

/ SAMPLE CHAPTERS FROM THE NOVEL
KILLING BRYCE /

by

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Critical Introduction

The object of this report is to examine several different applications of the third person restrictive mode of narration in fiction. The book from which the body of this report is excerpted is entitled KILLING BRYCE. This critical introduction will, a, briefly summarize the plot of KILLING BRYCE; b, acknowledge debts the author owes to the naturalist tradition, at the same time disclaiming any overindebtedness; c, outline any extra-literary influences which the author might have fallen under during the conception and composition of KILLING BRYCE; d, place this work within the tradition of the novel, citing many specific works and authors, with an emphasis on modern antecedents; e, discuss the notion of the third person restrictive and how this fictional resource is exploited in KILLING BRYCE, particularly in the sample chapters included herein, and, finally; f, briefly discuss the problem of establishing sympathy for fictional characters when operating under the third person restrictive mode.

It is Saint Patrick's Day, 1980. Sam has come all the way to the white semi-slums of Los Angeles from his underground hiding place in the "tube" of London. He has come with intentions of provoking his brother-in-law Bryce into a fist fight and killing him. Sam's motives are gradually revealed over the course of the book.

Simultaneously, Sam's mother Gwen is languishing in a Utah psychiatric ward, receiving vague presentiments that soon she and her son will be sharing a continent again. These presentiments have come directly from a postcard explicitly stating as much. She has forgotten that she has read the postcard. Such are the effects of thorazine.

Also concurrently the father, Professor Edwine, is playing poker in his BOQ room in Wiesbaden, Germany with a group of his students, all Air Force officers. The professor is trying to win back some of the money he has just sent to Sam to pay for his mysterious return to America. The professor is a most indulgent father, shelling out money at a moment's notice, because he correctly believes that his son is a genius. The professor is living in self-imposed exile across the seas because he cannot handle the recent developments in his family's life.

At this moment on Saint Patrick's Day Professor Edwine's daughter, Cassie, is in her upper-managerial office high atop the corporate headquarters of Zippy, Incorporated, a fast food conglomerate in Houston. She is pining away for her baby, whom she has left with her distant-cousin/husband back in Los Angeles. Her job calls her away from her baby three quarters of the time. She, too, is suffering discomfoting premonitions concerning Sammy. She has spoken on the phone a moment ago to her husband and has been informed that her weird brother has suddenly shown up, all sullen and uncommunicative and unannounced. She worries that the two young men might get into some kind of trouble.

Just at the moment when she is on the verge of correctly intuiting the nature of this trouble, her secretary steps in with some papers to be signed.

On this day, at this moment, McJunken, Bryce's amoral mentor, lies in a morphine ecstasy in the amputee ward directly downstairs from Gwen's place of incarceration. For mysterious reasons his leg is missing, and he is ruminating with glee upon the considerable damage he has wreaked upon the Edwine clan -- partly out of mishatched plots to seduce Gwen, and partly out of sheer perversity on his part. He holds total sway over Bryce and has used it with incredible destructive force, as is shown in the course of the novel.

So these, then, are the prime situations as they stand as of 11:20 to 11:45 AM, Saint Patrick's Day. They come in brief present-tense scenes, interspersed liberally with flashbacks. At first the flashbacks are episodic and apparently disconnected. But gradually the past tense takes over and the novel progresses in a straight chronological narrative, with the Saint Patrick's Day "nows" appearing only at climactic moments or at the ends or beginnings of books. (The novel is in four books.)

The main seminal development is the arrival of McJunken upon the scene. This wandering, Nabokov-reading former hitman sees Gwen and immediately becomes obsessed with having her. Gradually, he realizes that would be impossible, mainly because he himself is so preternaturally repulsive and Gwen is so fastidious. So he settles on trying to

make her notice him. He does this by effectively hypnotizing her stupid nephew Bryce and manipulating him into marrying Gwen's self-loathing, desperate, 350-pound daughter Cassie -- an action that McJunken is sure will mortify such a correct person as Gwen. But Gwen barely notices because she is involved with her own incipient madness and with worrying and cooing over Sammy, her "favorite genius ideal boy."

