



# Flush: A Biography

*Virginia Woolf*

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## **Flush: A Biography** Virginia Woolf

This story of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel, Flush, enchants right from the opening pages. Although Flush has adventures of his own with bullying dogs, horrid maids, and robbers, he also provides the reader with a glimpse into Browning's life. Introduction by Trekkie Ritchie.

## **Flush: A Biography Details**

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# From Reader Review Flush: A Biography for online ebook

## Luís C. says

A pretty little novel, but no more.

The form is poetic but the story remains flat, without bouncing. The idea of placing his autobiography through the life of his dog is not badly done, but it lacks some notes that would connect us to the reality of the facts. However, the methods of Virginia Woolf of foreignization used by are interesting, the vision of Flush on our world is quite captivating and it was in his eyes we find the beauty of the author's lyricism.

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## Efka says

Formos prasme "Flašas" - neabejotinai keisčiausia iš visų mano skaitytų biografijų. Dar neteko skaityti žmogaus biografijos, išreikštos per jo šunio gyvenimą. Tikrai netradicinis, bet pasiteisinęs sprendimas.

Woolf rašo gerai, stilius lengvas ir paprastas, nors gal kiek jaučiamas potraukis padaugiažodžiauti ten kur tai daryti nebūtina. Puikiai perteikti vietovių aprašymai - Londono lėšnynai nemaloniai nuteikę net namie, kita vertus Italijos aprašymai gręžtai pakliūpę ir norį atostogauti.

Bendrai paėjus, knyga - nieko stebuklingo, bet skaitosi visai gerai.

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## Hana says

Ha! So you thought this was a book about a dog?

Nope. It's by Virginia Woolf, so it is really clever social satire: a dog's eye view of Victorian mores, the absurdities of class consciousness, the stultifying life of London ladies (and dogs), the joys of running free in Italy, and the delights of sexual liberation. Of course Woolf has great fun writing from the point of view of one who experiences life as a sequence of vast and varied scents and we get some interesting insights into Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life both before and after her marriage.

Woolf draws on Browning's letters and poems to create this 'biography', but the story is amply embellished by her own imaginings.

This is how Elizabeth Barrett Browning described her English cocker spaniel, Flush:

"Like a lady's ringlets brown,  
Flow thy silken ears adown  
Either side demurely,  
Of thy silver-suited breast  
Shining out from all the rest  
Of thy body purely.

Darkly brown thy body is,

Till the sunshine, striking this,  
Alchemize its dulness, —  
When the sleek curls manifold  
Flash all over into gold,  
With a burnished fulness."

You can read the whole poem here: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/...>

Browning wrote a second poem about Flush that closes out the biography's final, touching scenes:

"You see this dog. It was but yesterday  
I mused, forgetful of his presence here..."

<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/fl...>

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## Lady Drinkwell says

A delightful read, I am forced to give it five stars. I love Virginia Woolf's writing style, I have always been fascinated by the story of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and I have absolutely fallen in love with this little dog. My heart was in my mouth reading of some of his misadventures.

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## Yani says

Si tuviera que definirlo con una palabra, sería "engañoso" (en un sentido positivo). Aquello que al principio parece ser la biografía del perro de la poeta Elizabeth Barrett Browning termina siendo su historia de vida, pero a través de los ojos del simpático animalito. Así y todo, Woolf no deja de lado problemas que conciernen tanto al perro como a la Humanidad.

El libro empieza con una aproximación muy linda y muy humorística a los orígenes de la raza *cocker spaniel*, en donde Woolf, con su fino sarcasmo, también comenta qué sucede con la aristocracia humana. Flush va a ser adoptado por Elizabeth y la relación entre ellos va a fluctuar entre el amor y el odio. Por supuesto, el que siempre permanece fiel y olvida las peleas más rápido es el perro.

Amé este libro por muchas razones. Creo que es casi innecesario decir que Woolf escribe y describe todo con una forma tan particular y tan admirable que vuelve difícil que uno abandone la lectura. Por más mínimo que sea el tema que esté tratando, ella lo agiganta y le da belleza, pero también sabe lidiar con cuestiones tan complicadas como la pobreza. La combinación de las vidas de la mascota y de su dueña me resultó subrepticia e interesante, al igual que la sensación de que Barrett Browning fue una mujer intensa, algo que me dejó con muchas ganas de leerla, a pesar de que en algunas ocasiones me cayó mal, como autora y como persona (refiriéndome a su correspondencia). A la vez, los datos sobre otros personajes involucrados en la

historia son imperdibles.

