

FOREWORD

Lillian Moats gives us, in *The Letter from Death*, a brilliant and strikingly original work of the imagination, drawing both on biblical scholarship and contemporary military doctrine, infused with wit and irony, grounded in a profound aversion to war and a celebration of human potential for peace.

She starts with a provocative premise, that our fear of death is an obstacle to our understanding of life, that this fear is used by those in power to seduce us into violence and hatred. Moats uses death not as a threat, but as a prism through which to examine the most profound questions that confront the human race today. Her ruminations on hell, and how it has been used through the ages, are both funny and troubling, a mini-education in how our culture distorts our perceptions.

She quietly skewers the blaming of war on "human nature," and draws on the research of respected military historians to tell us the untold story of the natural aversion of soldiers to killing. She also reminds

us of what we easily forget: the universal longing of infants for warmth and affection, surely a more powerful resource to draw on than the superficial layers of a culture that denies our deepest needs.

What more authoritative voice can we listen to, in rejecting the violence of war, than that of Death itself? This brief meditation has beauty and eloquence on every page, and it is accompanied by a set of wonderful illustrations by David Moats, the author's son.

Howard Zinn,

historian, activist, playwright and author of

A People's History of the United States and

You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train