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“It looks as if the world were waiting for rhetoric. We will have to learn more about such things and determine what rhetorics will serve us, let us speak both knowledge and ourselves into being” —Jim W. Corder on the possibility of a “new rhetoric” (“On the Way” 201).

“I have a map in my mind. Some features of it I know pretty well. Large parts of it are still terra incognita. I got to the places I know hoping to find a way into the places I don’t know” —Jim W. Corder in “Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret,” published in 1995, only around three years before his death from cancer (94).

Is it acceptable to start an essay with a question? The Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques Center at the University of Arizona (known by the apt acronym SALT) thinks so. One technique it recommends: “Start your introduction with a question you will answer in your paper” (Koosman). Well, if the first sentence of this paper is any indication, then question answered. But, if it is good to ask one question at the start of a paper, surely asking more than one might be better? After all, the more the merrier. That’s simple arithmetic, no? So, perhaps it is better to pepper the reader with questions, as rhetorical scholar, prolific author, and long-time teacher Jim Corder does in his 1995 essay “Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret.” In a particularly short first section of the paper, Corder begins each of the first nine paragraphs with a question. He wants to know “what…the rhetoric [he’s] in look[s] like.” He asks, “How does a leucocholic
invent?” He wonders what a “leucocholic’s topoi” might be? Corder briefly interrogates “leucocholic occasions,” “leucocholic structures,” and “leucocholic style.” He begins the final paragraph of this first section by asking, “Is there an audience for a rhetoric of regret?” (“Notes” 94-95). Following Corder’s lead—asking multiple questions like this—must be the way to go, I thought. I returned to the online .pdf from SALT, remembering that they had more to say about these “rhetorical questions.” Immediately, I was met with a warning label fit for prescription drugs and shallow swimming pools: “Caution: Do not make a long list of questions; simply ask one or two focused, considered questions that you plan to answer for your reader” (Koosman). Well, “focused” might be a problem for the leucocholic. But we’ll get to that.

It would seem, then, that Jim W. Corder might have been wrong. The proverb stating there is no such thing as a bad question: likewise incorrect. In economic terms, SALT suggests there is some sort of law of diminishing returns when it comes to a rhetorical style of interrogation. But how much interrogation is too much? Certainly, we don’t like to be barraged by rapid-fire questioning. That might feel all-too reminiscent of every interrogation-room scene in every crime drama ever: the mostly dark room, the obnoxiously bright hanging light, the good-cop/bad-cop dynamic of the questioning detectives, the knowledge that someone is evaluating every word behind that one-way mirror there, etc. and so forth. Under heavy interrogation, these crime dramas indicate that there are three things that are never denied someone brought in for questioning: a cup of coffee, a cigarette, and/or an attorney. Corder’s “Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret” doesn’t quite provide questions in laundry list fashion; instead,
he tries to answer them in the subsequent sentences that make up each paragraph. However, Corder’s indeterminate language in these paragraphs allows the questions to linger on. If the short first section of Corder’s essay were a song, “I don’t know” would be its oft-repeated refrain. In fact, he ends the final paragraph of the section with that same chorus (95). Something is going on here that is rhetorically unusual. We write to communicate, to tell our story, and here Corder seems to be thoroughly noncommittal. “Write what you know” is the oft-quoted mantra of many, though a simple Google search will suggest that nobody who’s written that quotation can be sure where it comes from. Corder, then, starts us off with questions throughout this first section, and leaves us with questions thereafter. So, can you blame me if, reading an essay with so many questions, I ask a question of my own? After all, I know my rights. So, damn it, Jim, I’m going to ask my question now: “What is a leucocholic?”

Unfortunately, Jim W. Corder passed away in August of 1998. But, as I hope will be apparent by the end of this paper, he put more of himself into his writing than most writers of academic prose. And, as I hope will be apparent by the end of this paper, his ideas about rhetoric and composition are as relevant today as they were during his life, and, in some cases, more so. While these last two sentences might sound a bit like a poorly crafted thesis, they aren’t quite—though, I suppose a thesis statement might lie less in the pen of the writer and more in the eye of the beholder. I’m trying to offer myself in this paper on Jim Corder—because I feel like he’d want it that way. If you’re with me so far, I hope you recognize that I share two things in common with my (as-yet-unannounced) thesis. The first is that both myself and my thesis are
forthcoming. The second: I am my argument, just as you are yours. I’m stealing that last point from Corder himself, of course. In his own words: “Each of us is an argument” (“Argument” 18). But what does it mean to say that we are all arguments? And still, I want to know what a leucocholic is.

As an adjective, leucocholic modifies a type of acid found in bile, a fact I learned from a medical study that I can’t possibly explain in full (Quinn). However, it might also be a very appropriate way to explain the style of writing Corder advocated for and which I’m duplicating here—duplicating in my own way, of course, because to do otherwise would be to defeat the purpose. If leucocholic comes from the word leucocholy, Merriam-Webster suggests the term means: “a state of feeling that accompanies preoccupation with trivial and insipid diversions” (“Leucocholy”). This paper will not only follow from Corder’s blending of a style that is both personal and academic, it will also proceed in a manner you might find disorienting. However, as writing teachers have always told me, it is better to show it than to say it. I want to invite you along for the ride of my thinking, my thinking about Corder’s thinking, because if you’re thinking this is my thesis, I’m told I should be specific. If anything, Corder’s writing style, like my own, embraces the writer’s “preoccupation with trivial and insipid diversions.” The hope here is that you recognize such digressions as a component of my identity, and, as we’ll see, my identity is, as Corder expresses in no uncertain terms, my argument (“Argument” 18). The hope here is that the text can grasp the reader; that it can show the reader who the writer is. Though it goes without saying, no writing can fully illuminate its writer, maybe some connection can be
achieved on the page. If that's the case, perhaps nothing is truly insipid. And nothing is truly a diversion.

