

---

# *A Little Take on Authority*

---

ANGELO GUEVARA-MALAVÉ

*Produced in Melissa Ringfield's Fall 2014 ENC 1101*

FADE IN

INT. COFFEE HOUSE

Jazz plays in the background. ROGER sits at a table, dressed in a white suit. He is smoking a cigar and holding a mug of coffee. Across from him, JANET sits in a green dress. She eyes him angrily. The lighting is dim, there's smoke in the air, and clinking is heard in the background.

ROGER

(Coughing)

What's wrong, doll face?

JANET

(Rolling eyes)

You know what's wrong, Roger. You know exactly what's wrong.

ROGER

(Smirks)

You're still holding that against me?  
Come on, kid, no need to hold a grudge.

JANET

That's what you do. You just sit there, smile, and tell me everything's okay. But guess what, Roger? I'm not okay. My life's falling apart all around me. All because of you!

Janet smacks Roger's mug from his hand.

The mug breaks and clinking stops. Jazz music halts. A door opens, immediately shining a bright light onto Roger and Janet. Everyone in the bar stops talking and begins to whisper. The door closes and footsteps are heard approaching Roger and Janet. A shadowed man stands in front of Roger. He pulls a chair up and sits down, light hitting his face. It is the well-respected Professor, JAMES PAUL GEE, in a checkered, oversized suit.

JAMES PAUL GEE

Everything okay here?

ROGER

Everything's perfectly fine. Cupcake here has just lost her cool, but she'll be alright, won't you dear?

JANET

I've had enough of your slick talk and wise words, Roger. You never give me the chance to talk!

ROGER

(Dabbing cigar)

Hun, come on. Not now, please.

GEE

Hey, let the Miss talk, would you, buddy?

JANET

Yeah, Roger, shut up!

ROGER

Come on, Janet. You don't even know who this guy is! May I ask who you are, Sir?

GEE

(Making himself more comfortable at the table)

Well I'm Professor James Gee, a regular here at this coffee house, where I like

GEE (cont.)

to do most of my studying and research. I really like talking to students here and getting to know people. So as I was saying, I'd like to hear what Miss Janet has to say.

JANET

(Acting like a victim)

Well, Professor Gee... I'm washed up. What I thought was going to be a fruitful and good life-

ROGER

(Interrupting Janet)

Maybe use a different adjective for life, dear.

JANET

(Annoyed)

What I thought was going to be a great life, studying abroad and making something of myself, has just all crashed and burned. All because of college.

GEE

(Leans forward in his chair)

College? I don't understand. College is supposed to open up boundaries, allow

you to grow academically, and help you succeed professionally! How old are both of you anyway?

ROGER

(Smokes and coughs)

ROGER (cont.)

Well I am 23 now. She's 19, correct?

GEE

19? Why, Miss! You have a whole lifetime ahead of you! How could you even say your life is washed up? That's just absurd!

JANET

Alright, Mister. I'll just have to invite you into my horrendous problem then.

GEE

(Smiling)

And I am okay with that.

JANET

Well, it all started in my first semester of college. I was given an assignment to write on paternalism. Philosophy, you know? Anyway—long story short—I ended up in an article by Professors Ann M. Penrose and Cheryl Geisler being compared to "Mister Authority" over here.

GEE

(Attentive)

You're the famous students? The authoritative graduate and the freshman student from the "Reading and Writing without Authority" article?

ROGER

(Smoking cigar)

That's us, yes.

GEE

(Bewildered)

Wow! Real bold move for those professors to use your real names, huh?

Gee takes a sip of coffee and clears his throat.

GEE (cont.)

But I see, I see... They really hashed you didn't they, Janet?

JANET

(Acting like a victim)

Very much so, after that was published, I lost confidence... ended up taking a turn in the road.

ROGER

(To Gee)

I try helping her—try telling her what she needs to do, but she won't listen.

GEE

Alright then, let's start there. What do you tell her? What do you think the

solution is?

