

## A LETTER FROM A TEACHER IN INDIA, with A POEM - "THE OFFER"

We have not understood the social cause of the coronavirus crisis or seen how it is a portent of what must come. Politicians talk of getting back to "normality." That would be disastrous. It is our "normality" that has caused the crisis. We are approaching the wipe-out of our species, just as many species have been wiped-out in the past. We seek a technical fix because that is the manner of our culture. Coronavirus is not sent to us from outer space. It is not even a simple consequence of nature. We don't see how fundamental and extensive the danger is. It comes from our total social and political situation and behaviour. We have to change that. I have received a letter from Rit Chattapadhyay, a colleague in India. His letter shows that even this late the change is still possible. That's why I am repeating the letter here.

Rit Chattapadhyay writes:

"Dear Edward

I read your recent paper "Afterword to the Shoe Thief" and your poem "The Offer" and as I kept reading the poem again and again it took me very close to Babi Yar (the site of the notorious massacre) in your play "Coffee." As if the city is our own Babi Yar now and we are always failing to ask the human question. It is all becoming as sharp as a knife, really subtle and direct."

He adds:

"Young people are reacting to your plays as you said they would. The young are with you."

### Poem: *An Offer*

He was early middle age  
Respectable and seedy  
No jacket  
He said its outside in the car sir  
I followed him across the carpark  
Dim floodlit  
The car was in a corner  
He lifted the boot  
Inside a grey half-transparent sack  
A gaping end  
I peered into it

A baby-faced black domed head white whiskers  
It swayed a little  
He said they make the best toothpaste  
The eyes seemed deeper than the head  
Did it remember the sea sand shore tides gulls sky  
The rocking waves  
He tapped the edge of the boot with a tusk-curved knife  
A little metal tune  
Got ready a thin cardboard carton  
The head drooped a little  
Too dim to see the mutilated body  
Good price per slice  
Customers come back for more  
I walked away through the maze of empty cars  
He called after me  
Special price for you mate  
I reached the street  
To have usurp the place of God and lied  
I watched the passing cars

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