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Leadership in William Shakespeare’s

Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar

By

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Leadership in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar*

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I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance upon the completion of this work.
I. Introduction

As a Leadership Studies and English double major at the University of Richmond, I have been constantly impressed by the ways in which the two majors complement one another. Literature and language seem to be both important tools through which one might study leadership as well as being essential to the functioning of leadership. Specifically, works of literature can serve as case studies for leadership, as the Hartwick Classic Leadership Cases have demonstrated. In addition, throughout history literature has functioned as a forum for the author to directly comment on the social and/or political questions of the day. Oftentimes these works have even led to social change, such as with Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Finally, leadership scholar Howard Gardner proposes that storytelling is essential to leadership. Leaders, Gardner explains, “achieve their effectiveness chiefly through the stories they relate” (9). In addition, Gardner feels that leaders must “embody those stories” (9), that is, live according to the stories that they present, their stories acting as a model for their behavior.

If literature is such a powerful teaching tool, and if it has potential to both critique and change society, and if story-telling is essential to the functioning of society, at least, to the leadership of society, what then, I began to wonder, are the common stories that individuals are exposed to in our society? That is, if we are being affected, even if unconsciously, by stories, what are those stories that we are telling, that are teaching us, that are changing how we relate to one another?

Immediately, I thought of the myths in our culture, such as George Washington’s cherry tree or Abraham Lincoln’s one room cabin, that definitely offer insight into our society and what we value in leadership. However, I recognized that I am more interested
in the written literature of our culture. I began to consider my exposure to literature as a high school student. I instantly remembered receiving my copy of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* on my first day of high school English class.

Educator John Wilson Swope explains that "*Romeo and Juliet* is usually the first experience that high school students have with Shakespeare" (218). Similarly, literary critic Hugh M. Richmond states that "students coming to know Shakespeare in the United States still do so primarily through two texts: *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth,*" and calls *Romeo and Juliet* the "third strong candidate for required Shakespearean reading" (254). Thus, considering the wide exposure of American high school students to these three works, I initially considered examining the relationship between leadership and *Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar,* and *Macbeth.* Ultimately, I decided to focus my study on *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* because the two plays were written during Queen Elizabeth’s reign whereas *Macbeth* was written under King James I’s rule, and therefore introduces a new set of political and social assumptions. Therefore, concentrating on *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar,* and considering that these two works are among the Shakespearean plays most commonly read, I was interested in learning 1) how these plays reflected Elizabethan conceptions of leadership, and 2) whether the plays offer lessons regarding leadership that are still appropriate today.

The body of my paper is divided into several sections. In the first section, I will briefly discuss the existing literature on leadership and Shakespeare and my methodology in determining aspects of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* that pertain to leadership. In Part II of my paper, I will provide an overview of the Elizabethan world-view and history, focusing primarily on perceptions of leadership, in order to provide a context for
discussion. Part III will be an evaluation of *Romeo and Juliet*. First I will analyze the play as to how it reflects Elizabethan concerns regarding leadership. Immediately following this section I will explore what insights *Romeo and Juliet* offer a modern audience. In Part IV, I will give *Julius Caesar* a similar treatment, first examining the play in relation to Elizabethan society followed by a section considering today's interpretations of the leadership in the play. Finally, Part V will contain my concluding remarks.

**Part I: Methodology and Literature Review**

As Lauren P. Fitzgerald comments in her Jepson School of Leadership Studies Senior Project, "Leadership and *King Lear,*" one of the greatest challenges in focusing on leadership themes in Shakespeare is "the language used in critical works" (2). Similar to Fitzgerald, in completing my elemental literature review, I discovered that rarely was the term, or forms of the term, "leadership" used by critics. Agreeing with Fitzgerald's methodology, I felt it was appropriate to then examine when Shakespeare uses variations of the word "leadership" in his texts.

John Bartlett’s *A Complete Concordance of Verbal Index to the Words, Phrases, and Passages in the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare* lists all of the words Shakespeare has used in his plays. I discovered that the term "lead" rarely occurs in the two plays that I was studying; the terms "leadership" and "leader" did not appear at all. When "lead" did appear, often it was used in the context of taking an individual somewhere:

"Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?"

(*Julius Caesar* I, i, 28).
However, occasionally "lead" would be used in a context that suggested a relationship between individuals in which one individual was being influenced or was dependent on the other:

"But let me tell ye, if ye should lead her in a fool's paradise ... it were a very gross kind of behavior" (Romeo and Juliet II, v, 165-166).

"Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius, That you would have me seek into myself For that which is not in me?" (Julius Caesar I, ii, 63-65).

Since leadership was not frequently discussed directly using contemporary terms of leadership, I decided to discover how scholars have interpreted Shakespeare's use of the term "lead".

Following Fitzgerald's methodology, I also turned to C.T. Onions' A Shakespeare Glossary for a "Shakespearean definition" of the terms "lead" and "leading". As Fitzgerald discovered, "lead" was defined as "to carry," "to take the first steps in (a dance with a person)," and "go forward" (Onions 152). "Leading" was defined as "to command," "direction," and "leadership, generalship" (Onions 153). No definition for "leadership" was given. Furthermore, of the three definitions of "lead" that Onions provides, none of them accurately describe the way in which the term "lead" is used in the above quotes from Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar. Thus, in order to be able to talk about leadership and the types of influence relationships found in the two plays, it is necessary to establish a definition of leadership.

In researching Elizabethan history and its world-view, I realized that one of the reasons that "leadership terms" do not appear in the text of Shakespeare's plays is due to the Elizabethan conception of the world. According to their vision, the monarchy was the
“leader” on earth, God the “leader” of heaven and the universe. Consequently, when Shakespeare intends to talk about leadership in concordance with the time in which he was writing he does not necessarily use the same terms and concepts as current leadership scholars. In addition, although leadership as defined by current scholars is apparent in the plays, it is apparent often only because of the way in which leadership is defined today.

That is, today’s broader definition of leadership encompasses many more behaviors and situations than did the Elizabethan definition of leadership. Hence, today’s scholars would find more examples of leadership in the plays than would an Elizabethan scholar.

Thus, in examining *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Julius Caesar* for their commentary on leadership, it was necessary for me to consider two definitions of leadership. First, I needed to consider how the plays commented on leadership according to the Elizabethans. Secondly, I needed to analyze the plays for what lessons they might unintentionally offer a modern day audience with its current conception of leadership.

The Elizabethan world-view and its different conceptions of leadership will be discussed in detail in section III of my paper. In deciding upon a definition of leadership for my discussion of leadership lessons for modern day audiences, it is necessary to consider the current debate regarding definitions of leadership. Stogdill’s review of leadership literature led him to comment that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (Stogdill qtd in Yukl 2). In “Leadership Ethics: Mapping the Territory,” Joanne B. Ciulla summarizes common definitions of leadership from the 1920s to the 1990s. For instance:

“1920s: [Leadership is] the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty and cooperation ...
1940s: Leadership is the result of an ability to persuade or direct men, apart from the prestige or power that comes from office or external circumstance …

1960s: [Leadership is] acts by a person which influence other persons in a shared direction …

1990s: Leadership is an influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.” (Ciulla 11-12).

Yuki explains that "most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization" (3). In order to have a working contemporary definition of leadership for the remainder of this paper, I will rely on Yuki’s broad definition of leadership as:

"influence processes affecting the interpretation of events for followers, the choice of objectives for the group or organization, the organization of work activities to accomplish the objectives, the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships and teamwork, and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization.” (Yuki 5)

Yuki’s definition is representative of current thinking on leadership because it incorporates the concepts of influence, cooperative relationships, motivation, and goals that are apparent in the other definitions. It is broad enough not to limit the analysis of the plays while focused enough to provide a framework to direct the study.

