

# Deeds and Words: The *Holloway Jingles* and the Fight for Female Suffrage

## Hechos y palabras: *Holloway Jingles* y la lucha por el sufragio femenino

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MARTA BAGÜES BAUTISTA

Institution address: Universidad de Zaragoza. Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. San Juan Bosco 7. 50009 Zaragoza. Spain.

E-mail: martabags@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-8297-8149

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**Abstract:** This article explores the importance of the written word of the *Holloway Jingles* in the fight for female suffrage through the analysis of the Foreword, "There's a Strange Sort of College" and "L'Envoi." Firstly, it will focus on the importance of writing as a venting tool for the suffragettes and it will demonstrate the idealization of imprisonment in the collection by comparing it to realistic and autobiographical accounts of life in Holloway Gaol, as well as the relevance of such an idealization in order to strengthen the bonds between the suffragettes both inside and outside of prison. Secondly, it will explore the impact of the collection within the feminist movement relating it to Virginia Woolf's and Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas, thus focusing on a wider notion of justice and freedom that was essential for their emancipatory fight.

**Keywords:** suffragettes; *Holloway Jingles*; prison; freedom; education.

**Summary:** Introduction. "At these words other faces will rise up." "And for liberty and justice make them burn." "But the glorious dawn is breaking." Conclusions.

**Resumen:** Este artículo investiga la importancia de la palabra escrita en *Holloway Jingles* en relación con la lucha por el sufragio femenino a través del análisis del Prólogo de la obra y de los poemas "There's a Strange Sort of College" y "L'Envoi." En primer lugar, señala la importancia de la escritura como herramienta de desahogo para las sufragistas y muestra la idealización del encarcelamiento que aparece en esta colección, comparándola con relatos realistas y autobiográficos de la vida en Holloway Gaol y destacando la relevancia de dicha idealización para reforzar los lazos entre las sufragistas tanto dentro como fuera de la cárcel. En segundo lugar, analiza el impacto de la colección dentro del movimiento feminista, relacionándola con ideas de Virginia Woolf y Mary Wollstonecraft, centrándose así en un concepto más amplio de la justicia y la libertad, que fue esencial para su lucha emancipadora.

**Palabras clave:** sufragistas; *Holloway Jingles*; prisión; libertad; educación.

**Sumario:** Introducción. “At these words other faces will rise up.” “And for liberty and justice make them burn.” “But the glorious dawn is breaking.” Conclusiones.

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## INTRODUCTION

History and art go hand in hand and they often influence one another. The first wave of the feminist movement is linked to the fight for female suffrage, and this awakening of women all over the world was reflected in the literature of the period. Suffrage literature did enact societal and political conditions, but it also contributed to the development of the movement itself. In the United Kingdom, the Representation of the People Act of 1918 granted the vote to women over thirty years old who met certain property requirements and to all men over twenty-one. It was one of the first countries that allowed women to make their voices heard at the polls, but it was not until 1928 that all women over twenty-one were granted the same voting rights as men. From the second half of the nineteenth century, women spent years fighting for the right to vote, but the suffrage movement was not merely about gaining the vote, it also fought for something deeper: for the right to have a voice. The feminist movement provided an alternative attitude to “hysterical silence, and the determination to speak and act for women in the public world” (Showalter 161), and female militants reflected this change in their texts. The literature of the suffragette movement had two functions: firstly, it allowed women to express themselves through an artistic form; and secondly, it let other women learn about their fight and become educated on the subject. According to Tyler-Bennett’s *Suffrage and Poetry* (1998), among all literary genres, poetry is the one that is given less importance in suffrage literature. In a similar vein, Kate Flint points out that “from the 1830s onwards, traditional educationalists often regarded poetry as a dangerous form” because it represented “romantic alternatives to parental values” like the repression of the self (qtd. in Tyler-Bennett 119–20). Significantly enough, the poems included in *Holloway Jingles*, a collection published in 1912 by the Glasgow branch of the WSPU (Women’s Social and Political Union), “provided a means of demonstrating solidarity, and also of communicating and responding to emotions created by incarceration” (Tyler-Bennett 120). This collection demonstrates that when “depicting imprisonment as a collective experience, [hunger strikers] transform the intentions of the law, by making a solitary punishment a collective bonding

process” (Tyler-Bennet 121). These suffragettes were imprisoned in an attempt to weaken their fight and dismantle the movement.<sup>1</sup> However, all of these women received the same treatment regardless of their social class or economic status, and thus imprisonment was proved to be counterproductive, because instead of debilitating the basis of the movement it actually functioned as a way to strengthen the bonds among these women, since “it bound them together as sisters and comrades, all enduring the same harsh conditions” (Nelson 153).