Technology has refashioned the contemporary world as one that is dominated by discourse. However, it has likewise promoted an environment of disembodied and impersonal communication. Jimmie W. Corder's notions of a new rhetoric, largely developed in the 1980s, is perhaps more relevant today than ever. Returning to Aristotle's three appeals: ethos, logos, and pathos, Corder identifies that these three are not only interdependent but also that ethos, the character of the speaker, is far more important than previously considered. It is important to pause here to consider the triangular nature of Aristotle's three appeals. The Aristotelian triangle of ethos, pathos, and logos has been largely ubiquitous, even though it is finds other expressions today. In the third and most recent edition of their textbook Everyone's an Author, Andrea Lunsford and colleagues focus on these three appeals: logos, ethos, and pathos (421-32).

Purdue's popular Online Writing Lab is more definitive on the matter: "There are three types of rhetorical appeals, or persuasive strategies, used in arguments to support claims and respond to opposing arguments. A good argument will generally use a combination of all three appeals to make its case" ("Rhetorical Strategies"). However, maybe, as Jim Corder subtly suggests, these three are already a combination. While there are other interpretations of Aristotle's writing, I'm going to stick with these three for the time being. My hope in this paper is to explain how Corder's vision for a new rhetoric highlights the fact that logos, pathos, and ethos are not discrete rhetorical appeals, and that ethos is the most powerful of all. Then, I'd like to move into a
consideration of how Corder’s ideas about a new rhetoric are more relevant today than ever. But, to be honest, the road might be long and winding at times. As I’ve alluded to, I’m a fan of the scenic route. I’m aware that this paper might, at times, traverse some familiar landscape in the field of rhetoric and composition. But it might also swerve off the highway from time to time, drive slowly through some more residential neighborhoods, and find alternate routes wherever possible. As Roseann Carlo says of Jim Corder, it might at times feel like I am taking you “down a path in the middle of the night without street signs” (104).

So, you’ve come here looking for a thesis. Fortunately, I have it right here. Don’t be alarmed if I’m patting my pockets with the alarmed look of someone who’s forgotten his wallet. It’s in here some place….well, I…I must apologize. I must have dropped it already somewhere on our journey. I can’t apologize enough, though it might not have been that great a thesis statement anyway. But still, it grates against my view of the world to deceive people, and the suggestion that I don’t have a thesis implies that I have nothing to say. Hopefully, you noticed where and when I dropped it. Maybe you even picked it up at that juncture? Maybe it is better if this is more of an anti-thesis at any rate. After all, the goal of this paper is, in part, to restore the consensual definition of essay back to the term’s etymology. You see, to steal a witticism from British modernist scholar Catherine R Stimpson, this essay will also be an “assay” (162). Both essay and assay come from the Latin exigere. That Latin term means “to weigh, try, prove, measure, adjust, ascertain, examine, inquire into” (“assay, n.”). That is precisely what I’m trying to do here. I’m trying to push you all to consider an essay as an attempt. I want you all to see
that, yes, it is a weighing of evidence. But, more often than not, an essay’s real-world effectiveness lies much more in the identity the writer chooses to show and the identity the reader cannot help but bring to his or her reading. I want you all to recognize that “adjust” is one of the definitions of that Latin root for essay. And that perhaps writers and readers need to approach a text with a certain amount of malleability. I choose the word malleability with care as it refers to something normally associated with hardness and rigidity: metal, for example. Or perhaps, as we’ll see, like your own understanding of the world. Something malleable is also “capable of being hammered or pressed out of shape without a tendency to return to the original shape or to fracture” (“malleable, adj.”). Through happy coincidence, to assay was once, “The trial of metals, by ‘touch,’ fire, etc.; the determination of the quantity of metal in an ore or alloy; or of the fineness of coin or bullion” (“assay, n.”). This attempt will ring hollow if you find the words on these pages, and by extension, their author, unreliable or dubious. It would appear that you, dear reader, are the “assayist” here. You are the evaluator. And evaluate we must. As Carl R. Rogers, the psychologist who lent his name to Rogerian argument, writes in his seminal article “Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation, “I would like to propose, as an hypothesis for consideration, that the major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove” (284). Coyly, Rogers is no hypocrite here; that he offers “an hypothesis for consideration” is his subtle recognition that his audience will undoubtedly evaluate him. Because evaluation is inevitable, I can only humbly request that you see this paper as an attempt and remain flexible enough to bear with me.
This will not be a political essay, although politics is, in part, the source of its exigence.

In an effort to teach my freshman composition students ethos, logos, and pathos—those vaunted sides of the Aristotelian triangle—I supplied them with the written texts of various speeches and played video of how those speeches were delivered. The trick, as any instructor knows, is to find compelling content. However, one must also heed Polonius’s wise words: “[B]revity is the soul of wit” (Shakespeare 2.2.90). In other words, the speeches could not be too long. (Perhaps I should take my own advice.) Donald Trump’s speeches were too incendiary not to include in this exercise, however the shortest speech of his I could find was an address from the Oval Office on immigration and border security from January of 2019. Unfortunately, stripped of his live audience and tethered to a script, Trump’s performance was not typical of the brand. I decided to excerpt the beginning of his now-infamous speech from the Ellipse on January 6th, 2020, just before the Capitol riot. After an unusually long time remarking on the size of the crowd, the media, and “big tech,” President Trump arrives as his thesis: “You know, I say, sometimes jokingly, but there’s no joke about it: I’ve been in two elections. I won them both and the second one, I won much bigger than the first. OK” (Naylor). I had cautioned the class to holster their political beliefs and consider the rhetoric. However, I did ask them to focus on how Trump feels the need to use logos to establish his ethos, as he does with that reference to his election victories. As we analyzed a few more speeches, I became surprised by how often something I had earmarked as ethos, for example, was seen by the class as logos. In each instance, the students were not wrong, and neither was I. I was struck then by, what for me, was a nuanced
view of the Aristotelian triangle. While the sides of the triangle—logos, ethos, and pathos—are important in their own right, perhaps more attention is due the vertices. The triangle metaphor is particularly apt; it accounts for the intersections of logos, ethos, and pathos, three appeals that are oftentimes inextricably linked. Perhaps this entanglement of the appeals could unpack some of the divisiveness that precipitated the Capitol riots in the first place? The reason for the division, I presumed, was somewhere in the longstanding tension between reason, or logos, and affect, or pathos. I thought back to David Hume’s famous quotation, “Reason is, and ought to only to be the slave of the passions” (418). Logical arguments so often fail because passion reigns supreme.

