New book means Air India bombing will be more than just ‘barely remembered’

By Wade Hemsworth

Chandrima Chakraborty, a McMaster University Scholar who has worked to study, explain and raise awareness of the Air India bombing of June 23, 1985, wonders why Canadians aren’t more aware of Canada’s worst mass murder. The mid-air bombing killed 329 people, and until the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, was the most deadly terror incident ever involving an aircraft.

Several years ago, when Chakraborty had tried to look up some academic research on the bombing for a course she was teaching, she was stunned to find there was none to draw upon, and has since worked to fill the gap, including interviewing many victims’ families.

Chakraborty, an Associate Professor of English and Cultural studies, is an editor of the newly published anthology, Remembering Air India: The Art of Public Mourning, together with McMaster colleague Associate Professor Amber Dean (English and Cultural Studies) and Angela Failler of the University of Winnipeg.

Continued to page 3
Dean’s Reflections

Every September for the past five years it has been my pleasure to welcome, on behalf of my colleagues in the Faculty of Humanities, another excited, enthusiastic and nervous group of first year students. I share their excitement, and some of their nervousness.

This will be a year of firsts in L.R. Wilson Hall.

Students from across campus who play in our School of the Arts Music ensembles are learning and performing on our magnificent Concert Hall for the first time ever. The School’s Theatre program is staging the world premiere of the English translation of Lope de Vega’s Women and Servants as its first major production in our new Black Box Performance Hub. Multimedia students are exploring the audio and video exhibition possibilities of this new space.

Meanwhile, up on the fourth floor, the Centre for Advanced Research in Experimental and Applied Linguistics (ARiEAL) is opening facilities to further the work of McMaster researchers working on the boundaries of language, linguistics and cognitive science. They will help us better understand, for example, how we learn to read, or how we acquire and lose first and second language abilities.

ARiEAL joins two other Humanities centres already up and running in the building. The Wilson Institute for Canadian History brings together researchers who want to study Canada’s social and political development in a global framework. The Institute on Ethics for Policy and Innovation supports applied ethical research to produce better and more effective health policy interventions around the world.

And those nervous first year students? They are being taught in new active learning classrooms in Wilson Hall, being introduced to the world of the Humanities in our new foundation courses.

Humanities researchers and students find themselves in new spaces that will enable them to do the work that universities are meant to do, to extend and deepen human understanding of the world around us. Together, they are building a brighter world.
The book is a collaborative endeavor with international scholars, creative writers, and visual artists exploring the complex processes of mourning and memorialization that have ensued. The book creates a new form of public record of what Chandrima describes as a “barely remembered” event in Canada’s history.

Former Ontario premier Bob Rae, who conducted a review of the events for the federal government and produced the 2005 report, Lessons to Be Learned, reviewed the book for the Literary Review of Canada.

“The focus of this book is not just on a failure of surveillance, policing, intelligence or the court system,” Rae writes. “Its theme is a wider, and painful, reality: the failure to embrace the Air India bombing and its aftermath as our own. Even Canadian scholars—including in the legal community—have failed to study and analyze it as a Canadian event. There are official inquiries but not much history. There are diatribes and conspiracy theories but not enough deep analysis.”

During the 30th anniversary year, Chakraborty led the organization of a two-day conference at McMaster Innovation Park that brought together Air India families, authors and scholars.

The absence of scholarly research on the tragedy, she says, was consistent with the broader and more troubling fact that the Air India bombing has never resonated as deeply with Canadians as the scale of the tragedy would suggest.

Popular book club helping international students hone their English language skills

By Colin Czerneda

A small extracurricular book club aimed at helping students develop English proficiency has grown from a few interested students to a popular and powerful method for students to engage with their English language curriculum.

“We know that greater overall engagement leads to greater academic success.”

The MELD Book Club, intended to provide students with the opportunity to develop their English language skills outside of the classroom, is the work of Tilly Wark, a recent graduate of the English & Cultural Studies program who drew on her own undergraduate experiences to develop the club.

She says she was particularly inspired by a course she took on modern British literature. “There was no such thing as an incorrect answer,” says Wark. “Any response was acceptable so long as we as students could support our arguments.”

