

Books as guides: Fall books: Reading habits

by [Kathleen Norris](#) in the [October 17, 2012](#) issue

I am seldom without reading material—the *Economist* is my staple for doctors' waiting rooms—but lately I find it more difficult to concentrate on reading that requires sustained attention, like poetry. I have to work at making time and a quiet heart. I begin and end each day with prayer, using *Give Us This Day*. Designed for Catholic readers, it contains daily mass readings and scripture reflections by many contemporary women.

I dislike reading online, but consult my local paper and the *New York Times* daily. I read the *New Yorker*, *Image* and *Vanity Fair*. I use Facebook to keep up with my nieces and a nephew.

Books are my travel companions. A canceled flight is an opportunity to browse in a bookstore, and when flight attendants instruct me to turn off anything with an on/off switch, I keep reading while the e-readers go dark. I'm more likely to read history than theology, and the latter is often from ancient sources. I'm now reading *On Living Simply*, excerpts from the sermons of John Chrysostom.

I depend on the *New York Times* and the *Economist* for reviews. It was through the latter that I found Alaa Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*, a novel set in modern Cairo, and when the Arab Spring erupted there, I felt that it had provided me some perspective on Egyptian culture. Books have always been my guide to a broader world. I prepared for my first trip to Australia by reading Thomas Keneally's *A Commonwealth of Thieves*, about the founding of what is now Sydney, and Kate Grenville's novel of the same period, *The Secret River*. I have since become fans of other Australian writers: Tim Winton and Gail Jones for her pithy, astonishing novel *Sorry*.