ROGER

Authority, Professor.

GEE

What do you mean "authority"?

ROGER

Authority in writing. What she basically lacked in her paper. The sole reason Professors Penrose and Geisler wrote their article.

GEE

The authoritative voice as a student, you mean.

ROGER

That's it. An authoritative voice as a COLLEGE student.

GEE

Well, Roger, enlighten me with your theory.

JANET

(Jealous of the turn in conversation)

Enlighten us, please.

ROGER

(Puts cigar down)

Well, I'd like to start off with the basic definition of authority. To have authority, is... is to demand and gain respect, have more experience, and have acquisition of knowledge from a certain

path.<sup>1</sup> It's someone or something that provides the driving hand in delivering a message.

JANET

But that's the tricky part right there.

JANET (cont.)

How can you even deliver a message when no one believes you or even cares what you say? That's where I struggle.

ROGER

Well, my dear, you have to gain ethos through your writing. Even if it's your first paper, you can show the people you're writing for that you're credible and you have a say in whatever you're stating.

Roger takes a smoke.

ROGER (cont.)

See, that credibility, "ethos," is important because "it establishes your authority with[in] a given discourse community or context, through conventions or tactics commonly practiced with that discourse."<sup>2</sup>

JANET

In English, please.

ROGER

Basically, you show the audience you're working with that you have a say in

---

<sup>1</sup> Penrose and Geisler

<sup>2</sup> Maddox para. 7

what's going on, that they can look to you for answers. You have to be able to appeal to them, you see? Talk their language, have common beliefs, the discourse.

GEE

The "Discourse."

ROGER

That's what I said, the discourse.

GEE

You mean Discourse.

ROGER

You're confusing me there, pal.

GEE

Discourse with a capital "D." I discovered it myself, actually. I mention it because, in all honesty, it is exactly what you're stating there. It's the "saying (writing)-doing-valuing-believing combinations" that are "ways of being in the world."<sup>3</sup> You have to be able to share that with your community.

JANET

(Confused)

Could you give us an example, please?

GEE

Well, of course! As Roger mentions, you have to be able to use these

---

<sup>3</sup> Gee para. 5

combinations of language in order to form that bond with your audience, your community. You wouldn't talk slang to your teacher, would you? I wouldn't think so. It's all about who you are

GEE (cont.)

appealing to.

ROGER

And that's a large part of having that authentic voice in writing—that appeal to your audience. You have to “[l]earn to become a legitimate participant in a community [by] learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of full participants.”<sup>4</sup> I had a buddy who worked with this real jerk named Alan. Alan was a computer support specialist with the mindset that he was the top authority in the office they worked in. But the truth was otherwise.

JANET

And why is that?

ROGER

It's the way he appeared to the office, his discourse community. When he exchanged emails with my friend, as he did weekly for his job, it was evident that “[Alan] did not write in ways the community members saw as appropriate.”<sup>5</sup> The office “[didn't] appear to view him as a fledgling member but rather as an

---

<sup>4</sup> Wardle 290

<sup>5</sup> Wardle 291

object—a tool enabling them to get work done.”<sup>6</sup>

GEE

Hmm... this sounds familiar. Maybe a problem with his identity kit?

ROGER

What was that?

GEE

I'll get back to it. Go on.

ROGER

Yeah, well, that leads me to say that just because you have authority, doesn't mean that you are the best. It means you can contribute to an overall community.

A man walks up to the table, holding a flask of whiskey in his hand.

ALAN

(Slurring his words)

Hey, Mister. If I heard you correctly, you had something to say about this guy right here.

Alan points to himself.

ALAN (cont.)

Well, I'd... I'd like to say that I am GOD.<sup>7</sup> And everyone in that dumb... dumb office, everyone in this room here are...

---

<sup>6</sup> Wardle 291

<sup>7</sup> Wardle 292

are nobodies!<sup>8</sup>

Security immediately comes and detains him.

