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METHODS OF WORKING WITH DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL IN ELENA GREMINA'S DOCUMENTARY DRAMA

ABSTRACT: This article examines the documentary dramaturgy of Elena Gremina (1956-2018) – a playwright, screenwriter, director, and co-founder of the Moscow-based Teatr.doc. Its aim is to answer two questions: how did E. Gremina use and modify existing methods of working with documentary material, and what distinguished her artistic approach to the documentary sources in her plays? The research material consists of documentary dramas on social and political themes: *Сентябрь.doc* (2004), *Час восемнадцать* (2010), *Двое в твоём доме* (2011), *150 причин не защищать Родину* (2013), *Помолвка* (2016), *67/871 (Документальная пьеса о 871 дне блокады в 67 историях)* (2017). A review confirmed that the plays follow three main artistic strategies and can be divided into “orthodox verbatim”, courtroom dramas, and fictionalised documents. Although verbatim serves as the starting point for all of them, Gremina freely incorporated other documentary techniques drawn from theatrical reenactment, the German documentary drama of the 1960s, and epic theatre. She actively engaged her audience, inviting empathy toward difficult experiences and involving the audience within the performances, which allows her brand of political documentary drama to be understood as both engaged and engaging literature.

KEYWORDS: documentary drama, documentary theatre, verbatim, Teatr.doc, contemporary Russian drama

STRESZCZENIE: Artykuł poświęcony jest dramaturgii dokumentalnej Jeleny Greminy (1956-2018) – dramatopisarki, scenarzystki, reżyserki, współzałożycielki moskiewskiego Teatru.doc. Jego celem jest odpowiedź na dwa pytania: w jaki sposób J. Gremina stosuje i modyfikuje w swoich dramatach istniejące wcześniej metody pracy z dokumentem oraz na czym polega oryginalność artystycznego opracowania materiału dokumentalnego w jej sztukach? Materiał badawczy stanowią dramaty dokumentalne o tematyce społecznej i politycznej: *Сентябрь.doc* (2004), *Час восемнадцать* (2010), *Двое в твоём доме* (2011), *150 причин не защищать Родину* (2013), *Помолвка* (2016), *67/871 (Документальная пьеса о 871 дне блокады в 67 историях)* (2017). Przeglądowa analiza dramatów potwierdziła, że są one napisane zgodnie z trzema głównymi strategiami artystycznymi i dzielą się na „ortodoksyjny verbatim”, dramaty trybunału i fabularyzowane dokumenty. Punktem wyjścia dla wszystkich sztuk jest technika verbatim, ale J. Gremina dosyć swobodnie posługuje się w nich także innymi metodami pracy z dokumentem, znanymi z praktyki teatralnej rekonstrukcji wydarzeń, niemieckiego dramatu dokumentu lat sześćdziesiątych oraz z dramatu epickiego. Autorka konstruuje zaangażowanie odbiorcy przez wzywanie do empatii wobec trudnych wydarzeń i włączanie publiczności do udziału w spektaklach, co pozwala określić jej polityczny dramat dokumentalny zarówno jako literaturę zaangażowaną, jak i angażującą.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: dramat dokumentalny, teatr dokumentalny, verbatim, Teatr.doc, współczesny dramat rosyjski

Elena Gremina (1956-2018) was a Russian playwright, screenwriter, and director who achieved her first major success with the play *За зеркалом* (*Behind the Mirror*), staged in 1994 at the Moscow Art Theatre. In the 1990s, plays based on her dramas were staged in theatres throughout Russia. From 2002 onward, she aligned her work with documentary theatre, co-founding the independent Moscow theatre of documentary art, Teatr.doc, together with Mikhail Ugarov and Alexei Rodionov¹. In the last years of her life, E. Gremina was known not only in Russia but also abroad, primarily as the author of plays for high-profile performances about current political events, which formed the core of Teatr.doc's political activism.