Remarkably enough, even though this collection of poems was written in Holloway Gaol in London, it was published by the Glasgow branch of the WSPU, founded in 1906 (“Suffragette’s Picket”). Glasgow had a strong suffragette presence with prominent figures like Helen Crawford, a co-founder of the Glasgow branch of the Women’s International League, and involved in Glasgow’s rent strikes (Atkinson 532), and Janie Allan, one of the founders of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women’s Suffrage, who organized WSPU meetings in St. Andrew’s Hall (Atkinson 308). Glasgow was a city that saw protests, demonstrations and strikes, acid attacks and bombs, and also political gatherings (“Bomb Plots and Riots”). In fact, Glasgow was the city of the “brutal arrest” of WSPU leader Emmaline Pankhurst (E. Pankhurst 491) that led to the infamous incident of “Slasher Mary.” Mary Richardson’s attack of Velázquez’s *Rokeby Venus* shook the country, as she was “one of the most beautiful women in mythological history,” destroyed “as a protest against the government trying to destroy Mrs. Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history” (Richardson, qtd. in Atkinson 467).

This compilation was written by several women, some of them anonymous, in the prison of Holloway Gaol and it concisely illustrated their feelings of sympathy and sorority, a condition that managed to go beyond the walls of their cells through literature. They needed to find a meaning to their suffering, a final goal to make it all worth it, and these poems, with their uplifting and empowering tone, allowed them to keep their meaning and their aim in mind. This struggle to maintain sanity and

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<sup>1</sup> Such an imprisonment also worked as a mechanism of control and surveillance upon the suffragettes, in accordance with Jeremy Bentham’s notion of the panopticon. According to Foucault, Bentham’s system of prison control, the panopticon, developed in the eighteenth century, was an emblem of modern power: “the ‘architectural figure’ of the disciplinary mechanisms of regulation, surveillance, supervision, and ostracism which surround the abnormal individual . . . Convicts are observed and created into objects of examination and experimentation” (qtd. in Semple 108).

a sense of self in Holloway was materialized through literature and writing, as it is the case with this collection, but also through other artistic forms: Kitty Willoughby Marshall, first imprisoned for throwing a potato at Churchill's front door (Atkinson 238), made a set of playing cards with materials she managed to locate within the jail ("Playing Cards"), while Katie Gliddon produced artistic drawings of her cell in 1912 (Gliddon). While writing the poems, these women reminded themselves of the reasons why the pain and the suffering they were enduring were necessary, and they also managed to counterbalance the many negative aspects of imprisonment through an emphasis on positivity, an optimism that gave them strength. Furthermore, they needed to create a purpose so that they could endure those extreme circumstances: writing poems contributed to achieving their objective and, as can be seen in the biographical literary accounts of their experiences, the suffragettes document

the reasons they were drawn to the movement and the sacrifices they were willing to make to get the vote for women. Their accounts provide fascinating descriptions of the women who led the different suffrage organizations and the characteristics that enabled those leaders to inspire such devotion in their followers. (Nelson xvii)

Considering the ideas exposed above, the aim of this essay is to shed light on a collection of poems, *Holloway Jingles*, that has been relegated to the margins of academic fields. In order to demonstrate the importance of the collection for the progress of the suffragette movement, I have chosen, as the object of my analysis, the Foreword and two poems from the *Holloway Jingles* (1912), as they encapsulate the essence of the feminist emancipatory project, mainly revolving around the notion of freedom both inside and outside the suffragettes' bodies. Such an advancement was possible not only through the idealization of the prison experience as a step towards freedom and the focus on the interior of prison and the body, but also through praising the idea of a general sense of freedom centered on life outside of prison and the soul. Furthermore, by drawing an analysis on autobiographical accounts like *The Suffragette Movement* by Sylvia Pankhurst, who uses a more realistic approach when portraying her experiences both inside and outside of prison, I will show the stark contrast between reality itself and the version of it presented in the Foreword or in poems like "There's a Strange Sort of College," which deals with the positive aspects of their fight, thus encouraging prisoners

and suffragettes to send a message of hope. In the second part of this article, I will move onto more abstract subjects by exploring the poem “L’Envoi,” written by Emily Wilding Davison, the first martyr of the suffragette movement, who sacrificed herself for other women and whose poem shows the highest level of determination and sorority among prisoners. Her poem substantially exemplifies the notion of the “freedom of mind” that Virginia Woolf presents in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), thus debunking the myth of feminist women as hysterical and irrational, as well as adhering to Mary Wollstonecraft’s belief in wisdom and education as the basis of universal freedom.

