperation and critique that characterizes what Castle purports to be the modernist Bildungsroman. Drawing on Castle's analysis of modernist Bildungsroman, this paper attempts to discuss how Virginia Woolf responds to the genre in her controversial work *Flush*. Through a close reading of the novel, it is my contention to understand how the author's appropriation of a canine figure signals her critique of anthropocentrism in Bildung tradition as well as the enactment to seek autonomous self-formation.

3. Nonhuman narrative in *Flush*

Admittedly, Woolf uses the form of canine Bildungsroman to give shape to *Flush*. However, the author fails to meet the generic demands of classical Bildungsroman, especially in terms of narration and socialization. The failure represents an experimentation from a modernist's endeavor in response to the "Bildungsroman form when it meets its demise through a relentless dehumanization" in the nineteenth century (Ever, 2013, p.28). In order to investigate her modernist consciousness embedded in *Flush*, in this section, I attempt to offer a detailed analysis of how Woolf's intentional failure in Bildungsroman demonstrates her

critique of anthropocentrism and rationalization in Bildung tradition (Castle, 2015, p.12). The first failure is demonstrated in the non-human subjectivity in the protagonist Flush, a cocker spaniel, which undermines the human-centric value that characterizes the previous canine Bildungsroman. This part first explores the features shared by *Flush* as a speculative biography and then proceeds to probe into the non-human subjectivity in *Flush* that separates itself from the tradition of narrating a canine's self-cultivation through a human-centric perspective.

It is, in fact, excruciating to tell whether *Flush* is primarily a biography or fiction. It indeed records a series of historical events, most notably, the elopement of the famous poet Robert Browning and his wife, and moreover frequently uses the poems or words drawn from the actual correspondence between the Brownings. At the end of *Flush*, Woolf (2016) specifically lists all the references "for readers who would like to check the facts or to pursue the subject further," even though "there are very few authorities"(p.107). Her comments indicate that *Flush*, even as it claims to be a biography, involves something other than historical facts. While acknowledging the authorities, Woolf also dismissed the book as a parody of her friend and Bloomsbury associate, Lytton Strachey (Smith, 2002). It is a send up to Lytton's renowned release of 1922 *Queen Victoria*, the new breed of biography featuring the speculation of the character's thoughts and expressions (Snaith, 2002). In *Flush*, Woolf joins him in imagining the memories, thoughts, and perceptions supported by limited evidence, thus giving the potential of representing the unexpressed and unverballed in its special form. In a footnote regarding Elizabeth Browning's maid Lily Wilson, the author asserts that this figure "cries aloud for the service biographer," which partially affirms Woolf's motivation and interest for the joke of Lytton (Woolf, 2016, p.109). It allows for, in this text, the mapping of the vicissitudes of a canine character who cannot articulate in human language.

In his research of the comparison of the biographical method between Woolf's *Flush* and Lytton's *Queen Victoria*, while pointing out the commonalities, Herman (2014) also highlights that Woolf's apparent lack of utilizing the "modalizing expressions" generally related to non-fictional discourse destabilizes the generic distinction between biography and fiction (p.561). Additionally, it is suggested that Woolf's biography appears without being overtly "hypothetical" or "conjectural" (Herman, 2014, p.551). Therefore, it fits into what Marjorie Garber (2011) claims: "a speculative biography," a genre that resembles the novel, "imputes motives, intentions, and causes, linking historical events in an arc of character intentionality that is a fictional construct" (p.225). It is my contention that in the different deployments of Lytton's biographical practice, Woolf embeds non-human subjectivity in the Bildung plot, which prevents itself from being "overtly hypothetical," as suggested by Herman (2014). Furthermore, this deliberate departure embodies her critique of the human-centric value that largely characterizes the previous Bildung. If the majority of canine Bildungsroman sets the goal to be "specifically human or specifically humanistic," *Flush* presents to be the biography narrating the dog's development for its own sake (Smith, 2002, p.349). In retrospect, Anna Swell's *Black Beauty* (1877) nurtures the first successful canine protagonist, in which her narration of horse experience may be creditable, but the canine voice and emotions are recognizably humane so as to seek sympathy. The subsequent works like Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906) feature "masculine emotional detachment" (Smith, 2002, p.349). It is in this context that Woolf's *Flush* critiques what facilitates the narration of canine Bildung: the anthropocentric bias. As indicated by Kendall-Morwick (2014), though the transformation of London's Buck in *White Fang* coincides with the prototype of Bildung plot, *Flush* "privileges the development of canine character over the cultivation of sympathy for animal suffering"(p.508). It is within my aim to demonstrate the canine subjectivity in the Bildung plot to show Woolf's criticism towards human-centric values that predominately underlie canine Bildung in the following analysis.

