focused on triathlons and the extraordinary athletes who compete in them, publishing many photographs in the specialized magazines and online media that cover the sport (see https://www.flickr.com/photos/timothycarlsonphotography/sets). Many of his images embed the human subjects in an almost overpowering natural setting. For example, a 2012 portrait of retired professional triathlete Eney Jones poses her in a white evening dress, standing with precarious grace on a rock amid a rushing river, setting up a riveting dynamic tension. A 2014 photograph from Israel’s Eilat triathlon shows a string of Lilliputian cyclists racing on a paved road that turns and twists through hilly desert.

Though he traces his photographic roots to the days of darkrooms and silver salts, Carlson has enthusiastically embraced modern photographic technology. “I’m grateful for the mature digital age,” he says of the modern high-end digital cameras that produce brilliant color and razor-sharp resolution. He has also taken to artificially lighting his subjects, or combining natural and artificial light sources in the same photograph. “I was seduced by, and fell in love with, the diffuse light of light boxes,” and began using it for portraits of certain people, he explains, citing the influence of Annie Leibovitz. Carlson’s 2012 portrait of a swimmer emerging from the water is arresting. The spray of water droplets—frozen in time against an impossibly blue sky by the strobe in the light box—gives the image an instantaneous quality, while a modest tilt of the horizon creates a degree of compositional tension.

Carlson still returns periodically to Daytona Beach to photograph and has no plans to put down his camera. He regrets never having done the depth of photo-journalistic reportage that characterizes some of the photographers who inspired him. But when pressed, he admits that he finds some of his own individual images “worthy.”

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**Speak, Memory**

*Dissecting her diary, a writer weaponizes solipsism.*

_by SOPHIA NGUYEN_

Ongoingness: The End of a Diary is a memoir that makes only one confession. In it, Sarah Manguso ’96, a poet and contributor to Harper’s, The New York Review of Books, and The Paris Review, reflects on her oldest project and vice: the journal she kept meticulously to and revised the text several times each day. The volume that results is slimmer and often elusive. It’s a commentary on a much longer text that reproduces none of those 800,000 words. It’s also an autobiography unweighted by personal detail or even proper nouns—those specifics that lend texture, trigger electric jolts of recognition, or provide footholds in a stranger’s life. She has audited her archives in order to understand her need for them.

Manguso has produced an essay in the oldest sense, a scrupulous and ruthless weighing of a subject. Ongoingness traces her obsession with documentation back to its source, and then forward to its eventual dissolution. The diary began when, at the age of nine, she was given a journal she used at first only out of duty; it lapsed when her son was born. During the decades between, she added to and revised the text several times each day. In a world that has invented the selfie stick, such recordkeeping seems so endemic as to be unremarkable. Yet as Manguso maps her compulsion, it proves wider and deeper. The prevailing sociable and networked narcissism imagines an audience. Her diary was a project so purely private it remained inviolable. “I wrote it to stand for me utterly,” she says, explaining her indifference to concealing it from prying eyes: “I might as well have hidden myself from view.”

The book shifts focus when she relates the life events—marriage, births, deaths—that, by defying discrete containment, forced her to accept memory as capricious, and history as continuous. Motherhood especially altered her powers of perception. During pregnancy, Manguso suffered from amnesiac spells. Later, tending to an infant’s constant needs exhausted her capacity to meditate on her day, or even to recall words. Her child’s life summoned her to a fuller participation in their shared present. Eventually, the daily entries became more sporadic.

The memoir interrogates the diary at every angle, particularly as a means of mastering time. Through the diary, Manguso tells us, she thought she could preserve the present even as it elapsed. She could guard against her disappearance after death—or worse, a forgetting so total that the past might never have existed at all. Her work is full of such precise, philosophical parsings. Rigor brings vitality and wit to her work. At one point, she romantically likens her method of memory to “listening to a broken tape by hand-feeding it one last time through the tape player,” an idea that she says captivated...
her generation. Then she admits, “I never did it. Maybe everyone was lying. No matter. It’s still a decent metaphor.”

Ongoingness appears after a year in which autobiography has driven the literary conversation. In fiction came Karl Ove Knausgaard’s latest installment to My Struggle, Ben Lerner’s 10:04, Rachel Cusk’s Outline, and Jenny Offill’s Department of Speculation. Jacqueline Woodson’s memoir in verse, Brown Girl Dreaming, won the National Book Award in young adult literature. Most proximate to Manguso’s project were the releases of highly personal nonfiction collections by Megan Daum, Roxane Gay, and Lena Dunham, as well as the more journalistic essays of Eula Biss and Leslie Jamison. It would be a mistake to ghettoize this cohort into a demographic subgenre of “women essayists,” yet they undeniably respond to a shared cultural moment, and register the same societal pressures. As a result, their work has evolved some common features.

