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*Review of SIGRID RIEUWERTS, ED. THE BALLAD REPERTOIRE OF ANNA GORDON, MRS BROWN OF FALKLAND Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011 pp. xiii + 339, isbn 978 1 89797 632 6*

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## SIGRID RIEUWERTS, ED. *THE BALLAD REPERTOIRE OF ANNA GORDON, MRS BROWN OF FALKLAND* Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011 pp. xiii + 339, isbn 978 1 89797 632 6

RUTH PERRY

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knew – I played in consequence additionally ill & sh<sup>d</sup> have been very angry w<sup>th</sup> myself for having made the attempt had it been in my power to avoid it – Scheener however tried to comfort me by saying he had not been so well accomp<sup>d</sup> all the eve<sup>s</sup> as in my slow movement & other flattering things’ (223).

Olleson supplies a generous quantity of footnotes, which give source information and identify institutions, personages, repertoire and events mentioned in the text, adding contextual detail where appropriate. For the phrases in foreign languages (mostly French) scattered through Susan’s narratives Olleson generally provides English translations within the text. It would be possible to suggest additional features that could have been included: perhaps one side of the running heads (which on both sides of the double spread read simply ‘The Journals and Letters of Susan Burney’) could have given the date of the letter concerned, since to find this may otherwise necessitate turning back many pages. A timeline of Susan’s life together with reference to other family members could have been a useful supplement to, on the one hand, the broad outline given by the chapter titles (such as ‘Mickleham and London, May 1787–July 1794’) and, on the other hand, the long and discursive biographical introduction. But as it stands, the volume is so replete with valuable information, and altogether so thoughtfully conceived and enjoyable to read, that it does ample justice to Susan Burney’s writings. It is surely destined to serve as an important reference source in its field.

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## EDITIONS

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SIGRID RIEUWERTS, ED.

*THE BALLAD REPERTOIRE OF ANNA GORDON, MRS BROWN OF FALKLAND*

Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011

pp. xiii + 339, ISBN 978 1 89797 632 6

The ballad repertoire of Anna Gordon, later Mrs Brown of Falkland, has interested intellectuals, folklorists and music collectors since before 1783. This was approximately the date at which a scholar and enthusiast for Scottish music, William Tytler of Woodhouselee, requested of Anna Gordon’s father, professor Thomas Gordon, that the ballads she had learned as a child be written down for him. Tytler wanted to establish a continuous Scottish musical tradition independent of Italian or English influences, and the old ballads were an important link in his argument. In the years that followed, Anna Gordon – by now Mrs Anna Brown – was appealed to several more times by antiquarians interested in the old songs, and she and her husband wrote out many more of the ballads she had stored in her memory.

The multiple – and overlapping – records of Anna Brown’s repertoire, together with some surviving correspondence about how and when she learned her ballads, and her claimed ignorance of the texts in other collections, have intrigued ballad scholars for the last two hundred years. Because of the differences among records of the same ballads, taken down at intervals of seventeen years or more, scholars interested in oral traditions have used these texts to speculate upon memory, oral transmission and the so-called oral-formulaic method of reconstituting a ballad each time it is performed. The terms of this theory were developed by Milman Parry and his student Albert Lord in relation to the epic ballad singers of Yugoslavia and used more recently by David Buchan to explain the variations in Mrs Brown’s ballad renditions (Albert B. Lord, *Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London: Routledge, 1972)).



Ballads are narrative songs, a literary genre of probable medieval provenance. The great nineteenth-century collector Francis James Child theorized that the popular ballad, as he called it, was a ‘distinct and very important species of poetry’ whose ‘historical and natural place is anterior to the appearance of the poetry of art’. It was an oral verse form, he wrote, that expressed a communal and national spirit and was shared by a society not yet divided ‘by political organization and book-culture into markedly distinct classes’. Unlike the poetry of art, it exhibited the ‘mind and heart of the people’ rather than the subjectivity or self-awareness of any one individual. (‘Ballad Poetry’, in Frederic A. P. Barnard and others, eds, *Johnson’s New Universal Cyclopaedia*, volume 1 (New York: A. J. Johnson & Son, 1877), 365–368, reprinted in Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, corrected edition prepared by Mark F. Heiman and Laura Saxton Heiman, five volumes (Northfield, MN: Loomis House, 2001), volume 1, xxvii–xxxiv.)

Like any literary genre, ballad texts have a characteristic structure, diction, tone and method, and a propensity for certain themes or preoccupations. They deal with complex familial or political situations, compressed into a small compass by their compact and intensely repetitive musical form. Typically a tale is quickly summarized up to its last sequence, and then slows down and expands into a few brightly illuminated scenes in which the main characters speak and act succinctly, dramatically enacting the events of that day in the telling. Dialogue alternates with impersonal third-person narrative. As with fairy tales, descriptions are formulaic rather than particular: maids are fair; they sew silken seams or milk their father’s cows; their gowns are scarlet or brown; horses are milk-white or grey. The main characters lack specificity; they are mothers or lords or sailors or sisters, inhabiting symbolic familial or social positions in the story rather than possessing individualized personalities. Thus there is no character development and no narrative of psychological or emotional response. The narration is all carried out from the outside, so to speak: we are told what the characters do and say, not what they think or how they feel, thus contributing to the famous ‘objectivity’ of the ballad mode.

