On effective analysis

A successful analysis can be generally textual or contextual in nature. But the two approaches are not
mutually exclusive—in fact, most analyses consider the details of the text, but also attend to the particulars
of context as well.

The Guardian

Straight from the Heart

Tim Collins

On July 11, 2005, a woman named Mari Fathy-Williams made an intensely moving speech in London at
the site where her son Anthony had been killed in a terrorist bombing four days earlier. Her speech was
reported in numerous media outlets, The Guardian, a British newspaper, printed Fathy-Williams’s speech on
July 13, with an analysis and commentary by Tim Collins. Collins considers the factors that make Fathy-
Williams’s speech so powerful, and places it in a larger context of responses to terrorism.

Caught in the spotlight of history, set on the stage of a very
public event, Mari Fathy-Williams, the mother of Anthony
Fathy-Williams, 29 and missing since Thursday, appeals for
news of her son. Her words are a mixture of stirring rhetoric,
heartfelt appeal and a stateswoman-like vision, and so speak
on many levels to the nation and the world. Her appeal is a
simple one—where is my son? If he has been killed, then
why? Who has gained?

Mari has found herself, as did on the eve of the invasion of
Iraq, an unwritten voice, speaking amid momentous events.
Her appeal, delivered on Monday not far from Tavistock
Square, where she fears her son died in the bomb attack on
the number 30 bus, gives a verbal form to the whirlpool of
emotions that have engulfed society as the result of last
week’s bombings. I suspect that Mari, like myself, had no idea
that her words would find such wide recognition, have fed
such an acute hunger for explanation, have stoked such a
thirst for expression of the sheer horror of Thursday’s events.

This kind of speech is normally the preserve of the great
orators, statesmen and playwrights, of Shakespeare, Churchill
or Lincoln. It is often a single speech, a soliloquy or address
from the sides of the galleries, that explains, inspires, exhorts
and challenges. But always such addresses are crafted for effect
and consciously intended to sway and influence, and often, as
in the case of Shakespeare’s Henry V, they are set in the mouth
of a long dead hero or delivered by wordsmiths who are
masters of their craft. It is rare in history that such oratory is
the genuine article, springing from the heart and bursting
forth to an unwritten audience. In Mari’s case, her speech
gained its power as a vehicle of grief and loss, and of the angst
of a mother who yearns for her beloved son. In my case it
was the opposite emotion from which I drew inspiration—an
appeal to understand, to empathize, to give courage and
purpose. I was motivated by a need to warn and teach as
well as to encourage. Mari’s motivation is a reflection on
loss and that most powerful of all emotions, a mother’s love.

The form of the address takes is as poignant as the language
used. There is an initial explanation of the extraordinary
circumstances of the loss, a cri de cœur for the innocent
bodies lost, a rejection of the act by its comparison to the
great liberators, and the assertion that her son is all our loss
in the family of humanity. It ends with her personal grief for
her flesh and blood, her hope and pride. The language
echoes verses of the Bible as well as from the Koran. It has
raw passion as well as heart-rending pathos.

With only a photograph of her son and a sheaf of paper as a
prompt, Mari’s words burst out with as much emotion as
anger. Her speech stands in stark contrast to the pronounce-
ments of politicians, prepared by aids and delivered from
copious notes. It is indeed the raw originality and authentic
angst that give the delivery such impact, the plea such effect.

His knighted veteran of the Royal Shakespeare Company
could deliver such an address without hours or even days
of rehearsal. I know from my own experience that only moment-
ous events can provoke such a moment, only raw emotion
can inspire such a spontaneous plea. I am often asked how
long it took me to write my speech, delivered to my regi-
ment, the Royal Irish, on the eve of the invasion of Iraq on
March 19, 2003, at Fort Bliss, Texas. The answer is simple—not one moment. There was no plan, I spoke without notes. For me there was only the looming specter of actual warfare and the certainty of loss and
killing, and I was speaking to myself as well as to my men. I
suspect for Mari there was only the yawning black void of
loss, the cavern left behind in her life caused by the loss of a
son who can never be replaced.
What then, can we take from this? Marie's appeal is as important as it is momentous. Her words are as free from hatred as they are free from self-interest: it is clear that no man can give her her heart's desire—her son. I was also struck by the quiet dignity of her words, the clarity of her view and the weight of her convictions. She does not condemn, she appeals; her words act as an indictment of all war and violence, not just acts of terror but also the unnecessary aggression of nation states. Her message is simple: here is a human who only wanted to give, to succeed and to make her mother proud. Where is the victory in his death? Where is the progress in his destruction? In her own words: "What inspiration can senseless slaughter provide?"