Once I had an appreciation both of the modern understanding of leadership and the Renaissance conception of leadership, it became much easier to discover critical works written on leadership in Shakespeare's works. That is, although the authors did not use the term "leadership" specifically, they would talk about, for example, the Renaissance fears of mob rule or the role of individual choices in Shakespeare’s plays.
Part II: Elizabethan history and world-view: On the brink of change

Scholars have provided two contrary descriptions of the Elizabethan era. On the one hand, influential writers such as E.M.W. Tillyard and his Shakespeare’s History Plays describe Elizabethan England in glowing terms as a unified and thriving age. Theodore Spencer, for instance, comments on the “remarkable unanimity with which all serious thinkers ... express themselves about man’s nature and his place in the world” (1). On the other hand, R. H. Wells feels that “the twenty-year period when Shakespeare wrote most of his plays was not one of intellectual uniformity, but a time of social unrest and political controversy” (1). Similarly, the Hartwick Classic Leadership Cases explain that “Elizabethan England was vigorous, dynamic, bold and forward looking, turning away from the vestiges of medievalism and working to create the modern world” (1).

These contrary depictions of the era suggest that Elizabethan England was experiencing a great change in its society and world-view. For instance, during her forty-five year reign, Queen Elizabeth raised England “from weakness, poverty, and bitter fraction to be comparatively united and undeniably a power among the nations” (Brown 28). In particular, England defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, making England the dominant naval force in the world. Yet, despite this nationalism and growth, England also suffered from an economic depression and outbreaks of the plague that often led to riots. In addition, the House of Commons began to gain more power, thus affecting the relationship between the monarchy and the parliament. Finally, even as the Elizabethans held a uniform world-view, thinkers such as Copernicus and Machiavelli were challenging this view. Thus, although on the surface situations such as Elizabeth’s long
reign suggest stability and unanimity, in fact England was very dynamic and not always triumphant.

The concept of the Great Chain of Being was the primary means through which the Elizabethans interpreted their universe. According to this theory, the universe is ordered through an enormous hierarchy. The top of the chain “represents perfection in the highest degree” (Suber 1). The being at the top of this chain is God. At the bottom of the chain is “the least possible perfection, which is nothingness” (Suber 1). Between these two extremes, beings are ranked along the chain according to their degree of perfection. For instance, man is placed higher than animals on the hierarchy. In addition, each being along the chain is also dependent or contingent upon the things that are higher in the chain (Suber 2). Only God, at the top of the chain is perfect and independent (Suber 2). Therefore, according to this philosophy, God is the cause of all things.

The concept of the God as the cause of all things is closely related to the Elizabethan conception of Providence. As defined by *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, “Providence” is the belief that God is “the power sustaining and guiding human destiny” (940). Douglas L. Peterson explains that Elizabethans recognized Providence as working in two different ways in order to achieve its ends: the “ordinary and open” way and the “obscure” way (313). The “ordinary and open” way is “the operation of natural law” (Thomas Brown qtd in Peterson 313). The “obscure way,” Peterson explains, is often misinterpreted by man as the workings of fortune (313). That is, man interprets events as happening by chance, when in fact Providence is working in a secret or “obscure” way (Thomas Brown qtd in Peterson 313). However, Peterson emphasizes “that the stars could influence though not directly determine choice is
common Renaissance doctrine” (308). Elizabethans believed that although God has specific ends He wants achieved, man has some control over the way in which these ends are met.

The frame of the Great Chain of Being and the workings of Providence shaped the way in which Elizabethans looked at government and leadership. Although Elizabethans might have disagreed on the particulars of political theory, James Emerson Philips, Jr. argues that all political theorists began from a common vision of the state. They envisioned a state was established by God, designed for the common good, governed by a sovereign authority, and composed of ranks and degrees, each with a task that contributed to the whole (Philips 20).

It is imperative to understand the inequality inherent in Elizabethan society. Although towards the end of Elizabeth’s reign the House of Commons began to acquire more power, democracy was not a form of government that was seen as viable or desirable. The people were viewed as indecisive and “not to be trusted with political power” (Wells 6). As Homily X, published in 1547 explains:

“All mightie God hath created and appointed all thinges, in heave, yearth, and waters, in a most excellent and perfect order. In the heaven he hath appointed distinct order and states of archangelles and Angels. In yearth he hath assigned kynges, princes, with other governors under them, all in good and necessary order.” (Certayne Sermons or Homilies, qtd in Phillips, 78-79)

Thus, the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being is transposed upon the world of government, with those beings of higher ranking ruling over those of lesser ranking.

Renaissance theorists further argued that since mankind’s needs are so diverse, “it would be impossible for each man to do all these things efficiently and perfectly for himself, or for one man to do them for all” (Philips 80). Consequently, God endowed
men with different talents "designed to satisfy a particular requirement not only for himself but for his fellows, who meantime are exercising their special gifts to fill other needs for him" (Phillips 80). Thus, all contribute to the functioning of the state. If one rank failed to fulfill its role, the state would fall into disorder. Once again, the concepts of the Great Chain of Being are transferred to the idea of governing, for all beings on the chain are dependent upon one another, as in the functioning of the state.

The political and social inequalities between individuals also affected the Elizabethan conception of honor and nobility. True nobility was defined as having three parts. First, it consisted of virtue and moral worth, which was "manifested by undertaking lofty enterprises, civil or military, in the service of the state" (Watson 77). In order to be considered noble, one must fulfill his duty to the state, thus emphasizing the concept of functional social stratification. Next, nobility consisted of noble blood or ancestry. Third, true nobility included titles acquired by "accomplishment of deeds of outstanding public service" (Watson 77). Once again, this qualification emphasizes state service and its relationship to degree and rank. Consequently, due to the social stratification, the aristocracy obviously contained more honor and nobility than the lower classes, while the monarchy was "politically and morally supreme" (Watson 82).

Since general consensus existed regarding the structure of the state, it was left to Elizabethan thinkers to determine or instruct the nature of the ideal ruler. The description of the ideal ruler typically involved the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, as defined by Cicero's *Offices* (Watson 95). Wells explains that Desiderius Erasmus's *The Education of a Christian Prince* was one of the most influential Renaissance treaties on kingship (62).
Erasmus describes the ideal prince as one who is the epitome of morality. In particular, Lester K. Born summarizes the characteristics Erasmus feels a prince should have: "wisdom and integrity, continence and clemency, devotion to his people, self-restraint, interest in truth and liberty, freedom from the vices of cruelty and pride, and the careful avoidance of flatterers" (13). In concordance with the heavy religious influence of the Great Chain of Being and Providence world-view, Erasmus emphasizes that a prince is to be a Christian prince (152). "The story of Christ" must be foremost in the prince's thoughts (Erasmus 148). Erasmus explains that a prince should follow God's example and "cast aside all personal motives, and use only reason and judgement" (159). Similarly, a true prince is concerned with the matters of the state rather than his own interests, whereas a tyrant is merely concerned with his own benefit (Erasmus 161).

Although it is true that the Elizabethan conception of the universe, the state, and the monarchy was fairly uniform, as has been mentioned, the Elizabethan era was on the brink of change. For example, in 1532, Niccolo Machiavelli published *The Prince*. Unlike Erasmus, who was concerned with instructing an individual on how to become a moral Christian prince, Machiavelli offered a more pragmatic approach to leadership. Machiavelli explains that in order for a prince to maintain his reign, he must "learn to be able not to be good and to use this and not use it according to necessity" (61). Machiavelli suggests that such an approach is necessary because "if one considers everything well, one will find something appears to be virtue, which if pursued would be one's ruin, and something else appears to be vice, which if pursued results in one's security and well-being" (62). Furthermore, whereas Erasmus advocated that a prince must be wise, honest, selfless and free of cruelty, Machiavelli proposes that it is not
necessary to have these qualities, but rather, only that one appears to have them (Machiavelli 70). He insists that a prince cannot consistently behave according to these virtues because he is “often under a necessity, to maintain his state, of acting against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion” and thus must know how to “depart from good” when “forced by necessity” (Machiavelli 70).