Over the Spring, students in the McMaster English Language Development (MELD) program met weekly in small groups to read, study and discuss Lawrence Hill’s The Illegal and, in the process, hone their English language skills.

“During Book Club sessions Wark says she encourages discussion, asks questions, and even plays music and short videos to engage with students. “I once had a TA who would start every tutorial with an ice breaker question just to get us in the mood to talk,” she says. “I thought it was a fantastic idea, so that’s how I start every Book Club session.”

“In the early Book Club sessions, the students were fairly passive,” says Wark. “Many would speak quietly, or write only a few lines with a written activity.” She says the transformation into a talkative and engaged group happened slowly over a few weeks, but the results are clear. “They have become a creative group, they challenge perspectives with their responses, especially during round-table discussions,” she says.

The MELD program, introduced three years ago, is intended for international students who want to improve their English language skills in preparation for enrollment in an English-language program at the university level. Extracurricular activities, like the MELD Book Club, that encourage students to practice their language skills outside of a traditional academic setting feature significantly into MELD programming.

“This has been our most successful year to date in MELD,” says Anna Moro, Associate Dean of Humanities and MELD Director. “Our success rate was 98% with our largest class yet.”

“I attribute our increased success in part to the expanded opportunities for student engagement beyond the classroom,” adds Moro. “We know that greater overall engagement leads to greater academic success.”
McMaster and Ryerson universities announced the Smart Robots for Health Communication project, a joint research initiative designed to introduce social robotics and artificial intelligence into clinical health care.

With the help of Softbank’s humanoid robot Pepper and IBM Bluemix Watson Cognitive Services, the researchers will study health information exchange through a state-of-the-art human-robot interaction system.

The project is a collaboration between David Harris Smith, professor in the Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia at McMaster University, Frauke Zeller, professor in the School of Professional Communication at Ryerson University and Hermenio Lima, a dermatologist and professor of medicine at McMaster’s Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine. His main research interests are in the area of immunodermatology and technology applied to human health.

The research project involves the development and analysis of physical and virtual human-robot interactions, and has the capability to improve healthcare outcomes by helping healthcare professionals better understand patients’ behaviour.

Zeller and Harris Smith have previously worked together on hitchBOT, the friendly hitchhiking robot that travelled across Canada and has since found its new home in the Science and Technology Museum in Ottawa.

“Pepper will help us highlight some very important aspects and motives of human behaviour and communication,” said Zeller.

Designed to be used in professional environments, Pepper is a humanoid robot that can interact with people, ‘read’ emotions, learn, move and adapt to its environment, and even recharge on its own. Pepper is able to perform facial recognition and develop individualized relationships when it interacts with people.

Lima, the clinic director, said: "We are excited to have the opportunity to potentially transform patient engagement in a clinical setting, and ultimately improve healthcare outcomes by adapting to clients’ communications needs."

At Ryerson, Pepper was funded by the Co-lab in the Faculty of Communication and Design. FCAD’s Co-lab provides strategic leadership, technological support and acquisitions of technologies that are shaping the future of communications.

“This project exemplifies the value that research in the Humanities can bring to the wider world, in this case building understanding and enhancing communications in critical settings such as health care," says McMaster’s Dean of Humanities, Ken Cruikshank.

The integration of IBM Watson cognitive computing services with the state-of-the-art social robot Pepper, offers a rich source of research potential for the projects at Ryerson and McMaster. This integration is also supported by IBM Canada and SOSCIP by providing the project access to high performance research computing resources and staff in Ontario.

“We see this as the initiation of an ongoing collaborative university and industry research program to develop and test applications of embodied AI, a research program that is well-positioned to integrate and apply emerging improvements in machine learning and social robotics innovations,” said Harris Smith.
McMaster alumna says the world needs “humanities-minded” people

By Erica Balch

Music has been a common thread throughout Diana Weir’s life.

It’s a passion that began early on when she learned to play the piano as a child, and was nurtured as a student in McMaster’s Faculty of Humanities where she completed a combined degree in Music and Cultural Studies.

“I knew I needed music to be part of my life in some way and that it was something that really spoke to me as an individual,” says Weir who since graduating in 2008, has built a successful career in arts administration, working with a number of arts organizations, including the Canadian Opera Company and the Hamilton Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, to bring what she calls the “transformative” power of the performing arts to the public.

