

The Long-Term Value of Words

AMPHORA IS A MAGAZINE put together, for the most part, by volunteers. We are fortunate to have many talented people making each issue possible. Unfortunately, these talented people are usually in demand in other areas as well—areas typically known as jobs, families, communities. So it should come as no surprise when a tide of paying work sidelines volunteer activities or family matters require extra attention. The past six months have seen the team at *Amphora* especially stymied in our efforts to produce the magazine, by a slipped disc, extra work demands, and—in an optimistic sign for the economy—new jobs for two of the graphic designers who stepped up to handle the issue now in your hands.

Layout was completed by Erin Watkins, a library and information student at the University of British Columbia with an extensive background in graphic communications. Her husband, Dale Davies, cut type with the late Jim Rimmer. We feel privileged to have her on board for this issue.

Speaking of volunteer contributions and paying work, copyright is a major issue for many writers these days. *Amphora* does not have a budget to pay writers, and hence the least right of any publication to ask its contributors for what many publishers now seek as a matter of course—complete rights to works published, whether in serials, books or online, or any other method of distribution devised or yet to be devised, now and in perpetuity. Some even seek an assignment of moral rights—the right of the author to be identified with a work, or to consent to changes in it. While authors—and creators, generally—have been seeking fair compensation in efforts to revise Canada's copyright laws, the relinquishment of all rights to a publisher makes any compensation after the initial payment (if any) a moot point. This issue arose most recently this spring when the Halifax Herald Ltd., publisher of Nova Scotia's venerable *Chronicle Herald* newspaper,

presented a contract to its freelancers. Harry Bruce, Silver Donald Cameron and other well-known columnists were among the recipients. Cameron described the situation thus:

I sell an apple to Dan Leger (the Herald's director of news content) once a week. After 13 years, he comes by and says, I need three or four or five more apples. Fine, I say, tell me how many and I'll give you a deal on them. No, he says, I can't figure out how many I want, so I'm taking the whole barrel. Whoa, I say, that's going to be expensive, and I'll have nothing for my other customers. You don't understand, he says. I'm paying you for one apple, but you're going to give me the whole barrel for nothing. Hand it over.

While the Herald contract didn't strip writers of copyright or seek moral rights, it constrained their subsequent use of material such that the potential for future revenues was much reduced. Other writers have not been so lucky.

Yet copyright is all writers have; the intellectual property they provide to magazines like *Amphora* or books rigged out in award-winning designs has a value. Canada's national copyright agency, Access Copyright, recognizes this by paying writers a share of licensing fees collected from libraries, copy shops and other places where photocopies of their work may be made. The amount owing on an article in *Amphora* amounts to just a few cents annually, but it's still a recognition that content has long-term value (Access Copyright pays fees based on a 20 year record of publications). While information wants to be free, its creators and custodians deserve their wages. It's those wages that allow them to keep giving back, in writing for publications like this and in passing along their knowledge to the next generation of creators.

~ Peter Mitham, editor