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# *The Death of Authority*

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## **The Prologue**

**I**t was dark that evening. I've never encountered a darker night in my life until this one rolled in. I can still recall where I was that night when I got the call. I was eating dinner with my wife and our 13-month old baby. Of course little Jeremy had to be 13 months old. I just hated superstitions.

When I finished my call I gathered my things to leave and crossed in front of my wife, who was still seated at the dinner table with a spoon full of small peas to Jeremy's mouth. She threw me a look that told me how upset she was at the call at this hour. But really, it didn't bother me; I worked hard at solving puzzles and her face only amused me.

I gave her a quick peck and hurried out the door before I could be stopped by anything else. From the distress I heard on the line, I knew it had to be serious. There were other cases I had to solve in the past that seemed to throw me off balance, but this one would be the mother-load. This earthquake would toss me over the cliff to be devoured by man-eating sharks.

When I arrived at the scene of the crime, there were lights and people flashing and bustling about. After quickly displaying my badge at the police officers on guard around the yellow tape, I stepped into the tent that surrounded the crime. Once inside, inspecting the details, I couldn't help the title that immediately popped into my head of what this chapter in my investigative career could be called if I wrote an autobiography: *The Death Of Authority*.

## **The Case of Authority's Death**

The victim, Authority, lived to be as old as the Greeks that first invented him and was still as important as ever. Basing my inferences on his profile, he seemed to be what gave newcomers and masters alike something called Ethos. Ethos was one of three appeals, the other two being his brother and sister, Logos and Pathos. These three appeals combined gave a writer authority with the help of Ethos portraying credibility, expertise, or competence in their discourse community; Pathos stimulating the feelings of the audience to evoke a change in their attitudes and actions; and Logos mobilizing the powers of reasoning.<sup>1</sup> Never was there a time that those three were separated, unless it was a matter of life and death.

A Discourse, in this sense, is a sort of 'identity kit' that comes with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write in a specific community so as to take on a role that others will recognize.<sup>2</sup> As a detective, I needed to delve deeper into the "identity kits" and appeals of my suspects, mastering in the recognition of each person's role in their discourse. I cut right to the chase.

It wasn't many hours after, near the crack of dawn, that a young woman was brought in to the station. She seemed timid and slightly fearful of the situation she found herself in, but she

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<sup>1</sup> Covino and Jolliffe 388

<sup>2</sup> Gee para. 6

seemed to hold information that might be vital to this investigation, so I jumped on the opportunity to interview her first.

Walking into the interrogation room they held her in, I decided to play good cop to see where it would get me. While we were carefully sitting down on the hard wooden chair, I asked her the basics: name, age, residence, what she knew about the crime.

It turns out her name was Janet. I knew the name rang a bell, but I couldn't decide where I knew her. I kept this discovery and mystery out of my facial expressions and proceeded with the interrogation.

"So, Miss Janet," I said as I opened up the file folder I had in front of me, taking a peek at the list of questions I compiled in a hurry before walking in. "What were you doing near the scene of the crime? I heard from some of the officers that brought you in that you were near the building where we found Authority's body, and you seemed to be very nervous at the time. If you ask me, this would be considered very suspicious and incriminating behavior."

"No! I swear I didn't kill Authority!" she said.

Maybe it was time to change to bad cop. "I beg to differ. If I see a nosy kid near the scene of a murder, jittery and nervous, then I assume they committed the crime. You seem like the type to only pick one arguing side of the conversation, not even creating your own opinion on the topic. I can tell that you only know how to use Pathos and Logos, without even eliciting Ethos in the writing process at all."

From what I observed Janet seemed to possess Pathos and, with hard work, she could have Logos as well in her writing process. I'm not sure if she had the ability to use Ethos well enough, but the accidental lack of use or butchering of Authority in an academic paper might have been enough to murder him.

Staring her down, I told Janet what I thought. "Maybe it was an accident that you killed Authority. If so, now's the time to confess because prolonging this will only make things worse."

"No, I swear I didn't kill Authority! I may not know how to write with Ethos but I didn't neglect my use of Authority so much that I killed him! I swear, in Penrose and Geisler's study I just didn't understand that '[t]exts are authored [and that] authors present knowledge in the form of claims.'<sup>3</sup> How was I supposed to know that I had to make my own inferences and claims on the subject? I may have had little knowledge in the past on how to use Ethos, but it wasn't enough to kill Authority. Please! I swear!"

