I decided to write this dissertation one evening in Frankfurt as the car I was in drove passed the Goethe-house at the Grosser Hirschgraben. It was a warm and languid day in the summer of 2011, that same day I had arrived in Germany after a gap of nearly four years to attend a conference. Earlier in the year I had registered for the PhD, I had several ideas about the shape of my research, but till then I could not really push myself to put pen on paper. But then it all started on that day in Frankfurt. I remember returning to my room that night and making a rough sketch of the arguments and themes, most of which is now concentrated in the first two chapters of the dissertation in its current shape. I have no explanation for the time and place of this rather thespian beginning, other than this: that I breathed full and well that evening after a long time; I suddenly could retrieve the trail of past memories, memories that seemed to belong to a different life since I returned to India in 2007. In short, I could encounter a life which was mine once. Now I feel that after my return to Kolkata, I did not miss being in Germany that much, but I missed more a certain difference, or the possibility of experiencing a difference which I once lived. Since coming back from that two-week long trip, I have been diligently sitting at least for a couple of hours each morning to work on this text, while trying to totally switch-off all thoughts concerning it for the rest of the day. I have hardly altered this routine in the past two years.

And yet, that was not the beginning of this dissertation. May be in a way, the beginning is not mine to mark. Many others have shaped my life in general, and my academic life in particular, and this text must belong to all of them. The ‘doctoral dissertation’ is inherently shaped as the first mark of individuality of an aspiring scholar, but at the same breath it also is a test of her ability to acknowledge others, other texts, other people, other thoughts. Placed in this double-bind, I take the risk of trying to make a list of names and events the way I remember them now, as this work stands completed.

My studies as a student of literature began in 2001 once I joined the MA-curriculum of the department of Comparative Literature at the Jadavpur University. The two years that followed changed the course of my life in more ways than one. I remember the eagerness with which I attended the courses taught at the department,
especially those by Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta, Ipshita Chanda, and Sibaji Bandyopadhyay. My interest in literary theory (particularly in works written around ‘structuralism’) was first aroused by the lectures of Sibaji Bandyopadhyay; a concern for the ‘literary object’ has not left my thoughts since, and it would be fair to say that the question of the ‘literary’ haunts this present dissertation as well. Friendly guidance of Sayantan Dasgupta and Sourabh Chakroborti is remembered. Appreciation of my work by Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta is a steady source of inspiration.

An important part of my academic life in Kolkata and of life in general through the last decade is spent at the second floor of the house at 18/53, Dover lane. Like life, the experiences of living in that space have never been linear or smooth, but always intense and wholesome. I fondly remember everyone whom I have met there and shared that space with.

From my Germany years I remember and express my gratitude to Rahul Peter Das (Dasbabu), Hans Harder and everyone related to the ‘Institute for Indology and South-Asian Studies’ and to the ‘VW-Project’ where I worked between 2004-2007. I also thank my friends and colleagues at the Graduate School, Halle (GSAA). I treasure the precious moments shared with Asma Hilali. I thank Johannes Rosenbaum, Daniela Schönemann and Elisa Dauth remembering our time in ‘Halle an der Saale’. My memories of living in the city of Halle will always be organized around the days spent with Fernanda, and her love.

I thank the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) for letting me write this dissertation under their aegis. I express my deep gratitude to all its teaching and non-teaching staff for their kind help and appreciation. Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha Thakurta, Lakshmi Subramanian, Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya, Manas Ray, Rosinka Chaudhuri, Manabi Majumdar, Priya Sangameswaran have all been particularly supportive and encouraging. Ranjana Dasgupta has always been inspiring with her pep-talks each time I encountered her at the ‘Centre’. I also thank Jadavpur University for allowing me to work on the project. Needless to add, the ‘world wide web’ and its sung and unsung heroes are indispensible to any academic work produced in our time.

I thank all members of our ‘study circle’ which has taken place more than a few times in the last two years and meant much more than day-long adda and excellent food. I have much appreciated and learned from the discussions. The weekly lecture series at the ‘feminist study group’ has been a wonderful diversion for a doctoral student obsessed with only a few threads of thought. Among friends, I thank Shenjuti Dutta, Anindy Sengupta, Susmita Ghose, Catrinel Dunca, Sumana Roy.
Shenjuti and Anindya have always lent a patient ear to all my rational and irrational ideas and fancies. The meetings, discussions and correspondences with Wiebke Keim of Freiburg University have been particularly inspiring. Nikita Dhawan’s (of Goethe-University, Frankfurt) appreciation is valuable to me.

