



## Research Article

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# Studying the Literary Features of the “Arctic Robinsonade” Plot in the Artistic Discourse of the 21st Century

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## Abstract

*This research aims to describe and study the “Arctic Robinsonade” plot embedded in the texts of the 21st century, considering the literary features of these texts. The authors revealed the properties due to which the “Arctic Robinsonade” plot is preserved in the literature of the first decades of the 21st century. Structural-semantic analysis enabled us to identify the elements that are introduced or removed from the plot of this story and update the potential content of texts created on the basis of one plot. This article assesses new opportunities for a promising direction in the subject area of the history of literature – studying fiction in the context of modern issues of preserving “cultural memory”. This article lays the conceptual foundations for further study of integrating a well-known historical episode into modern mass culture. This research demonstrates a significant practical contribution to the development of subjectology in the world literature. This article presents a number of useful literary commentaries aimed at expanding the interpretive background of the text, originally published in Europe in the 18th century – the book by P.-L. Le Roy about the adventures of Russian sailors on Svalbard (Spitzbergen). The scientific result of this research is the creation of a model of the “Arctic Robinsonade” in the texts of authors of the 21st century.*

**Keywords:** Arctic Robinsonade, plot, plot invariant, plot structure, interpretation

## 1. Introduction

The subject of analysis in this article is the plot structure of two works of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The texts are based on an event that occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: an unprecedented case of the survival of Russian fishermen in Svalbard. Since the events occur in the Arctic, we call this plot “Arctic

Robinsonade”.

The writings of two authors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century contain a comprehension of the Robinsonade model of the individual's life order and the existence of people in a detached environment, outside the big world (Tsybakova, 2008).

“Arctic Robinsonade” is a concept that has not yet entered wide literary usage. The works united by this title can be considered as a separate type of documentary robinsonade, based on the real case of an isolated group of people on a remote island.

The “Arctic Robinsonade” is based on the story of the Mezen “Robinsons”, which became popular from its very inception (second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) and continues to be in demand to this day: writers of completely different trends and eras turn to it (O. Belomorsky, M. Arkhangel'skaya, A. Zubkovsky, N. Lebedev, Z. Davydov, K. Badigin, S. Radzievskaya, O. Shcherbatov, etc.), implementing their creative plans in various forms of reception of the book by P.-L. Le Roy *A Narrative of the Singular Adventures of Four Russian Sailors, who Were Cast Away on the Desert Island of East-Spitzbergen* (1772).<sup>1</sup>

The hypothesis of this study is to test the assumption that the “Arctic Robinsonade” has several parameters that make it fundamentally different from the classical literary Robinsonade.

## 2. Methods and Materials

The historical approach is basic for this research; the study applied a combination of comparative historical analysis, elements of structural semiotic analysis, and motive analysis. An interdisciplinary approach is fundamental for this research, which makes it possible to reveal the originality of the described phenomena.

The research methodology is focused on the historical-genetic method, which is used to discover the internal links between the texts of modern literature and their analogue from the previous literary era (the book by P.-L. Le Roy). The application of the structural-semantic method to the analysis of the “Arctic Robinsonade” plot makes it possible to reveal a genetic link with the scheme of the classical Robinsonade. In the “Arctic Robinsonade”, the classic scheme of the plot about Robinson is filled with new content and meanings. Our research question is focused on the arsenal of artistic means used to form the plot line and the image of the Mezen “Robinsons”.

We conducted this research using methods of qualitative analysis of written texts. We adhere to the standpoint of M. Q. Patton, “any document containing text is a potential source for qualitative analysis” (Patton, 2015). Literary texts about the historical event of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as described by the authors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are significant for the formation of ideas about the experience of human survival in the Arctic desert.

The publications of scholars from various subject areas, including advocacy (Willgens et al., 2016), education (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018; Morgan, 2022), medicine (Bergman et al., 2023), and sociology (Khoja et al., 2023), were devoted to qualitative research methodology. Philology is not found in these studies. J. W. Creswell (2014) developed a general methodology for conducting qualitative analysis. In our opinion, areas of qualitative research such as narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, case studies, and grounded theory may be suitable for philological research.

In our research, a qualitative study allows us to identify a single common meaning in texts that offer a literary interpretation of one episode of the development of the Arctic. The work was carried out in several stages. The preliminary data collection stage is an anonymous online survey, aimed to establish the level of audience awareness of the story being told. The main stage is empirical work using literary texts. Analyzing the text, we come to the reasons why the characters behave in a certain way on the island.

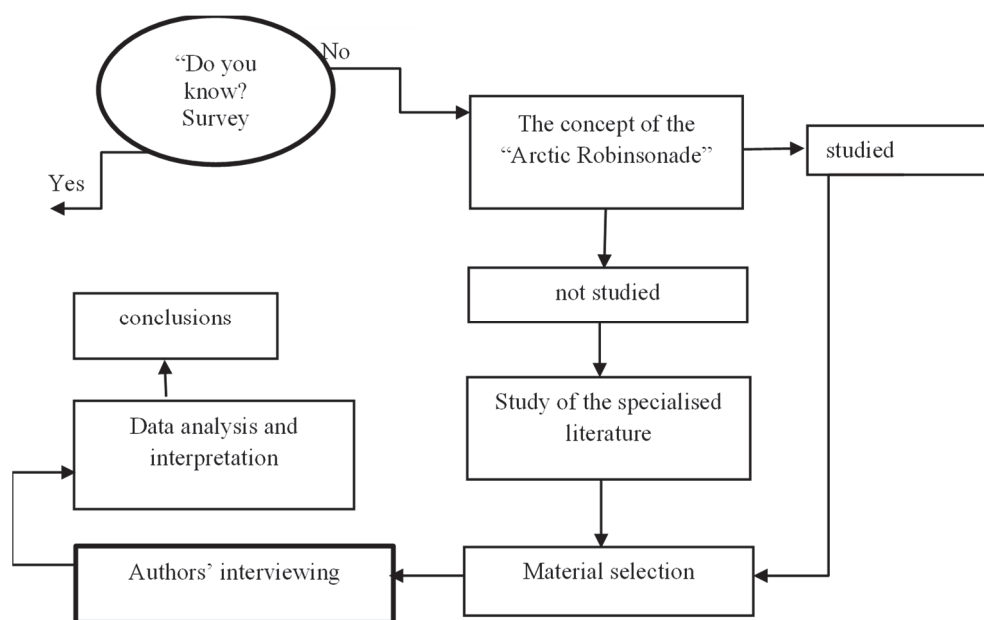
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<sup>1</sup> Le Roy, P.-L (1975). *A Narrative of the Singular Adventures of Four Russian Sailors, who Were Cast Away on the Desert Island of East-Spitzbergen* (4th ed.), Moscow: Mysl.

The task of the empirical stage of the study is to study and understand in detail the case of fishermen on Edge Island in texts of a certain period (early 21<sup>st</sup> century). In the interpretation of this case, various methods are used: interviews, source analysis, and visual-graphic method for presenting data; qualitative methods are also included.

The research process flowchart describes the stages of finding an answer to a given research question. The first stage is to define the research problem and develop a clear, concise, and relevant domain of research points. The starting point in our case was the survey “Do you know?” on the Internet (the survey has been conducted from 2021 to the present)<sup>2</sup>, which showed that the readership had little acquaintance with the history of the survival of the Mezen people in the Arctic in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The next stage was to characterise the concept of “Arctic Robinsonade” and establish its place in scientific discourse. As a result, it was revealed that the concept of “Arctic Robinsonade” has not been studied to date. The “Selection of material” stage implied choosing two contemporary authors who proposed options for the literary interpretation of the development of Spitzbergen. Using the method of unstructured interviews, we determined the reasons for these authors to address the topic of fishermen’s survival in the Arctic and the sources of their acquaintance with the plot. Detailed analysis and interpretation of data are the main stages of the research. In particular, a structural-compositional analysis of the plot was conducted, motives were identified, and characters were described. We also identified the proximity/remoteness of the author’s interpretation of the plot about the Mezens from the original source – the book by P.-L. Le Roy, and the degree of receptive development of D. Defoe’s novel about Robinson Crusoe. At the final stage, conclusions were formulated that reflected the planned result: the literary peculiarities of the plot about the Mezen fishermen.

