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Final Essay

Throughout Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* there are many instances of metaphors which help portray and cultivate the story more thoroughly. *Heart of Darkness* is a novel written about Marlow, a sailor, who recounts his story of taking a job for a company to sail deep into the Congo on a quest for ivory all while experiencing extreme brutality of the Congo people. While aboard this mission into the Congo river, Marlow meets this man Kurtz who he had been told about. Conrad develops Kurtz as a greedy, unjust man who has been corrupted by the greed of obtaining as much ivory as possible and treating the Congo people horribly. Metaphors are used to compare characters such as Kurtz and Marlow to objects and things which people might not necessarily have thought to relate them to. A theory called semantic twist accounts helps distinguish what develops a successful metaphor. Throughout the *Heart of Darkness*,the semantic twist accounts theory accurately describes how the development of metaphors convey that Marlow is like a Buddha and Kurtz is like a piece of ivory.

These metaphors are supported by the metaphor theory of semantic twist accounts which helps readers distinguish and understand the meaning of the metaphors more deeply. Semantic twist accounts is a theory which “holds that metaphor results from the interaction or interamination of words and word meanings as they are brought together and act on each other in the settings provided by particular utterances made on particular concrete occasions” (Hills, 2016, p. 6). This theory is evident throughout the novel because of the rich detail that surrounds the explicit metaphors. These metaphors are supported by the semantic twist account theory because the words chosen throughout the novel interact with both each other and the setting of the novel to develop the metaphor’s significance. Specifically, the semantic twist account theory sheds light on how the metaphors, Marlow as a Buddha and Kurtz as a piece of ivory, are understood in the context of the novel. The theory allows readers to understand the power that words and settings have on developing the following metaphors. Not only can metaphors be supported through the semantic twist account theory but due to the plethora of metaphors found in *Heart of* Darkness, they can be grouped into five clusters of categories based on their narrative task. According to Kimmel, these groups are penetration, wilderness, darkness, initiation, and ambivalence (Kimmel, 2005). The categorization of metaphors aids in the understanding of how words and setting can further portray the metaphors meaning more deeply.

First, I will discuss the metaphor comparing Marlow as a Buddha. I think Marlow can be described like a Buddha because of his experiences in his life shaped him into being a very philosophical and reflective human. His life altering trip in the Congo caused him a near death experience and because of this altering experience he possesses some greater sense of knowledge and wisdom that is found within Buddhas. This metaphor embodies the semantic twist account because Marlow is described while starting to tell his story as “lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes” (Conrad, 2006, p. 3). The specific words chosen to describe Marlow such as “preaching” interact with the setting of him sitting with the “palm of the hand outwards” to deeply convey how Marlow is like a Buddha. I can see this metaphor not only where it was specifically stated but even towards the end of the novel when Marlow is telling Kurtz’s loved one about Kurtz’s death and Marlow says things to hopefully bring her ease. I feel like this can relate to a Buddha because I associate Buddhas as wanting to keep situations calming and easing as possible. Conrad implementing this metaphor is unique because readers see the metaphor being developed throughout the whole novel rather than mentioned just one time. Additionally, Conrad uses the setting at the end of the novel where Marlow is comforting Kurtz’s loved one to accentuate the calming quality of Marlow as a Buddha. I believe that this metaphor can fall under one of the five categories of metaphors that Kimmel mentioned. Specifically, I believe Marlow as a Buddha falls under the initiation category because the initiation category deals with the “symbolic meaning and the cultural metaphysics of plot” (Kimmel, 2005, p. 207). My understanding of metaphysics, as something which encompasses being, identity, and knowing, makes me associate Buddha’s with metaphysics, therefore relating this metaphor to this the initiation category. Ultimately, this metaphor is accentuated by the interaction of word choice and settings provided by Conrad while supporting the metaphysics of the plot.

A contradiction to the metaphor, Marlow is like a Buddha, can be found in the novel. Even though Marlow can be seen as a Buddha, in certain instances he seems to exhibit qualities that are not related to a Buddha. This can be seen in his many instances of his trips in the Congo where he did not exhibit calmness and "his voice lost itself in the calm of the evening” (Conrad, 2006, p. 31). I think it is important to acknowledge this contradiction to the metaphor, to further understand what and why this metaphor was developed in the novel. Even though this contradiction can be seen, ultimately there is a greater use of word choice and settings that depict Marlow like a Buddha than Marlow not like a Buddha.

The other metaphor I will discuss is the metaphor describing Kurtz like a piece of ivory. This comparison of Kurtz to ivory made me think that Kurtz was succumbing to the evil ways in the Congo. Ivory was what was propelling Kurtz to voyage into the Congo and comparing him to a piece of ivory makes me think that he is turning into the evil itself. Ivory came at the expense of “strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed; a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire sent into the depths of darkness” and only due to those things “came a precious trickle of ivory” (Conrad, 2006, p. 10). This metaphor aids in my understanding of Kurtz as someone who is evil and on the brink of death and I came to this conclusion based on the interaction of words and the setting which supports how these metaphors are justified by the semantic twist accounts theory. Without these specific words and phrases such as “string of dusty niggers” and “depths of darkness” I do not believe that this metaphor would have been able to be accentuated as thoroughly. I believe this metaphor would fall under Kimmel’s category of darkness due to the dark, evil property ivory represents. The semantic twist account theory supports why this metaphor is so successful at depicting Kurtz as someone who is dark, greedy, and, evil. Additionally, this metaphor makes me associate Kurtz with greed because people wanted the ivory for the money and Kurtz turning into ivory symbolizes him as greed. Ivory was the main motivation for the voyage into the Congo and therefore perpetuated the greediness. Although ivory is seen in the novel in its raw form, reoccurring symbols in the novel represent ivory as well. One reoccurring image is the piano which appears at the end of the novel in Kurtz’s loved one’s home. A grand piano’s keys at this time were made of ivory and grand pianos “symbolically contain the cultural ideals which have served historically to justify the evils of imperialism” (Dilworth, 2013, p. 326). In order to live up to these cultural, imperialistic standards, such as the grandiose grand piano, evil must lay at the root of those standards. Dilworth’s source supports my understanding that the metaphor suggesting evil, greed, and death, all which exemplify corruption, exemplifies the hypocrisy of European imperialism. I think that Kurtz remains unlike ivory in some respects because I don’t think that we are supposed to be comparing Kurtz to the shape of ivory or the physical part of an animal that ivory is. Instead, ivory symbolizing death, evil, greed, and the hypocrisy of European imperialism are what Kurtz can be compared to.

 Ultimately, it is the semantic twist accounts theory in which the metaphors, Marlow is like a Buddha and Kurtz is a piece of ivory, are developed and understood. Conrad’s metaphors contribute to a theory like the semantic twist account theory because his metaphors are deeply rooted in the words and settings used within the novel. The understanding of what supports and justifies the understanding of metaphors is important for readers to know so they can better understand works of literature they are reading. Understanding metaphors shape the reader to view not only the novels differently and deeper but the world around them from a different perspective as well. The understanding of the semantic twist accounts theory aided in the greater understanding of *Heart of Darkness* as a whole and both sources shed light on how metaphors can be categorized and developed to further cultivate the novel.

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