In the biographical practice of *Flush*, it is not only Woolf's speculation but also her sensibility in differentiating canine and human experiences that constitute the non-human subjectivity it attempts to manifest. Evidence from reviews and books dispels the doubt about *Flush*'s prototype and identifies the canine protagonist as a golden cocker spaniel gifted to Woolf from Vita Sackville-West (Smith, 2002, p.350). Indeed, *Flush*'s front page presents an image of Woolf's dog, Pinka, situated in the interior house. Having been accompanied by dogs for almost her whole life, Woolf is rather familiar with their behavior. Therefore, Woolf's personal attachment to dogs, along with her great interest at the same time, allows for the possibility of the shrewd, unsentimental, and careful observation of a dog's everyday life. Woolf endeavors to speculate how humans and a dog perceive the same environment differently. Before being presented to Elizabeth, Flush spent his puppyhood mainly with his previous owner, Miss Mitford. On one occasion, when they take a walk, Woolf describes the dog's experience as follows:

A variety of smells interwoven in subtlest combination thrilled his nostrils: strong smells of earth, sweet smells of flowers, nameless smells of leaf and brambles; sour smells as they crossed the road, pungent smells as they entered bean-fields (2006, p.8).

In Woolf's subtle depiction of Flush's sensual impression, instead of pointing out what various smells feel like for a human, she concentrates on the dog's excitement of smelling things. Additionally, it reveals that serving as a human companion is not a dog's primary duty in his psyche, which explains why Miss Mitford's companion, Flush, in the end, "forgot his mistress; he forgot all humankind" (Woolf, 2006, p.8). A more rigorous attempt to explore canine self-awareness would necessitate imagination of what

modern ethologist Uexküll (2010) terms as Umwelt, namely the dog's perceptual world in *Flush*. In Flush's very first time into Elizabeth's bedroom, Woolf underlines the different nature of Flush's Umwelt and exposes the limitation of documenting it in pages.

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 (2006, p.20).

It is noted that Woolf's characteristic dashes are repeated multiple times so as to continue to describe Flush's initial impression, which results in, to some extent, a fragmented account of a dog's perception. Subsequently, it pushes readers to piece together the complete scene with bold imagination, which is obviously beyond human capacity. In short, similar passages aim to expose the limitation of human perception through the use of evidently incomplete analogy. Additionally, in a scene at the Brownings' home in Italy, Flush's reaction towards furniture appears to be so distinct that he sees "that article of furniture, whose chief function it was to provide shade, kicked on the floor," which again differs from human perception (Woolf, 2016, p.45). Insofar as it has been suggested that though inhabiting the same place, humans and animals perceive the surroundings differently, the text resumes to show how distinct it is in the canine's fashion of understanding self-development (Bildung). Confined to her bedroom with Flush, Elizabeth's aesthetic education does not come to a halt, for her writing and reading still ensure her active participation in the intellectual community. At the very beginning, Flush exhibits jealousy toward the privileged language that characterized the Bildung tradition:

When he heard her low voice syllabbling innumerable sounds, he longed for the day when his own rough roar would issue like hers in the little simple sounds that had such mysterious meanings (Woolf, 2006, p.39).

Flush's envying human access to language and the desire to speak may affirm the anthropocentric prototype of canine Bildung, but Woolf perpetually subverts the privileged status of language. Contemplating beside her companion Flush, Elizabeth finds nothing but frustration after a morning's writing, exclaiming, "After all, she may have thought, do words say anything? Can words say anything? Do not words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words?" (Woolf, 2006, p.39). In his investigation of Flush, Kendall-Morwick (2014) argues that Woolf's constant efforts to undermine the privileged language anticipate what Lacan purports, which is that language inevitably distorts the reality it intends to re-present. In addition, the author's critique of the limitation of language is especially apparent in the narration of Flush's experience with the elopement of the Brownings to Florence:

Here, then, the biographer must perforce come to a pause. The human nose is practically non-existent. The greatest poets in the world have smelt nothing but roses on the one hand and dung on the other. Yet it was in the world of smell that Flush mostly lived. Love was chiefly smell; form and colour were smell; music and architecture, law, politics, and science were smell. To him, religion itself was smell. To describe his simplest experience with the daily chop or biscuit is beyond our power (Woolf, 2006, p.86).

