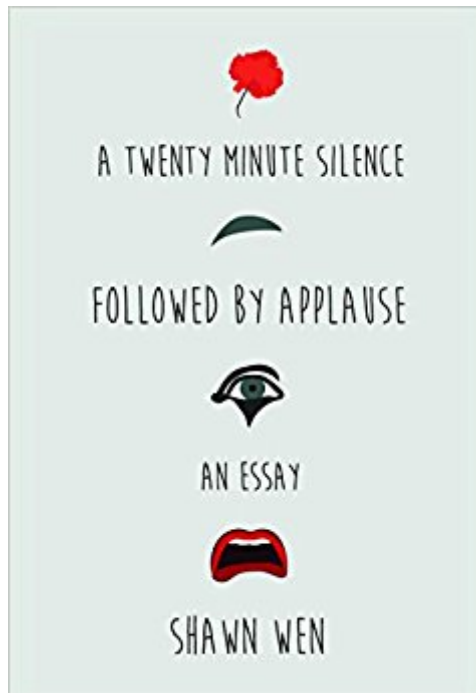




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# A Twenty Minute Silence Followed By Applause



## Synopsis

An Indie Next Pick for July 2017 "7 Best Books of July," *Men's Journal* "10 Titles to Pick Up Now," *O, The Oprah Magazine* "Most Anticipated Books of 2017," *The Millions* "A unique, poetic critical appreciation of Marcel Marceau.... A fascinating book...." Readers will marvel not only at Marceau, but at the book itself, which displays such command of the material and such perfect pitch.

Kirkus Reviews, starred review As a fledgling radio producer, Shawn Wen became fascinated by the one subject who seemed impossible to put on air: French mime Marcel Marceau, the internationally acclaimed "artist of silence." At the height of his fame, Marceau was synonymous with Bip, the red-lipped, white-faced mute in a sailor suit who conjured scenes, stories, and sweeping emotion through the gestures of his body alone. Influenced by Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp, credited with inspiring Michael Jackson's Moonwalk, Marceau attempted in his performances to "reveal the fundamental essences of humanity." Beyond Bip, Marceau was a Jewish Holocaust survivor and member of the French resistance; a bombastic iconoclast; a collector of failed marriages, masks, antique knives and doting fans; an impassioned workaholic who performed into his eighties and died deeply in debt soon after leaving the stage. In precise, jewel-like scenes and vignettes, *A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause* pays homage to the singular genius of a mostly-forgotten art form. Drawing on interviews, archival research, and meticulously observed performances, Wen translates the gestural language of mime into a lyric written portrait by turns whimsical, melancholic, and haunting. Shawn Wen is a writer, radio producer, and multimedia artist. Her writing has appeared in *The New Inquiry*, *The Seneca Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The White Review*, and the anthology *City by City: Dispatches from the American Metropolis* (Faber and Faber, 2015). Her radio work has been broadcast on *This American Life*, *Freakonomics Radio*, and *Marketplace*. She is the recipient of numerous fellowships, including the Ford Foundation Professional Journalism Training Fellowship and the Royce Fellowship.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Editorial Praise for *A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause* “[Shawn] Wen’s whimsical ode to Marcel Marceau showcases the performer’s determination to fill the blank spaces with a silence that stirs.” *O, The Oprah Magazine*, “10 Titles to Pick Up Now” “Artist and radio producer Wen’s first book is about one of the most fascinating performance artists of the last century: French mime Marcel Marceau, known for his *Bip the Clown* persona. Wen uses videos of Marceau’s performances, as well as interviews with him, to pay tribute to the enigmatic actor and Holocaust survivor.” *Men’s Journal*, “The Seven Best Books of July” “Marceau was a case study for Wen’s personal queries of selfhood • what it means to be an adult, what it means to be a good person, or an artist, or both. It was also an exercise in form and its limits and capabilities.... Her lyric essays observe the life of Marceau from slanted angles: traces of performance scenes, brief excerpts of his views drawn from interviews, lists of Marceau’s gleaming collections of worldly possessions whose accumulation reflects an emptiness. The terse, often poetic vignettes leave a quality of hauntedness appropriate to someone like Marceau.” *San Francisco Chronicle* “A unique, poetic critical appreciation of Marcel Marceau.... A fascinating book.... Readers will marvel not only at Marceau, but at the book itself, which displays such command of the material and such perfect pitch.” *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review “Effectively pays homage to both the history of mime and its solitary master, Marcel Marceau. . . . Wen crafts diamond-cut paragraphs that place the reader in Marceau’s enthralled audiences. . . . These invaluable descriptions by a writer versed in the tradition of making the nonvisible vibrant should be read slowly and with the same seemingly effortless focus Marceau gave to his art.” *Booklist*, starred review *Bookseller Praise for A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause*, “an Indie Next Pick for July” “If writing about music is like dancing about architecture, then what is writing about

