



# Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination

*James de Jongh*

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## **Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination** James de Jongh

Harlem, a quintessentially black city in the midst of a great modern metropolis, has piqued the imagination of writers and artists since the turn of the century. Its subsequent history as a legendary cultural centre and a notorious ghetto only intensified its mystique and inspired large numbers of writers, among them Sherwood Anderson, Federico Garcia Lorca, Fannie Hurst, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Ishmael Reed, and Tom Wolfe. In *Vicious Modernism*, James de Jongh traces the evolution of the imaginative usage of Harlem by literary artists over the past seventy years. The book concentrates on the aesthetic and cultural force of the idea of Harlem, and de Jongh identifies three distinct phases in its evolution within the literary imagination: its promise as a cultural capital in the 1920s; the failure of that promise and the emergence of a ghetto in the 40s; and finally, following the race riots of the early 1960s, a shared vision of Harlem as cultural capital and contemporary slum.

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