This passage is part of the human-centric value that characterizes the Bildung tradition, which presupposes that humans possess language as a privilege over animals. The human system of signification cannot completely appreciate what has been unfolded right in front of Browning's eyes. While showing her candor of inadequacy of language, Woolf narrates Flush as having successfully smelled everything with respect to the city, endeavoring to depict the world in the dog's eye by addressing the olfactory sense, which separates itself from the tradition of previous Canine Bildungsroman. The mastery of language confines what humans lack already, and the deprivation of language surprisingly completes Flush's perception. Thus, the emphasis on non-human subjectivity exhibited in Flush's different perception towards the same environment not only exposes the limitations of human language, which underpins the privilege of human perception but also critiques the anthropocentrism that predominately underlies the canine Bildung process.

4. Multispecies community in *Flush*

Flush starts with a disquisition on the genealogy of the protagonist: a cocker spaniel. Being identified as a superior dog embodying the merits of a spaniel, Flush is forced to associate with peers in Wimpole street's aristocratic family. However, by employing the historical event, the elopement plot of the Brownings, Woolf tells the story of the dog's failure in socialization on Wimpole Street and the dog's successful pursuit of his identity in Italy. The excursion to Italy can thus be understood as a journey away from the hierarchical society and towards a more open and freer place where individual freedom is retrieved through the resistance of social norms. It is in this sense that this paper would argue that Flush's failure in socialization marks "a return to the classical Bildung" where more attention is given to inner culture (Castle, 2006, p.6).

In the narrative of Flush's Bildung process in Wimpole Street, Woolf constantly stresses the excellent breeding of the cocker spaniel. Flush meets what "the Spaniel Club" claims to be the vices of the spaniel: "his head must be smooth, rising without a too-decided stoop from the muzzle; the skull must be comparatively rounded and well developed with plenty of room for brain power; [...] The spaniel that exhibits these points is encouraged and bred from" (Woolf, 2016, p.3). The superiority of the spaniel hence hinges upon arbitrary characteristics resulting from biological factors. With dark eyes and straight ears, Flush initially considers himself to be prevailing over others, knowing that "there is no equality among dogs: some dogs are high dogs; some are low" through his observation of how people's tone, behaviors differ when it comes to different dogs (Woolf, 2016, p.19). No matter how convincing the aristocracy is, the author critiques the absurdity of the human-imposed classification of dogs, which is superficially underpinned by arbitrary genetic factors, remarking that "if we now turn to human society, what chaos and confusion meet the eye! No club has any such jurisdiction upon the breed of man" (Woolf, 2016, p.4). Shortly after pointing out the ridicule of genetic hierarchy, the biographer continues by indicating that Flush's previous owner, Dr. Mitford, in a relatively impoverished position, is not qualified to take care of such a valuable human companion. Even in the hardest times, it never occurred to Miss Mitford to think about selling the spaniel because "he was of the rare order of objects that cannot be associated with money" (Woolf, 2016, p.9). Considering the pedigree of the cocker spaniel, Miss Mitford's sending Flush as a gift to Elizabeth Barrett, therefore, cannot be simply rendered as an act of generosity. The dog is not suitable to live with a family that is unworthy of his status, while "Flush was worthy of Miss Barrett; Miss Barrett was worthy of Flush" (Woolf, 2016, p.10). Here, a cocker spaniel of pure breed and a human being of social prominence are juxtaposed, as both are chained by constructed hierarchy and in this sense, Flush is obliged to fit into another world in line with the strict order in the exterior socialization. However, the acclaimed breeding solicits a myriad of confinement during the process of Flush's aesthetic education. Unlike his carefree life in Three Mile Cross, Flush's behavior is regulated, controlled, and confined in "the most august of London streets, the most impersonal" (Woolf, 2016, p.10). In Flush's final parting with Miss Mitford and the first meeting with Barrett Browning, he experienced the departure. He panicked and could not fully realize what the shutting doors signal immediately, but the biographer adds that "they shut on freedom; on fields; on hares; on grass; on his adored, his venerated mistress" (Woolf, 2016, p.14). It is a brand-new life he needs to adapt to from now on. Days spent with his new mistress are always in the secluded bedroom due to Elizabeth's invalidism. Confined to a relatively closed space, Flush's "natural instincts were thwarted" (Woolf, 2016, p.20). The cocker spaniel's natural desire was profoundly restricted in seclusion, and he "longed for air and exercise; his limbs were cramped with lying on the sofa" (Woolf, 2016, p.22). Even on rare occasions when Elizabeth is allowed to step outside accompanied by Flush, the outdoor education for a dog has changed here in Wimpole Street. In their venture to Regent's Park, the dog once again notices the same view, but he feels different:

Were there not trees and grass? He asked. Were there not the signals of freedom? Had he not always leapt forward directly Miss Mitford started on her walk? Why was he a prisoner here...he had learnt his lesson- in Regent's Park, dogs must be led on chains (Woolf, 2016, p.19).