En conclusión, *Flush* es un libro (y un perro) precioso que apunta a la sensibilidad que siempre despiertan los animales, con un trasfondo demasiado humano e imposible de ignorar. Y puedo afirmar que me pareció ideal para conocer y acercarme a Barrett Browning por un camino poco convencional.

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### **Jesse says**

After completing the groundbreaking experiment *The Waves*, Woolf “rested” by working on what she considered a mere trifle—a short novel that would eventually become *Flush: A Biography*, a version of the courtship of poets Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning as seen through the eyes of their omnipresent cocker spaniel. Using historical facts as a platform, what emerges is a witty and unusual take on one of the most famous real-life romances of all time, and even if it comes off as rather slight when placed next to Woolf’s other novels (particularly her later ones), it’s certainly one of her most lighthearted and irrepressible, and tremendous fun.

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### **Joseph says**

2018

Rereading Woolf's least know book. A biography English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning's red cocker spaniel. Woolf does an excellent job of telling the story from the Flush's perspective.

2012

A good story. We lost our rescued Doberman yesterday to heart failure so a dog book seemed in order.

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### **Emir Ibañez says**

No me siento digno de reseñar un libro de Virginia Woolf, simplemente diré que la pluma de esta mujer cada vez me enamora más.

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### **Michael says**

This was too tempting to resist. The great stream-of-consciousness novelist pulls off a “biography” of the beloved dog of Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It was a nice trifle, though missing some of the emotional engagement that comes from direct knowledge of the animal by the author.

Flush was a cocker Spaniel who grew up in the country, and then was brought to the London household of Barrett. Their first encounter give you some of the flavor of Woolf’s approach to capturing his experience:

*“Oh Flush!” said Miss Barrett. For the first time she looked him in the face. For the first time Flush looked at the lady lying on the sofa.*

*Each was surprised. Heavy curls hung down on either side of Miss Barrett’s face; large bright eyes shone out; a large mouth smiled. Heavy ears hung down on each side of Miss Flush’s face; his eyes, too, were large and bright: his mouth was wide. There was a likeness between them. As they gazed at each other each felt: Here I am—and then each felt: But how different! Hers was the pale worn face of an invalid, cut off from air, light, freedom. His was the warm ruddy face of a young animal; instinct with health and energy. 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 widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog. Thus closely united, thus immensely divided, they gazed at each other. Then with one bound Flush sprang to the sofa and laid himself to where he was to lie ever after—on the rug at Miss Barrett’s feet.*

In fact Elizabeth Barrett did have a cocker spaniel look:

For source material, Woolf had Barrett’s references to Flush in her poems and letters. The rest comes from her imagination of what it must have been like. Like William James characterization of a baby’s experience of the world as a “blooming, buzzing confusion”, here Woolf projects Flush’s experience of his first outing into London with his new master:

*The carriage stopped. He entered mysterious arcades filed with clouds and webs of tinted gauze. A million airs from China, from Arabia, wafted their frail incense into the remotest fibres of his senses. Swiftly over the counters flashed yards of gleaming silk; more darkly, more slowly rolled the ponderous bombazine. Scissors snipped; coins sparkled. Paper was folded; string tied. What with nodding plumes, waving streamers, tossing horses, yellow liveries, passing faces, leaping, dancing up, down, Flush, satiated with the multiplicity of his sensations, slept, drowsed, dreamt and knew no more until he was lifted out of the carriage and the door of Wimpole Street shut on him again.*

This is all charming. However, Woolf seems incapable of portraying humor and play that lies in the hearts of the dogs we truly love. She stretches for a bit of whimsy in the following, which effectively satirizing the class system of London:

*Flush knew before the summer had passed that there is no equality among dogs: there are high dogs and low dogs. Which, then, was he? No sooner had Flush got home than he examined himself carefully in the looking-glass. Heaven be praised, he was a dog of birth and breeding! His head was smooth; his eyes were prominent but not guzzled; his feet were feathered; he was the equal of the best-bred cocker in Wimpole Street. ... When about this time Miss Barrett observed him staring in the glass, she was mistaken. He was a philosopher, she thought, meditating the difference between appearance and reality. On the contrary, he was an aristocrat considering his points.*

For drama, the high points in this tale include a period of jealousy when Robert Browning comes on the scene, a terrifying incident where Flush is dognapped and ransomed, and an epiphany of new freedoms for Flush that come when the married couple moves to the Italy. A dog’s eye view of their celebrated romance is a nice deflation. Flush’s time with the kidnappers supplements Dickens with a dog’s vision of stinking squalor experienced by the lower classes. The time in Italy demonstrates a cure for the Victorian ills of London, as Elizabeth and Flush both blossom in health and egalitarian outlook.

