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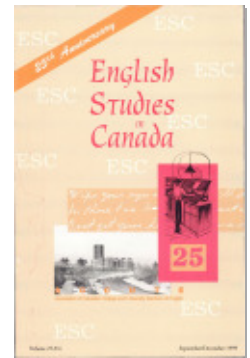
Interpreting Academic Acknowledgements in English Studies: Professors, Their Partners, and Peers

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*Interpreting Academic Acknowledgements
in English Studies:
Professors, Their Partners, and Peers*

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THERE IS A HISTORY AS LONG AS that of literature itself of the accompaniment of texts with paratextual¹ materials that are at once part of and disembodied from textual cores. Typically, these apparatuses — epigraphs or epilogues, mottoes or glosses, proems or prologues, choruses, prefaces, and arguments — have preparatory and pre-emptive as well as explanatory and rhetorical functions. A similar tradition has obtained in the comparatively much shorter history of academic scholarly literature about literature, where we may find such paratextual and formally non- or unintegrated matters as dedications, prefaces, acknowledgements, forewords and afterwords, introductions, footnotes, bibliographies, appendices, and indices. The functions of this matter emulate those in non-scholarly literature, and they have been the subject of very little published critical contemplation on the part of those professionals who write and publish documents within the various disciplines of academia.²

Perhaps the most prominent of scholarly paratexts in the humanities are acknowledgements. Along with indices and possibly introductions, acknowledgements are among the first glimpsed and most consistently canvassed sections of books. We read acknowledgements before we move into the weighty material that follows because it is here that an author may reveal traits of his or her personality that give us some sense of the human behind the scholar and that thus condition us in a more informal fashion than an introduction as to how to interpret his or her work. Jacques Michon, in a study of the editorial functions of prefaces in Québécois creative literature of the mid-twentieth century, suggests that the “préface est ce discours où l’auteur, délaissant son rôle de créateur, adopte pour un mo-

ment le point de vue du lecteur. Lecteur de son propre texte [...] il anticipe les attentes du public en motivant après coup ses choix d'auteur" (113). The acknowledging academic may adopt especially the role of the reader in a preface or introduction (with which acknowledgements are often paired), but in the acknowledgements s/he will be highly self-conscious too. S/he will imagine the reactions of personal acquaintances and those thanked (*and* those unthanked), as well as imagining the wider impressions given the audience who reads his or her book by his or her expressions of indebtedness in the acknowledgement. The lists of colleagues, institutions, libraries, and agencies found in acknowledgements read also somewhat as a form of academic gossip, in that they tell us when who has been working where with whom. Christina Crosby, in her own acknowledgements for a recent nineteenth-century literary critical book, observes:

The conventions of scholarly study are strict, and dictate that any book must have an aura of completion and internal sufficiency. Framed by an introduction and a conclusion, a book offers little evidence of the processes by which it is produced [...]. Only the acknowledgements explicitly open up the text and gesture towards the innumerable relations which are its conditions of possibility — which is why I always read them first when I pick up a book. (ix)

Almost invariably, acknowledgements embrace a formula whereby first professional and then personal debts are recognized. Because these two facets can operate towards similar ends, it is necessary to comment on the functions of each. But as my title indicates, I shall finally be most concerned to attempt to provide a historical overview of the role of women, specifically spouses of male academics, in acknowledgements in books in the field of English studies. This thematic focus is both suggested by and developed from basic data compilation, and demonstrates one example of how one can 'do things' interpretively with academic paratexts such as acknowledgements.

Fundamentally, the writing of acknowledgements is about cultivating or constructing an image. Acknowledgements present an author with an opportunity to indicate that s/he is humane, equable, thoughtful, generous, and reasonable — ultimately, that is, honest and worthy of our trust. As a kind of social intro-

duction to the academic “Introduction,” acknowledgements can act as an opening pre-emptive thrust in which the author may express winning self-effacement, reassuring circumspection, authority through connection to others, or respectability through adherence to custom. Acknowledgements are thus pointedly self-serving gestures, and they are by no means innocent. Certainly, they contain genuine and appropriate expressions of real gratitude, but as all authors sense, they simultaneously prepare the reader to judge sympathetically the author’s text.

Any student or academic is to some extent aware of the striking formality and similarity of academic acknowledgements. When acknowledgements are taken from their (con)texts and read and compiled separately, as in this study, their sober gravity and collective lack of variety can become almost unwontedly humorous. Yet it would seem that there is, paradoxically, identity in imitation and reproduction. All readers understand that reference to peers and superiors can reflect well on the author. As with epigraphs, gratitude expressed towards colleagues procures intellectual sanction through affiliation; it constitutes a kind of citation of authority and asserts an exclusive relationship to which the author has been admitted.

