

16 May 2016 (Winnipeg, MB)

Address by Dr. Elena Baraban, President of the Canadian Association of Slavists

Dear Colleagues, Members and Friends of the Canadian Association of Slavists,

This year members of the CAS celebrate the 70th anniversary of the emergence of the Canadian Slavistics and the 60th anniversary of our journal, the *Canadian Slavonic Papers/ Revue canadienne des slavistes*, one of the oldest and most respected scholarly journals in Canada and a leading Slavic Studies review internationally.

The History of CAS dates back to 1946 when the Canadian branch of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL) was founded. The first conference of the Canadian AATSEEL was held in June 1947. A number of Canadian universities (University of Saskatchewan, University of Manitoba, University of Toronto, and others) established Slavic Studies programs and departments shortly after the Second World War. In 1954, it was decided to form, on the basis of the Canadian AATSEEL, Canada's own learned society – the Canadian Association of Slavists. Thus, CAS as a scholarly association (recognized by the Royal Society as one of the Learned Societies of Canada in 1955) turned 60 in 2014. And, as I said, the inception of the Canadian Slavistics took place even earlier, 70 years ago and we have good reasons to be proud of the work by several generations of Slavists in Canada.

As we all look forward to many more years of productive work, it is useful to reflect on the current state of our association and, specifically, on the year that has elapsed since our last AGM in Ottawa in May 2015.

Today the Canadian Association of Slavists is an interdisciplinary society of scholars and professionals whose interests center on the social, economic and political life of the Slavic peoples, as well as their languages, diverse cultures and histories. The original mandate of the CAS – namely, the study of the languages, histories, and cultures of Central and Eastern Europe, -- is still relevant today. However, while the foundation of Canadian Slavistics took place after the Second World War in response to a clear need for expertise on Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the political, social, and cultural changes that were triggered by the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union inspired new avenues of research on these regions. Today, the changing political, economic, religious, and cultural landscapes in the former Soviet Union and in Europe need reassessment of the role that Canadian Slavists may play in providing their expert opinion about traditional and emerging agendas and areas of research.

On the one hand, research on Slavic diasporas in Canada, which was initiated decades ago, remains a major academic focus for many members of the CAS. As the current issue of the CAS Newsletter reflects, the same stability in research focus also concerns topics such as Holodomor,

Chernobyl, folklore, and major literary giants such as Tolstoy and Turgenev. On the other hand (and this is also reflected in our current Newsletter issue), new important areas of research have appeared in response to the dramatic political, social, and cultural upheavals that have followed the Ukrainian revolution of 2013-14. Furthermore, significant scholarly advances have been made in the development of pedagogy of Slavic languages, literatures, and cultures. In 2015-16, such efforts have particularly been noticeable at the University of Montreal, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and University of Victoria.

Many Slavic Studies programs across Canada have introduced new courses that address the needs and interests of today's students and that allow productive cooperation between Slavists and colleagues from other programs and departments, including Film Studies, English, History, Political Science, Religion, etc. Practically all Slavic programs in Canada also maintain and develop their ties with the community. At my home institution, the University of Manitoba, for example, new avenues for such cooperation between public institutions and the university programs have appeared with the opening of the Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg and the recent approval of the new Master's program in Human Rights. Some of the classes we teach in Slavic Studies benefit from including a field trip to the Museum's exhibits that are most relevant for our class discussions. In turn, the newly formed Master's program in Human Rights may be highly relevant for graduate students that focus on Central and Eastern Europe.

While the work that Canadian Slavists do is very important, Slavic Studies continue to face the same (and sometimes even more severe) challenges that the Humanities and Social Sciences have overall faced in North American universities in the last decade. The 'budget cuts' of which, I am sure, all of you are informed regularly during faculty meetings in your respective academic institutions seem to cut deeper and deeper into the Humanities and Social Sciences but do not seem to touch science departments or applied programs that decades ago were not even considered as legitimate university disciplines. In this financial climate, we should think of the best strategy to demonstrate to the administration the significance of the work we do.