This article focuses on the socio-political dramas written by the author post 2002². *Сентябрь.doc* (*September.doc*, 2004), *Час восемнадцать* (*One Hour and Eighteen Minutes*, 2010), *Двое в твоём доме* (*Two in Your House*, 2011), *150 причин не защищать Родину* (*150 Reasons Not to Defend the Homeland*, 2013), *Помолвка* (*The Engagement*, 2016) and *67/871* (*Документальная пьеса о 871 дне блокады в 67 историях*) (*67/871, A Documentary Play about 871 Days of the Siege in 67 Stories*, 2017)³. The starting point for all of these plays was the verbatim technique brought to Russia by artists from the London Royal Court Theatre, which involved assembling verbatim statements⁴ made by real people. In her texts, E. Gremina, like other Russian playwrights, treats verbatim as a springboard for her own creative explorations. The aim of this article is therefore to answer two questions: how does the author use and modify existing methods of working with documentary material in her dramas, and what distinguishes her artistic approach to the documentary sources in her plays? For the purposes of this work, I propose dividing E. Gremina's documentary plays into three main types, defined by the dominant artistic strategies within them: "orthodox" verbatim, courtroom dramas, and fictionalised documents.

"Orthodox" verbatim

The documentary phase of E. Gremina's playwriting began with the play *Сентябрь.doc*, written in collaboration with Mikhail Ugarov and devoted to the theme of the terrorist attack on a school in Beslan in 2004. The compositional basis of the play

¹ M. Hanukai, S. Weygandt, *Introduction. Drama Against "Theater" and Theater After Drama*, [in:] *New Russian Drama: An Anthology*, edited by M. Hanukai, S. Weygandt, New York 2019.

² After 2002, E. Gremina also wrote fictional plays based on documents and biographies. For the purposes of this study, however, I will consider as documentary only those texts whose poetics are shaped by the verbatim montage of recorded fragments of actual people's statements.

³ Although the main themes of the plays *150 причин не защищать Родину* and *67/871* (*Документальная пьеса о 871 дне блокады в 67 историях*) are historical events, both works correspond to phenomena present in Russia in the first two decades of the 21st century: *67/871* aligns with the "memory boom" and the growing "victory myth" of that period, as well as the debates surrounding it, while *150 причин не защищать Родину* engages with reflections on imperialism and the individual's resistance to the system.

⁴ Cf. И. Болотян, *Вербатим*, «Новый филологический вестник» 2011, № 1, с. 81.

was the use of the verbatim technique. In its classic form – referred to by Teatr.doc artists as “orthodox verbatim”⁵ – the playwright or creative team interviews a group of informants and records their accounts on audio or video. These recordings are then transcribed, and the playwright’s primary task becomes arranging the fragments of monologues and dialogues in a way that best conveys the overarching idea of the drama. Although elements of verbatim appear in all the works discussed, this method functions as the central artistic strategy only in *Сентябрь.doc* and *67/871*.

The basis of *Сентябрь.doc* consists of material collected by the authors from online portals, chats, forums, and blogs. The play is built from assembled statements by various figures, arranged thematically into seven sections: *Занях Мускуса* (*The Scent of Musk*), *Первое сентября* (*The First of September*), *Месть* (*Revenge*), *Хиджаб* (*Hijab*), *Легко сидеть за компом* (*It’s Easy to Sit at the Computer*), *Заложник* (*Hostage*), and *OUT*). Each section is further divided into numbered fragments 1 to 77⁶ and titled, (e.g., *Муслим* (*Muslim*), *Майбек* (*Maibek*), *Белая зависть* (*White Envy*), *Писал, скорее всего, русский* (*Most Likely Written by a Russian*), *Матери Чечни за мир* (*Mothers of Chechnya for Peace*), and others).