The contemporary personal essay habitually makes a certain swerve: when the author feels compelled to announce that she fully expects to be disliked or dismissed. Then she renews her commitment to authenticity, warts and all; the act of writing is framed as a bold transgression. Whether defensive disclaimer or preemptive strike, the subtext is always the same—“I am watching you watch me”—and wrapped up in the bravado is a gambit to gain the reader’s sympathy and respect. This reflex appears as often in print as it does in online outlets: Daum’s The Unspeakable, Gay’s Bad Feminist, and Dunham’s Not That Kind of Girl all have prefaces working overtime to justify their very existence. That they take pains to be taken seriously is understandable, but disheartening: imagine if, in the run-up to the vault, Olympic gymnasts first had to argue the point value of each twist and tuck.

Then she renews her commitment to autobiographical writing. “I started keeping a diary twenty-five years ago. It’s eight hundred thousand words long.” She doesn’t fuss about courting the reader. Her position in the literary landscape is evidenced by her resolute focus, manifest in her two prior memoirs.

Manguso dispenses with such gestures. “For better or worse, I write about myself,” she said in an interview with Guernica. In a roundtable of nonfiction writers for Gulf Coast Magazine, she shrugged off the eagerness of publishers and critics to define generic boundaries: “That taxonomy conversation, with its obsessive ranking and sorting, to me just reeks of fear.” Ongoingness begins with a coolly straightforward assertion: “I started keeping a diary twenty-five years ago. It’s eight hundred thousand words long.” She doesn’t fuss about courting the reader. Her position in the literary landscape is evidenced by her resolute focus, manifest in her two prior memoirs.

The Two Kinds of Decay documented Manguso’s long siege by a rare degenerative illness that destroyed the protective myelin sheaths of her nerve cells, causing paralysis. Her treatments began in her junior year of college. She waited for
The title piece appropriately begins with a character who is a “daredevil.”

**Banned: A History of Pesticides and the Science of Toxicology, by Frederick Rowe Davis ’88 (Yale, $40).** An environmental historian and historian of science at Florida State analyzes the poster-child of pesticides, DDT, in the wake of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring; the evolution of toxicology; and the subsequent development of new compounds—some implicated in severe mental illness in an earlier era.

**Ultimatum from Paradise, by Jacqueline Osherow ’78 (Louisiana State University Press, $18.95 paper).** A seventh collection of poems—many anchored in places (the rose dusk of Salt Lake City in January, the “...cabal / of trees—poincianas, / oleanders, rose dusk of Salt Lake City in January, the...” in Tel Aviv) and place-makers (Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Antoni Gaudí). The author is Distinguished Professor of English and creative writing at the University of Utah.

**Making Money: Coin, Currency, and the Coming of Capitalism, by Christine Desan, Gottlieb professor of law (Oxford, $85).** A constitutional historian dives deep into the political economy of money in England—from royal monopoly to joint creation with private investors—to illuminate how the means of exchange is in fact a form of governance and of social order. In a different vein, Amy Reynolds ’99, assistant professor of sociology at Wheaton College, writes in *Free Trade and Faithful Globalization* (Cambridge, $90) about various religiously based reactions (often quite critical) toward free trade and globalization, which are commonly seen as value-neutral in economic discourse; opposition, therefore, is commonly underestimated.

**He Wanted the Moon, by Mimi Baird with Eve Claxton (Crown, $25).** Perry Baird, M.D. ’28, disappeared from his daughter’s life when she was six. Fifty years later, in 1994, his diary/manuscript on his melancholy return to the family’s Chambers Street home from what’s really happening.”

One more day at the beach, just the five of us from Chambers Street.

Harris drives us in his car...I’m smiling now, remembering. Still smiling. Harris is just a shimmer, a null set. He reflects my grief, and it’s so bright I can’t see much behind it, but behind the brightness is a human shape. I look at him, then look away. I was so lucky.

The triumph of *The Two Kinds of Decay* lies in defiant control; the gift of *The Guardians* is in the complexity of acceptance. Where the first establishes a method for Ongoingness, which it most closely resembles in style, the second offers an emotional approach.

