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THE STEPPE AS A POST-APOCALYPTIC AND MYTHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE IN OKSANA VASYAKINA'S AUTOFICTION

ABSTRACT
This paper explores the role of the steppe in Oksana Vasyakina's autofiction novel *Steppe* (2022) through a post-apocalyptic lens, analyzing its function as both a physical and metaphorical space. The study examines the steppe's connection to the themes of memory, loss, and identity, drawing on mythological, ecological, and postmodern elements to portray personal and historical catastrophe. Ultimately, the steppe emerges as a space where time, place, and trauma converge.

KEYWORDS: dystopian literature, post-Soviet period, post-Apocalypse, myths, contemporary Russian literature

INTRODUCTION

Where must we go, we who wander this wasteland,
in search of our better selves?
Mad Max: Fury Road (2015)

Oksana Vasyakina (born 1989, Ust-Ilimsk) is a prominent voice in contemporary Russian women's literature – a poet, feminist, and openly lesbian writer known for her candid work in poetry and autofiction. Vasyakina has received numerous significant literary awards. Despite discriminatory laws against the LGBTQ+ community in the Russian Federation and official censorship banning her debut novel, *Wound* (2021), Vasyakina's writing – both poetry and prose – has received remarkable critical and popular attention.

While previous research has addressed themes such as intertextual connections with the preceding traditions of Russian literature (Avetisian 2023; Tyczko 2023), the poetics of autofiction (Kuhn 2022; Miagkov 2022; Razukhina 2023; Lugarić 2023; Altynbaeva 2023; Gubina 2023), and memory (Turysheva 2023), few studies have examined the spatial structure of her novels. This paper focuses on the steppe as it appears in Oksana Vasyakina's autofiction novel *Steppe* (2022) as a visual and symbolic shorthand for a world after a major catastrophe.

Vasyakina frequently explores themes of loss and traumatic personal experience: the debut novel *Wound* centers on the protagonist's journey through the Volga steppes to Siberia to bury her beloved mother, whose body she transports, undergoing a long-awaited yet deeply painful separation along the way. In turn, *Steppe* follows the same autofictional narrator during days she spent on the road with her father, a truck driver, former drug addict, and criminal who dies of AIDS. In both cases, the steppe is not just a setting for the action, but a metaphor of the cataclysmic and fragmented worldview of the female protagonist, rupture, trauma, and attempts – often futile – to connect with others. Its nomadic nature offers a unique opportunity to traverse time (through memory) and space.

For Vasyakina and her autofictional persona, the steppe is an alien and inhospitable expanse, functioning as an extension of Bakhtin's chronotope of the road – a literary motif of transformation and initiation through encounters and partings in a distorted world:

> Of special importance is the close link between the motif of meeting and the chronotope of the rode ("the open road"), and of various types of meetings on the road. In the chronotope of the road, the unity of time and space markers is exhibited with exceptional precision and clarity. The importance of the chronotope of the road is immense: it is rare work that does not contain a variation of this motif, and many words are directly constructed on the road chronotope, and on road meetings and adventures (Bakhtin 1981: 98).

All of the above applies to Vasyakina's novel *Steppe*, the plot of which unfolds along a highway stretching through the steppes of the Volgograd and Astrakhan regions of the Russian Federation during the 1990s and 2000s. Even the blurred border between these two decades, figuratively representing the boundary between the childhood and the youth of the autofictional character, who inherits the author's background and family history, transformed by artistic consciousness, does not carry real significance in the book because of its focus on the dystopian present and post-apocalyptic sensitivity. The steppe becomes a persistent site of constant catastrophe and decay, a lasting end of the world, and the lens of temporality and the non-linear narrative structure emphasize post-apocalyptic sensitivity.

Vasyakina acknowledges the mythological and folkloric importance of the steppe in many Eurasian cultures, particularly among those who historically inhabited or were closely connected to these flat and boundless regions. The vast and often harsh space has profoundly shaped the imagination of these people, inspiring

a rich tapestry of myths and legends, traces of which are obvious in memories of the main character's father and his masculine companions, literal nomads. While depicting the steppe, both strategies – mythogenic and post-apocalyptic – overlap and enrich each other.