I am certain that Marie's appeal will go down as one of the great speeches of our new century. It will give comfort to the families and friends of the dead and injured, both of this act and no doubt, regrettably, of events still to come. It should act as a caution to statesmen and leaders, a focus for public grief and, ultimately, as a challenge to, as well as a condemnation of, the perpetrators.

Marie is already an icon of the loss of Thursday July 7. Having travelled from Africa to find a better life, Anthony Fatoyi-Williams carried the hopes and pride of his family. Now, as his mother has travelled to London, arguably one of the most cosmopolitan and integrated cities in the world, and standing nearby a wrecked icon of that city, a red double-decker bus, she has made an appeal which is haunting as it is relevant, as poignant as it is appealing. It is a fact that such a victory as both Marie and I produced is born of momentous events, and inspired by hope and fears in equal measure.

But Marie's appeal is also important on another level. I have long urged soldiers in conflict zones to keep communicating with the population in order to be seen as people—it is easier to kill uniforms than it is to kill people. On July 7 the suicide bombers attacked icons of a society that they hated more than they loved life, the Red London bus and the tube. Marie's speech has stressed the real victim's identities. They are all of us.

Collins sees Fatoyi-Williams's strength as perhaps the most important aspect of her speech. She responds to horrific events in a way that personalises them and shows their human cost.

Collins examines how Marie's appeal, which convinces her audience of her sincerity and lack of malice.

Marie's speech

This is Anthony, Anthony Fatoyi-Williams, 26 years old, he's missing and we fear that he was in the bus explosion ... on Thursday. We don't know. We do know from the witnesses that he left the Northern Line in Euston. We know he made a call to his office at Ameac at 9.41 from the NW1 area to say he could not make [it] by the tube but he would find alternative means of work.

Since then he has not made any contact with any single person. Not New York, not Madrid, not London. There has been widespread slaughter of innocent people. There have been streams of tears, innocent tears. There have been rivers of blood, innocent blood. Death in the morning, people going to find their livelihood, death in the noontime on the highways and streets.

They are not warriors. Which cause has been served? Certainly not the cause of God, not the cause of Allah. Muhammad is only one who gives life and is full of mercy. Anyone who has been misled, or is being misled to believe that by killing innocent people he is serving God should think again because it is not true. Terrorism is not the way. Terrorism is not the way. It doesn't bring peace. We can't deliver peace by terrorism, we can deliver peace by killing people. Throughout history, those people who have changed the world have done so without violence. They have won people to their cause through peaceful protest. Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, their discipline, their self-sacrifice, their conviction made people turn towards them, to follow them. What inspiration can senseless slaughter provide? Death and destruction of young people in their prime as well as old and helpless can never be the foundations for building society.

My son Anthony is my first son, my only son, the head of my family. In African society, we hold on to sons. He has dreams and hopes and I, his mother, must fight to protect them. This is now the fifth day, five days on, and we are waiting to
Analyzing the rhetoric of the gay marriage debate

On May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court handed down a decision that legalized gay marriage in the state. Based on the ruling that denying same-sex couples the same rights as different-sex couples was unconstitutional, conservative and religious groups called the judges activist and liberal and accused them of bending to societal and political pressure in going against the intentions of the framers of the state constitution.

Andrew Sullivan, a gay, conservative political commentator argues instead that the law had to adopt—the judges’ apparent change of mind was not ideological but instead “empirical”, based on increased knowledge of who gay people are.” He continues:

Once you absorb this knowledge, this evidence, this truth, legislative schemes which arbitrarily separate gay people from straight people—and put gay relationships in a separate and unequal box—seem grossly unfair, and certainly a violation of the equality promised in various state constitutions. I think that’s what really happened in the two decades I’ve been arguing about this. We have altered our view of homosociality, and the alteration is not one of degree but kind. And so the law must adapt. Maybe it has happened too quickly for easy cultural digestion. But it is inevitable if we are not to replace knowledge with fear, and inclusion with, yes, prejudice.