

The smartest books around

The AAP's PROSE Awards for scholarly and professional publishing continues to expand. Andrew Albanese talks to John Jenkins about this year's edition

Anyone in the business knows the challenges of making good non-fiction stand out. But the Association of American Publishers' (AAP) PROSE Awards (Professional and Scholarly Excellence) have been doing just that, recognising the publishers behind the very best scholarly works each year. And in recent years, the awards have surged in popularity, with record numbers of submissions and new categories—and a booming Twitter following. With the 38th annual award submissions now underway, we caught up with PROSE Chairman John Jenkins to talk about this year's process. It's getting late, but you have time: the deadline for submission is 1 November.

AA: Last year was a record-setting year for PROSE submissions; anything new planned for this year?

JJ: Absolutely. Every year we add new and innovative elements to the PROSE Awards, and this year will be no exception. First, we're expanding eligibility requirements to create a more inclusive programme that better represents the members of our organisation and the exceptional works they produce. With the AAP's recent acquisition of the Association of Educational Publishers (AEP), all AEP members are now eligible for the 2013 PROSE Awards. We're also increasing our social media presence by engaging Facebook and Twitter followers with more interactive content, and we'll generate more promotion and publicity for participants and winners, both before and after the Awards.

Participants will also notice a change in the entry form, which now encourages publishers to provide more information about their entries: a 250-word description of the entry, as well as supporting materials in the form of reader reviews and endorsements, and press coverage. All that information is vital to the judges' evaluation process. And this year the journals and e-products categories will be evaluated alongside their book counterparts in each category, not only by the PSP's (Professional/Scholarly Publishing Division of the AAP) Journals and Electronic Information Committees, but also by our book subject-category judges.

And, we will premiere a new film at the awards ceremony, of course. These just get better and better, and last year's actually became a film-festival finalist. Our filmmaker Mary Rose Synek and her crew



John Jenkins

will soon begin shooting scenes in Houston and Boston, bringing to the screen a poignant story about the life's work of one of our recent R R Hawkins Award winners.

AA: Last year's top prize, the R R Hawkins Award, went to Princeton University Press, for Peter Brown's *Through the Eye of a Needle*. In his review, the great Garry Wills wrote that it was "a privilege to live in an age that could produce such a masterpiece of historical literature". The PROSE awards are directed at the profession, but do they help reach consumers, and are there plans to use the awards to help reach more consumers?

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JJ: That's an excellent question and the answer is a resounding yes. One of our main goals is to expand the reach of PROSE to the public. We would, for instance, like to secure a sponsor for the R R Hawkins Award, which would certainly give even more visibility to our highest profile prize. And this is also why our social media presence, across a variety of platforms, is so important. We're working to create engaging ways to bring people into the discussion, such as asking for their picks for this year's awards and tweeting out the names of the entries we're receiving as they come in.

Peter Brown's book is exactly the type of work PROSE seeks to honour. PROSE winners frequently receive coverage in the thought-leading press and news media, and books that are entered in PROSE are often reviewed in the *New York Times*, the *Economist* and the *New Yorker*. And, the PROSE awards do help sales; there have been big spikes in sales for various winners over the past few years.

We've also started creating partnerships with like-minded organisations. For example, PROSE has partnered with the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), which is a division of the American Library Association. RUSA provides a judge on our panel, Daniel Mack of the University of Maryland Libraries. By building an alliance with the librarian community we're helping to highlight winners with a new audience. And, it's nice to be partnering with libraries.

AA: Last year we spoke about your successful use of social media; can you talk a little about your social media strategy, and what you've found effective?

JJ: Social media presence is paramount to our programme's growth and success. We integrated Twitter into the judging room for the first time in 2013. The judges and I tweeted from inside the deliberations room, providing insights into what makes a winner and a glimpse into the kinds of discussions that go on during judging.

Our live, real-time Twitter feed at the awards luncheon, on screens and on the webcast page where we broadcast the awards, provides both the audience at the luncheon, and those watching remotely around the world, with the opportunity to dialogue throughout the event. And, our Twitter followers doubled between the judging and luncheon Tweet-a-thon! Putting the content out there and giving people an exclusive look behind the scenes intrigues them and really draws them in.

AA: Over the last five years the awards have continued to grow and evolve, with more categories. What has been the most popular or noteworthy new category in recent years?

JJ: We continually refine the categories to better serve the wonderful books we receive, and one way is through dividing up the categories. A few years ago, we created a separate Biography and Autobiography category that significantly increased the number of related entries we received. This year we're dividing the Clinical Medicine category into separate Theory and Practice categories, and we're doing the same with Education, which was especially prescient considering the acquisition of AEP mere months later. One thing we're really excited about this year is the debut of a Best App category for e-products—that is sure to explode over the next few years. ■