The first part of the drama consists of monologues by Muslims reflecting on their brothers and friends who were shahids. This is interwoven with a documentary layer that includes blog entries from the now-defunct website www.zurho.tk⁷ and a press article from the independent Chechen portal www.kavkazcenter.com, which was officially classified as extremist in Russia in 2011 and subsequently blocked. The poetic narratives of the shahids, reminiscent of legends, stand in contrast to the rest of the drama, which is filled with aggressive, racist comments and snippets of discussions from chat rooms. In between these emotional and hate-filled statements, the authors incorporate texts of a distinctly different nature: a poem, an official statement from the organisation “Mothers of Chechnya for Peace”, the confessions of a Muslim woman preparing to wear the hijab, and marriage advice for young Muslims. Together, these elements create a stylistically diverse polyphony, giving voice to all observers of the events, regardless of their backgrounds or beliefs. The verbatim technique employed allows for the combination of contradictory attitudes and discourses into a single text, while avoiding any authorial commentary. E. Gremina and M. Ugarov use the “zero position” characteristic of Teatr.doc’s working methods (a term coined by M. Ugarov⁸), which represents a neutral stance towards the content of the drama, refraining from authorial evaluation of characters and events, and a complete trust

⁵ Cf. *Вербатим: метод*, [В:] <https://teatrdoc.ru/doc/> (28.11.2025).

⁶ I suspect that the number of parts and fragments is not accidental and that it is related to the significance of the number seven in Islamic culture.

⁷ The content of the texts posted on the website is currently available in the oocities.org internet archive at <https://www.oocities.org/zurhosite/newsi.htm> (28.11.2025).

⁸ In the “zero position” described and promoted by M. Ugarov, there is a similarity to the acting technique developed by B. Brecht, whose essential feature was the so-called “alienation effect” (V-effect, from the German *Verfremdungseffekt*).

in the audience's ability to read and form their own opinions about the material presented⁹.

In classic verbatim dramas, the author preserves in the main text and stage directions the specific speaking mannerisms of the characters: pronunciation, linguistic errors, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and body language. W. Gremina and M. Ugarov, however, reflect the conditions in which the message is created, i.e., they imitate the situation of exchanging views on the Internet. They do so by incorporating elements of website interfaces and forum usernames (e.g. Малгобек (Malgobek), Владикавказ (Vladikavkaz), Вовас (Vovas), Королева Марго (Queen Margot), Гражданин России IVANOV (Russian Citizen IVANOV), Сибиряк (Siberian), Russoyob (Russoyob), etc.):

Ахмад Яхья АбуАбдуррахман, адрес – Под присмотром Всевышнего.

Ахмад Яхья АбуАбдуррахман.

Посмотреть профиль!

Добавить Ахмад Яхья АбуАбдуррахман в список друзей!

(...)

First Person, адрес– остров Святой Елены.

First Person, адрес– остров Святой Елены.

Посмотреть профиль!

Добавить First Person, адрес– остров Святой Елены в список друзей¹⁰.

As Vladimir Shunikov points out, at the time of its creation (2004), *Сентябрь.doc* was the only example of a Russian-language drama whose poetics were determined by the language of Internet communication¹¹.

The verbatim technique is prominently featured in E. Gremina's last documentary drama titled *67/871* (subtitle: *Документальная пьеса о 871 дне блокады в 67 историях*), which was created for a Russian-German theatre project at the Saint Petersburg Theatre of Generations. A group of artists involved in the project collected and recorded interviews with local residents who were witnesses and participants in the events that occurred in Leningrad during the siege by German troops from 1941 to 1944. Simultaneously, the historian Andreas Rüttenauer and a team of German participants conducted interviews in Berlin with members of the Association of Victims of the Blockade and gathered documents from German archives.¹² Ultimately, the documen-

⁹ Cf. И. Болотян, *Антисловарь Михаила Угарова*, «Театр» 2018, № 34, с. 126.

¹⁰ Е. Гремина, *Сентябрь.doc*, [в:] Е. Гремина, М. Угаров, *Пьесы и тексты*, т. 2, Москва 2019, с. 544-545.

¹¹ Cf. В. Шуников, *Прецедент сетевой драмы: "Сентябрь.doc" М. Угарова и Е. Греминой*, «Ярославский педагогический вестник» 2012, т. 1, № 1 (Гуманитарные науки), с. 256-260.