Leaner than its predecessors, Manguso’s third memoir is also composed of fragmentary sections, never more than a few paragraphs long, and sometimes as short as a few sentences. In *Ongoingness*, however, each page brings a fresh thought or recollection, untitled. This form doesn’t seem driven by a conscious attempt to defy the simplicity of a single continuous narrative, untidiness as grief, contemplating his friend’s suicide.

**The Guardians: An Elegy, by Antonio M. lado ’98, chair of mathematics and computer science at St. Mary’s College, have connected Crafting Conundrums: Puzzles and Patterns for the Bead Crochet Artist (CRC Press, $39.95), a mathematically grounded guide to torus knots, planar mapping, your own Escher bracelets, and more.

Algebra, a high-wire act for math phobics, is here rendered clearly, amusingly, and memorably.

For more online-only articles on the arts and creativity, see:

**Kara Walker “Sweet Talks” Harvard**

At the Radcliffe Institute, the artist unraveled some of the mysteries of her installation, *A Subtlety.*

**Lives in Television**

MTV’s president of programming and the executive producer of *Masters of Sex* on their craft. harvardmag.com/livesintv-15
Afternoon I declined a ride from one city to another with a friend who didn’t survive. A typical passage might read, “One afternoon without spending four hours on the bus back to college thinking and writing about what had happened during my trip.” In its way, her prose is as finicky as poetry; it lives and dies by the way it’s arranged on the page. (Manguso’s poetry, though equally cerebral, is less astringent.)

Ongoingness seems like the product of absolute reduction. Specifics have been seared away: where the narrator went to college and where she now teaches, her favorite band and the painting she fell in love with, the elderly writer she corresponded with before his death, and the names of her friends, husband, and son—all are a curious blank. She leaves plenty of white space, which toward the end of the book is interrupted by bursts of color, as the vibrancy of the present demands her attention, or summons an infant memory. A blue stuffed animal makes an appearance, as does the brightness of her boy’s hair, or the rainbows of her husband’s youth. Stripped of excess, the sentences are so stark as to seem opaque.

The one point when Manguso seems to falter is when Ongoingness ends. In an afterword, she explains her choice not to include the original diary, and details her process of rereading the 23 files, selecting excerpts, and then dispensing with this strategy altogether. This is the first time that she goes out of her way to explain herself; her coda, like those prefaces by fellow authors, betrays the apparent confidence of the rest of the book. The sentences grow longer and more prosaic. It’s perhaps best to consider these final pages akin to a director’s commentary: some may find this insight illuminating; others may find that this postscript dilutes the work itself.

In his 1972 book Ways of Seeing, the art critic John Berger draws a distinction between naked and nude female subjects, a metric since applied to writerly self-portraiture. Readers expect memoirs to orient themselves around a set of polar axes: growing pains versus progress gained, exposure versus disguise, confession versus composure. Manguso’s work defies these dichotomies; its closest relative among schools of painting might be Abstract Expressionism. She weaponizes solipsism to dive into the bedrock of human experience: memory faltering in the face of mortality, the humility commanded by time; the impossibility of taking the full measure of one’s life. The question that pervades all of Manguso’s work, and forms the heart and vascular system of Ongoingness, is: Why write? That question’s obverse reveals itself as: How to live?

Sophia Nguyen is a staff writer at the magazine.

David Azzolina writes: “Psychotherapist Alfred Adler is quoted as having said, ‘The only normal people are people you don’t know well enough yet,’ or words to that effect. I have not been able to verify that quote with a legitimate source. I even wrote Adler’s granddaughter Margot Adler when she was alive and she only knew it by hearsay. Any suggestions?”

John Simbeck hopes someone can source a comment “by Nietzsche (or Goethe? Kierkegaard perhaps?)” that he paraphrases as “‘Steal a loaf of bread (or larger goods) and the weight of the Law comes down mercilessly; steal a fortune and you’re deemed daring; steal a country and you become a hero. The amount of blame falls in inverse proportion to the magnitude of the crime.’ That last phrase is the key part I remember the closest,” and differentiates the quotation from other versions of the same idea, such as that delivered by Brutus Jones in the opening scene of The Emperor Jones: “For de little stealin’ dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin’ dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o’ Fame when you croaks.”

Josh Mittendorf seeks the name of a short animated Canadian film (circa 1972) “told from the perspective of a homunculus inside a man’s head, who sketches on an easel dangerous things he sees that he wants to remember and avoid in the future. Soon there are so many, the outer man becomes jittery and visits a psychologist. The psychologist (German accent) fits him with glasses that make everything look smaller. He is no longer afraid of his boss or barking dogs, but in the last scene, he is crushed by a steamroller that appeared, through his glasses, to be too small to worry about.”