In one of the interviews, Vasyakina categorizes characters and people in general as "people of hills" (e.g., Siberians, like the narrator) and people born in the Volga vastness, "people of the steppes" (Vasiakina 2022: 14), whose inability to communicate ultimately underpins the novel's sense of perpetual catastrophe. And all her plots revolve around this opposition: "people of hills," to whom the main heroine belongs, struggle to survive in the endless plains and combat their own agoraphobia (sometimes metaphorical).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the semantics and characteristics of the steppe as an artistic space in Oksana Vasyakina's autofiction through the lens of post-apocalyptic aesthetics and mythopoetic motifs. My hypothesis is that the post-apocalyptic genre has deeply influenced the structure of her books, with evidence of this influence found across various textual layers, particularly in the descriptions of the landscape that reflect trauma, loss, and historical fragmentation.

FEATURES OF THE POST-APOCALYPTIC GENRE

James Berger claims that "the rhetorical gambit of much postmodern theory is that the 'end,' or some end […], has already taken place, perhaps without our knowledge" (Berger 1999: 31), and this sense of an ending that has already occurred but "we have somehow outlived it" (Hurley 2013: 61) accompanies Vasyakina's narratives. Though her works belong to autofiction rather than science fiction, they adopt a distinctly post-apocalyptic tone.

While modernity was preoccupied with eschatological concerns and the concept of an impending apocalypse. Post-modernity, by contrast, inhabits the aftermath – an "aftertime". It operates within a sense of finality or immediately after it.

All scholars studying contemporary post-apocalyptic novels observe a shift in the meaning of "apocalypse" from "revelation," as it appears in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, to a secular meaning of "catastrophe". As Jerry Määttä explains, "central to most post-apocalyptic narratives is that the apocalypse is understood as a secular, albeit fictional, event – usually a global disaster, such as nuclear war, a pandemic, climate change or a collision with a celestial body" (Määttä 2019: 138). Vasyakina's stories reflect this model precisely: they begin after an intimate loss – such as the death of a family member (a domestic catastrophe) – and unfold against a backdrop of broader historical upheaval in the outside world (a global catastrophe).

Moreover, post-apocalyptic literature frequently addresses collective trauma. While Vasyakina focuses on the traumas within her own family – violence, crime, illness, alienation, misunderstanding, and the absence of emotional connection – her

work also captures the broader traumatic experience of the country in the process of decomposition, disintegration of post-Soviet Russia. Many scholars of the genre agree that in contemporary culture, the terms "post-apocalypse," "post-apocalyptic literature," and "post-apocalyptic films" are used in an increasingly broadened sense. It might be more advisable to speak of post-apocalyptic sensitivity in art in the 21st century, which is directly associated with the historical period humanity is living in, concerning endings, with all the essential doubts about the future, and reflected in literature, visual arts, and films.

Brett Stifflemire offers a useful framework for the post-apocalyptic genre:

> Post-apocalypse is a condition existing after the apocalypse in both common senses of the term. The post-apocalyptic world exists both after the end of the world and after the end of belief in a mythic structure that makes ending meaningful. Rather than simply rebooting history or creating a new historical point of origin, the post-apocalypse is a gap, a dilation, between one ordered existence and the revealing of the next. As a result, this post-apocalyptic interim is fraught with temporal, spatial, existential, and ontological concerns as survivors construct lives and worlds from fragments of the meaningful, ordered, pre-apocalyptic world. The post-apocalyptic genre, then, takes up the task of depicting this world and does so through both form and content (Stifflemire 2017: 4–5).

It is worth mentioning the main characteristics of the post-apocalyptic genre to demonstrate the validity and relevance of analyzing *Steppe* in this context. Stifflemire reveals that, firstly, post-apocalyptic thinking often involves bricolage and intertextuality to reconstruct the dystopian present from artifacts of the old world. Secondly, during the transitional gap period "the post-apocalyptic world does reflect the carnival square. The interim, post-apocalyptic dilation is a carnivalesque period in which vertical social hierarchies have been made horizontal, cultural norms have been abandoned, and the order of the day is disorder" (*ibidem*: 10). Thirdly, although the wasteland setting is important, the post-apocalyptic landscape of memory is even more significant: "survivors in a time after the end must face the loss of the people, the places, and the time to which their memories refer" (*ibidem*: 13).

These characteristics clearly resonate with *Steppe*. The novel's form and content evoke both the ecological and emotional desolation of the world in ruins, where memory and myth are the only remaining structures.

