



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY



Université du Québec
à Montréal

Symposium: The Season of Winter in Literature and Visual Art

22-23 September 2025

The symposium is co-organized by Heidi Hansson, Malin Isaksson, Maria Lindgren Leavenworth (Department of Language Studies, University of Umeå) and Daniel Chartier (The International Laboratory for Research on Images of the North, Winter and the Arctic, Université du Québec à Montréal, in cooperation with the Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la littérature et la culture au Québec).

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Program

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13.15-13.45	Daniel Chartier <i>Université du Québec à Montréal (Canada)</i>	“Thinking about the Seasonality of Winter: Some Methodological Proposals and Definitions from Researchers in the Humanities and Cultural Studies”
13.45-14.15	Heidi Hansson <i>Umeå University (Sweden)</i>	“Feelgood Fiction and Winter as Hyper-Reality”
14.15-14.45	Elena Lindholm <i>Umeå University (Sweden)</i>	“Boreal Winter as Escapist Fantasy in Latin American Literature”
Break		
15.15-15.45	Riikka Rossi <i>University of Helsinki (Finland)</i>	“Winter Moods: Perspectives from Finnish Literature”

15.45-16.15	Malin Isaksson <i>Umeå University (Sweden)</i>	“Winter as Character in <i>Le dernier Lapon</i> [Forty days without shadow] (2012) by Olivier Truc”
16.15-16.45	Eang-Nay Theam <i>Collège de Maisonneuve, Québec (Canada)</i>	“Representations of Winter in Women's Stories of Immigration to Québec”

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9.15-9.45	Jan Borm <i>Université de Versailles—Saint- Quentin-en-Yvelines (France)</i>	“To be Subject to the Winter in Labrador: Two Missionary Accounts from the 19th and early 20th Century in Comparison”
Break		
10.15-10.45	Maria Lindgren Leavenworth <i>Umeå University (Sweden)</i>	“The Snow Child in Winter”
10.45-11.15	Alexis Metzger <i>École de la nature et du paysage (France)</i>	“Painting Winter (17th–19th Centuries): An Interpretation by a Geographer-Climatologist”
11.15-11.45	Lennart Pettersson <i>Umeå University (Sweden)</i>	“Some Aspects of the Meanings of Snow in Visual Arts”
11.45-12.15	Claude Hauser <i>Université de Fribourg (Switzerland)</i>	“Winterity and Verticality: Crossroads. From the Conquered and Sublime Peaks to the New Sensibilities of a Winter Mountain Environment”

Abstracts

Borm, J. “To be Subject to the Winter in Labrador: Two Missionary Accounts from the 19th and early 20th Century in Comparison”

The Arctic winter has stimulated what one might term utopian and dystopian visions in literary representations. Accounts of the search for the North-West passage and wintering in the circumpolar regions strongly impacted the European imagination of the Arctic in the 19th century. Even today, the region is still prone to projections considering it to be cold and somewhat hostile, Stefansson’s « friendly Arctic » trope and climate change notwithstanding. In my presentation, I will discuss two missionary representations of winter in Labrador: an account of a dog-sled ride in the 1860s by the Moravian missionary Theodore Bourquin (1833-1914) and the 1918-19 published journal of Reverend Henry Gordon (1887-1971) entitled *A Winter in Lapland* (1919 ?). Both texts draw on Christian rhetorics of the edifying tale while presenting first-hand experiences of what both authors describe as “severe” conditions. They are both survival tales and a testimony to winter conditions that are a constitutive part of Indigenous cultural continuity or what Sheila Watt-Cloutier has termed “the right to be cold”.

Chartier, D. “Thinking about the Seasonality of Winter: Some Methodological Proposals and Definitions from Researchers in the Humanities and Cultural Studies”

This paper proposes a critical reflexion of winter, not as a mere climatic fact but as a socio-cultural, symbolic, and epistemological phenomenon. Far from being a passive backdrop, winter operates as a semiotic system that disrupts time, infrastructures, and cultural practices by imposing cold, darkness, and whiteness. Drawing on the concept of *hivernité*—the state or condition of winter—this presentation argues that winter, though abundantly represented, remains largely unthought, reduced to images of resistance and survival. Building on the works of Hamelin, de la Soudière, Walter, and Brunner, the analysis shows how winter destabilizes Cartesian logics: schedules collapse, mobility falters, and visibility diminishes. Winter transforms sociability and reconfigures the imagination, while imposing a circular rather than linear relation to time. From a critical perspective, the paper interrogates how winter is still conceptualized through summer, just as the Arctic is imagined from the South, reproducing discourses of adversity and “winterphobia.” In contrast, *hivernité* opens onto modes of conviviality, intimacy, and light-play, highlighting winter’s capacity for cultural innovation. The case of Montréal—seen as “the coldest major city in the world”—illustrates these dynamics, with its duplicated infrastructures, underground city, and luminous atmospheres as adaptive strategies. Ultimately, this paper calls for winter to be thought in its own right, as a central category of imagination and reflection, enabling to reconsider both northernness and a collective relationship to time, space, and identity.