I am deeply convinced that the humanitarian crises we witness in today's world can be dealt with only when the values and knowledge that are disseminated by the humanities and social sciences are once again viewed as indispensable for citizens of civilized countries. Indeed, the humanities help students to develop an ability to think creatively and critically, analyze data (from literature and fine arts to urban development and politics), and, ultimately become responsible citizens. An ability to understand the past and present, appreciate similarities and differences between different cultures, assess ethical concerns in a variety of situations is crucial for ensuring our communal progress. In practical terms, I invite members of the CAS to begin using our list server more actively for discussing how to strengthen Canadian Slavistics. And of course an opinion piece regarding the state of our disciplines can be also sent to our Newsletter. Furthermore, perhaps CAS members can form a working group in order to brainstorm the ways of preserving and developing our respective programs and departments. A CAS Facebook page may be established to serve as an informal and very attractive platform for keeping each other up to date about our research and teaching and about major events we organize.

I am happy to report that our association is overall in good order.

The CAS currently has slightly more than 200 individual members. While I am glad to see that today CAS has more individual members than the year before, there is certainly room for growth. It is really good to see that approximately one quarter of CAS members is comprised of our graduate students, those who will advance Slavic Studies in Canada for decades to come. It is also wonderful that retired professors continue to be active in the CAS and help pass on knowledge and experience to new generations of Slavists.

Since January 2015, Taylor & Francis Group has taken care of our journal printing and distribution. According to T&F, for 2015 *Canadian Slavonic Papers* had 156 institutional subscriptions. It is fewer than in the past but the overall circulation of our journal has grown significantly. 2,308 institutions had access to the journal in 2015 through hard copy subscriptions but also subscriptions to their various digital packages. Moreover, the revenue from the journal seems to be steady for the last two years (in fact, the revenue for the last year has increased) and we hope that the cooperation with the Taylor & Francis Group will continue to evolve in the best possible way.

Professor Heather Coleman (University of Alberta), who has been Editor of *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue canadienne des slavistes* since 2011, deserves much praise for her hard work on maintaining the high intellectual level of our interdisciplinary journal. In 2015, CSP had two excellent special issues: one is *Nostalgia, Culture, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* and the other one is about Orthodox Christianity in Russia and Eastern Europe. I hope that a future special issue of the CSP on the works of the 2015 Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich, which Heather has recently initiated by her CFP, will place the Canadian Slavistics in the vanguard of interdisciplinary research on Alexievich. It is also commendable that Heather has found a great way to balance regular and special issues of the journal while making each volume a success. On behalf of the entire CAS membership, I extend to Heather and her outstanding team of the guest editors, book review editors, and assistants our heartfelt thanks for the work they have done and best wishes for many future accomplishments.

Our conference this year has been expertly organized by Professor Bohdan Harasymiw, one of the most experienced CAS members and a wonderful conference program Chair. Bohdan also deserves recognition having conducted his work of Conference Program Chair long-distance, for, although Bohdan used to work for U Calgary for many years, he currently resides in Edmonton. Thanks to Bohdan and the dedicated members of his team, Ms. Svitlana Winters and Ms. Irina Shilova, all preparations for our annual meeting in Calgary went smoothly and everything was done on time. It is noteworthy that this year no additional call for papers was issued and the deadline for conference abstracts was not moved. The conference program nonetheless features even more papers than in Ottawa in 2015 and three round tables. I am happy to see many graduate students participating in the program as this demonstrates promise for the future of our organization and our profession. Cheers to Bohdan for putting together an excellent conference program! Professor Nicholas Žekulin (U Calgary) has graciously agreed to host our informal get-together for a BBQ this year. Thank you, Professor Žekulin.

Let me also remind you of the highlights of the past academic year.

In 2015-16 the CAS held its traditional competition for the best undergraduate and graduate essays. The Canadian Association of Slavists Annual Essay Contest for best graduate essay for 2014-15 have been awarded to Stephanie Dreier, a PhD Student in Germanic Studies, UBC, for an essay entitled "The Problem of Literary History." The essay was nominated by Prof. Steven Taubeneck. Our heartfelt congratulations to Stephanie and Steven on this achievement!

On behalf of the entire CAS membership, I sincerely thank the members of the Essay Contest jury, Professors John Dingley, Andriy Zayarnyuk, and Mark Conliffe for their service. The jury has decided not to award a prize to any of the contestants in the undergraduate student category for 2015-16. Partially, this decision was made because there had been very few submissions in 2015 in this category. I encourage all faculty who are members of the CAS to think about the best papers your students have written in the past academic year as early as April and May and suggest to your students they submit their work for the competition. In fact, it may be a good idea to inspire your students to do their best on essays at the beginning of the academic year (semester) by way of mentioning that their essays might enter the CAS best student essay contest.

