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Ancient Play, Modern Implications

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Jeanie Groh

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Ancient Play, Modern Implications



Office of University Communications

February 24, 2012

Gardner-Webb University Theatre To Present “The Burial at Thebes” March 2-6

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. —Gardner-Webb University will present Seamus Heaney’s “The Burial at Thebes” March 2, 3, 5 and 6 at 7:30 p.m., and March 4 at 2:30 p.m. at the Millennium Playhouse, located in the Communication Studies Hall. The play will be directed by James W. Thomas, interim dean of the School of Performing and Visual Arts at Gardner-Webb, and the sets designed by GWU’s award-winning technical director, Chris Keene.

The production will feature Gardner-Webb students and faculty, with special performances by communication studies professor Dr. Joseph Webb as the leader of the chorus, and longtime professional actor Dr. Earl Leininger, associate provost at Gardner-Webb, as Tiresias.

“The Burial at Thebes” is an adaptation of the Greek tragedy “Antigone,” written by Sophocles in the fifth century B.C. When Antigone’s brothers kill each other in brutal civil war, her ruling uncle Creon honors one with a decent burial, but insists, on penalty of death, that the other be left to rot in disgrace on the field. What follows is a daring collision of personal liberty and tyranny, religious conviction and legal oppression, and a sister’s heroism amidst her uncle’s stubborn resolve.

Although written within the context of ancient Greece, Thomas decided to set the play in modern Middle East. The script brings up timeless issues, said Thomas, ones that we are still dealing with today, making the setting particularly appropriate. “How much control does the state have over the individual rights? At what point does religious freedom end and the good of everyone else begin? These issues are prevalent in the play, and we hope the audience will notice their prevalence, also, in our everyday lives,” Thomas said.

Seamus Heaney, an Irish Nobel laureate, wrote “The Burial at Thebes” for Abbey Theater’s one-hundredth anniversary celebration. Initially skeptical about the potential for such a dated play, Heaney quickly discovered its contemporary relevance and pursued the project with passion. It was first performed in 2004, and has enjoyed rave reviews since.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University seeks a higher ground in higher education – one that embraces faith and intellectual freedom, and inspires in students a love of learning, service, and leadership.

-Written by communications intern Jeanie Groh



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