The methodology of the study can be visualised using a research process flowchart (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Flowchart of studying the literary peculiarities of the “Arctic Robinsonade” (compiled by the authors)

<sup>2</sup> Online survey is available via the link: <https://goo.su/dtWBiM3> (In Russian)

2.1 Preparing for data collection

Data collection involved conducting an anonymous online survey. The purpose of the survey was to reveal the level of familiarity with the history of the survival of Mezen fishermen on Edge Island in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The survey consists of three semantic blocks. In the first block, respondents report their location (Figure 2) and age (Figure 3). The second block contains the following questions: What literary plot did the story about Mezens' voyage to the Arctic remind you of? Do you know the names of the writers who developed the plot of Mezens' voyage to the Arctic? The third block is connected to the theory of literature. Questions are open-ended. The respondents were selected randomly.

As a result of the analysis of this survey, we came to the following conclusions.

Most respondents live in the Arkhangelsk Region, namely in the city of Severodvinsk (58% of the total number of respondents).

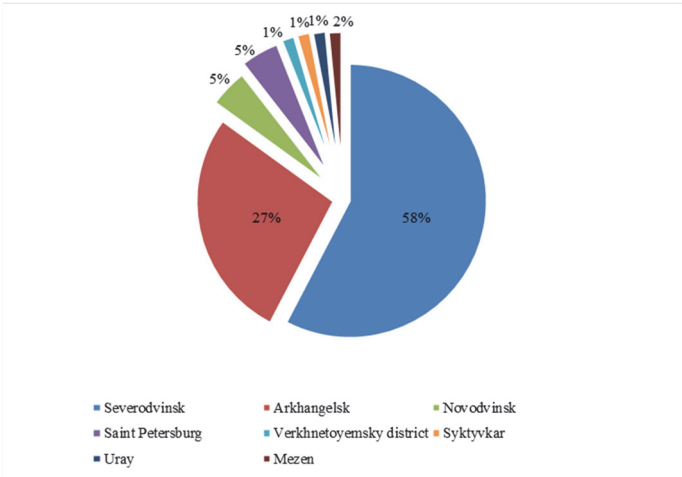


Figure 2: Bar plot. Distribution of respondents by place of residence (compiled by the authors)

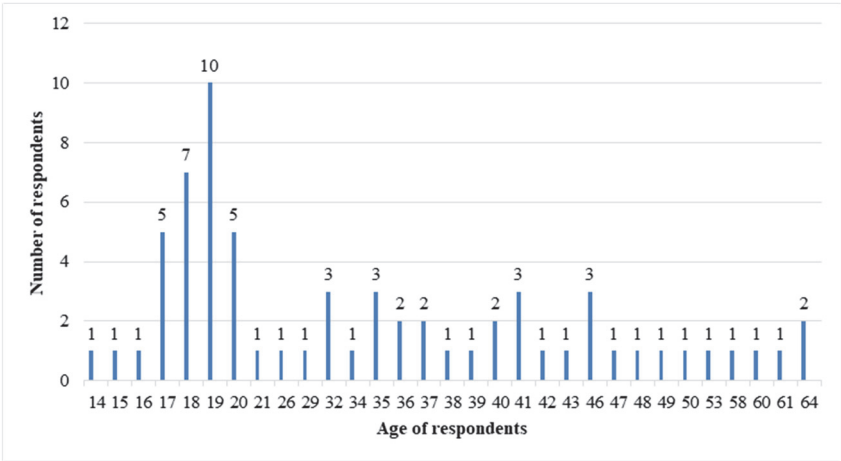


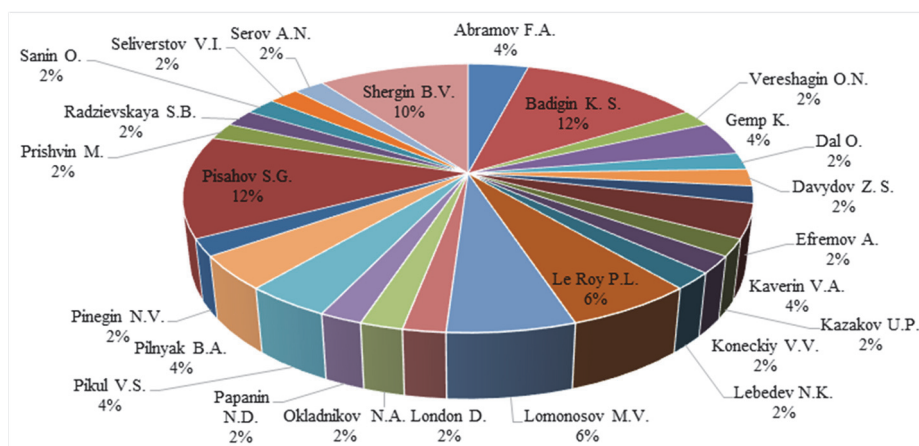
Figure 3: Bar plot. Distribution of respondents by age (generated by Google Forms)

The bar plot shows that most people who participated in the survey were young people aged 17–20 years.

Our observations showed that life in the Arkhangelsk Region and young age do not guarantee that the respondent is familiar with the plots under study. The most frequent answer of this category of respondents is “I don’t know” and “I am unaware”.

We received unexpected and varied answers to the first question of the second block about what kind of literary plot the story of the Mezens’ voyage to the Arctic reminds us of. These are the plots of D. Defoe about Robinson Crusoe, J. Verne about travelling around the world, ancient plots about the Argonauts and Homer’s *Odyssey*, the medieval plot of the Younger Edda, and the plots of contemporary authors Varvara Enal (from the series *Alive*) and Nikolai Vnukov (*Alone*). However, the most common answer was “I don’t know”.

The results of the answers to the second question of the second block are shown in the diagram (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Graphical chart with the writers’ names (compiled by the authors)

The diagram shows that K.S. Badigin, S.G. Pisakhov, and B.V. Shergin are the most frequently mentioned authors in connection with the plot. The chain of names is conditioned by personal contacts and friendship between K. Badigin, the author of the novel (*The Way to Grumant*), and the northern storyteller B. Shergin. The work of S. Pisakhov presents a Pomors’ story close to the plot under the study on the survival of two brothers on the island.

Thus, an online survey conducted using the Google Forms service showed that the modern reader is practically unaware of the story of the Mezen fishermen’s survival.

Readers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century associate the story of the fishermen from Mezen mainly with the authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our experience showed that the range of personalities who had incorporated this plot into their own works was much wider (see Multimedia Corpus of Texts about Mezen Robinsons, n. d.). We conventionally called the corpus of texts about the Mezen fishermen as “Arctic Robinsonade”.

Noteworthy, the plot about sailors who survived on Svalbard in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was reproduced in diverse variations throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries: publications in Germany and Russia in periodicals for readers of different age categories, translations, educational literature, novels, stories, and online-texts in new media.

Compared to texts of earlier periods, authors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century do not follow the original source word for word; they allow for rearrangement of the component parts of the plot, giving the story a new sound. The reconstruction of the past events, the adventure baseline, the vicissitudes associated

with the confrontation between man and cruel external conditions, the very fact of a fantastic six-year survival at critical temperatures, and the exoticism of polar themes find a response in modern readers.

