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Universidad de Navarra
Institute for Culture and Society

MARIE CURIE ACTIONS

Conference on Transitional Texts (Nov 1-Nov 3, 2018)
Institute for Culture and Society
University of Navarra (Pamplona)

NOVEMBER 3
12:00 - 12:30 Andrew Breeze (University of Navarra)

Oral narratives in twentieth-century Scotland and Ireland

From the late 1930s onwards, the English philologist Kenneth Jackson (1909-91) recorded folktales from speakers of Irish and Gaelic in Ireland, Nova Scotia, and the West of Scotland. He summarized the results of his researches in a classic volume, _*The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*_(Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), which is less well-known than it should be, for it was published in Wales and deals mainly with medieval and modern stories in the Celtic languages, familiar to a small minority only.

What he said there should be of wide interest. He drew attention to the familiar classification of folk-tale motifs by Stith Thompson and others, nevertheless proposing that 'popular tale' is a better term for such narratives than 'folktale', because in pre-modern times such narratives were appreciated by all social classes. Having worked with professional storytellers in Ireland, he also stressed differences between oral and written narrative. An oral narrative has to have coherence of structure. If it does not, it will soon be forgotten. It thus differs fundamentally from written narrative. On that basis he declared, for example, that the twelfth-century Welsh _Four Branches of the Mabinogi, markedly incoherent in their structure, were not composed by a professional storyteller, but are surely by a gifted narrator with access to professional scribes. Jackson's observations are of permanent value when the telling of tales by professional narrators remote from print culture is now extinct in Europe.

Keywords: oral narratives, Irish&Scottish folktales, storytelling