So should you read this book? It’s at least worth it for bragging rights to be able to say you tossed off a book by Virginia Woolf in a sitting or two. And to say that the stream of consciousness made you smile a lot. Who

would take the lack of belly laughs a deal killer? Though you can't find it on the bookstore shelves with "Marley and Me" or the dusty memoir section of library with "My Dog Skip" or "The Dog Who Wouldn't Be", you can resort to reading it online at: <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf...>

I will leave this with Woolf's rendering of the paradoxes in dog-human relations based on one of Browning's poems:

*The fact was that they could not communicate with words, and it was a fact that led to much misunderstanding. Yet did it not lead also to a particular intimacy? "Writing,"—Miss Barrett once exclaimed after a morning's toil, "writing, writing ..." After all, she may have thought, do words say everything? Can words say anything? Do not words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words? Once at least Miss Barrett seems to have found it so. 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 shown 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? The sun burnt and love blazed. But suppose Flush had been able to speak—would he not have said something sensible about the potato disease in Ireland?*

For a lyrical rendering Barrett's love for Flush, go to the primary source of Elizabeth's poem: "To Flush, My Dog"

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## **Jeff Jackson says**

This concise biography of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's spaniel is super charming, surprisingly dramatic, and beautifully crafted. For fans of "Orlando," this is wonderful in a similarly fantastical vein. It's mostly known as a trifle today, though for many readers it might serve as an ideal introduction to Virginia Woolf.

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## **Dolors says**

I never thought I would be so absorbed with the biography...of a dog!

But what was I thinking? Woolf's writing works its magic with no exception, of course.

Are you in the mood for the ideal dose of ironic, playful humor?

Do you crave for those intricately woven phrases that sing the English language with exquisite intonation?

Or for a literary game of original subtlety?

"Flush" is the described above plus a surrogate biography of the poetess Elizabeth Barrett-Browning and a jocular satire on the social conventions and the assumption of purity that is generally attached to the British ~~snobbery~~ aristocracy.

It's through the eyes, or maybe mostly through the snout of Elizabeth's dog that we follow her life as a young woman confined first by a mysterious illness at her father's house in Wimpole Street and the developing epistolary romance with Robert Browning prior to their elopement to Florence.

This novella is partly a reconstruction of the life of the Brownings through real documents, basically the poems and letters of Elizabeth, and partly a divertimento that brings the world alive with delightful descriptive passages vibrant with the smells, noises, flavors and fragmentary sights that constitute the

perceptions of this special dog. Flush absorbs the mood of his mistress and vice versa, establishing a chord of communication that transcends language, the laws of nature and Victorian rationality.

Flush rises above the concept of the spoiled pet dog and loyal companion. He becomes the recipient of Elizabeth's states of mind and the mysterious accord between these opposed beings, woman and animal, which culminates, with Shakespearean satire galore, into a rarefied but incredibly honest account of the poetess' life, internalized and intensified by his doggish observations.

It's impossible to read "Flush" and not imagine Virginia's own dog laying drowsily under the shade of a pear tree in the exotic garden of the Woolfs' summer residence in East Sussex, taking in all the aromas of flowers and plants, the sound of swarming bees and the sweet scent of figs about to burst out with ripeness and wonder which experiences, those of dog or man, are closer to artistic sensibilities.

Woolf seems to be of the opinion that, sometimes, the feelings of animals are more genuine, if not more human than humans themselves. And after reading this delightful novella and sitting under the shade of that fig tree, how can I disagree?

Monk's House, East Sussex

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## **Kyriakos Sorokkou says**

This was the 6th book I read by Virginia Woolf and her easiest, so far. It's a peculiar little book with a cute theme. I don't want to downgrade it by using the word cute but when the protagonist is a dog than there's some cuteness in it.

