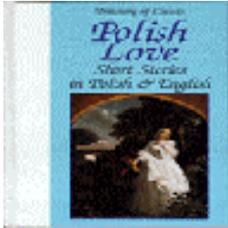

Treasury of Classic Polish Love Short Stories in Polish and English, translated and edited by Mirosław Lipinski (1997), 110 pages.



This modest volume is part of the series assembled by Hippocrene Books that deal with love in literatures of many countries. The title of the book is rather exaggerated; after all, there are only five stories, three of which are by little-known writers. Also, this book should have included a preface to introduce these authors and explain why these particular stories were chosen.

A short story is a difficult form. The content and the style indicate whether the result has any literary merit. One could compare it to a sketch by a painter. With a keen eye we can discern whether the sketch offers evidence of talent or not. On the other hand, the work may not justly represent the artist. Such is the case here.

Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916) and Zofia Nałkowska (1884-1954) are well-known. The first offers us the poignant story of a lonely sculptor widowed for twenty years; the second tells about a kitten-like, insecure woman who was meant to get married rather than plunge into an affair with a painter. This is a well-written satire. T. Rittner's (1873--1921) Amsterdam episode is hardly worth remembering. Karol Irzykowski (1873-1944) was primarily a literary critic; his short tale involves a somewhat surprising adventure involving a student climbing through the window to be near the object of admiration. Stanisław Dygat (1914-1978) recalls his first dance when his beloved inquires whether he likes poetry in general (oh, yes!) and what he thinks of the poem by Tuwim which begins (in Polish) with these hilarious words:

*Na stacji Chandra Unyńska
Gdzieś w mordobijskim powiecie
Telegrafista Piotr Płaksin
Nie umiał grać na klarnecie...*

In this instance, the humor is largely lost in translation:

*At the Chandra Unynski station
Somewhere in a head-bashing district
The telegraph operator Peter Wimperer
Did not know how to play the clarine*

Alas, before the boy has a chance to explore the promising relationship, an enterprising classmate snatches the girl away. Lastly, there is a short soliloquy by Halina Poświatowska (1935-1967), a talented lyricist, written before her untimely death.

George E. Suboczewski