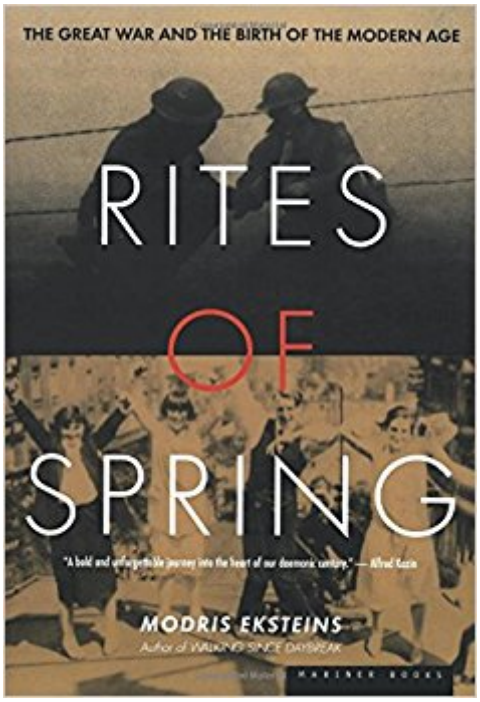
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Rites Of Spring: The Great War And The Birth Of The Modern Age



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Synopsis

A rare and remarkable cultural history of World War I that unearths the roots of modernism Dazzling in its originality, Rites of Spring probes the origins, impact, and aftermath of World War I, from the premiere of Stravinsky’s ballet The Rite of Spring in 1913 to the death of Hitler in 1945. Recognizing that “The Great War was the psychological turning point . . . for modernism as a whole,” author Modris Eksteins examines the lives of ordinary people, works of modern literature, and pivotal historical events to redefine the way we look at our past and toward our future.

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books; 1 edition (September 14, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0395937582

ISBN-13: 978-0395937587

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 78 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #72,854 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #91 inÃ Â Books > History > Military > World War I #134 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Military #2527 inÃ Â Books > History > World

Customer Reviews

In a trailblazing, iconoclastic work of cultural history, Eksteins links the modern avant-garde’s penchant for primitivism, abstraction and myth-making to the protofascist ideology and militarism unleashed by WW I. For Eksteins, professor of history at the University of Toronto, the seminal modernist artwork is Igor Stravinsky’s 1913 ballet The Rite of Spring , a celebration of life through sacrificial death. Moving easily between the cafes of Montmartre and the battlefields of Flanders and Verdun, this brilliant, eloquent study ties the modernists’ flight from history to the warring powers’ preoccupation with speed, regimentation and newness, the Germans’ mythic invocation of a tribal and folk past, Mussolini’s esthetic of brutality. Eksteins observes that the bloody Western Front in WW I was a "surrealistic" landscape before poet-soldier Guillaume Apollinaire invented the term in 1917. He interprets Lindbergh’s solo crossing of the Atlantic in terms of Gide’s "perfectly free act," one devoid of meaning other than its own inner energy and accomplishment. This provocative and

disturbing reappraisal of modernism rings with authority. Photos. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A brilliantly conceived and wonderfully written book of cultural and intellectual history that considers the impact of World War I on the 20th century. Ekstein (history, Toronto) begins by arguing that the ballet The Rite of Spring prefigured the mass psychology that was necessary to the waging of the war. He then carefully elucidates how the soldiers who fought experienced and internalized the horrors of the trenches. The last third of the book deals with the postwar era, considering Lindbergh's flight and its effect on Europe, the best seller All Quiet on the Western Front , and the Hitler phenomenon. Like Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory (LJ 7/75), this will likely become required reading for anyone who seeks to understand the central importance of the Great War to the decades that followed. For both public and college libraries.- Ann H. Sullivan, Tompkins Cortland Community Coll. Lib., Dryden, N.Y.Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