More specifically, we can note that perhaps the most important objective guiding careers of academics (a conference can be an excellent venue to see the phenomenon in action) consists in “getting themselves as much as possible into the center of conversation, into the center of arguments” (Ben-Ari 66). Eyal Ben-Ari, in a study of acknowledgements in ethnographies, concludes, “In intellectual name dropping the metamessage accompanying acknowledgements to well-known personages would follow these lines: ‘Listen to me because I am related to someone important enough not to be ignored’” (67). Acknowledgements, therefore, reveal individual academic self-reproduction. To break with convention under such circumstances may be to risk failure in establishing professional identity.

To preface discussion of the evolution of the role of female spouses in acknowledgements, it is instructive to consider a 1974–75 study on authors’ recognition of subordinates in collaborative research in the social and natural sciences. To gather data on this subject, questionnaires were sent to individuals who received footnote acknowledgement for their contribution

to research published in a selection of journals. In brief, Alan G. Heffner did not find evidence suggesting that there was "a systematic withholding of co-authorship from non-PhDs," and that non-PhDs are "significantly more likely to believe they were excluded from co-authorship than are PhDs" (379). Female PhDs, however, were twice as likely than any other group (female non-PhDs, male PhDs, and non-PhDs) "to believe they were excluded from co-authorship" (379, 381). In trying to answer the question why female PhDs but not non-female PhDs seem dissatisfied with their recognition, Heffner theorizes from certain responses received that non-PhD women may not realize that they are being excluded: "few non-PhD women believe they have been excluded from co-authorship because they have not been given the opportunity to make contributions that would warrant co-authorship in the first place" (381); as compared to male non-PhDs, female non-PhDs are "more frequently delegated the routine, menial 'bottle and test-tube washing' tasks by their male employers" (381). This conclusion will have comparative resonance when we apprehend the role of female spouses in such routine work of English scholarship as typing and compiling indices.

The findings of Michael Moore in his study of sex and acknowledgements in Psychology complement those of Heffner.³ In one statistical analysis, resultant data show that males "tend to acknowledge predominantly other males' professional advice" (1024), while females are more likely to accredit advisors of both sexes. The most obvious change that took place over time was that both sexes moved towards the acknowledgement of advisors of both sexes. I have noted this change in my examination of acknowledgements in English. Each sex tends to acknowledge members of his or her sex, but males are perhaps now more willing to acknowledge female advisors. Moore is certainly correct when he alludes to the fact that the number of female colleagues available for consultation by males affects the rate of males' acknowledgements of females. In their acknowledgements, females are more likely to acknowledge "professional" help of male spouses, while males are most likely to refer to "clerical" help of female spouses (1023). Such a breakdown is emulated in my basic research, as is another statistic present in Moore's study that he does not comment on, namely, that

males are more likely to acknowledge spouses than are females. In Moore's sample of 300 males, 25.3% acknowledge spousal aid; for a female sample of 70, the figure is 15.7%. Although it is speculation, this may be due to a historical tendency for some career women to be unmarried (and thus unburdened by traditional female familial roles involving child-rearing and domestic duties), while career men normally have had spouses who play key roles in the maintenance and advance of their partners' careers.⁴ Often, too, while men's support is frequently provided by female spouses, that of women often comes from other women and female colleagues. Or, as men are less likely to be "typing" spouses than females, if there is no professional aid to acknowledge, women perhaps do not acknowledge their spouses as often even though they do have them. And there is the element of male apologia, which will be discussed in a moment, that may help to explain why men seem to be more avid acknowledgers than females.

In my research, I drew upon methods employed in scientific studies, and thus used a sample size larger than any I had previously encountered in a study similar to my own. I designated the broad area of scholarship in British literature, ranged mainly through Library of Congress numbers PR 1 through 6000, and pulled down in excess of 500 books to examine their acknowledgements; I paid special attention to those that referred to spouses. I tried to achieve random selection, and to assure historical coverage. Later, because the vast majority of books pulled were authored by men, and in an effort to ensure balanced gender perspective, books by women were specifically sought, and over one hundred that included personal acknowledgements were pulled. I transcribed acknowledgements referring to spouses by scholars based mostly at institutions in Britain and North America, and largely set aside volumes written, say, in India or Scandinavia, because I wished to focus on acknowledging conventions common to British and North American milieux. Including scholarship in English studies from regions outside these latter could have diversified my study, but I sensed that differing academic and cultural practices and precedents across the world were simply too varied to encapsulate in a single study, and that the inclusion of the occasional acknowledgement from, for instance, Africa might

have altered my research in a direction away from, rather than towards, consistent and objective analysis. In prior versions of this paper, authorial names were suppressed from cited acknowledgements. For the present, however, it has been necessary to include names for reference purposes. Although they envision different aims than 'the text itself,' acknowledgements also exist in the context of an entire book, and to convey the impression that they represent the whole of an author's work is somewhat akin to indulging in irresponsibly selective quotation. It can be inappropriately revisionist, furthermore, for us to approach what we deem impolitic in earlier texts with a raised eyebrow and thus impugn the author. Academics write from contexts that will be partly determined in retrospect, and all writers hope that their works will be judged thoughtfully and indulgently, as well as critically, by their successors.

