Selected Works from

**Esther Inglis’**

*Octonaries upon the Vanity and Inconstancy of the World*

An Annotated Critical Edition

by

Gaeby Abrahams
Rebecca Hazell
Teresa Kennedy
Seana Stevenson
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Esther Inglis in Context
Historical Background by Teresa Kennedy

Esther Inglis cannot be reduced to the title “writer”; her work as a miniaturist moves well beyond a literary scope, incorporating her talent as an embroiderer, calligrapher and translator (Frye, 469). Esther Inglis was born to Nicholas Langlois and Marie Prisott, both Huguenots, in France, 1571. Huguenots were French Calvinist Protestants, characterized by their harsh opposition to the ritualistic emphasis of the Catholic faith. Huguenots occupied an obscure position in French society, and a movement towards their persecution was an imminent threat. This danger materialized in 1572 at the St. Bartholomew massacre; those who escaped this fatal event, including Esther Inglis and her family, immediately fled the country and the Huguenots were effectively eliminated from France. The Langlois family moved to Edinburgh, Scotland to live among other Protestants, and changed their name from Langlois, meaning “English” in French, to Inglis, the Scottish translation. Nicholas Inglis worked as a master at a French school, gaining special recognition for his perfection oriented practice by King James VI of Scotland, who later granted Nicholas a pension in 1578. Although her father was a well reputed educator, it is unlikely that Esther received any formal education; however, she was trained by her mother in calligraphy, a skill women were encourage to learn because “it was thought of as copying rather than as any genuine work in the public domain”
Esther’s mastery of calligraphy later qualified her to work as an official scribe for her husband.

In about 1596, Esther married a minister named Bartholomew Kello and, like her mother, chose to retain her maiden name. One critic suggests this is “an indication perhaps of her desire to retain a professional identity apart from her husband” (Frye, 471). Later, Kello was employed by James I of England, and some sources suggest that Inglis moved with Kello to London. By this time, Inglis had been working on the production of her manuscripts and books for over ten years, starting her creations around age fifteen. In addition to aiding her husband as a scrivener, Inglis bolstered Kello’s presence in the English court with her miniature books.¹ On the one hand, the dedicatory nature of her work clearly marks her “quest for patronage” (Kemp, 393). However, her work cannot be limited to this goal of patronage, and its features of craftsmanship and complex production qualify Inglis as an inventive artist.

The idea of female artists and female art was virtually non-existent in the seventeenth century. According to Rosemary O’ Day, this idea is perpetuated by “art historians [who] … have tended to dismiss female interest in art as amateur, practical, and non-intellectual” (325). Consequently, artistic work by women, particularly “flower painting”, are still likely to be classified as “crafts” and may remain insignificant and unacknowledged because of their “feminine” quality (O’ Day, 325). Until the late seventeenth century, artistic skills such as painting

¹ See Appendix A-1.
and drawing were unlikely to be distinguished from the other skills comprising a general education; rather, “the teaching of drawing in the English Renaissance was closely associated with the teaching of writing” (O’ Day, 326). Activities involving music, embroidery and needlework were considered the appropriate creative realm for women. In fact, it is likely that young girls were taught drawing to enhance their embroidery skills and their ability to create patterns.

