Joseph Conrad has traditionally been regarded as a romantic, a sea-dreamer and a writer of exotic tales. The socio-political and cultural aspects of his works, though acknowledged by scholars, have been ignored by critics over the years. In recent times, however, attempts to release Conrad from the old strait-jacket and to designate him as a writer of political novels have resulted in misplaced over-emphasis and simplification. To dub Conrad as a writer of political novels and to see him through the same critical stance as we may apply in case of some modern novelists, for instance, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Milan Kundera etc., will be erroneous. Obviously, overtones of political and cultural interactions are not explicit, but implicit in his works. The political and cultural dimensions are embedded into the very structure of some of his major novels and it requires a thorough probe to get into the real nature of those dimensions. This important aspect in Conrad requires adequate and comprehensive exploration.

Gustav Morf's The Polish Heritage Of Joseph Conrad (1930) sees Conrad as a repressed revolutionary and considers his fiction as the record of his struggle with
revolutionary tendencies. More recently Irving Howe, in *Politics and the Novel* (1957), almost restated the 'Morf Thesis' holding, with a commitment to the left, Conrad's writing to be an allegory of his desertion of the Polish independence movement. This has been followed in the sixties by Eloise Knapp Hay's *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (1963). Mrs. Hay endeavours to instil in the reader's mind a sense of Conrad's ideal of social cohesion. In his scholarly study, *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Novels of Joseph Conrad* (1967), Avrom Fleishman propounds the thesis that Conrad's works invariably project his appreciation for organic community as opposed to anarchy. He links Conrad with the tradition of Organicist thought and tries to fit him within its general principles.

The complex nature of Conrad's works makes it difficult to classify him into any of the readily available categories. The cultural and political implications of his novels continue to tantalise and challenge critical minds. They seem to abide our question and yet magnificently transcend our grasp. They are sufficiently subtle to leave any interpretation of them as doctrinal statements expressing some coherent system of political thought and cultural movement. In other words, his works
Ill are not reducible to any political or cultural ideology. Besides, Conrad had a special genius for positing irreconcilable attitudes and leave them without any final resolution. Any study of Conrad to be fruitful must take cognisance of the validity of the irreconcilable points of view in Conrad.

In my enquiry of Conrad I have tried to examine his literary texts in the context of relevant historical, political and biographical facts. However that does not mean that I have adopted a biographical or historical approach and tried to read literature as history or biography. I have taken utmost care to avoid the pitfalls inherent in the extremes of any particular approach. In other words, my study envisages an aggregation of all the available approaches, what has come to be known as the inter-disciplinary approach in modern critical jargon. Aesthetic considerations and imaginative aspects have nowhere been given the short shrift.

While it is very difficult for me to enumerate the names of critics and biographers who have been of great help, I wish in particular, to register my debt to Richard Curle, P.R. Leavis, Douglas Hewitt, Avrom Fleishman and Jocelyn Baines. References to Conrad's works, unless otherwise mentioned, are to the Dent Uniform Edition, published from 1921 onwards.