AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Dr. Ruth Perry, author of *The Ballad World of Anna Gordon, Mrs. Brown of Falkland*.

RP: Anna Gordon Brown, my first recollection of her is that on the first page of Francis James Child's collection of ballads, which was a magisterial collection put together at the end of the 19th century, it says on the very first page, it says “no ballads are superior to those sung by Mrs. Brown of Falkland in the last century.” And people have known about this informant, this person who knew three dozen ballads, the core of his collection, the best of those old Scottish ballads, but nobody knew anything about her. So I decided I would find out something about her. And it wasn't easy, I must say, because the Scottish archives are in such difficult times. Those archives in the National Library or Register House, they have money for acquisition, but they don't have enough money for cataloging. So there's a lot of uncatalogued material. But of course, I tried the usual way of checking the listings. I did all the normal kinds of archival checking and got what I could that way. But I knew that there was more. I knew there was more because it was an important family. Anna Gordon's father was a very significant figure in old Aberdeen in the second half of the 18th century. And I just knew there was more material.

AT: The fact that women's history records are often buried in collections that are about men, and that's one of those things that makes it harder to even find the women's history in the first place, has come up repeatedly in different conversations.

RP: Of course. In this case, that definitely plays a part. Because do we look for Gordon? Do we look for Brown? She got married in ‘88. She was already 41 years old. And it's hard to know, even in the biography, whether to call her Anna Gordon or to call her Anna Brown. But this is a story about archival obscurity, really. So one day, I go over to the building in Charlotte Square that has civil law records. And I have a reference, and I'm looking up Anna Gordon's husband, Andrew Brown, and the lawsuit that he had that he maintained for many years with the property owners. He was a minister, and they never gave him a proper manse, a house, which is one of the perks of being a minister. And so he was in a lawsuit with the property owners for most of the time that he was over there in Falkland, which is in Fife in Scotland. So I'm in the building that houses all the law records for Scotland in the 18th century. And I've looked up the lawsuit, and I've gotten my document. And I think to myself, there's got to be more. This family is involved in so many different things. So then I decide I'm just going to look. And I figure I'm there for the afternoon. Why not? So I ask the archivist to bring me all the records, the whole cardboard box of legal records from a random year. I just pick a year at random. I don't remember what it was. Say, 1777. And they bring me over this cardboard box with all of these legal documents folded in thirds and tied up. And I start going through them. And when the archivist sees what I'm doing, she says, “you know, you can just snip those cords” because all the records are tied with string, but it's not conservation string. And they want it to be tied with conservation tape. So she brings me a great big spool of conservation tape and a scissors, which, if you've ever worked in an archive, is just mind-blowing because they usually want you to use white gloves. Anyway, so I'm snipping the string. And when I retie those bundles, I retie them with conservation tape. And my hands are getting really dirty because this stuff hasn't been touched since 1777. So I have to keep going to the ladies’ to wash my hands. My computer's getting black. Anyway, so I do that. And I find some really interesting documents about Thomas Gordon, who is Anna Gordon's father. Turns out he is the guardian of the children of a very significant woman, Lady Diana Middleton. It's a significant family, both in Scotland and in England. And so I do it for one other year. I have time for one other year. And again, I find stuff just randomly. And I think to myself, I'm not going to live long enough. I couldn't possibly do this. There's no way. But then I decide, I put a little note in my preface in which I make a note to future historians saying I've managed to put together family trees and as much information about this family as I possibly can. So that when stuff turns up in the future, when future historians locate more on this particular branch of the Gordon family, they will know how to locate it.