STEPPE AS A POST-APOCALYPTIC NOVEL AND THE STEPPES AS POST-APOCALYPTIC SPACE

Despite its complex generic nature, *Steppe* shares a core feature with post-apocalyptic literature: the strong compulsion to narrate after the catastrophe. Vasyakina's protagonist, like survivors in post-apocalyptic worlds, seeks to testify to her experi-

ence, even in the absence of a clear audience. *Steppe*'s main character tells someone the story of her family – and, in the background, the story of her country. As De Cristofaro observes, post-apocalyptic characters often tell their stories in hopes of asserting meaning, despite fearing that no one may be listening (De Cristofaro 2020: 166). For instance, in *Steppe*, Vasykina's female protagonist addresses her story to an unknown interlocutor who, in line with postmodern conventions, may even exist outside the fictional world. This verbalization helps her establish a sense of control and communion.

In *Steppe*, the central storyline follows the protagonist and her father on a journey in 2010 from Vladimir to Volgograd and back to Central Russia through Rybinsk, ultimately concluding the journey in Moscow. Interwoven with this journey are recollections from her childhood in the "wild nineties" (*лихие девяностые*), a term often used to describe the chaotic period following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The book's narrative structure reflects temporal dislocation and spatial fragmentation – hallmarks of post-apocalyptic storytelling.

Environmental catastrophe is subtly present in the novel's backdrop. The summer of 2010 was marked by severe wildfires in Central Russia, driven by record-breaking temperatures and drought. This environmental crisis, resulting in widespread smoke, was clearly a consequence of climate change and a symptom of the so-called Anthropocene (Crutzen, Stoermer 2000) – a "geological epoch, in which human activities are having such an impact on Earth's ecology that they are leaving an enduring imprint on the geological strata" (De Cristafaro 2020: 7). The natural disaster resonates with the protagonist's struggle to connect with her father before his agonizing death. The characters escape from the vast and monstrous city of Moscow to the steppes, where there is nothing to burn – the last refuge for the nomadic truck driver and "steppe person" that the protagonist's father is.

In the novel, the steppe is depicted as a hostile environment, recalling the dystopian landscapes in the *Mad Max* universe or *Dune*, where survival requires knowledge of the wasteland's harsh conditions to avoid vanishing: "The steppe is sand, threaded with grasses and tiny whitish flowers. 'Don't stray from the paved road,' my father said. 'The moment you veer right or left, the wheels will get stuck, and you're done for'"[1] (Vasiakina 2022: 7)[2].

It is also typical of post-apocalyptic literature that such a hostile and desolate space was once inhabited but has been drastically altered by some catastrophe:

> The steppe used to be a garden. People built irrigation systems and grew whatever they wanted there: with so much sun, they could harvest three crops each summer. Bright red, fleshy oxheart tomatoes, golden pumpkins, cucumbers, and wheat. All of this thrived in the steppe.

[1] "Степь – это песок, прорезанный травами и маленькими белесыми цветами. Нельзя свернуть с бетонированной дороги, говорил отец, только двинешь вправо или влево – колеса завязнут, и тебе конец."

[2] Here and hereafter, unless otherwise stated, translations are the author's.

> Now, when you look at it, it seems like a vast salty wasteland with little blue clouds of camel thorn. But that's not true – if you give water to the steppe, it's capable of much. Then people left. Well, they didn't exactly leave… they simply stopped working this land. A new era arrived. The collective farms fell apart, crumbling like onion skin. But the pipes from the irrigation systems remained. They became nobody's property. They stayed behind like simple things, hidden in the sand and steppe grasses[3] (*ibidem*: 9–10).

In post-apocalyptic science fiction, the contemporary world is often viewed "through the eyes of a ruined future" (*ibidem*). In Vasyakina's novels, both the author and her readers inhabit the world *after* the end – several decades after the collapse of the USSR – and are part of a postmodern, post-apocalyptic autofiction. The collapse of the USSR is framed as an overwhelming and fateful catastrophe. Everything the protagonist witnesses during her childhood, and even later in the 2000s and 2010s through her father's perspective, can be seen as the decaying carcass of the former *homo soveticus* civilization.