ALAN (O.S.)

(Shouting)

Nobodies!

GEE

And that there answered your definition of authority, if I do say so myself.

ROGER

Truly feared for my life there, honest.

All three nervously chuckle.

GEE

But, yes! I thought I recognized your story! He is a regular here too. I've helped him constantly by fixing him up, figuring out his problem with Discourse in certain discourses.

JANET

How so?

GEE

Well, I try my best to work with him step by step to form "a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize."<sup>9</sup> This includes that

---

<sup>8</sup> Wardle 292

<sup>9</sup> Gee para. 6

Discourse we talked of in order to fit in with people at his job, etcetera.

Both Roger and Janet nod in agreement.

GEE (cont.)

Roger, what you say of Alan is totally correct. His misuse of language and beliefs, his capital "D" Discourse,

GEE (cont.)

lead him to have a disconnect within his office community.

ROGER

(Taking another smoke)

Exactly. Well put, Professor, well put.

GEE

(Takes sip of coffee)

Well, please proceed with your inquiry.

ROGER

Oh yes, yes. So as I was saying, there needs to be that bond within the community. The president and his country, the activist and his followers, the writer and the readers—all in a "parallel activit[y] involving [a] negotiation of meaning between [each other]"<sup>10</sup> so that everything can be communicated well, you see? That's when you form that credibility, that ethos, and in turn, you gain that authority.

---

<sup>10</sup> Grant-Davie 356

JANET

(Smiling)

Way to bring it back around! Hahaha!

ROGER

(Smiling)

Are you both getting it now? You, doll face?

JANET

I think so, I think so.

GEE

(After taking a sip of coffee)

Very impressive, Mister Roger, very impressive. I'd just like to understand more. You've made it a point to define what authority is and all its components, but you missed one thing.

ROGER

And that is?

GEE

Well, how this applies to the college student, how a freshman like Janet here can gain authority.

ROGER

I was just getting to that, old chap!

Gee smirks at Roger's distinct humor.

ROGER

Well, I'd like to first start out with the "Reading and Writing without Authority" article I mentioned

Professors Penrose and Geisler wrote on Janet and me. The reason it was written was to show the distinct difference between the writing of a graduate student, like myself, and the incoming freshmen, like Janet. The underlying message in the article, however, was to show differences in approach when writing a paper. Not just the writing itself.

JANET becomes more attentive, wondering what he has to say.

JANET

The approach, you say. The mindset to write a paper?

ROGER

That's right. See, being a graduate student working on doctoral work in philosophy, writing a paper on paternalism came easy to me. I had acquired most of my "knowledge, issues, and customs of the study"<sup>11</sup> through my years of college. When I wrote my paper on this subject, I used a wide variety of sources. I used ones I agreed with, argued against ones I did not agree with, and formed my own claims on the matter. I was able to analyze what I found, craft it, and bring forth a new message for my audience, the readers. Authority.

GEE

Kudos to you, scholar. You are a man of

---

<sup>11</sup> Penrose and Geisler para. 3

rhetoric.

ROGER

That I am, sir. That I am. That leads me to the approach Janet and many students like her have towards texts and writing.

GEE

(Getting excited)

Please!

JANET

(Attentive)

Oh yes, please. I really wanna' hear this.

ROGER

I read an article "Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively" by highly respected Margaret Kantz, a professor at the Central Missouri State University, in which she states how students do a number of things incorrectly when approaching certain texts. I'll get to the reason why I'm even mentioning this in a bit. Professor Kantz states, and I quote, that "students misunderstand sources because they read the texts as stories," they perceive that "all sources are telling the truth so any opinion or persuasiveness means the text is either false or made up," students "do not understand that facts are claims mostly used in persuasive writing to create impressions," and

they "do not read context as a rhetorical context but lists of facts."<sup>12</sup>

Janet whistles as if that was a lot to take in.

ROGER (cont.)