Robinsonade in the Arctic brings together writers from different countries, making it possible to consider it in an international context. *Dangerous Work: Diary of an Arctic Adventure* by Arthur Conan Doyle, which first became available to a wide audience in 2012, is a striking narrative centred on the theme of polar life. The northern cycle of stories by J. London is dedicated to the theme of heroism, the struggle against a cruel climate, and, of course, cruel morals ("The White Silence", "The Son of the Wolf", "The Men of Forty Mile", "In a Far Country", "To the Man on the Trail", "The Wisdom of the Trail", "An Odyssey of the North", and others).

We find elements of the "Arctic Robinsonade" in many works of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century and modern world literature. These narratives are based on the struggle, adventure, and survival of protagonists in harsh conditions. These are, for example, the novels "The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Man" by Jorn Riel (1931), "Night without End" by Alistair MacLean (1959), "Ice Floes and Flaming Water: A True Adventure in Melville Bay" by Peter Freuchen (1961), "Icebound" by Dean Koontz (1976), "Terrors of Ice and Darkness" by Christoph Ransmayr (1984), "Deception Point" by Dan Brown (2001), "Ice and Water, Water and Ice" by Majgull Axelsson (2008), "The Terror" by Dan Simons (2007; the book is based on John Franklin's lost expedition to the Arctic in 1845), "The Arctic Event" by Robert Ludlem and James H. Cobb (2007) and many others.

The "Arctic Robinsonade" is presented in the popular science genre. It is worth mentioning the famous story "Fram over Polhavet (Farthest North)" (1897) by the Norwegian polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930) about his famous attempt to conquer the North Pole. The book "The Voyage of the Vega Round Asia and Europe", written by Niels Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld after he navigated the Northern Sea Route in 1878-1879 on a steam-sailing vessel, is considered a classic of polar literature.

The book by the English polar traveller W. Herbert "Walking Across the Arctic Ocean" is devoted to a description of the trans-Arctic journey undertaken in 1968. The narrative "Portrait of an Ice Cap: with Human Figures" (1953) by James Scott is based on true documents - diaries of participants in the 1930 expedition to Greenland, which they kept day after day in the most difficult conditions, even on the verge of death.

Cinematic art has not ignored the popular theme of human survival in the extreme conditions of the Arctic. In 2014, the Norwegian director Grethe Bøe-Waal shot the adventure film "Operation Arctic" (Norwegian "Overleve i Arktis"), the very name of which already declares the problem of man's collision with the Arctic elements. At the 2018 Cannes Film Festival, the film "Arctic" (translated into Russian as "Lost in the Ice") by Joe Penna was presented, in which an aeroplane pilot named Overgård, who crashed in the Arctic, tries to survive in the hope that he will be found and rescued.

We offer to get acquainted with the works of the authors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – O. Shcherbatov, M. Starchikov, A. Kurengin, and A. Saltykov. We happened to contact two living writers – Mikhail Starchikov and Alexander Kurengin.

In the interviews, the writers spoke about the reasons for creating their works about the Mezen fishermen and the sources of information about survival in the archipelago. It was revealed that the authors studied the development of Spitzbergen and were interested in local history (the history of Mezen). This became the motive for developing the plot in their own texts.

## 2.2 The concept of "Arctic Robinsonade" in scientific discourse

Researchers from various scientific fields have been turning to the Robinsonade phenomenon for many centuries (at the same time, this phenomenon has long gone beyond the limits of the literary genre) and discovering new vectors of reflection. Among the recent large publications, the research *The Robinsonade Across Languages, Cultures, and Media* edited by J. Lipski (2020) attracts attention and provides a detailed history of the transition of the novel from one genre to another, i.e., he

analyzes the incredible path of the English novel spreading from the theatre and film industry to consumer goods and computer games.

In one of the monograph chapters, R. Swenson considers early examples of the genre, including Peter Longueville's play *The Hermit*. In P. Gill's article, the research question focuses on postmodernity and the use of the philosophical thought experiment - "counterfactual". The chapters of the second section, "National Contexts", are devoted to the spread of "Robinsonade" in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to other European national literatures. In particular, a fascinating story is presented about the perception of *Robinson Crusoe* in the literary culture of Poland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (O'Malley, 2023).

Some research papers cover a wide range of methodological approaches to the analysis of the English novel as a phenomenon and offer different interpretations of the literary text and the image of the protagonist.

Thus, the German researcher Wulf D. Hund (2023) calls the work of D. Defoe a "gloomy and brilliant bestseller" and analyzes the protagonist's anthroponym. The author derives a tripartite structure of the name Robinson, which is based on the themes of the pursuit of profit, hegemonic cultural claims, and despotic claims to power (Hund, 2023).

Nowadays, literary historians distinguish between the following types of robinsonade: classical and fantastic robinsonade (Kozmina, 2017), philosophical robinsonade (Nofal, 2021), national robinsonade (Ivanchukova, 2012; Toktonaliev, 2013; Litvinenko, 2015), urban robinsonade (Chulakov, 2014), and modern robinsonade (Gordeeva, 2015). In many articles, robinsonade is considered as a genre invariant of D. Defoe's novel, a way of comprehending the boundary between "us" and "them" (Grimova, 2019), as a literary narrative (Loschevsky, 2002), as a motive (Tsybakova, 2008), and as a topos (Litvinenko, 2015).

In the *Literary Encyclopedia of Terms and Concepts*, A. N. Nikolyukin defines robinsonade as an apology for the existence of an individual outside of society <...>, where the hero, as a result of a shipwreck, finds himself on an island... and meets a 'natural person'.<sup>3</sup> The above interpretation indicates some obligatory elements of the Robinsonade plot: the problem of 'personality and society', a shipwreck and a meeting with a 'natural person'. The authors of robinsonades do not always follow all of the above canons.

E. Y. Kozmina characterises a set of elements inherent in the plot of the classic and fantastic Robinsonade as follows: Robinsonade is built on an adventurous plot, the main event of which is the test of the hero. The hero of the classic robinsonade is tested for his ability to reproduce elements of human civilisation that are familiar to him. <...> The hero of the fantastic version survives in the conditions of another, inhuman world. He meets flora and fauna unknown to mankind and climatic conditions other than those on Earth. His task is not only to survive but also to understand this world and adapt to it, and most importantly, not to lose his human qualities. In this survival, it is checked what exactly should be preserved in a person to remain as such, and what can be changed in accordance with new conditions (Kozmina, 2017: 169). The researcher defines the key collision of two types of robinsonade – harmonious and disharmonious relations between man and the world, revealing a fundamental difference in national worldviews.

S. B. Tsybakova writes about Robinsonade philosophy: Robinsonade is most often a form of implementation of a moral search, an individual's attempts to gain independence from social ties, to penetrate the secrets of spiritual knowledge, nature, life, death, and immortality, into the spheres of invisible worlds and entities (Tsybakova, 2008: 166). Robinsonade manifests the individual integrity of the personal being "I-in-the-world". In addition, the initial episodes of Robinsonade contain an

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<sup>3</sup> Nikolyukin, A. N. (2001). *Robinsonade*. In A. N. Nikolyukin (Ed.) *Literary Encyclopedia of Terms and Concepts. Institute of Science Information on the Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences*. Moscow: Intelvak NPC, pp. 881-882. [Online] Available: [https://biblio.imli.ru/images/abook/teoriya/Literaturnaya\\_entsiklopediya\\_terminov\\_i\\_ponyatiy.\\_2001.pdf](https://biblio.imli.ru/images/abook/teoriya/Literaturnaya_entsiklopediya_terminov_i_ponyatiy._2001.pdf) (28 May 2023).



indication of the exceptional nature of the events that unfold in the textual fabric.