### 1. “AT THESE WORDS OTHER FACES WILL RISE UP”

The Foreword is the only text written in prose and it works as an introduction that summarizes the main ideas of the collection of poems. It is characterized by the abundance of pronouns in the first person plural, used as a way to build up a sense of community among the prisoners. It is also imbued by the positive outlook Theresa Gough seems to have on the prison experience, as the passage is full of positive imagery, especially in the second paragraph, using references to flowers like “daffodils and tulips,” to the “sunshine,” “the sun and the skie,” and even to “miracles” (Gough 158). Although this passage was written on 28 April, just when spring exhibits its splendour and nature wakes up after its wintry hibernation, this description of Holloway is far from being realistic, as it is endowed with heightened emotions and further idealized feelings, probably in an attempt to counterbalance the miserable conditions of life in prison. Therefore, expressions like “the passing of the weeks was punctuated by the flowers that blossomed in those grim surroundings” or “there, too, the love that shines through the sun and the skies can illumine even the prison cell” (158) are employed not only to enhance their day-to-day life but rather to portray what they felt regarding their fight for freedom, their motivation and how they projected their feelings onto their surroundings.<sup>2</sup> This characteristic of the Foreword appears all throughout

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<sup>2</sup> The projection of human emotions onto things and objects can be related to the literary trope of the “pathetic fallacy,” coined by John Ruskin in 1856 by which he originally meant to criticize the Romantic tendency to personify nature based on excessive emotions. According to Ruskin, “objects derive their influence not from properties

the collection: “all the poems negate both popular images of Holloway as a location where one is made to feel solitary, and the idea that women (particularly of middle classes) are destroyed by prison life” (Tyler-Bennett 121). In Katie Gliddon’s words: “it is so splendid to be living in the storm centre of the earth which is at present Holloway goal” (qtd. in Davies 79). The last two lines of this introductory section summarize the main ideas of the text: “in service to you, O sad sisters, in your hideous prison garb, we gain the supremacy of our souls. And we need not fear that we can lose anything by the progress of the soul” (Gough 158), thus highlighting the sense of camaraderie and sisterhood since they helped each other in the process towards freedom.

Interestingly, the Foreword ends with a quotation by the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. It belongs to his essay “Love,” published in 1841 in *Essays: First Series*, which has a similar end to this passage:

But we need not fear that we can lose any thing by the progress of the soul. The soul may be trusted to the end. That which is so beautiful and attractive as these relations must be succeeded and supplanted only by what is more beautiful, and so on for ever.

In the last paragraph of this essay, Emerson shows a similar ideology to the suffragettes: “thus are we put in training for a love which knows not sex, nor person, nor partiality, but which seeks virtue and wisdom everywhere, to the end of increasing virtue and wisdom.” Emerson, one of the key figures of the American transcendentalist movement, believed in the power of the individual, who was connected with the external world, and therefore in the influence the individual psyche could have on external circumstances. If their souls remained strong and if they truly believed in what they were fighting for, their inner thoughts could have an impact on their external circumstances. Including this quotation in the Foreword proves that these women were educated, well-read and intelligent, but this direct quotation has another function, perhaps the one the author Theresa Gough herself had in mind when she incorporated it: there is a clear parallel between the ideas of American transcendentalists and the

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inherent in them, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by these objects” (Ruskin).

suffragettes, as this quotation supports their ideas and their belief in progress.

One of the most striking features of the Foreword is that Gough does not mention the word “suffrage” or “vote.” By using phrases like “that omniscient love which is the basis of our movement” or “[i]n service to you . . . we gain the supremacy of our souls” (Gough 158), she is implying that the aim of their fight goes beyond obtaining the right to vote, and that the right to vote is their first step on their road towards freedom. It goes beyond suffrage because having a right to vote means having a voice, having a chance to be heard. By not being able to vote, these women were silenced and subjected to male authority. Another distinctive feature of this passage is the emphasis on the extra-corporeal experiences, on the soul. The Foreword starts by focusing on specific and precise qualities of the suffragettes, as it “moves from her memories of specific individuals to a mystificatory and forward-looking celebration of the [prison] experience” (Norquay 172), all of which attest to a kind of sublimity in their writings enhanced by strong emotions such as terror and joy, both to the same extent. Despite their imprisonment, what prevails in this Foreword, though, is an emphasis on the strong bonds of sisterhood and a convincing feeling of empowerment towards the freedom of their minds as well as an exacerbated desire for hope.

## 2. “AND FOR LIBERTY AND JUSTICE MAKE THEM BURN”

“There’s a Strange Sort of College” is a poem written by Edith Aubrey Wingrove during a hunger strike. It is made up of eight sestets with a full rhyme in the last four verses of each stanza (--abba). The regular form of this text exemplifies the severe rules of the strange sort of college the title refers to, as well as the strict body control it exerted upon them. Interestingly, the form of the poem mirrors its content, in an attempt to oppose imprisonment to freedom, as the latter was usually enacted in poems like “L’Envoi” using free verse. The poem subverts the traditional hierarchies of colleges: “the scholars are the teachers / and the staff they are the taught” (lines 7–8). As Norquay points out, “suffrage writers drew upon established discourses, traditionally associated with a masculine sphere and reworked them in the context of the cause” (174). A college tends to be associated with education and evolution and therefore the prison experience becomes equated with a process of construction of

character, rejecting the destruction of it that the government intended with their imprisonment.

