
Glimpses of science fiction theatre in G. B. Shaw's *Farfetched Fables* (1950)

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Abstract

The paper proves that *Farfetched Fables* (1950) by George Bernard Shaw is a prototype of science fiction theatre within Darko Suvin's theory framework. Since science fiction theatre is a rare genre and a challenging one as well. As such, it has its own peculiarities that are unfolded in this paper. They are tackled basically in the context of Darko Suvin's science fiction theory. Though, known generally for his comic social plays, George Bernard Shaw can be considered a pioneering figure in the realm of science fiction theatre. Such a fact is illustrated in handling his final play *Farfetched Fables*. Cognitive estrangement and the novum are among the substantial terms of Suvin's theory, that are simultaneously presented in the play. Herein, *Farfetched Fables* usually presents atypical alternative worlds, which are explored and analysed. The paper proves implicitly that Shaw is prophetic in delineating science fiction in particular firstly, and in adapting it to the theatre as well. It ends with possibilities of further topics of science fiction theatre.

Keywords: science fiction theatre, Shaw, *Farfetched Fables*, Suvin, the novum, Cognitive estrangement

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that George Bernard Shaw died several years ago – eighty years approximately- he pivoted the principles of science fiction theatre in the British drama. A reader, who contemplates his dramatic plays, especially *Farfetched Fables* of the title, cannot but admit that Shaw has been a potent force in the development of the science fiction theatre in particular. This play can be regarded as a landmark in that domain, since it reveals a genius playwright whose ideas and viewpoints prove his artistic originality and his ability to invent unusual situations. The fables of the play, though hardly connected and short, extend in time to reach the future as envisioned by Shaw. The fundamental ideas of human change and evolution in the course of the play prove that Shaw has a deep insight into the rationale of man. The will-be world of the play is eccentric and distinguished. It reveals “a species of the utopian genre” as asserted by Yde (2013) in *Bernard Shaw and Totalitarianism* (p.186). This can justify the fact that *Farfetched Fables* is rarely performed on the stage, since it was penned in 1950.

The paper is an attempt to answer the following questions: Why should George Bernard Shaw be considered a science fiction playwright? What are the characteristics of science fiction

theatre as presented in his last play *Farfetched Fables*? Is he influenced by a certain theory in writing the play? And finally, to what extent can the play be the basis of further science fiction dramaturgy? Herein, I depend on the application of Darko Suvin's theory regarding science fiction on Shaw's *Farfetched Fables* and the analysis of the play in question. The paper comes to the conclusion that Shaw can be regarded as one of the pioneering, brave playwrights in science fiction theatre genre.

2. Shaw's unusual ideas

Shaw presents a different man and a different species within the framework of the well-known Shavian ideas. That particular species includes some humans who are invisible and in control of the others. They are part of an ethereal world where they have no bodies, and can thrive on air solely. The play attempts to refine "Shavian philosophy... setting the first fable just after the end of the Second World War...the play depicts the formation of a disciplined world, scoured of intractable elements, and poised for orderly and expeditious progress overseen by invisible advanced beings", as Wixson (2020) notes in *George Bernard Shaw: A Very Short Introduction* (p.117).

In the first glance, elements of the science fiction genre are obvious, and can be detected in the play. The fairly strange world of the fables, the development of some human beings into disembodied incorporeal ruling figures, and the setting of the play -that extends to the far future- are all indicative of the science fiction world the play presents. Other elements are detectable too and can be assigned. The imagined world presented in the fables reflects a well-established world, where people who hinder progress and evolution are demolished, just to leave the path of progress and evolution clear and paved.

Perhaps that follows Shaw's fear of the civilization's devastation. "Then the final destruction of civilization is threatened" as stated by Shaw in his preface to *Farfetched Fables* in *Buoyant Billions, Farfetched Fables and Shakes Versus Shav* (1950) and complies with Shaw's call for the reconciliation of differences. "Differences of creed must be tolerated, analysed, discussed, and as far as possible reconciled" (p.79).