So Anna Gordon is a very intelligent, literary minded. I would say she's an oral poet. She's born into this family of professionals. They're not aristocrats. They don't own land. But they're related to a number of gentry families. And her father's a professor at the local university. And so is her uncle. Her father and uncle's dad was also a professor at King's College in Old Aberdeen. And when she's a girl, she hears her mother and her aunt, that is her mother's sister, singing wonderful old ballads with incredible stories and vivid imagery. And she learns them because she is attracted to stories and to song. And she learns these ballads. And then later in life, when the intellectuals of the Scottish Enlightenment begin to be really interested in old ballads, they find out about her through her father, who is one of them. He's an intellectual. He's a professor. And one of her dad's friends learns from her dad that she knows all these old ballads. And he asks that she write them down. So with the help of her nephew, she writes down the words and also the tunes to some of these ballads and gives the manuscript to this guy. And he then shares that manuscript out with people who are famous in the late 18th century for collecting. So he shares them with Robert Jameson, with Walter Scott, with Joseph Ritson, you name it. The people who are collecting ballads in the late 18th century, Thomas Percy, they all get a look at some of Anna Gordon's ballads.
And they're all very impressed with how thorough, how complete and how beautiful they are. They're especially wonderful. The language is very choice. There are no boring stanzas. It's as if she kept what was wonderful and then fixed what wasn't, which is what I think happened. So she passes on these ballads in a more finished, polished, beautiful form than she received them. And that's who Anna Gordon is. And that's who Francis Child was celebrating. And what I dug into was that family, the place of music in 18th century Scotland, the place of balladry in the Scottish Enlightenment, because I found it really interesting how compelling ballads were to that set of intellectuals who are famous, famous all over the world for philosophy and history and literature.

AT: And I do want to come back to that broader context later, but to bring it more specifically to Anna Gordon Brown and her family, because her family is quite interesting as well. Could you give us a bit more of the background of what was going on in her life and the family that she came from?

RP: On her mother's side, she was related to a very interesting cadet, as they call them, of the Craigievar family. Her maternal grandfather was a minor aristocrat, owned a lot of land. He was a poet and a musician. When he died, he left a lot of musical instruments, a lot of written music. And it turns out that he was a composer. There are manuscripts in the National Library of the violin compositions that he put together based on Scottish tunes. He composed Baroque forms like the sonata, using themes from Scottish folk tunes. And he was very much a patriot. He also wrote searing poems against the Treaty of Union. In 1707, Great Britain was formed, and that happened because the Treaty of Union put Scotland and England and Wales together. And he was totally against it. He felt that England was simply swallowing Scotland and that it was a terrible idea. Scotland had never been subject to another country before. There had been a long-time enmity between England and Scotland. They had fought over the centuries, back and forth, back and forth. And his name was William Forbes. He was completely against that Treaty of Union.

AT: And just in case there's any folks who are not aware of this fact, this is still a contentious issue in Scotland to this day, which I get into within my conversation with Sarah Sheridan. So just flagging this is not ancient history by any measure.

RP: You're absolutely right. I'm really glad you brought that up. And they're still talking about a referendum to separate from England. And the last referendum, which was in 2014, lost by just a little. But now the polls are showing, especially since Brexit, that Scotland really wants out. They want to be separated from England. That English policies are not to Scotland's taste. Scotland is a much more democratic, egalitarian culture than England still to this day. And the position of women in Scotland, that is something

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that I hadn't expected. The position of women in the 18th century was much more advanced and powerful than in England. I've spent my life as a scholar studying the position of women in England. And so when I started working on Scotland, I was really astonished. For instance, I'll give you a great example. Anna Gordon's own grandmother wanted to divorce this guy, William Forbes. This poet, this patriot, this man. And she initiated divorce proceedings in 1703. You couldn't do that in England. She initiated divorce proceedings and won. And they were divorced. And then, it's such an amazing story. William Forbes possessed a handsome estate and married very early in life, a lady remarkable for her beauty. She also was remarkable for her mental capacity. He became giddy. Now, this story that I'm reading, the words that I'm reading, come down from Anna Gordon's older sister to her daughter. So this is a family story as it was told in the family. “He became giddy and extravagant, neglected his affairs and his wife. And finding that she could not reclaim him, she separated from him. After which, they did not see each other for 20 years.” That's an exaggeration. It was less than 20, but still. “They then accidentally met at the house of a mutual friend. He did not recognize his wife, but was charmed with her beauty. And after she had left her friend's house, Mr. Forbes spoke in raptures of her and lamented his hard fate that he was not at liberty to offer himself. The lady of the house, smiling, asked him if he had no recollection of seeing that lady before. And he replied, none. She then informed him the lady was his wedded wife. He then implored her to bring about a reconciliation. And she promised to do her best on condition he could convince her he was a changed man. After the preliminaries were settled, they were reunited.” And Lilias Forbes” – the first wife of Professor Thomas Gordon and the woman who happened to be Anna's mom – was born after their second union.” Their eldest daughter was married to Professor Thomas Gordon's older brother. There were 25 years between the two sisters. Isn't that wild?

