

Reading “Footloose” Through the Lens of “The Bacchae” and Mimetic Theory:
Euripides’ “The Bacchae”, Starring Ren McCormack as Dionysius, Directed by Rene Girard.

Rico McCahon (Rico.a.mccahon@dartmouth.edu) and Mark Reeder (mark@mareeder.com)

With reference to Rene Girard’s readings of mythology, an important effort in expanding mimetic theory is through the analysis of contemporary cultural artifacts. These analogues of myth, rendered banal by our temporal and cultural proximity, serve as powerful points of comparison between the archaic world and our own. This paper seeks to identify the film “Footloose” as an exemplar of modern coming-of-age tales expressing mimetic principles. Within the rivalries between the various characters, the contested female, and the overarching struggle over whether the town should participate in the festival known as Prom, “Footloose” is ripe for analysis by mimetic theory.

When considering “Footloose” as a cultural artifact with attention to its mimetic attributes, remarkable and wide-ranging similarities emerge between it and Euripides’ “The Bacchae”. These two products of culture exist with over 2000 years between; yet retain identical structures. Though both are fictional tales emerging from the tastes and preferences of their times, they identify universal anthropological themes. These include the tendency to cast blame on outsiders and newcomers and the community tactics of controlling rivalry by means of prohibitions.

This paper will address several themes relating “Footloose” and “The Bacchae”. First will be the problems of rivalry in modern coming-of-age tales, specifically in “Footloose”. Then through comparison with “The Bacchae”, by establishing parallel structures, “Footloose” draws all the lessons and warnings learned from Euripides into the modern world. Finally, by addressing the rare instances where the two works differ, particularly that of the final scene, we will conclude with demonstrating that “Footloose” displays a profound understanding of the Revelation of the Cross without itself being overtly aware.