When I began my study, with scattered impressions I had gathered over years spent in university libraries, I expected confirmation of my feeling that acknowledgements had evolved somewhat, and that they reflected progressive enlightenment on the part of males in their recognition of females. An evolution is perceptible, yet the question is complex, and it may be possible to adumbrate here several aspects of the progression, and moreover to compare female acknowledgements of males.

The relationship of male scholars to their wives now appears less like an authority-subordinate axis than a partnership, as the acknowledgements I shall cite should indicate. Yet perhaps because of the power of the conventions that govern personal acknowledgements, the predominating and constant characteristics of acknowledgements remain their relative tonal and compositional similarity. As with professional acknowledgements, this seems ironic when one thinks that, superficially, acknowledgements are about identifying individuals and extending special recognition. Because the act of reading a compilation of acknowledgements becomes rather like trying to anticipate qualities of cars or houses as described in the specific, limited discourse of classified advertisements, one is almost tempted to suggest a prototypical composite in terms of a want ad:

WANTED: Wife for scholar. Duties: general help — researching, proofing, typing/wordpro, indexing, style advice. Good

humour and cheer necessary. Patience and endurance essential. Hours: many, variable. Remuneration in form of short acknowledgement.

To interpret personal acknowledgements, it is necessary to break down a composite such as this. There is, first of all, the address, in which certain trends have made themselves apparent over the course of this century. In early times, until about 1930, acknowledgements of female or male spouses in general are rare, with most recognition being of a professional nature. This period before the burgeoning of the academic industry also appears to predate the arrival of much female clerical help, who to this day dominate academic secretarial ranks. Typically, it is colleagues who are thanked for proofing and critiquing drafts of scholarly work. In the years surrounding the Second World War, it becomes more common to thank one's wife for her help. It is not until after the War, however, that the wife begins to receive a name along with her classification as a wife; a frequent convention is to dedicate the book to her by name, and then refer to her as "my wife" in the acknowledgements. Dedications that read "To My Wife" also become more unusual, and names are assigned along with the domestic office. Many early male scholars, even if they had wives whose collaboration deserved acknowledgement, may have felt uncomfortable bringing what they considered a personal notice into a professional acknowledgement that did not as yet frequently accommodate women. Name acquisition in acknowledgements is a significant step, for the denomination "wife" implies job, function, and adjunct — in short, subordinate. And as Marilyn Hoder-Salmon argues in her study of the acknowledging habits of famous male psychologists, "subordination is synonymous with silence" (109). A name, on the other hand, can indicate equality by association, and suggest a semblance of a voice, for a name suggests an individual person as a domestic designation does not. This shift seems a long time in coming, particularly when one considers that, in academic discourse, naming is everything; it is identification and recognition and admission to a select community, and not to acknowledge by name tends toward the humiliating and ostracizing professional sin of plagiarism.

From the 1960s on, it seems to have become more common to refer to one's wife along with her full name, and one notes very recently that it is becoming an accepted practice for men to drop the possessive "wife" altogether while acknowledging a female partner with her full name, which may or may not contain the male's surname. In the past, while men have depended on women to support and facilitate their careers, many women have no doubt achieved success in spite of their husbands and those who dominated their professional workplace, while they derived support from other women. In the acknowledgements of husbands by women that I transcribed, I discovered nameless husbands, husbands with only first names, husbands with both first and last names, and apparent partners or husbands who were referred to only by full name. The kinds of duties singled out for recognition are not necessarily radically different, however. Some husbands correct manuscripts and proofread; some are in the standard "advice and encouragement" (Bawcutt "Preface"; 1976) and "affectionate and remarkably durable support" (Harden "Preface"; 1984) roles; another, much like so many females before him, "cheerfully accepted extra family obligations" so that the study "could be undertaken" (Fowler vii; 1991). Tonally, female notice of male partners tends towards equality and rapprochement, as compared to the gallant references of males to females, which are so commonly creative of distinctions, subtle or emphatic, as we will see.

Insofar as onomastic reference goes, open acknowledgement of same-sex partners not only in professional work but also in personal life has become more prevalent. This has helped to legitimize and encourage appearance in scholarly works of same-sex personal acknowledgements, and evinces a new, or heretofore submerged, element of acknowledgement discourse.