By the end of her explanation she started to break down and sob. "I just didn't know."

Realizing that she truly didn't know anything about Authority's death, I knew I had to start from scratch to find a new suspect. Understanding that "texts" can refer to the many "mental and oral representations of the material texts, regardless of whether they are ever written out,"<sup>4</sup> I could see now that Janet's written text most likely resembled her verbal text. Taking what she said into consideration I could see now that she truly did know how to use Pathos to her benefit. Her use of Pathos convinced me enough to accept her claim, and even though it seems she may not have used Authority in her writing before, it wasn't enough to kill him from misuse. So the question still remained: Why was she there in the first place?

"Janet," I said, and her tear-stained face peered up into mine. "Why were you there in the first place?"

"I—I heard a commotion and through my window I saw Authority fighting with someone. But it was so dark I couldn't tell who it was. I just—I didn't know that 'knowledge claims can conflict, and knowledge claims can be tested.'<sup>5</sup>" She continued her unnecessary explanation,

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<sup>3</sup> Penrose and Geisler para. 6

<sup>4</sup> Prior 495

<sup>5</sup> Penrose and Geisler para.

because I already knew she was innocent. “Roger knew those kinds of things. He knew Authority better than me.”

At hearing the new name, I suddenly realized where I knew her from. The bell that was ringing in my head before had turned into a repetitive gong now. She had mentioned in her explanation that she was in the Penrose and Geisler study. She’s *that* Janet! But it wasn’t just Janet in the study. Roger was involved, too, and even though, from what I remember, he had more experience with Authority than Janet, which eliminated him as a suspect. He knew how valuable Authority could be, especially in writing. He might, however, have a lead to this investigation.

With no time to waste, I quickly rose up out of my chair, scraping the legs against the hard floor in the process. “Where is Roger now?”

Janet, who was still slightly distraught and surprised at my reaction, muttered through her gasping sobs that he would be in his dorm at college. After she gave me the name of the college, I told Janet that she had permission to leave.

Practically running out the door, I headed for the nearest phone to call Roger’s college to get him in the interrogation room as soon as possible. There is no time to waste when there’s a murderer still at large.

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After what seemed an eternity of waiting in my office reviewing and overlooking the evidence, I knew that the murderer had to be either a madman or someone who cared little about the repercussions of killing someone as important as Authority.

Starting to get anxious at Roger’s arrival, I finally laid my eyes on Roger entering the station. He walked very confidently and strode to the front desk where I hurried to greet him one-on-one. I could already tell the kind of Ethos he presented with the way he walked. This only made me presume that his Ethos in life would carry into the way he writes, the same way it would with Janet. Leading him into the interrogation room, I told him he had the right to consult a lawyer, but he interrupted me halfway.

“I know my rights, and I don’t need a lawyer,” he said. “I have nothing to hide and I want to make this quick; I have a very busy day ahead of me.”

“Okay then.” Glancing down at my watch, I realized the time was seven in the morning, and if I wanted to get a lot from Roger and catch the killer, I had to crack down. “What do you know about the recent murder of Authority?” Putting my hands in my pockets, I leaned on the back of my heels, curious of his answer.

“Authority?” His eyes grew wide and he seemed genuinely surprised. I was almost shocked he didn’t know. I was sure that at least someone would have seen the crime scene tape near the murder, or that Roger, with that much experience with Authority according to Penrose and Geisler’s study, would have still kept in touch with him on his whereabouts.

“I’m surprised that you don’t know about his death. I would have thought a person like you would keep constant contact with Authority.” Taking a seat on the wooden chair across from Roger, I listened to what he had to say next.

“I’ve always kept in contact with Authority, especially after Penrose and Geisler’s study proved to me how vital he could be. But I’ve also been very busy lately talking to Discourse and the Modes of Belonging.”

