OWEN, DANIEL (1836 - 1895), novelist

Name: Daniel Owen
Date of birth: 1836
Date of death: 1895
Gender: Male
Occupation: novelist
Area of activity: Literature and Writing
Author: Katherine Williams

Born 20 October 1836 at 53 Maes-y-dref, Mold, Flintshire, the youngest of six children. His father, a coal miner, lost his life, as did two of his sons, when the Argoed coal mine was flooded; Daniel Owen's mother belonged to the family of Thomas Edwards (Twm o'r Nant). He received but little education in his childhood. When he was twelve he began a five years' apprenticeship to a tailor; later, he worked for his old master for ten years. He began to preach in 1864, at the same time as Ellis Edwards. His early education was, doubtless, similar to the description of education given by 'Robyn y Sowldiwr' in *Rhys Lewis*. His work in the tailor's shop gave him an opportunity of getting to know people and to debate and argue about various topics; this experience is evidenced in his novels. There were also competitive meetings held in the town. About this time he translated an American novel, *Twelve Nights in a Bar Room*, his translation being published in a fortnightly periodical called *Charles o'r Bala*. He also wrote descriptions of some inhabitants of Mold to a South Wales periodical - some of these are included in *Straeon y Pentan*. At the same time he contributed to Welsh and English periodicals. He learnt the rudiments of music; like his father, he was a good singer. Although he was a constant chapel-goer, he was 23 years old before he became a church member.

Daniel Owen went to Bala C.M. College in 1865. He did not shine as a student, but he read much English literature. Before the three years' course was completed he left the college rather suddenly in 1867 to return home to look after his mother and a sister who were ill. He returned to his old master, the tailor; he afterwards opened a business on his own account but continued to preach. He gave up preaching in 1876 because his health broke down. He recovered slowly, however, and then, on the recommendation of Roger Edwards, began to write some of his sermons and to make word-sketches of some Calvinistic Methodists for *Y Drysorfa*; these afterwards appeared under the title of *Offrymau Neilltuaeth*. He afterwards agreed, again at the request of Roger Edwards, to write *Y Dreflan*, for publication, chapter by chapter. He then wrote his novel, *Rhys Lewis*, which was printed, chapter by chapter, in *Y Drysorfa* between 1882 and 1885. Afterwards *Enoc Huws* and *Gwen Tomos* were published in *Y Cymro*, a Liverpool weekly newspaper. He died 22 October 1895.

Before the time of Daniel Owen it can be said that nothing of importance had appeared in the world of the Welsh novel - in the sense in which the term novel is understood today. Daniel Owen described in *Rhys Lewis*, *Enoc Huws*, and *Y Dreflan*, the Welsh life that revolved around the Welsh chapel; in *Gwen Tomos* we get rural society - in all these he described certain characters who formed part of that society. He did not sketch the growth and development of those characters or allow them to work out their respective fates - he described them faithfully as they appeared. It is this wealth of detail which

makes his work valuable; he devotes much space to the conversing and the debating which took place among his characters - Saunders Lewis finds in this the influence of the religious 'Society.' His greatest weakness, possibly, is that he endeavours to tie each novel into a knot and that he fails to untie that knot easily and naturally. Although many of his characters were persons whom he knew in the flesh, they are, as we find them, his creations. Up to the present, he is our greatest Welsh novelist, in the quality of his work; he is also our most prolific novelist.

Besides the works named above Daniel Owen wrote *Y Siswrn* (1888). An English translation of *Rhys Lewis* appeared in 1889, and of *Enoc Huws* in 1894-6.

Author

Katherine Williams, (1891 - 1985)

Sources

T. R. Roberts, *Eminent Welshmen: a short biographical dictionary of Welshmen... from the earliest times to the present* (1908), and the sources therein cited

Further Reading

Robert Rhys, *Daniel Owen* (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru 2000)

Isaac Foulkes 'Llyfrbryf,' *Daniel Owen, y nofelydd: bywgraffiad* (Liverpool 1903)

Wikipedia Article: Daniel Owen

Additional Links

NLW Archives: Llawysgrifau Daniel Owen

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