McJunken realizes eventually that Sam should be his target; and in an incredibly brutal, abortive mugging scene he manages to fall off a third-story fire escape and pulverize his leg, leaving his intended victim, Sammy, high and dry and undamaged and totally ignorant as to even the identity of that peculiar little Irishman writhing down there on the asphalt.

Sam, halfway out of his mind with amphetamines and the deprivations of the musician's life, is so exaggeratedly horrified by the marriage of his sister to his distant cousin that he recoils to England, to fester and brood and play banjo for ha'pennies in the yellow tile tunnels of London's underground. From there he realizes that it is time for killing Bryce, and the action is brought cleanly back to the present. The ending will not be revealed here, but it is highly affirmative.

The preceding comprises only about three-fourths of the plot of KILLING BRYCE; but the main points have been covered. The selections excerpted for this report come early on in the book and are essentially introductory scenes. Cassie is presented before her marriage and trans-

formation from shut-in hypochondriac to tough businesslady. Professor Edwine is presented before his disillusionment and loss of faith in Family as an agent of human redemption. Gwen is presented before her final lapse into insanity. These selections were made precisely because of their introductory nature -- to make as clear as possible the subtle stylistic distinctions between each point of view. Most of the rest of the novel is more dramatic in form, with the characterization being done more through the horses' mouths, so to speak, rather than through the eye of the "reverberator."

Operating from so many different points of view, and having such an enormous field to work and play in, this novel manages simultaneously to be naturalistic and a satire of naturalism. For example: Sam is obsessed with the notion that he is foredoomed to die unpublished and obscure because half of him is comprised of the genes that formed the "hideous walrus colony known as the Edwine clan" -- his father's Jack-Mormon relatives. But it is strongly hinted, in a secret family legend that Sam knows nothing about, that Professor Edwine was a foundling. This bestows upon Professor Edwine the benefit of the archetypal hero's ambiguous origins, and totally undercuts Sam's prime life-obsession.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that Sam's harelip is a mutation caused either by Eisenhower's nuclear weapons tests upwind in Nevada in the year of Sam's birth, or by the primitive 1950's chemical compounds that Gwen was obliged to take so that Sam's foetus would not spontaneously abort when it got wind of the incompatibility of the

professor's blood type with Gwen's.

In any case, Sam -- mutant or not, cursed naturalistic anti-hero or not -- happens to be the strongest, most courageous person in the whole teeming book, the deepest delver, who digs down and finds his own considerably strong Bloodthirsty Demon and goads it to the very point of fratricide -- and defeats it. He denies violence not because of any overriding gentleness on his part, but simply because he finally understands that violence is trivial. Sam is far too proud and too busy to engage in trivial activities. The strongest affirmation here is not one of predetermination, but of the soul-excavating individual.

That is Sam's section of the book. There are other parts of the book that run like naturalist tracts. There are subplots acted out by fully-developed "minor" characters -- my coinage is foil novels. For example: Bryce has another gentler mentor, a Mormon Melchizedek whose Mormonism is presented as a component of his genetic makeup, who deliberately puts himself through an apostasy and joins the Episcopalian church simply because he covets a job as Kapellmeister in the local Episcopalian parochial school. But he winds up being unable to overcome the Mormonness intertwined to basically into his body's cells. In a world where people still argue about whether Judaism is a race or a religion, this foil novel's treatment of something as superficial as Mormonism takes on a gleefully, deeply perverted light.

Similarly, the Weltyan "sense of place" is played upon and disposed of -- in one section of the book. The one person with the most intense

awareness of what it means to be Utahn is Sam, and he reviles, almost vomits on the entire notion of Utahness. He sneeringly dismisses the Great Salt Lake, the very symbol of his homeland, as "the world's largest wet-cell battery, bisected into halves of unequal salinity by a dilapidated railroad causeway leading out to buffalo-infested Antelope Island." He considers the Mormon nation to be the Whore of Babylon in Moral Majority clothing. The landscape is never described in Sam's sections as anything more than a salted, sapped wasteland. Welty, of course, speaks of "sense of place" as a source of strength and integrity for a writer. Well, the most powerful and honest sounds that come out of Sam are his shrieks of Utah-loathing.

