

OID, JOYCE, AND THE WILL TO TRANSGRESS

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Abstract: Ovid's Metamorphoses constitutes one of the major subtexts of James Joyce's writing, especially A Portrait and Ulysses. A Portrait opens with an epigraph quoted from Metamorphoses, and the mythopoetic legacy of Ovid as the epitome of the exiled writer is fulfilled at the end of the novel through Stephen Dedalus's self-transformation, who is metamorphosed from a quoted object into a quoting subject. The diary records of Stephen, which mark this transformation resulting in the birth of the writer, start with March 20 entry – Ovid's birthdate, and end with the hope of an exilic quest to "forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race". Apparently, Stephen's – and Joyce's – search for a new and reshaping iconoclastic form of art and existence is not merely an artistic concern, for this individual transformation coincides Ireland's metamorphosis from a colonized nation into a free state through bloody wars in the first decades of the 20th century. Such direct references to Ovid turn into symbolic ones in Ulysses in the form of the metamorphosed body of the polyphonic literary text overflowing with grotesque images and catalogues of names – both mythic and historical – and finally, the use of myth turns into a tool for a demythologizing act that transforms and liberates the static perceptions of history, identity and language specifically in the Irish context.