3. Darko Suvin's theory of science fiction

In this context, Darko Suvin's theory of science fiction in his book *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979) is applicable on Shaw's *Farfetched Fables*. Suvin's theory of science fiction basically handles the concepts of estrangement and cognition and their subsequent effect on the genre of science fiction, especially in the interpretation of the social, the political, and the economic strata of the real world. It implies the cultural level as well. According to Suvin (1979), science fiction is a particular type of literature which is called literature of "cognitive estrangement" (p.4). In science fiction realms, the reader should have what Suvin calls 'Estrangement'. That is to say, the reader should have what "in literary theory ...is known as the attitude of *estrangement*" (p.6). Suvin draws on the Brechtian aesthetics that the effect of science fiction theatre on the reader or the audience is estrangement. That is to say, in the science fiction representation, the effect of estrangement lets the reader recognize the subject of the play, while it seems simultaneously unfamiliar. Such effect is both cognitive and creative (p.6). The plot of

Farfetched Fables determines the fictional estrangement of that particular genre. The technique of estrangement is that of basic latent attitude. As a formal device, it is shared by myth on the other hand.

3.1. The alternative imaginative worlds of science fiction

According to Suvin (1979) the imaginative worlds created by science fiction literature delineate alternative worlds of the future, that differ from our present world and allow the reader to approach the familiar in novel ways. The reader, therefore, aspires to find in the unknown “the ideal environment” or “other aspect of the Supreme Good” (p.5). As D. B. Shaw (2013) asserts: “SF writing is not *about* the future but is an extrapolation from known conditions into an imagined space, often beyond terrestrial horizons, which provides for (often didactically so) a critique of the social and cultural moment in which the work is produced” (p.785). science fiction’s “main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” as mentioned in Latham (2017, p. 118). In this way, the reader can contemplate and speculate the present reality and achieve a deeper understanding of the social, political and cultural facets of the present. According to Suvin (1979) “The aliens – utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers- are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world” (p.5).

3.2. Science fiction and myth

To clarify science fiction’s ‘cognitive estrangement’ Suvin (1979) differentiates between it and myth. Science fiction considers the standards of any age distinguished and peculiar, liable to change and therefore subject to a “*cognitive view*”. Myth on the other hand is conversely different, since it is not subject to the cognitive and considers human relationships static and “supernaturally determined” (p.7). Myth brings consistent motifs from inactive societies alive. Science fiction is present in the great epochs of history. It focuses on the diversity of the “future-bearing” elements from the “empirical environment”. Myth explains the phenomena whereas science fiction considers them problems and predicts where they lead. In other words, science fiction “sees the mythical static identity as an illusion, usually as fraud” (p.7). Science fiction is entirely in opposition to “supernatural or metaphysical estrangement” equally as to empiricism (p.7).

3.3. Science fiction and fantasy

Furthermore, Suvin (1979) also differentiates science fiction from fantasy as regards cognition. Fantasy is devoted to the positing of non-cognitive laws into the empirical. Fantasy includes (ghost, horror, Gothic, weird) tale (p.8). Fantasy is harmful to the empirical world and its laws since it is ‘impure’. Whereas science fiction is closer to the pastoral whose imaginary framework can isolate “two human motivations: erotic and power-hunger” (p.9). As such the pastoral is similar to science fiction which takes from the pastoral tradition “its sensual relationships” that do not manifest class alienation” (p. 9).

Dasgupta (1985) further notes that: “theatre (indeed all art) and science are not as divergent as is usually assumed” (246). He argues that “If both science and theatre seek to comprehend the nature of reality in all its varied manifestations, surely they must converge at some point in their individual searches” (238).

Suvin (1979) refers to science fiction as a genre that has “the constant intermingling of imaginary and empirical possibilities” (p.6). These specific elements are applicable in the case of G. B. Shaw's *Farfetched Fables*. Shaw presents alternative worlds in this play: they are far from the present world and simultaneously are closely related to it.

3.4. Parameters of science fiction

Suvin (1979) stresses the growing popularity of science fiction in the forthcoming literature that is handled by young writers and the readers as well who can appreciate “the new sets of values” (p.3) imposed by that genre. Suvin discusses some of the distinguishing characteristics typical of the science fiction genre. He names them “parameters” (p.10). The main characteristic according to him is the affinity between each genre and the “zero world” of the “verifiable properties around the author...the circumstances around the hero are neither passive nor neutral”. Moreover, “Ethics is in no significant relation to physics” in such empirical world and in the corresponding naturalistic or realistic literature. (p.11). “In the tragic myth it compensates the physics, in the optimistic myth it supplies the coincidence with a systematic framework” (p.11). In the fantasy world, ethics corresponds to the positive or negative physics. In the science fiction world, the hero may succeed or fail in his aims. Though appearing variable from contemporary literature, science fiction has affinity with the literature of our civilization in its maturity, compared with the integrity of science and philosophy as Suvin asserts (p.11).