At first *The Prince* met with little attention, but then public opinion exploded. The pragmatic approach to leadership that Machiavelli advocated was opposed to the Providence/Great Chain of Being ideology around which Elizabethans had structured their society. In suggesting that it was necessary for a prince not to be a pillar of virtue, Machiavelli disrupted the concept that the prince was higher on the moral hierarchy that ordered the universe, and thus threatened the existence of the hierarchy. If the hierarchy did not exist, then man was, in fact, not responsible to the universe, for a moral chain of being did not determine his actions. Consequently, Machiavelli was viewed by Elizabethans as a “exponent of a villainous, aesthetical tyranny” (Phillips 31). Similarly, Spencer explains that Machiavelli was seen as the “embodiment of human villainy” (44). However, although Phillips may be correct that Elizabethans either misinterpreted or did not adhere to Machiavelli's ideas (32), their violent rejection of them is significant, for it indicates that the Elizabethans were at least initially fearful of anything that might threaten their stable conception of the world.

However, Machiavelli was not alone in testing the foundation upon which society was built. Other conceptions of the nature of man and the universe were similarly beginning to threaten the Elizabethan world-view. The Copernican theory was first published in 1543, and like Machiavelli work, at first it received little attention. It was not
until 1610 that Galileo truly upset the system. Spencer explains that although Galileo was
too late to influence Shakespeare, the ideas were "merely a culmination" of "the
uneasiness and excitement" prevalent during the second half of the sixteenth century.
Thus, Shakespeare would have been aware of the simultaneous feelings of apprehension
and excitement.

Montaigne also questioned the hierarchical nature of the universe and man's place
in it. In 1569, Montaigne published a translation of Sabunde's *Natural Theology*, seeming
to justify the natural hierarchy. He then proceeded to criticize the text's ideas. Montaigne
provided multiple examples of the intelligence, rationality and morality of animals
(Spencer 36-37). Such descriptions implied that animals could also rise to a knowledge of
God, and, that "man himself is only another animal" (Spencer 36-37). If such a theory
were true, the natural hierarchy would not exist, nor would man's role as the necessary
governor of earth.

While Henry VIII's break with the Roman Catholic Church helped to centralize
royal authority and expand its control over religious matters, it also meant that
Protestantism needed to reshape the ideas of Christianity. Since Protestantism had
rejected the Catholic Church as fraudulent, it found itself wondering whether the
inherited ideas must also be questioned and perhaps rejected (Spencer 46). Furthermore,
Protestantism placed an emphasis on individual choice (Spencer 46). This idea, in a
sense, put pressure on the individual man whom heretofore had been assigned a role,
rank, and function by the church. Once more the hierarchy was threatened as man was
given the power of choice.
Finally, society was filled with uneasiness by the consequences of Queen Elizabeth’s personal choices. Elizabeth chose not to marry, thus there existed the question of her successor (Spencer 47). Coupled with this question was the public fear of political assassination. An assassination of the queen when no heir apparent existed would throw the state into turmoil.

The shifting trends in political and social philosophy and actions made the Elizabethan period a time rich for discussing ideas and debating the nature of society. The Elizabethans were grappling with serious issues and fears regarding the structure of their government and their society. Consequently, the writings of this time, in particular the plays of Shakespeare, are an arena in which these exciting ideas and their implications might be explored in more detail.

Part III: Romeo and Juliet

The introduction of ideas that threatened the traditional foundation of Elizabethan society particularly called into question the role of the individual in the universe and the nature of a good leader. In Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare reflects the debates occurring in society by embodying them in his central characters. In particular, Shakespeare explores whether Fate, Providence, or the individual controls one’s actions. Shakespeare also discusses what it means to be a good leader by portraying the character of Friar Lawrence through and Machiavellian lens and the character of Prince Escalus through the lens of Erasmus.

For the modern audiences, the questions that faced the Elizabethan audience are to some extent, still important. The individual must still consider who or what he/she allows to control his/her actions. In today’s world, which is wracked with so many
different types of conflict, it is also important to examine what it means to be a good leader and the role of a leader in these conflicts. It is especially important to notice that current conceptions of the role of a leader in conflict differ greatly from the conception held by the Elizabethan society. That is, to return to the original question of this paper, if literature is a powerful teaching tool and has the potential to both critique and change society, are the lessons being illustrated in Romeo and Juliet the lessons that modern audiences should be studying?

**The Elizabethan *Romeo and Juliet*: Personal Choice, Friar Lawrence and the Prince**

Shakespearean scholars do not typically see *Romeo and Juliet* as a commentary on leadership in the English Renaissance. However, critics have commented on the role of Providence versus fate versus choice in the play, the character of the Friar, and the depiction of Prince Escalus. Although on the surface none of these topics, save perhaps that of Prince Escalus, may seem to be related to leadership, each provides a commentary on or confirmation of the Renaissance conception of leadership.

In a sense, *Romeo and Juliet* embodies the struggle Elizabethans were engaged in between the traditional concepts of a) fortune, b) Providence and c) the new sense of self-consciousness and individualism brought on by the Reformation. It is typical for one reading *Romeo and Juliet* to ask who or what is ultimately responsible for the deaths of all the young people in the play. For instance, one might point to a sequence of events at the end of the play such as the letter failing to be delivered or Juliet waking just moments after Romeo's death and declare that these incidents are examples of coincidence or chance. In other words, there was no one controlling these events and they are tragic because none of the characters had the power to prevent them.
One might also suggest, as Douglas L. Peterson does, that these events are not the mere working of fortune, but rather, are the results of Providence. Peterson explains that "the stars could influence though not directly determine choice is common Renaissance doctrine" (308). Furthermore, Providence uses the stars "as the agency through which its determination will be effected" (308). According to Peterson, Providence had decreed that Romeo and Juliet’s love would be means through which the Capulet-Montague feud would be resolved (310). However, while this decree is "irrevocable," "how the decree is fulfilled – whether order will be restored through the normal operation of the laws of nature or through violence, retribution and purgation – will be up to them" (Peterson 310). Thus, Peterson suggests, that Romeo and Juliet partially control their fate because they choose to ignore the warnings from Providence, such as Romeo’s dream of "untimely death" (I, iv, 111) (Peterson 310). Observing these warnings and remaining attuned to Providence would have prevented the tragedy.

One could also argue that in fact that the characters carry all of the responsibility for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet and the other young people in the play. For instance, Romeo consciously disobeys Prince Escalus and returns to Verona after being banished. Friar Lawrence, an elder in the Church, consciously lies to the Capulets about Juliet’s death, thus missing an opportunity at intervention. Although Tybalt fatally wounds Mercutio, Mercutio knowingly provoked Tybalt into dueling by repeatedly insulting him. In each instance, the characters were presented with several options from which they picked a particular course of action.

Rather than advocating that an individual has complete freedom of choice or that Providence guides one’s actions or even that Fate controls everything one does,
Shakespeare manages to capture the three ideologies at play in *Romeo and Juliet* just as they were in Elizabethan society. For instance, Romeo battles with the concept of Providence versus individual choice. Part of him wants to take seriously his dream of death in Act I, scene iv. However, later, when he hears of Juliet’s death, rather than trusting in Providence, Romeo cries out “Then I defy you, stars!” (V, i. 24), thus asserting his desire to have control over his life and the events that shape it. Similarly, Juliet begs Fortune to “be fickle” and send Romeo back from exile (III, v, 60-63), indicating a belief that Fate controls events. Yet, Juliet’s initial decision to commit suicide when Romeo is banished (IV, i) suggests that Juliet feels that she can take control over her life. Suicide was in such opposition to Christian tenets that Juliet’s declarations that she will commit suicide indicates that she has little regard for God’s decrees.

The struggle that the both the characters in the play and the individuals in Elizabethan England were experiencing has tremendous implications for leadership. If Fortune controls all events, there is no opportunity to act independently, no way to avoid the plans that Fate has in mind. Perhaps the *Oedipus Rex* series is the most well-know example of the attempts of one man to repeatedly defy fate only to find himself enacting the very conditions he tried to avoid. In such a case, as leader one can only be reactionary, rather than being able to perform proactively. One only has the power to live the life that fate has decreed. Living according to such a mentality would be an extremely frustrating situation in which to live and lead, for one would feel as though one were a puppet, unable to assert control over one’s own life or change conditions for the betterment of society.
If Providence controls life, that is, if God has a plan for everything but individuals retain some power over how the plan is achieved, the freedom to act exists to some extent. Transitorily, leaders and followers have more control over the events affecting their lives. For instance, the king may have been granted the throne by Providence (i.e. the divine right of kings), however the king has the power to choose how to behave within this role. Erasmus, for example, was very concerned with insuring that the king would act as a Christian king. However, although the ideology of Providence grants some control to individuals, others are still left powerless. For instance, followers have less of an opportunity to challenge authority, for in doing so they would be challenging the decree of God and thus would be blasphemers.

