Dear Colleagues:

The work of Dame Cicily Fairfield, better known as Rebecca West, has drawn my attention over the years. By turns sharp, probing, luminous, and wise—and always prolix—West is known for wide-ranging fiction, biography, criticism, and travel writing. Her sprawling account of travel through 1937 Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, stands atop the list. Diana Trilling confidently calls it “one of the great books” of the twentieth century, and Larry McMurtry counts it as one of the few great travel books ever written, right up there with Mark Twain’s *Innocents Abroad*.

Not only because West is one of the great writers of the last century, but because I enjoy her writing, I have tried and failed, more than once, to read all of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*; both of my copies come in at well over 1100 pages. I intend to try again. Here’s an example of why I return to her book despite its daunting length:

> Art gives us hope that history may change its spots and man become honourable. What is art? It is not decoration. It is the re-living of experience. The artist says, ‘I will make that event happen again, altering its shape, which was disfigured by its contacts with other events, so that its true significance is revealed’; and his audience says, ‘We will let that event happen again by looking at this man’s picture or house, listening to his music or reading his book.’ It must not be copied, it must be remembered, it must be lived again, passed through those parts of the mind which are actively engaged in life, which bleed when they are wounded and give forth the bland emulsions of joy, while at the same time it is being examined by those parts of the mind which stand apart from life. . . . If art could investigate all experiences then man would understand the whole of life, and could control his destiny. . . . No wonder we reach out to lay hold on such a force when we are beset with disgusting dangers.

As autumn leaves fall and leave barren limbs behind, as shortened days bring longer nights, as the semester’s final frenetic weeks bear upon us, and as we grapple with the perils of a world gone awry, West points us toward art’s power to help us and our students live in the light of what we otherwise might neglect. Green leaves return. Lengthening spring days come again. The semester ends and gives way to a fresh beginning. And out of abundant cause for despair the world around, hope nevertheless “springs eternal in the human breast,” as Alexander Pope once put it.

Yet art, however central to good education it may be, is insufficient to save the world. For that we need and indeed must have greater help beyond ourselves. We therefore trust that “the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Advent blessings upon you all!

Please take note of the following:

- On Friday, December 6, we will host our second *Distinguished Scholars Day* of the year. Limited to prospective students with a minimum ACT 31/SAT 1410, this half-day program provides us an opportunity to showcase the best features of an Honors College
education. Although it is by design a smaller and simpler program than Invitation to Excellence, DSD nonetheless calls on the contributions of many of our faculty and staff. For their help on December 6, please express thanks to Al Beck, David Corey, Elizabeth Corey, Courtney DePalma, Phil Donnelly, Charmaine Dull, Paulette Edwards, Bill Neilson, Melanie Nogalski, Erin Stamile, and Jason Whitt, as well as students Micheal Munson and Grace Oliver.

- The Honors College Christmas Luncheon, to which all full-time faculty and staff are invited, will take place next week, on Tuesday, December 10, from 12:00-1:30 p.m., at the Baylor Club (President’s Suite, Level 500). Please rsvp right away to Paulette Edwards, and look forward to a festive, pleasant lunch together.

- I am delighted to announce receipt of a grant award from the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts (LFP). Awarded to support Re-envisioning the Humanities: Predicament, Perspective, Practice, the grant will provide stipendiary support for fifteen faculty teaching courses in the Honors College as they explore causes of the much-discussed national crisis in the humanities; reflect together on ways in which our mission-driven, interdisciplinary humanities curriculum provides a compelling alternative; and undertake their academic vocation with renewed conviction and strengthened expertise. I enjoyed writing the proposal and know the program will strengthen our shared work in the Honors College. Additional information, including details about the application process, will be made available in the spring semester.

- Much needed new scholarship support for our students is now available through the generosity of Justice Don R. and Tiffany Willett in establishing an endowed scholarship fund. Recognized as a Distinguished Young Alumnus by the University in 2005 and recipient of the Baylor Line Foundation’s Distinguished Alumni Award last spring, Judge Willett is also a long-time member of our Honors College Advisory Council. He currently serves on the bench of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. Advancing our goals in the Give Light campaign, this gift also honors Don and Tiffany’s commitment to support first-generation college students that come to the Honors College with merit and need. Thank you Don and Tiffany!

All the best,

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