''Our century is one in which life and art have blended, in which existence has become aestheticized. History, as one theme of this study will try to show, has surrendered much of its former authority to fiction.''This presents the emotional, aesthetic world post war. Feelings, hatred or love, predominate. This is a valuable addition explaining the reasons for modernity. Contents -ACT ONEI. ParisII. BerlinIII. In FlandersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ FieldsACT TWOIV. Rites of WarV. Reason in MadnessVI. Sacred DanceVII. Journey to the InteriorACT THREEVIII. Night DancerIX. MemoryX. Spring Without EndThis work requires an open mind and flexible thought. For example: ''Introspection, primitivism, abstraction, and myth making in the arts, and introspection, primitivism, abstraction, and myth making in politics, may be related manifestations. Nazi kitsch may bear a blood relationship to the highbrow religion of art proclaimed by many moderns. Our century is one in which life and art have blended, in which existence has become aestheticized. History, as one theme of this study will try to show, has surrendered much of its former authority to fiction.''Sounds condemning, even harsh. It this valid? Eksteins presents persuasive argument.''Ideas were much more likely to rise from a prescribed set of moral principles, derived essentially from Christianity and parenthetically from humanism. Action and behavior were to be interpreted in terms of the same principles. That buffer, between thought and action, a positive moral code, has disintegrated in the twentieth century, and in the process, in the colossal romanticism and irrationalism of our era, imagination and action have moved together, and have even been fused.'' Who can deny it?Seems

the basic theme is the drastic change in European history. Quotes Lenin - ''The European war signifies a violent historical crisis, the beginning of a new epoch,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• insisted Lenin in late 1914.''This entire work is devoted to explaining just what changed and why. Insightful and trenchant.One new (to me) explanation was - ''And as the external world collapsed in ruins, the only redoubt of integrity became the individual personality. David Jones looked on the Somme offensive as the last great action of the old world. Until then, the old customs and attitudes still held. What came after, he called ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the BreakÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The whole of the past, as far as I can make out, is down the drain.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•''Similarly, JoyceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Stephen Dedalus was provoked to remark, in words reminiscent of Schopenhauer, that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• As the past went down the drain, the I became all-important.'' Fascinating connection!Eksteins sees Nazism not as a few misleading many, but as logical result of cultural breakdown - ''Slowly the scale of Nazi atrocity began to surface. The toll had been horrendous: millions of Jews, millions of foreign slave laborers, Gypsies, homosexuals, JehovahÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Witnesses, the infirm. Auschwitz, too, became an emblem of the western spirit.''In this list, only Jehovah's Witnesses were martyrs who choose to resist as conscious decision. The others were sad victims. The Judeo/Christian morality/faith was/is justified by their record. It protected them from the breakdown and shame. They don't have the shame or guilt that racks modernity.''After Auschwitz, for Theodor Adorno, poetry was no longer possible. Words, the main vehicles hitherto of western sensibility and rationalism, were no longer adequate or appropriate. For many, silence seemed the only proper response. The scenes uncovered by the Allied armies in 1945 were not the inevitable outgrowth of the events that took place in early 1933, but they were a probable outcome.''''National Socialism was yet another offspring of the hybrid that has been the modernist impulse: irrationalism crossed with technicism. Nazism was not just a political movement; it was a cultural eruption. It was not imposed by a few; it developed among many. National Socialism was the apotheosis of a secular idealism that, propelled by a dire sense of existential crisis, lost all trace of humility and modestyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •indeed, of reality.''Eksteins sees some of the extremes of Nazi ideas still present, although attenuated -''Nazism was an attempt to lie beautifully to the German nation and to the world. The beautiful lie is, however, also the essence of kitsch. Kitsch is a form of make-believe, a form of deception. It is an alternative to a daily reality that would otherwise be spiritual vacuum. It represents ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“funÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“excitement,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• energy and spectacle, and above all ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“beauty.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Kitsch replaces ethics with aesthetics. Kitsch is the mask

of Death. Nazism was the ultimate expression of kitsch, of its mind-numbing, death-dealing portent. Nazism, like kitsch, masqueraded as life; the reality of both was death.''''The Third Reich was the creation of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“kitsch men,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• people who confused the relationship between life and art, reality and myth, and who regarded the goal of existence as mere affirmation, devoid of criticism, difficulty, insight. Their sensibility was rooted in superficiality, falsity, plagiarism, and forgery. Their art. was rooted in ugliness''''They took the ideals, though not the form, of the nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century avant-garde, and of the German nation in the Great War, and by means of technologyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •the mirrorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •they suited these ideals to their own purpose. Germany, the home of Dichter und Denker [poets and thinkers], of many of the greatest cultural achievements of modern man, became in the Third Reich the home of Richter und Henker [judges and hangmen],the incarnation of kitsch and nihilism.''Superficial, fun, excitement, devoid of criticism and insight? This is not just the Nazi world, this is now!This work is filled with such insights. Hitler and the wide appeal to the Germans covers many pages. Well done.Anyone interested in the change to modernity and how it happened will enjoy this. Eksteins connects some of the excesses of the past to the practices of the present. Thought provoking!(See also - ''The Revolt of the Masses'' by Jose Ortega y Gasset. Similar conclusions from another standpoint. Outstanding!)(This is additional note on 11/2/2016. I just finished listening to audible version. Caught more detail. Author really presents more detail than I would like, nevertheless, opens the mind to fascinating insights. The narrator's voice is trifle irritating along with little or no modulation. Could have found better. Still, I am glad I heard this book.)