Yet, if Providence had no greater plan and fate did not rule the universe, but rather, individual choice was the main ordering principle, the Elizabethan world-view was severely threatened. The power to make decisions granted the individual’s incredible freedom. First, it meant that the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being was not necessarily valid, for individuals were no longer dependent or contingent upon the higher orders. Consequently, heads of government would lose power over their “lesser” subjects. Similarly, if Providence’s divine right did not exist, one could challenge the authority of ruling bodies. Finally, it suggests that both followers and leaders are in the position to make decisions, for all individuals have the opportunity to assert control over their lives and events. Such a concept was vastly different than the Elizabethan conception of a socially and morally stratified state in which each individual was only capable of fulfilling his ordained role.
Just as the debate of the role of the individual in society was calling into question the monarchy’s authority and its role as leader, the religious debates during the Elizabethan era were questioning the Church’s authority and its role as leader in society. Although the Protestant Reformation was born in November 1517, when Luther nailed his theses to the church door in Wittenberg, the Reformation did not begin in England until Henry VIII declared himself Supreme Head of the English Church. James C. Bryant states that consequently, during Shakespeare’s time, England was “particularly hostile to friars and other representatives of Roman Catholicism” (322). When *Romeo and Juliet* was written in 1595, the English audience would have been indoctrinated with years of propaganda leading them to consider any Roman Catholic sentiment as “a political threat to England” (Bryant 322). Consequently, it is important to examine the role of Friar Lawrence in light of Elizabethan society’s challenge of the authority Roman Catholic Church, rather than to simply classify him as a well-meaning old man, as is often the case.

Bryant’s analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* lead him to the conclusion that Friar Lawrence is corrupt, or at the very least, ineffectual as a leader. Consequently, as a representative of the Church, Friar Lawrence reveals that the Church is fraudulent and incompetent as a leader of society. For instance, Bryant reveals that Friar Lawrence blatantly disregards the canon law of the church in several instances. Lawrence does not offer Romeo and Juliet premarital advice, “nor does he explain the obligations attendant upon the sacrament of marriage” (Bryant 328). Even though Lawrence recognizes that such passionate and hurried proceedings are sure to “have violent ends,” he agrees to “make short work” and quickly marry the young lovers (II, v, 9, 35). In doing so,
Lawrence not only goes against his better judgement that the marriage is too hasty, but speeds up the process by not offering the traditional counseling and explanations of the sacrament.

According to Bryant’s research, Lawrence also goes against the Anglican and Roman Catholic canons forbidding secret marriages (328). Furthermore, Bryant explains that to marry minors without parental consent was “considered a serious offence, incurring a penalty of suspension from clerical duties up to three years” (328). At thirteen years old, Juliet is at least two years younger than the minimum legal age (Bryant 329).

In addition to breaking canonical law, Friar Lawrence convinces Juliet to deceive her parents (Bryant 329). Lawrence initiates the plan for Juliet to stage her death (IV. i, 90-120). Lawrence also makes it appear honorable for Juliet to be committing this deceit by telling her that only “inconstant toy”, that is a “capricious change of mind”, or “womanish fear” will prevent her from being valorous and drinking the liquor (IV, i, 119-120, Evans 1085, n 119). Finally, Lawrence lies to the Capulets, continuing the charade of Juliet’s death, calling her a corpse, and making funeral arrangements (IV, v, 65-83). This deception is particularly noteworthy due to the influence of Erasmus’ *The Education of a Christian Prince* in society. Leaders were held to a higher moral standard than the general populace. Shakespeare presents Friar Lawrence, a man who should be considered a leader in the church and community due to his position as a friar, as corrupt and encouraging corruption in others. The implication is that Friar Lawrence represents similar leaders in the Catholic Church that are not fulfilling their roles as moral leaders of the community.
It is possible that Shakespeare does more than simply present Friar Lawrence as corrupt. In fact, Friar Lawrence seems to embody the Elizabethan public’s misinterpretation of Machiavelli. Many readers of Machiavelli misinterpreted the text as advocating a selfish, cruel and tyrannous approach to leadership in which the means always justified the ends. Bryant explains that Lawrence continues to justify the means with the ends, no matter how the means may violate social, civil, and canonic law (325). For instance, although Lawrence chides Romeo for so quickly forgetting Rosaline, he agrees to marry Romeo and Juliet because he recognizes that “this alliance may so happy prove / To turn your households’ rancor to pure love” (II, iii, 91-92). It could be suggested that the Friar justifies his breaking of the canonic law to marry Romeo and Juliet because of the potential end, that is, peace, that marriage might create. Furthermore, it may be argued that the Friar is only concerned with his own political ambitions. That is, the Friar rationalizes the deception of the Capulets on the basis that when peace is achieved, he will be rewarded as having masterminded the plan. Evidence for this is in the Friar’s deliberate decision not to reveal the love affair to the families as well as his behavior when the plan fails. When the Friar discovers the bodies of Paris and Romeo, he encourages Juliet to run away, and runs away himself when he hears the watch coming (V, iii, 159). Rather than remaining to take responsibility for his role in the deaths, the Friar flees, abandoning Juliet in the tomb. Furthermore, Lawrence tries to extricate himself from any guilt when explaining his role in the tragedy to Prince Escalus. For instance, states that he stands before the Prince “both to impeach and purge / [Him]self condemned and [him]self excus’d” from the murders (V, iii, 226-227). No longer able to appear as the great peacemaker, the Friar is only concerned for his own
safety. In identifying Friar Lawrence with the "villainous" Machiavelli, his corruption and flaws as a church leader are further emphasized.

Although current leadership scholars may also dismiss Prince Escalus, ruler of Verona, as an ineffectual, although not corrupt, leader of his community, by Elizabethan standards Escalus is portrayed as successfully fulfilling his role. As the Prince of Verona, Escalus is at the top of the social-political hierarchy, and metaphorically he is the head of the state-body, governing the rest. Shakespeare establishes Escalus as the head, rather than Capulet or Montague, with several different techniques. First, and most obviously, Escalus is a prince. Thus, the Elizabethan audience would have automatically assumed that Escalus is the leader of Verona, for such an assumption coincides with their understanding of the Great Chain of Being. Next, as Barry B. Adams discusses, Prince Escalus is given the first long speech within the body of the play (I, i, 81-103) (Adams 33). In giving the Prince the first speech, Shakespeare is asserting Escalus' prominence and importance. Furthermore, when Escalus enters, the brawl stops (Adams 34). Similarly, the Prince's appearance at the scene of Tybalt's and Mercutio's deaths stops the confusion then, and his appearance at the end of Act V reveals the intricacies of Romeo and Juliet's love affair and their deaths. Thus, the ability of the Prince's mere presence to stop brawls and confusion establishes the power of his authority. Similarly, the mere mention of Prince Escalus' name is sufficient for a mere citizen to use to command Benvolio to follow him after Tybalt's death (III, i, 139-140). Finally, when Escalus speaks in the first scene, he does so without stopping to consult or question the Montagues, Capulets, or the individuals involved in the fray. Escalus is able to see the
facts of the case for himself and presents his decree without providing his audience with a chance to question or criticize it. Escalus’ words stand on their own authority.

The feud between the Montagues and the Capulets threatens to throw the state into chaos and prevent it from working as a whole. Consequently, as early as the first scene the audience witnesses Escalus asserting his authority to ensure that the hierarchy is not destroyed. He denounces the unnaturalness of the feud, which has “disturb’d the quiet of the streets, / And made Verona’s ancient citizens / Cast by their grave beseeming ornaments / To wield old partisans” (I, i, 91-94). That is, the conflict has caused even the elders of Verona to put aside the natural accessories of their age, such as staffs, in favor of swords, accessories that are inappropriate for their age. Escalus also asserts his authority by establishing a punishment if anyone dares to threaten the peace of the state and the hierarchy again. The severity of the punishment indicates not only Escalus’ power, but also the seriousness of his intent to keep the social-political hierarchy intact.

