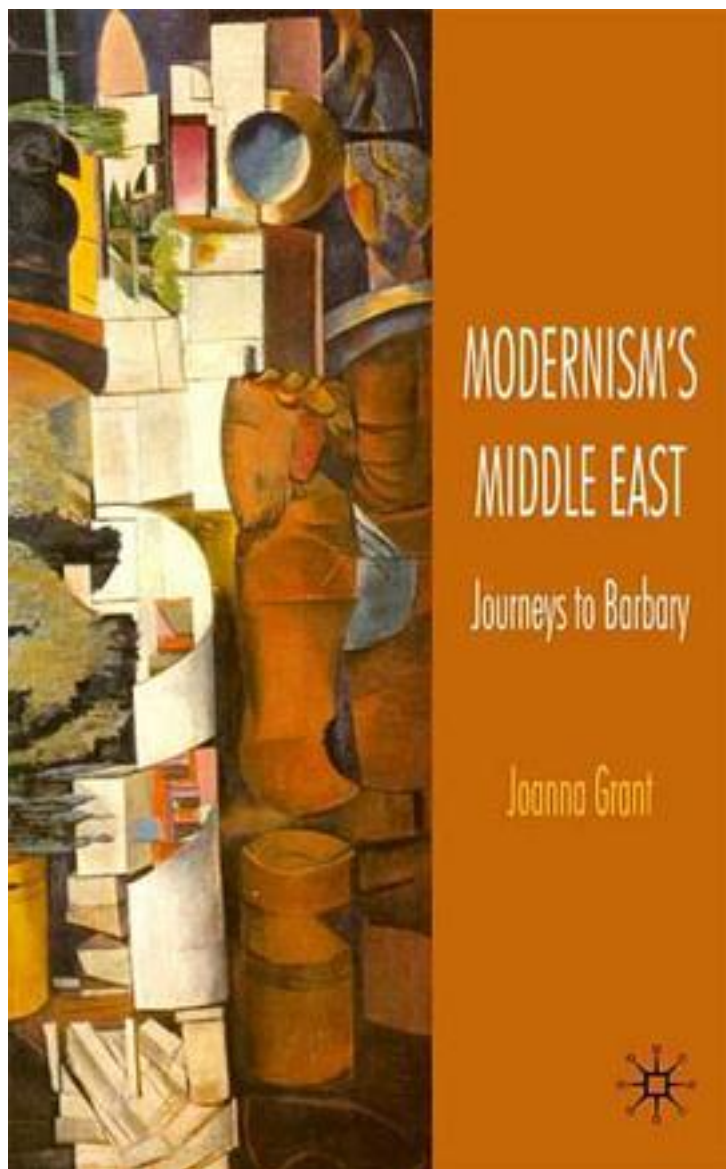


# Modernism's Middle East



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Due to a series of historical conflicts, coincidences and discoveries, the ancient civilizations and contemporary dilemmas posed by the 'Middle East' were much on the minds of authors and ordinary citizens in the English-speaking world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the wake of the First World War, the European powers sought to redraw the boundaries of many Near Eastern countries, a dubious favour that has had many repercussions. But what did contemporary writers and thinkers think that their images of the Middle East and the so-called 'Arab Other' might do for them in return? This text provides some answers to these questions. It examines the imaginative uses to which representative Anglo-American modernist writers put their images of the Near East and its inhabitants. These Orientalist fantasies became entangled in desires to reshape both the Western character and Western literature - renovating both seemed essential to the larger project of saving Western civilization from decadence. Unfortunately for these authors, or perhaps fortunately, these dreams of identification with an Other and with a region viewed as hard, granitic, noble and strange increasingly fall victim to their own popularity. Authors like Wyndham Lewis, who remained obsessed with kitsch even as he railed against it, record the increasing difficulty of keeping their fantasy pure and untouched. The final chapter of the text traces the fantasy's willed destruction in the works of gleefully perverse authors such as Paul Bowles, and that fantasy's rich and equally perverse persistence.

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