Much of what is distinctive about ballads, of course, stems directly from the fact of their oral transmission. Stock epithets and adjectives – ‘grass-green sleeve’ or ‘milk-white steed’ – were more easily remembered than more idiosyncratic descriptions, and were easily slotted into a line to fill out the rhythm or give a rhyme. While there are exceptions, the typical ballad metre is the ‘common-metre’ quatrain with an aabb rhyme scheme (though many of Anna Brown’s verses are abcb), alternating between iambic tetrameter and trimeter on successive lines. The melody, often using gapped scales and generally not exceeding about ten notes in overall compass, is repeated for each verse.

Mrs Brown’s ballads were famous in her own day for their texts, rather than their music, but her nephew Robert Eden Scott wrote out the melodies for fifteen of her ballads (out of almost three dozen); he was an amateur, and just learning to play the flute. She promised to write out the tunes for another set of words that she sent to William Tytler’s son in 1800, but if she did commit them to paper they have been lost, despite the survival of that later batch of texts in her handwriting. Child thought her repertoire ‘superior’ to any other ballads, but he was not much interested in the music of these cultural artefacts, and included few tunes in his compendium.

Bertrand Bronson attempted to remedy this situation with his marvellous four-volume collection of *Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959–1972), gathered from a wide spectrum of printed, recorded and live sources in the United Kingdom and North America. Where Scott had notated the tunes to his aunt’s ballads, Bronson included these. Because of his dissatisfaction with the nephew’s sometimes rather awkward notations, however, Bronson also offered his own ‘conjectural’ readings – what he thought were most probably the real melodies that Scott had been attempting to convey. Happily, both of these musical texts – Scott’s original 1783 notations and Bronson’s conjectural readings – are included in this edition of Mrs Brown’s ballad repertoire, although the editor’s account of Bronson’s musical thinking is occasionally somewhat garbled. The editorial notes also conveniently specify which ballad tunes can be found in Alexander Campbell’s *Albyn’s Anthology* (1816), George R. Kinloch’s *Ancient Scottish Ballads* (1827) and William Christie’s *Traditional Ballad Airs* (1876) – information also given in Bronson.



From the point of view of the literary texts, this book must now be considered the definitive edition of the ballads of Anna Gordon – a repertoire collected in several manuscripts by different hands and in different circumstances. The editor, Sigrid Rieuwerts, has conscientiously unravelled the different manuscript sources and laid them out side by side where one can compare them. (In the interests of full disclosure I should add that I have been working on a biography of Mrs Brown for some years now and shared my sources with Dr Rieuwerts at an early stage of her work.) She has also included full transcripts of many of the letters in various archives that relate to these ballads. Because she is familiar with the career of Robert Jamieson, one of the collectors interested in Mrs Brown's ballads, she has been able to identify his handwriting on one of the important manuscripts and to correct their chronology. I am not sure that her alphabetic labelling of the various manuscripts (A–E) will be adopted in preference to the labels previously used to identify the sources of Mrs Brown's ballads, but her meticulous transcriptions, her careful use of watermarks to date the sources and the clarity with which she lays out the sequence of their creation are invaluable.

For the student of music, there is little here that is not in Bronson's *Traditional Tunes*, although the facsimile reproductions of Scott's 1783 transcriptions, including tempo markings, surely ought to be of interest from a performance point of view. For each of the fifteen ballads notated by Scott, the singer Katherine Campbell has fitted the words of the first verse to Bronson's conjectural melodic texts in the notes at the back of the present volume, presumably as a guide to other singers. Walter Scott's daughter, Sophia, also had access to these fifteen notated ballads, and copied some into her own music notebook with her own emendations. Five of these musical notations from Sophia Scott are also reproduced in the notes to this volume, from an earlier article by Ailie Monro ('"Abbotsford Collection of Border Ballads": Sophia Scott's Manuscript Book with Airs', *Scottish Studies* 2 (1976), 91–108). The five ballads included from Sophia Scott's notebook are 'Jack the Little Scot' (Child 99), 'Lady Elspat' (Child 247), 'Brown Robin' (Child 97A), 'Twa Sisters' (Child 10) and 'Clark Colven' (Child 42A). As Rieuwerts rightly observes, 'However inaccurately Mrs Brown's tunes may have been taken down they are invaluable to our understanding of an early Scottish ballad tradition'. This importance derives in part from the fact that they are different from other tunes to the same ballads, together with their position 'amongst the oldest and, in four cases, the only records' of tunes for particular texts (69).

This edition will be of the first interest to ballad scholars, to traditional singers hunting for material and to anyone interested in the musical landscape of eighteenth-century Scotland. I found a few minor differences from my own readings in Rieuwerts' transcriptions of Scottish words in the ballad texts, and proofing slips such as a reversed sequence in identifying which Child ballads were meant in a letter written by Mrs Brown to an interlocutor (51), but these are minor quibbles. The edition is a near-impeccable work of textual scholarship, and anyone who cares about eighteenth-century Scottish ballads will be delighted to have it.

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ROSANNA SCALFI MARCELLO, ED. DEBORAH HAYES AND JOHN GLENN PATON  
*12 CANTATAS FOR ALTO VOICE AND BASSO CONTINUO*  
Fayetteville, AR: ClarNan, 2012  
pp. xxi + 175, NO ISBN

This volume is the first modern edition of the only extant works by Rosanna Scalfi Marcello (born 1704 or 1705), the gondola singer whose voice so entranced the Venetian nobleman and composer Benedetto Marcello that he made her his wife. With the notable exception of Barbara Strozzi, we have relatively few