

Preface

Joseph Conrad travelled extensively among peoples and races in the colonies all around the globe and narrated his first hand experiences of these crucial cultural interfaces in fictions in the heydays of the European empire. He was a Pole by birth and had adopted British citizenship by choice - facts both of which are equally important to understand his ambivalent attitude to the issues of race, culture and imperialism. Conrad's ideological standpoint is not thoroughly against or in favour of imperialism, and this inconclusive intellectual propensity often locates him writing between culture and empire. In fact, his intellectual attitudes to culture and empire have been the object of an ever-increasing flow of writings. It has been so hard to give him his due and to utter the final verdict concerning his real attitude as regards imperialism and races. His own fiction has provided evidence for both *aficionados* and denigrators. Although Conrad himself declared that he was content to 'sympathize with common mortals', no matter where they lived, this claim has been far from convincing for many critics. Many have seen him as accepting blindly the arrogant attitude of the white as put forth by Victorian sociologists and anthropologists; many, on the other hand, have defended him vehemently. But, as this thesis argues, there are inherent factors in Conrad's fiction and, most likely, in his character, that preclude the reaching of any final judgment on that head. The inconclusiveness is something essential to Conrad's intellect, and that is reflected in his fiction. The focal point in the thesis indeed is that this feature of ambivalent 'between-ness' is more pronounced in Conrad's texts than either of the two extreme readings of his fiction. The ground for such an ideological enigma, as has been argued, is to be found in the fact that Conrad as a liberal humanist recognizes the cultural difference of the races, but finally facilitates the empire to sustain the capitalist power structure by stereotypical representations of the cultures in his novels. Conrad is disillusioned in criticising the atrocious practices of the imperialists in the colonies. Yet, the obfuscation of the possibility of transcendence for any ethnically or politically different non-European and revolutionary culture seems to be a matter of deliberate ideological choice for Conrad. This thesis examines, thus, the configurations of imperialism, capitalism and political alternatives like the

revolutions and anarchies and their cultural representations in the novels of Joseph Conrad beginning from the premise that imperialism is rationalised through a dualistic model of self/other and functions as a hierarchy of domination/subordination.

In chapter one, Conrad's ideological location with regard to imperialism and its cultural consequences are discussed in their socio-historical and biographical contexts. Chapter two argues that *Heart of Darkness* configures the European model of imperialism as a split between light and darkness, between civilization and savagery. The chapter investigates the historical background to imperialism by focusing on the textual production of history in a variety of written forms which comprise the diary, travel writing, government report, and fictions. It considers how versions of history/knowledge are constructed through the writings of empire. In Chapter three, on *Lord Jim*, the character of the protagonist is analysed as a product of the imperial ideology and his failure is explored through the binary applications like Europe/ non-Europe, centre/ margin etc. The fourth Chapter, dealing with *Nostromo*, considers the cultural justification of the model, where capitalism, as the factor of imperialism, seems corrosive in its effect on individual morality and ethical values. The fifth one notices an ideological split within Europe as the growing activities of anarchic and revolutionary groups have been putting up relentless challenges to the existing capitalistic social system. Conrad's deliberate subversion of these activities in *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* does away with the possibility of any ideological alternative to that particular social system. The Conclusion tries to locate Conrad as an ideologue, torn between the extremes of culture and empire.