

A Study of Complex Emotions between a Dog and a Woman under Spatial Transformation *Flush: A Biography* by Virginia Woolf

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf, one of the most popular female writers of the early twentieth century, portrays women expressing their dissatisfaction with society and their own quests for self-redemption in diverse ways. Unlike traditional stream-of-consciousness novels, Woolf's *Flush: A Biography* features an animal protagonist and follows a chronological narrative structure. Set against the backdrop of the Victorian era and told from the first-person perspective of a dog, the text describes Flush's emotional experiences as he moves from London to Italy. It contrasts these emotions with the numb feelings of Miss Barrett, ultimately highlighting the importance of emotions and exploring how individuals cope with emotional deficiencies and awaken their self-awareness.

Keywords

Flush: A Biography, Spatial Transformation, Dog, Emotions

1. Introduction

Flush: A Biography is a unique novel published by Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) in 1933. In this work, Woolf vividly and humorously portrays the life of a dog, which indirectly reflects the journey of self-awareness of the renowned Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

1.1. Literature Review

Research related to this book can be categorized into three areas. The first category involves the subversion of traditional writing techniques and conventional

thought, suggesting that the book represents a shift in animal literature studies, redefining the “otherness” of animals (Ittner, 2006). The text also highlights how women seek recognition and support through the perspective of animal protection (Taneja, 2016). The second category focuses on ecological issues, conveying Woolf’s original intention: in the context of ongoing environmental degradation and human exploitation, the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature has become a significant topic (Zheng & Zhang 2015). This perspective emphasizes the equality of all beings in nature, including animals and plants, and suggests that humans should respect all forms of life (Guo, 2011). The third category involves spatial analysis, arguing that the novel centers on the theme of “freedom”. By contrasting and transforming spaces, the novel critiques the patriarchal constraints on women’s survival during the Victorian era and satirizes the social hierarchy and wealth disparity in London at the time. It also portrays Italy as the “other” in relation to Victorian England (Zhang, 2011). Through the narrative of binaries—dog and human, fact and fiction, space and time, Woolf breaks away from the Victorian tradition of biographies centered on elites, overly constrained by factual accuracy, and predominantly linear in temporal narration (Wu, 2014).

1.2. Research Method

In *Ethics, Humans, and Other Animals: An Introduction with Readings*, Hursthouse mentions that humans are the only animal species endowed with rationality (Hursthouse, 2000). Humans possess a complete physiological system that autonomously controls the body and responds to various external stimuli, but there are also behaviors performed without conscious awareness (Dawkins, 2000), expressing different emotions based on past experiences or sudden external stimuli. Damasio argues that awareness of an emotion requires the ability to experience that emotion and a reservoir of knowledge (Damasio et al., 2000). Highly perceptive (or impaired) consciousness can often be used to define terms such as emotion, perception, thought, and feeling (Block, 1998). Animals are seen as a continuation and culmination of post-structuralism, lacking language beyond the human realm and not beneficial to humans, merely representing humanity’s most primitive system (Weil, 2010). For non-literary scholars or those struggling with basic necessities, whether animals possess subjectivity is not a concern, and what matters is whether animals can be used to solve existential problems, so animal research has been stagnant. Even in the 18th century, it was still widely believed that there were distinct differences, and even sharp oppositions in certain respects, between the anatomical structures of humans and those of other animals (Cassirer, 2004). Animals often appear in various works in an anthropomorphized form, with few scholars studying animals in their own right. Erica Fudge has also noted, “If humans only learn about animals from historical texts and do not observe animals directly in their environment, they are merely seeing a representation of animals within the text” (Fudge, 2002). D. H. Lawrence also stated, “Anthropomorphism makes everything lose its soul” (Harrison, 2010). Derrida also opposed

anthropomorphism, stating, “Rather than those exquisitely crafted fables, I prefer to draw from my own memory of animals—those small creatures that helped me in my writing—and to endow them with a soul” (Derrida, 2002). It was not until the publication of Peter Sing’s *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* in 1975 that a series of studies on animals began.

