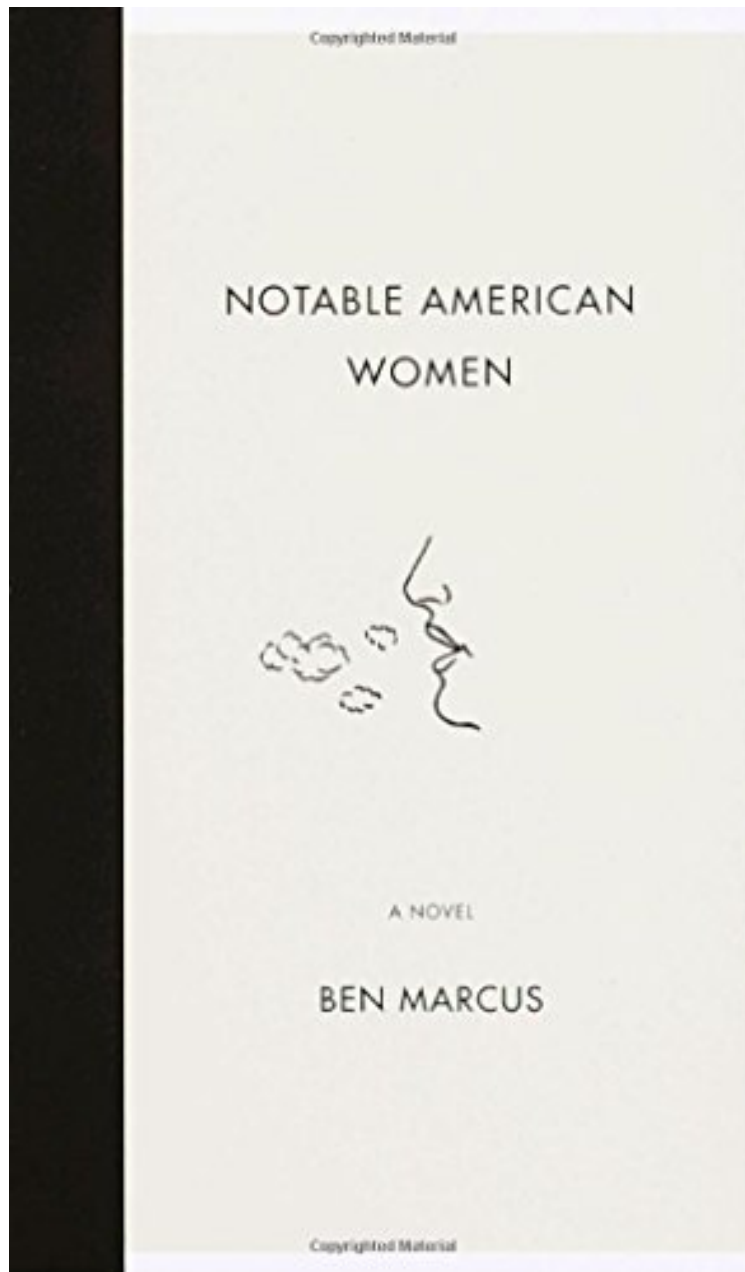


(Free pdf) Notable American Women: A Novel

Notable American Women: A Novel

Ben Marcus

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#755864 in Books 2002-03-19 2002-03-19Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.98 x .54 x 5.19l, #File Name: 0375713786256 pages | File size: 15.Mb

Ben Marcus : Notable American Women: A Novel before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Notable American Women: A Novel:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Best read aloud by an erotic toaster
By Jordan Loomis
Pablo Neruda once said that anyone who doesn't read Julio Cortazar is doomed; I say the same thing about Ben Marcus. I heard him read from this book long ago but he wiped my memory and was dead anyway, at the time. Now, risen from the ashes of genius, he has come to send us over the edge. If you recently wrote a favorable review of a psychological novel, stop wasting your time on this one. Throw yourself onto the sharp bones of postmodernity's corpse and read through the pain. Only in oblivion will you understand.
4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Lapidary Lunacy
By Bartolo
When someone writes a straight biography of Ben Marcus, I will be a customer. For this surreal parody of a feminist cult, set in the Ohio of his boyhood, must be in some ways autobiographical, but taken to absurd, imaginative extremes. It would be fun to discover which of the cockamamie inventions, therapies, theories are based partly in fact and which are made up from whole cloth, for most resemble no cult or human consciousness movement I've ever heard of. But I welcome Marcus as obviously one of the most gifted postmodern authors of his generation, perhaps the most innovative, and often the most hilarious. Now that Beckett and Gilbert Sorrentino are both gone, it's important for serious literary art to be fueled by a sense of humor, and preferably a ferocious one. A mark of general awareness of the human condition? You decide.
Marcus has a huge and varied vocabulary, obviously a feel for the sound of words, and chisels his sentences like a modern-day Flaubert. This is part of the glory of his writing here, and also cause for effort on the reader's part. I didn't find the writing settle into a rhythm that pulled me along, as happens with so much literature, even Beckett's, but a staccato series of sentences and paragraphs, self-consciously hewn. But this is certainly worth the trouble: as with modernist and postmodernist writers from Joyce onward, slowing one's reading pace is well worth the rewards of originality, certainly of Marcus' verbal pyrotechnics. Other reviews here will make up for what I've omitted in this description, but I wanted to add my own encomiums. Few of the younger generation have risen to take up the challenge left by Beckett, Perec, Calvino, Sorrentino and others; but we have Marcus, presumably at the dawn of a long and rich career, and, happily, writing in our own American idiom.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Difficult, but worth it
By vtlozano
Any attempt to describe this book is confusing. Roughly speaking, it is a book made out of language. Language is the main character. This language is set in a Midwest that is as abstract as the landscapes in Wallace Stevens poems, and concerns a cult of women who ritualize stillness and silence. There is another character, a boy, who lives among the women as a kind of captive in a war between the sexes. That war is described in the lyrical and formal epistolary language of diplomacy, though you're never sure what country or continent or even time. It gets under your skin, the way a haunting modern dance performance might. It just so happens that the dancers are nouns and verbs and adjectives and run-on sentences.