Finally, Escalus acts in accordance with Erasmus’ instructions on the behavior of a Christian prince. For example, one could argue that Escalus is prudent because he decrees that the next individual to start the feud will lose their life. He also is rational enough to see that there is more sense in banishing Romeo, than in causing the death of yet another young man. Escalus is also his own harshest critic, as Erasmus recommends. For instance, Escalus criticizes himself for “winking” at the feud, rather than taking a more active stance in resolving the conflict between the families (V, iii, 294). The measures that Escalus takes to stop the feud as well as his remorse at failing to do so would lead the Elizabethan audiences to view Escalus as a fulfilling his role as good Christian prince.
Thus, in reading *Romeo and Juliet* while keeping in mind the debates occurring in Elizabethan society, the reader can see that Shakespeare juxtaposes the morally corrupt and ineffectual “Machiavellian” leadership of the Friar with Prince Escalus as embodying the Christian leadership advocated by Erasmus. In placing these two models side by side, Shakespeare appears to prefer the leadership of Prince Escalus over that of Friar Lawrence, for he is a much harsher critic of the failings of the Friar than of the failure of the Prince to prevent the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare also puts into contention the concepts of Fortune, Providence, and individual choice throughout the play. It is possible to interpret the play as though each of the three ideologies are the guiding force in the play, thus I would suggest that Shakespeare was mirroring the debate occurring in society, rather than supporting a particular approach. Both the question of what it means to be a good leader and the issue of an individual’s amount of control over his/her own actions are pertinent to modern audiences, although a current interpretation of Shakespeare’s characters are often very different.

**Modern Implications for *Romeo and Juliet***

Over the centuries, political, social, and religious ideologies have changed dramatically from those of the late sixteenth century English Renaissance. Nevertheless, the works of Shakespeare continue to provide a multitude of lessons and insights into human nature and the way individuals interact. In fact, with the advent of social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and leadership studies, it is possible to understand Shakespeare’s texts from a new perspective.
Although the issues in *Romeo and Juliet* that were pertinent for an Elizabethan audience are still important to today's audiences, these issues are from a slightly different perspective. For the modern audience, it is important to look at *Romeo and Juliet* and the lessons it offers about conflict. Within this, the reader can focus on the role that the individual choice plays in creating or preventing conflict and the ideal behavior of a leader in a conflict situation.

William R. Cupach and Daniel J. Canary explain that conflict is "a natural feature of the human condition" (xv). Richard Hughes, Robert Ginnet, and Gordon Curphy cite research stating that supervisors and middle-level managers spend over 25 percent of their time dealing with conflict (363). Furthermore, as Brian Muldoon suggests, today global democratization has created dangerous conflicts worldwide that our old institutions haven't the resources to resolve (8-9). Conflict is omnipresent, thus it is necessary to have the capacities to understand and work with it without allowing it to be destructive.

The Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* begins by describing "Two households, both alike in dignity. / In fair Verona, where we lay our scene, / From ancient grudge break into new mutiny, / Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean" (Prologue 1-4). This passage is significant because it begins by emphasizing the similarities between the Capulets and the Montagues. In addition, it mentions that the conflict between the two families is an "ancient grudge" (Prologue 5). Muldoon explains that "conflict becomes difficult to manage when parties direct all their attention at one another—as if 'the other side' was the problem" (8). The emphasis on the similarity of the two houses suggests that these families do not truly have the differences that prevent them from being
peaceful. Furthermore, the ancientness of the grudge suggests that the two families have been fighting for so long that neither remembers the original reason for feuding. For instance, even Capulet feels that “`tis not hard, I think, for men so old as we to keep the peace” (I, ii, 2-3). Yet, despite the admissions that the conflict should be resolved, in practice, neither of the parties seems to be able to give up the feud.

Harley Granville-Baker states that “if it were not for the servants ... who fight because they have always fought, and the Tybalts, who will quarrel about nothing sooner than not quarrel at all, it is a feud ripe for settling” (20). Although it is true that the conflict is ripe for settling, Granville-Barker fails to understand the complex issues underlying the conflict. Muldoon explains that “what sustains conflict, at its base, is passion” (18). Passion, Muldoon suggests, is created by a sense of loss, either actual or potential (20). The feud between the Montagues and Capulets is steeped in passion and a fear of loss. Of course, there is the obvious passion and the fear of the loss of one another that exists between the lovers Romeo and Juliet. However, in the larger picture of the feud, there is the fear of a loss of self-esteem. Muldoon explains that a loss of self-esteem can be so threatening that “any attempt to restore it can seem justifiable” (23). Similarly, James Gilligan suggests that shame is at the core of violence. That is, when individuals feel ashamed at trivial matters, perceive themselves as having no non-violent means for resolving these feelings, and do not possess the emotional capacities that inhibit violent impulses, these individuals will resort to violence in attempt to replace the feeling of shame with one of pride (Gilligan 111).

The first scene of Act I in *Romeo and Juliet* depicts a brawl between the servants of Capulet, Sampson and Gregory, and the servants of the Montagues, Abram and
Balthasar. Sampson initiates the quarrel by biting his thumb at Abram and Balthasar. Sampson states that such a gesture is a "disgrace to them if they bear it" (I. i. 43).

Similarly, Tybalt perceives Romeo's presence at the Capulet ball as a personal insult (I. v. 82). In both of these situations the individuals who are insulted do not perceive themselves as having any means other than violence for addressing their feelings of shame. For instance, the servants break out into a brawl while Tybalt is prepared to kill Romeo.

As has been mentioned, the individuals feel shame because their self-esteem has been attacked. It is important to realize that more is at stake than simply an individual's self-esteem. Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams suggest that individuals categorize themselves into human groups that serve as the basis of their identity. For instance, one might categorize himself as a man, as a Roman-Catholic, as a Montague. Hogg and Abrams argue that "social groups are inevitable because there are functional -- they fulfill individual and societal needs for order, structure, etc." (18).

At first glance it seems as though the world of the Capulets and Montagues is chaotic. In a sense, however, the two social groups of the families do fulfill needs for order and structure. Membership in either of the two families provides the individual with a role. There is also a sense of pride surrounding one's group identity. In fact, Ronald Fisher proposes that when individuals belong to a group and that group perceives a threat to its identity, feelings of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility increase (103-104). This occurs because if the group is destroyed, the sense of self-worth that one receives by being included in the group is also lost.
The importance of group identity can be seen in the opening brawl between the servants. Sampson taunts Abram, saying that he serves a better man than does Abram (l. i, 54-60). Similarly, Tybalt takes Romeo’s presence at the ball as personally as he does because of his high identification with the Capulets. For instance, Tybalt states that “by the stock and honor of my kin. To strike him dead I hold it not a sin” (l. v. 58-59). Tybalt feels that not only personal honor, but also the honor of his kin, is at stake.

Although it may be true that an individual is driven to protect his/her group- and self- identities, it is also important to recognize the element of choice. Earlier, it was discussed that a belief in Fate made it difficult to act proactively. Recognition that one can assert control through choice gives the individual the power to do more than simply react to events. In particular, one can act to prevent or resolve conflict. For example, Romeo and Juliet had the option of revealing their love affair multiple times. In Act II, scene iv, Romeo has the opportunity to tell Mercutio and Benvolio about Juliet. Later, Romeo chooses to play word games with Tybalt in an attempt to avoid a duel rather than be forthright. It is true that being forthright with Tybalt may be dangerous, for Tybalt is likely to still misinterpret Romeo’s intentions, but the fact that Romeo has told no one save Friar Lawrence is significant. Furthermore, Friar Lawrence repeatedly chooses a particular course of action over the one that is legal or responsible. For instance, he chooses to break the law by marrying Romeo and Juliet. As an elder member of the community, Friar Lawrence has the opportunity and, one could argue the responsibility, to alert the Prince or the two fathers about the love affair when Romeo is banished. Instead, he chooses to stage Juliet’s death, an option that is farfetched and dangerous.
Each of these examples argues the importance of carefully considering the implications of one's actions so as to better address conflict.