1.3. Results

How, then, are animal emotions expressed? Can we imagine an animal that cannot speak, yet communicate in a language we do not understand (Wolfe, 2003), and express its emotions in this way? In fact, many animal species possess self-awareness, intentional behavior, and unique systems of thought (Searle, 2008). Language is not exclusive to humans; animals also have their own forms of language, which do not necessarily rely on speech but can be conveyed through body language. Posthumanist scholar Donna Haraway (1944-) defines animals in *The Companion Species Manifesto* as “living, material beings that carry with them their own complex histories, spatialities, and politics” (Haraway, 2003). The term “companion” derives from the Latin *cum panis*, meaning “with bread”. The relationship between humans and animals is not one of a superior species taming an inferior one, but rather a mutual dependency of equals (Haraway, 2008). Over ten thousand years ago, humans domesticated dogs, and throughout subsequent history, dogs and humans have been interdependent, but there has been little detailed research on whether dogs possess individual consciousness. It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that people began to realize that animals, much like humans, have perceptions and are living beings (Zheng & Zhang, 2015). Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* also confirmed the evolutionary kinship between humans and animals (Liu, 2008). Implicit in this is the idea that animals have emotions similar to humans; although they cannot speak, their facial expressions and body language communicate their emotions to humans. Furthermore, animals not only share emotional similarities with humans but can also be seen as emotional guides for humans (Yin & Wang, 2019). In studies of emotions, there is an overemphasis on negative emotions, making the study of positive emotions particularly important. Animals, especially dogs, are beloved for their inherently optimistic and cheerful nature and their ability to influence humans through their positive emotional contagion, making them an indispensable part of human life. Virginia Woolf, inspired by her affection for dogs, wrote a biography to affirm the positive emotional feedback that dogs provide to humans.

2. Attachment to Personal Space

The origins of the Spanish pointer are difficult to pinpoint, but it is one of the oldest known breeds. This breed may have first appeared in Spain, though most of them were developed in England. Due to the variety within the breed, different types of Spanish pointers have been defined differently, but during the Victorian era in England, the most esteemed Spanish pointers were characterized by very

specific physical traits, “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 eyes must be full but not gozzled; the general expression must be one of intelligence and gentleness.” (Flush, 10) To maintain the purity of the breed, the Spanish Pointer Club was established to study and discuss their appearance and temperament, preventing the breeding of impure lines. Spanish pointers were highly prized in British society, and owning a breed of higher purity served as a mark of social status. The arrival of the industrial era brought increased economic resources to the middle and upper classes, leading to a greater migration towards London. Particularly for those from the countryside, there was a strong belief that, compared to the simple and stable life of the countryside, they were more eager to experience the life of high society.

On April 1, 1889, *The Local Government Act of 1888* came into effect, making Reading an autonomous municipal town within Berkshire. Berkshire, located in southern England, west of Greater London and south of the River Thames, is considered a dispersed center of population, with Reading being a notable focal point. In their quest to enter high society, the Mitford family relocated to a property marked by a three-mile boundary near Reading. The workers’ cottages at the three-mile boundary were situated in an area of land that was uncultivated and resembled a wasteland. The Mitford family owned a purebred Spanish pointer. This choice was driven both by Dr. Mitford’s love for dogs and the need to use the breed as a symbol of family status. Miss Mitford decided to gift the dog to Miss Barrett. This decision was motivated by her reluctance to sell Flush as a commodity due to the constraints of her modest lifestyle and her belief that a pet of noble lineage deserved to live in a wealthy household. To her, Flush was a spiritually dependable companion, sensitive and intelligent, whose cheerful and positive emotional expressions brought her joy. However, due to her inability to alter the circumstances, she chose to send Flush to Miss Barrett, who lived on Wimpole Street.

Miss Barrett’s prototype is Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), a renowned Victorian-era English poet who, despite her extensive knowledge, suffered from illness. Her health deteriorated significantly after the unexpected death of her brother Edward, leading her to remain secluded in a dimly lit bedroom. Her father was a wealthy merchant with an estate in Shropshire that showcased the family’s financial power. Notably, the Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, marking the first time an industrial site was designated as a World Heritage site due to industrial development. The Barrett family, following the trend of the Industrial Revolution, moved to London and, due to their wealth, settled on Wimpole Street. Wimpole Street, a historic and prestigious residential area in London, was home to many lawyers and doctors. The wealthy not only owned more property than the common people but also controlled more visual space (Tuan, 1977). Within the household, spaces were differentiated according to social status.