According to A. R. Volkov and Yu. I. Popov, the plot scheme of Robinsonade in general can be represented as follows: life before the catastrophe – catastrophe – isolation – reclamation of a closed space – return to the former world (where isolation is the main genre-forming element) (Volkov & Popov, 1987). Another specialist presents the robinsonade as a work consisting of three parts: the heroic journey, the robinsonade as such, and the social utopia (Ivanchukova, 2012).

Theorists and historians of literature consider the structure of the robinsonade plot, which includes a stable set of structural narrative units interconnected by correlation relations. In this article, we consider the structure of this plot on the material of the “Arctic Robinsonade”.

Modern publications reflect other approaches to the analysis of Robinsonade. A psychoanalytic approach to studying the image of the protagonist has been chosen by young researchers from Indonesia (Floriani et al., 2020). The authors show that Robinson Crusoe, once on a desert island, uses a combination of protective mechanisms to preserve his personality: suppression, rationalisation, reaction formation, regression, aggression, apathy, and fantasy.

Educators-researchers, relying on Rousseau’s assertion that the novel about Robinson Crusoe is “the best treatise on education” (Rousseau, 1979), confirm the educational potential of the book.

The article by German researcher Annika Scheel (2023) focuses on the analysis of the didactic possibilities of the Robinsonade genre. Scheel notes that the modern children’s “robinsonade” is an example of the merging of intertexts, and the story of Crusoe is an interpretable doubled narrative of didacticism.

The Robinsonade plot is actively used in game studies (Lobo, 2019). English educators Sally Bushell and James O. Butler prove the suitability and adaptability of Robinsonade for Litcraft (an exciting educational process), give examples of using Robinson’s Island in the computer world of Minecraft when teaching reading, and analyse the influence of the space of the island on the reader’s experience (Bushell & Butler, 2023).

The Asian film industry has not bypassed the Robinsonade phenomenon. Thus, for example, South Korean filmmakers employed the Robinsonade structure and embodied it in two films: *Castaway on the Moon* (2009) and *The Larva Island* (2020). The study by Nguyen Thi Phú (Nguyễn, 2023) is devoted to the analysis of these film interpretations. In the article, the author concludes that Asian culture, having receptively assimilated the structure of Robinsonade, is limited to its three constituent thematic blocks – human isolation, survival on the island, and assimilation in society.

At the same time, in the European and Asian experience of studying robinsonade, the plot structure remains beyond the scope of research interest, a clear definition of the plot of “Robinsonade” has not yet been given, and the plots of national Robinsonades have not been analysed. “Arctic Robinsonade” has never been included in the research field of well-known specialists. In this study, we will try to fill the resulting gap.

### 3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The titles of the texts make us think of Robinson Crusoe, the hero of D. Defoe’s novel. This novel was first translated in Russia from the French abbreviation by Yakov Trusov in 1762 and printed in the St. Petersburg printing house of the Academy of Sciences. Approximately at the same time, the same printing house printed a book by an academician, historian, and Frenchman of German origin, Pierre-Louis Le Roy, under the title *A Narrative of the Singular Adventures of Four Russian Sailors, Who Were Cast Away on the Desert Island of East-Spitzbergen Where They Lived for Six Years and Three Months*. It was translated by an anonymous Russian author. The book by P.-L. Le Roy acts as an obvious pretext in the writings of the modern Crimean author and northern poet that differ in genres by their nature. A. Kurengin and M. Starchikov present the text about the adventures of four Russian sailors in citations, which determines the structure and, therefore, in many respects, the meaning of what is written.

The plot system of the *Polar Robinsons* (2021) includes some structural units describing the



rescue of Mezen fishermen from Edge Island in 1749.

The precedent name ‘Robinson’ in the title of the text evokes a number of associations: loneliness, entrepreneurial spirit, salvation, and religious tolerance. As we remember, in the novel by D. Defoe, Robinson lived alone on the island. In M. Starchikov’s story, a group of people act. The anthroponym “Robinson” is used in the plural: Robinson is not alone. The Russian-speaking writer set a different vector for reading Defoe’s work. The problem of the Robinsons on the island is not loneliness, but the ability to live and survive in liminal conditions while preserving human qualities. The epithet “polar” indicates the territorial affiliation or origin of the characters. Events in the text of M. Starchikov unfold not in the Atlantic Ocean, which is associated with the path of the discoverer Christopher Columbus, who moored to the shore of an unknown island, but in the polar latitudes – in the Arctic Ocean, which is specifically assessed for the possibility of laying the Northern Sea Route. In addition, Edge Island, which is still uninhabited in our time, is a territory, although not inhabited, but familiar to sailors (“I remember there is a little house there!” says the helmsman in the story of M. Yu. Starchikov). According to the memoirs of sailor Stepan Sharapov (Ivan Inkov reports this information in Kurengin’s story), there was a fishing hut with a stove in it, and it was possible to hide from the cold: “I heard that the hut is located not far from the coast!” Stepan Sharapov addressed his comrades.

Narration by M.Yu. Starchikov opens with a quote from the pretext:

*These unfortunate people lived  
almost six years in this sad dwelling  
(P.-L. Le Roy)*

The pretext carries a certain key to reading the further text, and its function is meaning generation and meaning increment. The first words of the epigraph set the motive of misfortune. The author, referring to Le Roy, qualifies people (read: sailors) as “unfortunate”. Thus, he prompts the observation that the sailors’ misfortune lies in the fact that they “lived for almost six years” on the island, that is, they did not die, but were able to survive there. The phrase “sad dwelling” is in a strong position in this sentence. The sad dwelling is a hut that was saving the Mezens from the cold and wild beasts for six years. The lexeme “dwelling” sets another motive – the motive of home, a shelter. In this place, semantic fusion of the image of the island and the image of the home occurs. The island takes on the meaning of “a family, living together people”.<sup>4</sup>

The short story includes three parts, each preceded by its own epigraph, orienting the reader in time and space. Events are presented in retrospection – from the denouement to prehistory. The text is written in the form of a dialogue with short remarks and questions from the rowers and detailed answers from Alexei Khimkov. Moreover, Khimkov acts as a diegetic narrator, since he himself is a direct participant in what happened, telling everything in the first person; he is the subject of the world he represents. In the first part, the time of events is the summer of 1749, and the place of events is the island of Maly Brun, in the Arctic Ocean. According to Le Roy’s book, the Mezen fishermen were rescued in August 1749 by the “staunch schismatic” of the Vygovskaya Hermitage, Arkhangelsk shipowner Amos Kornilov, who sailed past to one of his islands. The third chapter again transfers the events to 1749 – to the time of the rescue of the Mezens from Edge Island, to the dialogue between the rowers and Alexei Khimkov. The author places signs in the text that prove the authenticity of what is happening. Thus, the story of the four sailors, as interpreted by M. Starchikov, begins and ends with episodes of their rescue.

In the situation that opens the first chapter, an antinomial pair is set, which determines the boundaries of the chronotope of the fishermen’s life “ahead – behind”: “The rowers together leaned

<sup>4</sup> Semenov A. V. (n.d.) Etymological online dictionary of the Russian language. <https://lexicography.online/etymology/semyonov/%D0%B4/%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BC> (May 15, 2023) (In Russian).

on the oars, and the longboat quickly flew forward, gradually approaching the sailing ship “Bartholomew” swaying on the waves. In a whitish haze, somewhere behind, a huge island covered with ice and snow was gradually melting”<sup>5</sup>. The ship is awaiting them ahead, and “a huge island is melting” behind them. The metaphor of a melting island is associated with memory. The verb “melt” does not fit the idea of a huge island made of basalt slab; the stone does not have the property of melting. In one context, words with the semantics of uncertainty and delusiveness are pulled together – *a whitish haze, somewhere, behind* – and an image of solidity and inviolability. The image of a whitish haze performs the function of a border dividing the space into “ours” and “theirs”, “here” and “there”.

