Sharon Olds, long considered one of the country’s best poets, started the year by becoming the first American woman to win England’s T.S. Eliot Prize and then won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry two weeks ago. She will read Saturday at 7:30 at the First Universalist Church in Salem as part of the Massachusetts Poetry Festival.

**BOOKS:** What are you reading currently?
OLDS: I have four books on my desk. One is “The Shout” a poetry collection by Simon Armitage, an astounding British poet. Another is Toi Derricotte’s “The Undertaker's Daughter,” just an extraordinary book of poems. I also have Sean Borodale’s “Pages from Bee Journal.” The fourth book is one by Lee Child, suspense stuff.

BOOKS: How long have you read mysteries?

OLDS: Long time. I even have an index of the books I've read so that when I go to a bookstore I don't buy them again by accident. I allow myself no hardbacks with mysteries, only paperbacks. Mysteries are sort of like an addiction except it's a very useful and pleasurable addiction. Maybe that is what people think about their addictions.

BOOKS: Who are your favorite mystery writers?

OLDS: Lee Child, Tanya French, and Sue Grafton. Going back to old ones, Margery Allingham and Dorothy Sayres. I can't read horror, and I'm not too good at spy books. Mysteries give me a vacation from my own mind. I've read books so intensely all my life that I can climb inside of them.

BOOKS: Do you read contemporary fiction?


BOOKS: Is your reading different in New Hampshire than New York City?

OLDS: I have these books on roadside geology that will tell you what you are passing on the right as you drive up I-93, something like that. When I visited

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on birds, clouds, and stars. Those are really the books I read the most.

**BOOKS:** Do you read other nonfiction?

**OLDS:** I love nonfiction. “This Is Your Brain on Music” by Daniel Levitin, that’s a cool book. It’s about how we hear music. Then I read Malcolm Gladwell’s “Outliers.” I found that really interesting.

**BOOKS:** Are you drawn to certain subjects in nonfiction?

**OLDS:** While I’m writing or rewriting a poem I often get out the Bible because I was raised on it. A lot of my images and references come from that. And I have a concordance so I can track down words and phrases. I also have a couple of anatomy books. A poem can’t stand too much accurate anatomy. All that Latin can be a lot.

**BOOKS:** You wrote your dissertation on Ralph Waldo Emerson. Do you still read his work?

**OLDS:** Yes. I know a poem of his by heart, “Give All to Love.” I say it a fair amount just to myself.

**BOOKS:** What kind of books were you allowed in the very religious household you grew up in?

**OLDS:** I won a prize in choir. I believe it was for loudest voice. [The prize] was a book of child martyrs who had been killed for their belief and died very politely. I also read Nancy Drew, Life Magazine. I read fairy tales.

**BOOKS:** They didn’t censor your reading?

**OLDS:** No. We weren’t allowed to go to movies, and we didn’t have a TV. Reading and writing were respected so I wasn’t made fun of as some children are for having my nose in a book. I was always reading if I wasn’t running around outside. I got a lot of practice in imagining what I was reading by entering those
Amy Sutherland

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