CHAPTER V

SCOTTISH AND WELSH DRAMA
As regards Scots as a regional language David Daiches says, "the growing tendency of Scottish writers to write in English, while continuing to talk (and in a sense to "feel") in Scots, led to the disappearance of the Scots literary language and the survival of Scots only as a series of regional dialects."\(^1\)

1. "Campbell of Kilmhor"\(^2\) by J. A. Ferguson is a tragedy with an historical background. The period to which it relates is after the rising of '45. The cottage of Mary Stewart is visited by officers of King George in search of certain persons in a state of proscription on account of their crimes and treasons. They were hiding together secretly and trying to escape from the kingdom. Mary Stewart hid her son Dugald in a barn as soon as the approaching steps were heard. The army officers at first thought that the bird had flown and that their search was, therefore, fruitless. But certain signs in the cottage made them suspicious and they carried their enquiry into every part of the cottage and the barn outside. Dugald Stewart was discovered and when threats

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did not make him disclose the secret about his friends, he
was sentenced to death, but Morag, his cousin disclosed
the facts on being assured pardon, but Campbell of Kilmhor
played false and the young man was shot dead. His mother
Mary Stewart did not betray the rebels, accepting the death
of her son as a form of glory which would transform him into
a hero and a martyr. The mother was, therefore, shocked at
the girl's thoughtless conduct.

The betrayal and the martyrdom constitute a double
tragedy. The play ends in an atmosphere of gloom through
which no light is seen except the belief that heroes have
greatly to suffer, yet they have a life even when they are
cut off, more splendid than any in this world. The language
used is partly Scottish dialect and often achieves an effect
of considerable vigour and rude strength, particularly in the
speeches of Campbell. The other merit is an unsentimental
confrontation of the problem the play presents.

2. "Rory Aforesaid" by John Brandane. The plot is
concerned with the trial of a man charged with killing a
sheep. The lawyer advises him to plead not guilty but the

3. John Brandane's "Rory Aforesaid", One-Act Plays of To-day
puritan conscience of the man does not permit him to accept the defence because he has actually killed the sheep. The defence lawyer also suggested his shamming madness; he followed this advice and fell to baaing like a sheep every time any question was put to him. He was cross-examined but the cry he made in imitation of a sheep led everyone to believe that he had gone mad. The owner, however, deposed that he had "heard" the sheep being killed, for its groaning suddenly stopped. The judge did not take this as admissible evidence. The man was acquitted and when the lawyer asked for the fee, he baa'd again and thus escaped payment. In the court room confusion arose from a charge against the defence lawyer for not having paid the price of a length of tweed he had bought from the sheep owner. This is a prelude to a general confusion in the court where the law administered seemed to rely more upon the feeling of the people than upon facts. The comedy arises not only from the witty plea but also, partly at least from the chaos which prevented the charges from being properly heard. The sheep stealer's plea of madness has, however, a background of traditional wit, not confined to one country only.
3. "The Poacher" by J. O. Francis. The play brings before us some members of the lower middle class and we have an opportunity to see how they live and some of the problems they are concerned with. The play contains some Welsh words and expressions which give it a local colour, a glossary explains the terms.

The plot briefly is that Twmas who used to be a poacher is trying to turn over a new leaf under the influence of the local chapel and the inspiration of one Mr. Hughes. Mary, his wife does not, however, like her husband to give up poaching because the income of the family not being sufficient for its needs, an occasional fowl or two made things easier for her. Dicky who was his companion on his unlawful excursions comes to talk to him. Fearing that his influence would shake his resolution, he retired into a backroom. For Dicky poaching is the passion and the poetry of his life. His nostalgia for the moonlight on the hills and his comradeship with Twmas seemed to possess for him a moving quality. The company on these excursions was completed by Fan, the dog, and a ferret. Dick spoke of the old soldier, a rabbit which nobody could capture. Twmas had a theory about its hiding place which he discussed with

Mr. Hughes who came to see him. His eyes showed his secret passion for poaching and he listened with great eagerness. The previous night he was seen on the hills on the track of the "old soldier". He put on a hat with flaps to conceal his face. Later he changed to attend a cinema show. When Twmas heard this he forgot that he wanted to be respectable and also to play an important role in the village life; in fact, to be a big personage in the chapel by not keeping low company. What he heard from Dicky filled him once more with the old passion. A promise of the post of assistant superintendent made by Hughes could not, after these disclosures, hold him back from rejoicing with his poaching comrades. He went forth with Dicky, the dog and the ferret. Mrs. Mary was delighted to see that her husband was going to supplement the family budget and provide meat for the table. When she saw her husband was gone she told her daughter not to buy meat the next day from the butcher. She was satisfied that this particular item was henceforth assured of a steady supply.

The comedy lies in the frustration of the desire for respectability and for playing an important role in the chapel including election to the Rural District Council. The discovery of Hughes as a secret poacher in spite of his religious exterior is a bit of debunking, which amuses.
A difference is shown between Dicky Bach and the religious man Hughes. The latter finds in the wind and the weather causes for physical discomfort, and refuses to think of them in any other term. Dicky, however, sees nature as an ideal embodiment of joyous and beautiful things. In his view of the poaching excursions, there is no sense that anything is violated or any kind of rule infringed. It seems a mode of fulfilment, a way of being happy and so the two men are reunited, and poaching becomes for them, what it once was, a world of freedom and enjoyment.

