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Darkness with the subjective relativism of the impressionist attitude.¹¹ Did Conrad then deny the possibility of any secure moral position? At the very least, the novella expresses 'doubt', writes Caryl Phillips, 'doubt about the supremacy of European humanity, and the ability of this supposed humanity to maintain its imagined status beyond the high streets of Europe.'¹²

Conrad's clearest expression of this doubt in *Heart of Darkness* is through the character of Kurtz. He ascribes to Kurtz the philanthropic ideals of European civilization, with Marlow saying that 'All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz'¹³. We are told that he is 'an emissary of pity, and science, and progress'¹⁴, and that he 'had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort'¹⁵. Yet, despite the constant references to Kurtz, for most of the novella he is notable only by his absence. Marlow concedes that 'He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do.'¹⁶ The frequent references to Kurtz, coupled with the extended deferral of his eventual appearance, comprise the most significant use of delayed decoding in *Heart of Darkness*. The discrepancy between Marlow's preconceptions of Kurtz and the reality of his appearance is the foundation upon which Conrad's moral ambivalence lies.

This is why Conrad builds such intense anticipation around Kurtz. As Robert Hampson comments, 'there is a deliberate anti-climax in relation to Kurtz that expresses the story's radical scepticism about ultimate values and the possibility of

¹¹ Ian Watt, *Impressionism and Symbolism in Heart of Darkness* in Robert Kimbrough, ed. *Heart of Darkness: A Norton Critical Edition*, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1988) p. 319

¹² Caryl Phillips, 2003, *Out of Africa* from *Guardian Unlimited*, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/classics/story/0,900335,00.html> (accessed 11/02/08)

¹³ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Hampson (London: Penguin, 1995) p. 83

¹⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Hampson (London: Penguin, 1995) p. 47

¹⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Hampson (London: Penguin, 1995) p. 55

¹⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Hampson (London: Penguin, 1995) p. 50

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