This is a truly great work. It is really not a history book in the conventional sense. It is closer to a literary biography of modernism. Its key contention is that the First World War changed everything at a fundamental level. The most important change was ideological or moral. The old values that had held sway through the 19th century no longer seemed tenable or even relevant. Before the war the avant-garde had adopted modernism as a rebellion against bourgeois conformity and sterility. Its anti-rational and nihilistic tendencies had however limited its adoption by the wider public. The Great War shattered the old verities and led to a general rejection of accepted values. This led to a general growth and expansion of modernism. With the death of traditional values and standards, people sought to escape the constraints of history and fashion an artistic construct to provide meaning for their lives. This tendency,he claims, helped give rise to Fascism and Nazism.

The book starts out with a review of the changes in architecture and art near the end of le Belle

Ãƒâ poque in France. The book covers the writings of such luminaries as Thomas Mann (literature), Nijinsky (Ballet), Auguste Perret (architecture), and Igor Stravinsky (music). The initial theme of the book basically covers that fact that the seeds of change are born many years before the cataclysmic events that we relate to and remember as the cause of the change. (In effect, the OLD is swept away by a series of events and the NEW is now free to grow and bloom on the ashes and wreckage of the old.) This is evoked by the production of Stravinsky's "The Rites of Spring" as performed at the ThÃƒÂ©Ãƒ Æ'Ã Â¢tre des Champs-Ãƒâ lysÃƒÂ©es in 1913 in Paris. The theater itself is an astonishing departure from its most famous predecessor, the OpÃƒÂ©ra de Paris Garnier. A comparison of the latest changes from the era of le Belle Ãƒâ poque is shown in the OpÃƒÂ©ra de la Bastille (not mentioned in the book).The concrete structure of the ThÃƒÂ©Ãƒ Æ'Ã Â¢tre des Champs-Ãƒâ lysÃƒÂ©es, the production of "The Rites of Spring", and the dancing of Nijinsky all come together to show that the NEW was in it's infancy and only lying in wait for the OLD to be swept away. The First World War was this instrument of destruction. The book then proceeds to work through the many ways that the war performed this destruction.Some of these include:1) The wholesale destruction of the early combatants (and their now old fashioned sensibilities of combat) by a newly mechanized and industrial method of warfare.2) The realization as the war progressed that there really were no non-combatants as everybody soon became potential targets under the (proverbial) guns. The German naval raids on Hartlepool and Scarborough, the first air raids of London, and the shelling of Paris (the Paris Gun) all portended the truly mass destruction of cities in the Second World War.3) The deployment of the new weapons of war, the airplane, submarine, and tank.4) The use of mechanical weapons as mass killing machines like the Maxim machine gun (infantry), the breech loaded pneumatically recoiled rapid fire canon like the French 75 (infantry and counter-battery), and the super heavy cannon like the Skoda 30.5cm & the Krupp 42cm (fortifications).And, finally, the pace of the war itself as it went through the destruction of men, machines, cities, and regimes. (And, while not mentioned in this book, I personally believe that the Second World War was a continuation of this process. Just have a look at modern views of Paris, which was not heavily damaged in WW2 with London & Berlin, which were, for examples of architectural changes.)So, stick to it with the book & you will get an alternative view to the ultimate results of the war other than a simple rendition of the effects of the combat.Additionally, when reading this book:1) Use an internet connection and take a look at the write-ups on the people, events, and machines mentioned. Wikipedia is a pretty good reference here as it covers basic historical events and is not influenced by the flame wars of more modern topics or people (like Bush & Obama where the descriptions change on an hourly basis).2) Get a

copy of Stravinsky's "The Rites of Spring" from your local library and listen to it. Also, you might also want to listen to "The Firebird".

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