Hansson, H. “Feelgood Fiction and Winter as Hyper-Reality”

Feelgood novels set in northern regions often highlight winter weather and activities. The love story which is a central feature of the genre is metaphorically contrasted with the winter cold, while learning to enjoy winter sports or overcome the difficulties of being snowbound are common plot elements. Winter feelgood fiction is usually nostalgic, adhering to Arcadian patterns with snowy, rural locations represented as spaces of healing where people may reinvent themselves by leaving the pressures of modern life behind. Whether set in Scotland, northern Scandinavia or Switzerland, winter feelgood stories circulate a set of images of winter as hypernatural where a metropolitan visitor may discover her authentic self by overcoming the discomforts of winter. The nostalgic mood of escapist fiction precludes the representation of environmental concerns, connecting the genre to a preservation discourse that denies modern development. At the same time, the insistent hyper-reality of winter imagery can be seen as an expression of solastalgia, fictionally neutralising the imminent loss of winter. I will examine how the representation of winter as hyper-reality returns a sense of agency to the season in a selection of recent feelgood novels such as Jo Thomas, *A Winter Beneath the Stars* (2018), Christina Lauren, *In a Holiday* (2020), Zoe Allison *The Ex-Mas Holiday* (2023), Sarah Morgan, *Snowed in for Christmas* (2022).

Hauser, C. “Winterity and Verticality: Crossroads. From the Conquered and Sublime Peaks to the New Sensibilities of a Winter Mountain Environment”

This contribution aims to question the relationship between winter and mountain life, which has evolved in the second half of the 20th century, as Alpine practices and representations have become globalised in other high mountain regions around the world. How are phenomena usually associated with winter (cold, withdrawal, isolation, hostile elements, etc.) experienced and presented in the Nordic environment of high altitudes, which is almost permanent, as exemplified by ‘eternal snow’ and glaciers? What are the specific characteristics of this ‘vertical winter’, often claimed as an argument for identity in the countries that experience it, increasingly exploited for sporting purposes by elites and then tourist groups (climbing, skiing, etc.) and thus tending to be controlled and mastered beyond the risks it entails? Almost always elevated to the realm of the sublime or the mystical in its evocations, this relationship between winter and mountains will be analysed mainly through a large-format, richly illustrated high-mountain magazine entitled *Alpes-Neige-Roc* <https://strabie.fr/Alpe-Neige-Roc>. Published in Switzerland from 1951 to 1959 on a biannual basis, this periodical with artistic pretensions allows us to perceive vertical winter and the evolution of its forms through drawing, painting and photography, not to mention poetic metaphor and scientific essays. What remains of this winter and mountain imagery in more contemporary representations marked by environmental issues, in which the mountains appear as an advanced ‘sentinel’? Cosey’s comic book, published in 2008 under the title ‘À la recherche de Peter Pan’ (In Search of Peter Pan) (<https://www.rts.ch/archives/2007/video/cosey-et-la-montagne-26986558.html>), will allow us to analyse how environmental concerns lead to a ‘return to the senses’ in the representation of the mountains and the relationship between winter and verticality.

Isaksson, M. “Winter as Character in *Le dernier Lapon* [Forty days without shadow] (2012) by Olivier Truc”

Olivier Truc’s crime novel *Forty days without shadow* is set in northern Sápmi, in and around the Norwegian town of Kautokeino, and describes two parallel quests: one for an ancient Sami drum, another for unexplored natural resources. The shamanic drum, which is believed to have mystical powers, is stolen from a Kautokeino museum just as it was about to be exhibited to both locals and UN officials. As Truc’s two investigators from the Reindeer Police start their inquiries in the snow and the extreme cold, the winter characteristics frequently seen in literary representations from the North – cold, snow, darkness – become more than mere background and suspenseful atmosphere. Winter is described in terms that signal agency, thus becoming something of a character in its own right. This presentation explores how winter is represented both as a benevolent force and as an obstacle, or even an enemy to the main characters and their goals in *Forty days without shadow*. For the investigators Klemet Nango and Nina Nansen, the goal is to find the Sami artefact; for the visiting geologist Racagnal, to find a certain mineral. They all operate in the wintry landscape of Northern Sápmi, of which they have varying degrees of experience and mastery. The consequences of winter thus have different types of impact on different characters, those who know the North, those who are willing to learn, and those who ignore winter’s challenges.