¹² Cf. В. Левицкий, *Спектакль о блокаде «67/871» по пьесе Е. Греминой на сцене Театра Поколений: опыт художественного осмысления документального материала*, «Вестник СПбГУ. Искусствоведение» 2019, т. 9, вып 3, с. 495-511.

tary material included recorded interviews, texts by Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler, letters from German soldiers fighting on the Leningrad Front, and poems by Olga Bergholtz, which she wrote during the siege.

The drama, like in *Сентябрь.doc*, does not follow a traditional structure with distinct characters and their dialogue. Instead, the text is organised into 67 fragments grouped into thematic blocks, such as *Хлеб. Консервы. Крупа* (*Bread. Canned Goods. Grains*), *Пшено* (*Millet*), *Борщ ленинградский* (*Leningrad Borscht*), or *Воспоминания трехлетнего ребенка* (*Memories of a Three-Year-Old Child*), etc. The author did not alter the content of the characters' statements; the play retains their unique manner of speaking, including pauses and linguistic errors.

[...] И произошло то, что его мама... эхэ... (*выдох*) ну... договорилась с соседом (инвалидом войны)... эмээ... (*пауза*) в общем... этого отобрали у Гешки этого кота, обманув его, что они его туда уведут в подвал, где крысы водятся, там, где он будет сытый; потом он вернется домой... На самом же деле (*на выдохе*), в общем, мама из этого кота приготовила суп [...]¹³.

In some instances, questions or comments from the interviewers are placed in brackets to preserve the natural flow of speech without interrupting the protagonist's narrative: "[...] Стук в дверь, пришел солдат. С рюкзаком. (А звонка не было на дверях?) Не было. А так электричества не было, ничего ж не работало. (Угу.) С рюкзаком... [...]"¹⁴

The approach taken by the author and director of the play encourages us to reconsider historical events that have, over time, become obscured by official narratives and well-worn interpretations. Instead of relying on official sources, the play emphasises personal accounts, allowing the emotional truths and language of the characters to take precedence over factual truths.

The combination of various perspectives on historical events creates a broad model of historical processes in the play, allowing the audience to assume the role of an observer analysing the facts¹⁵, which aligns the work with German documentary dramas of the 1960s. Like German playwrights, the author underscores reflection, establishing a clear artistic framework – a scenic “basic quoting structure” that organises the factual material.¹⁶ This structure leads the reader and viewer to understand that they are not engaging with reality itself, but rather with a consciously constructed copy of it. Excerpts from interviews not only document content but also capture the manner of expression, enabling the audience to immerse themselves in the illusion of the world

¹³ Е. Гремина, 67/871, [в:] Е. Гремина, М. Угаров, *Пьесы и тексты*, т. 1, Москва 2019, с. 668.

¹⁴ Ibidem, с. 661.

¹⁵ П. Вайс, *Заметки о документальном театре*, «Иностранная литература» 1968, № 7, с. 212-215.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Borowski, *Konstruowanie prawdy. O strategiach uwierzytelniania i efekcie realności w teatrze dokumentalnym*, [w:] *Oblicza realizmu*, red. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Kraków 2007, s. 216.

presented. This creates a sense of direct contact with the characters,¹⁷ facilitated by processes of auto-intensification or auto-extension.¹⁸ The drama's metatextual structure, which includes quotations from documents and letters, as well as the author's "zero position", allows the reader to formulate their own conclusions and opinions. It is important to note that while German documentary drama relies on logical argumentation and clear reasoning¹⁹ to influence social consciousness, E. Gremina's work appeals more to emotions. They are stirred by the mixture of texts with contrasting stylistic tones and by the dominant verbatim technique that provides direct access to the characters' personal experiences. Consequently, emotion emerges as the primary factor for assessing historical reality, while the documentary aspect and distinct artistic framework lend credibility to the characters' experiences and place them within their historical context.

