

**THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF NETHERLANDIC STUDIES:
AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST DECADE, 1971-1981**

Joan Magee

Although in 1981 we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the official founding of CAANS at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland in 1971, the history of our organization began some two years earlier, in the fall of 1969, when Professor Christopher Levenson of the English Department of Carleton University placed the following full-page statement in the first issue of a new journal, *Comparative Literature in Canada Newsletter*:

Dutch Studies

Since as far as I know no Canadian university as yet offers courses in Dutch literature on a regular basis, no inter-university organization at present exists in Canada for sponsoring and coordinating any moves in this direction, and holdings in Dutch literature seem widely and thinly spread across Canada in public and university libraries but not in accordance with any apparent system.

I should like to suggest the following steps towards the greater availability of Dutch texts and courses in Dutch literature in Canada:

- (i) that a group be formed of Canadian university professors who have an interest in Dutch studies, their names to be circulated to all Arts faculties in Canada so as to encourage interest and support for programmes of Dutch studies at selected universities;
- (ii) that all Dutch literary works and literary journals held in university and public libraries across Canada be catalogued and filed and distributed to group members, so as to facilitate research;
- (iii) and that a newsletter be circulated regularly giving details of conferences, publications, exhibitions and lectures likely to be of special interest to students of Dutch literature and culture.

Those interested are invited to write to me at the Department of English, Carleton University, Ottawa 1, Ontario.

Christopher Levenson

Editor's Note

This announcement has been included as a special courtesy to a field of studies relevant to *Comparative Literature*.¹

With this auspicious beginning in a statement which seems as appropriate and stimulating today as it must have ten years ago, CAANS began to develop into the organization we know today. Its progress can be divided into four well defined

periods: an initial one, culminating in the formal founding of the Association in St. John's in 1971; the years 1971 to 1973, when there was great hope and enthusiasm; a third span of five years, marked by grim determination to keep CAANS alive despite the serious and perennial problems, mainly financial, which threatened its existence and, finally, a period of renewed growth and enthusiasm in the past three years.

The progress of CAANS can be traced by quoting from its *Newsletter*. The first issue of December 10, 1971 of which 1,000 copies were distributed, carefully stated:

It is our aim to publish whenever available material warrants it and available funds permit it.²

In June, 1972, after a successful meeting at McGill University, the second Newsletter more boldly announced:

A newsletter will be sent free to all members three or four times a year. As well as lists of new members, listings of various libraries' holdings in Dutch Studies, and readers' requests for information, it will contain translations of articles, short stories and poetry.³

After a pause of eighteen months the third issue appeared, with the opening sentences reading:

No, CAANS is not dead, just a little short on active members who will stay with the job. In the 18 months that have elapsed since our first official participation at the Learned Societies Conference there has been no further *Newsletter*, we still have no source of funding beyond membership fees, and the organizational aspects have to be taken care of by a handful of busy people in Ottawa. It was solely due to the efforts of our Kingston representative that we were able to mount a programme at all at the Learned Societies last June, and we would like to take this opportunity to offer him our sincerest thanks for all his work.⁴

In this same editorial Christopher Levenson points out:

The largest membership we have had so far has been 75 and many of these members have been passive. Canada is a huge country and considerable financial resources are needed to bring even a fraction of our members together even once a year. If CAANS is to succeed, it desperately needs the active support of all its members. This support can take two main forms: the submission of articles, news items and translations from Dutch, and the organization of Netherlandic cultural events at a local level.⁵

One year later the fourth issue, in smaller format, began with an editorial entitled: "CAANS needs you, who needs CAANS?" Following this ominous sounding title, the editorial states:

CAANS, as far as we know the only organization of its kind in Canada, has for the whole of its short existence suffered from "hand-to-mouth" disease. Not that the lack of money alone is the problem. In some ways this is merely the most obvious symptom of the fact that we are

operating in a vacuum...

In terms of what Canada, for its own good, should know, learn from the Netherlands, in fields such as urban planning, graphic design, state patronage of the arts - CAANS has enormous potential...