This scene obviously suggests that the people – four rowers and three men – have left the island. A huge ice island brings to mind the idea of the ninth circle of Dante’s Hell. It can be assumed that the author of the story implicitly recreated the journey and return from the world of the dead. Compositional inversion made it possible to affirm the idea of the victory of life over death, the idea of resurrection. Mezens – the chosen ones, who during their lifetime were granted the opportunity to see the torments of sinners and experience these torments on their own, – returned to the big world renewed.

Rescuers see strangers in Mezens: “Why are you wearing such wonderful clothes, not Christian ones? Maybe you are some kind of infidels? In the old days, the word “infidel” [*Basurmanin*] (distorted from “Muslim”) denoted a person of a different (non-Christian) faith - unorthodox, non-Christian, and outlander. Such a name offended the rescued men: “You yourself are infidels! the black-bearded man responded briskly, taking out a copper cross from somewhere under his clothes, “Woah, have a look!” The rowers looked at the aliens with curiosity because their appearance was different from the usual: they resembled primitive people. The author emphasizes that the clothes and high fur boots of the three men are “made of well-dressed animal skins”. This means that during the six years of their stay on the island, they have mastered furriery well and learned how to skilfully dress skins in the absence of special tools and solutions.

The following detail attracts attention: one of the men does not thank the rowers for their salvation from the island at all. “Thank you, Lord!” a middle-aged man, overgrown with a black and grey beard, crossed vigorously. In inhuman conditions, even having lost hope of salvation, he continues to praise the Almighty. He thanks the Lord rather than the rowers, because the rescue ship sailed to the island by accident, not at the request of the pilot of this ship. This was the intention of the Creator: to send the Mezens a trial. The black-bearded man defines the essence of life on the island as an ordeal: “For a long time we have been suffering hardship here”. An ordeal is the suffering of the soul after death. In all likelihood, the author’s words can be interpreted as follows: the stay on the island for the three survivors was an analogue of the afterlife torment. Thus, the first chapter of the story is a variation on the theme of the Russian sailors’ journey to the Other Kingdom and their return from there.

We hear the main story about the events that happened from the perspective of Alexei Khimkov, a participant and a witness to what happened. The second part moves the events six years back – “Winter of 1743, Mezen, Arkhangelsk province”. Here we learn how the sailors lived in their hometown before they got to the island, how the team was recruited, and the difficulties of collecting an artel for fishing.

One detail is emphasised: “Their voyage went wrong from the very beginning, tormenting the ship at sea with endless storms. <...> soon the ship was ice-bound”. The Mezens remained on the island. “That’s how we began to live as hermits!” The navigator continued his story, looking at the endless expanse of the ocean. “While there were charges for the gun, we felled the deer, smoked the

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<sup>5</sup> References to the text by M. Yu. Starchikov are cited from: Starchikov, M. Yu. (n.d.). *Polyarnye Robinzony. Golosa polunochnyh zemel* [Polar Robinsons. Voices of the midnight lands]. <https://golosasevera.ru/starchikov.html> (May 15, 2023) (In Russian).

meat and dried it for future use!" One of the meanings of the word "hermit" in Russian is "a person who, for religious reasons, settled away from people, in solitude and refused to communicate with people; solitary". We do not see this meaning in the text because people did not come to the island of their own free will and not out of religious beliefs: they went to fish, to earn.

An episode of interest is the story of Alexei Khimkov about how he found himself in a cave.

- I'm walking, and all of a sudden – there's a cave! he said. – I had a knife and a wooden club with me! I lit the torch that I always carried with me, crossed myself, and went to God knows where! And I had goose skin. What if a hefty bear hid there?
- Seeing how the heads of the rowers turned to him, intrigued by the story, the navigator deliberately took a leisurely pause.
- The ceiling in the cave was low, and I had to duck! he finally continued. "I was climbing along the stone corridor, and my heart was beating in my chest with excitement!" And all around it was dry and quiet, as in a grave, it already took me dumbfounded! And suddenly I saw this...
- Silent for a moment, Khimkov closed his eyes, as if memories prevented him from speaking.
- There were human remains right in front of me! He narrowed his eyes, flaring his nostrils predatorily. – Looks like a warrior from the epic times, one of those that we called Varangians in the old days! The clothes on the skeleton were all decayed, and only rusty chain mail remained! He had a helmet at his feet, and a sword, an axe, and two spearheads at hand!

In the plot episode "in the cave", the semantics of death reveals itself. The remains of the Varangian, who left his life here on the island, are a kind of proof of the idea that Svalbard (Spitzbergen) has long been expanded into by different peoples, but not everyone was given a happy opportunity to stay alive and return home with the generous gifts of the island. The semantic situation of this passage – the return with gifts – is not repeated in any other invariant of the plot about the Mezen "Robinsons".

They were able to enrich themselves on the lifeless Edge Island, but their bags of game were not measured in monetary terms: these were the skins of bears, 250 deer, etc.: "Pushing his fur hat to the back of his head, Alexei Khimkov carefully touched with his hand piled bales with fox fur, bear skins, and a fish tooth." The skipper, like a merchant, shifted his hat to the back of his head to carefully examine the wealth acquired on the island, and to some extent boasted of his treasure in front of the audience.

"Arctic Robinsonade" ends with a happy ending, as befits a classic Robinsonade. M. Starchikov's finale is moved to the beginning of the text. The author of *Polar Robinsons* wants to show a causal relationship: what kind of life the "hermits" led on the island, owing to which "these unfortunate people" were saved.

The Mezens managed to settle on the island, where there was nothing but ice, snow, and predatory animals. The island became a home for them, a shelter, on the one hand. They learned to hunt, dress in leather, and sew clothes without tools; they were not starving. They could collect prey – "soft gold": the skins of Arctic foxes and bears. On the other hand, according to Dante, the island is an analogue of the ninth circle of Hell, where the most terrible sinners fall. The Robinsons did not grumble at the Creator in a difficult situation; they preserved their faith and passed the trial. They did not recreate their civilized world on the island (like Defoe's Robinson), literally did not correct the Creator's plan, but lived in accordance with His Will.

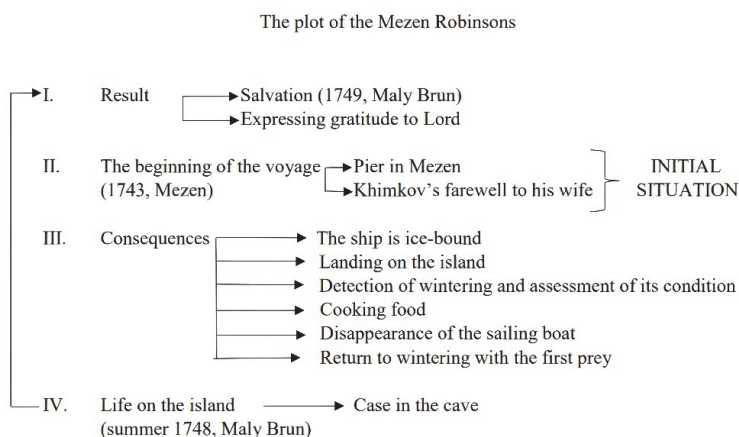
The trial of the Polar Robinsons is not a trial of loneliness, because they live as a family, as a team. However, the Almighty is testing the Russian sailors with the breath of death, which could catch them at any moment due to a large number of dangerous factors: terrible cold, scurvy, and fights with polar bears. One of the four Mezens, Stepan Sharapov, died of an illness, remaining forever in this place. According to Alexei Khimkov, the sailors lost "hope for salvation". The three survivors humbly accepted the way of life sent to them on the island. The trial of fidelity of Russian

sailors who found themselves cut off from the big world, in our opinion, is similar to the trial of Job.