If pathos was, as Hume’s out-of-context quotation seems to suggest, able to dominate logos, then this was no equilateral triangle: one side was clearly greater than another. Perhaps, then, the aforementioned Carl Rogers would be helpful. After all, to borrow some of his words—and some of his ethos—he sought to remove the “major barrier” of communication so often produced by “any emotional statement” (285).

In applying his experience as a therapist to communication in general, Rogers recognizes how pathos is often to blame for failed communication. “It is just when emotions are strongest that it is most difficult to achieve the frame of reference of the other person or group,” he writes (287). He is bullish that a “neutral understanding catalyst type of leader or therapist can overcome this obstacle in a small group” (287). Rogers is clear, however, that he is speaking about a third, mediating party, and that he has reached these conclusions based on his observations of “small groups” and with “limited research.” He describes this improved
communication in this way: “[It is] a situation in which I see how the problem appears to you, as well as to me, and you see how it appears to me, as well as to you” (287). My interest in this paper, to be clear, is in written communication. Needless to say, Rogers does not explicitly delve into the application his thought might have on writing in “Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation.” Fortunately, the first evangelists of Rogerian argument, Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, manage to adopt Rogerian argument to the written word in their oft-cited 1970 textbook Rhetoric: Discovery and Change. More “traditional argument,” they explain, “tends to be ineffective in those dyadic situations that involve strong values and beliefs” (274). Reading and writing, I think we could agree, qualify as such “dyadic situations.”

How realistic and practical could this approach be in real-world composition? Certainly, the therapist-client relationship is unique and, at times, incompatible with the kind of persuasive writing done in most real-world situations. Though I’ve warned you about “trivial and insipid diversion,” we’ve left Jim Corder for too long, and now is the time to return to him. Corder agrees that “the therapist is already a congruent person in the relationship” (“Argument” 22). So, given that the effectiveness of Rogerian argument depends on this relationship of power and communication, its application should be limited to very rare and specific situations. As I read more and more of Corder’s work, I was initially struck by his stylistic pyrotechnics. As I thought more and more about Corder’s work, I realized we shared similar ideas about the rhetorical triangle. Yes, logos, pathos, and ethos are interdependent. But while I gravitated more toward the interplay of logos and pathos, Corder decided to emphasize ethos—the side of the triangle I had overlooked.
However, while Corder’s work centers on ethos, scholarship often ignores the nuanced way he demonstrates that logos and pathos are not only interdependent variables, but also constitutive of ethos.

Corder’s most well-known article, "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” begins with a discussion of identity formation through discourse. His writing style is largely stripped down, relying on simple yet powerful words. He does not present a simple thesis statement and argue it straight through. If you’ll allow me the metaphor, a traditional argumentative essay presents the thesis statement as a blueprint with the writer stacking paragraphs of evidence like bricks. Corder’s thesis, on the other hand, performs more like a cartoon snowball, rolling downhill and becoming larger, richer, and fuller as it moves to conclusion. Don’t worry, I know those comparisons require a bit more explanation. Traditional argument in English-speaking countries involves a central claim, in the form a thesis statement, that is argued throughout the body of the essay. To return to Everyone’s an Author, Andrea Lunsford and several colleagues suggest that the Toulmin model of argument, which “has been widely used for writing arguments,” opens with a “claim.” That claim is supported throughout in the body of the essay, ultimately concluding with a paragraph that “restates the argument as strongly and memorably as possible” (442-43). Similarly, Lunsford and co-authors remark that classical argumentation, which had its origins in ancient Greece, “is still favored by many writers in different fields” (440). Classical argument functions in much the same way as the Toulmin model; it involves presenting a claim in the introduction, defending that claim in the body, and often summarizing
the argument in the conclusion (440). Much like a commuter train, these forms of argument announce their destination shortly after departure. In “Jim Corder’s Radical, Feminist Rhetoric,” Keith D. Miller agrees with my “circling” metaphor to describe the structure of much of Corder’s writing. Miller quotes “modern Spanish philosopher” Jose Ortega y Gasset, whom he acknowledges Corder never references, as providing an apt description for the form of most of Corder’s work. Of his writing style, Ortega y Gasset uses the plural “we” to refer to himself and his audience, writing: “[W]e will move steadily ahead toward a goal which I will not spell out because it would not yet be understood. We will go moving toward it in concentric circles” (qtd. in Miller 60). In “Argument as Emergence,” Corder seems, if I may manipulate the cliché, as focused on the journey as he is on the destination. In what follows, I offer a somewhat close reading of “Argument as Emergence” with the hope that the idea of narrative identity, which is aligned with reason and thus logos, can create situations in which two incompatible stories of the world can be enough to create feelings of pain and threat in the audience.

