

Reading to write: Fall books: Reading habits

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My writing life has become increasingly dependent upon my reading life, so much so that I generally begin my writing day by reading a new or newish volume of poetry (or the occasional richly textured work of fiction). I move from there to a selective poring over certain favorite and reliably provocative (if not so newish) poems by my favorites—Cavafy, Stevens, Frost, Bishop, Auden, Coleridge, etc.—reading until something unexpected in the familiar text provokes an unfamiliar response. More often than not, this response becomes the beginning of my new poem, which I have come to understand as bearing a dialogic relationship to the texts of my elders and betters.

My evening routine—which, following my evening rule of prayer, begins when others in the house have turned in for the night—is more likely to be a poring over patristic or otherwise spiritual writings by or about the saints and their hesychastic tradition. These are likely to be passages from St. Isaac of Syria, Saint Maximos the Confessor, St. Gregory Palamas or one of the more recent writers who have continued their tradition—the letters of Elder Paisios, the writings of Elder Porphyrios, Matthew the Poor, Paul Evdokimov, Metropolitan Hierotheos or the transcribed homilies of the beloved Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra. With their words in my heart, I settle into sleep with the prayer on my lips, desiring that their spirit will infuse my night, as well as the following morning's work.

My poems have become my side of a continuing conversation with those whose words, insights and reciprocal affection I have come to depend upon.