AT: Hang on, hang on. A pair of sisters married a pair of brothers?

RP: Yes, exactly. (AT: Okay.) The older sister, who was born the first union, married the older brother. And the second one, who was married after they got together again, who was Anna's mom, married Thomas Gordon, her dad. And both of those guys were professors at King's College in Old Aberdeen. That's only one. There are so many stories of this family that read like ballads. You can see why she was attracted to the form. And that's why I call it *The Ballad World of Anna Gordon*, because it feels as if her entire world was constructed in a cosmos constructed of ballads.

AT: Well, you mentioned her sister in terms of this family story getting passed down. So we got to talk about her sister who married the American.

RP: Exactly. There were three girls. First of all, they all lived in old Aberdeen. And she must have known her grandmother, that wild woman who married William Forbes twice, because that woman lived to 89 and she lived in old Aberdeen. And so she didn't die until Anna was 12. So she must have known what always sounds to me like a really formidable woman. Anyway, Lilias Forbes, who, as you heard, was the youngest daughter of William Forbes, died when Anna was, I think, maybe 13. And her older sister was 15. And then they lived with their dad, obviously, in the house that the university provided, which was called Humanity Castle, which was a big house, lots of rooms, three stories. And he brought interesting people home for dinner, and they must have had a few servants and so on. Okay, so that's where they're living when this young man comes from America and enrolls in the university. He was of Scottish descent. His father had gone to King's College. His father had actually had Thomas Gordon as a professor, because Thomas Gordon taught Greek and Latin. And he taught all the incoming students for generation upon generation upon generation. He was there for 60 years. He was very long-lived, and he worked at the university for 60 years.
So this guy, whose name was John Scott, his father had gone to King's, and he got into trouble when somebody insulted his father and called him out on a duel. And he took the challenge and dueled with this guy and shot somebody. So then the guy's friends were out gunning for John Scott, and he had to leave town. So

he left. And what he did was he went to Scotland, and he went to old Aberdeen, and he enrolled in the university that his dad had gone to. And he visited his father's old professor, Thomas Gordon. Thomas Gordon was very hospitable and invited John Scott to visit. And his two daughters, Anna Gordon and Elizabeth Gordon, the older one, were the ones who poured tea, right, and cut the cake and were the hostesses of these friendly visits. And John Scott was supposed to be a very well-spoken and beautiful, gorgeous man. And Elizabeth Gordon was extremely competent and also beautiful and also smart. And before long, these two were falling in love, and they eloped. It took a while before Thomas Gordon forgave her, but he did. And 10 months after they eloped, a baby was born named Robert Eden Scott. And Robert Eden Scott plays a role in this whole story because he was the nephew who wrote down the ballads when Anna Gordon sang them. He was the scribe, and he also did the musical notation because he had just learned how to play the transverse flute. But the story about Elizabeth and John is that they had this baby, and then John, who wanted to be an Episcopalian minister. Now, you have to understand that in Scotland, there's a national church. It's a Presbyterian church. There were Episcopalian churches, but there were many, many fewer, and very few of those had jobs and so on. He was going to go back home to America where they needed Episcopalian ministers. And he got a job, a very lucrative job, as chaplain to the royal governor, that is the governor who had been sanctioned by the King of England, the royal governor of Maryland. We're talking about America right before the Revolutionary War. So it's still a colony of England, and John Scott is offered this very good position as chaplain to the royal governor of Maryland, whose name was Robert Eden, and that explains the name of the nephew, why he was called Robert Eden Scott.