The study of the play reveals certain features of the social scene in Wales possessing a special value from the point of view of dramatic representation. In play after play we find the life of the lower classes being introduced. Two hundred years ago, even more recently, this would have been impossible. Fielding had said in *Tom Jones* that the life of the upper classes is monotonous and without variety. In our time, in play and fiction alike, the discovery of this truth has led to a wider attention being paid to lower classes, and as an element of increasing realism, there is an infusion of the dialect in the speeches.

5. "I will venture to say the highest life is much the dullest, and affords very little humour or entertainment" - *Tom Jones*, Vol.II, Book XIV. Everyman's Library (J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd.), p.201.
John Hampden in his Introduction to the Twenty-Four One-Act Plays (Everyman's Library 1959) makes the following observation: "In evangelical Wales the swift conquest made by amateur drama has been even more surprising than in Calvinistic Scotland. Its playwrights, in Welsh and English, now multiply rapidly, but none is more representative than Mr. J.O. Francis".

4. "Under Milk Wood" by Dylan Thomas. A radio play in prose has a dream-like setting. The slow movement of the prose gives this impression. Captain Cat, Mrs.Ogmore-Pritchard, Polly Garter and Mr.Edwards drift from dream to reality and back again. Those they loved and lost, overshadow those who live and give them their companionship. The world of the dead is a framework of reference by whose standard the actual seems a little faded, perhaps a little disappointing. There are some Freudian elements in the dream. Mrs. Willy Willy is spanked by her teacher. This may be an example of the kind of dream psychology Freud investigates.

We catch glimpses of the five hundred souls inhabiting the three quaint streets and the few by-lanes,

forming, as it were, a backwater of life. What is emphasized is a salty individuality belonging to the characters whose voices alone are audible. The process of life goes on and birth, death are episodes which recur at intervals. Time spreads its power and the mood that dominates is that of listening rather than of acting a part. What we hear is a flight of an owl and the dawn advancing, so to speak, by inches. There is religion in the shape of a place of worship which has, however, no aesthetic appeal. The sea plays its background music and the birds with their continual chatter add to its volume. The town-hall bell rope is pulled by Captain Cat rousing from sleep the sleepers every morning. Mrs. Beynon and her daughter Lily speak about the little things which relate to the morning breakfast and we hear that Polly Garter is going to be arrested for "having babies." This is the backwater life with some degree of topsy-turvydom which perhaps expresses the poet's whimsicality rather than an actual state of things. For we do not miss the domestic atmosphere: "frying pans spit, kettles and cats purr in the kitchen." This is an intimate picture; what it says conjures up the home atmosphere. In fact, an intimacy of tone seems to characterize the entire play. The poet is seeing things from inside and is exploring the nerve centre of life and in so doing he slips into a dreaminess of mood. For the present becomes a part of a repetitive pattern which

7. Ibid., p.31.
seems to be an image of eternity itself: "The town smells of seaweed and breakfast all the way down from Bay View, where Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard, in smock and turban, big-besomed to engage the dust, picks at her starchless bread and sips lemonrind tea, to Bottom Cottage, where Mr. Waldo, in bowler and bib, gobbles his bubble-and-squeak and kippers and swigs from the saucebottle."8

There is a lot of humour in such references to Mr. & Mrs. Cherry Owen who "sit down to last night's supper of onions boiled in their overcoats and broth of spuds and baconrind and leeks and bones."9 The statement gives a comical view of the food consumed by certain people.

Time seems sometimes to stay put: The ship's clock in the bar says half past eleven. Half past eleven is opening time. The hands of the clock have stayed still at half past eleven for fifty years."10 The next sentence is a humorous comment on the clock's immobility. "It is always opening time in the Sailors Arms."11

The poet reveals an original power in his description of nature: "among green lathered trees, the white houses of the strewn away farms, where farmboys whistle, dogs shout, cows low, but all too far away for him, or you, to hear. And in the town, the shops squeak open."12

8. Ibid., p.31
9. Ibid., p.32
10. Ibid., p.36
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p.37
All through, the background of nature supplies the liveliest element: "Outside, the sun springs down on the rough and tumbling town. It runs through the hedges of Goosegog Lane, cuffing the birds to sing. Spring whips green down Cockle Row, and the shells ring out. Llaregyb this snip of a morning is wildfruit and warm, the streets, fields, sands and waters springing in the young sun."\textsuperscript{13}

Rev. Eli Jenkins claims: "We are a musical nation."\textsuperscript{14}

It is interesting to note what Geoffrey Moore says on this point: "The Welsh are the only people I know who sing hymns at football matches and in pubs,..."\textsuperscript{15} The attitude of mind that this reveals is reflected in Dylan Thomas's poetry. The play has the effect of a musical fugue. This perhaps explains Dylan Thomas's opposition to introduce any break in the Television entertainment. Philip Burton quotes his opinion: "there was to be no interval. On this point Dylan was adamant.... A play must be an unbroken experience, like a film or a symphony."\textsuperscript{16} That Dylan Thomas writes with exact truth to the atmosphere and background of his country is witnessed by the following verse by R. S. Thomas:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.47  
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p.54  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.68
\end{flushright}
There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics
Wind - bitten towers and castles
With scam ghosts. 17