It also is important to examine the attempts of the formal leaders in *Romeo and Juliet* to address the conflict. The conflict in Romeo and Juliet is what Muldoon would define as "hot conflict." According to Muldoon, hot conflict usually provokes aggressive behavior and "usually cannot be resolved through direct confrontation because reactive countermeasures simply prolong the cycle of reaction" (35). Instead of direct confrontation, one must use containment. Containment consists of creating order by setting parameters (Muldoon 39). One looks to contain a conflict so that it does not destroy everything in its path. (Muldoon 35).

Prince Escalus attempts containment by decreeing that, "If ever you disturb our streets again / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace" (I, i, 96-97). However, this decree does not attempt to create order, but rather, tries to assert control. Muldoon explains that there is a difference between order and control. The imposition of control tends to backfire because it is aggressive, sparking a reaction from the individuals controlled. Escalus attempts to control because his pronouncement is punitive: anyone disobeying him will die. In addition, although Escalus orders Capulet and Montague to visit him so as to "know our farther pleasure in this case" (I, i, 100-101), there is no evidence in the play that this conversation resulted in an alternative means of resolving their conflicts. After Tybalt and Mercutio is killed, rather than implementing containment then, Escalus continues the vicious cycle by not only banishing Romeo, but doing it for vengeful reasons. That is, Escalus states, "I have an interest in your hearts' proceeding, / My blood for your rude brawls doth lie a-bleeding; / But I'll amerce you with so strong a
fine / That you shall all repent the loss of mine” (III. i. 188-191). Mercutio was kinsman to Escalus. Therefore, rather than remaining objective, Escalus seeks revenge for Mercutio’s death by banishing Romeo, hoping to make the Montagues feel as devastated as does he. In acting revengeful himself, Escalus does not provide a behavior model for resolving conflict for the Montagues and Capulets to follow.

Just as Escalus serves as an ineffectual container and model for addressing conflict, Capulet’s attempts to contain the conflict are also fail. Although Capulet prevents Tybalt from attacking Romeo at the ball, Capulet does so by shaming Tybalt. Capulet insults Tybalt by stating, “You’ll be the man!” (I, v, 81), implying that Tybalt is a boy playing at being a man. In addition, Capulet calls Tybalt a “princox” (I, v, 86), which The Riverside Shakespeare defines as “an insolent boy” (Evans, 1066, n 86). Capulet is attacking Tybalt’s self esteem, which will lead to increased feelings of shame. Thus, rather than containing the conflict, Capulet escalates Tybalt’s feelings of shame, which he violently takes out on Mercutio and Romeo at the first opportunity (III, i).

Furthermore, as Coppelia Kahn points out, Capulet does not provide moral guidance for young Tybalt (338). That is, by addressing Tybalt with insults, Capulet does not provide Tybalt with an alternate way of behaving when faced with conflict. Tybalt acts violently because violence has been the only model of resolution he has seen.

Recalling Yukl’s definition of modern leadership, it is easy to recognize that Friar Lawrence, Capulet, and most importantly, Prince Escalus, fail to display successful leadership. It is most significant that Prince Escalus does not demonstrate leadership because as the formal leader of Verona, that is, the individual with the official title of leadership, he has the most resources at his disposal to bring an end to the feud.
however, fails to successfully enlist support from either the Capulets or the Montagues to stop the feud as well as from any outside sources, such as Friar Lawrence or the other citizens of Verona. Furthermore, although he punishes the families for feuding, he does not give them any real motivation or reason for why they would want to end the feud. For instance, even his threat of the death penalty for the next individual caught fighting he lessens to banishment. Thus, although the Elizabethans may have interpreted Prince Escalus as the ideal Christian prince who did all that he could, modern readers are more critical of a portrayal of Escalus as the ideal leader. Rather, for today’s audiences, Romeo and Juliet provides a model for how one should not behave, rather than depicting a positive model of leadership. This difference is significant, for in presenting this text to young readers, it is important that they do not attempt to emulate Escalus, for such an approach would certainly fail in today’s society.

Part IV: Julius Caesar

Whereas Romeo and Juliet discusses the nature of the ideal leader, Julius Caesar raises questions about the ideal form of leadership. As discussed earlier, the changes occurring in Elizabethan society were calling into question the moral, social, and political hierarchy that had traditionally ordered the universe. In addition, an aging Queen Elizabeth was signaling the end of an era and a change in leadership. Consequently, in Julius Caesar Shakespeare examines several models of leadership for the entire society: mob rule, a triumvirate, and a monarchy. Shakespeare also uses the character of Brutus to depict the dilemma that potentially faces all good followers: what to do when a leader has set himself above the people?
Modern audiences can also appreciate the debate concerning the best form of government or leadership. However, the play also offers today’s readers a case study in self-deception. In Romeo and Juliet readers witnessed the importance of individual choices and their implications. Through the characters of Brutus and Caesar, Julius Caesar illustrates the necessity of a critical awareness of one’s environment in order to make well-informed decisions.

The Elizabethan Julius Caesar: Seeking a Viable Form of Leadership

King Henry VII’s attempt to restore England after one hundred years of war initiated a centralization of authority in the hands of the monarchy that was perpetuated by Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church and Elizabeth’s long reign. When Shakespeare wrote Julius Caesar in 1599, Elizabeth was over sixty-five years old and had been ruling for over forty years. Yet, Elizabeth had never married and produced an heir. Consequently, the country was very concerned about the status of the monarchy and the inevitable change of power that would occur when the aging queen died. As such, William and Barbara Rosen point out that it is important to remember that at this time Shakespeare wrote the tragedy of Julius Caesar, not the history of Julius Caesar (109). In doing so, they suggest that Shakespeare found in the turmoil following the death of the aging Caesar “some reflections of the horrors that could overtake his own country, and [saw] in the complexities of a power struggle the problems for his own government” (Rosen 109).

Despite the push of the House of Commons to have more control in the framing of policy during the end of Elizabeth’s reign, the concept of democracy was viewed as
neither possible nor desirable (Wells 6). A reflection of this sentiment can be seen in *Julius Caesar*. From the opening scenes of the play, the public is depicted as fickle and indecisive. For instance, the workers in Act I, scene i are celebrating Caesar's triumph over Pompey's sons. Murellus, a tribune, berates the workers, asking them to recall when they "climb'd up to walls and battlements, / To tow'rs and windows, yea, to chimney-tops ... To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome; / And when you saw his chariot but appear, / [had] you not made an universal shout" (I, i, 38-44). Not only are the workers inconsistent regarding whom they support, but they also celebrate the triumphs of Romans over Romans (Evans 1106, n 51). In doing so, they display a lack of loyalty to their fellow Romans.

The epitome of the public's unpredictability and irrationality is in their reaction to the speeches of Brutus and Antony and in the mob scene following the orations. In the opening of Act III, scene ii, the plebeians are demanding an explanation of Caesar's murder (III, ii, 1). By the end of Brutus' speech, the plebeians are chanting their support of Brutus, even so far as suggesting that Brutus replace Caesar (III, ii, 50-52). Antony's speech immediately follows Brutus' speech. Initially, the public defends Brutus, such as when the plebeians cry out "'Twere best he speak no harm of Brutus here!" and declare that they are "blest that Rome is rid of [Caesar]" (III, ii, 68-70). However, the public is easily swayed by Antony's skillful rhetoric. After a mere one-third of his entire funeral oration, that is, the first 35 line speech of four appeals to the public totaling 104 lines, the plebeians are declaring that Brutus has had great wrong done unto Caesar (III, ii, 108-109). Halfway through Antony's speech the plebeians are calling Brutus and the conspirators villains, murderers and traitors (III, ii, 153-155). By the end of Antony's
speech, the plebeians are rushing off to burn down the house of Brutus and run the conspirators out of Rome (III, ii, 230, 255, 268-269).

