



The Shape of Things to Come: Prophecy and the American Voice

Greil Marcus

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From the author of *Mystery Train* and *Lipstick Traces*, an exhilarating and provocative investigation of the tangle of American identity

"America is a place and a story, made up of exuberance and suspicion, crime and liberation, lynch mobs and escapes; its greatest testaments are made of portents and warnings, biblical allusions that lose all certainty in the American air." It is this story of self-invention and nationhood that Greil Marcus rediscovers, beginning with John Winthrop's invocation of America as a "city on the hill," Lincoln's second inaugural address, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech about his American dream. Listening to these prophetic founding statements, Marcus explores America's promise as a New Jerusalem and the nature of its covenant: first with God, and then with its own citizens. In the nineteenth century, this vision of the nation's story was told in public as part of common discourse, to be fought over in plain speech and flights of gorgeous rhetoric. Since then, Marcus argues, it has become cryptic, a story told more in art than in politics. He traces it across the continent and through time, hearing the tale in the disparate voices of writers, filmmakers, performers, and actors: Philip Roth, David Lynch, David Thomas, Allen Ginsberg, Sheryl Lee, and Bill Pullman. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, the future and the past merge in extraordinary and uncanny ways, and Marcus proves once again that he is our most imaginative and original cultural critic.

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