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Literature in the Service of Politics. Politics in the Service of Literature. The „Case” of Wanda Wasilewska.

Doctoral dissertation written in the Institute of History of the Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa under the academic supervision of Professor Tadeusz Dubicki

Wanda Wasilewska worked and wrote in three different historical periods: in the interwar Poland, during the 2nd World War in the USSR and after the war in Kiev, Ukraine. Facts from her life are generally known and unchangeable, but the assessment of her political activity, especially during the 2nd World War, when she became chair of the Union of Polish Patriots, still awakens debates. Today, when access is open to numerous source materials and archives, allowing new interpretations of those phenomena and events, the figure of Wanda Wasilewska causes many controversies.

What makes Wanda Wasilewska's biography unusual is her rich life, which contained a lot of incongruities: she was a daughter of the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the II Polish Republic, Józef Piłsudski's trusted friend and a colonel in the Red Army. Before the war she was one of famous activists of the Polish Socialist Party, during the war she was a supporter of the Stalinist Soviet Union. It is difficult to present Wanda Wasilewska's biography as a cohesive whole. Her biography is full of information gaps, incomplete information and secrets. Wanda Wasilewska is an interesting character from the psychological point of view. In her rich and turbulent life her private matters are intertwined with her public activity. Hence, the aim of this dissertation is to discuss again the role which Wanda Wasilewska played in the recent history of Poland, which involves presentation of her biography. Furthermore, it is impossible to study Wanda Wasilewska's literary works without a knowledge of her ideological attitude and details from her personal life. Closer examination of Wanda Wasilewska's works allows to formulate a statement that the themes and artistic forms of her novels were determined to a considerable degree by current political events and her own situation in life. Her works are full of stylistic devices, especially phrases and epithets. When considered in general aspect, Wasilewska's style is characterized by vividness of descriptions, which she achieved using comparisons and metaphors. Wanda Wasilewska's literary output comprises, in addition to some novels, stories for children and youth, reportages and texts published in Polish and Soviet magazines.

The chief aim of this dissertation is to show the relations between Wanda Wasilewska's socio-political activity, her journalism and prose writings and to systematize the knowledge of her life and literary works. The dissertation also endeavours to overcome the stereotypes concerning Wanda Wasilewska, myths and legends developed by her supporters and opponents. The fundamental research task in this dissertation was to confront the opinions and judgments formulated about Wasilewska. For this purpose, when relating the particular stages of her life, attention was focused on the socio-political, journalist and literary activity of Wanda Wasilewska, using the problem-based and chronological structure.

The source database used in the dissertation consists mainly of documents kept in the Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw. These are personal files of Wanda Wasilewska and her father, Leon as well as her friend, Janina Broniewska and her colleagues: Wiktor Grosz and Bolesław Drobner. Additionally, some valuable materials kept in the Archives of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków have been used in the dissertation – two files of Wanda Wasilewska, containing the documentation concerning her university studies and defence of her doctoral dissertation. The Archives of the Jagiellonian University provided also catalogues of the Faculty of Philosophy containing lists of subjects studied by Wanda Wasilewska in the particular semesters. The Archives of the Ministry of National Defence in Modlin sent a scan of Order No. 11/MON of the Minister of National Defence of 6th May, 1978 giving the name of Wanda Wasilewska to the Military Historical Institute (Journal of Orders of the Ministry of National Defence of 1978). The aforesaid source database was supplemented with materials from the Bolesław Waligóra Central Military Archives in Warsaw, from the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, from the Institute of National Remembrance in Katowice. To reconstruct the life path of Wanda Wasilewska some printed sources were used, such as the Polish press of the interwar period and the 2nd World War: „Oblicze Dnia”, „Płomyk”, „Almanach Literacki”, „Czerwony Sztandar”, „Wolna Polska”, „Nowe Widnokregi”, „Żołnierz Wolności”; academic studies, dictionaries, audio-visual materials (interviews, radio programmes), articles discussing the socio-political activity, journalist and prose works of Wanda Wasilewska and works classified as the so-called reminiscence literature – diaries, memoirs, (auto)biographies and other reports of people more or less connected with Wanda Wasilewska. In this group, by way of example, were: Zygmunt Berling, Włodzimierz Sokorski, Janina Broniewska, Nikita Khrushchev, Maria Dąbrowska, Jerzy Putrament, Aleksander Wat. Finally, the protagonist of the dissertation is allowed to speak herself in the quotations of her memories recorded in 1964 during her meeting

with the staff of the Institute of the Party History based at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party and autobiographic sketches entitled: *O moich książkach* (*About my Books*), *Lata, które minęły* (*Years That Passed*) and *Podróż po życiu i książkach* (*Journey Through Life and Books*).

This dissertation entitled: *Literature in the Service of Politics. Politics in the Service of Literature. The „Case” of Wanda Wasilewska* consists of three chapters, each of them being divided into two parts. They deal first of all with the political activity and secondly with the literary works of Wanda Wasilewska in the particular historical period.

In the introduction the current state of research has been described, the literature and sources used have been reviewed and research questions have been formulated. The narrative flow has been subordinated, as in other biographical writings, to chronological structure. The timeframe of the dissertation, which covers Wanda Wasilewska's lifetime from her date of birth to her date of death - results from the character of the dissertation. Three parts of the study correspond to three consecutive periods in Wasilewska's life.

Chapter 1. *Childhood and youth* deals with the ideological background of Wanda Wasilewska and formation of her ideological attitude. To understand thoroughly all factors which determined Wasilewska's later choices, it was necessary to study her youth, which was undoubtedly influenced by the atmosphere of her family home and by her father, Leon Wasilewski. In the description of the Wasilewska's youth, special attention has been paid to her intensive activity during her university studies in the Union of Socialist Youth and Society of Workers' Universities, because the observations she made during that time had a tremendous significance for her later writings. In 1927 Wasilewska graduated from university with Master's degree in Polish studies, having written and defended her Master's thesis entitled: *Podhale u Tetmajera i Witkiewicza* (*Podhale Region in Tetmajer's and Witkiewicz's Works*), which became also her doctoral dissertation. In the years 1927 – 1932 she worked in schools in Kraków as a Polish and Latin teacher. In 1934, with her second husband and daughter from her first marriage, she moved to Warsaw, where in the years 1934 – 1936 she worked in the illustrated magazines for children and youth „Płomyk” and „Płomyczek”. During that period she published three novels – *Oblicze dnia* (1934), *Ojczyzna* (1935) and *Ziemia w jarzmie* (1938).

Chapter II. *Political and journalist activity of Wanda Wasilewska in the years 1939 – 1945* examines Wasilewska's political and literary activity during the 2nd World War and seeks to present the circumstances which led Wasilewska to the decision to collaborate with Soviet

