The Fictionalization of Wartime Childhood in Young Adult Novels by Anatolij Pristavkin

"I was created by war", writes Anatolij Pristavkin in his last autobiographical povest – a Russian term denoting a medium length prose narrative - characteristically entitled The First Day – the Last Day of Creation (Pervyj den' – poslednij den' tvorenija). As he lost his mother to tuberculosis at the age of ten, and knew his father to be fighting at the front, the war became the context of his socialisation: Pristavkin spent his childhood in various orphanages, and was in 1994 evacuated to North Caucasus, where he was one of the few of Muscovite orphans to escape massacre. Pristavkin's large-scale literary project is focused on this traumatic biography. He approaches his childhood with increasing introspection in six short novels and countless short stories. The gaps in his inconsistent traumatic memories are bridged with repetitions which disguise the construction of an intrafictional reality and guarantee narrative coherence. But at the same time they obscure the constructed nature of such memories, which are conditioned by context and an individual perspective. Thus breaking the 'autobiographical pact', Pristavkin transforms what he does not want to express about his own life into imaginative moments of relief, into so-called "ideal autobiographies". The paper demonstrates how Pristavkin depicts and elaborates his traumatic war memories in his young adult novels.

Keywords: autobiography, Pristavkin, wartime childhood, World War II, young adult fiction, orphans