In William Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, a no-fail reference guide on influencing mass behavior lies in the speech given by Marc Antony in Act Three. In less than 200 lines, he is able to transform a placid crowd into revenge seeking rioters. It is not Marc Antony’s logic that wins the crowd from the level-headed Brutus, however, for logos is left wanting in his speech. Instead Antony fills what he lacks in reason with copious and at times, excessive, amounts of ethos and pathos. To these devices he then cunningly adds logical fallacy and verbal irony, making a potent concoction of inciting rhetoric.

Marc Antony utilizes ethos in two distinct ways; through the way he addresses his audience and through the way he refers to himself. “Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears” is a prime example of ethos and is Marc Antony’s famous and powerful opening statement (3.2.78). In the first three words, Antony establishes a connection with his audience by allying himself with them, appealing to their defense of nationality, and establishing the political nature of his forthcoming remarks. Throughout the entirety of his words he repeats these titles six times, using an adjective modifier each time to drive his argument further. For example, he adds the word “gentle” to “friends” for the express purpose of juxtaposing the crowd’s apparent civility with the brutal assassination of Caesar (3.2.145). He adds the word “citizen” to “roman” to emphasize his republican call to arms against the alleged tyranny of Brutus (3.2.246). Flattery also plays an integral role in the way Antony addresses his audience. He does not belittle the crowd, but calls them “masters” and the heirs of Caesar (3.2.126). Appealing to the pride of his audience, Marc Antony achieves a bond that is only strengthened with the tactics he uses to substantiate his own position.

Surprisingly, Antony never uses his worldly achievements to further his position through ethos. Every citizen in Rome knows Antony is Caesar’s right hand man and one of the richest officials in Rome, and, typically, persuasive speakers would enhance their ethos by citing such accomplishments. However, Antony
uses an entirely unexpected approach. In fact, he molds himself into the “common man”, a tactic that has since been used in everything from advertising to presidential campaigns. Instead of establishing himself as educated and an officer of the state, Antony calls himself “a plain blunt man . . . have[ing] neither wit, nor words, nor worth . . . nor the power of speech to stir men’s blood” (3.2.222-227). He appeals to the masses by subtly becoming one of the many. In addition, Antony then enhances this position by contrasting himself with assassins by ironically stating, “I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts. I am no orator, as Brutus is” (3.2.221). This humility tactic cements the audience’s loyalty toward Marc Antony, but his ethos only achieves a sense of trust in the speaker and not yet a belief in his cause.

Antony gains the trust of the masses through his use of ethos, but he then has to ensure that there is as much hatred toward his rival, Brutus, as there is faith in his own intentions. This proves to be a risky endeavor because his audience is calling for the crowning of Brutus even as Antony mounts his podium. Marc Antony then has to denounce his enemy and simultaneously refrain from it. Impossible as it seems, this task is pulled off flawlessly using verbal irony. Antony begins his speech referencing Brutus and the other assassins as “noble” and “honorable men” in a seemingly sincere manner (3.2.82, 87). This in no way could have turned the crowd against him, for they believed it to be so. Then, Antony makes the fatal analogy, “But Brutus says [Caesar] was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man” (3.2.91-92). This connection proves to ring with truth to the crowd at first. One can almost see them all nodding their heads in agreement. However, it quickly becomes a vehicle for scathing sarcasm. Marc Antony references Caesar’s apparent generosity and immediately and sarcastically follows it with this formulated analogy. Then, to further prove his point he adds, “I thrice presented him a kingly crown, which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?” (3.2.101-102) Once again, he follows his point with, “Yet Brutus says he was ambitious, and sure, he is an honorable man” (3.2.103-104). This masterpiece of cunning and verbal irony works in such a way as to bring his audience over to his side while simultaneously never condemning himself for speaking against Brutus. To solidify his ambiguity he declares, “I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke.” and, “I rather choose to wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you, than I will wrong such honorable men” (3.2.105, 130-133). The phrase “honorable men” is used an
excessive eleven times, each time with building verbal irony until the mob becomes vividly convinced of Brutus’s treachery.

Antony, in the meantime, drives his audience on an emotional rollercoaster, first commending Brutus, expressing a fear of speaking against him, briefly calling him traitor, and then immediately returning to praise. His use of this type of self contradiction is sprinkled intermittently throughout his speech to give his audience a sense of unconscious confusion which clouds their ability to reason. Another, more blatant example of the way Marc Antony uses selfcontradiction is found mid-way through his speech. After addressing the crowd as friends once again he then says, “Let me not stir you up to such a sudden flood of mutiny” (3.2.214-215). Yet, in that very same paragraph he ends by ironically declaring that he wishes that he was able to “move the stones of Rome to rise and mutiny” (3.2.234). With the skill he presents his argument, the contradiction is hardly noticeable, but blatantly obvious when analyzed. Unfortunately, his Roman Audience, by that time, is completely trusting and not able to realize their gullibility. Marc Antony, in his rhetorical success, does not limit his use of logical fallacy only to self-contradiction.