What this means is that students are not seeing the big picture when using their sources correctly. They see them as "a list of facts" as Janet did in her paper. Anything that seems opinionated, persuasive, a voice, they just forget about. Not reading context as rhetorical means just that. They do not see the overall circumstance of what the source is telling them, they do not see the in-depth conversation. But is this something students can't handle? No. Students are all capable of reading rhetorically, comprehensively, and avoiding those points Kantz has stated.

Roger slowly stands up from his chair

ROGER (cont.)

Once they do that it will give them confidence. Once they do that they will be able to construct their own thought on the text, cite that source, and give that input into their papers. This will then expand their ethos and open up a relationship between them and their audience. That relationship becomes a bond, thus showing their authority.

---

<sup>12</sup> Kantz 433

At this point Roger is standing up, oblivious to the fact that he expelled his theory out in front of the whole coffee house. He is immediately showered with snaps and positive statements from people around him.

ROGER

Thank you, thank you.

Roger sits back down.

GEE

Wow, really have to hand it to you, son. That was... grand.

JANET

Roger, wow. Honestly, thank you for that. As much as I really don't want to say it, that really opened my eyes.

ROGER

Janet... That really means a lot. I'm glad I could finally help with your dilemma.

JANET

Seriously! I find it so riveting now how easy it all really is. I have to be able to focus on not just getting through something, but really understanding it all the way. I made a mistake of taking things too literally when reading and not taking them out of context for a true meaning. That showed in my writing and ultimately gave my writing little authority.<sup>13</sup>

GEE

---

<sup>13</sup> Penrose and Geisler para. 2

Now, Janet, what's your next move?

JANET

I think it's time to go back to school.  
I just need that confidence, you know?  
And I think I found it.

ROGER

That confidence is what the first step  
to having authority is all about.  
You'll make it big, kid. If you follow  
those steps, you'll definitely excel  
professionally. I believe in you.

GEE

(Standing up)

Well, I think my work here is done.

ROGER

Your work?

Roger laughs.

ROGER

You're an interesting man, you know  
that?

GEE

(Laughs)

Take care, scholars.

GEE exits, a backlight is shown on him.

Roger and Janet look at each other and smile. They get up as  
Roger puts his white suit jacket on Janet. They both walk  
through the door, a backlight on them both.

FADE OUT

THE END

## Works Cited

- Gee, James Paul. "Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction." *Journal of Education* 171.1 (1989): 5-17. Rpt. in Wardle and Downs n. pag. Web. 4 Nov. 2014.
- Grant-Davie, Keith. "Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents." *Rhetoric Review* 15.2 (1997): 264-79. Rpt. in Wardle and Downs 347-64. Print.
- Kantz, Margaret. "Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively." *College English* 52.1 (1990): 74-91. Rpt. in Wardle and Downs 428-46. Print.
- Maddox, Willa. "Navigating Authority in Coursework and Life: An Unofficial Guide for Fellow Students." *Stylus: A Journal of First-Year Writing* 5.2 (2014): 5-11. Web. 4 Nov. 2014.
- Penrose, Ann M., and Cheryl Geisler. "Reading and Writing without Authority." *College Composition and Communication* 45.4 (1994): 505-20. Rpt. in Wardle and Downs n. pag. Web. 4 Nov. 2014.
- Wardle, Elizabeth. "Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces." *Enculturation* 5.2 (2004): n. pag. Rpt. in Wardle and Downs 284-301. Print.
- Wardle, Elizabeth, and Doug Downs, eds. *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2014. Print.

## Angelo Guevara-Malavé



Angelo Guevara-Malavé is a freshman at the University of Central Florida where he is majoring in Marketing and Business Administration. His aspiration would be to continue his studies into graduate school to earn a Master's Degree in his field. His career interests are to work in entertainment marketing and someday own a film production company. Angelo was also awarded a place on the Dean's List. Besides his studies, Angelo enjoys filming and going on adventures with friends.