



★ The Danger to Be Sane: Creativity and the Eccentric Mind

Rosa Montero, trans. from the Spanish by Lindsey Ford. Europa, \$28 (256p) ISBN 979-8-88966-186-3

In this unique exploration, Spanish journalist and novelist Montero (*Weight of the Heart*) unpacks the relationship between creativity and madness. Combining psychological research, literary analyses, author testimonies, and her own experience with anxiety and panic attacks, Montero meditates on the nature of the brain and the forces that drive the writerly impulse. She presents several hypotheses for why writers write, including their awareness of the multifaceted nature of the self (as Ursula K. Le Guin once said, “I think most novelists are aware at times of containing multitudes”), and points to the fact that many novelists use pseudonyms and experiment with themes of imposture, forgery, and duality. Many writers, including Joseph Conrad and Philip K. Dick, had childhood trauma, she observes, speculating this is why storytellers are obsessed with the passage of time and death. Elsewhere, she traces the prevalence of mental illness among writers, parses how socialization and neurological makeup influence creativity, and examines the addictive temperaments of artists. Montero’s theories are consistently intriguing, as is the

suspenseful narrative she unfolds of her pursuit of an imposter who posed as her for many years when she was a young journalist in Madrid. This is rigorous and thrilling. (*May*)