Courtroom dramas

Among E. Gremina's documentary plays are works based on actual court proceedings – similar to the German courtroom dramas of the 1960s – such as *Час 18* and *Помолвка*. *Час 18* addresses the circumstances surrounding the death of Sergei Magnitsky, the lawyer who exposed abuses within the Russian Federation's tax authorities. The play marked Teatr.doc's first production to depart from its "zero position", moving instead toward explicit criticism of state actions. The text opens with two introductory fragments, "From the Theatre" and "From the Director", which provide some brief information about the Magnitsky case, articulate the artistic team's manifesto, and describe the work's genre ("the trial that did not take place, but should have"). This is followed by a list of documentary materials used in the play: Magnitsky's diaries and letters; materials collected by his mother and aunt; a report by the commission monitoring the observance of human rights in detention facilities; and texts by journalists and human rights defenders, including Dmitry Muratov, Yevgenia Albats, Valery Borshchov, Olga Romanova, and Zoia Svetova. The drama concludes with a bibliography of press articles and radio programmes recounting the protagonist's story.

The actual text is divided into ten sections, each centred on protagonists drawn directly from the real events: Sergei Magnitsky's mother; the judges Alexei Krivoruchko and Elena Stashina; the investigating judge Oleg Silchenko; the prison doctor Alexandra Gauss; and the paramedics involved. Gremina constructs a fictionalised framework in which those who were responsible for or witnessed Magnitsky's death are interrogated and judged. The characters' testimonies are mediated by the "Theatre Man", a character reminiscent of the narrator in Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre.

¹⁷ S. Bottoms, *Putting the Document into Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective?*, "The Drama Review" 2006, vol. 50, № 3, p. 59.

¹⁸ R. Felski, *Literatura w użyciu*, przekł. J. Borkowska et al., Poznań 2016, s. 48.

¹⁹ M. Borowski, *Konstruowanie prawdy...*, s. 215.

Пункт первый

МАТЬ (обращается в зал). Посмотрите, пожалуйста, инструкцию к спектаклю.

Пункт первый. (Ждет, когда зрители прочитают).

ЧЕЛОВЕК ОТ ТЕАТРА. Инструкцию к спектаклю прочтите, пожалуйста. Прочитайте! Прочитали? Наталья Николаевна Магницкая, мать²⁰.

The play also aligns with epic theatre in its frequent disruption of the action through instructions and improvisational prompts for the actors, as well as through the use of projected captions (such as performance guidelines and excerpts from Sergei Magnitsky's letters). To further stimulate the audience's imagination, the drama incorporates a reconstruction of real events: an acting sequence developed in consultation with a doctor, in which two performers reenact the moment of Magnitsky's death.

The fictitious court at the centre of the play is staged as a ritual designed to symbolically restore justice through dramatic means. In the final section, a theatrical trial of Alexei Krivoruchko takes place. During this scene, one of the actors pours boiling water over the judge's hands – the same boiling water Krivoruchko refused to Magnitsky in the real-life court hearing. In this way, the documentary drama becomes a catalyst for a political happening, intended to draw the audience into the case and encourage resistance to abuses of power.

E. Gremina undertakes a similar task in *Помолвка*, a drama concerning the case of the political prisoners Oleg Sentsov and Oleksandr Kolchenko, who were arrested in Crimea in 2014 and charged with terrorism. Written for Teatr.doc's 2016 production *Война близко* (*War Is Near*), the play is based almost entirely on materials from the trial. Its central figures are Oleg Sentsov, the film director accused of terrorism; Alexei Chyrniy and Gennady Afanasyev, both implicated in the case; and Alexander Pirogov, a witness cooperating with the security services. Their lines consist of verbatim quotations taken from the court proceedings. The play also includes the character of Alexei Chyrniy's lawyer, Ilya Novikov, who speaks only once; his line reproduces a Facebook post he published after being removed from the case by the court. In addition, Gremina introduces a fictional figure – a curator – who comments on and contextualises the characters' statements.

The drama is divided into seven parts/episodes, composed of fragments from the characters' testimonies, interspersed with epic, narrative commentary that outlines the characters and offers brief descriptions of the events. Alongside the characters' lines, the author includes unassigned statements – an indication of the text's orientation toward theatrical production rather than strict dramatic convention.

The play opens with an interactive prologue in which the actors, not yet assuming their roles, address the audience directly in a manner characteristic of epic theatre:

²⁰ Е. Гремина, *Час 18*, [в:] Е. Гремина, М. Угаров, *Пьесы и тексты*, т. 2, Москва 2019, с. 565.