The essay opens by quoting A.G. Mojtabai. While Mojtabai remarks, “We are all authors,” Corder transforms that claim into “each of us is a narrative” (16). In the second section of the article, Corder repeats the claim: again “Each of us is a narrative.” This second section is only two short paragraphs, however in the second paragraph, he explains that we are not only narratives but also arguments. Here Corder is interested in the harmony or friction that can occur when two narratives, or two people, attempt to communicate. With language that recalls bucolic suburban life, Corder explains, “A good part of the time we can live comfortably adjacent to or
across the way from other narratives” (18). However, sometimes this utopian harmony is disrupted. Corder heightens his diction in this short second section for the first time. Sometimes “another narrative impinges upon ours”, it “thunders” (18). This foreign narrative is so distinct from ours that “it is disruptive” and “shocking.” Here Corder invokes Rogers: these discordant narratives are “threating” (18). Great violence happens when we are exposed to another story that runs counter to our own. Because these narratives are “the evidence we have of ourselves and our convictions,” because they represent our very identity itself, we try to defend our narrative against this invasion from without (18). It is then that Corder makes the point that we are all arguments. Following up this short section, he begins the third portion of his essay with, “Each of us is an argument, evidenced by our narrative” (18). With the repetition of “Each of us” to begin the second and third sections, Corder makes use of anaphora—albeit separated by a full paragraph—to heighten and confuse what might otherwise be conflicting sentiments. “Are we narratives,” one might ask, “or are we arguments? And what, if anything, is the difference?” While the repetition of “Each of us” might slow the reader down to consider this question, the parallel construction only heightens the connection between the two. We are arguments, Corder wants us to understand, precisely because we are narratives. As this third section unfolds, Corder shows us the reason behind the violence intrusive narratives might inflict. What happens if we recognize our narrative was wrong to begin with? “Do we hold our narratives?” Corder asks, “Keep telling the story we have been telling? At all costs?” (19). These are questions he leaves open. I suppose the assumption is that this friction between narratives is dealt with on a case-by-
case and individual basis. If Corder were to make an over-arching assumption about this, he might run the risk of his “narrative...crush[ing] up against our own—disruptive, shocking, incomprehensible, threatening, suddenly showing us into a narrative not our own” (19).

This might be a good time to halt construction on this essay and reexamine the blueprints. “I thought you were talking about the interdependence of logos, pathos, and ethos,” you might say, “and I’m becoming concerned. I see the pathos above with the ‘threat’ of these conflicting narratives, but I’m starting to doubt your ethos.” Here we can enlist the work of Kenneth Burke. In a brief article summarizing his notions of “dramatism” and logology, Burke agrees with Corder’s idea that our understanding of the world and ourselves is linguistic and narrative in nature: “The discriminations we make by language constitute our realm of knowledge” (90). Compare that with Corder’s suggestion that, “we are all fiction-makers/historians,” though, “we are seldom all that good at the work” (16). What Burke refers to as “discriminations” are translated into choices in “Argument as Emergence”: “The choosing we do to make our narratives (whether or not we are aware of the nature of our choosing) also makes our narratives into arguments” (18). Burke goes on to explain that what he calls “logology” is “epistemological because it relates to the initial duplication that came into the world when we could go from sensation to words for sensations” (91). This ability to use words to represent experience is precisely what yields narrative. As Burke writes, “When they [humankind] could duplicate the taste of an orange by saying ‘taste of an orange,’ that’s when STORY comes into the world” (90). Corder agrees with Burke here, crediting language as the stuff that narratives are
made of (18). However, though words are the raw material of narrative, does that necessarily mean that they are tied to logos? Fortunately, Burke is quite clear on this: “And episteme being the Greek word for knowledge, we’re on the slope of ‘epistemology,’ which means words, in the sense of reason, about knowledge” (92). Thus, with a little help from Burke, Corder’s notion of narrative identity can be seen as tied to reason and thus logos. Corder isn’t quite done, of course. Occasionally, then, we encounter “a contending narrative that shakes and cracks all foundations and promises to alter our identity, a narrative that would educate us to be wholly other than what we are” (“Argument” 19). We often resist these “contending narratives” composed of logos, then, because they invoke an emotional response in us that is tied to how we have constructed our own narrative identity. The connection I’ve hoped to make above is that narrative identity is founded on logos, and that challenges to this narrative identity, as Corder and Rogers both mention, can have a negative response. In short, logos can have a direct impact on pathos during communicative acts. But is this notion of narrative identity tenable?

Dan P. McAdams and Kate C. McLean, two of the leading scholars in the field of narrative identity, define the theory as “a person’s internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” (233). Compare that with Corder’s notion in “Argument as Emergence”: “We are always seeing, hearing, thinking, living, and saying the fiction that we and our times make possible and tolerable, a fiction that is the history we can assent to at a given time” (17). There is, then, a temporal element within these narrative identities. Corder, for instance, is clear to suggest
that these narrative identities exist "at a given time." The above quotation from McAdams and McLean highlights the potential malleability of this narrative identity with respect to time in their reference to an "evolving life story" that considers "the reconstructed past and imagined future."

However, while I'd hoped that Burke would clear up relationship between narrative and logos, I'm still unconvinced. And, because this is my story you're reading, if I am unconvinced, there is little doubt that you may be too.