Lindgren Leavenworth, M. “The Snow Child in Winter”

The Russian folktale Snegurochka in numerous variations and adaptations tells of a couple making a child out of snow. Magically coming alive, the child then leaves as spring approaches, and the story’s themes consequently reflect the cyclicity of seasons, the power and consequences of love, and the intermingling of realistic and speculative worlds. In my contribution, I will focus on Alaskan author Eowyn Ivey’s novel *The Snow Child* (2012) and on how the tale in this version works with the season of winter on both literal and figurative levels. In this novel, a girl, Faina, is found alone in the snow by a couple that has relocated to Alaska to grieve the death of their child. Faina is intimately connected to the Arctic winter: “she’s made from this place, from this snow, from this cold” (Ivey 226) and seemingly does not exist outside the season. She thus comes to personify a geographical and seasonal Otherness, which unsettles the narrative’s epistemological and ontological foundations. My primary interest lies in examining how winter in the novel both originates and negates life, but I will also discuss how material aspects of the cold season highlight themes of isolation and vulnerability. I will also briefly look at other variations of the folktale, among them the vignette “The Snow Child” in Angela Carter’s collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) and Arthur Ransome’s “Little

Daughter of the Snow” (1916), in order to highlight the central role the season of winter plays in Ivey’s novel.

Lindholm, E. “Boreal Winter as Escapist Fantasy in Latin American Literature”

For obvious reasons, the boreal winter is a rare motif in Spanish-language literature. Yet from the early twentieth century onward, it begins to appear as an escapist fantasy landscape in short stories and novels that depict various states of static powerlessness in the face of prevailing life conditions across Latin America. This literary motif can be traced back to the Uruguayan writer Juan Carlos Onetti and his short story *El pozo* (*The Pit*, 1939), in which a snow-covered boreal landscape emerges as a dream space of action and self-realization—a stark contrast to the protagonist’s paralyzed, stagnant existence. Later developments of this motif can be found in Laura Restrepo’s allegorical novel *La novia oscura* (*The Dark Bride*, 1999), where the elusive and sexually exploited Sayonara—a mysterious parallel to Colombia itself—is granted a sense of interiority and humanity through a fantasy of longing for a man in a snow-covered land. Another notable example is Wendy Guerra’s *Todos se van* (*Everyone Leaves*, 2006), in which the fantasy of a remote, snowy Scandinavia contrasts with the paralyzed and deteriorating post-Soviet Cuba, where the protagonist is increasingly left alone in a state of helplessness as those around her flee the country. What unites these depictions of winter is their narrative origin in settings characterized by diametrically opposite climatic conditions. The boreal winter in these works does not follow the cyclical temporality experienced in the Arctic regions where snow and ice return each year, but rather emerges as a static, idealized counter-image. In this way, boreal winter becomes a mirrored expression of the protagonists’ own experience of stagnation and existential paralysis. The aim of this study is to explore this recurring winter motif in Latin American literature as a *borealist fantasy*—a literary reflection of northern meteorological conditions, dislodged from their original context and transplanted into the warm South, where they take on new forms and functions. What do these forms look like, and how can they be understood through the lens offered by Latin American literature? These are the questions this paper seeks to address.

Metzger, A. “Painting Winter (17th–19th Centuries): An Interpretation by a Geographer-Climatologist”

This presentation explores the intersecting temporalities present in winter landscape painting. While a painted landscape may appear to capture a fleeting moment of weather, it also conveys the broader seasonal context in which it was created—whether painted on site or in the studio. More broadly, such works can offer insights into the climate of a given period, where *climate* is understood as the average state of the atmosphere over a defined time span and within a specific geographic area. Adopting the perspective of a geographer-climatologist, this analysis pays particular attention to climatic spatialities and temporalities—namely, types of weather, seasonal conditions, and longer-term climatic patterns. The study focuses on two markedly different artistic traditions: 17th-century Dutch winter landscapes and 19th-century Impressionist winter scenes. Through a comparative approach focused on the works of artists such as Hendrick Avercamp, Jan van Goyen, Alfred Sisley, and Claude Monet, several key questions are addressed: What types of weather did artists choose to represent? Do these artworks reflect the actual climate conditions of their respective periods? What hypotheses can be formulated to explain the appeal and selection of winter landscapes? Ultimately, how does the lens of a geographer-climatologist deepen our understanding of these paintings? This discussion is informed by doctoral research that led to the book *L’hiver au Siècle d’or hollandais. Art et climat* (Sorbonne Université Presse, 2018), as well as a research in partnership with the Musée d’Orsay as part of the 150th anniversary of Impressionism.