So what did they do? They left the baby with the grandpa and the two aunts. They just left their baby, because it was a three-month rough voyage, they weren't sure that the baby could make it. It was tough. It was physically tough. So they left the baby behind with grandpa and with the aunts, and they went to America, where they first took this position as chaplain. And then when the Revolutionary War broke out, because the revolutionary committees weren't entirely convinced of his loyalty to the revolutionary cause, they insisted that he move inland, that he not stay on the coast. And so he set up a plantation in inland Virginia called Gordonsdale, named after his wife's last name. A that's where they lived through the Revolutionary War, and they had more children. And those kids were full brother and sister to Robert Eden Scott, same mother and father. It's just that he had never met them, and they had never met him. He had never really even met his mother. And so there's another dramatic story told later in the book about Robert Eden Scott, 21, decides to go to the newfound United States. Its revolution has happened. There's this new country. His father has died, but his mother is alive, and he's got these siblings who live there, too. So he takes the three-month voyage across the ocean, and he ends up first in Annapolis and then in Gordonsdale, Virginia. His mother writes that when this son of hers walks through the door, she looks at this stranger and says, “that man looks like my father.” And it must have been partly body language and gesture. That's who brought him up. Her father brought him up. So that's a little bit of the story of that family. It was a very interesting family.

And offspring of cousins went all over the world. They went to the East Indies. They went to the West Indies. They went to England. And I tell as many of those stories as I can. And as I say, I include family histories that took me probably a year for each page to gather the information about birth and death dates. The trouble with doing family history in Scotland is everybody's named the same thing. To look for Gordons and Forbes in the Northeast is like looking for Smith and Jones in a U.S. telephone directory. You could tear your hair out. It's impossible. And they all have the same first names, too. So you have to do birth and death dates, and that's not easy to find. But I did what I could. And there are four really solid family trees in that book.

AT: So you mentioned earlier that she didn't marry until she was 40. And something that I noticed when I was putting together my book, *The View from the Hill*, about women who made history after 40, was that a common theme was that the reason that they didn't do these things younger in their lives was because they were busy taking care of their families. So I'm wondering if part of why she didn't marry until she was 40 was because she was left to take care of her baby nephew. She, I assume, more or less raised him. And she's probably also

taking care of her father in that way that daughters were often expected to become like the housekeeper and the hostess and all of that for widowed fathers. So am I right in that assumption, or have I just made that up?

