

Story for performance #688  
webcast from New York City at 08:00PM, 09 May 07



Source: Michael R. Gordon, 'Official takes case to US but skeptics don't budge', *New York Times online*, 09/05/07.

Tags: [Iraq](#), [water](#), [death](#), [war](#)

Writer/s: [Adrian Heathfield](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

His voice sounded strange to me. Each word shuddering with tones I could not yet feel or recognise, each word passing through me like invisible matter. Its force was like soft air moving through my ears: so not heard, not really heard as such.

Up in the distance, the dust clouds from the last car to pass us by were still settling on the road. I have to say, it's not that I was not paying attention: I was. I really was. My ears were pricked, as they say, even my eyes peeled, and the general senses heightened; this is how it is here, these days, with the troubles. This leads you all the time to wait for the tiny signs of *it* coming: *it* being sudden but not unpredictable.

They say that those who have been close to the death, when it comes, have a sense of its looking as it takes over things, and so no matter how fast it can come, there is always some time, when you might feel it, if you have the nose or ear or eye or whatever, and this helps. And the *idea* of this help is what you hold on to, when you are out and about; to think that you can get out of the way or whatever, do the cheating of it, and take away the sense of its coming for next time. Anyhow, this is not the thing I am talking, as this is the death thing, and what I was talking before, with the words 'passing through me like invisible matter' was definitely the *life* thing. Just a last note though on this death point, because some are fond of saying that it always comes too soon, but I have to say that that's not it, at all. It always comes in its own time, is what I think. And this time is not *your* time, obviously, until of course 'your time has come', as they say.

So, it was late in the day, the last mile of a walk, when he said these words to me in the open. Quite faint. And I did not see the beauty. Or hear much of anything at all, as I have said. Anwar, his name was. Not a common name around here. Yes, we were in the open, which is a dangerous place, but these days the only place you can be if you must fetch water. His talk was mundane: the stuff you hear a lot of. He talked about the cost of houses and the changing weather. He talked of the exhaustion from all the work; of the love he had for her in the day to day, the way they fitted; their place and all its things; also the child and her ways of being, the funny stuff she did, her brilliant energies and such. He talked about his fears for the future, his doubt about the purpose of it all, there being nothing much left of it once he is gone. He spoke of the politics and its becoming history. He said, 'What is there to know, that is not already known?'. He spoke of

making the most of the present, living for it, as a kind of religion. His secret in all this, of wanting it to last very long: 'As long', he said, 'as anyone could imagine'. He looked straight through the eyes.

We were getting nearer to the turn and the water, the walking inside the talking, and I knew soon that he would be gone. Something in him knew this too. Like this sense of an ending, coming over us, not yet finished but the finishing inside it all like a weight, a tangible heaviness, of some already done future. Yes, and a freedom, undeniably there, like all the new cranes on the skyline, but of course, not to be said. And it was somewhere in all this, toward the end, that it happened. And this is the when I am speaking of: the passing of it into me. Not in the story of the such and such, which in and of itself, was nothing much to speak of. But, as they say, 'the spirit of the thing', though this too is quite inadequate, as words go, in relation to the thing itself, which has no itself. I guess that's part of the problem here.

But at that time, and *now* for that matter, not so much the problem, as the virtue, the beautiful force that bled into me, unbeknownst to me. I keep saying this 'beautiful' word, and to be honest you could just say \_\_\_\_\_, or substitute this \_\_\_\_\_ every time I say it, for whatever word you have for the quality of things you love but cannot say what it is they have are or why. Personally, I don't have a better word.

He gave this to me, when least expected, though of course, long ached for, long waited to hear. This was the time then, when it came to me. I think I can say that, though it is hard to say what time it was. He was civil, courteous even. He turned in another direction and went his way.

So, to draw these findings to a conclusion, what I can say about it is this: that I did not hear it, or know the look of it at the time. And I still cannot. Though it was there, in something done in the saying, like a gesture or a dance you cannot think. I am only speaking of one instance of it, and there are of course many that you live by, one for each passage of your life; and you live by them, without them ever telling you that this is what you are living by. Living doesn't need to disclose its reasons or anything much about itself. Why should it? It's only us—those that are doing it—who keep searching.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Adrian Heathfield.*