The metaphor of the college is extended throughout the poem, but it is not until the very end that the lyrical subject explains what it actually represents and who the scholars really are. Instead of letting the reader know what the metaphor stands for, she chooses to allow the readers to discover it themselves as the poem unfolds, making them think carefully about what they read in every verse and every stanza, forcing them to tie up all the loose ends. However, presenting the prison as a college is far from realistic. In reality, suffragettes “marched through a strange sort of skeleton building” (S. Pankhurst 232), they were locked in “pitch-dark cubicles” (230) and they “marched barefoot from place to place,” with their “dull gaze bent downwards” (236), in an “atmosphere of fear” (231). They were dispossessed of all their personal belongings and they lost their identities: in prison they were addressed as numbers, not by their own names. In contrast to the idyllic portrayal of prison as a college for women, Sylvia Pankhurst provides a different perspective in her narration, concerned with true facts over feelings: “To me, all this was misery” (235). Pankhurst refers to one of the main aims of writing about their imprisonment: “I thought it good propaganda for our movement to reveal our prison experiences” (238). However, the aim of this collection of poetry was not to reveal these experiences, but to portray their feelings towards imprisonment and suffrage in a positive and heroic way. There is a stark contrast between the epic tone of this poem, told from the insider’s perspective of the suffrage struggle, and the monotonous poem that Ann Veronica, the heroine of H. G. Wells’s eponymous novel (1909), writes during her imprisonment in Holloway: the latter’s poem is superficial, bland and full of references to men and pieces of clothing like skirts and hats (Wells 411). This comes to prove that, even though some men might have shown their commitment with the suffrage struggle and might have attended protests and demonstrations, like H.G. Wells himself (Atkinson 99), only the women who endured this traumatic experience had a full understanding of their mission and their goal, of their beliefs and of themselves.

The imagery of this poem is similar to the one employed in the Foreword and it idealizes the experience of imprisonment by emphasizing its positive consequences and excluding the negative aspects of prison like torture or isolation. This is mainly achieved by resorting to several powerful words with positive connotations like *fight*, *right*, *justice*, *liberty*,

*friendship, prize*. Sylvia Pankhurst herself claimed that she “wanted the others near (her) to aid them in their struggle” (442). They found strength in one another and they built a support system that went beyond their cells. In the sixth stanza, the poem includes an indirect reference to the WSPU slogan: “deeds not words” (line 33). The suffragettes, unlike suffragists, believed in actions, in using violence to fight for their cause if necessary—often window-smashing, one of the most common causes of imprisonment among suffragettes—as a way to stand out and call attention to their movement. Militants wanted to be imprisoned: in *The Suffragette Movement* Sylvia Pankhurst recalls the actions that led her to prison, saying she broke a window “to make sure of imprisonment” (439). They had a clear objective when doing this: “we had to make a fight which brought in the light of publicity in order to secure customary courtesies” (S. Pankhurst 230). However, this collection of poems proves that words are just as important as deeds: by using words, the prisoners could find solace and they could constantly remind themselves of why they were there and why prison was an important step in their road towards voting rights. Moreover, these words could trespass the walls of their cells and appeal to the minds of other women outside prison either fighting for their cause or deciding whether to join their fight, thus proving that their words could in fact fuel deeds.

Apart from the reference to the WSPU slogan, there are other direct intertextual references: in the fifth stanza, the lyrical subject includes a quotation from the Bible belonging to Luke 6:31: “unto others you must do as you’d have them do to you” (lines 28–29) is the scholar’s motto, which is a way to indirectly question and denounce the ill treatment of suffragettes in prison while demonstrating that their (good) behaviours could serve as examples of dignity and admiration for other women. The second reference appears in the sixth stanza, i.e., “Rule Britannia” (line 31), a patriotic song from the eighteenth century, using both the title of the song and the verse “Britons shall never be slaves” (line 32). This is another way of challenging the way prisoners were treated, as it ironically suggests that suffragettes were treated like slaves. The poem suggests that the government was not following the ideas of either the Bible or patriotic songs like “Rule Britannia,” signaling how those in power were being hypocrites because they were not actually doing what they preached.

