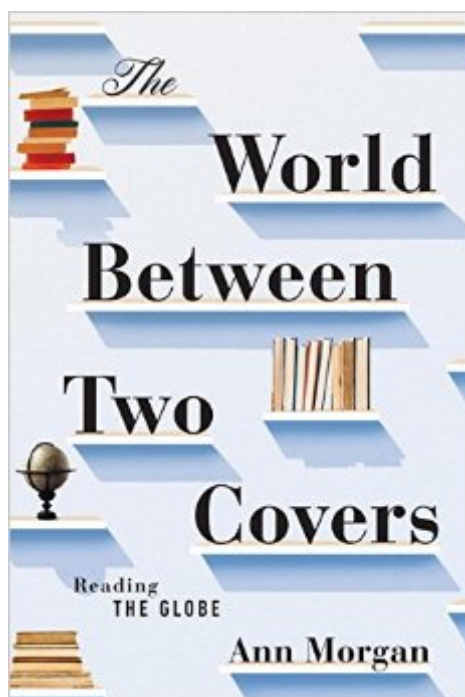


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# The World Between Two Covers: Reading The Globe



## Synopsis

A beguiling exploration of the joys of reading across boundaries, inspired by the author's year-long journey through a book from every country. Ann Morgan writes in the opening of this delightful book, "I glanced up at my bookshelves, the proud record of more than twenty years of reading, and found a host of English and North American greats starting down at me. I had barely touched a work by a foreign language author in years. The awful truth dawned. I was a literary xenophobe." Prompted to read a book translated into English from each of the world's 195 UN-recognized countries (plus Taiwan and one extra), Ann sought out classics, folktales, current favorites and commercial triumphs, novels, short stories, memoirs, and countless mixtures of all these things. The world between two covers, the world to which Ann introduces us with affection and no small measure of wit, is a world rich in the kind of narratives that engage us passionately: we meet an irreverent junk food-obsessed heroine in Kuwait, an explorer from Togo who spent years among the Inuit in Greenland, and a former child circus performer of Roma background seeking sanctuary in Switzerland. Ann's quest explores issues that affect us all: personal, political, national, and global. What is cultural heritage? How do we define national identity? Is it possible to overcome censorship and propaganda? And, above all, why and how should we read from other cultures, languages, and traditions? Illuminating and inspiring, *The World Between Two Covers* welcomes us into the global community of stories.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Blogger Ann Morgan spent a year reading books from nearly every nation, 196 (plus one) books in all. This is the story of why she did it, how she accomplished it, and many questions and thoughts that arose in the course of the project. I was surprised that the book was not very much about the individual books she read, but that was fine with me, since I was more interested in the logistics (How did she find get books from North Korea? How did she decide what constitutes a country? What was the quality of the translation into English?) If you want to know about the books as she read them, they're still on her blog. But the book cover and marketing led me to believe that this would be more about the books themselves, so I'm not surprised that some readers are disappointed. It's a monumental undertaking to try to cram into a single year. Just reading the books would have taken longer than that, I would have thought, and the time it took to find possible candidates, track them down and acquire them was another full time job. Add to that the regular blog posts and responses to interested followers, and it's quite an impressive accomplishment. Morgan is a thinking reader and she examines such topics as censorship, the influence of English on the rest of the world, the internet's effect on focused reading, the nature of translation and the responsibilities of translators. She also talks about libraries, bookshops, her bookshelves, and reading on the subway. She even talks about the books themselves from time to time, but I suspect that out of any collection of two hundred books, only about a quarter to a third of them will be worthwhile and that there will be quite a few stinkers in the batch.

Frequently when bloggers make the leap to book publishing, the result is a pretty paper repackaging of their digital content, so I expected Morgan's *The World Between Two Covers* to be a simple recap of her year-long project of reading books from around the world — a breezy literary travelogue, if you will. Instead, while the books she read do make cameo appearances throughout the text as well as being listed in an appendix, Morgan offers us something a great deal more interesting than simple regurgitation, telling us the story around the stories and the surprising logistical (how does one get books from North Korea?) and ethical (what exactly constitutes a country, anyway?) roadblocks she encountered on her journey. It's a fascinating trip, full of WTF moments (HOW low is the percentage of foreign books translated into English?) and authorial insights, including an extended section in harmony with Adichie's argument about the dangers of a country or a people being known by a single story. Particularly, as Morgan points out, when that story may have been chosen for translation because it has just the right amount of foreignness (read: slight exoticism) to make it in the global market, rather than because it's truly representative. It's a surprisingly, delightfully academic look at reading and publishing, with

fun discursive dips into the multiplicity of reasons people read - Sherlock Holmes stories became wildly popular in China in the late nineteenth century due to their perceived educational value and the challenges of translation, which go back at least to the 4th century CE, when St. Jerome sharply replied to criticisms of his translations of the Pope's letters by arguing that translation is meant to be not word for word but sense for sense.

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