Chapter 4
Joyce’s Multifarious Styles in *Ulysses*

In an obituary of Richard Rorty published in the *Los Angeles Times*, Crispin Sartwell disapprovingly cited Rorty’s maxim “Truth is what your contemporaries let you get away with saying” as evidence of relativism gone amok.1 Because Sartwell’s obituary appeared online, this particular iteration of this line was subsequently reprised in numerous articles and essays on Rorty, many approving, even though it is not actually something Rorty ever wrote. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* he did write, “The aim of all such explanations is to make truth something more that what Dewey called ‘warranted assertability’: more than what our peers will, *ceteris paribus*, let us get away with saying.”2 Rorty’s line is considerably more nuanced than Sartwell’s miscitation and, indeed, means almost the opposite of what Sartwell claims it does. However, the miscitation is in effect a self-fulfilling prophecy precisely in being re-cited by others: apparently, citing (or misciting) Rorty is what your contemporaries, or perhaps our peers, let you get away with saying.

The problem that Rorty identifies—which is glossed over in Sartwell’s miscitation in a nontrivial manner—is whether the truth can be *more than* what our peers will, *ceteris paribus*, let us get away with saying. Can there be a truth that withstands and survives the perpetuation of misreadings and misapprehensions? This question is central to Nietzsche’s epistemology. In his early essay “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” he asks, “What is truth?,” to which he answers:

A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, decorated and which, after lengthy use, seem firm, canonical and binding to a people: truths are illusions
that are no longer remembered as being illusions, metaphors that have
become worn and stripped of their sensuous force, coins that have lost
their design and are now considered only as metal and no longer as
coins (WEN, 257).

According to Nietzsche, truth is an illusion that we buy into, an illu-
sion that we forget is an illusion because of some kind of suspension
of disbelief. This is not to say that the truth is merely just what one
can get away with saying, rather that the truth might only be avail-
able to language in a manner that is complicated by rhetorical effects.3
Indeed, Nietzsche is being quite canny in his formulation, since he is not quite saying that “I know what the truth is; the truth is just a
metaphor, just a lie.” Instead he uses a numismatic metaphor to illus-
trate the concept that the truth is just a metaphor. Paul de Man points
out this apparent contradiction quite elegantly: “A text like On Truth
and Lie, although it presents itself legitimately as a demystification
of literary rhetoric remains entirely literary, rhetorical, and deceptive
itself.”4 No single perspective can be privileged automatically. This is
why Nietzsche promotes genealogy (or rather genealogies, since these
are, by necessity, plural) as an alternative to a monolithic historical
account. In the absence of an unequivocal truth, a multiplicity of per-
spectives and styles can allow for a “truth” that is more than simply
what one’s contemporaries (or peers) will allow or condone: “the more
affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different
eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our
‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be” (GM, III§12). The point
here is not to construct a functional equivalent of some objective
“God’s-eye-view,” but rather to concatenate multiple perspectives in
a parallactic manner in order to arrive at a more nuanced perspective,
a perspective that nonetheless remains fallible and provisional. The
“multifarious art of style” (EH, 265) is thus ethically charged, since
the acknowledging of multiple perspectives respects “truth” more
than any single overriding hypostatic dogma.

Nietzsche starts the Genealogy of Morals by condemning unnamed
“English psychologists” for positing their own particular cultural
norms—specifically those of utility—as universally true and norma-
tive (GM, I §§1–2).5 These English psychologists have thus hypo-
thesized their own idiosyncratic ethos. They believe their coin to be true
and universal. Such a “moral” view of history is represented in Ulysses
by the Unionist Mr. Deasy. Deasy is a stickler for officially sanc-
tioned symbolism, as is evinced with his savings box that divides each
denomination of coin appropriately (U, 2.217–20). For Deasy, truths