The pipes buried in the steppes function, on one level, as "various forms of infrastructure in disrepair" (Määttä 2019: 150), typical of post-apocalyptic landscapes. On another level, they are ruins that, as Jerry Määttä claims, "often evoke an intimate form of melancholia and a sense of loss, something verging on the nostalgic" (*ibidem*: 149). They may also be seen as "monuments to idealized civilizations of the past […] reminders of the inevitable fall of all empires and civilizations, of the capriciousness of history itself" (*ibidem*: 139). Interestingly, the motif of retrieving relics of a lost Soviet world alludes to *Roadside Picnic* (1972) by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, in which "stalkers" venture into the dangerous "Zone" to retrieve strange artifacts left behind after the Visitation of a mysterious extraterrestrial civilization.

Here, the steppe functions both as a post-apocalyptic wasteland of ruins and artifacts and a landscape of memory – a living archive marked by temporal disjunction. The protagonist is brutally forced to acknowledge that these endless plains devour everything: from the ancient sea to her own father's decomposing body. The steppe consumes not only objects but also lives:

> I've thought a lot about those shells in the steppe. They've been lying there since the time when the steppe was a sea. The sea receded, but the shells remained, and now they are slowly worn away by wind and water. Somewhere else, there is a grain from that very shell that once lay on the floor of the ancient Caspian Sea. In much the same way, my father has been lying in a steppe grave for seven years, nourishing the steppe saltwort and the groundwater. His dead

[3] "Раньше степь была садом. Люди построили оросительные системы и выращивали в степи все, что им хотелось: в степи много солнца и они снимали за лето по три урожая. Алые мясистые помидоры 'бычье сердце', рыжие тыквы, огурцы и хлеб. Все это было в степи. Сейчас посмотришь, и кажется, это одна сплошная солончаковая пустошь с голубыми облачками верблюжьих колючек. Но это не так: если степи дать воду, она на многое способна. Потом люди ушли. Ну как ушли… Люди перестали заниматься этой землей. Настало другое время. Совхозы распались, как распадается луковая шелуха. Но трубы от оросительных систем остались. Они стали ничьими. Они остались, как простые вещи, схороненные в песке и степных травах."

> body isn't going anywhere anytime soon. A shell in the steppe sand is white and dry. His white and dry skull, split into two parts, will remain in the steppe as long as the slow sea continues to die and shrink[4] (Vasiakina 2022: 226).

Even the smallest details in Vasyakina's artistic world anchor the novel within the post-apocalyptic genre. For instance, in *Steppe*, the world is populated by marginal figures – bandits, addicts, and truck drivers. Lawlessness and anarchic order prevail, evoking the dystopian atmosphere of the *Mad Max* universe. As noted earlier, monstrous forms of life dominate the world after the end, affirming its carnivalesque nature, where moral and social norms are inverted. In one episode, drunken policemen are killed under the wheels of the narrator's sleeping father – a moment that epitomizes the collapse of institutional power. In this world, institutional power – symbolized by the despised city of Moscow – holds no significance.

As Antonio Gramsci famously observed, this variety of monstrosity is characteristic of transitional times: "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters." (Gramsci 1971: 276). Vasyakina's steppe is such a monstrous and liminal zone.

MYTHOPOETICAL STEPPE: A LIVING BEING AND A CHTONIC BEAST

The mythological layer, as many works of the genre, is significant in Vasyakina's novel, despite the secular and realistic descriptions of Russia in the 1990s and 2000s. For the narrator and Vasyakina – both "people of the hills" – the boundlessness of the steppe evokes fear and a sense of the sublime. The steppe becomes not only a landscape but a living, breathing, almost sentient force:

> During the day, the hum of the steppe is veiled by an intense, overpowering light. You look out over this vastness, and you can feel nothing but awe – awe at the endlessness of the steppe, pushing and flooding into your eyes. There is nowhere to hide from it during the day; it has to be endured, understood, and accepted as it is – grand, a bit forlorn, and monotonous[5] (Vasiakina 2022: 12–13).

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[4] "Я долго думала о тех раковинах в степи. Они лежат там со времен, когда степь была морем. Море ушло, но раковины остались, и теперь они медленно истачиваются ветром и водой. Где-то в другом месте есть крупица той самой раковины со дна старого Каспийского моря. Так мой отец уже семь лет лежит в степной могиле и питает степную солянку и грунтовые воды. Его мертвое тело еще долго никуда не денется. Раковина в степном песке белая и сухая. Его белый и сухой череп, раскроенный на две части, будет лежать в степи, пока медленное море умирает и сжимается."