I think, perhaps, the word to seize upon in McAdams and McLean's work is unity. As we are discussing Aristotelian notions of logos, pathos, and ethos in rhetoric, perhaps Aristotle himself can offer us a sturdier bridge across the stubborn cognitive gulf that may divide narrative and logos. In his Poetics, it almost bears no mention that Aristotle recognizes narrative as imitation. His thought radiates outward from this premise. "First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood," the Poetics suggests, "one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures" (850). Corder parrots this notion that narrative is an essentially human element: "[Creating narratives] is human. It is what we do and are" ("Argument" 17). However, in order to fully establish the connection between narrative and logos, some more heavy lifting is required: it is necessary to apply Aristotle's explanation of logos to his broad conclusions regarding successful poetry. Enthymemes are one of the prime examples of logos, Aristotle explains. When discussing enthymemes in Book 22 of Rhetoric, he pulls an example from, of all places, poetry: "Suppose it be Achilles whom we are to advise, to praise or blame, to accuse or defend; here too we must take the facts, real or imaginary; these
must be our material” (804). It is no stretch to see that the enthymeme, and thus logos, is not mutually exclusive from narrative. Clearly, the suggestion that these facts might be “imaginary” hints that the occurrences within a poem or dramatic work, perhaps *The Iliad* in this case, are still governed by the same principles of logic and human reasoning as a rhetorical composition. Once we progress to *Poetics*, the logos of plot becomes even more firmly established. “But most important of all is the structure of the incidents,” writes Aristotle. “For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men but of an action and of life, and life consists in action” (852). The most important part of a narrative is its plot, Aristotle explains, before going on to express that the logic of plot is necessary. He breaks narrative up into “the beginning,” “the middle,” and “the end.” Central to an understanding of each of these components, it is implied, is the audience’s recognition, through reasoning, of causation (854). Aristotle likewise mentions “Thought” as the third-most important component of narrative. He defines the term as “the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances” (852). Aristotle explicitly mentions the relationship between this component of narrative and “the art of rhetoric.” Because, according to Aristotle, “[t]hought” is “found where something is proved to be or not to be,” and because logos, in the form of the enthymeme, is “the most effective of the modes of persuasion,” narrative is undergirded by logos (852, 740). The centrality of causation, and thus reason, mentioned by Aristotle with respect to importance of plot in narrative, is echoed in McAdams and McLean’s work on narrative identity. Citing Tilmann Habermas and Susan Bluck, McAdams and McLean conclude that the ability of an individual to recognize “causal coherence” during adolescence
precludes that individual's ability "to construct stories about their lives" (235). Narrative identity, then, is not only a recognizable framework in the field of psychology for understanding how we construct our identities, but, following Aristotle, narrative proceeds largely from human reason, or logos.

While we have already seen that Corder is suspicious of Rogerian rhetoric, he does concede that he is very much "indebted" to Rogers's work ("Argument" 23). In yet another article published in 1985, Corder likewise describes Rogerian acolytes Young, Becker, and Pike's Rhetoric: Discovery and Change as "a powerful rhetoric of our time" ("On the Way" 190). After discussing the notion of narrative identity and extending it to what I would call "argumentative identity" in "Argument as Emergence," Corder moves into a brief discussion of Rogerian argument, much of which I have summarized above. As the title of Corder's essay, "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love" suggests, he and Rogers seek a common goal of communication in which both parties understand and accept one another. However, Corder also acknowledges the potentially unrealistic idealism of Rogers's theory. As we have seen, Rogerian argument seeks to suppress emotion. Corder, on the other hand, expresses skepticism that emotion can ever be adequately banished from communication in many rhetorical situations. Though he is genuinely positive about some of the "texts that propose patterns of Rogerian arguments," and admits that they "will work some of the time," he refers back to the violence caused when our personal narratives, the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and how the world is, are
violated by an antagonistic interlocutor ("Argument" 22). In fact, that is his particular project with this article. Corder writes:

I am suggesting that the arguments most significant to us are just where threat occurs and continues, just where emotions and differences do not get calmly talked away, just where we are plunged into that flushed, feverish, quaky, shaky, angry, scared, hurt, shocked, disappointed, alarmed, outraged, even terrified condition I spoke of a little earlier. (22)

The anaphora above, with the repetition of "just where" in three successive clauses, only heightens the pathos levied upon us when exposed to another’s story that doesn’t fit our own. As we progress through each of these clauses, the language becomes heightened as the cognitive chasm between interlocutors becomes more and more ominous. Finally, Corder closes with a laundry list of negative feelings and emotions in the last clause. The negative adjectives begin at the physical level of the body—"flushed, feverish, quaky, shaky"—before moving to the psychological—"angry, scared, hurt," etc. "Argument as Emergence," then, is Corder’s attempt to not only outline why rhetoric sometimes fails, but also to find a more realistic alternative to Rogerian argument, which also seeks to reestablish successful communication. "What can free us from the apparent hopelessness of steadfast arguments contending with each other, of narratives that come bluntly up against each other?" Corder muses. He admits that he does not know. However, he also explains that a "start" might be to alter our conception of argument (25).
While Corder, with his characteristic self-deprecation, might insist that he does not know how we can achieve communication, if not solidarity, with another who’s story of self is radically different from our own, he certainly has a hypothetical plan. He restates the agonism of traditional argument, with its logos-centric love affair with evidence. Rogerian argument too ultimately relies largely on such evidence, albeit presented in the most easily digestible form; it is merely a horse of a different color painted with a different brush. These notions of argument are about “display and presentation,” Corder tells us (26). If you doubted my own, or Miller’s, suggestion that there is something circular about the structure of Corder’s writing, he doubles back to one of his earlier claims here: “But argument is not something to present or to display. It is something to be. It is what we are” (26). Here Corder restates his cryptic title: “If we are to hope for ourselves and to value all others, we must learn that argument is emergence” (26). Because everyone is an argument, it is unclear who is doing the emerging here. Is it the writer, the reader, or both?

