

The years between 1961 and 1969 must have been good ones for the judges, organizers and prizewinners of the Wheatley Medal. For eight years, Britain's only award to "recognize and encourage excellence in indexing" could be announced and presented in the knowledge that the literary world would notice, for a brief moment, those usually unacknowledged toilers in the salt mines of alphabetized taxonomy. In the last year of that decade, a new prize shouldered its way on to the literary stage, rewarding not industry, diligence and patience, nor the "challenge of diacriticals and transliteration", but something blithely described as the "very best book of the year". The Booker Prize had arrived (later to attract another sponsor, Man Group plc), and with it the now too familiar "frenzy", the panel of judges, the longlist, the shortlist, the list of "passed over", the television cameras, the banquet, the speeches, the interviews with publishers, with agents, even with writers, the lucky winner, the gallant losers (who might also be winners at the cash tills), the "post mortems", the sales analyses, the blog posts, the Tweets, the re-Tweets....

This year's Wheatley Medal-winner was announced in the same week as the shortlist of the younger prize, which is why you may not know about it. Professor John Sutherland, President of the Society of Indexers, who has written in these pages about the value and worth of his members' work, presented the Wheatley Medal for 2011 to a team of indexers from the Netherlands, Caroline Diepe-



M is for Medal

veen, Pierke Bosscheriet and Jacqueline Pitchford-Belder, for their work on the index to *The Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (edited by N. Stillman and published by Brill). There were honourable mentions for Joan Dearnley, for *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, and for Barbara Hird, for the *New Cambridge History of Islam*, Volumes One and Four.

It was Jonathan Swift's advice to "get a thorough insight into the Index, by which the whole book is governed and turn'd, like fishes by the tail". But too often indexers' work (or, more likely, the work of amateurs who have tried their hand at indexing) is acknowledged by reviewers only to point out its sloppiness or error. So we are happy to join Prof Sutherland in congratulating the winners and commendees, particularly at a time when not being included on the shortlist for the Other Prize has been deemed worthy of discussion, comment and even of vote.

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