3.5. Science fiction in natural and human sciences

Science fiction according to Suvin (1979) started as a “pre-scientific or proto scientific approach” unfolding the fraud of simple social criticism and satire and moving towards “the sophisticated natural and human sciences”. It developed into a “mapping of possible alternatives” (p.12) or other worlds. Science fiction is basically dependent on the cognitive estrangement and as such can be regarded as a literature of that type. Therefore, it is distinguishable from non-literature, empiricism, non-cognitive genres as fantasy and the prevailing confusion of those dominant terms according to Suvin (p. 12-13)

According to Suvin (1979) science stands for cognition and fiction refers to estrangement. Science here covers not only the natural science but all the cultural or historical sciences. (p.13). Science fiction depends on “sociological, psychological, historical, anthropological” bases for its formation (13). Thus, it motivates the reader to come out of his familiar world to another world which examines fresh possibilities. Hence imagination plays an important part in science fiction. Suvin advocates the flexible affinity between literary structure and science fiction that is if fulfilled “a cognitive – in most cases strictly scientific- element becomes a measure of aesthetic quality of the specific pleasure to be sought in SF. (p.15).

3.6. Science fiction and novum

Though science fiction seems to be exploring fresh possibilities of imagined world, it draws on the scientific or the technological concepts that challenge one's preconceived notions. As such, the technique of novum is of paramount importance. It refers to the creative imaginative element in science fiction which distinguishes it from other genres. It functions as a catalyst or motivation for the previously described notion of cognitive estrangement that paves the way

for the required transformation. It is entirely new, and its existence in the work of art stirs our imagination and forces us to consider our world in a novel way. As Suvin (1979) argues, “*SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional novum validated by cognitive logic*” (p.63).

“A novum of cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s and implied reader’s reality...its novelty is totalizing in the sense that; it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale or at least of crucially important aspect thereof” (p.64). As such, it takes the form of the technological, the social, the political, or in sum the imaginative stir of the status-quo. It can be said, that the novum is the technique of discovering the alternative worlds presented in science fiction. Suvin borrows the term “novum” from Ernst Bloch and modifies it (p.64). Science fiction tension is created by the disparity between the reader who symbolizes certain type of the present-world- man and “the Unknown or the Other”-world-man created by the novum. Thus, the novum bridges the gap between both the “fictional and (the) empirical” as Suvin contends. Though the term has many characteristics it cannot be specifically defined (64). In degree, the innovation can simply refer to difference in “magnitude”. Examples are new inventions such as “gadget, technique, phenomenon, relationship” (p.64). On the other hand, it can extend to include “a setting” of “spatiotemporal locus”, “agent and/or relations basically new and unknown in the author’s environment” (p.64). The novum is entirely based on science though introduced in a way that defies the reader’s fixed ideas. The situation in a work of art does not depend on a specific motivation or “rationale”, however, its significance is either scientific or cognitive. The imaginative new texture of science “can play the role of scientific validation in SF” since it does not struggle with its philosophical basis of the author’s time (p. 67-8).

4. Analysis of Shaw’s *Fables* according to Suvin’s theory

Farfetched Fables consists of six short fables or plays. The time of the first fable is just after the Second World War. The setting is a London-public Park in the mid-twentieth century. The play begins with an argument between a young woman and a man which ends with a proposal of marriage, and is met with refusal on the part of the woman. Due to the war-horrors there is a sentiment of rejection to give birth to children:

“Until men are wise and women civilized, they had better not be born”, says the young woman (Shaw, 1950, p.102).