Flush asks himself what has changed in his mind. Indeed, nature remains the same for a cocker spaniel, but in Wimpole Street, the privilege of being chained has forced him to sacrifice freedom. Flush's natural instinct and desire are thus suppressed in his identification with his entitled blood manufactured by genetic hierarchy. Despite his physical confinement, Flush also undergoes the emotional breakdown of understanding human emotions. As the novel progresses, Elizabeth and Flush grow closer. In order to acclimate to his new accommodation, it is inevitable for Flush to learn to comprehend human emotions, even in pain. This is how Woolf describes the very first encounter between Elizabeth and Flush:

Each was surprised... Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other? She might have been- all that; and he- But no. Between them lay the wildest gulf that can separate one being from another (Woolf, 2016, p.15).

The biographer here stresses the difficulty of mutual communication between humans and animals. They resemble each other but have virtually different communication systems. The painful experience peculiar to Flush's efforts to surmount cognitive issues has been dramatized in his reconciliation with Elizabeth's spouse, Robert Browning. The confrontation starts even before their meeting when Flush observes that something dangerous is looming by the gesture of Elizabeth picking a letter, and his mind generates the idea of "some danger menacing his safety" (Woolf, 2016, p.51). Flush even fantasizes about the shape of the enemy, who is not a dog but a man "in a cloak,...a cowed and hooded figure" (Woolf, 2016, p.52). When his imaginary rival physically appears, Flush decides to take action and bites the target's trousers and, in return, receives "a flick of the hand" (Woolf, 2016, p.63). The repeated attack on Robert again is met with indifference. After being humiliated twice, Flush "resolved to meet his enemy face to face and alone" (Woolf, 2016, p.43). On one occasion, being admitted into Flush's territory, Robert notices the "impending attack and is determined to meet it in the most conciliatory of spirits" and "provided with a parcel of cakes" (Woolf, 2016, p.43). Overwhelmed by his anger, Flush ignores the well-meant gesture and immediately flings himself at Robert and barks so aloud that it alarms the maid. The revenge leads to him being beaten soundly, being confined for half an hour, and worse still, the intentional aloofness from the mistress, which frustrates Flush deeply. Being exiled for days, Flush struggles to finally comprehend the complicated

relationship between humans because “If he bit Mr Browning, he bit her too” (Woolf, 2016, p.47). It takes pain for Flush to realize the envisioned enemy’s place. In his movement to eat the cakes offered by Robert, even if they are not fresh anymore, he endeavors to show his understanding of hatred and love. In the transformation of his willingness to relinquish freedom for the glory chain and his attempt to comprehend delicate human emotions for human sympathy, we can see how Flush socializes in Wimpole Street. The cocker spaniel seems to have successfully become a member of the community. However, I would argue it is not until the journey to Italy that Flush realizes how inclusive or exclusive his previous life is and begins to unleash his potential to conduct self-education centered on his inner culture. It is in this sense that Woolf’s failure to harmonize with the exterior world marks her efforts to seek freedom in autonomous Bildung.

5. Conclusion

Despite the fear of being labeled as a sentimental writer, Woolf still released *Flush* as an experiment in animal biography. To probe into her modernist response to the classical genre of Bildungsroman, this paper starts with an introduction to what Castle calls the modernist Bildungsroman. Through a close reading of *Flush*, it is argued that Woolf’s failure in the human-centric narrative and harmonious socialization of traditional canine Bildung represents her modernist endeavor in the project of “recuperation and revision of the Enlightenment concept of aesthetico-spiritual Bildung, which has been rationalized and bureaucratized in the course of the nineteenth century” (Castle, 2006, p.4). The non-human subjectivity manifested in her narrative of the dog’s Bildung plot critiques the anthropocentrism that characterizes the animal character in canine Bildung, and the rejection of genetic hierarchy and the dog’s embracing his identity as a mongrel embody Woolf’s pursuit of freedom in autonomous Bildung. The present paper centers on investigating Bildungsroman, a genre itself in crisis. By mainly adopting Castle Gregory’s argument of modernist Bildungsroman, the present paper illuminates that future research could reconsider the relationship between modernism and the form of Bildungsroman. Additionally, considering the recent animal studies, Woolf’s experimental work, *Flush*, calls for more interpretation from an interdisciplinary approach.

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