Although it may seem trivial, it is worth considering further male spousal reference because the notion that "wife" has undesirable possessive overtones — which it can be seen as having and which feminist scholarship has undoubtedly brought to the attention of males — implies a male conspiracy that may not have been recognizable to either sex beneath the strong conventions of personal acknowledgements. Robert Gifford, in his study of dedications in *Psychology*, seems rather blandly to theorize that societal prudence encourages naming, "In to-

day's world, where a dedication 'To Jane, Ellen, and Sue' may be misconstrued by some readers, it helps to add, 'my wonderful wife and daughters'" (224–25). Possibly, the attachment of names has more to do with impersonality and identification. That nameless wives began appearing alongside what were normally purely professional acknowledgements was a first enlightened step. Reference to wives without naming, and especially in dedications such as "To My Wife," may have seemed a distant-sounding, impersonal practice whose reinforcement of subordinate female roles led to the incorporation of (usually first) names. In professional acknowledgements, the roles of the acknowledgees are commonly assigned (say by institution) or implicit; thus, the introduction of a female name required clarification as to the contribution made. If one is to refer to one's wife by first name only, one feels compelled to explain who she is by adding the term "wife." A single first name or nickname implies affection, intimacy, and the informality of everyday address. On the other hand, to cite a full name only can seem as stilted and as inappropriate a reference to the person with whom one shares one's life as the mere description of "wife." And nowadays, of course, when it is common for both spouses to work, and to work separately on their own computers, it may be that the female spouse has a job that gives her another primary identity beyond that of a wife. In sum, while reference to a spouse of either sex with the formality applied mainly to professional acknowledgees and without the subordinate implications of shortened forms of first names or terms of domestic office such as "husband" or "wife" may represent an ideal of equality, such an ideal can only be attained by the negotiation of several precarious personal balances.

Early acknowledgements of females by males occasionally stress qualities that were at one time widely and stereotypically held to be innate to the female sex, such as an almost motherly⁵ meek and calm detachment:

I cannot, however, express my gratitude to the one who is least conscious of the worth of her inspiration and the sustaining sweetness of her 'warm and partial praise,' my wife. (Weaver ix; 1932)

I am grateful to [...] my wife for remaining serene. (Faulkner xiii; 1973)

Soon, however, perhaps as it was discovered that women do not live in detachment from the worldly cares and dreams of men, the scholar's wife began to be lauded for patience, endurance, and tolerance, as the following selection indicates:

I must [...] express my thanks to [...] my wife, for whose patient assistance and encouragement the dedication of these volumes is an inconsiderable return. (Callan xxxviii; 1949)

The finished book I dedicate to my wife, who had the patience to endure its composition. (Unwin Dedication; 1954)

My greatest debt is to my wife for her helpfulness and patience. (Hughes vi; 1956)

Many friends and colleagues who have helped me [...] deserve my gratitude; but none so much as my wife, the most cheerful, long-suffering victim of all. (Lever viii; 1956)

Finally, I thank my wife, Mary, for her help in the checking of references, for her valuable criticism, and for her unfailing patience and encouragement. (Lodge xii; 1966)

The greatest of my debts, which I acknowledge with most pleasure but can least adequately requite, is to my wife Elizabeth and to Kate and Macfarlane, who for five years and in three countries forebore the chaos of my research, travels, irascibility, and proofreading, because capable of believing the myth that, someday, my labors on this book would be ended. (Hoffman xvi; 1967)

And I must offer to my wife [...] loving thanks for *her* patience, devoted service to a figure about whom she was not always as enthusiastic as I, and affectionate support over these last years. (Hunt xi; 1982)

"Support and encouragement," "practical and critical help" — these are the phrases that echo down the generations in recognition of scholars' wives.

What begins to be apparent in the quotations above is that women are behind significant portions of academic work. It is

astonishing how often they turn up doing routine tasks, chiefly typing and compiling indices, the latter being one of the more trying activities in the creation of a book. But there are other occasions, particularly in earlier periods in the history of English studies, where it seems evident that wives merit mention on the spine of books as much as in prefatory acknowledgements. Often, and again most frequently at earlier dates, the scholar's wife is a kind of style advisor. It is a timeworn truism in English studies that form and content are inextricable, and, plainly, if one can ameliorate style, one must be able to comprehend and adjust content as well. While scholars may scrupulously cite even the slightest suggestions of colleagues, wives will not necessarily find themselves in the indices that they prepare. Here are some examples that hint at the wider contributions made by the wives of English scholars:

The 'thanks to my wife' with which prefaces traditionally conclude would, in this case, be an impertinence easily recognized by the attendants in all the libraries and archives in which our research has been done. These volumes are really a collaboration in which G. E. Bentley is responsible for most of the ideas and all the mistakes and E. G. F. Bentley for half the solid work. The only pertinent thanks I can offer her are for her tolerance and sense of humour. Fortunately for me, she has no part in this preface. (Bentley vi; 1941)

