

Two dystopic visions on the relationship of humans and progress - Emile Souvestre and Cordwainer Smith

Maria do Rosário MONTEIRO

CHAM, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Universidade dos Açores

E-mail rosariomonteiro@fcsb.unl.pt

Abstract

Zaha Hadid's statement that is used as an epigraph to this book is also the cornerstone of this essay: "Non puo esserci progresso senza affrontare l'ignoto". This sentence has an ambiguous meaning and can be interpreted in at least two different ways: either as a natural challenge or as an aggressive defiance. This ambiguity encompasses the relationship between individuals, communities and progress, reminding the image of Janus, each facing a different side, both forming the same and a different entity. It is a natural and complementary ambivalence. Every endeavour undertaken by promoters of progress has a degree of uncertainty, a pending threat of failure, and the outcome always produces positive and negative consequences frequently in uneven ways.

Culturally, in a consistent way at least from the beginning of modernity, Western civilisation has regarded progress as a natural unstoppable endeavour. Sometimes even as a duty of every rational educated person - to pass (or trespass) the frontier of the known, to act, to evolve, to transform, to change, and to discover the "God given world". This almost linear way to understand progress, to view reality from a dominant, sometimes exclusive point of view, tends to erase the notion and effects of negative consequences both on individuals and on communities, assumed by the dominant culture as acceptable collateral damages in the name/notion of rational evolution.

In this essay, the main goal is to defy this dominant trend of evolution as based mainly on material, objective, rational

progress, and defy the unique view of a future based on quantifiable and technological evolution. This challenge will be done with the comparative analysis of two literary texts: Emile Souvestre's *Le monde tel qu'il sera* and Cordwainer Smith's "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard".

Keywords: Progress, Emile Souvestre, Cordwainer Smith, unique versus multi-visions of reality, utopia, dystopia