Weir, who earned a Master’s Degree in 2015 after completing the McMaster-Syracuse Master of Communications Management program, says the skills and values she developed as a Humanities student have helped lay the groundwork for her success.

In an interview Weir reflected on how her education in the Faculty of Humanities has prepared her for her career:

“Being a humanities student taught me how to talk to people, how to work with many diverse stakeholders and how to present ideas in a clear and concise way and those are really important things in my line of work.

The values that I learned from my education in humanities – to be aware of my impact on the public, to have a desire to pursue quality and to put value into the world – they absolutely contribute to both in my professional life and in my personal life. Studying the humanities gave me the ability to think critically about a problem and gave me the confidence to speak up about issues. I learned to talk to different kinds of people so that no matter who I’m engaging with, we’re engaged in a mutually beneficial exchange of thoughts. These are all things that are taught in the humanities.

Humanities students should take time to learn what their interests and values are so that over time they can find the place in the world they feel most connected to.

Weir was recently named the Executive Director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra (HPO), she is now focused on connecting the music of the HPO to audiences in the Hamilton community.
Born and raised in Toronto, Orra Rose Henan (Cert ’51, BA ’53) grew up in the Great Depression. She arrived at McMaster in 1950 at the age of 32 to study theology with the Women’s Leadership Training School, led by Dr. Lois Tupper (DDiv ’74), the first female professor appointed to a tenure-track position at a Canadian university. Thanks to Dr. Tupper’s encouragement, Orra stayed at McMaster and completed her BA.

Orra worked for many years as a church administrator, and later became a special education teacher until her retirement in 1984. A lifelong learner who loved to travel, she was dedicated to promoting literacy, equal rights and social justice.

Although she later attended several other places of higher learning, it was McMaster that held a special place in Orra’s heart. Through her will, she established a bursary to support students in the Faculty of Humanities.

In her memoirs, she summed up her philosophy of life: “For the future, I trust our families will build on the past and go forward with optimism.” Her generous bequest is now helping Humanities students go forward and follow their own passion for learning and discovery.

To learn more about leaving a gift in your will, please contact:
Kelly Trickett, Associate Director, Gift Planning
University Advancement, McMaster University
Tel: 905-525-9140, ext. 21990 | Email: tricket@mcmaster.ca

Unique course helps students piece together Hamilton’s history
By Matt Terry

Hamilton’s Auchmar House is to History students what Cootes Paradise is to biology students.

The 19th-century mansion is a history lab, of sorts, that has to be experienced in person rather than through a textbook.

That’s why Robert Pinchin and Elizabeth Ivanecy were so excited about their third-year History Practicum placement with the Friends of Auchmar, a community group committed to the preservation and public use of the 161-year-old house.

The unique course pairs McMaster History students with local businesses or community groups working on specific heritage projects.

Pinchin and Ivanecy were tasked with researching Auchmar House, its original occupant (influential Hamiltonian Isaac Buchanan) and the site’s historical significance.

The two-storey brick manor, at West 5th Street and Fennell Avenue, was completed in 1855. Buchanan was a wealthy Scottish merchant, civic leader and well-known political figure in Canada West.

“If we had just researched the house, though, we’d have come up with some facts like how it was one of the first in Ontario to have indoor plumbing,” says Pinchin. “That’s important, sure, but by really immersing ourselves in our work, we discovered much more about the history of Auchmar, Isaac Buchanan and Hamilton itself.”

The pair learned, for instance, that Buchanan was a founder of a military regiment that would become today’s Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, was an influence on Sir John A. Macdonald’s National Policy and was an abolitionist who offered up Auchmar as a space for Emancipation Day celebrations.

“Getting out of the classroom allowed us to broaden the definitions of what history really is,” says Pinchin. “We developed skills that we never would have developed in the classroom,” says Ivanecy. “Students in other faculties go out into the field – why not us?”

Ivanecy also says the experience made her feel like more of a citizen of her hometown.

“After learning about the city’s history, I feel more attached to Hamilton,” she says. “I feel like I see Hamilton in a different way.”
High achievers: McMaster welcoming first-ever Integrated Business and Humanities class

By Andrew Baulcomb and Erica Balch

This fall McMaster welcomed some of the sharpest young minds in Canada into the Integrated Business and Humanities (IBH) program.