Outside of novels, I have done systematic reading in nothing but art and music history and theory, pharmacology and sexology, and Carl Jung (useless except accidentally, so he won't enter into my discussion here). What sociology I have has been picked out of the sociology-rife air. I justify my generation of 336,000 words out of thin air by virtue of my musician's-ear awareness of everything that goes on in the audible culture around me, and by pointing out that I am trying primarily to get novels published, and it is only horse sense to derive the bulk of one's material from popular notions when the literary marketplace is so venal as it is now in America. So the topic of this report must be one of pure literary technique -- since that is the only pertinent area in which I've done systematic, even obsessive thinking.

This book is the next step in the novel, no rodomantade intended.

The step before was GRAVITY'S RAINBOW, which took the stylistic innovations of the two previous steps, REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST and ULYSSES, and liberated them in terms of time and place (in the first instance) and subject matter (in the second instance). The result, as everybody knows, was a boring, unreadable, sophomoric, but important tour de force. KILLING BRYCE displays a mastery of all the new Pynchonian techniques of self-centered "neo-stream of consciousness," but hearkens also back to the earlier novels of Tolstoy and Flaubert to provide the reasonably well-informed, attentive reader with something entertaining, edifying, and accessible. If one or two of the various individual styles have not been easily distinguishable to some of the lesser New York literary agents, and if they have been unable to uncover evidence of my "mastery of all the new Pynchonian techniques," it is simply because their ears have been jaded by over-exposure to the mere pyrotechniques of Vonnegut, Tom Robbins, Barth, the Barthelmes, and the other legion hybrid spawn of Proust/Joyce/Woolf. Laboring under a similar jadedness of the ears, some people still claim that Rimsky-Korsakov is a superior orchestrator to Brahms.

So, what KILLING BRYCE has to offer, then, are exercises in several different applications of the third person restrictive mode of narration. Sam's uses the intensely self-conscious, self-centered, highly informed Nabokovian mode, such as is applied in PNIN, where puns and private anagrams and literary allusions are of prime importance in the delineation of the main character. No excerpts from Sam are used in this report,

mainly because his sections do not stand well on their own: without a context to provide a reason for this strangeness of style, the Sam sections look merely like examples of callow obscurantism.

Gwen's style, in this excerpt at least, constitutes an almost clinical observation of a mind wandering, applying the scientifically precise methods of Joyce (in the earlier Stephen Dedalus sections of *ULYSSES*), and Woolf (all throughout her *MRS DALLOWAY*). Gwen, like Woolf, a proper lady, tends toward interior monologue rather than pure stream of consciousness. Interior monologue, as everybody knows, is Woolf's grammatically corrected version of the Joycean stream of consciousness; and it is entirely appropriate to proper ladies, who most certainly think grammatically, even at private moments. One will note that Gwen's style gets slightly subjectively outré only at moments of emotional stress. Later on when she goes completely insane, the reader is treated to a grand demolition spectacle of this great cathedral of grammar crumbling to monosyllabic pumice on the sidewalks of Salt Lake City.

Cass and Professor Edwine have languages that are similar. They love each other a great deal and think in similar ways. Each of their styles verges at times on the quasi-omniscient, using the intuitive insight possessed by the center of consciousness as an excuse to impinge upon other human consciousnesses to a controlled degree -- with the purely utilitarian intention in mind of moving the plot along. These sections subtly flirt with violation of point of view, using as their

precedent similar violations perpetrated by Henry James and Marcel Proust when they think we are not paying attention. These sections, Cassie's in particular, could be said to employ a Jamesian "reverberator," or a passive mediator between reader and action, as can be found in Proust's *CITIES OF THE PLAIN*. Cass and her father are the most unself-centered people in the book. Their comparative insight into others stems largely from their love of humanity. The selection of their two sections was made mostly as a means of displaying the subtlety of difference in their thought modulations -- the reader must look beyond the obvious colloquialisms they share as doting father and daughter.