RP: No, no, no. I'm sure that some of that is true. There was another sister named Margaret. When Elizabeth left to go to America, Margaret also absconded from the household because they were all very musical. And Margaret was very musical. And she made friends with this wealthy, childless English couple in Aberdeen who invited her to come and stay with them. They sang and played piano and they were very musical. And she sang as well. And she went to live with them. She visited home and so on, but she was no longer living at Humanity Castle. Thomas Gordon, Anna's dad, did remarry and I'm sure that some of that had to do with taking care of Robert Eden Scott, the baby. But yes, Anna definitely had household chores. Even once there was a stepmother, and they got along very well, she must have been expected to show this new woman the ropes. The stepmother was an extremely generous, kindly, sympathetic person. For instance, when Robert Eden Scott took that trip to see his mother, the stepmother took a ring off her finger that the dad had given her when they got engaged and gave it to Robert Eden Scott to give to his mother when he got there and wrote a really lovely letter to the mother about what a great kid Robert had turned into. You get a sense of not a competitive at all, but a very kindly, generous stepmother.
Anyway, yes, I think that's true that she was at home partly. But I also think it's true that she was quite an educated woman. Thomas Gordon educated generations of young men in Old Aberdeen, and he also is said to have educated his daughters. And for a while, he was lodging students. For a while, students were living in the building and being tutored by him. And I'm sure that those young women sat in some of those sessions and learned a lot from him. So what I'm saying is that she was a particularly well-educated woman for the times. And I suspect that there weren't a lot of men that interested her until this guy comes along, Andrew Brown, who, interestingly, had been a chaplain in the British Army during the Revolutionary War and had been posted to North America. So he had been in the Revolutionary War on the British side. And when the surrender came, he was quartered with General Burgoyne's troops in New England, in Boston, in particular at a place called Inman Farms in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Now, I live one block from Inman Square, which I assume was named after Inman Farms. So right where I'm sitting was where Andrew Brown was quartered when the British Army surrendered in the Revolutionary War before he was shipped home to Scotland, where he met Anna Gordon and married her.
The whole time that they were in Fife, he was trying to get a proper house and didn't. So when they first got married, they lived in the Falkland Palace, which today is Scottish National Trust and quite gorgeous. It's a wonderful old palace. And it had been built in the 15th century for the Scottish kings. It was the place that they preferred to go to hunt. When Anna lived there with Andrew, there were only a few rooms that had ceilings that were waterproof. The rest of it was open to the rain. And the whole thing had been falling apart for a long time. I have a picture in the book showing the towers in disarray and open and people just hanging around in what would have been the gardens in front. So it was just a thoroughfare for local folks. And that's where the heritors or the property owners put their minister while they dithered about whether or not to build a manse for him. I've been to Falkland Palace and I've walked through it and I've seen where they lived in the basement. And I've seen what that would have looked like and how dark it would have been. And people visited it at the turn of the century. So Walter Scott has a scathing remark about a few bad rooms in Falkland Palace. This last weekend, there was just a celebration of the book and the balladry, the music, in Falkland Palace. So that's where they lived. And for the 12 years that they lived there, 1788 to 1802, when they moved to Trenent in East Lothian. It's much closer to Edinburgh. The letters that she wrote from that time all have the upper right hand designation of where she's writing from. It says Falkland Palace. It's pretty wild given that that's where kings used to live, but it wasn't very fancy when she was there. And she wrote a poem to a friend of hers and it's in the book as well. And it was a poem meant to be sung to the tune of Auld Lang Syne, in which she writes to a friend that she's now living where the kings used to burl wine, drink wine, because that's the beginning of Sir Patrick Spence. So she's now living where the kings used to burl wine and she wishes that he would come and visit them

because she misses him. This is an old friend of hers that she used to sing with. He used to sing and he used to play the harp and she used to sing. I think she must have in her youth sung a lot because she learned those ballads so completely and thoroughly. She must have kept them alive by singing.

AT: Well, let's talk about the ballads themselves because I've been more interested in the family drama. (laughter) But one of the things that I really love about this project is that there are a dozen beautiful recordings of the ballads available on the book's companion website, which I will link in the description and everyone should go check it out when you're done listening to this. So how did that come about?

