Acknowledgements

There are perhaps paths that lead us again and again to people who have one and the same function for us: passageways that always, in the most diverse periods of life, guide us to the friend, the betrayer, the beloved, the pupil or the master.
— Walter Benjamin

This thesis is dedicated to you, my teachers and friends, solitary readers, walkers of the dream, gentle whisperers who have caressed words and rekindled the embers of the mind in the midst of stormy nights. To you, for helping me learn the melancholy flight of birds, the starry landscapes of the night, the silent heavy breathing of trees. To you, for teaching me the quieter and subtler magic of books. Thank you for giving me the strength, and the will to face life and reality in all its strangeness. Without you and all the lessons I had, I would have been a very different person.

The thesis wouldn’t have been written without continuous support from my supervisor, Swapan da (Professor Swapan Chakravorty of the Department of English, Jadavpur University, and Director-General, National Library, Kolkata). A mentor and a guide for life, he has allowed me total flexibility to pursue ideas, and inspired me greatly to look beyond the obvious and the formulaic. I thank him for his time and patience, his close attention to the many minutiae that escaped my frenetic writing, and his efforts to help me work my nebulous ideas and organize them in a set of reasonable objectives. I thank him for the vast tapestry of stories that once lit goggle-eyed undergraduates in their darkened classrooms: also for the inexhaustible supply of unconventional tales and diabolical anecdotes about society, literature, and history which makes you realize that life, the fantastic act of negotiating reality while living it in the foul rag and bone shop of your heart, works in a much greater, subtler, and
complex way than all your imaginings. I remain in great debt to my teachers at the Department of English, Jadavpur University. Sukanta *da* (Professor Emeritus Sukanta Chaudhuri), for the wondrous classroom magic, the numerous crossed-out answerscripts, and detailed marginalia on my undergraduate tutorials. For the moving day in 2002, when he suddenly appeared out of nowhere on a road that saw me listlessly distributing handouts to passerbys, and scolded me for discontinuing my studies. Sajni *di* (Professor Emeritus Sajni Kripalani Mukherji) for believing in me, and allowing me to join my postgraduate courses after a gap of three years. Supriya *di* (Professor Supriya Chaudhuri) and Amlan *da* (Professor Amlan Dasgupta) for all the densely charged astonishing particles of light when the world stood still in messianic time during their lectures.

I remain forever indebted to Tintin *da* (Dr. Abhijit Gupta), friend, teacher, and historian of lost books, for helping me find direction at a time when older dreams melted away. For the unlimited supplies of science fiction, fantasy, comics, and rare works of scholarship and fiction when I needed them the most. For the numerous discussions and lengthy arguments, angry disputations while playing football, his quiet way of inspiring confidence. Rimi *di* (Dr. Rimi B. Chatterjee), friend, teacher, and magical wordsmith, for the books, long and invigorating conversations, lessons in cheerfulness. Nilanjana *di* (Professor Nilanjana Gupta, presently Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Jadavpur University) for various discussions on the Indian “mass media”, and access to the books and collections of the School of Media, Communication and Culture, Jadavpur University. And Paromita *di*, Santanu *da*, Rafat *da*, and other teachers of my department, for their encouragement and support over the years. I am also indebted to Dr. Tirthankar Chanda and Sanat Raichoudhury for their encouragement and love since my schooldays. And to Sensei Avijit Mitra and other teachers of the Academy of Aikido (India) who allowed me to train at their dojo, and healed my mind as well as my body when the world seemed to close around me. Together, my teachers provided me the perfect combination of morals, motivations,
and friendship that a wayward student could ever desire while battling out his inner
demons, uncertainties, and precariousnesses of thought.

Thanks to the Scholarship Division of the Tokyo Foundation, Japan, and members of
the Steering Committee of the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund
Programme at Jadavpur University (JU-SYLFF Programme) for considering me
eligible for their funding, and providing me with a generous scholarship that helped
me focus on my research and writing during the last three years.

I am very grateful to Joyashree di (Professor Joyashree Roy of the Department of
Economics, Jadavpur University, and Director, JU-SYLFF Programme) for her
enthusiasm concerning my work, constant promptings, and tough criticism during the
progress report workshops. But for her severeness concerning deadlines, I wouldn’t
have completed this thesis in another ten years. Her suggestion for jotting down the
haphazard fragments that pass in the mind during the critical moments of transition
from consciousness to sleep, as well as her other spartan prescriptions for carrying out
the actual act of writing, helped me greatly. I thank her for constant encouragement,
her strictness coupled with the warmth of understanding that allowed me ready and
unrestricted access to JU-SYLFF facilities and resources, and the much-needed
isolation for work that I had at the JU-SYLFF rooms long after the official university
hours. These were the rooms where I locked myself up for long days and longer
evenings, smoked many cigarettes of guilt, stared blankly at the creeping shadows,
overheard passionate undergraduates singing of love and revolution or complaining
about course work, boyfriends, and toilets. But I did end up writing the greater part of
this thesis there to the sounds of passing voices and silence.

Thanks to the anonymous voices for the diversions. To SYLFF Assistant Sayanti,
Suman da at the Global Change Programme, and JU-SYLFF Fellows, Sreerupa,
Payosni, Subhashree, Bipasha, Ritajyoti, Avishek, Shyamashree, Sreya, Payal,
Nilanjan, Rimple, and Duke da, for the patience showed, the grilling sessions survived
together, energizing conversations, and the great cheer. To Shibu, Swapan, Lalu,
Ratan, and Naseerda, for the many glasses of tea; Kestada for the cigarettes; Milan-da, for the strange assortment of nondigestibles consumed at his canteen over the years.