This is a biography of a dog called Flush. Flush was Elizabeth Barrett Browning's beloved dog. She was a Victorian poet and her husband was a poet as well, Robert Browning. He was the one who wrote the epic poem that inspired Stephen King's The Dark Tower Series, *Childe Roland to The Dark Tower Came*

This is not just the biography of the dog, Flush, but also the biography of his owner, Mrs Browning. We see her with Flush as a puppy and she as a frail Miss Barrett, living in a respectable street in London. We see Flush as an adult dog in Italy with her now called Mrs Browning. We see his jealousy when she gave birth to a boy. We see kidnappings, life in Italy contrasted with life in London, and we learn about the history of his breed (Spaniel).

This is also a book that shows us how life was for dogs in the Victorian era.

So in other words this is a fictional / non-fiction book (aka biography), since every time Woolf decided she was going to write a non-fiction biography her imagination took over. This is what happened here, in Orlando, and in a third biography, Roger Fry's (a friend of hers).

Woolf drew her material from two poems written by Barrett Browning about her dog and her letters between her and her husband.

If you like dogs, Victorian era, and biographies this is for you.

## Duane says

This is the biography of a dog, a cocker spaniel named Flush who was owned by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. And through the eyes of Flush, and the writing of Virginia Woolf, we get a look at the life of the poetess herself. It's an interesting way to write about someone, but the talented pen of VW is up to the challenge.

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## Teresa Proença says

Nos seus diários, Virginia Woolf diz que escreveu **Flush** como forma de um "*apaziguado entretenimento*", que lhe permitiu descansar do esforço exigido por **As Ondas** e conceber o romance seguinte - **Os Anos**. Talvez por a entrega da autora não ser em pleno, esta leitura não me tivesse deslumbrado. Direi mesmo que, se não tivesse tão presentes na memória e no coração duas das suas obras-primas, pensaria que ler Virginia Woolf não é nada de especial e talvez nem a lesse mais.

No entanto, embora sem o arrebatamento dos anteriores, gostei deste livro; porque aprendi um pouco sobre a vida da poetisa Elizabeth Barrett Browning e me enterneci com a história de Flush, o *cocker spaniel* que a acompanhou nas fases mais importantes da sua vida. Talvez mais ainda porque também eu, há muitos anos, tive a ventura de amar e ser amada por um *cocker spaniel* - uns seres maravilhosos, meigos, inteligentes e de uma dedicação sem limites aos seus donos - e esta leitura ofereceu-me a alegria de o recordar, embora com muita saudade.

Flush...

Rá...

Obrigada Virginia.

(James Edwin McConnell, "*Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her cocker spaniel Flush*")

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## Nihan E. says

Kraliçe Victoria döneminin önemli ?airlerinden Elizabeth Barrett'in hastal??? ve evinden kaç???nda her zaman yan?nda olan, sahibine enteresan bir ?ekilde çok benzeyen ve onun can yolda?? olmak k?sa ya?am?ndaki tek iste?i olan Cocker köpe?i Flush'?n öyküsünü okuma ?an?? elde ediyoruz bu kitapta. Hem de bizzat Flush'?n bak?? aç?s?ndan.

Bu kadar ince dü?ünölüp i?lenmi? bir hikaye de ancak Virginia Woolf taraf?ndan yaz?labilirdi. Çünkü küçük detaylar? tahammül edebilece?inden daha fazla görebilen bir yazard?.

Flush'?n öyküsü de ayn? incelikle i?lenmi?, dili hem basit hem de cümlelerle olu?turulan bir sanat. ?airin hastal???n?n a??r oldu?u dönemde yata???n?n ayak ucunda onunla birlikte saatlerce yatan Flush, kap? aç?l?p d??ar? ça??r?lsa bile oray? terk etmezmi?. Yolda???n?n yan?nda olmay? güne? ?????na ye?lermi?. Bundan daha büyük bir fedakarlık örne?i var mıdır?

Flush üzerinden modernliğin insanı nasıl doğadan uzaklaştırdığına da bir eleştiri getirilmi. Flush sahiplenince köpü oynadığı yemyeşil çimenlere istediği gibi çökmez olmu, dilediğince kirlenememi. Yine mutluymu? ama boynunda bir zincirle gezmek zorundaym. Buna özgürlük diyebilir miyiz? Modern insan özgür insan mıdır yoksa hepimiz kendi renkli hapisanelerimizde mi geçiriyoruz hayatımızı? Gibi sorgulamalarla yine yazarın konu tutumu.

Elizabeth Barrett'ın hastalıktan kurtaran mücadeleci ve baş dik ruhu ve de aşk olmu. Yatağından bile çökmezken sevdiği adam uğruna doğduğu ülkeyi terk etmeyi göze almış ve gittiği yerde gerçekten mutlu olmu. Biricik köpeği Flush'tahayatının sonuna kadar yanındaym.

