

Asheville, Western NC bustled with literati in 2014

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(Photo: Jason Koski / University
Photogr)

It's been a great year for books in Western North Carolina. Visits from mega-star authors gave fans a chance to connect with their literary heroes, and new contributions to the local lexicon deepened the region's already rich tradition. Here are a few highlights from the year in books.

Robert Morgan wins Thomas Wolfe award

With "The Road From Gap Creek," Hendersonville native Robert Morgan continues the saga of the life of the Richards family that he started with "Gap Creek" in 1999. This month, the novel won the Western North Carolina Historical Association's 59th annual Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award, presented by the Western North Carolina Historical Association each year since 1955 for works with a special focus on Western

North Carolina.

Elizabeth Gilbert sells out

For her fans, Elizabeth Gilbert is more than an author. She is more of a life coach and a spiritual role model. In 2013, she released a novel, "The Signature of All Things," about an early 19th-century botanist. In a June event co-sponsored by Malaprops and the Great Smokies Writing Program, Gilbert spoke to fans and took their questions in a sold-out event at UNC Asheville's Lipinsky Auditorium. The topics ranged from queries on writing to questions about the meditation practice that she wrote about in her 2006 blockbuster memoir "Eat, Pray, Love." Afterward, she graciously posed for pictures and signed books for elated followers.

James Patterson supports Malaprop's

One of the best-selling American authors of all time, James Patterson has around 300 million books in print worldwide and holds the record for the author with the most New York Times No. 1 best-sellers. In September, he spoke at the Literacy Council of Buncombe County's annual Authors for Literacy event and visited Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe, one of 54 bookstores across the nation to receive one of his grants to support local, independent bookstores. Patterson's visit raised awareness about the Literacy Council's work and his own cause, Read Kiddo Read, a nonprofit he created to get books into the hands of kids.

Kate DiCamillo visits Spellbound

Best-selling children's author and Newbery Award winner Kate DiCamillo is the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, a position created in 2008 by the Library of Congress to promote reading among young people. The duty of her role is "to remind people of the great and profound joy in stories and that reading changes everyone involved." Earlier this month, she stopped by Spellbound Children's Bookshop at Reynolds Village in North Asheville as part of her ambassador role. Crowds of excited children and parents extended out onto the sidewalk as DiCamillo greeted kids and signed books, asking kids questions about themselves.

'Wayfaring Strangers' celebrates musical roots

With "Wayfaring Strangers: The Musical Voyage from Scotland and Ulster to Appalachia," authors Fiona Richie (host of NPR's weekly Celtic music show "The Thistle and the Shamrock") and Doug Orr (president emeritus of Warren Wilson College and interim chancellor at UNCA) trace the roots of the traditional songs that have become such a beloved part of Appalachian heritage. Spending as much time on the other side of the Atlantic as here, the book shows how ballad stories traveled and picked up English, German, Welsh, African, French and Cherokee influences along the way.

Tom Robbins recalls WNC childhood

In September, "rockstar god of literature" Tom Robbins — who spent some of his childhood in Blowing Rock — came to Asheville, a place he called "magical," explaining that his mother named him after Thomas Wolfe, a fact he said must have Wolfe "spinning in his grave." Robbins was touring in support of his new memoir, "Tibetan Peach Pie." At Malaprop's, he answered fans' questions and kept everyone in stitches the whole time with stories from his life.

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