

Joanna Wojdon, *Świat elementarzy. Obraz rzeczywistości w podręcznikach do nauki czytania w krajach bloku radzieckiego*, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, Warszawa 2015, ss. 246 (“Dydaktyka historii, historia dydaktyki”, t. 2).

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Early school education, especially the first three years of primary school, is a very important element in the formation of one’s identity. In the general-development aspect, this is the time when children learn to work — both independently and in groups — and acquire first experiences of mental and physical activity. This stage of education also highlights the importance of the ability to identify with social groups one represents and to name these groups and their characteristic features. For many children, the main source of this information is their first textbook, a primer supposed to introduce them to the world of knowledge.

History proves, however, that a common goal of public education, especially in totalitarian countries where some form of censorship exists, is the indoctrination of the new generation with a spirit desired by the authorities in order to emphasize the child’s belonging to a particular ethnic or social group. Joanna Wojdon in *Świat Elementarzy (World of Primers)* accurately points out that “[...] the youngest reader is very uncritical and credulous, therefore susceptible to influences [...]. This provokes the great temptation to present such a picture of the world to pupils, while implementing the reading techniques that correspond to authors, publishers or more abstractly understood adult societies or authorities”.<sup>1</sup> The first texts children are in contact with can be related to visions that, camouflaged amongst songs and pictures, trigger specific emotions, beliefs, and judgments. This phenomenon is peculiarly visible in the Eastern Bloc countries occupied by the Soviet Union after World War II.

Joanna Wojdon’s book is an attempt to show the vision of the world created in primers from selected countries of the Eastern Bloc and, consequently, the ways

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<sup>1</sup> Por.: “[...] najmłodszy czytelnik jest bardzo bezkrytyczny i łatwowierny, a zatem podatny na wpływy [...]. Wyzwała to wielka pokusę, by przy okazji wdrażania do techniki czytania przedstawić uczniom taki obraz świata, jaki odpowiada autorom, wydawcom czy bardziej abstrakcyjnie pojmowanemu dorosłemu społeczeństwu czy władzom” — J. Wojdon, *Świat elementarzy. Obraz rzeczywistości w podręcznikach do nauki czytania w krajach bloku radzieckiego*, Warszawa 2015, p. 7.

children were indoctrinated in Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. The book is of historical and cultural character, as it relates to the processes that shaped the social mentality between 1946 and 1989.

*Świat elementarzy* consists of an introduction, six thematic chapters, a conclusion, a list of abbreviations, references, and an index of names. The introduction consists of four parts: *Why primers? Why politics?*, the state of research, methodology, and the outline of the structure. After a brief account of the presented field of study, the author accurately comments on the works concerning the political role of primers in the countries of the entire world, underlining the lack of comparative research, especially with regard to the countries of the former Eastern bloc. As a research method, Wojdon chooses the discovery of particular ideological messages in the given books, and her aim is “[...] to observe certain chronological and geographic regularities, formulate generalizations and distinguish differences between individual countries”.<sup>2</sup> The author validates the selection of textbooks from the Cold War era with the willingness to cover the entire area of the Eastern Bloc, which in turn enables her to reconstruct the totalitarian image of the world created by local authorities in these countries.

Wojdon indicates what content is responsible for the education of the next generation in the spirit of patriotism in the chapter *Wide world — homeland. Between patriotism and communism*. Compared to Western countries, textbooks from the states behind the “iron curtain” focus on the ideological message: homeland is understood not only as a beautiful country, but primarily as a place for industrial and urban development (with particular reference to capital cities). In this section, the author also describes how national symbols, such as flags, emblems, and anthems, appearing almost in all components of the Eastern textbooks, are presented. They are visualized when a new letter of the alphabet is introduced to pupils, some important texts focus on their symbolism, or they are also elements of everyday life (even during child entertainment).

The subsequent several pages of the book are dedicated to the description of the history of a given country that appears in the Eastern Bloc textbooks, a theme which distinguishes these primers from the Western tradition. Wojdon also accurately points out the presence of portraits and descriptions of state leaders, presented as extremely important personalities in the life of the whole nation, children included. Wojdon also observes that the primers focus on showing the importance of the army and public officials, displaying the unusually frequent images of the soldier — the protector and hero of the nation and the policeman — the helper and the trusted guardian. This clearly distinguishes the Eastern world in the primers from Western standards.

<sup>2</sup> Por.: “[...] na tej podstawie spróbować zaobserwować pewne prawidłowości chronologiczne i geograficzne, sformułować uogólnienia i wyodrębnić różnice między poszczególnymi państwami” — *ibid.*, p. 15.