Servants in the “basement” were considered lower-class and confined to crowded spaces like the kitchen and laundry room, with no permission to leave the basement. In contrast, servants in the front hall, responsible for receiving and attending to the master, were allowed to move between various rooms according to a structured arrangement. This spatial division reflected their status and duties, but all activities were ultimately orchestrated by the master. Social hierarchy was marked not only by rank but also by the allocation of power within the same rank. The most powerful person in a family held absolute authority over its operations.

The Barrett family had numerous adult children and servants, and while their residence was not as spacious as a manor, it was designed to reflect the master’s taste. The residence retained the style of the 1830s, with a mix-and-match approach to furnishings. The walls and corridors were filled with symbolic objects, but due to insufficient ceiling height, the space appeared both dim and cramped. Within the same space, there was a hierarchy; the rooms at the front were associated with respect, while those further back or below had decreasing levels of respect. Flush first encounter with Miss Barrett took place in a bedroom located in the rear of the residence. As a woman, Miss Barrett’s status in the household was relegated to the back, dark, and mundane areas. Fleurette described this bedroom as an “antiquity”.

“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-” (Flush, 23)¹

The terms “crypt”, “fungus”, “mould” and “sour smell” suggest a predominantly dark color scheme in the room, reflecting the harsh living conditions and the gloomy disposition of the room’s owner. Regarding the room’s layout, the author provides a detailed description: dense green plants cover most of the window sills, and although the curtains are thin and transparent, the cluttered arrangement of items in the room keeps it dimly lit. To alleviate the sense of crowding, Miss Barrett’s room, in addition to her father’s eclectic taste, is decorated with numerous mirrors. The curtains, featuring castles, gates, forests, and peasants, appear vividly under the weak sunlight, indicating Miss Barrett’s longing for spaces beyond her own.

The first meeting between Flush and Miss Barrett is remarkable: one is a free animal living in an open wilderness, while the other is a frail girl confined to a dark room. Yet, as described by the author, they bear striking resemblances. This similarity in appearance creates an inexplicable connection between the two different species. How do their emotions influence each other within the same space? Psychological theory known as “self-extension” posits that people often choose pets that resemble themselves, viewing these pets as extensions of their own selves.

¹Woolf, Virginia (1933). *Flush: A Biography*. London: Hogarth Press. Subsequent references only point out the work and the page number.

Due to the mirror effect, pets tend to imitate their owners' behaviors, and owners are also influenced by their pets, leading to increasing similarity and emotional resonance between them.

The text frequently mentions that Flush always stays on the small rug to the lower right of Miss Barrett. According to Tuan Yi-Fu's spatial theory, the human body is also a space, and the interaction between the body and surrounding space creates new spatial experiences. "The right and left sides of the body and their derived spaces can be easily confused, but in social spaces, the right side of the owner is considered the place of honor" (Tuan, 1977). Therefore, Flush's presence is of significant importance to Miss Barrett.

Elizabeth's father was domineering and lacked the understanding of his educational role as a parent. Apart from the maid, only her mother could offer long-term companionship and solace. When Elizabeth was 22 years old, the death of her mother dealt a heavy blow, leaving Elizabeth to dwell alone in the dark bedroom. Due to health reasons, Elizabeth was forced to move to a seaside villa arranged by her father for her recovery, which indirectly led to the drowning of her beloved younger brother, Edward. Unable to cope with such a blow, Elizabeth became even more reluctant to leave her bedroom, seemingly resigning herself to ending her life there. This state of resignation resulted in emotional numbness, which was alleviated with the arrival of the puppy, Flush.

Attachment theory requires a close connection between mother and infant. The mother fulfills the infant's daily needs and provides positive emotional feedback, which fosters the infant's sense of "social" awareness. Attachment emotions encourage the infant to approach familiar people or things, creating a sense of security and trust that allows the infant to explore the surrounding environment boldly. Furthermore, maternal encouragement provides the infant with the courage to engage with the external world, fostering a confident, outgoing, and optimistic personality. Early mother-infant attachment promotes cognitive development in children. The father's role is also crucial; when the mother indulges excessively, the father should patiently guide the child in understanding appropriate interpersonal relationships. In a family, parental love serves as the most direct method for children to learn social interactions. By establishing a close relationship with their children and providing wholehearted nurturing, parents enable their children to find appropriate solutions to challenges and accurately assess their own abilities, even after leaving the parental home. Although dogs and humans cannot fully understand each other, their mutual attachment is quietly expressed through companionship.

