EDITOR’S NOTE

A looming pile of unread magazines sitting on my desk speaks to me, reproving me for choosing other pleasures rather than keep up with their deluge of words: *New Yorkers*, *Atlantics* and the occasional alumni weekly. But the harshest voice is that of the *New York Review of Books* (NYRB). Christened “daunting” by my book-loving son, it brings tabloid-size pages of dense, intellectual commentary on the printed word and page-length ads for books by multiple presses. Yet the pain elicited by the untouched NYRBs isn’t so much the ponderous content or even the number of words. It’s what it represents—the entire world of books.

Yes, I’m here to complain about books. Masquerading as vehicles for education and uplift, books are really nefariously subversive, quietly challenging us to “read me.” From my bedroom bookshelves they stare out at me, the read ones challenging me to remember what they said, the unread ones asking why I haven’t got to them. My “buy one, give one away” resolution has gone nowhere, and space is getting tighter on the shelves.

The clarion call from books to the book-obsessed used to be easier to tolerate, limited to bookstore excursions where you just had to quickly resist the catchy dust jackets before scurrying out the door. But then along came Amazon, simplifying book buying for all but the Internet ignorant, followed by the Kindle, with which you can stuff your “to-be-read” queue with a few quick clicks. And, eerily, Amazon seems to know what will tickle my click finger.

Medical school should have cured me of my book obsession. Four years of lugging around heavy textbooks, which then took up seemingly permanent residence on my shelves, should have fostered a lasting aversion. But the nonmedical stuff keeps beckoning me. I’m not sure what fuels this troublesome habit. I don’t think I think I’m smarter the more books I read, and certainly the growth of my fund of knowledge dwindles with each birthday despite how many books I read. I don’t belong to any book clubs, and the number of people with whom I discuss books is quite small. Perhaps it truly is a compulsion like checking all the doors or washing your hands repeatedly. If so, drugs might help.

But I’m not really sure I need or want to be cured. I long ago steeled myself against the Barnes and Noble temptress and am usually able to muster good arguments to not buy that book in front of me. And I am convinced, for now at least, that consuming books is good for me. Books can take me to worlds beyond the daily drone of the office. I get to share the mind of someone with a life totally different from mine who has thoughts and ideas that never occur to me.

Frequently bound by their clinical rituals, doctors need to stretch their minds, and reading does just that for me.

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Confessions of a bookaholic

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