

**In memoriam Alexander Frederik (Sasha, Sander) Zweers
(11 June 1931 – 29 October 2011)**

Gus Dierick



On November 2, 2011, CAANS learned of the passing away of Alexander Frederik Zweers, affectively known by all as Sander or Sasha.

Sander was born in Amsterdam in 1931 and studied Russian there at the University of Amsterdam. He obtained his PhD in 1971 from the University of Groningen with a dissertation on Tolstoy's *Boyhood, Childhood, Youth*.

He came to Canada in 1962 and was a lecturer at the University of British Columbia until 1967, when he moved to Waterloo, Ontario as Assistant Professor in the Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literature Department, eventually becoming first Associate Professor (1973) and then Professor (1997).

Sander's main interest in Russian was with the great 19th century Realists, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, later also Ivan Bunin, on whom he published a book and a number of articles. His research projects took him several times to Russia, where he also participated in a number of conferences and exchange programs.

Sander's interest in Dutch literature came relatively late. His work on Russian realist literature probably inspired him to look at some of the Dutch counterparts to his Russian heroes. His first published article was on Herman Heijermans; there followed articles on Marcellus Emants, Frederik van Eeden and Louis Couperus. His was often a comparative approach, linking the two literatures together: Henriette Roland-Holst and Leo Tolstoy, Tolstoy and Stijn Streuvels, Tolstoy and Couperus, Ivan Turgenev and Marcellus Emants.

In recent years he turned his attention to 20th-century authors such as Bert Voeten, J. Bernlef, Boudewijn Büch and Jacoba van Velde, as well as the detective novel and the art of acting. Active to the end, he gave a presentation to CAANS on Harry Mulisch, just at the last CAANS conference in Fredericton in June. His last paper on Russian literature was presented on April 28th during a special session of his Department's Annual Conference, to coincide with the Department's 50th anniversary celebrations. It was a paper on Tolstoy and, as a colleague indicated to me, was 'characteristic, a spirited and in parts dramatic paper.'

CAANS members will recognize Sasha's typical delivery in this remark. In contrast to many a less fortunate presenter, he was able, thanks in part to his full baritone, to deliver his papers in a lively manner, impeccably articulated and spiced with drama. But beyond the manner of presentation, the many papers he gave during the annual CAANS conferences will be remembered as being informative, often surprising in their linkages and always well documented.

In addition to his scholarly work, Sander was an extremely active and productive administrative member of CAANS. For many years Sander was the member at large for the Waterloo Chapter, where he organized a very successful conference on the Second World War in 1989. Nationally, he was a founding member of CAANS, its President from 1991 to 1993, and a long-standing member of the Editorial Board of the *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* from 1984 until his passing. He led a full life and we at CAANS had the pleasure of sharing in it with him.

In 1980 Sander and Remkes Kooistra founded Dutch at the University of Waterloo, which is still thriving with healthy enrolments in Fall and Winter

semesters each year. It is one of the few surviving Dutch programs on the University level in Canada.

Sander had *two* great interests: literature and music. He came from a distinguished musical family; his grandfather, Bernard Zweers, was one of the three most prominent composers of his day, along with Johan Wagenaar and Alphons Diepenbrock. Some CAANS members may remember hearing Sander present a paper on Bernard Zweers' Third Symphony, *From My Fatherland*. He was also a member of the Kitchener-Waterloo Philharmonic Choir (under the direction of Howard Dyck). For his long service he was presented with a Volunteer Service Award from the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture, Tourism and Recreation in 1993 – an award of which he was justifiably proud.

I had the opportunity to have many conversations and exchanges of e-mails with Sasha in the last few years. Sometimes these concerned literature, often Dutch language use (he was a stickler for detail). I did not always agree with him (he saw himself as a guardian of 'proper' Dutch, and was averse to neologisms and casual contemporary Dutch). Many times we also exchanged views about music, and we went to a few concerts in Toronto together.

It is gratifying for me to know that the last concert he was able to attend featured one of his favourite orchestras and conductors (the Kirov Orchestra of St. Petersburg under Valery Gergiev).

Sasha will be missed by all who had the privilege to know him.

Hopefully, other, younger colleagues will carry on his work in the same generous and lively spirit.

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Compiled by Basil Kingstone

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