RP: Well, a ballad is not a ballad unless it's not a ballad unless it is sung, period. A ballad is not a ballad if it's just words on a page. That's because what the music does is it enhances the meaning of the text where the breaks are, where the breaths are, where the new lines start. All of those things feed into the meaning of the text. And it just never gets across in the same way if it's simply words on a page. And you can dismiss them when you read them as words on the page, but you cannot when you hear them as they unspool. It's the slowness, partly, that you're forced to actually live in them for a little bit of a while and imagine those scenes. There's something incredibly visual about ballads. You really, very rarely hear them without seeing some of those scenes. I speculate in the book that the narrative structure of ballads is the same as dreams.
So as I was learning about Anna Gordon and thinking about the ballads that she left for us, I had a friend in Scotland, a traditional singer of great expertise and experience. And I kept talking to her about it. She was very interested in Anna Gordon. Alison (McMorland) was a real buddy throughout this. She drove me places and talked to me about the places that Anna had lived and every new discovery that I told her, she got excited about. And I said to her at a certain point, “maybe you should record some of these ballads.” And she said she would, that she was interested in that. So I sent her the manuscript with the musical notation for some of them. And what she did, since she learns traditional music through her ears rather than from a manuscript, she had a fiddler play those notes. And she recorded that, and then she listened to it until she had it in her marrow. Once she had those tunes by heart and deeply embedded in her memory, then she put the words to them.
And Alison is a great singer and a great traditional singer of ballads. So she knew just how to phrase things, just the pace for them. And she called upon a friend, Joe Miller, who is a musicologist and has a gorgeous voice also, to do four of them. So Allison does eight of them, and Joe does four of them. The thing about the companion website that I really insisted on, that I fought for, is that it has the words as well as the singing. So when you go online and click on one of those ballads, Kempion or Young Bekie or whoever, if you click on it, you hear it, but you can also read the words. You can scroll down and follow the text, which I think is very important. Because until you have heard it through once, heard the story and understood it, then the second time you've got it. You don't need to look at the words again. You need it the first time to make sure you've got all the words, because some of those words are Scottish words that make sense when you see them, but they sound awkward to an English, especially an American, ear.
So there are 12 ballads, and they are done in the time-honored style, which is rather slow. Some of them have a bit of accompaniment coming in and out. We didn't have serious accompaniment to any of them, because people didn't do accompanied singing of ballads in the 18th century. But Alison, very cleverly, decided to try to duplicate domestic music-making. That is, people sitting around in a domestic setting making music together might very well have picked up a flute or a guitar and joined for a few verses or played the tune and then let the singer continue a cappella. So that's what these are like. These ballads are recorded in a manner that is attempting to duplicate 18th century domestic music-making. And they are historically as accurate as anything you'll ever get. So you're listening to 18th century balladry when you hear those ballads. They're really beautiful.

AT: Well, and for anyone who's not aware, recreating historical music is a much broader field than a lot of people might be aware of. So you have folks who are making historically accurate instruments, for example,

because what we have today is not the same materials, for example, as what they would have been using in those times. And I find this really fascinating because it is a way of sharing experiences across centuries as immersive history, similar to people who recreate recipes from centuries ago that are not how we would make them today. And often they are awful. I've talked with Beth Hubble for several episodes, and she told me that one of her students made her cookies from a recipe by Hildegard von Bingen. And the cookies are awful. (laughter) But it is a way to share that experience that generations past would have had on some level. So when we're talking about recreating this music as accurately as possible, my understanding is that for at least one of them, Thomas Rhymer and the Queen of Elfland, there was no music available. And I believe there's also a question of how accurate Robert's own notations would have been.

RP: Yeah, there was a man named Bertrand Bronson, who was a professor at Berkeley in the 50s, and he put together four volumes called *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*. And he collected tunes in America and in the UK for as many of those Child ballads as he could find were sung, were still being played and sung. And he used manuscripts as well as live recordings and so on. So it was a thorough search of the field for the tunes of the Child ballads. There are 305 Child ballads, by the way, ballads that Francis James Child collected. And Bronson didn't think that Robert Eden Scott's notations of the tunes that his aunt was singing were accurate based on how well they fit the words. So he also developed what he called conjectural readings, the readings that he thought probably were the tunes that Robert Eden Scott had not accurately recorded. But we went back to the original manuscript. We went back to what Robert Eden Scott had written down on the staff notation, because we thought that was probably closer to the original. Some of them are perfectly tuneful and work fine. And then, yes, there were a few that just didn't have tunes, because Scott did not write down tunes for every single one of Anna Gordon's ballads. And she generated the words to some of those ballads later than the time that they sat down and did it together. Because people would write to her and then she would send them another ballad. So then we went to Bronson and we would try to find tunes that came from the northeast of Scotland as close to her dates as possible, as historically close to her as we could. But always we have given the tune source, so whoever listens to those recorded ballads has very accurate information about where we got the tune. The words all come from the manuscripts of Anna Gordon Brown, of course.