3. Aversion to Social Space

As the population influx into the capital city of London increased, the number of slums surged dramatically, leading to a significant decline in air quality and a severe compression of living space. According to Charles Booth's London Poverty Map, the City of London, located in the central section of the map, although a

developed area, still experiences poverty levels between 30% and 40%. The surrounding areas are densely populated, and economic downturns have led to a shortage of jobs, exacerbating poverty conditions, which generally range from 50% to 70%, with a potential for further deterioration. The state of poverty in London is more severe than sociologists have described, with spacious living areas becoming increasingly scarce, leaving even the wealthy unable to escape the overcrowded environment.



Charles Booth's *London Poverty Map*²

Due to the vast disparities in poverty, the impoverished often resort to unscrupulous methods to acquire money, with stealing wealthy people's dogs being an accepted means of income in society at the time. The Barrett family lived on Wimpole Street, located in the 25th district of Westminster in central London, where the poverty level is around 30%. According to Woolf's description of Miss Barrett's room, it is known that her bedroom is separated from the slums by only a wall. Therefore, 50 Wimpole Street is likely situated in the lower right part of the 25th district, adjacent to the 3rd district. The 3rd district, which borders Wimpole Street, is St. Giles, where the poverty level exceeds 70%, making it comparable to Whitechapel, and each slum area has its own overseer. Fleche, being a purebred Spanish dog, was predictably stolen. In total, Fleche was stolen three times, and the ransom to recover it amounted to twenty pounds.

According to the text, Fleche was stolen from Wimpole Street and taken to Whitechapel. From Charles Booth's Victorian Maps of London,³ it can be seen that Wimpole Street is separated from Whitechapel by only one street and is close to Oxford Street. The complex layout of London's streets means that a thief could transport the stolen dog through various streets to Whitechapel; alternatively, the thief could take Oxford Street eastward, passing through Hoborn and the main city area to reach Whitechapel. Whitechapel, located in the upper right corner of London's 72nd district, has a poverty level just below the 70% found in the 66th district.

²Booth, Charles. *London Poverty Map*. Public Domain: British Museum, Maps C. 21. a. 18. (295). Because the picture is not clear, some details cannot be explained in detail.

³<https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/16/-0.1685/51.5220/100/0> Victorian maps are compared with modern maps to obtain the route of Flush's abduction.

“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... Thirst was his worst suffering; but one sip of the thick greenish water that stood in a pail near him disgusted him; he would rather die than drink another. Yet a majestic greyhound was drinking greedily... The room was dark. It grew steadily hotter and hotter; the smell, the heat, were unbearable...” (Flush, 78-79).

Through Flea’s perspective in *Whitechapel*, the dire state of the area becomes evident. Descriptions of “darkness”, “the thick greenish water”, and “the smell, the heat” suggest that the pursuit of industrial development at the expense of public welfare results in an ever-widening gap between rich and poor, potentially inciting public anger and posing societal risks. Typically, dog thieves operate under specific rules: they accept payment for the return of the stolen dog and do not negotiate the ransom. As long as the ransom is paid, the pet will be quickly returned to its owner. However, when Miss Barrett sought her brother’s help to ransom her dog, the entire Wimpole Street community united against this, with Mr. Browning and other upper-class individuals aligning with the rich to oppose White chapel’s practices. They viewed paying the ransom as yielding to extortionists and condoning those who gain without effort, essentially protecting the privileges of the wealthy. Finding common ground between women and animals is a way of affirming the “other”, yet under patriarchy, such affirmation is not permitted. Identifying with animals signifies “affirming the other, which shatters the official cultural self-set reality” (Scholtmeijer, 1995). Miss Barrett’s inability to accept the notion that “class always requires sacrifice” and her refusal to disregard the value of life make her realize that those in power protect only what benefits themselves, while the vulnerable—such as animals, women, and the lower classes—are abandoned. By entering or engaging with the lower-class environment, Miss Barrett shares experiences with those in that space. Her actions as an objectified woman challenging patriarchal norms through contact with the lower class undoubtedly express her discontent. This interaction with the lower classes stimulates Miss Barrett’s emotions, gradually awakening her from a state of numbness.