“You mean Engagement, Imagination, and Alignment?”<sup>6</sup> I confirmed. Realizing why he might have become friends with the Modes of Belonging to join Discourse, I voiced my opinion out loud. “I know that during the study, you were completing your doctoral work in philosophy, so I can see

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<sup>6</sup> Wardle 288

how Discourse and the Modes of Belonging could be a big help in knowing how to enculturate yourself in that specific group.”<sup>7</sup>

Now taking in all of the facts, I could understand how the five of them could be the closest of friends. In becoming incorporated in a discourse community, one must demonstrate the positives of the different Modes of Belonging to become not only an accepted newcomer of the discourse, but an eventual master. Through participation (Engagement), imagining roles for oneself (Imagination), and shaping one’s vision and identity to line up with that of the group (Alignment), a person can become completely involved in a new community.

“Yes, exactly, I just—” Roger stopped mid-sentence, as if distracted by a passing thought. He stared almost mindlessly as his eyes glazed over, perhaps remembering something.

Furrowing my eyebrows in confusion at his current state, I asked what was bothering him.

He glanced down at his hands, inspecting the veins and lines in them. His confident stance and posture was almost gone as he put all his focus on his fingers, trying to choose the right words to say I suppose.

“I was talking with Discourse a week ago. He was telling me that he met someone new. I think... I think his name was Alan. He told me that he was having trouble getting Alan accustomed to his new discourse community and that no matter what, Alan wouldn’t—”

“He wouldn’t what?”

“He wouldn’t use the conventions of the Discourse, which was really constraining him from fully entering into that community. Every time things wouldn’t go Alan’s way, he would blame Discourse and the people in that discourse community for being ‘less than’ or he wouldn’t even see himself as the problem. When it was obviously and always his fault! He knew what he was doing when he would blame Discourse and yell at Imagination.”

It seems this guy might be our man. Not only does he seem to neglect the Discourse he’s in, but he also seems to be one to envision his own roles in the community rather than following the rules set forth by the discourse community itself. Following the group is the key to being a newcomer and becoming enculturated, and if one was frustrated and angry enough, they could kill Authority on their way to shoving themselves into a position that’s not meant for them.

“What more do you know about Alan?”

“Not much besides that. I know he’s not the nicest of guys and if anyone could kill Authority on purpose, it would be him.”

It seems like we found our guy. “Where would he be now?”

“I’m not too sure. Discourse told me that the last time they spoke was a couple of days ago on my campus, so he might still be there.

Thanking him quickly for his answers, I ran out the room and notified the nearest detective I could find. “We need to find this Alan guy pronto.”

Sending out patrols and officers to scout for him, I hurried into my office to finish up some paperwork on the case. Only an hour later, at nine in the morning, I heard a man struggling to fight off the ironclad grip the officers who held him in his handcuffed state. The suspect, almost thrown inside the room, seemed to relax somewhat, when an officer and I walked inside to interrogate him.

“Why the struggle if you have nothing to hide?” I meant to grill this guy as if my life depended on it.

He gave me a face full of disgust and revulsion at my challenge, “Because I don’t like being manhandled for no reason!”

“Well then, maybe the next time you find yourself in handcuffs strolling into the station you might not be ‘manhandled’ if you choose to cooperate with us instead.” Skipping the niceties, I demanded more of him. “*So where were you last night when the crime took place? Do you have*

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<sup>7</sup> Penrose and Geisler para. 3

*anyone to account for your whereabouts last night? Do you know the victim Authority and have you been angry with him recently? Who was Authority to you?"*

It seemed that no matter the amount of questions I directed at him, he wouldn't budge. He'd either give a grunt if he was amused or glance at me and the other officer present if we were lucky. If this guy had any authority, in life or in his writing, he wasn't showing it now. After an hour and a half of nothing solid, I was starting to reach the bottom of the long list of interrogatory practices that would get him to confess, so I tried hitting him with hard accusations as a final effort.

"You were seen fighting with Authority last night! Admit it, you never liked him because you always wanted to be seen as the boss and Authority was just someone beneath you that was in your way."

I could see the corner of his mouth twitch into a smile, if for only a millisecond. I knew I was getting close.

"You were the one who killed Authority!" I yelled, hitting the table, hoping for a reaction.

"Yes! So what if I did?"

I couldn't help but feel my eyes widen. I pushed him further. This was just hypothetical. I needed him to confess.