The entire text by M. Yu. Starchikov can be considered as an embodied metaphor for the rebirth of a lost soul. An island in the Arctic is not a desert; it is a sacred place where God does not leave a person and a person does not become an object of temptation by an evil spirit. Salvation is not interpreted here as a return to the mainland from ice captivity. Salvation is the affirmation of life even in the liminal cruel conditions of permafrost, the affirmation of the superiority of life over death.

Entertaining elements are completely absent in the “Arctic Robinsonade”; however, instructive elements are clearly read: the beginning and ending indicate that the whole story is told by the protagonist to glorify the power that can save a person and determine his fate, first of all in the real world. Alexey Khimkov never gets tired of praising the Lord. In three parts of the text, M. Starchikov puts the formula for glorifying the Almighty in a strong position.

Let us present the plot structure of the “Arctic Robinsonade” in the version of M. Starchikov in the form of a diagram (Figure 5):



**Figure 5:** Scheme of formalising the plot of the Polar Robinsons story by M. Starchikov (2021)

The scheme of an elementary plot about the Mezen “Robinsons” comprises the following structural units: “Result”, “Initial situation”, “Consequences”, “Life on the island”. Each structural unit in an elementary plot is formed by one or several simpler plots containing three components: the subject, the place, and the time of the action of this subject. Thus, the structural unit “Result” in the plot of *Polar Robinsons* includes simple plots: 1) salvation on Maly Brun and 2) expressing gratitude to the Lord. The structural unit “Initial situation” marks the beginning of the Mezens’ voyage and includes simple plots: 1) a pier in Mezen, 2) Khimkov’s farewell to his wife, 3) bad weather. The time and place of the events are indicated in the epigraph and referred to six years back. The subjects of the event are the helmsman, Alexei Khimkov and his wife. The functional unit “Consequences” is more structured. It includes several elements semantically organised by the exploration of Edge Island and adaptation to life on it. The key scene here is the fight with the polar bear. The next unit – “Life on the island” – excludes descriptions of activities related to the production of fire, food, bows, and bear spears, as in other authors. The main event in this part of the text is Khimkov’s story about how he found himself in a cave and brought back a trophy – a battle axe with a bronze notch.

Thus, the principle of plot construction in M. Starchikov’s story involves the development of the idea that people who find themselves on an island of their own free will give meaning to the surrounding space. The island stay saved the lives of the hunters. The six-year wintering of the

Mezens is a miracle of God's providence.

The text of A. Kurengin *Mezen Robinsons* consists of seventeen stanzas, uniting the description of the life of the Mezen people according to the following scheme: pre-island life – island stay – life after they left the island. The author presents the events of Mezens' voyage in his own way. The beginning of the text is marked by the motive of the past, as if returning to epic times. In the first stanza, the chronology of events is set – a distant, “one thousand seven hundred and forty-third” year, history is significantly removed in time from the present. The location is indicated as Okladnikova Slobodka – Grumant. The subject is designated – the four Pomors – and their deed, “left to hunt”. An epic characterisation of the Mezens is created: “valiant people”, “Mezen army”, “proven, brave friends”. We dare to assume that Kurengin uses hyperbole, calling the four fishermen an “army”, that is, the troops. Although, if we consider the etymology of the word “army”, the range of meanings of which includes “competition”<sup>6</sup>, it is possible that the competitive motive between the teams of the fishermen themselves is meant: whoever comes to the fishery first, the prey is his; they need to protect your prey from uninvited guests.

Epicism is a key characteristic of the northern poet's text. The author presents and evaluates events from the perspective of his own vision. He is neither a participant nor an observer of events, but he has knowledge of a given historical fact.

Compared to the plot of Le Roy, the author of the poem changes the direction of the hunters' motion. The initial situation in the text is the return home from fishing and hunting and the completion of the trip on the ice. The first stanzas are marked by the motive of returning from a successful hunt. The Mezens approached Edge Island as they planned to complete their fishing in the ice; mooring to the bay of the island was not an occasional event:

*In that year, hunting was successful.  
But it was the time to rush home,  
The boat was moving in the caravan of ships,  
To complete this catching in the ice.<sup>7</sup>  
[V tot god zveroboyka udachnoy byla.  
No vremya nastalo domoy pospeshit',  
Lod'ya v karavane sudov ikh poshla,  
Chtob promysel etot vo l'dakh zavershit']*

The category of time given in the text attracts the readers' attention. Time lives separately from the Mezens, according to its own laws, as if it is tuned by someone against the will of a person: “it was the time to rush home.” In the sixteenth quatrain, we read: “The wintering is over. Their time has come”. The life of the Mezens was calculated in the timekeeping that someone had set up. The motive of predestination is relevant.

The author of the poem changes the number of ships returning from the campaign. Mezens go in a caravan, that is, in a group of merchant ships. The fishermen are the only ones who decided to land on the shore to hunt. Edge Bay (the eighth stanza) is a place marked with a memorial cross. The Pomors know that an Old Believer lived on the island before them, but his fate is unknown. Nothing scares them, nothing stops them. They quietly go hunting here. The island is a familiar territory prayed for and protected by God.

Unlike Defoe's novel, Kurengin's poem lacks the motive of a shipwreck, nor does it contain diary entries similar to those kept by Robinson Crusoe on the island. The islanders did not draw up the results of their mental activity in the form of a table that shows the “good” and the “evil” in their

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<sup>6</sup> Etymological online dictionary of the Russian Language by M. Fasmer. <https://lexicography.online/etymology/vasmer/> (In Russian).

<sup>7</sup> The text by A. Kurengin is cited from the source: Multimedia corpus of texts about the Mezen “Robinsons”. <https://mezrob29.ru/aleksandr-kurengin/> (In Russian).

lives. Accordingly, they do not reflect on what is happening to them and do not charge out to God.

The team did not intend to spend the winter on the island; therefore, when going to Edge, its members took with them a minimum of supplies and weapons. Bad weather – “trouble” forced them to stay on the island: people and all ships were swept away by a storm. However, the Mezens managed to find their belongings: an axe and a board with nails. In terrible circumstances, the four lucky ones were blessed with saving their lives, and the island saved them.

A. Kurengin showed the scale of the disaster, in which the fellows and countrymen did not survive. In this case, the modern poet deviates from the plot of Le Roy, in the version in which the Mezens, returning to the shore to tell the rest of the hunters about a hut on the island, see neither the ship nor the team.

*In the next stanza we read:  
The Mezens decided to return to the hut.  
And render that harsh edge habitable here.  
[Mezentsy reshili vernut'sya k izbe.  
I kray tot surovyy tut obzhivat'.]*

It would seem that people made their own decision. However, the next stanza shows the intervention of a higher power into the course of their lives:

*The Lord gave them a root like this:  
Spruce, shaped like a bow.  
[Gospod' podaril im koren' takoy:  
Yelovyy, po forme pokhozhiy na luk.]*

Thanks to the Lord, they made the first weapon – a bow. Then, they made a bear spear to defend themselves from wild beasts. They set up a forge, as in Slobodka, forged iron and made spears and arrows.