I am also happy to report that the first competition for Canadian Association of Slavists' Taylor and Francis Book Prize in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies was very successful. We received many excellent nominations for the prize. In recognition of its contribution to the study of the Soviet prison system, the Canadian Association of Slavists awarded the inaugural 2015 Book Prize to Dr. Alan Barenberg for *Gulag Town, Company Town: Forced Labor and its Legacy in Vorkuta* (Yale University Press, 2014). Based on extensive research in central and arctic archives, Barenberg studies the relationship between prisoners and the civilian population in the northern settlement of Vorkuta. On behalf of the CAS, I express our gratitude to the 2015 Book Prize jury -- Professors Nigel Raab (Loyola Marymount University), Donna Orwin (University of Toronto), Tatiana Rizova (Christopher Newport University -- for their enthusiasm and expert opinion.

Our second Book Prize competition has begun with the call of nominations issued several weeks ago. Shortly after our annual meeting, the jury for the Canadian Association of Slavists' Taylor and Francis Book Prize -- Professors Andriy Zayarnyuk (University of Winnipeg), John Dingley (York University and University of Victoria), and Volha Isakava (Central Washington University) will begin their work of evaluating the books that have been nominated for this year's contest.

My report would be incomplete without mentioning the CAS's valuable contribution to the advancing of Slavic Studies internationally. In the past, CAS members played an important role in the founding of the International Committee for Soviet and East European Studies (ICSEES), which was later renamed into the International Committee for Central and East European Studies (ICCEES). Professor Adam Bromke (McMaster University) was the primary organizer of the ICSEES and of the first World Congress of Soviet and East European Studies in Banff (Alberta, Canada) in 1974. Professor Bromke was also the President of ICSEES until 1980. Other Canadian Slavists served in key positions in this international organization for many years. Last year, in 2015, the CAS was well represented at the 2015 ICCEES IX Congress in Makuhari (Japan). Canada was represented by Olga Bakich, Edita Bosak, Heather Coleman, Stanislav

Kirschbaum, Alexei Kojevnikov, Volodymyr Kravchenko, Andrii Krawchuk, Thomas Lahusen, Tong Lam, David Marples, Veronika Makarova, Mikhail A. Molchanov, Dragana Obradovic, Olga Pressitch, Gunter Schaarschmidt, David Schimmelpenninck Van Der Oye, M. Mark Stolarik, Irene Sywenky, and Serhy Yekechyk. Most, but unfortunately not all, of these scholars are members of the CAS.

My sincere compliments go to Prof. Andrii Krawchuk (University of Sudbury), who has been the CAS representative for ICCEES for many years. Prof. Krawchuk has worked very hard on planning the 2020 Congress of ICCEES that is to take place in Montreal. As you know, the CAS's bid to host the Congress was accepted. It is a great honour and also much responsibility for Canadian Slavists to host the Congress. There is considerable work to be done, including the finding of the sponsors, invitations of keynote speakers, cooperation with university administrations, etc. All of these activities are spearheaded by Professor Krawchuk. On behalf of the entire CAS, I express my deep appreciation of Andrii's excellent work.

CAS finances are also in good order, as everyone can see from the report of Maryna Romanets, our secretary-treasurer. Thank you, Maryna, for your work. It is also very clear, however, that for the last several years, we have been operating on a very tight budget. Perhaps the incoming Executive of the CAS need to brainstorm more actively whether there is potential for improving the financial situation of the CAS. The charitable status of the CAS was restored quite a few years ago. It is high time for us to consider how the CAS can make use of it.

Dorota Lockyer (a graduate student representative on the CAS Executive) has continued her valuable work on improving graduate student participation in CAS works by means of maintaining "Graduate Student Corner" webpage/blog, housed on the CAS/CSP website and by continuing to organize a roundtable for graduate students at our annual conference.

My special compliment goes to Ms. Shona Allison, our Newsletter Editor. This year our Newsletter has received a facelift through the inclusion of a few announcements and pictures. I invite all CAS members to consider the CAS Newsletter as a platform for sharing their considerations about our courses, state of our profession, planned conferences, and new initiatives and also as a venue for advertising our graduate programs and new publications. We certainly can include pictures and links to the video materials if not video clips themselves. We regularly receive reports from several Canadian universities and quite rarely our Newsletter has any materials about programs and schools in the Atlantic Provinces. Please stay in touch!

Last but not least, I would like to dearly thank all members of the CAS Executive who have made my work easier in the past year. Their dedication, professionalism, and wisdom have been crucial for ensuring that the CAS thrives and remains a productive organization.

With best wishes,

Elena V. Baraban