Wojdon dedicates the next chapter, *Wide world — Technological Development and Civilization Transformation*, to the common motif present in the primers, that is, the technological and civilizational progress taking place in the brand new political systems of the Eastern Bloc. Starting with means of transport, through space flights (an extremely significant and important moment especially in Soviet readings), industrial development and expansion of factories, and finishing with household appliances, the author shows the special character of the presented elements as part of children's love for homeland, safety, and peaceful future. However, above all, Wojdon underlines the role of ideology propagating the importance of collective work as something beneficial for the entire society. It is also worth mentioning the subsection on representations of rural life, showing positive changes taking place in areas of joint work in the field, the aspirations of all the children to work as tractor operators and the benefits from and development opportunities provided by the local authorities.

The following chapter, *The world a bit closer — adults* is, above all, a discussion of the family model promoted in the Eastern Bloc. Wojdon observes that even the number of children in Russian households changed from five in the 1950s to just two in the 1980s. She also focuses on the different roles of children in everyday life (specific categorization into homework, play and pleasure). In the following chapter, *The Nearest world — school*, Wojdon presents a picture of the world closer to children than the house — the school desk. She accurately notices that in the Eastern Bloc, this private world occupies a primary place. The positive image of the building, the teacher (almost always a woman), and the school interiors (including all of the national symbols) should arouse the pupil's desire to attend school.

An interesting phenomenon mentioned by Wojdon is also the representation of children's daily rituals, such as awakening, morning preparations, the road to school, taking classes, leisure activities during breaks and after-school. The latter deserves particular attention: the author accurately sums up the role of collective forms of spending time in the world behind the "iron curtain" created in the textbooks, with a prime role attributed to promoting pioneer activities. The world outside school in the Eastern Bloc primers is compared with its Western equivalents in the chapters *Children in private* and *Holidays*. The author notes a number of patriotic references in Eastern publications (ideologies promoted by the authorities appear here even within the proposed play).

Celebration, understood as a family time spent together by children and adults, is in most textbooks primarily occasioned by public holidays. Wojdon observes that despite national borders, the presence of the New Year is highlighted in all of the primers. For children, the most important part of the celebration is a decorated tree and, of course, New Year's gifts. Summing up this subject, the author states that in the East European primers holidays have clearly a secular character.

Finally, Wojdon raises two questions: first, how far the essence of the primers was intended and carefully deliberated; and second, how accurately primers reflected

reality and how strongly they tried to shape it. Although the author fails to answer them unequivocally, the general picture of the primers that emerges from her research is undoubtedly an interesting introduction to the problem of educating primary school pupils.

Particular attention should be paid to Wojdon's careful preparation and analysis of source materials, fully described in the bibliography. *World of primers* is a valuable academic study that can be recommended both to researchers of the post-war history of early school education and to readers wishing to deepen their knowledge of the topic.

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Тетяна Качак, *Українська література для дітей та юнацтва: підручник*, ВЦ «Академія», Київ 2016, с. 352.

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Tetiana Kachak's textbook on Ukrainian children's and youth literature is one of the very few books on the subject available on the Ukrainian publishing market. The book is intended especially for students and for those who work with children and youths, that is librarians or employees of cultural and educational institutions.

The textbook begins with a short theoretical introduction, enabling the reader to situate its subject of research within the framework of Ukrainian literary studies. Kachak briefly discusses the existing definitions of children's and YA literature coined by such theorists as Yuri Kovalov, Ludmila Serdiuk or Lubov Kilichenko, and then derives the following definition of her own: Children's and youth literature consists of artistic, popular science and journalistic texts intended for children and young people (p. 10). The definition does not, however, make any mention of the findings of international literary studies, for example Kimberley Reynolds' *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (2011), Sebastien Chapleau's *New Voices in Children's Literature Criticism* (2004), and Peter Hunt's *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (1991).

Kachak then enumerates the roles of children's and youth literature (educational, pedagogical, entertaining, cognitive, rhetorical, and aesthetic). Yet, her descriptions of each role are rather short. Instead, the author focuses on the approaches to the periodization of Ukrainian children's and youth literature. Though Lubov Kilichenko's approach had been widely accepted since the 1990s, it has lost much of its validity nowadays. The most popular contemporary paradigms for periodization have been proposed by Svetlana Terpeluk, Natalia Bohdanec-Biloskalenko, and Boris Shalaginov. Terpeluk visibly relies on the general periodization of Ukra-