Finally, I should like to make suitable public acknowledgment to my wife, Elizabeth; but to do so is beyond the scope of a prefatory statement within the confines of good taste. Suffice it to say that whatever felicity of style there is in this book is due almost completely to her. (Swedenberg xi; 1944)

The deepest debt of gratitude of all [...] I owe my wife, Eleanor Johnson. Throughout the years of research on which this book is based she worked with me as a fellow student. There is no aspect of the character of Dickens and his associates or of his relationships with them that I have not clarified in my mind by discussion with her, and no judgment of his work that has not profited from her comment. She has not only typed my manuscript in its numerous redrafts, but given the most detailed criticism to its style and struc-

ture. Every chapter, every page, almost every paragraph is in some way the better for her painstaking thought. But her influence extends far beyond the purely editorial realm. Her belief in me and in this book have sustained me in my work from its beginnings to this moment of completion. (Johnson xiii–xiv; 1952)

My other acknowledgements are gratifyingly personal: [...] to my wife, whose more immediate suggestions and encouragement throughout the writing of the book have appropriately culminated in her insistence on typing the entire manuscript. (Mudrick vii–viii; 1952)

Finally, my wife Dorothy typed the manuscript and in the process tightened and straightened it a great deal, thereby keeping things going beautifully just when it seemed that not only the book but the author was finished. (Sale viii; 1968)

No public acknowledgement can adequately express my gratitude to my wife Jackie who, in a very real sense, made this book possible. Her expert knowledge and appreciation of modern English poetry and her sharp eye for a slovenly sentence saved me from many a pitfall. (Banerjee “Preface”; 1975)

Most of all, I owe this book to Mary Rosenberg, who helped everywhere with the research and interviews, who tirelessly typed through to the final manuscript, shared in the seemingly endless checking of documentation, and who joined in coaxing the work through the final proofreading and indexing. (Rosenberg xiv; 1978)

All these examples imply an academic partnership all but invisible to readers of the body of the book in question. If the wife really did “insist” on typing the manuscript, she probably felt that she had some stake in the creative development of the book. And the imagination of library attendants who could call the author to task on his accreditations rather suggests the inadequacy of the acknowledgement. The 1944 acknowledgement is of a type Hoder-Salmon optimistically refers to as “obscure” when she encounters evidence of an author promising sexual

attention for secretarial services. Such acknowledgements are of a common gallant strain of acknowledging whose more innocuous forms can be related to romantic self-depiction as a deep-thinking writer bound by a need for intellectual fulfilment to the buried life.

Some remnant of this self-depiction can be traced in the distinctly modern trend of including one's family in prefatory statements. And male writers are, of course, considering their audiences. When it seemed that women were unlikely candidates to pick up an academic work written by a man, it was acceptable to offer personal acknowledgements that might have been patronizing or backhandedly complimentary to the female sex. Presently men in English studies know that women (especially when students, who may make up the greatest segment of an academic's audience, are considered) might constitute a majority of his readership. It seems best, then, to appear a tender and gracious husband and father.

Finally, a 'thank you' to our son Nigel who happily busied himself with his toys while his mother and I were preoccupied with correcting the final typescript for the publisher. (Banerjee "Preface"; 1975)

Finally, in prefacing a book as concerned as this one with conventions it would ill beseem me not to thank my wife for her sustaining encouragement, and her tolerant endurance of a writer's ill-temper, nor to omit the contributions made by Jonathan, whose Macbeth-like murdering of sleep delayed the early stages of the writing, and Christopher, whose imminent arrival hastened its completion. (Lindley x; 1986)

I also want to thank Joe Montgomery and Claire-Elise Grace for putting up with an absent-minded father who stole one of their rooms for his dusty books and noisy typewriter. Finally, to Jan Howell Marx, who kept faith in this project during the years when I abandoned it, who urged me to take it up again when I was ready, and who made it financially possible for me to carry it through, what can I say but, 'it's done!' (Marx n. pag.; 1986)

Nearer to home, I must also mention Tommy and Percy, whose insistence on rising early often got me to my com-

puter earlier than I had either intended or wished. The muse who enabled me to complete this study of Shellyean love — she could have inspired a Shelley book on no other topic — usually doesn't rise so early. She is my wife, Kelly Brennan, the only person as pleased as I am that this book is completed. Both my gratitude and priorities are indicated in the dedication. [**For Kelly:** *What is all this sweet work worth/If thou kiss not me?*] (Ulmer Dedication, "Preface"; 1990)

These passages represent the expansion of personal acknowledgements in recent years, which are frequently including even pets. Although they certainly may spring from heartfelt emotion, they have obvious rhetorical uses. They are by turns charming and humorous, irresistible and sentimental. They help to establish the humanity of the author and to balance the elite connections that he has just revealed in his professional acknowledgements. Although they can tend towards the offensively smarmy, and although there is an uneasy relation between the early cavaliers who implied lewd recompense for their wives and the updated modern figure of the male domestic romantic-critical conqueror, the humble images they create can make one think it almost a strategic disadvantage not to have children to acknowledge.⁶ Where only wives are concerned, however, prior decades of English scholarship definitely do produce "obscure" acknowledgements:

My wife steadfastly refused to have anything to do with this book. For this I am grateful, and to her it is dedicated. (Williams viii; 1955)

Finally, to my wife, who had nothing to do with either the composition of the book or with the preparation of the typescript, yet without whom this study would never have been written, I owe my deepest debt of gratitude. It is to her that this volume is dedicated. (Munro "Acknowledgments"; 1969)

It is decidedly difficult to apprehend the genuineness of the appreciative sentiments expressed by the former writers. The latter, although he senses the conventions of personal acknowledgements, nevertheless probably left his wife, who apparently would know "nothing" of such customs, a little cold.⁷ At other

times, acknowledgements can have a somewhat hollow feel, as in this concluding remark, "Once I had thought that a writer's thanks to his wife was a mere convention of 'prefacemanship.' I have since learned the error of that view" (Levine 10; 1968). One notes the gallant strain in the linguistic echo of stereotypical male qualities or terms of reference such as "sportsmanship," "gamesmanship," and "penmanship".

Collectively, as we have seen, acknowledgements may have an artificial tone because of their dominant, all-pervasive distinguishing trait, which is their hyperbolic, overwrought language. Spousal acknowledgements are invariably littered with adjectives such as "indefinable," "unfailing," "endless," "constant," and "inexpressible," phrases such as "most of all," "greatest debt," "none so much," "no words adequate," and, of course, that wifely *sine qua non* clause, "without whom [...]" There are perhaps several reasons for this. Studying professional acknowledgements, Ben-Ari notes that it is difficult to know when a debt has been repaid: "the ambiguity as to whether indebtedness has been repaid and the uncertainty about who is in whose debt," he theorizes, ensure the maintenance of professional acknowledgement discourse (68). Because of the unidirectional nature of academic acknowledgements, one cannot be sure that one has shown appropriate gratitude, and thus one tends to be emphatic. And since an acknowledger can elsewhere be an acknowledgee, the acknowledger knows that there is little to be gained from understated appreciation.⁸

In spousal acknowledgements, on the other hand, the question is not so much "how much thanks is enough?" but "can I offer thanks enough?" or repay with words debts that issue not from definable professional situations but from everyday life. There is no academic vocabulary for this, and little opportunity in acknowledgements to commend the execution of the mundane chores that sustain everyday relationships and livelihoods. Before thanking his partner and dedicating his book to their son, one acknowledger looks back over the travails that went into the present volume and thinks, "Perhaps the greatest value of intellectual work of this kind is that it leaves one sunk in a condition of ethical ruin, having run up social and intellectual debts that can never be discharged" (Connor "Acknowledgements"; 1992).

A brief acknowledgement must often carry all the weight of announcing the product and culmination and justification of what is normally years of work—small wonder, then, that it should sound sheepish in its attempt. Moreover, latter-day academics usually sense that, while their personal acknowledgements may know a limited period of potency, the library shelf life of their comments may be immemorial. Readers of the works of academics are largely other academics, and they will be scouting books as they read them for hints on how to compose their own acknowledgements. Public performance anxiety is thus not unknown to the personal acknowledger, and can inspire the stateliest plumage.

We have noted that many men are perhaps justifiably guilty when acknowledging their spouses because their spouses have often contributed a great deal more to their work than a personal acknowledgement—or even an academic acknowledgement—can convey. Another factor in the guilty tone of these acknowledgements is suggested when one compares spousal acknowledgements to their clerical counterparts. Wives, as it were, work for free, or do so, at various levels of willingness, to further their husbands' careers. By contrast, library staff locate materials and secretaries type or wordprocess as a vocation. What they are paid for their pains in wages effectively remunerates them and removes for acknowledgers much of the burden of assessing how much gratitude is owing them. The guilty tone is thus markedly lessened in acknowledgements to these workers whose contributions to scholarly work are often as significant as those of wives. Here, the recurrent formulae involve, naturally, good cheer, as well as "care," "industry," and the inevitable "expert typing." Occasionally the notices are chivalrous; I recall reference to a woman who "bravely undertook all the secretarial work." At other times, they are casual, "I should also like to express my thanks to Joy Cavazzi for typing the manuscript with her usual skill and good humor" (Thompson "Acknowledgments"; 1985). Often, they are downright patronizing:

Librarians as a class of persons are among the most cooperative to be found. (Baker vii; 1957)

Miss Jenny Stigers was stoical in her typing of the manuscript.⁹
(Ryan "Preface"; 1968)

Sometimes the evocations are depressing: "My thanks, finally, to Penny Evans, who has once again suffered in cheerful silence while she produced a superb typescript from my terrible manuscript" (Brooks-Davies ix; 1985).

