Acknowledgments

The PhD years have been very beautiful and intense and the time has come now to conclude this important period in my life. Here I want to thank the people who have influenced my scientific work and helped me reach this moment.

Primary thanks go to my supervisor prof. Lambert Schomaker who has given me the chance to work in his group. Lambert, your prodigious knowledge on handwriting that you generously shared with me during the last years provided the necessary basis without which the current thesis would have been impossible. Your thorough approach to science was an invaluable guide to me during the project and your honest friendship has always provided a tonic spirit to our discussions. I am very fortunate to be able to continue to work together with you in the postdoc period.

I am grateful to the members of the assessment committee, prof. John Daugman, prof. Frans Groen and prof. Jos Roerdink, for reading and evaluating the manuscript. I appreciate their willingness to assume responsibility for the quality of this dissertation.

I thank prof. John Daugman and prof. Linne Mooney for giving me a dataset with images of medieval documents to test the effectiveness of the writer identification algorithms described in this thesis on historical writings.

During my PhD project, I had a very good and productive collaboration with Nobuo Ezaki. I am grateful to him, also because he introduced me to Asian cuisine. For a short period, I also collaborated with Vamsi Madsu on the topic of signature verification. I thank Katrin Franke for her constant interest and implication in the area of forensic document analysis. I am grateful to Louis Vuurpilj for giving me some very useful advice in a critical moment of the project. I also thank the engineers from Prime Vision and the forensics experts from the Netherlands Forensic Institute for very stimulating discussions.

Further, I wish to thank all my colleagues from the Artificial Intelligence Department for their contribution in making my stay in Groningen a very pleasurable one. The trips organized in the department were very nice moments where I could directly experience the Dutch landscape and hospitality. I thank Esther Wiersinga-Post and Geertje Zwarts for having helped me find a house in Groningen. I thank Wouter Teepe for always being very kind and supportive and also for providing some essential pieces of furniture for my house. I also thank Tijn van der Zant for his contribution to the proposal that became the research project in which I am currently involved as a postdoc. I would also like to mention Axel Brink who is making sure that writer identification remains an active area of research in Groningen. I am grateful to Maria Niessen...
and Axel Brink who kindly accepted to be my paranymphs for the public defense ceremony.

I also wish to thank the Romanian community in Groningen who always provided very useful information and much needed practical support, especially with the accommodation at the difficult beginning: Mihai Popinciuc, Gabriel Blaj, Bogdan Craus and the families Didraga, Grigorescu, Chezan and Jalba. I also wish to express my thanks to Cosmin Grigorescu and Andrei Jalba for providing the \LaTeX macros for producing this thesis.

I thank my former colleagues from the Biophysics Department of the University of Bucharest where I worked before coming to the Netherlands. They have provided a very warm and unforgettable environment in which I could develop my academic interests. Especially, I express my sincere gratitude to prof. Aurel Popescu who has introduced me to the fields of Neural Networks and Pattern Recognition and who has also offered me my first university position. I also thank prof. Laura Tugulea for creating the first opportunity for me to come and visit the University of Groningen.

My deepest gratitude goes to my beloved parents, Fevronia and Ilie, for their encouragement, continuous support, and especially for their hard work and unconditional love. Apart from being great parents, you have also shaped my scientific identity through your personal example.

Special thanks go my daughter Ioana who has, reluctantly, accepted all my absent minded episodes and always kept up a good spirit. I also thank my son Stefan for being such a lovely baby and rewarding me with a big smile when I return home after work. Last but not least, I am grateful to my wife Monica for her inexhaustible love and patience and for keeping our family functioning throughout all these busy PhD years. Dear Monica, you have critically listened to all my theories as a true scientific companion and gracefully helped me take the right decisions.

Marius Bulacu
Groningen
December 2006
Look but coldly on it all,
Should they praise or should they jeer;
Waves that leap like waves must fall,
Do not hope and do not fear.
You imagine and construe
What is well and what is ill;
All is old and all is new,
Days go past and days come still.

Mihai Eminescu (Translated by Corneliu M. Popescu)