Ben Marcus achieved cult status and gained the admiration of his peers with his first book, *The Age of Wire and String*. With *Notable American Women* he goes well beyond that first achievement to create something radically wonderful, a novel set in a world so fully imagined that it creates its own reality. On a farm in Ohio, American women led by Jane Dark practice all means of behavior modification in an attempt to attain complete stillness and silence. Witnessing (and subjected to) their cultish actions is one Ben Marcus, whose father, Michael Marcus, may be buried in the back yard, and whose mother, Jane Marcus, enthusiastically condones the use of her son for (generally unsuccessful) breeding purposes, among other things. Inventing his own uses for language, the author Ben Marcus has written a harrowing, hilarious, strangely moving, altogether engrossing work of fiction that will be read and argued over for years to come.

.com For the ambition and creativity he displays alone, Ben Marcus has written a very memorable debut novel with *Notable American Women*. Marcus demonstrates an extraordinary stylistic ability in this challenging and bizarre account of family life within an oppressive cult. The author places himself within the novel as a character whose mother joins and hosts a feminist group known as the Silentists, whose goal is to put "an end to motion and noise" for the purpose of complete "emotion removal." The strange and fantastical novel is composed primarily of the fictional Marcus's explanation of the leaders, rules, and history of the Silentists, as well as a description of his youth spent in the group's Ohio compound as a test subject and sire for a planned "emotion-free" society. Most accurately classified as science fiction (though often darkly humorous), *Women* maintains an unsettling balance between absurdity and horror, shifting its subject from the academic to the domestic. Yet throughout, the narrators maintain a cold distance between themselves and the events they're describing, reflecting their lack of emotion through an objective tone and placing the reader squarely in the emotional vacuum in which the fictional Marcus is raised. The effect is akin to viewing the world from behind glass, or from behind a layer of shed skin, as the fictional Marcus does when he wears the empty husk of his sister. A heart can be found in the novel, however, that is well worth discovering: beyond its detached creepiness lies an allegory deeply concerned with the dangers of conformity and the maniacal pursuit of human advancement. --Ross Doll
From Publishers Weekly
Conceptual daring, deadpan humor and dizzying forays into allegory mark Marcus's first novel, the semi-science-fictional tale of a boy raised in a futuristic Ohio by his experimentalist parents and a sect of radical women Silentists. Ben Marcus, as the young protagonist is called, is made to swim in a "learning pond," drink "behavior water," follow the "Thompson Food Scheme" and take "language

enemas." This regimen, designed by Silentist matriarch Jane Dark, is intended to purge Ben of all emotion, to "zero out [his] heart." Ben's father, who introduces the book with a bitter message to the reader, has been banished by the Silentists to a hole in the ground behind the house; Ben's mother, who bids the reader farewell at book's end, is a remorseless Silentist disciplinarian. Ben himself, taught to eschew all personal expression, tries to present a strictly utilitarian narrative of his upbringing weaving in a history of the Silentist movement, a disquisition on female names, and a manual of Silentist behavior and yet cannot help expressing the distress he feels in the smothering grasp of Jane Dark and her minions. Marcus (*The Age of Wire and String*) has crafted a dystopian novel in the tradition of *Brave New World* and 1984, with an overlay of 21st-century irony and faux naiveté. Writing in off-kilter documentary-style prose laden with acronyms and neologisms, he often wanders into ponderous whimsicality, but stretches of the novel are inspired riffs on contemporary totems and anxieties. Ambitious and polished, if sometimes willfully opaque, this is an intriguing debut. (Mar. 12) Forecast: Anointed by the junior literary establishment as one of its brightest stars (sections of *Notable American Women* have already appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Harper's* and *Tin House*), Marcus will get major review coverage. A strong ad/promo campaign, a 10-city author tour and a clever, minimalist cover will help push this comfortably priced paperback original. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* Those of us who were captivated by Marcus's debut, *The Age of Wire and String*, will welcome this latest addition to what is destined to become a very significant body of work. Marcus negotiates an esoteric though uniquely American literary terrain, mining such seemingly diverse sources as Gertrude Stein and Donald Barthelme. One of the virtues of this novel is that although it deals with issues of great significance such as gender, childhood, and coming of age, it is not easy to describe or paraphrase. Marcus reinvents the family drama in the story of a boy who grows up without feelings amidst a conspiracy of women obsessed with weather and silence. The book evokes an alternate reality revealing the dark side of our common history, an uncanny version of America that exists nowhere else but in Marcus's lyrical, abstract prose. This will be a difficult read for many, but it will surely stand the test of time as a genuinely important book. Recommended for all collections. Philip Santo, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.