Pettersson, L. “Some Aspects of the Meanings of Snow in Visual Arts”

As long as there has been winter and as long as there have been depictions of winter, there have also been depictions of snow as snow, and ice, are the quintessential visual signs of winter. Today, in geographical areas that seldom experience snow during winter, it is still snow that is used as visual markers in for instance Christmas cards. This might be due to the fact that other signs of the seasonal change, such as for instance a lower temperature or lack of leaves, are not visual signs in the same way as snow is. In this paper I will outline some of the meanings that have been put into snow in visual arts

as well as some of the interpretations snow has been given. The latter varies from something magical, over something threatening to something that is familiar and marks a “home”. The primary material will be Nordic visual art from romanticism up until the present time and among the artists that will be mentioned are Jenny Nyström, Carl Gustav Carus, Peder Balke, Alvar Jansson and Bruno Liljefors. The intention of the paper is not to give a complete story of snow but rather to discuss what meaning it has been given and how we as spectators put meanings into the very same element.

Rossi, R. “Winter Moods: Perspectives from Finnish Literature”

In Finnish literature, central texts of national Romanticism depict Finnish summertime nature, flourishing idylls of happiness and peace stemming from the tradition of antiquity. Winter and frost, instead, represent famine, struggle of survival, even evil and curse, triggering fear and sadness. In the Kalevala, Louhi, the Mistress of the North, the shamanistic matriarch of the people of Pohjola, sends hard frost to the South to cause trouble for the people of Kalevala. Many iconic authors from the Finnish Lapland depict how harsh and lonely life in the long periods of darkness and sub-zero temperatures lends itself to melancholia and tragic passions, extreme emotions known “Arctic hysteria” – a concept that Finnish modernist authors adopted after the Second World War, expanding and redefining the concept, making Arctic hysteria signal to the whole cultural mentality of the nation. In this presentation, I investigate how Finnish literature has depicted winter and focus on the moods and emotions evoked by cold, darkness, ice and winter weather. While ideas of winter-related sadness and mood disorders have shaped images of Finnishness, alternative views are provided by texts which depict the comfort of the season of rest. Some indigenous authors provide views to experiences of spirituality and serenity of evoked by the season the low activity in nature. These contrasting interpretations of winter emotions reflect the overlapping of “inside” and “outside” perspectives to the imagined North (Chartier 2012). They further demonstrate how literary texts may configure and generate various discourses and vocabularies of emotions, which may circulate in language communities over generations, and finally impact the real-life expressions and experiences of emotions.

Theam, E-N. “Representations of Winter in Women's Stories of Immigration to Québec”

This paper will analyze different representations of winter in women's narratives of immigration to Quebec. The experience of immigration to Quebec as lived and recounted by women writers suggests that, among the novelties associated with the new land, the seasons - and in our case, that of winter - leave visible traces in literature. In this sense, the women writers - in their feminine conditions as women, mothers and daughters - seem to experience winter in an idea of filiation and opposition. Between new possibilities for anchoring and uprooting, the winter season imposes solidarity, community and, paradoxically, solitude. The works discussed in this paper are examples of this. In Ying Chen's *Lettres chinoises* (1993), snow and winter represent comfort and new possibilities for certain characters: 'La ville était couverte d'une épaisse neige de janvier. Mais je sentais une chaleur monter très haut, monter jusqu'à envelopper doucement l'avion.' Between comfort and a change of scenery, winter embodies an adaptation, whether positive or not. In Mariana Mazza's work, Montréal-Nord, winter is synonymous with slowing down: 'Le moment de la saison où tout est au ralenti. Le soleil est couché depuis peu, mais on a l'impression qu'il n'a jamais existé. Il neige faiblement sur les arbres en dormance. Le temps prend son temps.' (148, 2022) In Kim Thúy's *Ru* (2009) and Caroline Dawson's *Là où je me terre* (2020), different reactions to winter are also reflections of immigration experiences. Between reflections on the effect of winter on the immigrant experience, the paper will seek to draw out a discursive study of the winter season from a female perspective.