The cultivation of painting and drawing as artistic skills for women did not begin until the last three decades of the seventeenth century. It became laudable for women, especially those belonging to the elite class, to display proficiency in these newly acclaimed areas. Nonetheless, women’s artwork was not to be exhibited in public, but remained highly concealed and private, perhaps being modestly shared amongst female peers. Inglis is an exception in her time, as her miniature books entirely defy these social limitations on art. Inglis compiles the skills of embroidery, calligraphy, painting and drawing to create a complex artistic whole. While flower drawings are a recurring feature in her work, the very fact that her miniature books were accepted by royalty as valuable gifts suggest that they qualified as artistic commodities. Furthermore, Inglis’s books were entirely public works; their dedicatory nature and their tendency to be placed on open display counters the female expectation of private art. Additionally, Inglis may even be considered a commercial artist because although these books were presented as gifts, there was an implicit understanding that they would be exchanged for a monetary reward.
Nearly all of Inglis’s fifty-eight works were in “dedication to someone of rank, including Elizabeth I, James VI, Prince Henry, and Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford” (Frye, 469). It is important to recognize how Inglis consciously constructed her work with a patron in mind, personalizing them to “create an even more direct line between her literary production and the desire for the rewards of patronage” (Kemp, 391). Inglis made the habit of including a self portrait in her books,² perhaps to remind the recipient of the author. In one sense, as Susan Frye describes, Inglis’s work was the foundation of a prosperous “family enterprise” (476). The money Inglis earned from her miniature books, between £5 and £22 per work, served as a substantial secondary source of income, and was used to support her son, Samuel (Frye, 476). However, this financial reward was only one benefit; the additional incentive of receiving patronage from powerful individuals was political advancement.

Inglis’s husband, Kello, was the one who actually visited the courts and presented the adorned books to her honored recipients. In being the distributor of his wife’s work, he was inextricably tied to it, and this association likely earned him commendations that helped improve his status within court society. Theresa Kemp emphasizes that the nature of Kello’s involvement is ambiguous, and “the extent to which Inglis and Kello deliberately worked together and would have seen their work as a collaborative endeavor” is questionable (393). Conversely, Frye points out that Inglis does not try to appeal to her audience as a

² See Appendix A-2.
wife or mother, a strategy commonly used by women seeking patronage, but presents herself “as the prototype of the career woman,” perhaps indicating that Inglis desired to personally control and oversee her work (476). Inglis’s personal success and popularity with her patrons is evident from a letter dated June 20, 1620 that is addressed to the King, requesting his help in securing an internship at a prestigious university for her son (Kemp, 393).

Inglis’s authority as an author is derived from her religious and moral principles and her belief that her work was a reflection of God’s work. This is often expressed in the various mottos Inglis placed below her self portraits. For example, one reads: “De dieu le bien/ de moy le rien” (From the Lord goodness, from myself nothing)” (Frye, 478). Inglis’s texts were not entirely original, as the content was often copied or translated. Yet, “the phrase “by the hand and pen of me Esther Inglis” recurs in both her dedication and titles,” suggesting that she was intent on taking ownership of what she produced (Frye, 483).

Inglis’s work is noteworthy in the way that her hand-made manuscripts sharply contrast works in print. The value of Inglis’s books lie in their complex production process and the fact that they were irreproducible and could not be circulated to a mass audience. Consequently, by not being widely marketable, her books were considered rare commodities. For example, her experimentation with many different scripts produces a keen awareness in the reader that the book is an artistic endeavour that is entirely divorced from print production. The smallest book she made is measured as one and half inches by two inches (Frye,
479). This unique and elaborate method of presenting writing draws attention to the important function of these books as objects. They held a much elevated status to other manuscripts because they were regarded as treasures and collectibles. Susan Frye argues that Inglis’s involvement in the full production of her work “amounted to a profound disruption of the usual male-controlled forms of textual production” (479). Inglis’s control and authority over the production of her work subverts almost every expectation and convention governing women writers in Renaissance England.

Esther Inglis passed away on March 15th, 1638.

Works Cited


Manuscript Transcription (original spelling)
Transcribed by Gaeby Abrahams

Octonaries
vpon the vanitie
and inconstancie of the world,
writin and limd be me, Esther
Inglis the XXIII, December 1607