*The sea element brings its gifts to Russian sailors:  
The sea gave metal for forgings,  
The storm bestowed upon the shipwreck without measure.  
[Metall dlya pokovok more davallo,  
Oblomki sudov shtorm bez mery daril]*

Curiously, the storm bestowed upon the shipwreck “without measure”, which means that boats with people were constantly suffering wreckage outside the island. Whereas this same island protected the four Mezens and provided “meat and fish in abundance all the time”. In isolation from civilisation the Mezens were not so bad. The words of Ivan Inkov confirm this idea:

*It used to happen that Ivan wintered before,  
Storms offered shelter without choice.  
[Byvalo, i ran'she Ivan zimoval,  
Shtorma predlagali bez vybora krov]*

In all previous cases, the storm threw the poor fellows into other conditions where they had no choice. Whereas there was a hut here to hide from bad weather, there was a tool to protect themselves and find food. Note that the hunters did not kill the beasts out of passion on the island to sell the skins later. They had plenty of meat so as not to die of hunger.

They did not feel that something terrible was happening to them; they perceived the unfolding circumstances without horror. Nature and the world took care of the Russian sailors; therefore, they were surviving in the uninhabited space for six years and three months.

The trial of the protagonists on Edge Island was a disease, scurvy: “But everyone was very sick

with scurvy". However, in Kurengin's version, none of the four died from the disease; they knew how to be treated: they ate frozen meat and drank warm blood. According to Le Roy, sailors were treated with scurvy grass (*Cochlearia*) and active physical movements.

Under these circumstances, the surviving fishermen gratefully accepted everything that life brought them. They did not despair, did not lose heart, but worked (like Defoe's Robinson) and did not raise a rebellion against the Lord. For their patience, humbling, and humility, the water brought a saviour:

*From Onega, the boat was brought by water into the storm,  
Amos Kornilov was their savior.  
[S Onegi lod'yu v shtorm prinosit voda,  
Kornilov Amos ikh spasitelem byl.]*

Departing from Le Roy's book, Amos Kornilov sailed to the Old Believer camp on one of his three islands not of his own free will – he was sent by some unknown force to save the Mezens.

Four sailors escaped death. They returned to Slobodka, as mentioned in one sentence in the seventeenth stanza: "Meet the sons of seafarers, Slobodka!" They returned with "rich gifts". Hence, the fishermen were visitors to the Arctic Island. The treat is a gift. Edge gifted his guests and allowed them to take away "furs and skins beyond count". And the prey – beasts caught by force and killed for commercial purposes – was lost by the hunters in the first storm.

Thus, the poet of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has changed the vision of the Arctic. In his presentation, this is a place suitable for life, being under the auspices of the Lord and the sea element. People who come here are given plenty of everything.

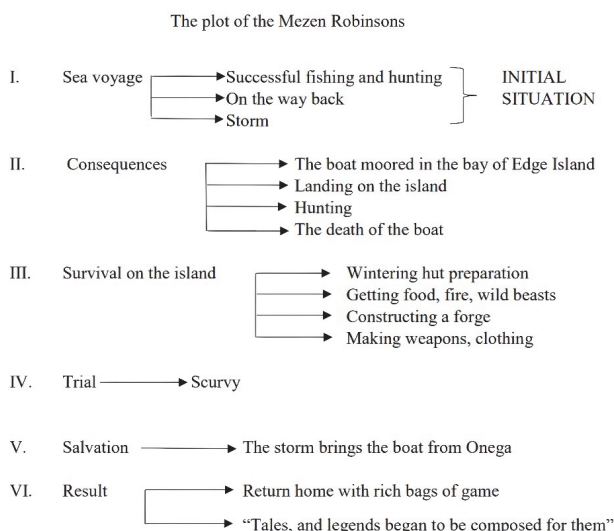
The result of the six-year wintering of the Mezens is the perpetuation of these events in legends and tales. The motive of happiness frames the story about Mezens in A. Kurengin's text: a successful hunt (the beginning of the text), saving lives on the island (in the middle), and a happy return home (at the end).

The organising force of the plot in the poem about the Mezen "Robinsons" by A. Kurengin is the way home. In the introduction, it becomes known that the four men are returning from fishing from Svalbard, and at the end, the sailors rescued and saved by the island are sailing home.

Formalization of the plot of "The Mezen Robinsons" by A. Kurengin is shown in Figure 6.

The plot in the "Mezen Robinsons" includes several subplots. The plot structure of A. Kurengin's poem consists of the following plot situations: the initial situation (in one sentence of the first stanza: "The four Pomors – the Mezen army/left Okladnikova Slobodka"), the situation "sea voyage" and its consequences, the situation "survival on the island", the situation "trial", situation "salvation", and the result. There is some discrepancy with the invariant of this plot by M. Starchikov: the activities of the Mezen people on the island are shown – tailoring, making fire, cooking, making a bow, a bear spear, an anvil, and a forge. The disease is indicated as a trial. In general, the motive of returning home is brought to a logical ending in the plot.





**Figure 6:** Scheme of formalising the plot of the poem “Mezen Robinsons” by A. Kurengin (2018)

The poetic work of A. Kurengin presents the story of a group of people who walk in the face of God, hope for help from above, and their life clearly exemplifies God’s Providence. In the text, the divine plan for them is read in detail (there is a memorial cross on the island, the bow is a gift of the Lord). The Mezen Robinsons found themselves in a difficult situation, but this episode is provided in the scenario of their life as a trial that they can go through. They survived and were eventually rescued.

Following the ups and downs in the insular life of the fishermen, we observe salvation, taken literally, that is, we read how people are saved from death, how they survive, thanks to the fact that they do not renounce the Almighty in their disaster.

The profession of protagonists was chosen deliberately: Defoe’s Robinson is a merchant, trader, and entrepreneur, whereas Russian Robinsons are fishermen and hunters; they earn money by selling killed beasts, furs, fish teeth, and seal oil. The hero of the English novel ends up on the island as a “punishment” for having forgotten about God, and the insular path for him is in many ways the path to himself. An isolated life and difficulties strengthen him in faith; therefore, he chooses to return to his homeland. In the Russian version of Robinsonade by A. Kurengin, the heroes return home from fishing, land on the shore in the bay, and survive thanks to the faith that is strong in them. The fundamental difference between Defoe’s Robinsons and those of Russian authors is that Robinson gained what he lost, while the Mezen “Robinsons” survived thanks to what they had.

The image of a shipwreck in Defoe’s novel and in the texts of Russian authors perfectly reflects the state of the world, which is on the verge of breaking into a “crisis”, the loss of moral values. Their sailing boat disappeared, things were lost forever, the team perished, nothing was left of their former life. This means that they must re-create a new world and themselves in it. Defoe’s hero does just that. Mezen Robinsons also create the world (fire, clothing, bow, arrows, forge), but they do not re-create themselves, because they live according to a different law, as a community, on the principle of caring for each other, paying attention, experiencing patience, and humility. The Mezen Robinsons accept the world as it is and do not stop praising God.

Russian authors in the plot about the Mezen “Robinsons” described the ideal way of life - community: community of dwelling, community of food, community of supplies and property. There is a picture of general consistency in everything. Waking up and eating together, the Mezen people

rejoice in the same thing. Individual differences are lost. The whole absorbs the individual and dissolves him in itself. This removes the burden of independent existence and responsibility. It is freedom from your personality. “Robinsons” do not know good and evil; they do not isolate these categories in the world.

Defoe's hero lives by the following principle: “I subordinate the world to my will, because there is no God”. Crusoe considers the world his property. In the “Arctic Robinsonade” the characters do not impose their will on the world, because they do not doubt for a second that the world and they themselves are subject to another, Higher, will. Russian heroes are aware of where their will ends and the will of the Creator begins.