AT: Now, coming back to the broader context of ballads, because you mentioned that her grandfather was a composer, and because of the nature of ballads as folk music, there's often no single creator of the story and the words. (RP: Right.) But you get different variations and evolutions over the years telling these communal folklore stories that also typically don't have a specific known origin point, but are passed down from generation to generation. So what do you think Anna Gordon Brown was contributing other than sitting down with Robert to document this? What was she bringing to that tradition?

Rp: The process of collecting tells one where ballads were popular, because there are some where there are lots of versions in a certain area and then none somewhere else. It is said that Barbara Allen, for example, is the most widely known, widely sung ballad, both in the UK and in America, that you can find versions everywhere and so on. I think the Smithsonian has a tape that Charles Seeger made of Barbara Allen from everywhere in the world. Or Twa Sisters, which Anna called The Cruel Sister. That particular ballad, which is Child No. 10, that has specific versions in America, in the UK, and in Scandinavia. And they have very different characteristics. It's like an animal that has evolved here, here, and here. And it evolves with different characteristics in these different contexts. And that is really interesting. Just to study those forms of evolution. And some of Anna Gordon's ballads are found nowhere except the northeast of Scotland. They really are very localized to that area. But when you compare Anna Gordon's versions to other versions of ballads that have cropped up elsewhere, been collected elsewhere, what you see is that her versions are the most complete, the least fragmentary, the ones that have the most detail in them. The splicing is especially wonderful, which verse is used in which order, how the verses are ordered, or which details you find, what the language is. Her ballads

include verses that nobody else's ballads include. So I think that what she contributed was literary quality. I think she was a poet. And she improved these folk tales that came to her in song form. And that she was able to work within the strictures of the rhythms and the rhymes that are required to make those ballads work. And made them more literarily satisfactory. They're better. They're definitely better. Other than my analyses, which I do do, there are other literary critics who have written about how her version of this ballad or that ballad is a more expert and poetic and satisfying version. So I'm not the first to say this, but I'm saying it loudest.

AT: I mentioned earlier, Thomas Rhymer and Queen of Elfland, which my understanding is this is a pretty popular story, but that her version of the ballad is the earliest known explicitly Scottish version. So what is the, I guess, relevance of that? Why is that important?

RP: Because it probably is the earliest. It means that other versions have derived from it, that people have heard it. People in other countries heard her version and told the story again in their way with the particular twists that made it local for them or that made it important for them. One of the examples that I give is Lampkin. Lampkin is a ballad which, if it follows certain form, if the motivation for the mason who goes back into the house and kills people, if that motivation is present, then it is thought to be from northeast of Scotland. Other versions have been found where the motivation is dropped or it's combined with a different ballad and the story is altered and so on. But Lampkin is an interesting example where following where it turns up and the form that it's in where it turns up tells you something about who carried it and to whom it was important. And the thing that I found really interesting about Lampkin is that, first of all, the name Lampkin is a Flemish name. The northeast coast of Scotland was settled by Flemings for a few centuries only, and there was a reason for that historically. And this version of Lampkin that Anna Gordon sings is to be found only in the northeast of Scotland. You don't find it in England, you don't find it elsewhere in Scotland and so on. But then a version turns up in the United States in the very county that Anna Gordon's sister lived in, the county where Gordonsdale, the plantation that her sister and John Scott owned and ran, where they lived. A version turns up in 1920 and then you go into Child and you look at his notes and he tells about somebody in the 1880s who reports in that same location, hearing the local Black community singing something like Lampkin with those words. So it turns out that that ballad that we know comes from the northeast of Scotland in particular, and that Anna Gordon knew and knew all the words to. She has the complete story and it's one of her more masterful narrations that her version seems to have gone across the ocean and is being picked up by a Black community where her sister lived.