But without even minimal support the small group in Ottawa, who try in their spare time to keep the organization together, is rapidly losing heart, and without some sense of support at least from the professional community, we shall have to give up. Previous exhortations to our members and readers have failed to elicit much response. If this appeal also fails to produce articles, offers of papers, etc. there seems little point in going on.⁶

The next year, in January 1976, the fifth issue appeared, with an editorial by J.F. Houwing explaining that Christopher Levenson was on sabbatical and that a committee led by Mrs. G. Grodde would be assuming editorial duties for the following issue, due to appear in 1977. He urged members to pay their dues, and submit articles and papers for the coming Annual Meeting. Then in May, 1977 the lowest point in CAANS' fortunes was reached, when Christopher Levenson wrote in his editorial in the sixth issue of *CAANS Newsletter*:

It is now six years since CAANS was started at the Learned Societies' Conference in St. John's Newfoundland. At the time it was thought and hoped that our association would help to fulfill a need, that we could make some of the most vital social and intellectual movements in the Netherlands and Flanders accessible and relevant to Canadians, whether or not of Dutch or Flemish origin. These are still our aims and I am not prepared to say yet that they are unrealizable, but the obstacles have been enormous...

Firstly, the number of Dutch or Flemish Canadians who actually have the time and energy to do something to help CAANS is very small...

Secondly, and this has proved a major disadvantage, there is at present only one university in the whole of Canada where Dutch language and literature is taught (in the form of two survey courses) — the University of Calgary — so that there is no existing organization we can use of the sort that is available in, say, Russian, Spanish or French Departments and no hope under present economic circumstances of persuading either German or Comparative Literature programmes to expand into Dutch language or literature. CAANS members are for the most part isolated and without any local focus that could compensate for the lack of a smoothly functioning national organization. The yearly meetings under the auspices of the Learned Societies Conferences have been rewarding and stimulating for those few of our members that have been able to attend and it is hoped that the articles and papers that we have published in the *Newsletter* have been valuable.

Ultimately, however, it is impossible to continue an organization such as CAANS without the active support of a large number of qualified people in a number of centres across Canada. This even more than financial considerations, such as the lack of any funds beyond what we raise through membership fees, has placed a steadily increasing burden on the handful of Ottawa members who constitute the executive, not because we want CAANS to be Ottawa-based, but because so far no feasible alternative has presented itself: Consequently, when we read in the Fall 1975 issue of *Neerlandica extra muros* that an organization with aims comparable to our own, the American Association for Netherlandic Studies, had been founded in the United States it seemed that rather than continue an uphill battle in Canada, we should attempt to integrate with the new American association and so open up to our membership the far more widespread American resources in terms of universities and colleges where Dutch is taught...we should at the same

time safeguard whatever we felt to be valuable in our own organization, notably papers, articles etc. written with a specifically Canadian context in mind.⁷

In this editorial Christopher Levenson called for members to attend the coming meeting at Fredericton in May, 1977 prepared to "approve the negotiations that would enable CAANS as an organization to participate in the activities of AANS while retaining a distinctive, albeit limited, Canadian identity."⁸

However, the turning point in CAANS' fortunes had been reached. Although the attendance in Fredericton was small, enthusiasm was high, and the lively discussion at the Annual Meeting showed that CAANS would retain its identity as it had been established during the past six years of its official existence as one — though admittedly a very small one — of the Learned Societies of Canada.

Although the 1977 issue was the last of the *CAANS Newsletters* to appear until the Fall of 1979, nevertheless the intervening period was an exciting one marked by growing participation in the Annual Meetings. These were held at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario in 1978 and at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon in 1979. It was apparent that CAANS had entered a new phase of its existence, and that there was hope of a resurgence of interest. That this obvious enthusiasm was not a temporary phenomenon soon became evident, and CAANS entered upon its fourth phase, one of rapidly accelerating growth and activity, culminating in the issue of the 10th Anniversary special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies—Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises* in which this overview of CAANS activities 1971-1981 appears. In our Anniversary Year, 1981, not only is CAANS in existence but flourishing; *CAANS Newsletter* is published four times a year, *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies—Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises* appears twice a year, and the multitude of CAANS activities both national and local is such that the remainder of this article can do little more than provide a brief outline of a few of the developments of the last three years.

But, first, as CAANS has reached the point of assured existence into the next decade, it seems only fitting to return briefly to its earlier stages of existence and pay due homage to a number of the "pioneers" who made the current activities possible. For the original letter sent by Christopher Levenson to *Comparative Literature in Canada Newsletter* in 1969 received a limited but highly prophetic response. Only three letters of support were written. Professor Adrian van den Hoven of the French Department of the University of Windsor wrote to express his interest and to offer his support to the proposed organization. Professor Symphorien van de Maele of the University of Ottawa wrote to urge that Flemish literature be included among the areas of interest. This letter

indicates that even in the initial stages or organization there was concern to give due attention to Flemish culture. A third encouraging letter arrived from the University of Massachusetts where, coincidentally, at that very time Professor E. M. Beekman was at the point of sending a similar memorandum to all faculty members of German Language and Literature, and Comparative Literature departments in the United States.