As people age, they become increasingly aware of their independence; while parents give us life, they cannot control our thoughts and actions. With growing experience, children gradually realize that their parents are also flawed. When the image of parents no longer seems as majestic and the parents attempt to control every aspect of their children’s lives, the children express their dissatisfaction through rebellion. Initially, this dissatisfaction manifests as anger, stemming from a lack of understanding as to why parents need to control everything. As time goes on, this anger may transform into two types of emotions. One type is a numbing emotion, similar to that experienced by Miss Barrett, arising from the absence of a maternal figure, leading the child to depend on the father despite his oppression. This numbing emotion is compounded by the burden of increased family expenses due to illness and the death of a brother, resulting in feelings of guilt. This

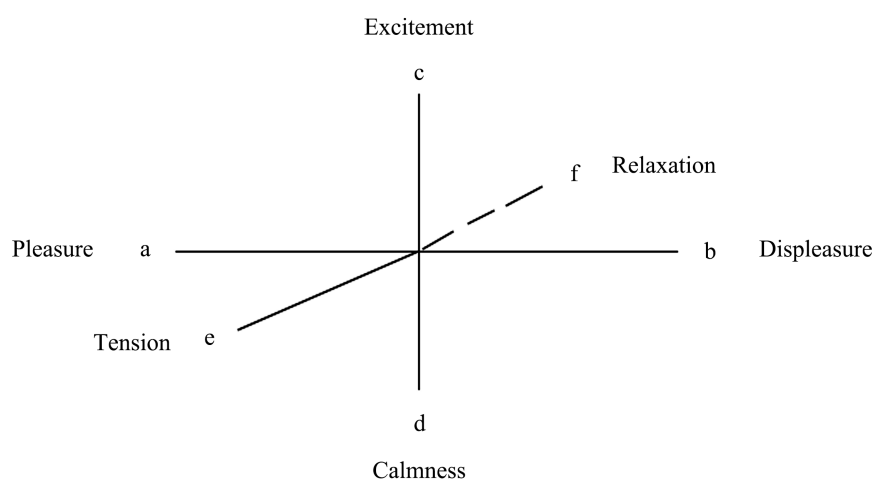
also reflects the natural instinct of a child to trust their parents. According to Confucius and Confucianism, filial piety is the most genuine and primal natural feeling; it is this sense of “inevitability” that allows for heartfelt filial devotion (Huang et al., 2021). The torn emotional state causes Miss Barrett to lose clear judgment. Anger combined with guilt can easily evolve into numbness. The other type of emotion is one where anger, stimulated by external societal pressures, gradually transforms into disgust. Disgust can lead to two types of behavior: one is destruction, causing harm to society; the other is escape, initiating a self-defense mechanism.

Flush’s deteriorating mental state solidified Miss Barrett’s resolve to leave London. Despite Mr. Browning aligning himself with the wealthy in the dog theft incident, why was Miss Barrett still willing to escape with him? First, rituals are often necessary for the activation of positive emotional energy, as the human emotional system still centers on the older fear-attack dynamics (Turner, 2009). When the amygdala’s fear responses are consistently triggered, emotions tend to become increasingly negative. The act of assigning meaning to specific symbols and objects is known as a ritual, which serves a significant purpose as a social phenomenon. Rituals allow people to express their emotions towards others, hoping for mutual improvement and fostering a positive and progressive effect. Miss Barrett’s numbing emotions reflect the severe impact of her father’s domineering behavior on her ability to properly understand her feelings. The activities shared with Flush—such as “sleeping on the right-hand carpet”, “going for walks together”, “shopping together”, and “eating food together”—made Miss Barrett realize that she was being thoughtfully accompanied by the dog. These shared activities had a ritualistic quality, which gradually alleviated her inner turmoil. The attachment from Flush led her emotions to shift from negative to positive. During the emotional healing process, her encounters with the poet Browning, including “letter exchanges”, “the first meeting on May 21”, and “weekly or biweekly meetings”, also positively influenced Miss Barrett. Browning’s respect and the pleasant emotions derived from their interactions helped thaw Miss Barrett’s numbing feelings. Moreover, the dog theft incident was merely a catalyst; Flush’s aversion to London resonated with both Miss Barrett and Mr. Browning. Before Miss Barrett personally engaged in negotiations, she read Mr. Browning’s letter, which not only expressed his willingness to marry her but also outlined his reasons for opposing the payment of the ransom, “I labour against the execrable policy of the world’s husbands, fathers, brothers and domineers in general.” (Flush, 88) When people work together towards a common goal, one person does not take away another’s space, On the contrary, by supporting colleagues, one expands the other’s space (Tuan, 1977). For the younger generation of the last aristocracy, there appears to be less concern with hierarchical distinctions. Instead of joining conservative factions, they are driven by innovation. Miss Barrett and Mr. Browning shared a common goal: to escape the patriarchal rule of London.