It is in the mob scene following the funeral orations, however, that the Elizabethan horror at power in the hands of the undisciplined lower classes becomes apparent. In Act III, scene iii, Cinna the poet is mistaken for Cinna the conspirator because they share the same name. Cinna protests that he is not Cinna the conspirator, but the plebeians simply declare, "It is no matter, his name's Cinna. Pluck his name out of his heart, and turn him going" (III, iii, 32-34). With the irrational rule of the mob, people lose their individuality: one Cinna is interchangeable with the next. Furthermore, under mob rule, there is no sense of the consequences of one's actions. That is, the plebeian orders that Cinna's name is to be taken from the man's heart, and then the poet sent on his way. Of course, such an action is impossible. Finally, at this point in the play, the verse breaks down into prose for this scene, emphasizing the lack of order and structure to the public rule.

Although the mob rule is dangerous, Shakespeare is also commenting that the rule of the triumvirate that follows is just as undesirable. Antony and Octavius begin their government by doling out revenge for Caesar's murder. In the first scene in which Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus are seen together the men are determining who will be executed, brutally and pragmatically agreeing to kill even their brothers and nephews (IV, i, 1-6). As soon as Lepidus exits, Antony and Octavius begin to discuss plans to render him as "the ass bears gold ... either led or driven, as we point the way" (IV, i, 21-23), and to later dispose of him when they have finished using him (IV, i, 25-27). The triumvirate is already lying and traitorous. In addition, in this first scene, Antony plans to have
Caesar's will changed, now that it has served its purpose (IV, i. 8-9). Despite his talk of his love for Rome, in reality Antony is manipulative and self-serving.

Hence, when provided with the unpredictable mob and the corrupt triumvirate as the two alternative models of government, the pseudo-monarchy represented by Caesar does appear to be the most desirable solution. Yet, even Caesar's pseudo-monarchy presents problems, primarily due to the nature of Caesar. Frank Kermode suggests that "Caesar was beginning to forget his mortality" (1104). To Elizabethan audiences, such behavior would have suggested that Caesar perceived himself to be higher on the Great Chain than he was actually ranked, thus potentially upsetting the order of the universe. Caesar's inflated self-concept makes him deny his weaknesses. For instance, Caesar is terribly concerned with denying that he is fearful. For instance, Caesar declares that "Danger knows full well / that Caesar is more dangerous than he. / We are two lions litter'd in one day, / And I am the elder and more terrible" (II, ii, 44-47). This bravado and desire to appear courageous in the eyes of the Senate leads Caesar to blindly go straight into the hands of the conspirators. Caesar also envisions himself as "constant as the northern star" (III, i, 60), although the audience has just witnessed Caesar waver several times in his decision to attend the Senate. Finally, Caesar is susceptible to flattery, a vice in leaders that both Erasmus and Machiavelli warn against (Erasmus 193, Machiavelli 93). Decius explains that through flattery he can sway Caesar to follow him to the Capitol (II, i, 202-211). Hence, it is dangerous that Caesar is susceptible for flattery for it enables others to influence his behavior and decisions. Caesar is therefore at risk to make decisions based on the desires of his advisors rather than making the wisest decisions.
Consequently, although Shakespeare might favor monarchy for its stability, he does recognize that it is dangerous if the king is not fit to be a leader of his people, that is, if he threatens to disrupt the order of the universe through his grandiose ideas or makes unwise decisions because he is influenced by corrupt advisors. Since England was about to experience a change in power, Shakespeare was concerned with not only the most effective form of government, but also the problems that might arise if a less than ideal leader was crowned after Elizabeth's death.

Brutus represents the noble Englishman that was about to face the change of power in Elizabethan England. Although modern audiences might interpret the character of Brutus differently, Elizabethans saw Brutus as embodying the ideals of the Renaissance society. Watson explains that Brutus was in accordance with the "Renaissance conception of nobility as exalted virtue" (175). Throughout the play, Brutus is referred to as noble and honorable. For instance, Cinna hopes that Cassius can "win the noble Brutus to our party," that is, the conspiracy (I, iii, 141). In fact, it is because Brutus is so noble that Cassius is able to convince him to join the conspiracy, by presenting it as a noble act on behalf of the Roman state (I, ii, 151-161). Brutus himself admits that he loves "the name of honor" more than he fears death (I, ii, 88-89). Finally, even Antony comments upon learning of Brutus' death that he was "the noblest Roman of them all" (V,v, 68).

It is necessary to recall the components of the Renaissance conception of honor and nobility. First and foremost, it was noble to undertake enterprises in the service of the state. Brutus explains to Cassius that he is willing to risk his life if "it be aught toward the general good" (I, ii, 85-89). He is desperately concerned that the assassination only
occur if done with the intention to serve the state. For instance, he warns the conspirators that “if these motives be weak, break of betimes” (II, i, 116). In fact, he wishes the assassination to appear as a sacrifice, not a butchering (II, i, 166). Finally, he explains to the public that he rose against Caesar not because he “lov’d Caesar less, but that [he] lov’d Rome more” (III, ii, 21-22).

Secondly, nobility required one to have noble blood or ancestry. One of the devices that Cassius uses to convince Brutus to join the conspiracy is to remind him of his noble ancestry. Brutus’ ancestor, Lucius Junius Brutus, was the leader of the “expulsion of the Tarquins and the establishment of the Roman republic” (Evans, 1108, n 159). Thus, Brutus has a heritage of nobility that fought to preserve the Roman state.

Finally, nobility consisted of having title acquired by fulfilling deeds of public service. Brutus has the title of Roman senator. Furthermore, one might consider Brutus’ title in the play to be “noble Brutus” since he is referred to as such throughout the play because of his reputation for service to the state.

According to Frank Kermode, “the death of Caesar gave and Elizabethan with a concern for politics plenty to think about” (1103). For although Brutus is characterized as having the same qualities as the English noble aristocracy, he did assassinate, for all intents and purposes, a king. Yet, as Kermode points out, Shakespeare makes an effort to distinguish Brutus’ reasons for killing Caesar from Cassius’ jealous reasons (1103). Furthermore, Kermode explains that “in Shakespeare’s day there was growth of interest in the problem of defining royal status” (1104). Caesar is not yet a king, for certain legitimizing ceremonies did not take place (Kermode 1104). Therefore, technically, Brutus still had the “right of resistance” (Kermode 1104). However, the assassination of
Caesar leads not only to the terror of the mob, but years of civil war. Thus, it appears as though Brutus had no right to rebel against Caesar (Kermode 1104).

Therefore, although Shakespeare does depict Brutus as noble, Kermode argues that Shakespeare did not consider his act of assassination a “right one” (1104). Rather, Shakespeare uses Brutus to simply illustrate the dilemma potentially facing an Englishman, “when a king ... might set himself above Parliament” and forget his mortality (Kermode 1104). In fact, if Kermode is correct in his interpretation, Shakespeare was anticipating the leadership difficulties of King James, when he did, in fact, view himself as above Parliament. However, although Shakespeare depicts the assassination attempt as an unsuccessful means of resolving the problem, Shakespeare does not offer a viable solution to the “Englishman’s dilemma.” Just as Shakespeare merely presents the debate of Providence versus Fortune versus individual choice in *Romeo and Juliet* without advocating an ideology, in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare only depicts undesirable solutions, and fails to provide a positive model for society.

**Modern Implications for *Julius Caesar***

As discussed in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is important to realize that individuals have the responsibility to act proactively, especially when engaged in conflict. In *Julius Caesar*, the character of Brutus is faced with an inner conflict. In order to act proactively in his conflict, Brutus needs to be able to make well-informed decisions.

However, benefiting from the lens of Freud, modern readers may interpret Brutus as a “master of self-deception” (McNeir 9) and recognize that his decisions are not well-informed. According to L.C. Knights, Brutus, in trying to separate his personal feelings
for Caesar from his deliberations, actually represses feelings that “unacknowledged … influence simply by distorting” (52). That is, he deceives himself regarding the motives and himself and the rest of the conspiracy, and thus errs in deciding to join the conspiracy.