The burden of emergence falls on the writer, or “arguer,” we learn shortly thereafter. As Corder writes, “At the point of advocacy, most particularly at the crisis point in adversarial relationships, the burden is on the maker of the argument as he or she is making the argument” (28). As I’ve suggested, Corder has thusfar spent the bulk of the essay demonstrating the relationship between logos, or the narrative stories we use to create our identities, and pathos, the pain we feel when those narratives run counter to our own. Now Corder’s discussion suggests that the previous impasse may be remedied by the third and oft-overlooked side of the rhetorical
triangle, ethos. However, Corder is mostly interested in a particular kind of ethos, the one he has termed “generative ethos.” Though “language is a closure,” Corder’s notion of “generative ethos…uses language to shove back the restraints of closure, to make a commodious universe, to stretch words out beyond our private universe” (31). It sounds like generative ethos, then, is what Corder believes can, in the words of Carl Rogers, serve as the “[f]acilitation” to alleviate the “[b]locking” of “[c]ommunication.”

As we’ve seen on this road to Corder’s new rhetoric, logos, pathos, and ethos are inextricably braided together. While it might seem paradoxical on the surface, this does not imply that the three appeals are of equal weight. Corder suggests that each is a gestalt, greater than the sum of its parts. So even though ethos, logos, and pathos all derive their value in part from the interaction between the other two appeals, in addition to other factors, each finds its expression as a qualitative value. Corder favors ethos. So, now the road bends again. Citing S.M. Halloran, Corder muses that

logos generates accord only when the speaker and hearer inhabit the same universe of language or value. If neither emotional argument nor logical argument can account for all discursive accords, we must turn back to technical argument and inquire how the presentation of one self to another creates acceptance or agreement, or failed to do so. (“Varieties” 69)

So far, we’ve seen how Corder’s notion of a narrative self becomes an argumentative self, most visibly when two incompatible narratives of identity encounter one another in an act of
communication. Because Corder believes that everything is rhetoric—*rhetoric* in the persuasive sense that Aristotle understood the term—an adverse emotional reaction is generated by the friction created in all communicative acts involving competing narratives. If persuasion were a mathematical equation, if there were some algorithm to compute its effectiveness, we could easily see that it would be a multivariable equation. Logos and pathos do not operate in isolation from one another. In fact, their bearing on each other is unavoidable. Ethos certainly complicates this equation even further as the third dependent variable to enter the mix. As Miller and James S. Baumlin remark in their “Introduction” to *Selected Essays of Jim W. Corder: Pursuing the Personal in Scholarship, Teaching, and Writing*, “[E]thos is implicated in all aspects of rhetoric” (9). While Miller and Baumlin go on to discuss notions like “invention” and “arrangement,” we’ll see that logos and pathos too are implicated by ethos.

I must admit, a little sheepishly, that I was naive to assume logos, pathos, and ethos were independent in the first place. Aristotle discusses that ethos ought to come from the text rather than preconceived notions of the speaker’s character. In “Varieties of Ethical Argument,” Corder himself quotes from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* to show how ethos is tied to the text itself:

> Ethical proof is wrought when the speech is so spoken as to make the speaker credible; for we trust good men more and sooner, as a rule about everything; while about things which do not admit of precision, but only of guess-work, we trust them absolutely. Now this trust, too, ought to be produced by means of the speech,—not by a previous conviction that the speaker is this or that sort of man. It is not true, as
some of the technical writers assume in their systems, that the moral worth of the speaker contributes nothing to his persuasiveness; nay it might be said that almost the most authoritative of proofs is that supplied by character. (62)

Ethos, then becomes something the writer can generate. Roseann Carlo sums up Corder's notion of generative ethos succinctly as an approach "that attempts to build time and understanding into discourse as a way to reach out and embrace audiences" (268). As Carlo goes on to clarify, style becomes a major component of this generative ethos. She writes, "Style becomes essential as it is the only way for the writer to develop an ethos to be 'present' to the reader, to enfold a reader into his or her inventive universe" (272). "Enfolding" is Corder's ideal relationship between the author and audience. Carlo suggests that enfolding is precisely what "closes the distance between reader and writer" (268). After remarking how "speed, clarity, and efficiency" are valued in much academic writing, she expressly remarks that Corder's generative ethos often ignores these ideals (268). As we have already seen, generative ethos requires time as well as stylistic considerations. While any one of a number of Corder's essays could serve as an example of this use of style to generate ethos, perhaps "Hunting Lieutenant Chadbourne: A Search for Ethos Whether Real or Pretended" might be most useful. I've chosen "Hunting Lieutenant Chadbourne" for a particular reason: there is a layered approach to generative ethos. What do I mean by that? Corder looks for the person contained in those letters, and, in writing about the experience, reveals himself in the process.
Corder opens his essay with a brief personal story about a short essay he had written and published in the book *Lost in West Texas*. A Texas “roadside historical marker” indicating it was the site of Fort Chadbourne, an outpost named for a twenty-three-year-old officer that had been killed at the beginning of the Mexican War, catches his attention. In a curious attempt to establish his own ethos, Corder admits that “the essay was wrong in several important ways” (221). What follows is his attempt to learn more about this Second Lieutenant Theodore Lincoln Chadbourne. He manages to obtain and photocopy a stack of letters Chadbourne had written. Corder’s interest in the letters is clearly tied to his notion of generative ethos. He writes, “I wanted to save the letters for last because I wanted to believe that he was in them, that he was there.” However, backtracking as he often does, Corder expresses his immediate doubts: “Almost from the start, of course, I knew that I might never find him” (223). Already at this juncture, in admitting he had made mistakes in the earlier article and hypothesizing that his project might be an ultimate failure, Corder rejects the kind of commanding ethos he recognizes in much persuasive writing. In “Argument as Emergence,” Corder prescribes a situation in which “we arguers can learn to abandon authoritative positions” (29). Corder’s self-doubt continues. He looks to many of the theories about writing that have challenged his belief that “ethos is real and in the text left by the speaker” (224). Here Corder is upfront with his own emotions: he is “frightened.” “If ethos is not in the text, if the author is not autonomous,” he writes, “I’m afraid that I’ve lost my chance not just for survival hereafter… but also my identity now” (225). At this juncture, one is tempted to ask what genre of writing this piece represents.
Despite his references to ethos, to “interpretative communities,” to “the social construction of discourse,” and to “reader-response theory,” the style and form of the essay is anything but academic in nature (224). As we’ve seen, it begins with personal narrative, which is the dominant form throughout. We’ve also observed how Corder rejects the authoritative tone common in scholarly writing by admitting his previous mistakes and his anxiety about what he might find out about ethos in these letters. His thesis seems to be more of a question or hypothesis than a claim as he wonders if the text can truly present its author. He repeatedly ponders and restates this thesis over and over again. He is plagued with doubt. As much as he desires to find the author in the text, he also acknowledges that the writer can never be fully in the text. “At the moment I want and need ethos in the text,” he writes, “I deny it. I am not there but elsewhere” (226). This is what Miller means when he describes the “circular” nature of Corder’s form. The thesis is not presented and argued straight through. A large part of this essay is the journey.