An old man appears just to declare that the war ended, and the superpowers agreed to ban atomic bomb manufacturing making it a capital crime. Adiseshiah comments that: “*Farfetched Fables* is a sardonic exposure of war profiteering” (2023, p.121). The young man is alchemist, who is motivated by the woman’s idea, that once they will invent a poisoning gas to kill people without influencing the environment. He seizes the opportunity to think about inventing that weapon, in consideration of the material gain he will get if he succeeds. As Adiseshiah asserts, the dialogue contains “A jarring mix of romance, satire, and tragedy (that) produce an affective discomfort appropriate for signalling the perversity of this opportunism” (p. 121). Adiseshiah suggests that the “brief vignette combines Socratic dialogue with satire, to produce a piece that contains aspects of agitprop and Brechtian epic theatre” (p.121).

YOUNG WOMAN: That won't stop war. Somebody will discover a poison gas lighter than air! It may kill the inhabitants of a city; but it will leave the city standing and in working order.

YOUNG MAN [thoughtfully, letting the newspaper drop on his knees] That is an idea.

YOUNG WOMAN: What idea?

YOUNG MAN: Yours. There is a lot of money in it. (Shaw, 1950, *Farfetched Fables*, p.103)

The fable presents an argument on the realities of specific types of war- that is the chemical and the atomic. The greedy young alchemist notes in the discussion that, due to the destructive nature of the atomic bombs, they will not be used again. However, the future alternative would be a poisoning gas. Consequently, he hurries to invent that particular type of gas, that would kill people without influencing the environment. Herein, the empirical alternative of Suvin is the basis of such assumption and the novum is presented as well.

He succeeds in inventing that particular type of gas in the second fable, but his government refuses to buy his invention and considers him irrational. Therefore, he sells it to the South African government, and goes to live on an island called the Isle of Wight in England, thinking that it is a safe place. During a heated discussion on the topic of the poisoning gas, the two major characters of the second fable: the Foreign Secretary and the Commander-in-Chief are killed by that type of gas that has been dropped on London. Thus, the effect of war is clear (Yde, 2013). The notion of war is known to everybody; however, it takes the form of the unexpected technological in *Farfetched Fables* and as such, it complies with Darko Suvin's theory which is denoted beforehand.

Shaw is wholeheartedly influenced by science in such *Fables* as "The third fable is set in an anthropometric laboratory" that is used to assess the human capacities exactly. The fable reveals the near future, which is hardly far, that it displays the effect of the previous-fable's incidents. However, the evolution is still invisible. Before that Laboratory, the audience is confronted by five characters. Three of them are employees who meet two other figures. They are two persons: a fool who thinks himself a genius and vice versa. The setting is the Isle of Wight, which represents the ten elite of society or "a colony of the Upper Ten" (Shaw, 1950, p. 109).

It is Shaw's belief that a small number of the population -from five to ten percent for instance- should represent the ruling class. Therefore, such a colony is for them. No ordinary or average men are allowed in. "Neither Mediocrities nor Any bodies are admitted" (Shaw, 1950, p. 109). One's status is determined by an examination within the Anthropometric Laboratory, and people are classified into levels within those limits and grades. Men and women are classified according to their abilities. If one -like the Tramp in that fable- refuses to be classified, he will be assorted as dangerous, and will be killed finally.

The Commissioner speaks about his book on the Human Diets and he is the sole character in the fourth fable. He recites a book's chapter. The Dictaphone, he recites with, is an example of the advancement of technology, since it saves time. The title of the speech is "Living on Air" (*Farfetched Fables*, p.114). It shows the vegetarians' substitution of animals by water and air in the human diet, during the twentieth century.

The Diet commissioner advocates being vegetarian, since it is based on being more vigorous and active than animal eaters. This fact is in contrast to a superstition assuming the reverse. The British people will be influenced by a reformer who will persuade them to live on plants and fruits - simply on vegetarian meals. However, the real advantage in being vegetarian is in saving the effort exerted to breed animals. He goes further to assume that; the highbrow scientists of the ignorant dark ages assert that the human meal is poisoned. He further quotes a Russian female innovator, who assumes that, air and water should be consumed as they have not been yet. Fasting for months, like saints, and living on air and water, she assumes, would be the end of the food problem, that will lead to change in society and in the world consequently.