Such oxymoronic recognition suggests something that is enunciated more flatly in the following notice, but that runs through most all acknowledging of females by males: "Finally, we thank Carol Rawls, our patient and always good-humoured typist, who frequently called our attention to our errors and oversights and who prepared the final typescript" (Eakin "Acknowledgements"; 1985). The implication is clear: while males are responsible for the major intellectual productions, their female help is good at handling the little things, and pointing out minor trivia that nevertheless have to be dealt with if the text is to be taken to market. Admittedly, it is difficult to glorify typing or wordprocessing — so much so that perhaps the attempt, which only glorifies by comparison the scholar, should not be made. Female scholars in English are much more adept than males at not creating obvious class distinctions between themselves and secretarial or institutional help largely by not using florid language that seeks to glorify the unglorifiable. Women, perhaps, have historically had a more intimate awareness than men of the true glories and rewards of routine, menial tasks and so are not apt to mischaracterize them. The linguistic gender differences here can mirror similar nuances in professional acknowledgements. There is often an oedipal flavour in the overwrought gratitude that men offer colleagues who have helped them; a sense of supersession is conveyed by the acknowledger, whose acknowledgement opportunity bespeaks a heroic conquest over academic forefathers. Females thanking their colleagues, by contrast, often strike a note that suggests accession to a community achieved with the help of members of that community. Significantly, females are statistically more likely than males to acknowledge the aid and support of professional or student seminars. In recent years, the inclusion of reference to the scholarly benefits of having students has grown for both genders, but it is much more marked amongst female

academics. Yet if a gradual progression in the status of wives, from unacknowledged to acknowledged as subordinates to (at least implicit) acknowledgement as partners, can be posited, it is doubtful the same could be said for clerical women.

What this points up is a basic conclusion suggested by the foregoing study, which as a whole tends towards the representation of spousal acknowledgements, whatever their originally envisioned and superficially inclusive functions, as instruments of exclusion or occlusion, circumscription, and subordination (professional acknowledgements, conversely, are ultimately shaped so as to include the acknowledger and acknowledgee in a community of knowledge). When one thinks of the necessities, pleasures, and complexities of composing acknowledgements, one begins to understand that, as much as changing the protocols, or parameters within which personal acknowledgement takes place, it is necessary to alter the discourse itself. It would be novel for an acknowledger actually to begin with personal acknowledgements instead of the professional, something I have only encountered twice in all my research (Loftis viii; 1959, and Hepburn xvi; 1981). One might think that perhaps it were best if there were no acknowledgements at all, since acknowledgements both personal and professional can contain such (real or generically acquired) artificial or superficial sentiments. Recently, however, I came across a volume without acknowledgements by an experienced scholar who had written several prior books that did contain acknowledgements (in general it seems to be the case that junior scholars are the most effusive acknowledgers, and feel that they are most indebted to the largest number of people), and, following Christina Crosby, I felt the lack of a preambulatory and informal public and private introduction to the "Introduction" that I have come to expect and enjoy as I peruse acknowledgements as part of my decision regarding whether or not to read further in the books I pick up (Chapman; 1986). The text, signalling in its paratextual nudity the entrenchment of acknowledgements as a constitutive element of works in English studies, seemed stark and unwelcoming.

Dedications, we know, because they sometimes only contain initials, can be obscure as to the dedicatee. With acknowledgements, perhaps the occasional cryptic aside, in something such as the manner of liner notes on many popular music record-

ings, would be appropriate. So long as the acknowledgement is decorous and not likely to offend the reader, perhaps it would be refreshing in its very impenetrability, for surely a genuine acknowledgement is one that only the specific acknowledgee or acknowledgees in question can understand.¹⁰ One might propose that publishers, chary of space, should be pressed to allow greater indulgences of magnanimous and owing authors, but such an aim still involves negotiation of precedent, convention, and decorum. Acknowledgements have grown with academia, and the 972 co-contributors listed in a 1993 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (one author per two words of article) serve as a cautionary case for circumspection in gratitude as well as debt incursion (Rennie and Flanagan 470).

The following 1980s closing lines, at all events, sound weary and repetitive:

My husband John does not come last, even though it must appear so here. (Reibetanz xi; 1983)

Though I acknowledge last my wife Judy's kindness in bearing so much, she should know it comes first. (Stein ix; 1988)

In the genuine dissatisfaction of the statements there is an awareness of custom that is at once a rhetorically useful but ultimately constraining reproduction of convention. We "should know" that it must not "appear so."