Jointly developed by the Faculties of Business and Humanities, the program was conceived to produce the country’s next generation of business leaders. Only 52 students will begin their studies in September.

The inaugural cohort was selected based on academic standing, leadership qualities, extracurricular activities, volunteerism, and community engagement. In addition, each student took part in a wide-ranging online interview prior to admission.

According to Emad Mohammad, Director of the IBH program, the aim is to prepare students to make an impact on both business and society. “IBH will encourage community engagement and sustainable business practices, with a great deal of emphasis placed on responsible leadership and management tactics in a changing global economy,” he explains.

“Classes will be small, students will benefit from individual attention from faculty, and there will be opportunities to represent McMaster at academic conferences and events across Canada and beyond,” Mohammad continues.

“IBH will encourage community engagement and sustainable business practices, with a great deal of emphasis placed on responsible leadership and management tactics in a changing global economy,”

First-year classes include topics such as Introduction to Ethics; Foundations of Community Engagement; Business Environment and Organization; and Insight and Inquiry: Questions to Change the World.

Associate Dean of Humanities, Anna Moro, says the program will bring a humanistic perspective to the study of commerce, something she says is increasingly critical in the business world.

“We need business leaders with the ability to deal with uncertainty, and with the complexities generated by the multiple cultures, histories, systems, and viewpoints of our interconnected world, as well as leaders who understand the far-reaching consequences of their decisions, and are guided by an ethical framework,” she says. “The Humanities offerings in this program will help provide students with the foundation they need to develop these indispensable skills.”
More than 150 students, colleagues, friends, and alumni gathered at the University Club in March 2017 to honour Henry Giroux, McMaster University Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest and Professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies. The event provided the McMaster community with an opportunity to thank Giroux, a public intellectual, prolific writer, and world-renowned and honoured educational and cultural theorist, for donating his personal archive to the University Library.

Lorraine York, Distinguished University Professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies recently has been inducted as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Dr. York joins other McMaster faculty members, including Barry Allen, Distinguished University Professor in the Department of Philosophy, in receiving the country’s highest academic honour. York is a specialist in Canadian literature, whose recent studies have explored Canadian literary celebrity and celebrity culture.

Victor Kuperman, Canada Research Chair in Psycholinguistics and Associate Professor of Linguistics and Languages, was one of 7 co-applicants awarded a 2016 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Grant of almost $2.5 million. Their Words in the World Project aims to train approximately 500 students, postdoctoral fellows, young researchers and others in the latest techniques of investigating how people process and represent words.

Amber Dean, Associate Professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies, was awarded the Faculty of Humanities Donald Shepherd Book Prize for her book Remembering Vancouver’s Disappeared Women: Settler Colonialism and the Difficulty of Inheritance (University of Toronto Press). The book offers a timely, critical analysis of the public representations, memorials, and activist strategies that brought the story of the disappearance or murder of women from the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in Vancouver to the attention of a wider public.

Matthew Woolhouse, Associate Professor of Music in the School of the Arts, has been presented with an Early Researcher Award. He has partnered with Hamilton City Ballet to help create a video game that will help take dance therapy to those with Parkinson’s around the world.

At the 2017 meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank received a Clio Prize for the best book in Ontario history, for The People and the Bay: A Social and Environmental History of Hamilton Harbour (UBC Press). The book was described as “a finely nuanced study of Hamiltonians complicated relationship with their harbour over the past two centuries”.

David Ogborn, Associate Professor in Communication Studies and Multimedia, received a Canada Foundation for Innovation’s John Evans Leaders Fund grant to construct the Networked Imagination: A Laboratory for Network Music and Live Coding. The space will be used for research and performance of live coded music using visual and audio sources.

On September 29, the School of the Arts welcomed the Jimmy Stahl Big Band to the magnificent new Concert Hall located in the L.R. Wilson Hall for Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The performance was dedicated to Harry and Tom Waller ’51, and recognized the Waller family’s generous gifts to the university.

Humanities Research at a Glance
Over the last five years we have received:
• 8 Federal Tri-Council Research Grants
• 4 New Royal Society of Canada College Members and Fellows
• 3 Canada Research Chairs
• 3 Ontario Early Researcher Awards