Klasikler arasında ve yazarın diğer kitaplarına nazaran daha kolay okunuyor. Kitapların da mutlaka olmalı.

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## Fionnuala says

..the Victorians loved biographies, especially biographies of eminent people - kings, queens and other distinguished members of society. Flush is the biography of such an eminent Victorian. Or rather Flush is a parody of a biography of an eminent Victorian. We might even say that Flush is a parody of a parody of a biography of an eminent Victorian because Flush is in fact the biography of a dog. But not just any dog, an Eminent Dog, the pure bred Cocker Spaniel belonging to another eminent Victorian, the poet Elizabeth Barrett who eventually married Eminent Victorian Robert Browning after they'd exchanged an entire volume of love letters; they then went to live in Italy, taking Flush along with them. (view spoiler)

That a dog-lover wrote this biography is clear from the outset. The reader even wonders if the book might have been written by a dog, so marvellously done is the dog point of view: the action revolves entirely around sounds, smells and scamperings. But needless to say, Flush wasn't written by a dog but by Virginia Woolf who it turns out would have loved to have been a dog. In his biography of his aunt, her nephew Quentin Bell, tells us: *Flush is not so much a book by a dog lover as a book by someone who would love to be a dog.*

So if we're wondering about the unusual choice of biographical subject, the dog rather than his mistress, Quentin's quote seems to give us the answer. But there is also the parody aspect already mentioned. In 1933, Woolf wrote to a friend: *I was so tired after finishing 'The Waves' that I lay in the garden and read the Browning love letters, and the figure of the dog made me laugh so I couldn't resist making him a Life.* I wanted to play a joke on Lytton. Lytton Strachey was Woolf's long time friend and a rather irreverent biographer himself; his Eminent Victorians is a parody of the serious biographical style so beloved of the Victorians.

So now that we've chased our tail sufficiently, we are back where we started. The Victorians loved biographies..

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## Ronald Morton says

This is one of my wife's favorite books. Prior to having children, when we used to go used book shopping together, she would buy any copy of this she came across to gift to friends. Up until now I'd never read it (in

my defense, she's read almost none of my favorite books, and I've read many of hers through the years, and will continue to do so).

Flush is a sweet little book, beautifully written, about Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog Flush (and, in the margins, it is also about EBB). It manages to capture the deep love (and also the depth of general emotion) felt by a dog for its "person"; also, it provides an ahuman perspective of human relationships, and brings a wisdom that is unexpected in a book about a dog.

A lovely book, well recommended to any and all dog lovers.

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### **Carmo says**

Fluxo de consciência em versão canina, para ir entrando de mansinho na escrita de Virgínia Woolf, antes de me atrever a vôos mais altos.

Mesmo tratando-se da biografia de um cão, a autora não deixou escapar a oportunidade de aplicar umas alfinetadas bem humoradas à sociedade inglesa da época; snob e preconceituosa, de apontar o dedo às diferenças abissais entre as condições de vida de ricos e pobres, e ainda ao pouco que se esperava das mulheres e que as relegava para um papel social pouco significativo.

Ao conhecermos a história de vida do cachorro, ficamos também a conhecer um pouco melhor a sua idolatrada dona: a poetisa Elizabeth Barret Browning, assim como o seu marido, o também poeta Robert Browning.

Flush, foi ternamente retratado e a leitura é agradável, especialmente para todos os que tenham amigos de quatro patas...mas eu, sou mais de gatos...

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### **Lori says**

Dogs are color blind.

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### **Ali says**

I have been looking forward to reading Flush for months, and I really wasn't disappointed. Written in the period after Virginia Woolf had completed writing *The Waves*; which she had found so draining Flush, is a complete joy. Flush – for those who don't know – is a biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog, a cocker spaniel that was her constant companion, both before and after her marriage to Robert Browning. The book is a combination of fiction and non-fiction, through which we meet the two nineteenth century poets, revealing something of the early years of their marriage.

Although it appears so much lighter in tone than many of her other works, Flush does in fact consider social inequalities and the way that society treated and classified its women. Virginia Woolf employs her famous stream of consciousness style to explore women writers, through the point of view of a small, spoiled brown dog. Apparently Woolf drew her inspiration from the two poems that Elizabeth Barrett Browning published

about her dog.

full review: <https://heavenali.wordpress.com/2016/...>

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