4. The Stable Emotions of Foreign Spaces

German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt proposed the Tri-Dimensional theory of

feeling. He posited that emotions are experiences constructed from psychological elements, beginning at a neutral point (indifference) and fluctuating among three dimensions: pleasant-unpleasant, tension-relaxation, and calm-excitement. Emotions are not confined to simple categories such as ab/cd/ef; at their intersection with the neutral point, they can transform into any emotion randomly. For instance, as pleasant emotions diminish, the resulting emotion may not directly become unpleasant but could instead turn calm. Likewise, a calm emotion, when subjected to external stimuli, might shift into an unpleasant one. For animals, they use their sense of smell to discern odors in the air and derive information about their surroundings, which informs their emotional responses. The United Kingdom experiences a typical temperate maritime climate, influenced by the North Atlantic Drift, characterized by mild winters, cool summers, minimal temperature variation, limited sunshine, and frequent rain and fog. London, a quintessential fog city, exhibits minimal temperature changes but frequent weather fluctuations. During the Victorian era, rapid industrialization in Britain led to deteriorating air quality, severe river pollution, and poor sanitary conditions. In London, Flaubert detected negative emotions from the scents in various locations—Miss Barrett’s bedroom, the villa, the basement, the streets (such as Wimpole Street, Oxford Street, and Vere Street), and the rooms in Whitechapel. Although these negative emotions did not immediately harm society, the vulnerable were inevitably at risk. Thus, escaping London was not only about fleeing patriarchy and dog thieves but also about finding more spacious and less crowded environments elsewhere, making it a wise choice.



Tri-Dimensional Theory of Feeling Diagram⁴

Italy, located along the Mediterranean coast, has a typical Mediterranean climate characterized by mild, rainy winters controlled by the westerlies, with abundant rainfall, and hot, dry summers with sparse cloud cover and plenty of sunshine. The most favorable living conditions are found during the spring and autumn, when the weather is clear and the climate is cool. On September 12, 1846,

⁴Che Wenbo: *A History of Western Psychology*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Education Press, 1998, p. 218.

after Miss Barrett and Mr. Browning secretly married, they fled on the 18th of the same month, accompanied by Flush and the maid Wilson. After traveling through the southern region of Vaucluse in France, they arrived in Italy. They first visited Pisa, then stayed in Florence, and eventually settled in the Casa Guidi in Cascina, a villa similar to those in the southwestern United States. Compared to Florence, this area has a lower population density, offering more open space, simpler local customs, and a slower pace of life. From Miss Barrett's description, we learn that Flush experienced a significant moment of liberation in Cascina. Now, their relationship is not as intimate as before, and they each have their own space.

In the mid-19th century, Italy was notorious for its flea infestations, with fleas infesting every corner of the country and even humans being unable to escape their bite. In the summer of 1848, Flush inevitably contracted fleas. To protect the symbolic value of his fur, Flush suffered greatly. Eventually, in a life-threatening situation, Miss Barrett was forced to shave his fur completely. After the fur was removed, Flush did not dislike his hairless appearance; rather, he came to understand the meaning of self-liberation by shedding this symbolic constraint. In this episode of fur shaving, the author describes Flush's fur as a symbol of British gentlemanly status, noting that a hairless dog is merely an insignificant creature. This description reveals that it was people, not Flush himself, who were concerned about his status. Flush did not care about his nobility, as he pondered, "To be nothing is that not, after all, the most satisfactory state in the whole world?" (Flush, 127-128) In the spacious Italian environment, Flush had ample personal space to reflect and examine himself. This self-understanding allowed for a comprehensive appreciation of others' characteristics, enabling his aversion to be healed and transformed into a state of emotional stability.