Encouraged by even this modest response to his announcement, Christopher Levenson tried to solicit still more letters of support by writing a circular letter in April, 1970. This was addressed to all English, French and German departments of universities throughout Canada. This time there was a greater response, with twenty-one letters arriving from all parts of Canada. Professor Levenson then began to plan the Inaugural Meeting of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies. This meeting took place on Saturday, February 13, 1971 at Carleton University, Ottawa, and was called jointly by Christopher Levenson and Professor Jacques van Vlasselaer of the Department of French of Carleton. The Embassies of both the Netherlands and Belgium provided practical assistance, marking the beginning of a decade of encouragement from the Governments of these two countries. On this occasion the support was financial and it permitted key members of the Planning Committee to travel to Ottawa for the inaugural meeting. Three out-of-town scholars had been chosen from those who replied to Christopher Levenson's letter. These were Professor van Dongen of the University of Guelph, Professor René Breugelmans of the University of Calgary, and Professor Simon Vosters of the University of British Columbia. Professor James Tassie of Carleton University presided at the inaugural meeting. While this vitally important meeting lasted only for a little over an hour, it was then that the aims of CAANS were first crystallized, taking much the same form as they hold today. The meeting ended with a decision to time the first formal meeting of the new association to coincide with the meetings of the Learned Societies of Canada, to meet that year in Newfoundland.

Christopher Levenson then sent a letter to this effect to all who had replied to his form letter, by now 55 in number. All were invited to attend the Founding Meeting in St. John's, and were asked to publicize the founding of CAANS. Nearly all replied that they regretted that they would not be able to attend because of the great distance involved, and a lack of travel funds. However, a small group of potential members did meet, and CAANS was duly founded, on June 3, 1971.

During the years of effort which followed the members from Ottawa and Kingston, with the support of the Royal Netherlands and Belgian embassies, saved CAANS from collapse. Although the only income through the entire decade was from membership fees of from \$5.00 to \$8.00, not only did **CAANS Newsletter** continue to appear, but later a journal edited by Adrian van den

Hoven of the University of Windsor was added. That this feat was possible was primarily due to the dedicated stewardship of Fritz Houwing of Ottawa, who served as Secretary-Treasurer during the years of discouragement. Together with Dr. Gerald Wilde of Queen's University, as President, and Christopher Levenson as Editor, he preserved the Association until it became possible to enter a new era of growth later in the decade.

This era of growth came primarily through a sudden increase in the activities of local Chapters of CAANS, primarily in Windsor, Toronto and Montreal, but also newly established groups in Winnipeg, and London, and ones in the initial stages of development in Waterloo, Ottawa, and St. Catharines.

The founding of local chapters of CAANS was encouraged from the earliest days of the Association, for it was considered one of the chief means of overcoming the problem of distance. Those members who could not attend the Annual Meeting could, it was hoped, take part in Netherlandic cultural activities at a local level. Already in 1971 groups were active in Calgary, Ottawa, and Windsor, and were in the earliest stages of development in two or three other cities. However, only the Windsor group survived through the years of discouragement, 1973-1977. Little knowing that the Windsor group was the only survivor, that Chapter continued to send sporadic annual reports to the national headquarters.

After enjoying seven years of varied and successful local activities sponsored by the Windsor Chapter of CAANS, an informal group of CAANS members and adherents in the Windsor area mounted a "CAANS (Windsor Chapter) Seminar on Netherlandic Studies" in November, 1978, at the University of Windsor. This successful three-day seminar was focussed on the University community and on the Windsor community at large. The University of Waterloo had just introduced a highly successful course in Dutch language and culture, and this important fact was made the focus of a discussion on the topic "CAANS on Campus". Nineteen professors and students from the University of Windsor and other Canadian and American universities took part in this discussion which ended the three-day seminar. During this seminar a series of papers and musical performances, film showings and discussions brought the interests and activities of CAANS to the attention of all interested members of the community. Through the auspices of the Royal Netherlands Embassy, the First Secretary, Charles Huijbregts arranged for the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands to provide a showing of an important feature film, just released, *Max Havelaar*. This token of support for the Seminar was a vital contribution to its success for it attracted many members of the university community.

This first Windsor Seminar was followed by a second in 1980 and a third in 1981, all well attended and enthusiastically received. A number of grants from Wintario (*Jan Klaassen in Canada*,

a puppet performance), the Canada Council (poetry readings by Christopher Levenson, a play reading by Christopher Heide), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (a paper by René Breugelmans), and Department of the Secretary of State (a discussion of the films *Liberation* and *Ashes of War*, presenting the role of the Canadian forces in the liberation of the Netherlands in 1944/45), all contributed greatly to the success of these three Windsor Seminars. Local music groups, church leaders, the Art Gallery of Windsor, and many individuals from the community of Windsor and of neighbouring Michigan, contributed as well. And the Netherlands Government continued to offer tangible support with feature films and key speakers.

