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REVISION OF THE CONCEPT OF PROGRESS IN BRITISH HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

The article is aimed at defining the transformation of the doctrine of progress in textual space of British historiographic metafiction of 1980s-1990s. The research relies on exploring the set of novels written by P. Ackroyd, A.S. Byatt, R. Tremain and J. Winterson which are devoted to Renaissance and Victorian periods in the history of Great Britain.

The idea of progress and its usefulness for our society as one of the metanarratives was mainly formed in the times of Renaissance. In 1794 two philosophers M. Condorcet and J. Fichte introduced into the intellectual mainstream the word “progress”, as well as the opinion that the development of science influences the development of mankind.

Most of scientists relied upon inventions and innovations, seeing in new achievements only positive future. The Victorian belief in constant improvement was supported by many factors including the rise of income, easy reach of many products and the leading role of Britain on the world arena. Progress almost became the working belief for society basing on idolizing constant scientific evolution. Nevertheless, starting from the end of XIX century this doctrine lost many of its supporters. Main problem which undermined the idea was the cost of cultural and technical progress for people and environment.

One of the main topics presented in the texts is apocalyptic and catastrophic vision of lineal development which reflected in depicting natural and human cataclysms – floods, huge war losses, Great Fire of London, Great Plague, storms, forecasting of technological era and death from medical interference. The thirst for knowledge is endless for protagonists in the novels about Renaissance times while retro-victorian texts doubt the positive value of progress, considering the destructive side of science. The society of the XIX century is negatively diminished to organized ant society (Byatt’s «Morpho Eugenia»). The motif of

progress is realized in topos of engine (Ackroyd's «Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem») where the first positive perception of a calculating machine turns into sad visions of human future.

The novels provide material for re-thinking of the concept of progress. Their re-writing is achieved with the help of postmodern irony, epistemological indeterminacy and doubts in common beliefs, as well as depiction of protagonists' professional activities.

