Topics in Transnational Literatures:

Student Name

Global Homesickness

Cayce File: Going Postcolonial on Globalization

Cayce Pollard, the main character in William Gibson’s 2003 novel Pattern Recognition, suffers from a kind of homesickness induced by globalization that serves as a nice example of the dilemma of the postcolonial individual. She can no longer feel comfortable in a single place, or perspective, for long and must move from place to place in order to maintain any sense of security, or control, in a world as quickly heading towards an often impending sense of globality as the one she lives in.

First we’ll take a look at the homesickness induced in Cayce through some of the complex global processes that comprise globalization, and then we’ll work on defining her as a postcolonial individual, and her dilemma.

The traumatic global event under the surface of the entire novel is 9/11 through Cayce’s personal view of the loss of her father on that day. Cayce is our touchstone character to discuss the processes of globalization, though largely as a reactive force. The world is happening around her, she is whisked away into the uncontrollable currents of the Bondish plot, of the marketing strategies, of the uncontrollable behemoth of the growing frenzy of media attention surrounding the footage, of the Taki subplot, of the theological discussions of the Asian Sluts site. All of these link back to the “Singularity” of 9/11 which traumatized Cayce into this reactive state. This novel is largely her journey back to becoming a proactive individual in a global world.

At the beginning of the novel we’re addressed with a variety of smaller ways in which Cayce is both annoyed with and slowly reacting to the globalization at play in the world. Several examples of this pattern in her behavior are her aversion to all logos, despite the fact that she too is a part of the problem as her job is to help coolhunt the next logos. By hammering out the trademarks, removing the labels from her clothing, evening abbreviating her outfits to CPUs she is trying to fashion her own world, a world of her fashion.

Cayce is rejecting the world presented to her, a world in which people blow up buildings, a world in which the spermish logo on a shoe will be manufactured by small children living in poverty somewhere in Asia, a world in which lurkers pervert her chatroom in which serious art is debated. All of these are examples of the “compressed time and space of social relations” that James Mittelman defines as globalization on page 10 of our text. That Cayce sits in a board room and can nod yes to the sperm, and then somewhere in Asia small children will develop an odd relationship with this image disturbs her. She largely sits in a role of adjudication over the chatroom, interjecting points of order into a chaotic environment filled with uninformed people speculating in real time about images from who knows where. Rejecting the interconnectivity of the world, and the inevitable “intensification of consciousness” that comes with globalization as Roland Robertson puts it on page 10 of our text, is one of the ways she is reacting to the loss of her father. Her obsession with antiques is an expression of her loss, maybe not of some lost utopian vision, for certainly Bibendum is a part of the past too, but a world in which her father could exist, protect her, or at least protect himself. Globalization is the set of processes that sets Cayce off, triggers her, and the singular traumatic moment behind these small triggers is the loss of her father. Win, the perimeter security man is lost forever, and she is left with a borderless world.

The nature of the loss is what sets Cayce up to be in a postcolonial dilemma. She is on the bottom of this loss, in the sense that she has no explanation. Her job is this way too, always feeling a pawn in some indiscernible chess game of Bigend’s. Certainly this is a larger sentiment from 9/11 victims, but the nature of Win’s profession, Cynthia’s seemingly hair brained odyssey into the realm of EVP, and the fantastic lack of conclusion of the law suits establishing Win’s death all contribute to placing Cayce in a position where no one really understands her point of view. Her point of view being just blocks from an unexplainable event that her father was unexplainably present for. These factors make Cayce ‘subaltern’ to even 9/11 victims. That is to say that while it was unexplainable for survivors of the victims of 9/11 that such a tragedy could occur, it becomes even more for Cayce in light of these other factors.

So she keeps taking on new places. She moves, never quite feels comfortable for too long in one place. She becomes a refugee. As Young puts it on page 12 “Life has become too fragile, too uncertain. You can count on nothing.” From Damien’s flat in mirror world, to Japan, to Russia, etc. Even her coping mechanism, the pilates, is an aggressive form of yoga that focuses less on stillness, than intense, repeated moving. Through this moving she is seeing the world in a variety of perspectives. She is escaping the singular perspective of the trauma brought on as a ‘response’ (Steger illustrates Osama Bin Laden to be quite aware of the tools of globalized communications despite the method of asymmetrical warfare he choreographed) to the “complex set of processes” that is globalization by utilizing postcolonial theory, and acquiring a more historical context to the larger tragedy that hits her so personally. It takes her digging up corpses from past world wars and a variety of other torturous misadventure to finally put her own difficulties back in to a broader perspective. One of the first places she allows herself to feel at home is in Boone Chu’s ex-girlfriend’s apartment in Japan. This apartment is a nice parallel to her own apartment in New York, both having survived somehow the tragedy around them.

The final chapter, in which Cayce revisits her e-mails came as a relief to this reader after all the crap Cayce goes through. Gibson deftly ties up several plots in a very short chapter to create a nice uplifting sense at the end of the novel. Cayce finds the closure she’d been searching for and claimed she’d had as her father is officially dead now beyond question, and legally. Her mother’s financial concerns are put to bed, and Judy getting a job at Blue Ant was particularly amusing. Most importantly Cayce’s dogged pursuit of the truth from the lower rung of the these varyingly opposed echelons of power are what heals her trauma of a dematerialized father, as a man materializes in front of her. Postcolonialism becomes the mechanism through which Cayce finds a way to exist in a world hurtling toward ‘globality.’ Gibson paints a rather optimistic portrait of Cayce at the end, and as such, an optimistic portrait of living in modern times.