The recorded history revolves around the food problem, which makes men dominated by nature. Getting rid of the desire for food liberates man generally, and is replaced by an eager search for knowledge of nature, in order to control it. The same desire is replaced with one of truth and justice. This is basically a text of biology for infants as Shaw contends. The reciter orders two hundred million copies (Yde, 2013, p. 189). "The super gorilla became the soldier and servant of Creative Evolution. Full stop. Postscript" (Shaw, 1950, p.116). The last lines tell us that this is a primer on rudimentary biology for infants, now in its tenth edition.

The setting of the fables remains the same with slight changes, whereas the characters vary. They are always involved in discussion before a building, whose design changes. In the fifth fable, the sign of "Diet Commissioners" has been replaced by another one of "Genetic Institute". In the fourth fable, the evolved characters are from the future. When they speak, they reveal Shaw's ideas. Here, the characters discuss the history of their ancestors while being surprised by the latter's foolishness. Being dressed in garments which have signs denoting their sex, they are two men, a woman, and a hermaphrodite.

One knows that reproduction has become limited to laboratories. The process is done by scientists with chemicals for the sake of experimentation. In their quest for knowledge and power, they think that personal contact for the sake of reproduction is shameful. "Strangest of all, they seem to have experienced in such contacts, the ecstasies which are normal with us in our pursuit of knowledge and power" (Shaw, 1950, p.119). In reference to Shaw himself, the speech continues, "In the dark ages of the nineteenth and twentieth century, there was a man who aspired to be a vortex in thought and a woman who declared that the mind made the body and not the body the mind". (Shaw, 1950, p.120)

Simultaneously, they share Shaw's view for the inappropriate alphabet. As stated by Shaw, they cannot make an alphabet that spells their language correctly. In this context, Hitler is being mistaken by them for Jesus in their debate, which revolves around the death of a man (a prophet for them), who was killed by the authorities for forcing money changers away from a temple. On the other hand, the hermaphrodite is angry with the body claiming that the experiments they do are in vain, since they make use of the body. They should get rid of it ultimately. As Shaw (1950) states: "We must get rid of our physical bodies altogether... I dont want to be a body: I want to be a mind and nothing but a mind" (p. 120). The fable ends with that declaration by the Shamrock: the "pursuit of knowledge and power will never end" (p.120).

The final fable starts with five students, who are distinguished by numbered caps. They are different in age, and they are regression to twentieth century ancestors. They are not biologically advanced, and are involved in discussion too. They are ruled by another race that is the Disembodied Race or Thought Vortex. The latter race inspires the former embodied beings and penetrates their brains, "since they need our hands and brains as tools in that pursuit". (Shaw, 1950, p.127)

That quest is of knowledge and power. In the argument between Youth One and Youth Three, one knows that they are not entirely destructive but they serve the Creative Evolution of Shaw. Being destructive means that they "would have tramped on us and killed us, or poisoned us with phosphorus" like the Superman and the black beetles (Shaw, 1950, p.126). Shaw's idea of evolution is complete here, as these creatures or super beings seek violence as well as creativity, "for the pursuit of knowledge and power involves the slaughter and destruction of everything that opposes it" (p.127).

Their tutor explains that particular species learns through trial and error. In their search for knowledge, they can tread on all obstacles, even if they are beetles or other humans. Their way must be clear, and through this path, they have to kill criminals, who are incorrigible or without conscience. They are needless and useless now, though they used to be in the past.

Teacher...But they are no longer either useful or necessary, and must now be exterminated. They cannot be exterminated by disembodied thought. The mongoose must be inspired to kill the cobra, the chemist to distil poisons, the physicist to make nuclear bombs, others to be big game hunters, judges, executioners, and killers of all sorts, often the most amiable of mortals outside their specific functions as destroyers of vermin. The ruthless foxhunter loves dogs: the physicists and chemists adore their children and keep animals as pets. (Shaw, 1950, pp. 127-28)

According to Yde (2013) the selfishness of individuals and the paradoxical attitude of the physicists and the chemists, who create mass destructive weapons, and simultaneously love their pets are quite astonishing and amazing. (p.191) "These benevolent killers are inspired by a higher power, the Teacher declares, acting at the best of the Life Force". She goes on to remind her students of "those children of ours who cannot get beyond the First Form, and grow up to be idiots or savages. We kill them" (Shaw, 1950, p.128). She continues to say that she and her students may be killed too, if they meet a later and higher civilization, that would consider them fools and savages.