Now, her sister would have known that ballad, they had the same mother and aunt, they heard the same ballads sung around the house when they were young. It's just that Elizabeth, who was also very musical, played the piano, played the guitar, but she was never asked to write down the ballads and she was never collected right the way Anna Gordon was collected. But she probably knew the same ballad, but she probably knew the same ballads. So it's interesting to find this ballad interestingly altered in the mouths of the Black community where she lived. And not only that, but the plantation that she ran, of course, was a slave-driven plantation. Now, the story of Lampkin is the story of a mason who builds a castle for a man, for a lord, and is not paid for his labor. And then the lord goes abroad, leaving his wife and children behind. And the mason creeps in with the help of a nurse who says that the lady of the house was never kind to her. And these two servants between them kill the lady and kill the baby. They eventually get caught and punished, but they do violence. What's interesting is the way that violence is damped down in the Black version, sung by people who are expected to work for nothing and to care for the children and the property of white owners without having any of their own, etc. What's interesting to me about the changes in the texts is that it's somewhat disguised. The violence against the master and the mistress and the child is somewhat disguised and definitely damped down. And a lot of the more violent verses are dropped.

I found the fact that that was a ballad that you could find in that community, that is really interesting. And the fact that what was done to the text is also pretty interesting. Now, I've also got a lot of information in the book

about which Child ballads were collected in the Black communities in those southern states, because that has been done. We know which Child ballads are sung in North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, and so on. And so whatever is known, I include, and I include all the references and so on. Because the southern states of the United States were settled in part by Scots. And so they brought their music with them. And so balladry got transferred into the new United States. And some of that came from Anna Gordon.

AT: You've really touched on how ballads can tell us history. About migration, about values, and what people believed in, and maybe ways that they found community through this music and these stories. Why were they important to people at the time? Because I can think of a couple examples, like I'm guessing literacy wasn't as common. I know books were way more expensive. And so you can't pass things on in written form as easily. And music gives you a way to transmit these stories orally. Maybe it's a way to find community through these shared narratives and potentially shared values.

RP: You can remember stories better if they have tunes to them. Anything with a tune sticks with you better than it does if you don't have it. I remember putting tunes to chemistry formulae when I went to college. And so there I am sitting in the chemistry exam humming to myself. There are two things. There's, first of all, the general importance of folk music, which is the music that people make. Until very recently, if you wanted to hear music, you had to be in the room with somebody who made it. It's as simple as that. There was no other way of getting music. That has changed just in a few generations. So that's one thing, is that the love of music required people who could sing or who could play.
And then these stories, which are very suggestive and are put together with lots of blank places that you can project your own meanings into. These stories are best passed around when they go with tunes. Folk music became very important in the second half of the 18th century, in Scotland in particular, because of, first of all, the Treaty of Union, and second of all, Culloden. Culloden is how we refer to an uprising where the Scots tried to break away from England. And they did it by using armed force to try to put the Scottish kings, who had been displaced by the Glorious Revolution, to put them back on the throne. By the time of Culloden, we've got these Hanoverian Georges, who are the kings of England. They're from Germany. And the Jacobites, as they're called in Scotland, wanted to put the Stewarts back on the throne of Scotland and England. That's who they thought belonged there. And so there were these uprisings, first in 1715, and then another one in 1745. We call that Culloden. And that was a big, a very bloody and important uprising. And the English put it down with great ferocity and occupied Scottish territory for a long time afterwards, stole property, repressed the inhabitants. There are a lot of outrages that are recorded. And it was during that time and after that Scottish intellectuals and patriots began to feel that they wanted to preserve Scottish cultural history before it was lost. And that is part of the story of why ballads were collected in the second half of the 18th century. It's because they were part of Scottish history that English hegemony had nothing to do with, but they were part of a pure Scottish past that Scottish patriots wanted to preserve and valorize, celebrate. So that's what I was also referring to, the importance of balladry during the Scottish Enlightenment.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast, and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.