Finally, Corder gets to the letters themselves. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he offers several selections from them. After all, wouldn’t someone so infatuated with finding the person in the language of a text want that person to speak for himself? Corder ultimately feels his hypothesis proven. In these letters, he is able to draw a picture of the kind of man Lieutenant Chadbourne was: “In the letters that survive, I found no trace of deceit or rancor. He is never self-serving, never mean-spirited. He is a gentle, funny, honest, strong young man, with a wide-ranging capacity for care” (240). However, this picture is incomplete. With his characteristic
ambivalence, Corder concludes, "He slips away from me, and doesn't" (240). While Corder has not found everything, he has found enough. In one telling moment, he offers an aside to a "literary theorist" that might contradict his insistence that the author might exist in the text:

(Listen, literary theorist—you who say the author is not the author but only one in a social community that actually writes the text, you who say that the character of the speaker is not the text, is only my projection, you who say the author dies when the reader is born—come and be with me in my life for a while, follow me as I transcribe his letters, watch me wince at the first letters, then shrink at the later letters, then shake at the typewriter as I read his last letters...). (234-35)

It would seem, then, that generative ethos is a possibility. And, if we look at Corder's physical reactions to Chadbourne's texts and the person he found in them—we can see how generative ethos may also give way to pathos.

All of this talk about generative ethos, narrative identity, and the interaction of the three Aristotelian appeals suggests that Corder is outlining a new rhetoric. The notion of "a new rhetoric" was a fairly ubiquitous term throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Corder was certainly intrigued by the possibility. In addition to "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love," he also published "On the Way, Perhaps, to a New Rhetoric, but Not There Yet, and If We Do Get There, There Won't Be There Anymore" in 1985. Corder accurately recognized:

To make a new rhetoric, we will have to face the implications of miniaturization and electronic communication and to decide whether new technologies may indeed

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bring a new kind of literacy and with it a new kind of rhetoric. The copiousness of
print, the mélange of visual images mixing with that print, and tapes and tapes, may
call for a new sense and new critical capacities. (195)

Of course, we can't hold it against Corder for his now-quaint notions that data would be
continually stored on "tapes" or that it would be "print" that would be "copious." I can somewhat
remember the technology of 1985: the tape seemed cutting edge and the ability to print from the
Tandy was great—until the teeth of the printer lost their bite on the holes of the specially
designed printer paper. However, if "print" is already no longer "copious," discourse certainly is.
And miniaturization and electronic communication now exist at a level Corder probably couldn't
have fathomed when the star of Bedtime for Bonzo began his second term in office. The
widespread ability for many to marry visual images and text, though, was something he surely
anticipated correctly.

In 1978, when Corder published "Varieties of Ethical Argument," he noticed the decade's
"preoccupation with credibility." Though it might not have been readily apparent, Corder
suggests that this "preoccupation" had actually brought ethos to the forefront. He writes: "We are
already interested in the process by which words are used to constitute a view of the speaker's
self, and we have had many occasions to learn that words are sometimes used to create a self that
replaces or masks the speaker's real self" ("Varieties of Ethical Argument" 62). Here, Corder
specifically references the Watergate hearings, in which the nation "heard speakers use language
apparently intended to cleanse their characters and thereby to promote credibility" (62). As time
has proven, Corder’s aforementioned prophecy regarding technology and the proliferation of communication and discourse was accurate. I think it might be plausible to suggest that now, more than ever, we have reached the verge of such an ethical crisis. And, looking forward, I can’t help but think that someone will say the same thing of their time a decade in the future.