TO THE VERTVOVS
AND MY LOVING FREINDE AND
LANDLORD M. WILLIAM JEFFRAI

Alcides doubtfull of his way (beloved friend) being environed with two Ladyes Virtue and Vice: the one alluring him with all the humayne transitory pleasours of this world; the other perswading him with gifts and graces of the soule with moderat contentment: he rather choosed with Lady Virtue to clime the steep and stonie rocks to attayne to the Castell of Falicitie, then with Voluptuousnes to bath him self with the schort and momentall vanities of this life; And at lenth enter in eternall perdition. For the way to damnation is broad, and to salvation narrow, figurit out in Pythagoras Y. But as Virgil sayes Quisquis enim duros casus virtutis amore, Vicerit, ille sibi laudem decusq parabit; Atq desideam luxumq, sequetur inertem &c: Yow being one (to my knowledge) who with Alcides hes pressit to go thorow the perilous mountaines of this lyfe houping to attayne to that inspeakable Castell of Falicite, which attends all thois who loves and feares the Lord and trewlie serves him to the end. I have at the desyre of my husband [preserved] this most singular work of my pen and pensill for recreation of your mynd. [...] may see how light, fragill, vayne, inconstant, mutable, schort, and wiek [...] compared] to a boble of water, to show to yee in presens of Phaeton. [...] and persist in Virtue to the end: as the Palme doth in growing notwithstanding [...] weight laid thereupon for impesement of the Vegetive lyf, Radicall sap and [...] thereof. This I commend you to Gods protection. [...] Decemb. 1607
Your assured freind in
the Lord Iesus,
ESTHER INGLIS

SONNET,
VポンESTHER INGLIS
ANAGRAMME
RESISTING HEL
RESISTING HEL, thou shalt the heav’ns obtaine
    Devils are afray’d of such as them resist
    Draw neere to God, he will draw neere againe
    And compass thee about with armyes blest
Be always strong, and constantly persist
    The sharp assaults of Satan to sustaine
First arme thy selfe, then enter to the list
    Thyn ayrie foes in hyer parts remaine.
Gird therefore up thy [...] with [...]  
    Have Gods owne word a sharp [...]  
Let Righteousnesse thy Breastplate [...]  
    Thyn heade as Helmett lett Situation [...]  
But above all mak stedfast Fayth thy Sheeld
So shalt thou be assurd to win the feeld.
          G. D.

SONNET,
TO THE ONLY PARAGON AND
matchles Mistresse of the golden Pen
ESTHER INGLIS

Some when with conqring armie and vaillant interpryse
    They daunted have the pryd of high and gallant harts
With mightie Monuments rays’d up in many parts
    The all consuming force of wasting Tyme defise
Some other men againe, a serer manner tryse
To free their dieing fame, from Tymes most deadlie darts
    These do by divin writts, by Sciences, and Arts
Give wings unto their names, to flie abroad the sky’se
And many men of olde, by charitable works
    Did climbe the Temple of Fame, among the greatest Clerks
Desyring nothing but to eternize their name
    But the glore of thy sexe, and mirakill to men
Dost purches to thy self immortill preyse and fame
By draughts inemitable, of thy unmatched Pen.  
          G. D.

OCTONARIES VPON THE VANITY-
TIE- AND INCONSTANCIE OF THE WORLD

OCTONARIE I.
When one may firmely staye, the ordinary rout
Of the great Poste of heav’n that beares the light about
When one may firmely staye, the ever-rouling yeire
On his triumphant Teeme, of months, of houres, of dayes:
When one may firmely staye, the many squadrons cleere
Of twicling starrs that in, the emptie welking strayes,
Darting against our heades, the long beames of their eye:
Then maye he firmely staye, the worlds inconstancie.

OCTO. III.

The fyre, aire, water, earth, the world with changes fill
They tourne and tourne again, each in the other still
So God was pleas’d to make what this lowe worlde
Of well-agreeing warrs of contraire Elements
To teache us that we ought for our cheef good enquire
Else-where than in the earth, the water, aire, or fyre
That the true reste of man, rests in an hyer place
Then earth, aire, water, fyre, or they all can embrace

OCTO. VIII.

When the sweet Spring doth dres th’ earth in a livrie greene
And evrie Tree of fresh with floorish clothed bein
  The floures are pleadges trew
  Of fruits that shall ensew
Wordlings that fruietles are albeit yee floorish doo
In pleasures and delytes, in wealth and honnour too!
  Your fained fruiet we find
  Blown off with evry wind.

OCTO. IX.