The appearance of one of these Disembodied Thoughts is a comic one. "I am an embodied thought. I am what you call the word made flesh," (Shaw, 1950, p.129) asking them to call him Raphael. Youth 3 is impudent with it; therefore, Raphael threatens him saying that he is restricting his magnetic power so as not to kill him. "I am restraining my magnetic field. If I turned it on it would kill you" (Shaw, 1950, p.130). He adds that, due to his excessive desire for knowledge, he has incarnated and has demolished his physical desires. He explains that his yearning for specific fields of science such as mathematics, discovery, and exploration is far greater than physicality. It is the inherent curiosity for being bodiless, and the repulsion of physicality, which lead to the development of the heroes of the last fable. Like Raphael, they have become bodiless, surviving on air solely, while being full of intellectualism.

In a conversation between the students and the teacher, one of the students shows doubts concerning the possibility of discarding the body, for which the teacher replies, that all animals can throw away their bodies, through the evolution process. To enlarge their brains, the desire for change has been grounded on their search for power -the absolute power- that is impeded by the body. Therefore, they renounce it for the sake of that power. (Yde, 2013, p. 192)

The ideal world Shaw seeks is fundamental in his utopian contrived realm. He is a philosopher who is for a disciplined society. However, that society does not comply with the democratic regime prevalent in the West. Nor does it conform to the prevailing economic system. “Shaw still remains a symbol of humanitarianism and integrity”. (Yde, 2013, p.195)

Shaw is prophetic in his introduction of the tendency to destroy in humanity and he predicts the lethal appetite growing in man generally. As the setting of *Farfetched Fables* covers a span of time from the early twentieth century to the future, and the play is set shortly after the nuclear war, it presents alternative worlds prevailed by both science and power. Herein, Shaw predicts the competition and invention of the chemical weapons through the search for the best formula of poisoning gas.

As Broderick asserts “Darko Suvin situated SF as a literary form ... marked by two unusual devices: Cognitive Estrangement and the novum”. Suvin’s novum that is explained beforehand, is presented in the *Fables*. The idea of a particular innovation, presenting a phenomenon or relationship that is based on the reader’s or audience’s reality, is skilfully dramatized by Shaw. The whole world of the *Fables* experiences specific changes that are based on reality. The technological world presented by Shaw or part of it, is equivalent to the term novum. Herein, there is some sort of tension, upon which the difference between the unknown world of the fables- created by the novum- and the real world of the audience -symbolizing the present - world man- depends. The Suvinian novum connects the two realms of the play “fictional and empirical” (p.64) though it is basically drawn from science. The novum or the innovation refers to the difference in magnitude or it includes “a setting” belonging to certain space and time. On the other hand, it involves a major character, or new, or unknown relations. Despite that fact, it is presented variably and as such, shakes the reader’s preconceived ideas. All the imaginative new texture of science that does not struggle with its philosophical basis of the author’s time “can play the role of scientific validation in SF” (Suvin, 1979, p.6).

The reader as well as the audience can understand the contrived imagined world, through scientific observation, and the practical experiment as well, and as such, reaches the state of cognitive estrangement. Suvin’s cognitive estrangement can be found in the play in which, estrangement is blended with cognition. The newly contrived world is distinguished by its novelty, that is inexplicable at first sight, and it demands to be classified, and as such it becomes the novum. In the play, the imaginative framework is represented by the alternative worlds, in which the reader can experience the familiar world though in a variable unfamiliar way. Therefore, the novum can be seen in the representation of the disembodied creatures. As Adiseshiah (2023) points out, “In *Farfetched Fables* disembodiment has been realized” (p.120). That is the basic novum of the entire play. Moreover, it can be seen in the fresh techniques of reproduction done in labs as well. One can say that, the classification into sexless

beings and the hermaphrodite, present other type of novum, based on imaginative empiricism or experience.

Shaw depends on a variety of techniques and styles. They are “brief and ironic sketches” on the future of human beings, as Indick reveals (1997, p.34) The play consists of “a consecutive group of sketches” as Conolly describes them too when saying, “It is a bit of a stretch to describe the six ‘fables’-conversations- as a play” because of its shortness (2022, p.426).