At the risk of dating myself, I can recognize how technology, and the internet in particular, has profoundly changed my academic behavior. Two decades ago, the “Internet” (the convention back then was to capitalize it) might not have been in its infancy, but it was still in its childhood. And like a child, it was viewed by Generation X and many boomers with a mixture of distrust, caution, and mystery. Despite its practical uses in the early part of the twentieth century, we were largely discouraged from using it during my undergraduate years. “Maybe don’t use the Internet for research,” I remember many of my professors cautiously recommending. With scanning technology not as readily available as it is today, professors did not post reading online. Instead, they would give them to the University Copy and Cell Phone Repair Center on Waverly Place, which, in turn, would assemble them into “coursepacks.” These “coursepacks” were bound together with a plastic spiral binding and usually retailed for around $20. “When you get a chance, go over to our good, law-breaking friends at University Copy and pick up the coursepack,” several professors joked after handing out a printed, stapled copy of the syllabus. When I returned for graduate school some two decades later, the COVID-19 pandemic had temporarily shuttered many libraries, making browsing the library stacks for research an impossibility. Nearly all of my research that first semester was conducted through the use of the
Sojourner Truth Library’s extensive list of online databases. I must confess, it felt like I was
doing something wrong. When I began teaching freshman composition earlier this year, our
textbook, the aforementioned *Everyone’s an Author*, devotes an entire chapter to “Evaluating
Sources” (520-28). Indeed, I followed suit, devoting an entire week to teaching students how to
vet sources they found online. What Corder wrote back in 1978 is as true today as ever: “The
preoccupation with credibility on all sides during these last ten years or so indicates that we have
been involved in fact in learning about ethos whether we knew it or not” (“Varieties of Ethical
Argument” 62). We have now come nearly full circle. My thoughts first began with Trump’s
speech at the Ellipse on January 6th and led down a path that interrogated the ecological
relationship of logos, ethos, and pathos. From there, Jim Corder demonstrated the violence we all
feel when we encounter a narrative that is different from our own. While I mean this violence in
a figurative sense, in the sense of the pain caused by a threat to our narrative identity, the Capitol
riots demonstrated how this internal violence can manifest itself in actual physical violence.
What is the solution? To quote Jimmie W. Corder, “I do not know.” But I agree with him that we
need to take a long look at how we view and teach argument.

Let’s conduct a small thought experiment. I want you to close your eyes. Are they closed
yet? Well, obviously not, but you get the idea. What is the first thing that comes to mind when I
say the word *argument*? Does it conjure images of a quarrel with a partner? Or images of a
particularly memorable fight your parents once had? Or perhaps you might recall a time you
were mistreated and stood up for yourself? The word *argument*, I would...um...*argue* is so often
viewed as some sort of heated verbal exchange in which neither party is particularly pleased. You might be surprised to learn, as I was, that the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for *argument* defines the word without the hostility it often connotes. For the noun form of *argument*, the *OED* lists seven separate definitions, some with a few sub-definitions. Most refer specifically to *argument* as the presentation of evidence, the establishment of a position on an issue, or “a process of reasoning.” In one definition, it is “[a] connected series of statements or reasons intended to establish a position,” with the semi-combative hint “to refute the opposite” nestled innocuously within parentheses. Sure, *argument* had once meant “A subject of contention,” but the *OED* explains that this usage is “Archaic,” offering only two examples from the seventeenth century (“argument, n.”). As Wendy Beth Hyman of Oberlin College remarks during a seminar for the Shakespeare Association of America, she encourages her students to ask themselves the following: “What can I change my mind about today, every day?” She goes on, “So that we don’t just write essays where we find a thesis, make a claim, and defend it at all costs. Like, look at what that has wrought in the last x number of years in this country” (“Shakespeare”). The implication Hyman is making is that we are teaching argument all wrong. The need to remain steadfast and unwavering in the face of argument “enforces a closure” (“Argument” 18). Perhaps what we need to teach is that our narratives of the world can and should be malleable. By removing the authoritative nature of argument and by writing ourselves into the texts we produce, perhaps, as Corder suggests, we can “shove back the restraints of closure, to make a commodious universe, to stretch words out beyond our private universe” (“Argument” 31).
As we reach the end, I hope you’ve enjoyed the journey. Stylistically and formally, I’ve tried to reach a compromise—after all, that is what this paper is about. I’ve tried to blend the more traditional, or, as I’ve suggested, architectural structure of a typical thesis-based argument with Corder’s more circular rhetorical form. This paper attempts to treat Jim W. Corder’s work through the lens of a rhetorical ecology created by the interaction of Aristotle’s three appeals: logos, pathos, and ethos. As we’ve seen, one of Corder’s major contributions is his attention to the power the oft-overlooked ethos might have as unifying factor when a rhetor’s text runs counter to his or her audience’s worldview. While I believe Corder successfully promotes ethos to the level of consideration it deserves, he likewise shows how it is, in part, determined by logos and pathos. Nevertheless, Miller correctly points out that Corder believes “ethos is the most important element in persuasion” (60). How can we rectify one leg of the Aristotelian triangle as being more significant than the others if all three exist in what I’ve suggested is an ecological system of interdependence? Perhaps the best way to understand this is to recognize that, because none of these three elements exist completely in isolation, the perceived appeals to logic and emotion in a text may be sufficient, but if the logos and pathos in the text do not contribute sufficiently to convince the audience of the speaker’s character, the entire text is rendered impotent. In this way, there is, perhaps, a sort of gestalt relationship between the three elements. In other words, what I think Corder suggests is that without ethos, your argument is worth nothing. As we’ve moved toward a society dominated by technology and communication, a society that increasingly gives a voice to those historically silenced, ethos has remained
overlooked. But, perhaps, Corder’s solution would be viable if we approached composition with less agonism. Perhaps, as Corder suggests in “Argument as Emergence,” the solution truly lies in “changing the way we talk about argument and conceive of argument” (25).

Again, I am fully aware that this paper is a bit of an experiment. I’ve used familiar pronouns like “I,” “we,” and “you” throughout. At times, I’ve tried to bridge the academic with the informal. I’ve joked around at times. I’ve circled back to points and repeated myself. I’ve plagued you with flurries of contractions and contradictions! And, most recently, I’ve refused to vary my sentence structure. Yes, I’ve broken many of the rules. Like any experiment, this was an attempt. An attempt to put as much of myself into the writing as I could muster. If the new rhetoric Jimmie W. Corder advocated has a chance, then writers must take chances. They must not be afraid to leave themselves on the page.


“Shakespeare and Social Justice: From Principle to Action.” *YouTube*, uploaded by the Shakespeare Society of America, 10 October, 2021, m.youtube.com/watch?v=28kb1gOnpAI.