mime like? In Shawn Wen's capable hands, it can be descriptive and fresh, aphoristically wise, and artfully somber. Whether Wen's animating, with her precise words, the motions of Marcel Marceau's famous stage persona ("Bip the Clown"), or spotlighting his private life through lists of his holdings, or revealing scraps of speech (interview answers, commercial transcripts, his advocacy for fencing as a "school of humility," or his belief that Michael Jackson had "the soul of a mime"), *A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause* rivets and rewards its reader. Read it to learn a new kind of body language, from an exciting writer worth watching." —John Francisconi, Bank Square Books, Mystic, CT "Wen uses the omnivorous form of the essay to full effect in this elegant, winsome biography of the iconic mime Marcel Marceau. Through an intricately structured series of scenes, lists, quotes, and breathy meditations on the body and voice, Marceau comes alive on the page: dancing with an unseen woman, ducking bullets on a silent battlefield. 'He is not exactly a comedian,' Wen writes. 'Not a tragedian. He swings between these two poles.' Between those poles, and between the covers of this deceptively slim volume, the full range of human emotion is splayed and felt." —Mairead Stead, Literati Bookstore, Ann Arbor, MI "A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause is as mesmerizing as a performance from Marceau himself. With perfect concision and vivid prose, Wen depicts a legend with humor, empathy, and keen observation. I loved this book." —Katie Eelman, Papercuts J.P., Boston, MA "As in the work of Marcel Marceau, Shawn Wen crafts a language of silence and absence around the life of her subject to give a much richer picture of a true and unusual talent. These are essays as pantomime, drawing readers in to reveal work of simple and delicate elegance, executed with the utmost precision." —Jarrod Annis, Greenlight Bookstore, Brooklyn, New York "If you're into elliptical meditations on silence, performance, the weirdness of bodies, and loss, this is the book for you." —Stephen Sparks, Point Reyes Books, Point Reyes Station, CA "Shawn Wen's *A Twenty Minute Silence Followed By Applause* is a loving tribute to a most untranslatable figure: Marcel Marceau, the mime who defined his art for the 20th century. A connoisseur of silence who could out-talk Studs Terkel, a world-famous performer who felt like a failure, Marceau presents contradictions that make him hard to grasp, but these nimble essays rise to the task beautifully. You don't need to know anything about mime, or Marceau, to appreciate Wen's lyrical and innovative take on biography." —Travis Smith, Flyleaf Books, Chapel Hill, NC "A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause is the sort of book that makes every line feel like a revelation. A meditation on the French mime Marcel Marceau, Wen weaves a mixture of poetry and journalism to create a beautiful look at a misunderstood art.

Reminiscent of Maggie Nelson and Sarah Manguso, Shawn Wen is a an exciting and talented new voice." — Emily Baillaine, Green Apple Books on the Park, San Francisco, CA

"Shawn Wen's book isn't just an exploration of the unique genius of Marcel Marceau, but also of how performers, writers, and other artists shape the space of our thoughts. Wen dives through one of the most misunderstood forms of performance to reach for more fundamental ideas of how and why we try to communicate with each other. A strange and beguiling book." — Josh Cook, Porter Square Books, Cambridge, MA

Additional praise for *A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause* — "Threading the subtle seam between what lives and what remains, *A Twenty Minute Silence Followed By Applause* succeeds in conjuring the poetry of Marcel Marceau's performance as both a character on stage and in history. Just as description evokes the illusion of a body, Wen's bio-essay shapes the surreal beauty and contradictions within Marceau's life. Like pulling a ghost from a dark room, this is an accomplished work of historical portraiture: precise in its objects, complex in its melancholy, and insightful in its humor. Most surprising is how Wen holds an uncanny mirror between the mime's non-verbal brilliance and the pleasures of the text."

— Thalia Field, author of *Experimental Animals* — "Intellectually agile and tenderly imagined, Shawn Wen's incandescent essay reminds readers that writing is gesture, that movement is a language of thought, and that the union of the two is a thing of beauty. In reading it, you'll come to know Marcel Marceau—but more importantly, you'll feel some of his strange, daring brilliance on every page."

— Alexandra Kleeman, author of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* — "Shawn Wen has written a surprising, impressionistic portrait of a man who was among the best-known artists of his day. With deep research and a clear love for her subject, Wen shows how Marceau's stripped-down performances, in the post World War II era, became part of the world's attempt to recover from the enormity of what had happened. He made the case for silence, and audiences around the world loved him for it."

— Nancy Updike, producer *This American Life* — "In *A Twenty Minute Silence Followed by Applause*, Shawn Wen draws a portrait of Marcel Marceau that is equal parts heartbreaking and delightful. Her poetic and tender prose gorgeously captures the man whose body and life were inextricable from his art, an art written by silence. The play of the mime through Wen's loving gaze becomes the play of us all as we live, and love, and like him, eventually pass off the stage into our own ultimate quiet."

— Hannah Lillith Assadi, author of *Sonora*

Shawn Wen is a writer, radio producer, and multimedia artist. Her writing has appeared in *n+1*, *The*

New Inquiry, The Seneca Review, The Iowa Review, The White Review, and the anthology City by City: Dispatches from the American Metropolis. Her radio work has broadcast on This American Life, Morning Edition, All Things Considered, and Marketplace, and her video work has screened at MoMA and elsewhere. She is the recipient of numerous fellowships, including the Ford Foundation Professional Journalism Training Fellowship and the Royce Fellowship.

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