Though the dialogues are too short to leave a long effect, they are “humorous and thought-provoking, making a diverting and sobering evening of theater” as Indick asserts (1979, p. 34). Being dialectic, his play is part of a vast oeuvre of Shaw that presents the characters who disclose their thinking directly. (p.34) “There is character conflict, but most often shallow, simply for thematic explication of the creative evolution of the human race” (p.25).

The aesthetic techniques of the play include the intermingling of styles, the intentional discord of faithfulness with satire, and the mixture of the serious and the ironic which can “provide an exhilarating provocation for the spectator” (Adishesiah, 2023, p. 128). Herein the play incites brave new ways of thinking about “identities, particularly classed, gendered, raced, and sexual identities” (p.128). Shaw is for revaluation of old aging people as potentially assertive and he calls for the extreme rejection of the “deep -rooted normalization of gerontophobia” (p.128). Shaw welds “allegory and eugenics” too in this play, as Peters writes (1998, p.23).

Farfetched Fables is a direct reaction to the atomic bomb of Shaw's time, and such a bomb could annihilate an entire generation of humanity, as well as the future ones. The *Fables'* style is used to dramatize the might-be- effect of Shaw's Creative Evolution as well. It works to restore human race in modified shape, to reach the “vortex of pure thought”. Shaw is prophetic to warn against the double threat of the nuclear weapons' proliferation, as well as the creation or invention of much more destructive ones. According to Carpenter (1998) the woman of the first tale “visualizes a further step in the evolution of genocidal weapon” (p.176). Though one expects a romance in the man-woman relationship yet, such expectations are misleading. The comic dramatic conflict does not ensue out of subject disagreement; rather it arises out of the new situation effect on such might-be-relationship (p.175).

5. Critical overview

To clarify his ideas, Shaw's style depends entirely on real situations, which are shown through the ‘cut-and-thrust of debate’. Such a debate is typical of Shaw since debate is “a technique recommended by G.B. Shaw” (Suvin, 2010, p. 518). Carpenter (1998) further continues to assert that the real circumstances, in which every character speaks his own language, are based on idioms and stressed articulateness. (p.174). Through the debates of the characters cover many familiar Shaw subjects such as: the atomic bomb, the chemical warfare, education, vegetarianism, genetics, evolution, and Russia, “they are independent of each other and not connected by a story line” (Conolly, 2022, p.426). In this context, Henderson (1956) describes them as “dramatic exercises, stage experiments, in which the characters resemble ventriloquized marionettes, speaking with the voice, and titillated by the hand, of the Puppet Master” (p. 576).

These tiny *Fables* prove to be fascinating especially if seen in the light of Shaw's non-dramatic comments and when set side by side (Carpenter, 1998, p. 173). The play's atmosphere is relative to sciences, for instance it refers to atomic energy, engineering and physics. The latter represent three inactive domains of life- science at that time, though they are hilarious and resonate nowadays. The worlds of the play are so varied to include also, neuroscience and the physiology of intelligence, the nutrition science and finally, the artificial reproduction, as Zallen points out (Peters et al., p. 83-4).

Farfetched Fables can be regarded as "a projection of the race in the distant future" according to Wardle (Peters et al., 1994, p.84). Esslin notes that, "The gradual elimination of the physical side of humanity, the conscious breeding of a higher type of race, was very much in Shaw's mind" and as such, the *Fables* according to him are "projections of the future" "in nineteenth-century terms". Esslin specifically calls the play a "nineteenth-century scientific utopia" (Peters et al., 1994, p.85). Worth mentioning is the fact that utopia is a science fiction theme.

Weisband illustrates that, "each part of this mosaic is about the relationship between human physicality, however experienced - sexuality, digestion, breathing - and the imagined possibilities of immortality". According to him, "the theme that runs through these *Fables* is the possibility of immortality derived from genius (Peters et al., 1994, p.85).

As far as the technique of the play's performance is concerned, Davis asserts that the costume of Raphael, the director of the 1992-production of the fables, reminds him of the feather capes that ancient Mexican priests used to wear calling it a "grotesque" representation (Peters et al., p.87). He refers to the vortex too, which he describes as being "minimal kind of pinwheel" with colours -as they do not have a complex cooler system- and he makes use of four attractive machines called Intel abeam to represent the vortex and dancing atoms in the performance.