[5] "Днем гул степи застилает яркий непреодолимый свет. Ты смотришь на этот простор и ничего, кроме изумления, чувствовать не можешь. Изумления оттого, что степь бесконечна и она все лезет, лезет тебе в глаза. И нет в ней места, где от нее самой укрыться днем, ее

This imagery is rooted in the aesthetics of the sublime – where vast, indifferent nature overwhelms the human psyche – and in mythic archetypes of the earth as a living, omnipotent force. The steppe, in the protagonist's childhood nightmare, is infinite and unreachable, echoing the Borgesian motif of the terror of the infinite.

Moreover, the steppe is not merely expansive; it is animate. In some myths, it is imagined as a living entity that breathes, moves, and even devours people. This perception is tied to the dangers the steppe presents – sudden changes in climate and a lack of shelter and resources make it inhospitable for unprepared travelers (see Kerrigan *et al*. 1998: 22–23). These mythologies and connotations persist in Vasyakina's novel, where the steppe is capable of absorbing everything:

> In the steppe, everything crumbles and smolders. My father would throw cigarette butts and duchess soda bottles right out the window. I asked him why, and he replied that the steppe would take them. The steppe absorbed everything, and it was unclear where it all went. Everything in it disintegrated and perished, as if the steppe were a field of destructive sound that broke down any object at a molecular level once it entered[6]
> (*ibidem*: 13–14).

In Turkic myths, the steppe is often personified as an active and spiritual space. In some legends, it is viewed not only as part of nature but also as an entity capable of influencing human fate, granting or taking life (see: Dulam, Vacek 1983). For example, the spirits of the steppe could be seen as helpers or protectors of the tribe; however, if traditions or nature are neglected, the steppe may "turn away" from the people, becoming hostile and destructive.

Vasyakina continues this tradition of personification of the steppe, vividly depicting it in anthropomorphic terms: "I thought the steppe was like a soft belly. From the window of my father's truck, you could see it lying there, shifting with tiny rises and falls"[7] (*ibidem*: 7). And later, this metaphor is expanded:

> I told you that from the plane window, the steppe looks like a soft belly. But in reality, it's hard, wind-packed beige sand. It's heavy. You look at it from the window and it seems welcoming; you might ask it, 'Hide me behind a hill in your white grass,' and it will beckon you with a fold of its belly. You'll walk a long way to that hill, only to find it flat and hard, with nowhere behind it to hide. A strip of cassette tape has caught on a sharp, sturdy blade of grass and whistles in the wind. It's turned completely blue now, faded by the sun, and the grass nods in the wind. It nods in a human way, resigned. Everything here is moving, going

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необходимо терпеть, сознавать и принимать такой – великой, немного сиротливой и однообразной."

[6] "В степи все рассыпается и тлеет. Отец выбрасывал окурки и бутылки от дюшеса прямо из окна, я спросила, почему так, он ответил, что степь заберет. Степь все забирала, и непонятно, куда оно все девалось. Все в ней рассыпалось и гибло, как если бы она была полем губительного звука, который на молекулярном уровне разрушает любой объект, который в нее попадает."

[7] "Я думала, что степь похожа на мягкий живот. Из окна отцовской фуры было видно, как она лежала и ворочалась крохотными возвышенностями"

somewhere. The wind drives the clouds, drags along the stub of a plastic bottle. Someone used that stub as a scoop. It's dragged along and along, with the endless rustling of everything around. The rustling speaks to you, but it doesn't hear you. The blind, relentless southern wilderness fills you with fear. But don't be afraid[8] (*ibidem*: 17–18).

The motif of the living steppe resonates with the Mongolian and Turkic cult of Tengri – the sky and earth deity – in which both the earth and the steppe are imbued with sacred energy (Lörincz 1972). The steppe can "breathe" through the winds or change, which is perceived as a manifestation of its living essence. In Mongolian shamanic tradition, the earth – especially the steppe – is considered alive and capable of punishing those who violate its sanctity (Bum-Ochir 2002). For example, in Mongolian poetry and folklore, the steppe is often described as a "great body" (Kerrigan *et al.* 1998: 124), as in Vasyakina's novel, with its vast expanses compared to skin and its rivers and roads to veins. This description creates the impression that the steppe is a massive living entity, overseeing people and responding to their actions – a bestial space of both death and renewal.