The fact that this poem was written when the author, Edith Aubrey Wingrove, was hunger striking, is quite significant as this practice was another form of rebellion. Sylvia Pankhurst claims that theirs were the first

thirst strikes (441). Hunger striking began in Holloway in 1909 as a response to the government's refusal to consider the suffragettes political prisoners (Schlossberg 89). There have been several interpretations of the significance of hunger striking and forcible feeding. Some claim that forcible feeding became a "shorthand for the physical, political and sexual cruelty of man towards women" (Schlossberg 89). In a way, both hunger strikers and those in charge of forcible feeding were turning something abstract into something physical, and the fight for control and freedom of women became, in this way, something tangible. Generally, forcible feeding has been interpreted as a metaphor:

a way for the British government to literally stop the mouths of the noisy suffragettes with foods, or as sites of rape and torture . . . . By refusing food, the suffragettes effectively called attention to the practices of a government that would not let them speak, that refused to honor or nourish their political appetites and ambitions. (Schlossberg 89–90)

Another common interpretation is that since the female body was thought to be the source of "intellectual inadequacy, it ensures her exclusion from the world of politics" (Schlossberg 95). They were fighting against their own bodies, aspiring to become something intangible, to become a soul without a body in order to be able to get their rights. However, hunger striking was not only a way of rebellion against the system; it could also be interpreted as a way of controlling their own bodies, of claiming ownership over themselves: they had been stripped of all their possessions, they were locked up in tiny cells, they were mistreated and tortured, and ultimately, they were establishing control over themselves since their food and drink intake was something over which they could reclaim control. Their jailers could govern everything about them, but just physically. They could not control their attitude, what they said to themselves, their thoughts and their minds. The hunger strikes were an attempt to project their minds' inner sense of freedom onto their bodies, but through forcible feeding the government asserted its control over their bodies. Through these poems, the authors demonstrate that despite the torture and the attempts to discourage them through physical confinement, their minds remained untainted. Their bodies endured pain and suffering, but their minds proved to be even stronger because they remained faithful to their ideology throughout the imprisonment. These poems serve both as a display of their mental strength and as fuel to further strengthen their

movement, inside and outside prison. Thus, verses like “come out and take your place” (line 38) and “true courage must prevail” (line 30) attest to the suffragettes’ impulse to keep their courage and endurance alive, no matter how harsh the circumstances were. These verses that urged suffragettes to keep strong are alternated with verses that serve as a reminder of their strong sense of sorority, and with verses like “they find they must give in / to that gallant, honour-loving little band” (lines 11–12) or “there we take our F.H.G.,<sup>3</sup> / a very high degree, / and the hand-grip of true friendship—that’s the prize” (lines 16–18) they focus on the positive outcome of their imprisonment and try to extoll the gift of friendship and comradeship. Such an enlightened attitude acted not only as incentive for their fight and their subsequent victory but also as a sign of solidarity, showing a kind of relationship that started during the fight for female suffrage but that would change the way women would relate to one another from then on.

### 3. “BUT THE GLORIOUS DAWN IS BREAKING”

“L’Envoi,” written by Emily Wilding Davison in 1912, is made up of four quatrains. It is written in free verse, but the rhythm is established by means of parallelisms and repetitions in every stanza such as “marching fearless” (lines 2–3), “gleaming with” (lines 6–7), “enemies may assail us” (lines 10–11), “freedom’s beauty” (lines 14–15). Davison uses free verse to deal with the theme of freedom and, accordingly, the structure of the poem mirrors the content. The form of the poem is significantly different from “There is a Strange Sort of College,” which actually shows the formal heterogeneity of the *Holloway Jingles*. This eclecticism resembles the hybridity of the suffrage movement itself; the suffragettes were a group made up by different women of varied social backgrounds, different classes, with diverse experiences but joined by a single goal: the right to vote. This becomes a leitmotiv in the collection of poems, and their differences are shown formally rather than through their content. Nevertheless, there is also an obvious similarity in formal terms: all of the texts in the collection are poems, and there is a reason behind this.

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<sup>3</sup> Fellowship of Holloway Gaol, which, according to Katharine Cockin (94), worked as a way of reorganizing prison as an establishment for education rather than as a correctional institution.

According to Sylvia Pankhurst, having a limited amount of paper to write on and fearing that her diary would fill up too quickly, she chose to write verse “as the most concentrated form of expression” (445). This limited amount of space meant that all the words were chosen carefully in order to convey exactly what was in their minds. Despite being quite heterogeneous in formal terms, then, all the texts in the collection share the basic feature that they are written in verse.