ПРОЛОГ

Актеры обращаются к публике

- Скажите, у кого есть яйца? Поднимите руки. У кого есть яйца и член?
 - Кто считает себя мужчиной?
 - Кто из вас уверен, что останется мужчиной, когда наступит момент пиздеца?
 - В двадцатом веке во второй половине в нашей стране после смерти Сталина и перед поздним Путным можно было прожить всю жизнь, избегая этого самого момента проверки.
 - И сейчас можно, если постараться.
 - Но момент пиздеца иногда приходит к тебе, мужчина, не спрашивая.
 - Так еще раз – у кого есть то, что должно быть у мужчины, поднимите руки?
- Актеры поднимают руки. Считают поднявших руки в публике*²¹.

E. Gremina incorporates elements of theatrical reenactment²² into the play, embedding documentary material within a narrative framework that continually reminds the viewer of the constructed nature of the scenes. This strategy enables the presentation of a condensed sequence of events, allowing their significance and the drama's central message to emerge more sharply. The work, which draws on earlier traditions of documentary theatre, also participates in a contemporary trend within the genre – one defined by a turn toward empathy, both for oneself and for others, and by an effort to foster communication across social and ideological divides²³. This artistic intention becomes particularly evident in the ending, which quotes one of Oleg Sentsov's courtroom speeches. In it, the director speaks with understanding about Gennadiy Afanasyev, who initially testified against Sentsov and Kolchenko but later retracted his statement during the trial:

ПОСЛЕДНЕЕ СЛОВО

СЕНЦОВ. [...] Я очень рад, что Гена Афанасьев смог перешагнуть себя и сделал очень мужественный поступок. Я очень рад за него. Не потому, что будет какой-то скандал или нас оправдают. Нет. Этого не будет. Я рад, что он будет жить и понимать, что не струсил.

Вы себя можете оправдывать, что детей надо кормить. Но зачем растить поколение рабов? Я хочу пожелать россиянам научиться не бояться²⁴.

The inclusion of this quote in the text gives the play the qualities of artistic activism, aiming to engage the audience directly and to stimulate social reflection and change²⁵.

²¹ Е. Гремина, *Помолвка*, [в:] Е. Гремина, М. Угаров, *Пьесы и тексты*, т. 2, Москва 2019, с. 699.

²² R. Schneider, *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, London – New York 2011.

²³ W. Wojdyra, *Fatamorgana autentyczności. O syntezie faktu i "fake'u" w teatrze semidokumentalnym na początku XXI wieku*, [w:] *50 twarzy popkultury*, red. K. Olkusz, Kraków 2017, s. 513.

²⁴ Е. Гремина, *Помолвка*, [в:] Е. Гремина, М. Угаров, *Пьесы и тексты*, т. 2, Москва 2019, с. 716.

²⁵ P. Serafini, *Performance action: The politics of art activism*, London – New York 2018, p. 2.

Fictionalised documents

The methods used by E. Gremina also include the fictionalisation of documents. In 2011, she wrote the play *Двое в моем доме*, which focuses on the house arrest of Uladzimir Niaklajeu, a Belarusian poet and presidential candidate in the 2010 elections. The text is based on interviews with Niaklajeu and his wife, Volha, conducted in Minsk that same year by Katerina Bondarenko, Talgat Batalov, and Aleksandr Rodionov, as well as on improvisations by the actors of Teatr.doc. In addition to the Niaklajeu couple, the drama features three unnamed Belarusian KGB officers who supervised the politician during his house arrest. According to the character list, there were in fact more officers present; the three guards thus function as a collective representation of the authorities.