"You attempted to 'assert the identity' that you imagined for yourself and therefore resisted the one imposed on you by the workplace Discourse you joined!"<sup>8</sup>

"So what?! Everyone else is 'just users,' they don't mean anything to me and the social ladder I stand on. I admit that I did it! But Authority had it coming. I make my *own* identity. I use my *own* conventions. I believe in my *own* values! I am my own command! I AM GOD!"<sup>9</sup>

"Then you're under arrest for the murder of Authority by the police of Writing City! Take him away!"

I glanced at the officer beside me, who looked furious at Alan's confession. I saw him immediately grab Alan's arm and march him to the back of the station for holding.

## **Wrapping up the Investigation**

Alan didn't display Authority in the proper way Authority was meant for. He imposed his status on the values, beliefs, and conventions of his workplace's discourse community, breaking away from the laws that govern all newcomers and masters alike.

In other words, Alan had murdered Authority through the use of his ego; were he made aware of his destructive and imposing ways that tried to replace Authority's role in good writing, this murder may not have happened.

Yet even though we may have lost a valuable writing tool here in Writing City, it will not go unnoticed. If enough people believe and use Authority again in their writing, his spirit will live on forever, as it has for this long. It seems like this murder could be turned around into a reprisal of how writing with Authority could benefit all if we all take the responsibility to teach one another how to use it.

THE END

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<sup>8</sup> Wardle 295

<sup>9</sup> Wardle 292

## Reflecting Back on “The Death of Authority”—A Note from the Author

The reason for personifying the various concepts and techniques of good writing as characters in my story was to embed in the minds of the readers that these concepts are separate from one another and at the same time connected, in both the creative story and in good writing. By characterizing Discourse and the Modes of Belonging, the reader then develops the desire to find out how these characters play a part in the investigation and how they play a part in good writing at the same time. With Authority as the main role and aspect of good writing, its counterparts (Discourse, the Modes of Belonging, Ethos, Pathos, and Logos) help to support the outcome of good authority use. With the detective’s prior knowledge and the help received by interrogating Roger, Janet, and Alan, the detective was led to the discovery of Alan’s crimes, and therefore his eventual confession and arrest. Since Alan was the one that didn’t properly use all aspects of writing to create the authority needed in his workplace Discourse, he had been the one to butcher his use of authority in writing, thereby killing him from neglect, misuse, and arrogance.

My motive for defining specific terms and not others within my story is due to the need to keep a flow within the storyline while also informing the audience of immediate and necessary techniques to maintain authority in their own writing as the story progressed. Terms such as “identity kit” from Gee and “modes of belonging” from Wardle, for instance, were mentioned so briefly that they require more explanation.

An “identity kit” is one’s image of themselves inside a community—specifically, a discourse community. In order to be enculturated and become a member of a community, one must fulfill the values, beliefs, and ideals of the group they are joining (Gee para. 5). The best way to do that is to don a different image or costume oneself to fit in with the group. In each discourse community, as either the newcomer or the master, one acts differently for each, such as when a student talks in a different manner with a teacher than with a parent; in that way, the classroom and the home are two different Discourses. “Modes of Belonging” relate to “identity kit” in terms of discourse community since it describes the three necessary ways one must “engage in the work that other community members do, including the writing they do” (Wardle 288). Joining a new workplace Discourse is not simply learning new ideas and skills; it’s constructing an identity specific to that Discourse so as to truly be embedded into the community (Wardle 288). With Engagement, Imagination, and Alignment one can be recognized as a member through engagement such as participation, imagination such as imagining one’s role in terms of the whole of the group, and alignment such as aligning one’s ideals with the community’s. Making Alan the villain and murderer of this piece, I demonstrate that a misuse of Authority can lead to imposing oneself in a community which may not be the best way to acclimate oneself in a discourse, especially in the workplace. When a writer doesn’t use the counterparts of writing such as Ethos, Pathos, Logos, and the Modes of Belonging, properly, they imagine themselves in a role that isn’t meant to be theirs, which causes friction between the newcomer and the masters of the group. Imagining one’s role in the group as something different than what was assigned, and not aligning to the Discourse’s goals, makes the newcomer seem like a bad guy. Imposing oneself in a

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group the wrong way can destroy credibility, or ethos, in that community and isolate a person from engagement in the Discourse. Therefore, Alan “killed” Authority in his writing through his actions by not abiding by the rules of joining a new Discourse.

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