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Theoretical Relation of English Modernism to the Enlightenment of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

According to popular belief of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the dominance of Renaissance ideals led to the natural degradation of European society, the loss of values, and the eventual catastrophe. The main problem and the 'culprit' of this process, according to the 'crisis thinkers' such as F. Nietzsche, T.E. Hulme, T.S. Eliott and I. Babbitt, was a seemingly unrelated figure, the 18th century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Modernists, often with very personal and scornful remarks, attacked Rousseau and his ideology, accusing him of creating dangerous nihilism and moral anarchy that had virtually destroyed the civilisation of the West. The paper examines the origins, grounds, and consequences of this notable controversy. It highlights the attitude towards Rousseau in regard to one of the most important features of Modernism - the tendency of reevaluating European cultural traditions. There is also an analysis of the system that made Rousseau a 'dangerous' thinker and an object of endless polemics for Modernists. In this regard, special attention is paid to the reflection of nature and man within both Renaissance Humanism and Modernism. The paper clearly highlights two opposing ideologies in the history of literature and culture, on one side of which are the Modernists and 'crisis theorists' while on the other, figuratively, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Finally, the paper demonstrates not only the tendency of reevaluating cultural traditions, but also the crucial role of Renaissance Humanism and anti-Rousseau polemic in the ideological construction of Modernism.