Early in the play Cassius urges Brutus to join the conspiracy. Brutus admits to Cassius that he has “some aim” to do what Cassius would urge him to do (1. ii. 163). Later, however, Brutus complains that he has not slept “since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar” (1. i. 61-62). Brutus is deceiving himself regarding his own desires by placing the initiation of the idea with Cassius. By separating himself from the initiation of the idea, Brutus is able to separate himself from responsibility. That is, he can view himself as answering the pleas of the state, rather than have initiated the idea out of his own fears and jealousy.

Evidence that Brutus is clouded in his judgment lies in his soliloquy of Act II, scene i. In his monologue, Brutus repeatedly qualifies his statements about Caesar with the phrase “he may”. For instance, Brutus states that if crowned king, Caesar’s nature “might change;” he “may do danger;” and he may “scorn the base degrees,“ through which he rose (11, i, 13,17, 26). The term “may” suggests that none of these behaviors are certain, nor are any of them things that Caesar has already done and of which he might be accused. Therefore, Brutus is making his decision very subjectively.

Brutus is also deceiving himself by thinking that the other conspirators are acting selflessly in the assassination of Caesar. The audience has the privileged information that Cassius has been manipulating Brutus by flattering his honor and planting letters from the public. Yet, if Brutus was not willing to be deceived, he would recognize the envy
apparent in statements of Cassius such as: "And this man [Caesar] / Is now become a god, and Cassius is / A wretched creature" (I, ii, 115-117). Brutus, however, is so blinded in his judgement that he feels the conspirators do not need to take an oath because their purpose is so noble and their resolve united (II, i, 132-134).

Finally, it is apparent that Brutus has deceived himself regarding Mark Antony. First, Brutus declares that Antony is harmless, and thus he need not be assassinated (181-183). In addition, Brutus errs when he allows Antony to speak Caesar's funeral oration. Brutus is in error because he feels that the public will support their cause, particularly since he thinks he received letters pleading for such action. Furthermore, Brutus fools himself into thinking that he has more power than he does, emphasizing that he gives Antony leave to speak. In doing so, he does not appear to be generous, but rather, as though he is stepping into the role of Caesar granting favors; Brutus reenacting the behaviors he sought to murder. Brutus' self-deception is his downfall; each decision creating more chaos and leading to his death.

Brutus is not the only character that is self-deceiving in the play. Julius Caesar also has a tendency towards self-deception that is closely tied to his desire to present a different persona to the public than in his private home. For instance, during Senate, Caesar declares himself to be "as constant as the northern star" in his decisions (III, i, 60). Yet, in the previous act, the audience witnessed Caesar change his mind about attending Senate. Caesar decides to go to Senate because he does not want the senators to whisper that "Lo, Caesar is afraid," (II, ii, 101). Decius also explains Caesar claims he hates flatterers, yet is easily flattered (II, i, 207-208). Caesar is also convinced to go to Senate when Decius interprets Calphurnia's dream positively and by revealing that the
Senate plans on crowning Caesar (II, ii). Finally, in an attempt to keep up appearances as a king more concerned with matters of the state than those dealing with himself, he pushes aside Artemidorus’ letter (III, i, 6-8). Thus, in succumbing to flattery and his own desire for approval from the senators, Caesar blindly leads himself to death.

Both Caesar and Brutus make ill-informed decisions because they fail to critically examine themselves and their environment in order to understand better the context within which they make their decisions. Consequently, their decisions are biased and often influenced by personal motives or the wishes of others. They fail to recognize the implications that these choices will make in their personal lives (i.e., their deaths) and in the public sphere (i.e., mob rule and a reign of tyranny by the triumvirate). For modern audiences, Julius Caesar provides a valuable lesson about the importance of making well-informed decisions. Specifically, a leader must understand the context of his decision and the consequences of his actions. If a leader is, as Yukl’s definition suggests, in the position to influence a group’s “interpretation of events,” “the choice of objectives for the group,” “the organization of work activities to accomplish the objectives,” and “the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives,” (Yukl 5) failing to understand context and consequences is potentially very dangerous. As Julius Caesar demonstrates, Brutus’ ill-informed decisions led to the choice of the wrong objective for the group, Caesar’s assassination. In addition, the conspirators were motivated to assassinate Caesar based on personal rather than state reasons. Finally, Brutus was unable to offer the populace an “interpretation of the events” that withstood Antony’s interpretation, thus leaving the conspirators without the public’s support.
As with *Romeo and Juliet*, it is important to recognize that for the modern audience *Julius Caesar* provides a negative model of behavior. That is, readers must read critically in order to recognize that Brutus and Caesar a self-deceiving and that this leads to their downfall rather than simply the machinations of Antony or the conspirators. In addition, since Shakespeare does not offer a well-developed, self-aware character that can serve as a model, the reader must infer how such an individual would behave. Thus, without a careful reading of *Julius Caesar*, the modern audience is liable to miss the important lessons regarding leadership that the play offers.

**Part V: Conclusion**

The original question of this paper was if literature is a powerful teaching tool that has the potential to both critique and change society, and if story-telling is essential to the functioning of society, what are the common stories of our society that we are telling? In addition, what are these stories teaching us about how we relate to one another? The plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare were chosen as two “stories” that are common to our society on basis that these two plays are taught most frequently in American high schools, and thus a large percentage of people are exposed to these plays every year. Each play was then examined in the context of the society in which it was written as well as for the lessons it offers today’s readers.

In analyzing *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* with an understanding of the nature of Elizabethan society, it is apparent that the plays reflect the debates and questions that were being raised regarding leadership during that period. *Romeo and Juliet* portrays the debate between the three ideologies of Fortune, Providence, and
personal choice as ordering conceptions of the universe. Depending upon the ideology, the individual in society has more or less control over events and decisions that shape his/her life, with Fortune offering the least control and personal choice offering the most control. The more control an individual has, the more power he/she has to challenge authority and act proactively, rather than reactively in situations. The ability to act proactively means that the individual can create change and shape events, thus potentially leading to the betterment of one’s personal life and society. Specifically, the leader has more power to mobilize efforts towards acting proactively and creating change.

For modern audiences, *Romeo and Juliet* emphasizes the importance of individual decision making and acting proactively within a conflict situation. That is, one must take actively take steps towards a resolution of conflict. *Julius Caesar*, however, demonstrates that it is important to cultivate a critical awareness of one’s self and environment in order to make well-informed decisions. In leadership, such awareness is essential, for a leader and a group’s decisions can be disastrous if the full consequences of one’s actions are not considered.

In reading *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* it is also important to recognize the difference in the way an Elizabethan audience and a modern audience react to the two plays. Although Shakespeare’s plays have demonstrated themselves to appeal to audiences centuries after they were written, Shakespeare was writing within a certain time period, and his ideas are affected by that context. For instance, an Elizabethan audience recognizes Prince Escalus of *Romeo and Juliet* as demonstrating the characteristics of an ideal leader. Modern audiences, however, perceive Prince Escalus as an ineffective leader for failing to resolve the conflict between the Montagues and the
Capulet before it ended in the death of so many young people. Furthermore, while Elizabethan audiences characterized Friar Lawrence of Romeo and Juliet as being corrupt and having Machiavellian tendencies, many of today's audiences have a better understanding of Machiavelli and would not feel that Friar Lawrence was behaving according to Machiavelli's ideology. A similar difference in perspective occurs with Julius Caesar. Although Elizabethan audiences view Brutus as containing the noble qualities valued by Englishmen, modern readers recognize that Brutus is self-deluded and therefore errs in his judgement.

The difference in perspective between the context within which the plays were written and the context within which audiences read the plays today is critical to recognize if these plays are, in fact, imparting lessons. The different perspectives lead modern audiences to understand the plays as primarily offering negative models of leadership. That is, the plays depict what one should not do or the negative consequences for following a certain course of action. Although understanding negative models allows the reader to eliminate as options certain types of behavior, the reader is left without any suggestions as to how one creates positive consequences. Therefore, if Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar are to remain common stories in American society, it is recommended that these works be enhanced with a discussion of the negative models of leadership which the plays offer and alternative positive models of leadership that are not demonstrated in the texts. Literature can be a powerful teaching tool for understanding and teaching leadership as long as the texts are understood and discussed in their complexity.
Works Cited


