

Acknowledgments

In late March 2017, tweets with the hashtag #ThanksForTyping began appearing on my time line. These tweets were from a graduate school colleague of mine, Bruce Holsinger, now a professor of English at the University of Virginia. Holsinger's tweets highlighted what till not too long ago had been a part of the convention of acknowledgments in academic books: male professors thanking their wives for typing their manuscripts. Below are a few of the examples that Holsinger posted on Twitter, rightly calling them "an archive of women's academic labor":

"I am most grateful to . . . my wife for typing, retyping and typing yet again the manuscript."

"With two aching fingers my wife typed out the whole manuscript."

"I have to thank my wife for typing the whole of this difficult manuscript in spite of the heavy burden laid on housewives by a six years' war and its oppressive aftermath."

"Immediately after the war ended I resigned my alumni duties and devoted all my free time to my dissertation. After a year of research I started writing in the fall of 1946 and finished in the spring of 1947. My chairman, H. Clay Reed, helped me by arranging a very convenient schedule and my wife typed my manuscript drafts as soon as I gave them to her, even though she was caring for our first child, born in June 1946, and was also teaching part time in the chemistry department."

"I wish here to express my thanks to my wife for typing and retyping most of the manuscript 15 or more times; and I thank her and my editor, Miss Estelle Nachbar, for much constructive criticism."



Besides the burden of unpaid labor, in each of the examples the female spouses bear the burden also of anonymity. Just by itself this would have been a striking fact, but the omission of the names turned out to be embedded also in the ideology of style: this was revealed by another tweet of Holsinger's quoting from a manual of style.

What did this rule of style erase? Here's Holsinger: "A number of responses that came in talked about the politics of academic labor and writing, the role of women as collaborators, often even unacknowledged co-authors of academic work."¹ A seemingly simple injunction about style naturalizing, with a deliberative intent, the identification of women as writers, proofreaders, editors, typists, or translators.

The examples that Holsinger tweeted are extremely unlikely to appear on the acknowledgment pages of scholarly books, but the above discussion serves as a reminder to me to thank the Vassar College students who have been assigned to me over the years as research assistants on work study. In particular, I want to thank Mikko Harvey, Danielle Bukowski, Noah Johnson, Faith Hill, and Hadley Seufert.

One more thing that I'm thankful for. It cannot be denied that for the most part what the reader usually encounters in this particular section in a book is the necessary, courteous, but quite routine enactment of gratitude. Therefore, I was very pleased to encounter a disavowal of that conventional feeling in the following acknowledgment by Brendan Pietsch, an assistant professor of

religious studies at Nazarbayev University, in his book titled *Dispensational Modernism*: “I blame all of you. Writing this book has been an exercise in sustained suffering. The casual reader may, perhaps, exempt herself from excessive guilt, but for those of you who have played the larger role in prolonging my agonies with your encouragement and support, well . . . you know who you are, and you owe me.”² This candor struck a chord in other hearts too, and *Inside Higher Ed* reported that a blog post that Pietsch made about his acknowledgments page resulted in drawing attention to a book that had “previously had about nine readers.” I’m happy for him and want to borrow his idea—and his luck—by heaping blame on those who were my enablers. You know who you are, but guilt only goes so far; in fact, it goes in both directions, and I owe you.

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