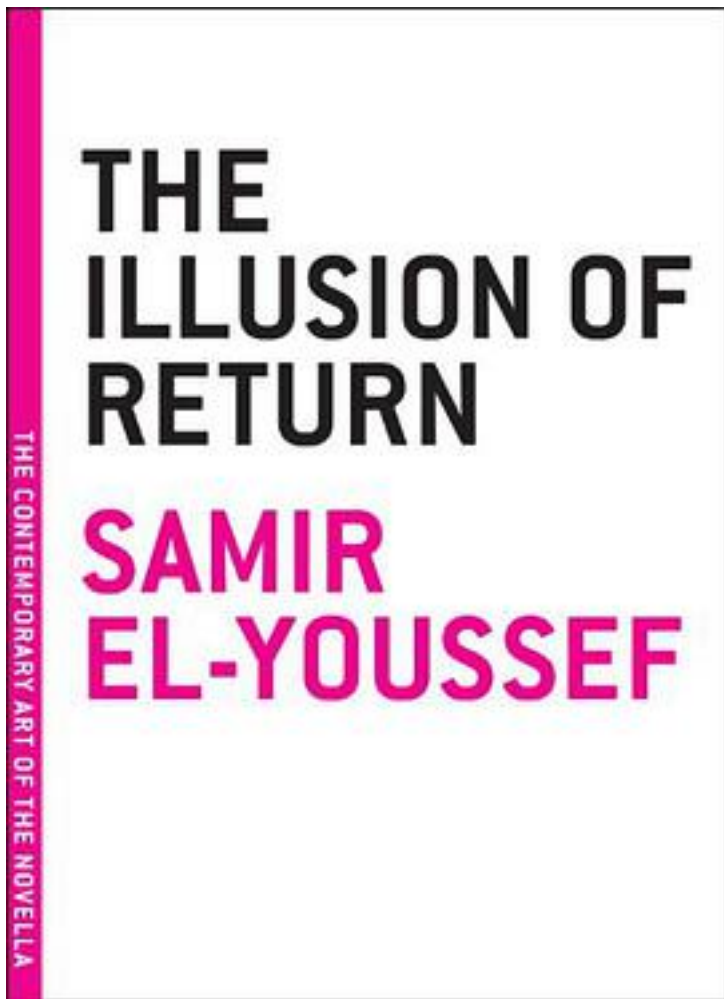


The Illusion of Return



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著者:El-Youssef, Samir

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I could no longer resign myself to the idea that the past was unreal.

The nameless narrator of this startling novella believed himself to be under no illusion: a Palestinian refugee, he had escaped the deadly tumult of Lebanon—the roving militias and endlessly complicated religious violence—by having long ago fled to London. He knew he could never go back.

But then one day an old friend who had also escaped calls him and asks to meet at the airport on a stop-over on his way back to Lebanon. For the narrator, it summons up everything he thought he had suppressed, both the yearning to go home and the secret reason he can't.

Thus the reunion with his old friend becomes, for the narrator, a disturbing confrontation. And as they plunge into diverging memories—his friend's frighteningly unreal, his own even more frighteningly too real— The Illusion of Return becomes a revealing and moving study of extremism and its brutalizing effect not only on nations but on the intimate lives of the individuals it touches.

The Contemporary Art of the Novella series is designed to highlight work by major authors from around the world. In most instances, as with Imre Kertész, it showcases work never before published; in others, books are reprinted that should never have gone out of print. It is intended that the series feature many well-known authors and some exciting new discoveries. And as with the original series, The Art of the Novella, each book is a beautifully packaged and inexpensive volume meant to celebrate the form and its practitioners.

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