The thesis owes much to long and captivating conversations I have had with elderly journalists who spent the greater part of their lives working with the newspaper companies and news-agencies. Of them, I remain particularly grateful to Manojit Mitra, Ramen Guha, Amitabha Choudhury, Nilanjan Dutta, Soumitra Das, Raghab Bandyopadhyay, and Nabarun Bhattacharya. Most of their telling helped shape my meagrely understanding of the historical complexities of the English-language newspaper business in India; I thank them for entertaining my curiosities and questions—particularly Manojit-babu, Raghab-da and Soumitra-da, for the unending telephonic queries on persons and events. Major parts of this thesis are based on documents, records, and books I accessed at the libraries of Jadavpur University, the Calcutta Commercial Library, and the National Library, Kolkata. I thank all library staff for finding them as well as for their patience in scribbling “N/F” on slips when they didn’t. I remain in particular debt to Gobindababu, retired librarian at our departmental library, for all the small acts of kindness, and his enquiring about my research every time we met.

It is impossibly hard to choose and name a few among many friends who have motivated me. But this thesis wouldn’t have been written without infinite and generous support from Debapriya, poet, precious friend, Weatherwaxian optimist, and fellow doctoral aspirant. I thank her for the long conversations, undiminished enthusiasm concerning unfinished projects, and magic charms that morphed my recalcitrant writing machine into a broomstick. For the long introspections about sentient life existing elsewhere in the galaxy, and for sharing ancient witching formulas that cut short procrastination and forced me to write.

Much thanks to Anusua, for having great confidence in me, far more than I ever deserve. Smiley and his friends, for the patient sharing. Shatarupa, for books and discussions on Indian newspapers. Moni, for the songs of the rivers, the wanderlust,
and spiritually-charged lessons in punctuality. Souvik, for all the dead poets mourned, the live authors castigated. Joydip and Avijit, for help in growing up, and stimulating conversations. Samsun, Bappa, Arnab, Rupanjan, Picklu, Niranjan, and Prabir, for all the great memories, the sorrows.

I have also received great encouragement and support from many caring seniors. Thanks to Bhaswatidi, for her endearing affection, her reading of parts of my thesis, and gentle lessons in grit and determination. Samantakda, for his inspiration and camaraderie, the ample supply of books and reading material involving mysterious phantoms and photocopiers, and alternating heavy doses of sarcasm and optimism. Neel, for the encouragement, fantastic reading lists, and books. Chandrimadi, Angshumanda, and Sreyashidi, for the strength to survive the grind during my journalistic misadventures and beyond; the books, the admonitions, the love, and the care. Thanks to Rashmididi, for the countless tings and momos, the confusing taxonomy of rhododendrons during mountain climbs, and persuasive editorial suggestions on my writing. Pinakida, for introducing me to the university in 1998, and an ever-expanding universe of crazy cinemas and comics. Sarbajitda, Aparajitadi, and Dipankardada, for the wonderful time spent discussing newspapers, comics, avant-garde cinema, lockpicking, and the philosophical purpose to having computing machines thoroughly resistant to the desires of humans. Anindyada, Madhujadi, Sudiptoda, Sujitda, Akida, and Sandeepda, for all the motivational talk; Madhumiadidi and Somnathda, for sharing my anxiety that I would never complete my thesis.

There were many juniors and friends cheering me as well: Joy, Martin, Mohit, Rishi, Jaydeep, Aritra, Romila, Pooja, and Soumik. Also Spandana, Shubham, Dipanjan, Pramit, Tito, Jijo, Kunal, Minakshi, Nikhilesh, and Rangit. Of them, I remain particularly grateful to Martin for helping me compile the appendices; Dionysiac Mohit for his entertaining companionship during various trips; Joy, Soumik, and Tito for distracting me with books and pirate treasures when I needed to concentrate on my writing.
Thanks to my parents for their understanding, great love, and faith in their son; for giving me the courage to pursue what I believed. To my sister, Jayjayanti, and brother-in-law, Tarunda, for their warmheartedness. To my niece Pantu for being the most considerate when I borrowed her room from time to time, and letting me play with her toys.

To Sangita, guardian angel and comrade, for simply being there. Probably she is the one who truly understands what made this road really, really long and tortuous. It is enough to say I tormented her greatly, and she suffered the most.

Finally, this thesis really wouldn’t have been possible without the enormous contributions of all the silent, unassuming individuals living in India, the Calibans and Quasimodos of history, the faceless victims, recreants, and rebels, ordinary souls whose rich and meaningful lives and sacrifices are never recorded, or distorted beyond recognition in the “news” carried by the élite “national” newspapers. Though it does not speak about them, this thesis acknowledges its incalculable debt to all these extraordinary individuals who have survived the ravages of power, and overwhelmingly constitute the real in the social spaces of India; struggling with the bare fact of living, they continue to impart small valuable lessons in life and achievable deeds that are indeed great examples of Promethean determination. I thank them for communicating immense inspiration and hope, especially when I have exaggeratedly wallowed in inventories of my own dejectedness. I thank them for making me painfully aware of the different realities that exist outside the newspapers, the television, and the comfort zones of the academy; I thank them for the quiet unassuming lessons in humility and continuance.

All the errors, slips, and inconsistencies of thought and expression encountered in this document, of course, remain mine.