When Sommer hott inflames the ayre
The joyfull Cloune shakes off all caire
The yellow treasure of the playres
At large requyting all his paynes.
But yee that with discourses vaine
And found desyres, we ever find
Nothing to sowe; but only wind;
What can yee reape but wind again.

OXTO. X.
When as the witherd leaf doth fall
And wan-hewd Autumnne doth spall
And with fowle tanny spots desgrace
The beautie off the faire yeares face
Their maye (as in the glas) be seene
Thy lyfe, ô wordling! Some tymes greene
And sometymes faded and forlorne
As yow no fruiet nor leafe had borne.

OCTO. XI.

The wrincled winters face dost thou behold
With frosts and snowes ore-spred benumd with colde?
Thus are we all, such is our very cace
When wee the last part of our age attaine
When winter's past, the spring retourns-againe
But yee, ô wordlings! that your hoipes do place
In this fraile lyfe, and higher hopies resing
Your winter lasts without all hoipe of Spring

OCTO. XXV.

The water streames right swiftlie slyde;
The flyeing darts more swiftly glyde
And yitt more swifter flies than thay
The wind that drives the cloudes away
But so exceeding soudain bee
The course of wordly ioyes wee see
That it farre swifter flies we find
Than either water dart or wind.

OCTO. XXVIII

The beautie of the world goes
As soudain as the wind that bloes:
As soudain as yee sie the floure
To wither from his first coloure:
As soudain as the flood is gone
That's chaste by others one by one:
What is the world then I pray?
A wind, a floure, a flood alway.

OCTO. XXX.
Go Goldsmith beat me out, a hudge round hollow boll
Which full of wind, we may the world his image call;
And lett it as much rare and dainty beauties have
As all thy cunning can with curious hand engrave,
Expressing there-upon fruits of all sortes and kind.
And then with this devyse deck me the resteles Boule
Thus doth the world still about her center rowle
Whole fruits but painted are, and founded on the wind.

OCTO. XXXI.

Far sooner shall yow sie
The faire day light,
No more opposed be
To the black night:
Far sooner may a man
Join eauen and od,
The fyre and vater, than
The world and God

OCTO. XLIII

Wher's Death? It's in the world. And wher's the world? in death
It's death unto it self: And what's in all the world
That fils the worlds self, so much as doth the world;
Which doth begett and breed, yea gives lyfe to his death
But if Gods love should raise the World above the World,
By slayeing of the world, or will the love or death;
Then happy should we sit, to triumpe over death.
The world no more a world. And Death dead in the world.

OCTO. XLVI.

What Monstre have wee heere? That hath of heade such feare,
So many eares and eyes; of divers sortes and kynde;
Whose vesture poudred is, with plaisant green before;
And hath nothing except a darknes black behynde
Whose restles feete, upon a rouling bowle doth slyde,
Borne on by winged tyme, that swiftly flies awaye:
And death runs after still, still shooting at his syde?
I sawe it well. What was't? It was the world I saye.

OCTO. XLVII.
Stay, heark yee wordling: whither runst thou so?
Listn and give eare to vertuo' lesson now.
Yitt runs he on, after the world tho;
Nay flied allace! As fast as riuers doo
That sodainly wax'd proud, sends doun amaine
Their stormie streames unto Neptunus raigne
My counsele, lyke a rock, encounterd thame:
But they passe ore, and grumbild at the same.
Octonaries\textsuperscript{1} upon the Vanity and Inconstancy of the World,
written and limned\textsuperscript{2} by me, Esther Inglis,
December 1607