The drama is structured into fifteen fragmentary scenes that together form a coherent plot centring on the interactions between the couple and the KGB officers. The climax is Niaklajeu's courtroom speech, while the resolution occurs in an acting sketch when all the characters clean the apartment together after the politician's release, erasing all traces of the officers' presence. In this final symbolic scene, the foam and water wash away not only the physical dirt but also a portrait of Alexander Lukashenko displayed on the television screen. The etude is accompanied by stage directions, which, according to the instructions, are read aloud during the performance. In this way, the drama concludes with an epic element – a narrative statement offering an allusive commentary on the contemporary political situation:

РЕМАРКА, КОТОРАЯ ЧИТАЕТСЯ: ... И парни берутся за дело. Раздеваются до пояса в раже, блестят тренированные мускулы. Они стараются. Они выметают мусор, они моют стены. Скребут пол. ВЛАДИМИР и ОЛЬГА выдергивают проволоки «прослушки». Парни покорно подбирают их. Гэбешники очень стараются. По квартире льется вода, летит пена. Весь мусор сметает эта уборка. И все, что случилось в этой квартире, эти минуты, которые они вместе прожили с болью и ненавистью и борьбой и любовью, – все исчезает. И даже портрет Лукашенко на телеэкране пена эта смывает! Будто и не было его. Все чисто. Чисто-чисто-чисто²⁶.

Another element characteristic of epic drama appears in the twelfth scene, in which Uladzimir and Volha prepare for the trial. The growing emotional tension is neutralised by a technique echoing Brecht's "alienation effect" (*V-effect*, *Verfremdungseffekt*) – the characters suddenly begin to talk about their experiences not in the first person, but in the third person:

ОЛЬГА. Нервы на пределе уже. Потому что завтра суд. А Владимир зарос за эти месяцы. Волосы торчат неаккуратно. Раньше его Ольга стригла, а сейчас-то Ольга

²⁶ Е. Гремина, *Двое в моем доме*, [в:] Е. Гремина, М. Угаров, *Пьесы и тексты*, т. 2, с. 617.

лежит пластом на кровати своей среди мягких игрушек, молчит, глаза на мокром месте. Завтра суд. Идут процессы над оппозицией, каждый день, срока так и щелкают – пять лет... шесть лет... пять лет... Да придет ли Володя живой через пять лет? Глаза на мокром месте у Ольги. Не до стрижки.

ВЛАДИМИР. А Владимир спокоен. Он не боится за себя. Весь в своих мыслях. И тут ловит его один ин стражников, сильной рукой на стул припечатывает.

ПЕРВЫЙ. Давайте помогу постричься! Все-таки суд завтра! Придете такой – будет неуважение к суду²⁷.

The effect used by the author surprises the reader, distancing them from the characters for a moment, which makes Niaklajeu's speech in the next scene, delivered in the first person and expressing opposition to the actions of the authorities, resonate with double force.

In addition to fragments based on documentary material, the drama contains three scenes with dialogues between officials, created on the basis of improvisations by the actors of Teatre.doc. Fictional situations showing the moral doubts of one of the men about his work make the plot more attractive and enrich the main conflict of the work.

E. Gremina also uses the strategy of fictionalising documents in her play *150 нпучин не защищать Родину*, which tells the story of the Turkish siege of Constantinople and the fall of the city. As the author points out in the introduction, the documentary basis is “verbatim from the 15th century”, i.e., the “Memoirs of a Janissary, or the Turkish Chronicle of Konstantin of Ostrowica, Written Between 1496 and 1501”, poems by Sultan Mehmed II, the Conqueror of Constantinople, and poems by Yunus Emre, a Turkish poet and dervish from the turn of the 14th century. The play consists of 25 scenes/episodes, in which action reconstructing the events of the spring of 1453 takes place. Its protagonists are historical figures: Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror, Vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasha, the Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos, the last megaduke of the Byzantine Empire, Luke Notaras, a Genoese soldier and volunteer during the defence of Constantinople, Giovanni Giustiniani Longo, a Hungarian bronzesmith Urban, Pope Nicholas V, as well as several characters representing the powers of the time and fictional characters placed by the author within historical events. Following the model of epic drama, the action unfolds simultaneously on two levels: the events in which the characters participate with the narration being addressed to the audience of the performance. The lines spoken to the audience are delivered by both the narrator and the other characters in the drama. E. Gremina also employs the “alienation effect” in this play. At times, the characters shift fluidly between speaking to one another and speaking directly to the audience within the same speech. In Mehmed's case, this effect is reinforced by the insertion of poetic fragments woven into his prose lines:

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 612-613.

