

Any reader who has been puzzled by *Ulysses* or perplexed by *The Waste Land* knows the difficulty of modernist texts. Difficulty, in fact, was the most noted characteristic of what became the canonical texts of high modernism—the works of Faulkner, Joyce, Stein, Eliot, Pound, and Woolf, to name a few. In *The Difficulties of Modernism*, Leonard Diepeveen examines how difficulty became central to our encounters with modern literature and culture.

Literary modernism's first readers often complained that difficulty was "running rampant in literature," that art had become a "plague of unintelligibility." Diepeveen argues that the simultaneous appearance of modernism and discussion about difficulty was not coincidental—difficulty allowed modernism to rise to the status of high art, and it was fundamental to how modernism shaped the canon not only of twentieth-century literature, but of the literature that preceded it. He argues that modernism can be best understood as the moment when knowing how to maneuver through difficult art became the central sign of one's ability to participate in high culture.

This lucidly written, highly entertaining yet detailed history of the spurious debates surrounding difficult art will transform our understanding of literary modernism and its cultural impact.

Leonard Diepeveen is Associate Professor of English at Dalhousie University. He is author of *Changing Voices: The Modern Quoting Poem* and coauthor of *Active Sights: Art as Social Interaction* and *Art with a Difference: Looking at Difficult and Unfamiliar Art*.