To the Virtuous and my Loving Friend and Landlord M. William Jeffrai

Alcides\textsuperscript{3} doubtful of his way (beloved friend) being environed with two ladies,
Virtue and Vice: the one alluring him with all the human transitory pleasures of
this world; the other persuading him with gifts and graces of the soul with
moderate contentment: he rather chose with Lady Virtue to climb the steep and
stony rocks to attain to the Castle of Felicity, than with Voluptuousness to bath
himself with the short momental vanities of this life; And at length enter in
eternal perdition. For the way to damnation is broad, and to salvation narrow,
figured out in Pythagoras Y\textsuperscript{4}. But as Virgil says, \textit{Quisquis enim duros casus virtutis
amore, Vicerit, ille sibi laudemque decusque parabit; At qui desideam luxumque sequetur
intertem}\textsuperscript{5} &c: You being one (to my knowledge) who with Alcides has pressed to
go through the perilous mountains of this life hoping to attain to that
unspeakable Castle of Felicity, which attends all those who loves and fears the
Lord and truly serves him to the end. I have at the desire of my husband
[preserved] this most singular work of my pen and pencil for recreation of your
mind. [...] may see how light, fragile, vain, inconstant, mutable, short, and weak
[... compared] to a bauble of water, to show to thee in presence of Phaeton\textsuperscript{6}. [...] and persist in Virtue to the end: as the Palm doth in growing notwithstanding
[...] weight laid thereupon for impeachment of the Vegetative life, Radical sap
and [...] thereof. This I commend you to Gods protection. [...] Decemb. 1607

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1]{Octonaries: groups or stanzas of eight lines of verse, \textit{esp.} each of the sections of Psalm 119 (OED)}
\footnotetext[2]{limned: illuminated; painted, depicted, portrayed (OED)}
\footnotetext[3]{Alcides: another name of the divine Greek hero, Hercules}
\footnotetext[4]{Pythagoras Y: authorship of verses in which the Pythagorean Y originally appears is uncertain.
The Pythagorean Y is a symbol for the pattern of human life. The straight portion represents an
individual’s uncertain age, uninfluenced by vice or virtue. The bifurcation begins at adolescence.
The virtuous path is difficult but leads to a blessed life, whereas the path of vice is easy, but leads
to destruction}
\footnotetext[5]{Quisquis enim duros...sequetur intertem &c: Whoever overcomes harsh misfortunes by love of
virtue will obtain praise and glory, but he who follows idleness and idle luxury &c.}
\footnotetext[6]{Phaedon: son of Greek god Helios. Phaedon was struck down by one of Zeus’s thunderbolts for
driving his father’s chariot and the sun down toward the earth, threatening to scorch the planet}
\end{footnotes}
Your assured friend in the Lord Jesus,  
Esther Inglis

Sonnet,  
Upon Esther Inglis  
Anagram  
Resisting Hel

Resisting hel, thou shalt the heav'ns obtain  
   Devils are afraid of such as them resist  
   Draw near to God, he will draw near again  
   And compass thee about with armies blest.  
Be always strong, and constantly persist  
   The sharp assaults of Satan to sustain  
   First arm thyself, then enter to the list  
   Thine airy foes in higher parts remain.  
Gird therefore up thy [...] with [...]  
   Have God's own word a sharp [...]  
   Let Righteousness thy Breastplate [...]  
   Thine head as Helmet let Situation [...]  
But above all make steadfast Faith thy Shield  
So shall thou be assured to win the field.

G. D.  

Sonnet,  
To the Only Paragon and  
Matchless Mistress of the Golden Pen  
Esther Inglis

Some when with conq'ring army and valiant enterprise  
They daunted have the pride of high and gallant hearts  
With mighty Monuments raised up in many parts  
The all-consuming force of wasting Time defies  
Some other men again, a surer manner tries  
To free their dying fame, from Time's most deadly darts  
These do by divine writs, by Sciences, and Arts  
Give wings unto their names, to fly abroad the skies  
And many men of old, by charitable works  
Did climb the Temple of Fame, among the greatest Clerks

7 G.D.: unidentified author
Desiring nothing but to eternize their name
But the glory of thy sex, and miracle to men
Dost purchase to thyself immortal praise and fame
By draughts inimitable, of the unmatched Pen.

G. D.

Octonary I

When one may firmly stay the ordinary route
Of the great Post of heav’n that bears the light about
When one may firmly stay the ever-rolling year
On his triumphant team, of months, of hours, of days:
When one may firmly stay, the many squadrons cleare\textsuperscript{8}
Of twinkling stars that in, the empty walking strays,
Darting against our heads, the long beams of their eye:
Then may be firmly stay, the world’s inconstancy.