For ambitious nations and individuals, the satisfaction derived from spaciousness is merely an illusion, which fades as the space once enjoyed increases (Tuan, 1977). Different geographic locations shape Flush's and Miss Barrett's varying emotional responses to society. In a foreign land, Britons find no sense of belonging and are intensely passionate about objects in which they can invest their emotions, yearning to discover the essence of life through them. When the craze for crystal balls and divinatory tables arrived in Italy, Miss Barrett inevitably developed an interest in these unknown objects. However, since households with crystal balls were few, she and a group of fellow Britons living in Italy gathered daily around the table, attempting to "decode the messages conveyed by the table's edges", hoping to seek self-unification and fill their inner void through the false pretense of communicating with the dead. When she had the ability to change her environment and felt she had control over her destiny, she saw no reason to long for her previous life. She erased the past through escape and validated her existence through her own talents and values. However, for most people, emotional attachments are difficult to manage. As a poet, Miss Barrett could channel her emotions into her poetry, but her poetry written in a stable environment focused on the theme of the Italian people's struggle for independence and freedom during

the Italian War of Independence. While expressing sentiments for another country, she both celebrated her own freedom and struggled to conceal her inner emptiness. This leads to a secondary reflection on emotions: Did she truly achieve freedom? In a foreign space without a sense of belonging, with patriotic feelings nowhere to vent, does her existence really have meaning? As emotions become more complex, individuals uncontrollably grasp at certain things to affirm their feelings. Miss Barrett's numbness began to crack under the intense attachment and aversion from Flush. According to the plot, her emotions should, like Flush's, transform from numbness to stability in a stable environment. For a dog, a care-free life is already fulfilling; "Flush is no different from a baby". Flush was largely indifferent to the emotional geography and events of revolution. However, as a human, Miss Barrett's emotions are inherently complex. Unlike animals, she cannot simply cast her emotions aside and live in the moment, leading her to "a visionary and inclined to knock round at all the doors of the present world to try to get out" (Flush, 142). When she becomes lost in illusion and neglects her spiritual support, her emotions lack a solid foundation.

Flush passed away in the summer of 1853. Before its death, it continued to wander the streets of Italy as usual, content with its current life and without much emotional attachment, yet acutely aware of its own significance. Observing young dogs frolicking, Flush did not regret lacking such freedom in its youth but instead grasped the essence of life: there is no use in lamenting or feeling shame for not having exerted effort in the past, as life does not offer foreknowledge. As Flush neared the end of its life and returned home, its sudden action reminded Miss Barrett of how Flush had accompanied her through unhappy times on Wimpole Street. "But he was silent. He had been alive; he was now dead. That was all." (Flush, 150) In its final moments, Flush pressed close to Miss Barrett, an intimate gesture conveying forgiveness for her neglect while also reminding her to cherish everything she had. This act served as a reminder not to forget the important people and things around her while looking forward, emphasizing the need to appreciate what is present rather than endlessly pursuing the unknown. Without Flush's presence, Miss Barrett might have spent her life in numbness. However, this selfless dog, willing to forsake its own desires for its owner, used its loyalty to remind her not to forget the original reason for leaving London—to escape a repressive environment. Everyone yearns for the past, and even dogs inevitably take pride in "sharing their youthful experiences with younger ones". Yet, reminiscing about the past is not about returning to it but about valuing the present, understanding one's desires, and finding oneself.

5. Conclusion

Through the author's depiction, we can clearly sense the dire conditions of the poor. While Barrett is able to escape such an environment, their suffering persists. Woolf uses this narrative to hint at the equality of civil rights. In such an oppressive setting, self-awareness gradually awakens, leading people to focus more on

personal quality of life, enhance concern for others, foster interpersonal relationships, avoid war, and support peace. Miss Barrett's series of emotional transformations in the foreign space not only represent her own experience but also reflect the complex emotions of those escaping national turmoil. Immigration is one way to seek open space, while others may choose to travel abroad, attempting to determine whether living under foreign colonial rule is better than life in their own country. This is also a means of seeking self-discovery and emotional support.

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Conflicts of Interest

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