My parents have been supportive of this work throughout, even if I have not always been forthcoming in explaining my academic motives in detail. Without their support, I would not have a place to stay, would not be able to sustain myself, and simply, would not be able to finish this dissertation. My father is untiring in his daily work in putting everything concerning our small household in order. My mother has always worried about my academic future and future in general. She has sacrificed a lot over the years for my well being, even as she carried on with her own profession of being a school teacher. The place she worked in was quite far from where we used to live in north Kolkata. I remember how she journeyed almost across the length this hectic city to pick me up from school on her way back from work. As I grew up, she could not quite agree with all my decisions about life and studies, and we have had several lingering debates. Especially in the last few years, I could see her patience waning, as my academic life kept lengthening. I hope she would be much relieved, now that I have really submitted this dissertation.

I underline with sincere gratitude the contribution of Anirban Das, under whose guidance this dissertation is prepared. I have known him for nearly a decade now. His support has truly been incalculable in my formation as a student of ‘theory’. Around 2008-9, when I decided to embark on a more conceptual and philosophical kind of research (the focus then was chiefly the works concerned with ‘deconstruction’), I could hardly find any support or trust from my peers, teachers and friends. At that point, I felt that not many were open to the idea of a purely conceptual kind of academic research, even less thought it actually worthwhile to make a serious academic comment on critical feminist theory. The question which worried me at the time was the following: why one has to limit ones negotiations with strictly conceptual arguments and texts to classroom-teaching and syllabus crunching only, shying away from really acknowledging these encounters in writing, in the academic texts one produces at the university? At another but related register, I realized that most of us were haunted by a lingering doubt that if it at all was possible, from the wrong side of the globe, and of translation, to make original interventions into the works of thinkers who have come down to us as proper-names written in bold. At this key moment of my academic career, Anirban was the sole person who reassured me of the intellectual and practicable value of conceptual work; and of the possibility of
having direct and critical negotiations with texts and arguments of any kind, as long as one was willing to go through the pain of confronting the difficulties in articulating such negotiations. As official supervisor, he has been extremely patient and supportive, I have especially appreciated his style of discussing work over excellent food and good coffee.

It would be absolutely impossible to live in this city without the support of my favourite family: Anirban Das, Rumela Roy and Adira Das Roy, impossible to write, read, think, impossible to keep faith in honest work, I realize it each day. I am fortunate to have the honour of attending almost all the house-parties organized by Rumela in the past few years (who, almost like a good test bat of the old, always have ample time, both for professional and family life), and of knowing about the latest trends in world music from Adira. I have gathered some much needed memories of happiness sharing time with them, theirs is the ‘happy family unlike any other’.

A special note of thanks to Isabella Bruno for her friendship and for making me feel at home in Frankfurt each time I visit Germany (and to her mother too, a magician in the kitchen). It was she who drove me around Frankfurt that evening. Later, as we sat talking at the ‘Café Bar-Celona’, I explained to her what my PhD was all about, trying to talk over the persistent happy humming of the gathering crowd. ‘I would surely write it down and remember this evening too’, I told her.

Parts of this dissertation were presented at different venues, notably at the ‘Cultural Studies Workshop’ organized by the CSSSC, at the ‘Frankfurt Research Center for Postcolonial Studies (FRCPS)’, Goethe University, Frankfurt, at the Institute of Sociology and the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, University of Freiburg, at the ‘URPP Asia and Europe’, University of Zurich, at the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University, at the ‘Law and Gender workshop’, School of Law, University of Lucerne, at the School of Womens Studies, Jadavpur University, at the conference ‘Feminist Inscriptions in Social Sciences’ held at the CSSSC. I thank all the organizing institutions for giving me opportunity to share my work with academic peers and all the participants who commented on parts of this dissertations in its various forms.

Lastly, I need to remember the person who first posed to me, in her own way, one of the central questions that this dissertation confronts. Was that only a repetition of a problem already known to me, or was that the moment when I realized that the force of a repetition lied in its eruption as a fresh pain each time? Either way, this dissertation, as if, is also an address to that moment.