

## Reviews

Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), xxii + 714 pp.

With this encyclopaedic and erudite study, Catriona Kelly consolidates her position in the first rank of those currently writing in English about Russian cultural history. Her subject is nothing less than the Russian experience of childhood from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first, her corpus a vast array of material drawn from (among other sources) pedagogical treatises, official documents, family archives, childhood memoirs, school textbooks, children's literature and interviews with over 150 informants in Moscow, St Petersburg, Taganrog and elsewhere. While much of the narrative is necessarily concerned with adult notions of childhood as reflected in the history of institutions and policies, its overarching aim is 'a reconstruction of the world of Russian children' (4), a 'history of daily life as experienced by Russian children' (5) in terms of what they ate, what they wore, what they did at school, what games they played, how the world around them impinged upon their perception of it. Such an undertaking, as Kelly recognizes, is essentially an 'imaginative exercise' (3); and imagination is what she has in abundance.

The first of the three parts into which the book is divided is entitled 'Imagining Childhood' and consists of four chapters examining key changes in representations of and attitudes to children over successive chronological periods: from 1890 to the Revolution, from 1917 to the rise of Stalinism, from 1935 to 1953 ('Thank You, Dear Comrade Stalin, for a Happy Childhood') and from the death of Stalin to the end of the Soviet Union. Part II, 'Children on their Own', takes as its subject the plight of orphans and *bezprizorniki* and plots the course of childhoods spent in children's homes and correctional 'colonies'; while Part III deals with the (generally more fortunate) experience of children growing up within the family, following their progress from infancy to adolescence, from *yasli* to high school.

This framework enables Kelly to demonstrate her formidable command of detail, ranging from birthing practices to breastfeeding, from swaddling clothes to disposable nappies, from playground lore to teenage sexual *mores*, from child-

labour legislation to young people's theatres and TV programmes. At the same time, it helps her explore in depth the tensions and assumptions implicit in the changing attitudes to childhood which characterise the whole period: the differences between 'child-centred' and 'adult-centred' approaches to education, 'sentimentalist' and 'rationalist' notions of child development, contested models of 'collective socialisation' (71) *versus* nurture within the nuclear family, competing emphases on the carefree and 'joyous' Soviet childhood and the inculcation of ideological conformity and socialist values. Inevitably, the breadth of the project poses particular problems of selectivity: as the author recognises, 'inclusivity of sources has to be offset by compression in other respects' (16), so that the concentration on the Russian childhood from birth to age 13 or 14 largely excludes the experience of other cultural minorities (apart from Jews and Tatars as the most significant) or of life beyond puberty, and the focus on the perceptions of children themselves leaves less scope for detailed analysis of the reflections of the adults (educators, theorists, administrators) whose role in their upbringing was so decisive. While some readers may take issue with these self-imposed constraints, most will acknowledge the consistency with which they are applied and concede their necessity in the interests of a coherent narrative.

Beyond its exposition of institutional, social and political history, the book is most centrally concerned with the Russian childhood as cultural myth and its projection through representations of growing up in art and literature. The rich Russian traditions of writing about childhood and writing for children are constantly invoked to illustrate arguments, acknowledged 'classics' such as Korney Chukovsky, Marshak and Mikhalkov cited alongside less familiar authors like Lidiya Charskaya, anonymous primers, popular songs and ephemeral jingles, all in the author's own lively translations. Case studies in the transformation of childhood into myth are provided by the stories of Pavlik Morozov (the subject of an earlier study by Kelly) and Zoya Kosmodem'yanskaya, each of them examined in the context of changing Soviet attitudes to and expectations of the citizen of the future. The numerous 'documentary' photographs of children at work and play are complemented by reproductions of artworks, greeting cards, propaganda posters, magazine advertisements, stills from films and the like which constitute a graphic record of the child's world (the echo of that iconic Soviet institution *Детский мир* is no accident). The collection of such a diversity of illustrative material represents an achievement in itself, and one that adds substantially to

the value of the whole. Again, inclusivity comes at the cost of compression, and individual readers will no doubt have their own suggestions as to what omissions seem most regrettable or unexpected: my own list, for example, would include Garin Mikhaylovsky's fictional autobiography *Childhood of Tyoma* (1892) or Sergei Bodrov's film *S.E.R. [Freedom is Paradise]* (1989), in both of which are crystallized points made in the discussion of the periods they respectively reflect. But this is to quibble (just as much as it is to point out that the 'Jerryish' hero of the *Just You Wait!* cartoons is not 'Little Rabbit' (479) but Little Hare).

Catriona Kelly is well aware of the dangers of 'making grand statements' (598) about the rearing of children in Russia, and *Children's World* is cautious in drawing conclusions about the impact of the Soviet upbringing on those whose lives were shaped by it. In coming to terms with so complex a phenomenon as growing up in Russia in the twentieth century, such caution is a strength rather than a weakness. The great achievement of this book is to impart a sense of childhood as it was lived; of few academic studies can it be said so truly that there is not a dull page in it.

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Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, *A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 669 pp.

*A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change* is the first volume of a trilogy intended to provide 'the most comprehensive survey and analysis of political and economic change in the modern Balkans and East Central Europe available in English', as Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries state in the preface (xii). This is a bold aim indeed considering the geographical and temporal range in question. Proceeding on the pragmatic assumption that 'half a loaf is better than none', the authors have chosen to focus on politics and economics and to dispense with a discussion of cultural and intellectual developments. This still leaves the reader with a well-nigh indigestible mass of information drawn from a wide range of sources.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I deals with the Balkan peninsula from the Graeco-Roman period to the First World War. Subsections include