McJunken's style penetrates the man's mind to such a shallow degree that his scenes appear to be written in the slick, shallow, "parviscient" mode used by Irwin Shaw and Mario Puzo and other writers of popular, cheap trash (H. E. Francis calls their method "sloppy omniscience"), where action is all and characterization is perfunctory, and the only reason one character can be called the main one is that his name is the object or subject of more verbs than any other. This approach is justified by the shallowness of McJunken himself, whose main function, in the first three-fifths of the book at least, is to generate mindless activity and to cause trouble for everybody else. For palpable reasons he has no excerpt in this Master's Report.

There are three different levels of informedness. Gwen and Sam are both highly educated and self-conscious, and their styles have literary

allusions sprinkled in liberally, along with metaphysical conceits and the like. Cass and Professor Edwine are middlebrows -- but each is possessed of more or less unconscious poetic gifts. Bryce and McJunken have low-average intelligence and next to no education. Generally speaking, the ratio of immediately available, gratifiable sympathy can be traced in a sort of bell-curve over these three levels of diction: the middlebrows are the most spontaneously lovable, with a marked drop in attractiveness as one proceeds to either end of the spectrum. That is not to say that the other four characters are not sympathetic; it just takes some extra effort and thought and compassion to get used to them. That, along with the unusual length, is what is keeping KILLING BRYCE unpublished and off the shelves of Mini Marts all across this country and Canada and Australia: in a commercial literary marketplace main characters have to be spontaneously digestible, pre-chewed, like Twinkies.

Chapter Eleven

Cass wore a light blue cotton print, a mummy-type affair. It was more like a miniskirt on her because she was so tall. She'd bought it long ago when she was with her mother and brother in Sienna. She'd still been skinny back then, and she'd wanted something light and baggy so she could feel breezes and just wear panties underneath. Also it would've fit just right in case she ever got pregnant with a black baby -- Cass remembered thinking that. Now it was just a fairly tight, long blouse that she wore over pants whenever she had to go out of her parents' house, because it covered her bottom. Cass was not pregnant; she hadn't made love at all for the longest time. But she had really gained a lot of weight.

She didn't feel so unattractive when she wore her light blue Italian print. The material was very unusual -- sort of natural and coarse, and sometimes people stopped in their double-knits and acetates and asked her about her nice blouse.

But in public places such as doctors' offices where she had to sit waiting for a long time in a straight-backed chair among the dumb old

business magazines, her blouse sometimes began to feel tight and pinchy up underneath her breasts and made her uncomfortable. She didn't like the thought of the red marks that the material would dig around her ribs; she had enough red lines down in that area already. The doctor would see her soon.

It was odd, but Cass usually never got that certain urge when she was with physical body doctors. The kind of doctors you get naked for usually didn't turn Cass on at all, unless they were very young and very beautiful. (Her and her mom's old gynecologist had a colleague, a sort of young disciple, who fit that description: whenever the old man was ill or out of town and the young beautiful man was handling the appointments, Cass always embarrassed everybody by getting all lubricated there in the stirrups.)

But that was an unusual case. Usually Cassie just felt numb all over when naked in a doctor's office. She wanted not to think so, but she was sure that the reason for this numbness could be found in the mirrors in MDs' offices, in which she saw her own distressing nakedness under an unkind white light. She was young and she'd never nursed, but her breasts already were as low and deflated and liney as an old aborigine's, and it sometimes seemed as though her skeleton itself had bent under all that weight. It seemed she had no shoulders; and the long, curvy triangle of open space that she used to have rising between her closed knees and her crotch was gone. She was no fashion model, and being with body doctors reminded her of that.

It was the mind doctors that made Cassie want to leap out and grab their

Killing Bryce

penises -- (that is, assuming they weren't middle-aged and old-fashioned and sort of creepy, like Mo Katz, her mom's analyst). Cass supposed that when people got fat like her their sexiness got sort of squeezed up from their bodies to the region of the head, centralizing in either the brain or the tastebuds or both. In Cass it was both, but mostly brain. And these many, many various sorts of brain doctors made her feel sexier than she'd felt ever since she'd been town pump across the ocean so long ago. These doctors were men who paid attention to her brain, which was now as ticklish as genitals.

