Novelist

Robert Gipe

Thursday, April 20

CRAFT TALK
Arts & Activism: The Unnatural Nature of Natural Storytellers
2-3:15 p.m., Table Rock Room, Plemmons Student Union

READING
7:30 p.m., Table Rock Room, Plemmons Student Union
Robert Gipe grew up in Kingsport, Tennessee. His novel Trampoline, published by Ohio University Press in 2015, has received acclaim from readers and critics. Trampoline is an innovative illustrated novel, the coming-of-age story of 15-year-old Dawn Jewell, who copes with her family and boyfriend and community, while helping her grandmother to challenge coal-mining practices in rural Kentucky. Gipe’s original drawings communicate and enhance the story. Appalachian Journal reviewer Amy Tipton Cortner wrote, “Gipe’s illustrations... flow along with the narrative, indispensable to the dialogue and plot.” Cortner observes that “Dawn’s story ‘fuses the local with the mythic,’ as Faulkner said all enduring literature must do,” and humor “gives this novel buoyancy. Humor... drags Dawn by her shorn green hair to her recalcitrant redemption.”

Michael Ray Taylor, reviewer for the Knoxville News Sentinel, wrote that “In Gipe’s hands, Jewell’s voice is musical and honest, her language and syntax brooking no nonsense and yet capturing the beauty and nuance of mountain life that others around her miss. ‘Trampoline’ is a new American masterpiece.” Trampoline received the 2015 Weatherford Award in fiction from the Appalachian Studies Association and Berea College, an award given to new works that “best illuminate the challenges, personalities, and unique qualities of the Appalachian South.” Gipe’s second novel, Weedeater, is forthcoming.

Robert Gipe is a graduate of Wake Forest University, with a master’s degree in American Studies from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He has worked as a pickle packer, a forklift driver, and educational services director for Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky, where he collaborated for nearly a decade with public schoolteachers on arts and education projects. He currently lives in Harlan, Kentucky, and works as the director of the Appalachian Program at Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College in Cumberland, Kentucky, a job he has held since 1997. He serves as a faculty coordinator of the Crawdad Student Arts Festivals – a series of events highlighting dancing, music, art, writing, and many other forms of creative expression. And he is a key producer of Higher Ground, a series of community-based musical dramas inspired by oral histories and local issues.

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