It is therefore fitting that, for Vasyakina's heroine, it is the steppe that devoured her father: "Father loved watching the clumps of grass in the steppe; by autumn, they would fade under the sun. Now Father himself had become the steppe, feeding it with his own body. […] The wind and sun of the steppe had worn him down and aged him. AIDS led to paralysis in part of his face and several fingers on his right hand, and meningitis destroyed his mind"[9] (Vasiakina 2022: 90, 109). In this context, the steppe is read as a chthonic beast – indifferent to average mortals and pathographic on a historical and ecological scale. Considering that the steppe could be both a metaphor for Russia and its disastrous history – its historical and environmental decay – these pathological comparisons become increasingly concerning. It is a landscape of myth and mourning, where the personal merges with the planetary.

Undoubtedly, the steppe carries positive connotations in various cultural traditions across the world – it often symbolizes freedom, spiritual vastness, or a harmonious relationship with nature. However, in Vasyakina's narrative, the steppe takes

[8] "Я сказала тебе, что степь из окна самолета похожа на мягкий живот. На деле же она твердый, спрессованный ветром бежевый песок. Она тяжелая. Смотришь на нее из окна: кажется приветливой, попросишь ее – спрячь меня за бугром в своей белой траве, и она поманит тебя складкой своего живота. Ты будешь долго идти к бугру, и окажется, что он плоский и твердый и нет за ним места, где спрятаться. Пластиковая лента от магнитофонной кассеты зацепилась за острую крепкую травку и свистит на ветру. Она уже вся голубая, выгорела на солнце, и травка кивает под ветром. Кивает по-человечески, обреченно. Все здесь двигается и идет куда-то. Ветром гонит облака, ветер тащит обрубок пластиковой бутылки. Кто-то этот обрубок использовал как черпак. Он тащится, тащится, и слышно бесконечный шелест всего, что здесь есть вокруг. Шелест к тебе обращается, но тебя он не слышит. Тебе страшно от слепоты жестокой южной природы. Но ты не бойся."

[9] "Отец любил смотреть на пучки травы в степи, к осени они гасли на солнце. Теперь отец сам был степью и кормил ее собой. […] Степь ветром и солнцем объела его и состарила, СПИД привел к параличу части лица и нескольких пальцев на правой руке, менингит разрушил его мозг."

on a more ambivalent and deeply personal meaning. It becomes a symbolic extension of the father, a figure the protagonist longs to understand and connect with but ultimately fails to. Both the steppe and the father remain enigmatic and threatening entities – forces of nature that resist intimacy and comprehension.

This symbolic alignment becomes especially significant in the final chapters of the novel. Just as the reader begins to feel sympathy for the father – a long-haul truck driver, an ordinary man shaped by an unforgiving period of social transition – the narrator disrupts this sympathy by recalling a moment of violence. In a flashback, she describes an episode of physical aggression driven by his jealousy toward her mother. For a daughter marked by trauma, it is nearly impossible to reconcile love with violence. Thus, the steppe, as the father's elemental habitat, also becomes inseparable from the emotional landscape of fear, alienation, and moral ambiguity.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, Oksana Vasyakina constructs a vividly mythic and post-apocalyptic landscape, where geography becomes inseparable from memory, loss, and trauma, a space existing in the aftermath of the world's end. The author employs elements typical of the post-apocalyptic genre, including ruins, traces of the Anthropocene, a fragmented narrative structure, and, significantly, myths. The novel explores various forms of "endings": historical, universal, and personal. A main character, a "person of hills", contrasts sharply with her father, a nomadic "steppe person," and experiences profound alienation and terror in the face of the boundless, limitless space that bears witness to countless catastrophes. This positioning renders her especially vulnerable, amplifying her post-apocalyptic mindset and anxiety. Her only means of regaining control is through storytelling – a practice echoed by generations of survivors in post-apocalyptic literature and films.

The protagonist of *Steppe* journeys through time, space, and her own memories of childhood in the turbulent "wild nineties". The steppes, which can also be interpreted as a metaphor for Russia itself, serve a dual purpose: as a post-apocalyptic zone filled with remnants of the USSR's collapse and a post-apocalyptic landscape of memory of her father and their inability to connect.

In the novel, the steppe is carnivalesque, temporally dynamic, conscious yet indifferent, and rich in semantic and mythopoetic meanings. This paper offers only a preliminary analysis of the spatial structure of Vasyakina's novel. Further research into the representation of spaces – such as steppes, provincial cities, and towns – within the author's literary oeuvre appears highly promising.

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