

Title: Childhood Lost and Recovered: Two Examples from Contemporary Russian Cinema and American Theater

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In this paper, I would like to examine the content and the context of a Russian film, entitled “Итальянец” (Director Andrey Kravchuk, 2005) and an American play, entitled “Memory House” by Kathleen Tolan, which debuted in NYC in the same year. In both, the protagonists, each in his/her own way, struggle with and explore their adoptive realities. In the first case, a little boy of six years in a provincial Russian town escapes his orphanage to find his birth mother, and, in the second, a college-bound teenager, adopted from Russia as a child, works on a college admissions essay that delves into her ever-fading memories of her Russian childhood. In the end, both protagonists reach their goals – the boy finds his mother’s house and the girl finishes her essay, thus, restoring the balance of their identities. In my paper, I would be referring to Vygotsky’s ideas of personal development (Выготский Л.С. *Собрание сочинений в 6 томах*. Том 4. *Детская психология. Педология подростка*) and to Mikhail Epstein’s ideas of agelessness (Журнальный зал Русского Журнала: *Звезда*, 2006 N4 - МИХАИЛ ЭПШТЕЙН - К философии возраста.). I will argue that, while brushing against the ages of others and, thus, overstepping the boundaries of their natural age, both protagonists end up fulfilling the goals of their natural stages in life – the comfort sought by a child and the independence of a teenager. I will further argue that this classic conclusion to the psychological development of each character is what, in spite of various shocking experiences along the way, creates a comfortable outcome for the viewer. I will conclude my paper by attempting to connect both examples with larger trends in contemporary Russian and American cinema/theater.