Cassie was seeing all these doctors because she had been feeling ill lately. For the past five years. The symptoms sometimes switched around or traded off one for another, but the one thing that had remained constant all throughout this half-decade was a muddy feeling, a feeling of muddiness in her brain. And a smart person can't help but develop a permanent, debilitating sort of anxiety when her brain is feeling muddy. Her brain's all a smart person's got, really.

As for other symptoms, well, sometimes Cassie felt that her pee was too strong: uncomfortable coming out and dark-looking, strong-smelling. When she was still in her body doctor phase she worried about sedimentation rate and about hypoglycemia and about various other physical disorders of a general life- and personality-altering sort. These diseases had been coming out in paperback form in the supermarkets lately.

She had her daddy bring her huge blocks of orange rubber cheese, which was supposed to have the same mollifying effect as the Aventyl that her mom

took. Dietary supplements and minerals she'd eaten by the cupfull, meal-sized dosages of pills.

But none of the plain old physical doctors could ever find anything wrong with her, yet. They told her she had better lose weight or else. Worse things would happen to her than even she, with her hypochondriacal, psychosomatic brain, could cook up. They ignored her complaints and suggested she was just fat and neurotic. So Cass had very calmly switched to the mind doctors.

She wasn't depressed or discouraged; she didn't care if it was all in her head or not; she just wanted the mud to go out of her brain and her pee.

Since Mo Katz was right in the middle of analysis with Gwen, he couldn't very well get too much involved with her daughter Cass. So he just had a few conversations with her to "steer her on the proper course." Cass sensed right off that Dr Katz, this creepy man to whom her mom was giving so much of herself (all of herself, really -- isn't that what psychoanalysis meant--?), this creepy, imperious doctor wasn't taking Cass's complaints too seriously either. Though he never once mentioned overworked imagination, he was still sort of flippant when he recommended that Cass go see some of the other sorts of psychologists. The glint behind his glasses told Cass, "Yes, since you are a basic, textbook hypochondriac of the mildest sort, I shall send you over to the tinkerers, the conjurers, the so-called brain physiologists among my colleagues. They'll entertain you with their gimmicks and take your parents' money until such time as you can find something else besides your fat body to worry about. Full-blown psychoanalysts such as myself are too important to

Killing Bryce

waste our time on the likes of you, young woman. So be off to the tinkers and let me get back to pondering your fascinating, complex, challenging, mad mother --(we're just getting to the good part, the crash of '29)--"

Cass received no broken heart from this rejection. Creepy old-fashioned psychiatrists and their creepy old-fashioned psychology were something she'd never been able to swallow anyway. They didn't seem to make her feel nearly as healthy and tingly as the newer, behaviorist kind of medicine did. Mostly, men like Katz seemed morbid and destructive. For instance, Cassie was sure that Freud (or at least the popular conception of him that the supposed experts like Mo Katz had allowed to take root) was partly the reason why her brother Sam was so snotty and secretly sad today.

When he was little, her brother was so full of unabashed, indiscriminate affection, and was so thrilled with words, that he always was making up nicknames, terms of endearment for everybody and everything around the house and yard. Cassie had lain by her bedroom window one series of midsummer afternoons and had counted over two dozen different pet-names that little Sammy had cooed to Zachariah their pet dog in the back yard. (This was before it got squished by a dumptruck.) "Honey-Bunny, Scummy-Bummy, Hummy-Drummy," etc.: they had just seemed to flow from his mouth like honey. And, even though Sam was only a couple of years younger than Cass, he had once tried to name her "my 'nother-Mother." And he was always wanting Cass to play the babyish bedroom and body games they'd played in the distant remembered days, the bathing-together days before they'd gotten so dangerously close to puberty. He was always being seductive and wanting to play "smooth backs"

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and "bumpy bed" and "tickle under armpits" and "jawbone on the bod." But Cass was by that time sophisticated enough to respond only with silence or even stern looks, because this was the sixties and everybody, even children, had some small smattering of "Freud," the "Freud" that came across on the psychodramas on tv in those days. Just enough "Freud" to make "'nother-Mother" seem like a dirty word, and to make skin something not to be smoothed in brotherly, sisterly ways, but only to be fucked, and then only with all sorts of old-fashioned psychological significance and weight attached.