The title “L’Envoi” is a French word that means “the consignment.” It has a patriotic and bellicist tone. It does not mention the suffragette cause or the fight for the vote, but there are some references to her “comrades marching fearless through prison” (line 2). For Davison, their cause is “human progress” (line 8), and she presents the fight for the vote as a universal experience, therefore claiming that freedom is “rousing all the world to wisdom” (line 16). Nevertheless, when referring to freedom itself, she defines it as a feminine entity, using the female form of the third person pronoun “her” in line 14, thus indirectly linking women to freedom. However, this poem is neither focused on the prison experience nor on specific aspects of the movement but rather on the more abstract aspects of the suffragettes’ philosophy and of the first-wave ideas of feminism, using descriptions of feelings over facts. In this way, in terms of tone and imagery, it resembles the Foreword in the *Holloway Jingles*. It is a sort of anthem and its goal is to encourage the suffragettes to keep fighting, both inside and outside prison, for their right to vote but also for their right to be free and equal. Like Wingrove’s poem, this one also makes several references to powerful words with positive connotations like *fearless*, *freedom*, *triumph*, *wisdom*. The parallel ideas mentioned above contribute to associating darkness with prisons and freedom with triumph, and the image of the breaking dawn (line 13) “represents the optimistic faith the supporters of suffrage carried throughout the years of struggle” (Nelson xi). Significantly, the structure in free verse is used to emphasize the importance of certain words at the end of every line, such as *comrades*, *guiding*, *glowing*, *freedom*, *triumph*, *progress*, *radiance*, and *wisdom*. There are certain words that are repeated in specific verses, thus forming parallel structures: *marching*, *gleaming*, *enemies*, *freedom*. These parallelisms highlight the most important words in the poem and facilitate memorizing it and remembering its message. Freedom’s appeal is presented as visual, making reference to its “beauty” (line 14) and also audible, recalling its “clarion call” (line 15). The word *freedom* itself is repeated three times throughout the poem, which serves as a way to

reinforce that bringing freedom to the world is their main goal, and it is presented as something inevitable that is bound to happen because the process has already started, they are already “marching fearless through the darkness” (line 2).

Furthermore, this poem establishes a connection between freedom and wisdom: it is not a matter of who is right and who is wrong, who is in power and who is not, but rather it is a matter of who is wise and who is not. Those who are denying women their right to have a voice and be heard, those who consider the female sex to be inferior to men, those who mistreat women: those people are not wise, and the suffragette cause is not only a fight for the vote but also a fight for wisdom, for emancipation, for reason. Wisdom and reason are values that have been traditionally related to men, whereas women were usually associated to feelings and irrationality. “L’Envoi” subverts this traditional dichotomy by presenting the suffragettes as wise, guiding the world “in the cause of human progress” (line 8). This is similar to the subversion of the male and female positions in the first poem, “There’s a Strange Sort of College”: men are presented as obstacles for the development of the world and women are presented as active, constructing an improved society based on reason and wisdom.

Emily Wilding Davison, the author of “L’Envoi,” is considered the first martyr of the suffrage movement. For a long time, she had believed that “the deliberate giving of a woman’s life would create the atmosphere necessary to win the victory, and bring all the suffering of the militants to an end” (S. Pankhurst 467). She had previously attempted to commit suicide when she was in prison, but she survived. However, her last and successful attempt took place in a public space, at the Derby, which was full of spectators and journalists, and even King George V was there. Her sacrifice was witnessed by thousands of people, and the cameras of the journalists even filmed the moment she walked on the track of the race and was hit by the king’s horse. The initial plan was to wave “the purple-white-and-green at Tattenham Corner” (S. Pankhurst 468), the colours of the suffragette flag, “which, by its suddenness, it was hoped would stop the race” (468). At this point, Sylvia Pankhurst recounts: “whether from the first her purpose was more serious, or whether a final impulse altered her resolve, I know not” (468). She died four days later, and “the great public responded to the appeal of a life deliberately given for an impersonal end” (469). She had a clear objective, she was completely sane and the reasoning behind her actions was logical. By sacrificing herself, she

embodies the “fearless” (“L’Envoi,” line 2) comrades she addresses in her poem and she exemplifies the highest level of sorority, giving in her own life in order to render their movement visible, to become a martyr and to let other women enjoy the rights that she was not able to have and for whom she sacrificed herself. Millicent Fawcett, a suffragist who did not believe in the use of violence in the fight for the vote, wrote in a letter that “action of the prisoners has touched the imagination of the country in a manner which quieter methods did not succeed in doing” (qtd. in S. Pankhurst 239). Her actions and her sacrifice were a way to transfer her inner and abstract feeling of freedom into the material and physical world, a way to make visible the freedom that she felt within her soul.

The government was aware of the dangers of martyrdom, though, because it could further strengthen the movement, and this is the main reason behind the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-health) Act, passed in 1913 (popularly known as the “Cat and Mouse Act”): in order to avoid deaths among the hunger strikers, those who were thought to be close to death were temporarily released from prison to recuperate under police watch. After a medical inspection confirming that they had sufficiently recovered, they would be rearrested and were made to serve the rest of their sentences. For some, the cycle of arrests and rearrests could continue for many months at a time with long-term health consequences. Suffragettes like Emily Wilding Davison could inspire other women through their actions but also through poems like this one: her actions made her a martyr but her words made her an inspiration, her verses could be just as powerful as her actions. The hegemonic male population feared the suffragette movement because they dreaded women’s victory, thinking that success in their fight would imply that they would lose some of their rights. As Carolyn Christensen Nelson points out, “the often-violent response to the women’s actions revealed male anxiety about women interjecting themselves into men’s public space” (xvi). The punishment of suffragettes was based on male fear and not on female law-breaking. These women were treated as if they were insane when in reality, they had never been saner: they had finally become aware that they were equal to men and as worthy as them, and therefore they should be granted the same rights. Nowadays, this may seem like an obvious statement, but in the early twentieth century this was revolutionary. In fact, the feminist movement was commonly associated with hysteria, a nervous disorder often diagnosed among women “exhibiting more than usual force and decision of character, of strong resolution, fearless of danger” (Showalter 145).

