

Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (1989).

Questions (worth 100 points):

1. This is a work of cultural history. When writing about war, why care about things like ballet or literature? Isn't it all about politics and strategy? Discuss what Eksteins says in the preface.
2. Chapter One (Paris) focuses on the ballet "Rites of Spring" by Igor Stravinsky. Go to youtube and view the following at:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjX3oAwv\\_Fs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjX3oAwv_Fs)

and

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vb8njeKBfqw&feature=related>

Now compare to a more traditional ballet, Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* at

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T\\_5WCZ-XvG4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_5WCZ-XvG4)

Can you understand how Paris audiences would have been shocked by the *Rites of Spring*? What, according to Eksteins, was the point in departing from tradition? How does Eksteins fit this into French intellectual issues of the relationship between the past and the future?

3. Summarize and discuss Chapter Two (Berlin). What were the major themes and of German political and intellectual life? How did the Germans view war?
4. Summarize and discuss the positions of the different powers described by Eksteins in Chapter 3 (In Flanders' Fields). Was there a true "bad guy" in the lead up to the war?
5. Discuss Chapters 4 (The Rites of War) and 5 (Reason in Madness) which describe the battlefield and the reactions of the soldiers—mostly young men in their late teens and early twenties—to what was happening around them based on the very extensive literature from the war. Describe your feelings about these chapters. Could you see yourself here?
6. Chapter 6 (Sacred Dance) focuses on the German side in terms of philosophy and attitudes towards the "old order". Summarize these attitudes. Why is Germany's mindset so important for understanding this period as well as the rise of fascism?
7. In Chapter 7 (Journey to the Interior), Eksteins discusses the reaction of artists to the war. Summarize their responses. Can you understand the rise of movements like Dada? Also in the chapter (pp. 227-233), there is a discussion of comradeship, which plays an important role in Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* that you read as a freshman. How does Ekstein define this comradeship?

8. Chapters 8 (Night Dancer) and 9 (Memory) focus on the aftermath of the war, in terms of its effects on European society. How did the peoples of the various Great Powers react to war?
9. Chapter 10 (Spring Without End) looks ahead to the years leading to WWII and traces the political, cultural and social origins of Nazism to WWI. Summarize these origins. Can you see why many historians view WWII as merely an extension of WWI?
10. Discuss what you thought of the book.