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Ovidian Art and Incest in *The House of Yes*

In one scene, Jackie O. adjusts her pink Chanel suit and matching pill-box hat. waiflike in her aloneness. In another, a string of pearls is the perfect complement to her black velvet dress and her velvety black bob. Back in her pink suit, she fires a gun at her brother who is waving like President Kennedy, riding in a convertible. Our Jackie O. is not the first-widow of the United States, but rather a character played by Parker Posey in the 1997 black comedy, *The House of Yes*, directed and written by Mark Waters, after a Wendy McLeod play. The film evokes the Roman world explicitly, with early passing references to Julius Caesar and Lucretius. This paper shows how reading Ovid, and his incestuous story of Byblis and Caunus from *Metamorphoses* 9, enriches the viewing of Waters' film.

The story of Jackie O and Marty follows the basic plot of Byblis and Caunus. A girl is filled with desire for her twin brother and makes determined attempts to win his love. Eventually she proves unsuccessful, and the brother leaves home. Jackie O's story is complicated by her obsession with all things Kennedy. She and her twin brother Martin share a common first memory: the image of the president being shot and the horror of the first lady, recurring in film clip after film clip. This leads them, at the age of fourteen, to attend an Ides of March party dressed as the pair, the beginning of their frequent re-enactment of the scene together, as a prelude to incestuous love. The presence of the Kennedy family provides the mythological resonances for an American audience that Byblis herself invokes when pointing to Greek and Roman mythological *exempla* for her behavior.

The two tales are linked more profoundly still in their interest in the erotic potential of art, and especially art's capacity to achieve one's desires. In *Metamorphoses*, a written text, Byblis becomes a reader and writer of Elegy. The bulk of her tale is an Elegy she composes in hopes of winning her brother's love. She follows all the major conventions of the genre, including specific allusions to Catullus and Ovid's erotic work. She is ultimately unsuccessful, however, and her horrified brother runs away.

Film is the medium of this modern re-working; and in *The House of Yes*, a movie, Jackie O. assiduously studies mythologized film and video clips from American media, and its bizarre obsessions, as an erotic handbook. When Marty begins to resist their incest, bringing home a girlfriend from college, Jackie O. costumes herself ritualistically, persuading her brother to participate in their erotic drama. Ultimately, though for different reasons, Jackie O fails, as Byblis had. Byblis' failure has been attributed to a failure, not of art, but of gender – a female is shown to be incapable as an agent of erotic elegy. The power of art is affirmed in a different way in the film. The conclusion comes about as a counter-narrative arises from a different source, providing a different world of ritual, equally strong. Thus the initial similarity between the two pieces, incest between twins, is deepened as both explore the powers of myth and art for erotic desire.