These suffragettes were put in prison, which became a pseudo-psychiatric hospital since it was an attempt to “cure” these women from their disorder, but in fact it had the opposite effect: by gathering women of different social backgrounds together, the government only managed to further reinforce their movement and their sense of community. By receiving the same treatment and sharing this traumatic experience, these women strengthened the bonds between them.

Feminist critic Hélène Cixous claimed that hysteria was a “powerful form of rebellion against the rationality of the patriarchal order” (qtd. in Showalter 160). The suffragettes, like feminist fin-de-siècle New Women, were labeled as hysterical because their beliefs challenged the status quo. These women were not mad, they were rational and powerful beings: the hysteric is the “woman-type in all her power: a power which was turned back against [her] but which, if women begin to speak the language of their own desire, would be a force capable of demolishing the structures of the family and society” (Showalter 161). The authors of these poems did have a voice, they only needed the world to listen. The *Holloway Jingles* allowed these silenced women to speak up against oppression using their own voices, and poems like “L’Envoi” demonstrate that these women were far from irrational or hysterical, it was actually quite the opposite: the suffragettes proved that they had a clear goal, “rousing all the world to freedom” (line 16), and their reasoning was their belief in “human progress” (line 8). This does not seem too unreasonable, but traditionally women had never been thinking subjects, they had always been voiceless objects confined to the private sphere, and when women started to demand their rights, men felt that their position of superiority was being challenged. This belief led to a sense of anxiety among men, who were those that could in fact be labeled as irrational or hysterical, especially considering that some of their actions in response to hunger striking consisted of “feeding” some suffragettes through the vagina or the rectum (Davies 79). In her poem, Davison shows the logical thoughts behind the male construction of suffragettes as unreasonable or even mentally ill, which is in line with later definitions of hysteria examined by Breuer and Freud in their work *Studies on Hysteria* (1891), a study which shows a more sympathetic and admiring view towards the hysterics. In contrast to the hostile construction of hysterical patients in previous studies, these experts thought hysterics were not weak but rather “people of the clearest intellect, strongest will, greatest character and highest critical power” (qtd. in Showalter 157). Until the publication of this work, English psychiatry

saw rebellion against domestic confinement and the patriarchal system as a symptom of hysteria, whereas Breuer and Freud claimed that it was in fact the monotony of such a confinement system that led to hysteria (Showalter 158). Thus, when Davison refers to freedom in her poem, she is hinting at both physical freedom from prison, and psychological freedom from the chains that bind them to the domestic sphere and patriarchal oppression, a freedom that would heal the world.

The poem provides an insight into a woman committed to the suffragette cause. The government tried to silence these women; they tried to punish them in an attempt to discourage them in their fight for the vote. However, “L’Envoi,” like the rest of the poems of the collection, shows that imprisonment and torture did not manage to dissuade them, in fact, it only strengthened their movement. The government only had control of their bodies; they took ownership over their physical selves. However, the minds of the suffragettes remained their own. In her essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), a cornerstone text in the feminist movement, Virginia Woolf deals mainly with the issue of female writing and female representation in fiction, but she also reflects on the idea of freedom, claiming that “there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind” (88). This idea can be applied to this collection of poems, because it demonstrates that despite confinement and torture, the suffragettes still had control over their minds, an empowering fact because, as Woolf claims, manipulating the body does not necessarily translate into a manipulation of the mind. These women were incarcerated in an attempt to punish them and dissuade them in their fight for the vote, but the government only had control over their physical selves. These women had become aware of their status as free citizens deserving the same rights as men, and once that occurred, there was no way the government could send them back to the private sphere. The seed of freedom was now in their minds and it would eventually bloom and translate into a sense of freedom in the physical world.