If Cassie had been less corrupt, had responded more naturally to her brother, it might've been easier for him. He obviously had been that sort of boy who still needs a lot of touching and reassuring well into what is supposed to be the "latency" period. If Cass and Mom had only been sweeter to him, he might have turned out less snotty. Cass blamed — but, in the very next moment she always realized that this sort of retrograde regretting and blaming was just the sort of thing that creeps like Katz would want her to do; and she let it alone.

Better to think of her family as she had done sometimes back in Germany: as if it were a typical Henrik-Ibsenian cursed brood, the result of a bad blood mix, with absolutely no chance of fulfillment, no matter its nurture. Therefore no regrets.

In any case, Cass was glad that Katz sent her to the "tinkering" sort of head doctor. They were younger, handsomer, they had fascinating machines, and they thought about things like tissues and electricity and brain cells

Killing Bryce

and plain old nervy skin more than they thought about heady abstract things that you couldn't feel or smell or taste. Cass didn't have to get naked for them, so she could feel free to squinch herself up inside and get as wet as her underpants could absorb.

Like the time she was hypnotized. She was just sitting there, knowing full well that she'd been hypnotized, remembering every word that had been spoken during her trance, and knowing exactly what was going to happen at the very moment that the hypnotist worked the signal word into their conversation. Nevertheless, when at the signal her arm raised up high above her head, all by itself, uncontrollably, Cassie had gasped "Damn!" making it two syllables just like her little southern airmen had done back in Wiesbaden. All her black lovers put together couldn't've made her do something that -- eerie. And, even though two whole months of hypnosis hadn't enabled her to auto-suggest the muddiness away, still it made her feel nice for a long time. Here was something not boring to think about. And the doctor was cute and nice to her; he said she was a perfect subject. And just talking in civil tones to a young man, all alone in a room with him, made Cassie feel like a woman again -- for a while.

Or else there was the time she cooled the biofeedback machine. It was the first time she'd ever set foot inside the place where her handsome cousin Bryce Barkdull worked, the tacky dayglo-orange building with its hippy receptionist and staff, all wearing the tranquil, vapid stare of the alpha-awareness initiate; it was the first time Cassie had ever laid eyes on this particular type of oscilloscope -- (when she was little, she and WN7-EAP,

the nice poetic Jewish boy, had built from scratch their own larger, more cumbersome oscilloscope that worked with an orange needle, but she'd never seen this fancy kind up close, with the pencilbeam of white light); and it was the first time she'd ever felt electrodes and slippery conducting jelly applied to shaved parts of her body. But, nevertheless, the therapist barely had time to explain the nature of the game before Cass offhandedly made the glowing line jump exactly as it was supposed to jump. Pure alpha waves on the very first try! Everybody from all the surrounding offices gathered around, including the dope counselors, her muscly brown cousin among them. At will Cassie entertained her audience by screwing the pattern up. She tried to make the sort of abstract waltzy designs that she'd seen in that enormous old Disney cartoon "Fantasia" when she was little -- disembodied violin bows sort of swinging through space. She could almost approximate the boom-chug-chug rhythm with the glowing white line in its little circle of black glass. It was as easy as belching at will, as easy as making herself have an orgasm with no hands -- as a matter of fact, the same muscles seemed to be engaged (or disengaged) in all three activities. This biofeedback machine was as easy to fool as those lie detector tests they'd routinely made her take on the secretary job she'd had at Wiesbaden. With the polygraphs she deliberately made herself get shrill inside, so that it looked like she was lying in her teeth, even when they asked her if she was a boy or a girl. With biofeedback it was just the opposite: she just loosened everything and swam.

This time it was the therapist who said, "Damn." Totally flabbergasted,