Octonary III

The fire, air, water, earth, the world with changes fill
They turn and turn again, each in the other still
So God was pleas’d to make what this low world
Of well-agreeing wars of contrary Elements
To teach us that we ought for our chief good enquire
Elsewhere than in the earth, the water, air, or fire
That the true rest of man, rests in an higher place
Than earth, air, water, fire, or they all can embrace.

Octonary VIII

When the sweet Spring doth dress th’ earth in a liv’ry\textsuperscript{9} green
And every Tree of fresh with flourish clothed being
The flow’rs are pledges true
Of fruits that shall ensue
Wordlings\textsuperscript{10} that fruitless are albeit thee flourish do

\textsuperscript{8} cleare: expressing the vividness or intensity of light: Brightly shining, bright, brilliant \textit{(OED)}
\textsuperscript{9} livery: uniform serving as a distinguishing characteristic \textit{(OED)}
\textsuperscript{10} wordlings: Inglis’s use of the affectionate endearment “wordling” demonstrates a fondness for her work and an authority over it that emphasizes her role as a creator
In pleasures and delights, in wealth and honour too!
    Your feigned fruit we find
    Blown off with ev'ry wind.

Octonary IX

When Summer hot inflames the air
The joyful Clown shakes off all care
The yellow treasure of the play'rs
At large requiting all his pains\(^\text{11}\)
But ye that with discourses vain
And found desires, we ever find
Nothing to sow; but only wind;
What can ye reap but wind again.

Octonary X

When as the withered leaf doth fall
And wan-hued Autumn doth spall\(^\text{12}\)
And with foul tawny spots disgrace
The beauty of the fair year's face
There may (as in the glass) be seen
Thy life, o wordling! Some times green
And sometimes faded and forlorn
As though no fruit nor leaf had borne.

Octonary XI

The wrinkled winter's face dost thou behold
With frosts and snows o'er-spread benumbed with cold?
Thus are we all, such is our very case
When we the last part of our age attain
When winter's past, the spring returns again
But thee, o wordlings! that your hopes do place
In this frail life, and higher hopes resing\(^\text{13}\)
Your winter lasts without all hope of Spring.

Octonary XXV

\(^{11}\) paine: punishment; penalty; suffering or loss inflicted for a crime or offence (OED)
\(^{12}\) spall: chip or splinter (OED)
\(^{13}\) resing: to sing again (OED)
The water streams right swiftly slide;
The flying darts more swiftly glide
And yet more swifter flies than they
The wind that drives the clouds away
But so exceeding sudden be
The course of worldly joys we see
That it far swifter flies we find
Than either water dart or wind.

Octonary XXVIII

The beauty of the world goes
As sudden as the wind that blows:
As sudden as ye see the flow'r
To wither from his first colour:
As sudden as the flood is gone
That's chased by others one by one:
What is the world then I pray?
A wind, a flow'r, a flood always.

Octonary XXX

Go Goldsmith beat me out, a huge round hollow ball
Which full of wind, we may the world his image call;
And let it as much rare and dainty beauties have
As all thy cunning can with curious hand engrave,
Expressing thereupon fruits of all sorts and kind.
And then with this device deck me the restless Ball
Thus doth the world still about her centre roll
Whole fruits but painted are, and founded on the wind.

Octonary XXXI

Far sooner shall you see
The fair day light
No more opposed be
To the black night:
Far sooner may a man

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14 Octonary XXX: Inglis’s manuscript presents this verse written entirely in reverse. See Appendix B-1.
15 Octonary XXXI: Inglis’s manuscript presents this verse in strikethrough, a typographical technique that identifies words that are incorrect or words that are not intended for inclusion in the text. However, her decorative joining of the strikethrough lines demonstrates that Inglis’s application of the technique had meaning beyond its purpose. See Appendix B-2.
Join even and odd,
The fire and water, than
The world and God

Octonary XLIII

Where's Death? It's in the world. And where's the world? in death
It's death unto itself: And what's in all the world
That fills the world's self, so much as doth the world;
Which doth beget and breed, yea gives life to his death
But if God's love should raise the World above the World,
By slaying of the world, or will the love or death;
Then happy should we sit, to triumph over death.
The world no more a world. And Death dead in the world.