“L’Envoi,” then, vigorously posits a global sense of freedom that according to Davison will benefit the whole world. This emphasis on a universal progress is something that could be linked to the importance of education as the basis of human development. In the late eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), an essay denouncing gender inequality which deals with the value and meaning of education for the emancipation of women. In her text, she discusses the differences in the roles of men and women in

society, arguing that the foundations of these differences are based on nurture and not on nature. Therein she states that

[i]t is time to effect a revolution in female manners—time to restore them their lost dignity—and make them, as part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world. (Wollstonecraft 48)

Like Davison, Wollstonecraft also called for a universal revolution that would benefit both men and women, and she laid the foundations of the feminist revolution: “I do not wish (women) to have power over men but over themselves” (70). The general sense of anxiety and fear among the male population in regards to the feminist and suffrage movement was related to a misunderstanding of the main belief of the movement itself: women did not want to change their status by occupying the male position in society or by taking away men’s rights; women wanted to change their status by being allowed to enter the public sphere, by gaining ownership over themselves and by being allowed to have the same rights as men. This global change is, according to Wollstonecraft, built upon an equal education for the identical opportunities of both sexes, an education based on wisdom and truth: “reason is, consequentially, the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning the truth” (58). Davison, like the rest of the suffragettes, believed their emancipation would be a consequence of reason and wisdom, and thus the last line of the poem emphasizes the need of “rousing all the world to wisdom” (line 16) in order to be free. As endlessly pointed out by Wollstonecraft, the cultivation of reason was essential to undo the patriarchal association between an extreme sensibility that more often than not led women to hysteria, and the weakness of the female sex. For Wollstonecraft, only by dislodging sensibility from the female body can women become freer human beings, with the same capabilities and desires as men:

This overstretched sensibility naturally relaxes the other powers of the mind, preventing the intellect from achieving the sovereignty that it needs to attain to make a rational creature useful to others and content with his or her own role in life; because as one grows older the only natural method for calming the passions is through the exercise of reason. (48)

Despite the chaotic prison experience, the imprisoned suffragettes managed to find a balance between reason and emotion, using them both

as a driving force in the movement. The poems in the *Holloway Jingles* show the reasoning of the suffragettes, contradicting the traditional belief that women's emotions were overpowering and made them unable to reason. The collection demonstrates that women can be rational as well as emotional, that their emotions were not destructive nor did their sensibility have to relegate them to the private sphere: they used their emotions together with their reason in order to spread awareness and education on their cause through their poems, which would eventually free them from societal constraints as second-class citizens.

## CONCLUSIONS

Poetry has traditionally been a male-dominated genre within the realm of literature. The *Holloway Jingles* is a collection of poems written by suffragette women, hence their double relegation to the margins, first as women and then as feminist militants. In this collection, several female authors lend their voices to the suffragette movement in their fight for emancipation and progress. Despite the simple style of the poems, the *Holloway Jingles* shows the importance of literature and the written word in the development of the suffragette cause, and it also demonstrates that words can in fact be as powerful as deeds. The heterogeneity and the plurality of voices of the collection contributed to the construction and definition of the suffragette movement, and the fact that it was a written text facilitated the spread of their ideology. The collection had a double function; it helped women inside and outside the prison: imprisoned suffragettes could vent their misery through the written word by expressing their feelings while it also helped them remain strong and positive, and free women could learn about the movement and also use the poems as anthems for their fight.

Thus, the *Holloway Jingles* functions as a tool for the development of the suffrage movement because each poem teaches a lesson, and the written word could travel and reach a wider audience than the spoken word. Doubtless, this collection was—and still is—a key tool for the education of women and men by offering them a non-politicized agenda of the movement. Since, according to Wollstonecraft and the suffragettes, education is the basis of wisdom and reason, this collection was indirectly changing the situation of these women by bringing them one step closer to their goal. This educational function of the poems was key for the development of the first wave of the feminist movement, which began

when women became aware that they had to fight to be granted suffrage rights in order to be considered citizens. Moreover, this collection debunks the myth of the suffragette as an irrational or hysterical woman, which was a common belief in society at the time. The poems demonstrate that these women were not solely ruled by their emotions and that they managed to find a balance between their feelings and their intellect and used them both in their fight. They also show that despite the physical punishments, the suffragettes' minds and their ideology remained untainted; they demonstrated courage and resilience and they proved that there is nothing stronger than the power of the mind, exemplifying Woolf's idea of mental freedom. The suffragettes were courageous, and the *Holloway Jingles* was both a reason for and a depiction of their strength.

Literature and history often influence one another, and the *Holloway Jingles* shows the close relationship between the two. This collection was deeply influenced by the historical conditions but at the same time it also had an impact on history due to the effect it had on the suffragettes' spirit and morale, thus highlighting that the relationship between art and history is clearly symbiotic. Therefore, these poems should be considered key texts within the tradition of feminist literature, as the suffrage movement was the harbinger of the feminist movement. The fight for the vote went beyond the mere action of putting a paper in a ballot box: it was a fight to stop being regarded as second-class citizens, a fight for the right to be treated as equals, for the right to have a voice and be heard. For these women, the only thing worse than death was silence, and the *Holloway Jingles* allowed these women to find their voices and use them in the fight for progress and freedom.

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