Most importantly, we must change the wording within convention. As Hoder-Salmon contends, it may be that the ongoing introduction of feminist acknowledgements, which are generally more demonstrably egalitarian than those of males, will enhance the content and tone of acknowledgements in English studies. A first step, however, is to gain an interpretive perspective on the development and evolution of acknowledgements in the field, and this paper envisions a contribution in that direction. Here, finally, is an acknowledgement by a well-known feminist writer that is elegantly succinct in its awareness of acknowledging conventions and the difficulties they present. In traditional mode, the writer thanks family members for style advice and then adds, "but it would be hardest of all to enumerate their true contributions—among them, language itself" (Sedgwick "Acknowledgments"; 1985).¹¹

NOTES

- ¹ The term is taken from Gérard Genette's compendious *Seuils* (1987). The work has been translated by Jane E. Lewin as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997).
- ² Literature scholar Terry Caesar's "On Acknowledgements" appears in the *New Orleans Review* 19 (Spring 1992): 85–94. Editors Drummond Rennie and Annette Flanagan ponder recent developments in acknowledging practices in medical research in "Authorship! Authorship!: Guests, Ghosts, Grafters, and the Two-Sided Coin," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 9 Feb. 1994: 469–71. For a provocative study of footnote discourse in Classics, see Steve Nimis, "Fussnoten: das Fundament der Wissenschaft," *Arethusa* 17 (Fall 1984): 105–34. Joseph Bensman considers footnoting in the social sciences in "The Aesthetics and Politics of Footnoting," *Politics, Culture, and Society* 1 (Spring 1988): 443–70. Psychology scholar Robert Gifford calls for attention to dedications in "Book Dedications: A New Measure of Scholarly Indebtedness," *Scholarly Publishing* 19 (July 1988): 221–26.
- ³ In statistics-based studies, Moore looks first comparatively at male and female acknowledgement practices in books published over the course of this century and then at selected journals dating between 1959 and 1979.
- ⁴ A 1966 book dedication in Political Science sums this up rather archetypally: "*TO MY WIFE who has so often had to adjust her life to suit the demands of my work*" (Kristianson).
- ⁵ Mothers (and parents), often because of sacrificial actions or natures, are frequent dedicatees. But mothers are also protectors, as a Yeats scholar reminds us as he closes his acknowledgements, "Finally, this study of Yeats is dedicated to Margaret Keane, my mother; any negative criticisms of it should be addressed to her. She will respond, I assure you" (Keane viii; 1987).
- ⁶ A female scholar offers the following:

This book could not have been written without the constant help and support of my husband, Jacob Bannet, who lived with it from its inception with better than good grace, or without my two lively small sons, Jonathan and Alan, who helped by puncturing abstraction, making me laugh and by allowing me to sleep—at least most nights. (Bannet ix; 1989)
- ⁷ A 1990 take on this situation, of somewhat similar aridity, witnesses a male English scholar who notes in concluding his acknowledge-

ments that his wife “did not produce the index, having much better things to do, but her love and support have been vital” (Parfitt x). Ben-Ari reports a more amusing and sensitive rendition of a similar acknowledgement made in 1974 by anthropologist Regna Darnell, “Finally, I would like to thank my husband [...] who, although he does not type, has contributed in innumerable ways to the completion of this manuscript” (qtd. in Ben Ari 76). Or consider this felicitously worded domestic acknowledgement, with an eye to tradition, by a female English scholar, “Throughout, David Izakowitz has been my best and truest collaborator; though he has not been the wife who selflessly typed it all, we have managed both spheres, the home and careers, together, and to him and to our children I owe my happiness” (Booth xii–xiii; 1992).

- ⁸ This relational axis seems increasingly to be telescoped in the now frequent appearance of key acknowledgees on the dustjackets of academic works as effusive blurb writers. It is improbable that this evidently partial praise, akin to ensuring that one’s best friend reviews one’s books, does the academic book industry much credit.
- ⁹ In this case, the adjective used to describe the acknowledgee seems suggested by her name; a lightly patronizing consonance is apparent. It is improbable that academics in English, naturally sensitive to the sound and appearance of writing, would create like patterns when referring to famous male scholars, e.g. “Fish wished,” or “Said said.” If the acknowledger wished to stress artlessly and above-all his typist’s dedication, the alliteration would likely not be present.
- ¹⁰ For a raucous sendup of the acknowledgement genre, see the acknowledgments for James R. Kincaid’s *Annoying the Victorians*, in which colleagues are cited for doing “nothing” (ix), not returning calls or letters or extending invitations to parties, and so on.
- ¹¹ This paper originated during a session of Professor Heather Murray’s History and Institution of English Studies course at the University of Toronto. To the class participants, and particularly to Professor Murray for her extensive advice and commentary, I am grateful. A version of this paper was presented at the 1996 Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada Congress at Brock University, and I should like to thank the anonymous proposal reviewers and conference delegates for their input. In addition to anonymous journal reviewers, I wish to thank for their feedback Donna Coates (University of Calgary), Naomi Cull (University of

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