The play raises questions about the morale of the future mind and intellect or the evolution of the human mind as proposed by Weisband (Peters et al., 1994). He stresses the line of the Hermaphrodite in the play when saying, "We must get rid of our physical bodies altogether, except for the stuffed Specimens in the Natural History Museum. I don't want to be a body. I want to be a mind and nothing but a mind" (Shaw, 1950, p.118).

That is the end of the Fifth Fable, however, in the Sixth Fable the Teacher says, "Yes; for the pursuit of knowledge and power"- and that linkage comes very close to whatever moral is, the linkage of knowledge and power- "involves the slaughter and destruction that oppose it". The disembodied pure thought can spur all people including the hunter, the soldier, the benefactor and the peace-lover as Weisman notes (Peters et al., 1994, p. 89).

Esslin goes further to connect the Hegelian idea of the pure disembodiment of the human spirit to Shaw's ideas in the *Fables* (Peters et al., p.89). According to Wisenthal (Peters et al., 1994) *Farfetched Fables* does not guarantee the advancement but assures its possibility (p.90). Zallen refers to Daniel Kevles, in his book *In the Name of Eugenics*, explaining the concept of positive eugenics and negative eugenics. The former refers to encouraging those with good qualities – the elite for instance- to reproduce more, whereas the latter refers to prohibiting or preventing by sterilization programs the ability of those with limited qualities to reproduce themselves. This may be done through massacre in extreme. According to Zalen, Shaw handles the second

idea, or negative eugenics. Therefore, in the second fable, the people whom scientists prove to be with limited qualities in the laboratory are killed (Peters et al., 1994, p.92).

6. Conclusion

Verily, Darko Suvin's theory regarding science fiction can be seen clearly in Shaw's *Farfetched Fables* in which Shaw's ideas of the forthcoming destruction of humanity and culture loom over everywhere. Examples of Shaw's unusual ideas can be traced in *Farfetched Fables*, in which some of the invisible humans with no bodies, control others and live on air solely. People who hinder progress are devastated, and the rest of men pursue pure knowledge feeling that it is their utmost pleasure. That is to say, that pursuit springs out of the mind rather than of the body. Such ideas by Shaw, are relative to science fiction theatre.

In that context, Suvin's idea of cognitive estrangement appears to dominate Shaw's play. That is to say, *Farfetched Fables*, that can be seen as an early type of science fiction, is shaped through imaginative and cognitive layers. Shaw presents alternative realms in the play that are taken from scientific or technological wells. Those worlds create a cognitive estrangement spirit in the readers and the audience as well. As such, the created mood destroys past concepts in their mind, and gets them oriented with an unfamiliar world. Simultaneously, the novum is exemplified in the new ideas presented before them in the play. It has its contribution in the cognition process, in which the readers and the audience contemplate their realities, and accept the unfamiliar world presented before them. Examples of the novum in *Farfetched Fables* can be seen in the invention of a lethal weapon -the poisoning gas- that destroys humanity but leaves environment clear and sound. Based on genetic engineering, is the other novum created in the anthropometric lab where people are assessed according to their abilities. Other one is presented in the colony of the elite people. A further novum is presented in human diet restriction to create vegetarians, who thrive on water and air solely. Characters from the future wear garments to reveal their own sex, whereas reproduction is limited to laboratories. The idea of renouncement of the body to live with the mind only is also there, to show another sort of novum.

Such scientific framework challenges one's conception of human nature, and shakes the conventional ideas of individuality and kindness. It stimulates the readers to reflect on the nature of science as well. Suvin's Cognitive estrangement generally separates the readers or the audience from their own realities, while presenting alternative worlds in which they reassess their environment culturally, politically and socially. Therefore, the sense of estrangement motivates the readers and the audience to criticize what they see, in the process of imagining the future or the different world.

Science fiction theatre in the current play *Farfetched Fables* gets the readers and the audience estranged from their present to become immersed in speculations on that utopian or dystopian alternative world. Thus, it opens up new possibilities for further speculations on the science fiction theatre as a genre and on the natural or environmental phenomena relative to it. Perhaps the following quotation from Latham's (2017) *Science Fiction Criticism*, reveals that science fiction theatre demands from the audience not only "specialized, quantified positivistic knowledge" but also "a social imagination whose quality...testifies to the maturity of his critical and creative thought" (p. 125).

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