One point Antony makes in his speech seems to be very out of place. This red herring in the form of a reference to a false will of Caesar’s serves as another logical stumbling block for the crowd to trip over. Out of context and irrelevant, Antony mentions a will Caesar had supposedly written to the citizens of Rome right in the middle of a paragraph extolling, albeit sarcastically, the honor of Brutus (3.2.133-134). It does not matter that the will is counterfeit, the interest and the greed of the crowd is peaked. The most important effect, however, is the immediate change in direction Antony takes. He is able to smoothly make a rhetorical one-eighty from the praise of Brutus to the praise of Caesar through the mention of this generous will. The red herring is the turning point in Marc Antony’s speech and receives such a reaction as to become an emotional trigger. Antony uses it twice more through the rest of his speech, once using Caesar’s Will to build anticipation and, therefore, emotion (3.2.150-151). Then, he uses it at the very end of his speech, going so far as to make up actual words to it (3.2.245-256). This false yet seemingly supreme generosity of Caesar transforms the originally peaceful crowd into a mob convinced it had been cheated.
Through ethos, logical fallacy, and verbal irony Marc Antony had thus achieved trust in his own person and distrust for Brutus and the other conspirators, but it was his use of pathos which drove the mob to riot. Antony’s use of vivid figurative language is the skillfully delivered majority of his pathos. For example, early on in his speech Antony melodramatically sighs, “Bear with me; my heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, and I must pause till it come back to me” (3.2.110-112). This overly emotional remark and figurative lament obviously stirs pity in the crowd for they murmur, “Poor soul!” and “There’s not a nobler man in Rome than Antony” (3.2.119-122). Clearly, his pathos creates a bond between himself and his audience. He cements his connection further with a tactic used similarly in the St. Crispin’s Day speech in Shakespeare’s Henry V (Shakespeare Ins 24-73). Imploring the masses to mourn over the body of Caesar, Antony speaks of how they will be respected for being present at such a historic occasion, similar to King Henry’s parallel prophecy of the Battle of Agincourt. “Kiss dead Caesar’s wounds . . . yea, beg a hair of him for memory, and dying, mention it within [your] wills, bequeathing it a rich legacy” (3.2.137-142). Clearly, pathos through emotional references, like pity and honor above, is utilized skillfully in this speech.

Marc Antony uses hyperbole in his pathos to exaggerate the greatness of Caesar with “yesterday the word of Caesar might have stood against the world. Now lies he there and none so poor to do him reverence” (3.2.123-125). This larger than life description further intensifies the emotion of the crowd by making the assassination an earth shattering event. Building emotion upon emotion, Marc Antony then calls the crowd to gather around the bloody corpse of Julius Caser, thus using humanity’s morbid curiosity to augment his pathos (3.2.162). In this arrangement, Antony unleashes his ability to manipulate the crowd through figurative language in an emotional one page passage. Using personification, he declares the presence of “ingratitude, more strong than traitor’s arms” and describes Caesar’s wounds as “poor poor dumb mouths” (3.2.189, 228-230).

Melodrama is Antony’s final blow to the crowd. In one particular passage he reminisces about something as unnoticeable as Caesar’s cloak, pointing out every dagger hole. Dramatically he labels every tear. “See what a rent the envious Casca made” and “This was the most unkindest cut of all” draws the audiences
attention and emotion to the smallest wound on the body of Caesar, thus making the shear number of stabs an unbearable sight (3.2.179, 187). Antony weeps, Antony pauses, Antony questions and commands the crowd in juxtaposed sentences, and, at the end, finishes with a powerful, “Here was a Caesar! When comes such another” (3.2.257).

Marc Antony’s speech in Julius Caesar is a powerful commentary on how the absence of logic in an argument can be easily hidden by a plethora of distracting rhetoric. Careening wildly through an agenda of ethos, pathos, logical fallacy, and verbal irony, Antony befuddles the initially pacified crowd to the point of riot. It’s interesting to note the offhand remarks the crowd makes immediately before and after the speech. After Brutus’ unemotional and logical explanation for the assassination of Caesar, the crowd does in fact believe him and lauds his decision. Cries of “Let him be Caesar!” ring affectionately and ironically throughout the crowded forum (3.2.56). In dramatic contrast, the audience is transformed by the end of Antony’s short address into a hell-bent mass intent on destroying everything Brutus owns (3.2.258-264). The rhetorical devices that William Shakespeare was able to so skillfully arrange in Marc Antony’s impacting speech have been used ever since as tools for manipulation. From Presidential speeches to textbooks, the rhetorical tactics found in Act Three of Julius Caesar continue to incite the masses in ways that we often don’t even realize.

Works Cited