The first successful Seminar in Windsor in 1978 drew the attention of a potential CAANS member in Toronto, Mark Boekelman, who thereupon took out membership in the national organization and with great enthusiasm assisted in the foundation of the Toronto local chapter of CAANS. Joan Magee, as programme director of the Windsor local chapter was asked to address a group of potential members in Toronto. By spring 1979 the first active group in Toronto had been organized and had begun to plan a full programme in the Toronto area. This has been a most successful programme involving local CAANS Seminars in 1980, 1981 and planned for 1982 as well as the successful encouragement of the introduction of Dutch language instruction at all levels, elementary to university, in the Toronto area.

By the spring of 1980 a new CAANS member from the City of Montreal, Mrs. Janny Lowensteyn of the Department of Sociology of Concordia University, together with Dr. Jan Lobelle and other enthusiastic new members, had attracted enough support to found still another local chapter. One of the most gratifying aspects of the Annual Meeting of 1980, held at the Université de Québec à Montréal, was the official foundation of the Montreal Chapter. This newly formed chapter will hold its first seminar in October, 1981. It has been active in establishing courses in the Montreal area.

In the spring of 1980 two other chapters were founded, one in Winnipeg, Manitoba and another in London, Ontario. Both groups have held film programmes as a way of reaching out into their communities and attracting potential members. In the case of both chapters individual members are very active promoting the aims of CAANS, and their activities augur well for the future of CAANS in Manitoba and in Southwestern Ontario. A London member made an important contribution to the success of the official celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of CAANS, celebrated at Acadia University, Nova Scotia. This member, Bert Kloezeman, a London artist, prepared a certificate in honour of a pioneer translator of Dutch literary works, the late Dr. Watson Kirkconnell, for many years the President of Acadia University and one of Canada's greatest literary scholars. At a ceremony held on June 2, 1981 in the Kirkconnell Room of Acadia University Library, the certificate

prepared by Bert Kloezeman on behalf of CAANS was formally presented to Dr. J. R.C. Perkin, Acting president of Acadia University. The First Secretary of the Royal Netherlands Embassy, Henk Revis, gave a statement of appreciation of the contribution to international scholarship made by Dr. Kirkconnell in translating into English plays by the great Dutch poet, Joost van den Vondel. In turn Dr. Perkin presented a book about Dr. Kirkconnell's life and work which he, himself, had edited, and which he felt would be of interest to members of CAANS. The ceremony was concluded with a poetry reading by Christopher Levenson, as founder of CAANS. He read a number of poems representative of the Golden Age of Dutch poetry in which Vondel lived, which he had translated from the Dutch.

Still three other local groups are in the initial stages of development, those of Ottawa, Waterloo and St. Catherines. It is hoped that the year 1982 will be an active one for each of these potentially strong local chapters. The CAANS Annual Meeting will take place at the University of Ottawa in May, 1982, which will bring many members and potential members to Ottawa, and will, we hope, encourage the development of a strong local chapter to continue the work of the chapter founded in Ottawa in the earliest days of the Association. Waterloo members are looking forward to a local CAANS Seminar, to take place in November, 1982. With an extremely large group of students, currently numbering over one hundred, studying the Dutch language either in regular classes or by correspondence, there is every indication that an active local chapter in Waterloo will serve a useful role. St. Catherine's, too, has potential as an area of development, for there are many local people of Dutch ethnic origin in the Niagara peninsula to encourage the development of local opportunities to study Dutch language, literature, and culture.

To summarize the process made in the first decade, in particular the last three years: the Dutch language is now taught at the University of Toronto by Professor A. P. Dierick, at the University of Waterloo by Dr. A. F. Zweers and Dr. R. Kooistra; Netherlandic literature and culture are taught at the University of Calgary by Dr. René Breugelmans and at the University of Windsor by Dr. Louise Nelson. All of these members of CAANS have introduced Netherlandic Studies into the course of studies at their respective universities only to be rewarded with large classes of enthusiastic students. It is with great interest that the membership of CAANS awaits news of more courses of this nature in still other universities.