МЕХМЕД.

Брошенный, я брожу, безумный, я кричу,

Оставленный любовью, я утратил мечту.

Я просыпаюсь и ныряю в глубокий мрак.

Придите, взгляните, вот что любовь сделала со мной.

ХАЛИЛ. Хорошо. Я все понял. Мы снимаем осаду, да? Мы возвращаемся? Тебе не надо ни о чем беспокоиться. Я собираю совет.

И я собрал совет²⁸.

The author also uses the opposite technique – at times, the narrator takes on the role of a character in the drama:

РАССКАЗЧИЦА. (...) Иоанн Джустиниани – герой. Он герой по высоким меркам XV века, когда мужчины бились на мечах и проводили жизнь в войнах. Я всегда был героем. И когда я узнал, что город остался без помощи, я собрал добровольцев и поехал (...)²⁹.

Interestingly, the “verbatim from the 15th century” – that is, excerpts from Janissary chronicles – are interwoven directly into the plot. The Janissary appears in the drama as an active participant in the events, recounting his experiences of serving in the Ottoman army. He emerges as a tragic figure – a Christian conscripted into the ranks of the enemy – who seeks ways to undermine the Turks from within. While fighting on their side and contributing to the fall of Constantinople, he simultaneously searches for the army’s weak points. Gremina juxtaposes his story with a short episode in which a soldier brings him a reward for being the first to place a ladder against one of the towers on the besieged city walls. The scene in which the Janissary kneels to receive his reward from a Turkish soldier is one of the clearest moments in which the central theme is articulated: the question of when conformism results in the loss of one’s identity, and whether it is truly possible to survive such a loss³⁰. The play’s artistic activism subtly operates on an analogy between the existential dilemmas faced by those living under Constantine XI and those encountered by contemporary Russians.

It is also worth noting that *150 причин не защищать Родину* is the play that most actively involves the audience in its theatrical realisation. In the opening scene, lines describing the tragic events of 1453 and announcing the drama’s action are read aloud by members of the audience members selected by the actresses.

²⁸ Е. Гремина, *150 причин не защищать Родину*, [в:] Е. Гремина, М. Угаров, *Пьесы и тексты*, т. 2, Москва 2019, с. 655.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 646.

³⁰ Р. Пашимян, “*150 причин не защищать Родину*”, «Новое время» 2014, [в:] <https://nv.am/150-15/> (28.11.2025).

Summary

A review of E. Gremina's socio-political documentary dramas shows that the documentary material in all her plays derives from interviews or recorded statements by the protagonists (forum comments, articles, documents, diaries, chronicles, and poems) and is subsequently edited in accordance with the dramatic concept. Alongside the verbatim technique – which forms the foundation of all the dramas analysed – Gremina freely employs other documentary practices known from theatrical reenactment (acting etudes based on factual information), German documentary theatre of the 1960s (trial materials, artistic frameworks organising documentary content), and epic drama (the narrator figure, narrative stage directions, Brecht's "alienation effect", direct audience addresses, interruptions of the action through instructions, character and event descriptions, prompts for actor improvisation, and projected subtitles). None of these techniques is reproduced in its original form; instead, Gremina selects and interweaves elements from various dramaturgical and theatrical traditions, creating texts that are both original and unprecedented.

In her documentary dramaturgy, E. Gremina is among the first Russian playwrights to shift from neutrality to explicit political expression and artistic activism. Seeking to encourage audiences to form their own judgements about the events presented, she relies primarily on the shaping effect and appealing to emotion. Her dramas combine an artistic framework conducive to intellectual understanding with literal transcription of statements, lending credibility to the characters' accounts and creating the illusion of direct contact with them. Audience engagement is fostered both through calls for empathy in the face of difficult socio-political realities – typical of contemporary documentary drama – and through direct spectator involvement in the performances. The author's stance aims to instil a sense of agency in the audience, allowing her political documentary drama to be understood as literature that is simultaneously engaged and engaging.

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