Janina Fitowska-Przybyłowa (1892–1975)

Janina Przybyłowa (maiden name Fitowska) was born at the end of the XIX century and lived well into the second half of the XX century. As a young woman she witnessed the change World War I brought to the world. Obviously, for a Pole, the most important result of this war was independence for Poland after more than one hundred years of nonexistence of the Polish state and brutal oppression of the Polish people by the occupying powers. After the end of the war, the people of Poland had their challenges doubled. Not only did they have to rebuild the country, but also work hard to establish democratic institutions of the new state. Life in Poland wasn’t easy, and Janina Przybyłowa’s life wasn’t easy. Although of petite frame and with some physical disabilities she had to become independent, and worked hard to achieve that. Working as a teacher she pursued higher education at the universities of Lwów and Warsaw. Most of the time she received the highest grades during her studies. She was talented and ambitious, as well as demanding of herself and others. She was very meticulous in whatever she was doing and this sometimes annoyed people. Yet she was able to instill in her students the love of Polish language and literature, and her lectures were fascinating for many of them.

Although she came to Toruń from another part of Poland and the culture and customs of Pomerania must have been very different from those of the Lubaczów – Jarosław – Przemyśl area, it is Toruń where she flourished. She married an established painter, Eugeniusz Przybył, also a fellow teacher and book lover. Their house became the center of artistic and literary life of Toruń. She herself wrote quite a few pieces, at first related to teaching and later to the cultural life of the Toruń area. Looking at the list of her publications one quickly realizes how important books were to her. During the German occupation of World War II her mission became to save the Polish books from Toruń City Library (Książnica Miejska) and the documents of the Book Lovers Society (Towarzystwo Bibliofilów).
After World War II she became the first director of the City Library of Toruń (Książnica Miejska im. Mikołaja Kopernika). She worked hard not only to organize the library but also to make the books available to members of society and to encourage people to read. The tragic years of the German occupation were always on her mind. She tried through her writings and activities to save memories of people that perished in the war. She herself was for a while almost forgotten. Even her tombstone did not have a name on it.

This article contains her biography and bibliography of her writings and publications.

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