A number of CAANS members have written books and articles on Netherlandic subjects which have been published in CAANS' own journal, *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*, *Revue canadienne d'études néerlandaises*, and in other Canadian journals. Others were actively involved in the filming of *Liberation* (M&M Films) and *Ashes of War* (N.F.B.), both films having been made to mark the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the

liberation of the Netherlands by Canadian forces. As an activity associated with the Windsor Chapter of CAANS, Hendrika Ruger has founded the Netherlandic Press, a non-profit venture, and a number of its publications have been made available for sale, including a checklist of the Netherlandic holdings of Waterloo University Library, an occasional paper prepared by Marsha Blok; another occasional paper entitled *Jan Klaasen in Canada*, edited by Joan Magee; and *Wantij/Neaptide*, poetry by Kees Snoek of the University of Michigan translated by three other members of CAANS, Sharon Short Robertson, Jan de Vries and Arie Staal. Two other collections of poetry will be published by the Netherlandic Press this fall, *Under Dutch Skies* with translations by Hendrika Ruger and Dorothy Howard, and translations of poetry of Holland's Golden Age by Christopher Levenson. Other books, theses, and research projects with Netherlandic subject matter are known to be in process.

As it completes its tenth year of existence and looks forward to the next decade, it becomes evident that the Association has reached a point where the need for planning for the future becomes apparent. No longer is CAANS a particularly small association but rather one of some size, numbering between 200 and 300 active members. CAANS publishes regularly, issuing a journal twice a year, spring and fall, a *Newsletter* four times a year, and a membership list once a year. To date the only source of income has been from membership fees, recently raised to \$10.00 for regular members, \$5.00 for students and those over 60 years of age. But these limited funds have produced the two CAANS publications, and these have created interest and new membership for the Association. It is hoped, now, that by improving both publications in the decade to come, membership in CAANS will continue to increase in the 1980's.

It appears that there will be a continued interest in local seminars sponsored by local Chapters of CAANS. In October, 1981 the Montreal Chapter of CAANS, ACAEN Section Montréalaise will mount a two-day seminar with papers on various aspects of the themes Language and Education, Ethnicity, History and Economics. This particularly interesting programme is expected to draw a large attendance, particularly from the central and eastern parts of Ontario and from Québec, as well as a number of international participants and observers. In May, 1982 a seminar of international importance will be mounted in Toronto, sponsored by the Toronto Chapter of CAANS. Since Toronto and Amsterdam are twin cities, it has been possible to plan a most interesting seminar built around this relationship. "Randstad" and "The Golden Horse-shoe" will be represented on a number of panels of internationally recognized experts on the subject of urban planning, and other areas of interest for the 1980's.

On looking back through the past ten years of CAANS existence, one is struck by the foresight of Christopher Levenson when he formulated his plan for the Association. His words show a vision

which is echoed in the local programmes of CAANS chapters:

I should like to see not just a few of the relevant experts but the country as a whole made aware of Dutch achievements in say, urban planning, education and social services...⁹

Finally, one can say that it is the vision of our founder, Christopher Levenson, that has carried CAANS through the last decade to this year of celebration, 1981. He has expressed this vision most aptly:

By a combination of these various approaches we can perhaps, in the long run, create both a wider demand for translations by the student body and the population as a whole and a greater supply of students prepared, despite all financial and occupational perils, to help meet that demand by their translating. Moreover, and in my view most important of all, we will have opened the doors to a clearer understanding by a majority of Canadians of what lies behind the visible manifestations of various groups' ethnic identities. In this way we can make of multiculturalism something even more significant, a part of a new Canadian cultural internationalism that looks beyond London and Washington to absorb and put to use all sources of mutual enlightenment.¹⁰

1 Christopher Levenson, "Dutch studies" in *Comparative Literature in Canada Newsletter*, v. 1 no 1 (1969) p. 23.

2 Jack Riedé, "Editorial" in *CAANS Newsletter*, 1 (1971) p. 1.

3 Christopher Levenson, "From the Editor's Desk" in *CAANS Newsletter*, 2 (1972) p. 1.

4 Christopher Levenson, "Coming up for the third time" in *CAANS Newsletter*, 3 (1974) p. 1.

5 Christopher Levenson, "Coming up for the third time" in *CAANS Newsletter* 3 (1974), p. 1.

6 Christopher Levenson, "CAANS needs you, who needs CAANS?" in *CAANS Newsletter* 4 (1975), p. 1.

7 Christopher Levenson, "Editorial" in *CAANS Newsletter* 6 (1977) pp.1-2.

8 Christopher Levenson, "Editorial" in *CAANS Newsletter* 6 (1977) p. 2.

9 Christopher Levenson "Statement for a panel discussion" in *Translation and Interpretation* (Vancouver: CAUTG, 1975) p. 118.

10 Christopher Levenson "Statement for a panel discussion" in *Translation and Interpretation* (Vancouver: CAUTG, 1975) p. 120.