

## *Freedom of the Press*

IT'S LATE MARCH, and Eastern Canada is being slammed with yet another bout of wintry weather as I write this. It's just past the equinox, and my office is warming nicely from the late-afternoon sun. The past few months have seen first the solar new year, then the lunar new year; and, just up the street, a shop is announcing Nowruz, celebrating the Persian new year that coincides with the equinox.

We trace the progress of the year by such markers, and fast on the heels of newness come the festivals of freedom and release: Purim, just before Nowruz, Passover and Easter.

The publishing world has its own celebrations, too. Since 1993, the United Nations has recognized May 3 as World Press Freedom Day to honour the importance of a free press and prompt those engaged in publishing—and by extension, the book arts—to reflect on the privileges and responsibilities this freedom grants.

*Amphora*, and other publications serving those engaged in the design, manufacture, distribution and reading of books, have benefited from a long tradition of press freedom in Canada. Provincial government monies fund this journal, and—while the opinions of contributors may not always reflect those of the Society—*Amphora* and, through it, the Alcuin Society provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues relating to the design, collection and overall enjoyment of the written and printed word.

It hasn't always been so easy for those in the trade. Ralph Stanton, in his series of dispatches from Europe (including the column in this issue), has noted the dangers facing Renaissance printers who produced works others would rather not have had published. You can read in this issue how the printer Christophe Plantin,

despite his Protestant sympathies, navigated the treacherous political waters of his day and became a successful commercial printer serving readers across Spain's vast empire.

More recently, we've seen how Canada's federal government has stealthily pared the holdings of departmental libraries across the country. A code of conduct for staff at the national library and archives in Ottawa has restricted their freedom of expression. Yet push-back from librarians and the public alike resulted in a new, softer code of conduct being adopted in December 2013.

"Restrictions on employees' professional development activities have been substantially reduced and references to discipline for personal opinions expressed in limited access forums have been removed," the Canadian Association of University Teachers reports.

This is good news, and underscores the importance of being free to discuss even difficult subjects. It allows change to happen, and gives an airing to the concerns of the day. It's the kind of freedom that benefits artists, too, as David Esslemont demonstrates through the overview of the influences on his varied career. Ann Marie Holland's article on the collection of writer William G. Colgate highlights the important role the press served in developing his knowledge of Canada's arts scene, and ultimately a library that now serves researchers at McGill University.

"Could we ever know each other in the slightest without the arts?" Gabrielle Roy is famous for asking. Perhaps not.

But we could certainly never even know she was asking the question if her freedom, and ours, to disseminate those words didn't exist.

~ Peter Mitham, editor