A sailor from York, like a demiurge, creates his Paradise on Earth, and in the twenty-fourth year of his life on the island, he creates a man from Friday. Mezen Robinsons retain themselves in conditions of permafrost and a minimum of living creatures.

The hero of the English novel needed a trial for his soul to be able to pay attention to another person, turn to his neighbour toward sympathy and love, and begin to live according to the gospel law “Reject yourself”. For the Mezen Robinsons, the principle of selflessness is the basic law of life. The island is needed in the plot to prove the presence of God in the world.

It is not surprising that the image of Robinson Crusoe correlates with the parable of the prodigal son who left his father and paternal roof (Patronova, 2023). Robinson left his father's house and went into the big world without a blessing. Mezen “Robinson” A. Khimkov is married and yearns for his family on the island. Defoe's Robinson is one against the world, and the “Mezen Robinsons” are trying to fit into the world of the Arctic as a community.

In the “Arctic Robinsonade” variant, the sailors sail to Spitzbergen consciously: they are not looking for adventures; they have a very specific task – to catch the wild beasts. The fact that they got isolated was an unexpected coincidence: a wind of a different direction blew, bad weather broke out, and the sea on the eastern side of the archipelago cleared of ice for a short time over a long period.

The survival of Russian sailors on Edge Island involves several interrelated actions, the same as in the classic version of Robinsonade: repairing (but not making new construction) a house/hut /cabin, gaining or producing food, and treating the sick or wounded (caring for Fedor Verigin, the injured from a bear). They do not create a new highly organised society or a new social system. They do not encounter the unknown, given that year-long wintering on Svalbard (Spitzbergen) was common. It can be easily seen that some motives of the “Arctic Robinsonade” do not coincide with either the classical or the fantastic versions of the Robinsonade. The characters repeat the path of mankind — from the primitive state to the present in their actions (making a vessel out of clay, firing the vessel to keep the fire going, making threads from dried deer veins, making stone arrowheads, making iron needles from nails, dressing animal skins, sewing clothes from skins, processing and storing meat).

Thus, the structural analysis of two modern texts carried out in this article made it possible to trace the development of the plot about the Mezen “Robinsons”.

#### 4. Conclusion

This article describes micro-research in the context of a qualitative approach using online surveys, interviews, and document analysis. This research aimed to understand the phenomenon under study, namely the literary features of the “Arctic Robinsonade” in the processing of the authors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research task was to analyse the author's interpretation of the historical episode of the fishermen's survival on Edge Island. The data presentation format includes the online survey results in the form of charts and graphs, interviews, and an analysis of documents, as such.

All the works carried out within the research framework confirmed the need to study the historical fact of the unprecedented survival of fishermen on an uninhabited island in 1743–1749, actualising it in the cultural memory of descendants.

Narration about the fate of four Russian sailors on Edge Island in 1743–1749 has come down to

our days in different literary traditions – French, German, Russian, and even American. The plot of the “Arctic Robinsonade” took shape in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the combination of plot blocks about Pomeranian crafts on Grumant, about annual winterings on Spitzbergen of the Dutch, British, and Russians, and about the skill of Pomor pilots. In Russian tradition, the story block about the six-year survival of the Mezens on an island in the Arctic provided the basis for the “Arctic Robinsonade”. The texts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century showed the development of the plot and the transformation of its structure during the transition from one genre to another. The texts are based on a written source – the book of P.-L. Le Roy. Note that the texts presented in this article have significant semantic differences.

The study of the plot of the “Arctic Robinsonade”, which implements the cultural model of the Robinsonade in traditional schemes, to a certain extent makes it possible to clarify the moral and holistic orientations of modern literature. In the “Arctic Robinsonade” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the plot-forming core is a group of heroes who do not take active steps to get out of a distressed situation. Elemental forces act as the antagonist of the collective hero of the “Arctic Robinsonade”. “Robinsons” act in opposition to extreme conditions (cold, hunger, death). The essence of the plot of the “Arctic Robinsonade” is the confrontation between a man and the external circumstances of the acts of God. There are two options for resolving this conflict. The first is that the hero overcomes circumstances, works, and restores the world (civilisation) around him in the way he used to see it. Such an outcome is appropriate within the framework of Protestant ethics (D. Defoe’s version of Robinson). The second is that the hero accepts the world as it is, without trying to interfere during ongoing events – this is what the Mezen fishermen do as the plot develops in the texts of M. Starchikov and A. Kurengin. The texts accumulate a similar complex of motives: the motive of a sea voyage, bad weather, survival on an island, overcoming death, salvation, and returning to the big world.

Thus, the plot of the “Arctic Robinsonade”, which appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of a real event, evolves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, develops and acquires new meanings: the place of events is no longer depicted as hellish, unsuitable for life, but as a fertile, sacred space that provides all the benefits for human life; heroes conquer death; faith in God becomes the leading means of survival for both the soul and the body.

The scientific novelty of this work is determined by the following: the analysis of the “Arctic Robinsonade” plot building allows us to establish conceptual differences in the interpretation of the event of insular survival and development of the Arctic.

The chronological scope of this research is limited to the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because precisely at this time, a new wave of interest arose in this story as an important element in preserving the cultural memory of the northerners. At the same time, this period is marked by the development of such a concept as “network literature”, the methodology for studying which is in its infancy. The choice of territorial framework – the “northern text” – is explained by the existence of a common set of plots that are characteristic of this region. The study lacks many names and facts related to the history of the plot about the Mezen fishermen and hunters in the reference and fiction literature of earlier chronological periods.

The plot model of the “Arctic Robinsonade” and the ways of its implementation are relevant for studying the further existence of this plot in the Russian and foreign written tradition. The schemes of the plot and motive complexes that are singled out in the texts and used to form the plot will make it possible to describe the nature of the dynamics of this plot in different phases of literary history.

The “Arctic Robinsonade” has a number of parameters that make it fundamentally different from the classical literary Robinsonade: the chronotope is radically changed, a group of heroes’ act, episodes of keeping a diary and collisions with natives are absent in the composition. The narrative has no geographical details of the description of the voyage, and the ideological content conveys religious and mythological representations of Pomor fishermen.

Consideration of the “Arctic Robinsonade” plot makes it possible to expand our understanding of specific works about the survival of the Mezen people on Svalbard (On Svalbard) and the literary process as a whole. The results of such an analysis enrich the epistemological picture of literature,

revealing hidden connections between various aspects of literary creativity and its sociocultural contexts. Studying the plot of the “Arctic Robinsonade” also enables us to comprehend its place in the broader history of literature and find possible parallels with other creative works, complementing the comprehensive approach to the study of literary phenomena.

A comparative analysis of works about the survival of sailors from Mezen by different authors shows different aspects of the narrative, cultural narratives, and audience preferences in the 21st century. Analysis of this plot demonstrates how literary preferences change over time and how the emotional and intellectual needs of modern audiences influence the choice of literary writings.

Cultural narratives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflect changes in the sociocultural environment. There is a desire for stories that reflect a diversity of voices, experiences, and perspectives. Experimentation with form, crossing boundaries between different genres and media formats, is becoming increasingly common. Studying the “Arctic Robinsonade” plot reveals how these techniques are used to create a profound impact on modern audiences and how they contribute to the evolution of literary creativity. Further research and analysis in this area will help us gain a more complete picture and develop a deeper understanding of literary scholarship.

Potential future directions for research in this area can be outlined. Specific research points can attract specialists in history in the aspect of analysing the Russian exploration of the North, the development of trade in the Russian North in the 18th century, missionary activity on Svalbard (On Svalbard), and the fate of historical figures associated with the above-mentioned historical circumstances (Shvetsova et al., 2023).

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