Octonary XLVI

What Monster have we here? That hath of head such fear,
So many ears and eyes; of diverse sorts and kind;
Whose vesture powdered is, with pleasant green before;
And hath nothing except a darkness black behind
Whose restless feet, upon a rolling ball doth slide,
Borne on by winged time, that swiftly flies away:
And death runs after still, still shooting at his side?
I saw it well. What was't? It was the world I say.

Octonary XLVII

Stay, hark thee wordling: whither run'st thou so?
List'n and give ear to virtuo' lesson now.
Yet runs he on, after the world though;
Nay fled alas! As fast as rivers do
That suddenly wax'd proud, sends down amaine
Their stormy streams unto Neptune's reign
My counsel, like a rock, encountered them:
But they passed o'er, and grumbled at the same.

\[16 \text{ amaine: to lower (a sail, etc., esp. the topsail) (OED)}\]
Esther Inglis should be inducted into the literary canon for many reasons. Scholars celebrate her work, specifically her calligraphy, and her political views, though controversial, are scattered throughout her work. Inglis also had a very supportive husband Batholomew Kello, who would help sell her books. During her time she also had many admirers in the humanist community. Inglis wrote mostly Octonaries, which are stanzas of eight lines of verse.

In Sarah Gwyneth Ross’ article “Esther Inglis: Linguist, Calligrapher, Miniaturist, and Christian Humanist,” she shows how Inglis was portrayed at the time of her writing. “Inglis won the admiration of learned men such as Andrew Melville...John Johnston...Robert Rollock...and Bishop Joseph Hall...all of whom praised Inglis not just for her manual skills, but for her status as an intellectual” (Ross, 173). Inglis did not receive the perfect education but was educated. To be called an intellectual during the time she was writing is very impressive, especially when highly respected and educated men are saying it.

Inglis uses rhyming couplets in most of her poems. This adds a style and sophistication to her poetry. In Octonary VIII she uses the shape of the poem, and specific word counts to stylize her poem. She begins with two long sentences, then the middle two, rhyming, are five words each; this moves back to two long sentences and back again to the five word sentences in the end. This is a very specific choice for a poem and shows the thought that went into her work.
She was clearly working through the rhythm of her poetry and thought through the structure of her pieces.

Inglis also switched up her rhyming. In Octonary XI her format is AABCCBDD. She sandwiches ‘When we the last part of our age attain/ When winter’s past, the spring returns again/ But thee, o wordlings!’ between “This are we all, such is our very case...that your hopes do place.” She shows her mastery here. The middle section is a separate but connected thought. Placing it between a sentence shows she can keep her rhyming while still branching out to try different stylistic choices. This shows Inglis did not just want to write regular poetry but worked at her craft and continued to challenge herself.

Religion is also shown in her work. In Octonary XXVIII she questions faith. “The beauty of the world goes/ As sudden as the wind that blows...What is the world then I pray?/ A wind, a flow’r, a flood always.” She writes this showing how praying for material or earthly good is no use. As a humanist she believed that prayer, supernatural, and mortality were useless. Inglis saw the way the world worked and knew that prayer would not solve anything.

Esther Inglis used her poetry to show her religious and political views, as well as to challenge herself with rhyming couplets and interesting verse forms. Her background in calligraphy helped give her a name during her time and showed how intricate her work was as a whole.

Works Cited

Appendix A


2. Esther Inglis, Self-Potrait, “De dieu le bien/ de moy le rien” (“From the Lord goodness, from myself nothing”). Octonaries. Manuscript, 1601.
Appendix B

1. Manuscript Facsimile of Octonary XXX

2. Manuscript Facsimile of Octonary XXXI

Far sooner shall yow lie
The faire day light
No more opposed be
To the black night:
Far sooner may a man
Join euen and od.
The fyre and water, than
The world and God.