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." On-goingness 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 a change in the newspaper's style, he observes, "I believe I am the last man in history to be described as 'homosexual' in The New York Times as a matter of editorial policy." Clark, A.B. 1903, LL.B. '06, LL.D. '51, a mandarin at the pinnacle of New York lawyering, friend and counselor to presidents, served on the Corporation from 1931 to 1950, delivering timely, crucial defenses of academic freedom against the loyalty-oath challenges of the day.

Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart, by Lex Bayer and John Figdor, M.Div. '10 (Rowman & Littlefield, $32). Bayer, an entrepreneur, and Figdor, humanist chaplain at Stanford, join in "rewriting the Ten Commandments for the twenty-first century." They even launched a crowdsourced project to select the top 10 beliefs to live by.

Essays After Eighty, by Donald Hall '51 (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, $22), and The Devil's Tub, by Edward Hoagland '54 (Arcade, $24.95). Two original literary lions in winter, still roaring. Hall, a poet laureate of the United States and National Medal of Arts honoree, writes frankly, from age: on a New Hampshire winter's day, "I teeter when I walk, I no longer drive, I look out the window" at accumulating snow. Hoagland, who has crafted reportage, essays, and fiction from difficult places (geographically and psychologically), here collects 10 short stories.
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 manic-depression and institutionalization came into her hands, and now forms the basis of her memoir wrapped around that text—a painful and revealing portrait of severe mental illness in an earlier era.

To improve your STEM (look it up) self: The Cartoon Guide to Algebra, by Larry Gonick ’67, A.M. ’70 (Morrow, $18.99 paper), the latest in the series, begins with Chapter 0 (you have to know arithmetic) and gently leads you through and beyond the terrors of high-school math. Dinah L. Moché ’58, professor of astronomy at Queensborough Community College/CUNY, tilts your sights higher in the eighth edition of Astronomy: A Self-Teaching Guide (Wiley, $21.95 paper). And in a collaborative first, computer scientist Ellie Baker, Ph.D. ’99, and Susan Goldstine, Ph.D. ’98, chair of mathematics and computer science at St. Mary’s College, have concocted 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.

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 toxics, 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 manic-depression and institutionalization came into her hands, and now forms the basis of her memoir wrapped around that text—a painful and revealing portrait of severe mental illness in an earlier era.

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