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“TURN[ING] DREAMS INTO REALITY”: INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF *SEHNSUCHT* IN TWO TIME TRAVEL NARRATIVES BY ALFRED BESTER

Molly Cobb

The Speculative Longings of *Sehnsucht* in Science Fiction

Sehnsucht in psychology is defined by Dana Kotter-Grühn et al in “What is it we are longing for?” (2009) as a desire for “ideal, alternative states and experiences of life” that focuses on both missing aspects of one’s current life and “fantasies about ideal, alternative realities” (428). Such fantasies often draw upon an overlapping concept of time that lacks distinction between the past, present, and future, with Kotter-Grühn et al referring to these longings as “a temporally complex experience” (428). Nurtured as they are through imagination and fantasy, these longings are, according to Susanne Scheibe et al in their study “Toward a Developmental Psychology of *Sehnsucht*” (2007), “unattainable in principle” (779). Considering these aspects of how *Sehnsucht* is meant to function psychologically, the relationship to Science Fiction is an interesting one, especially as it pertains to time travel. As Scheibe et al claim, the longings associated with *Sehnsucht* “include simultaneously aspects of the past, present, and future” with the idea that one’s longings “are assumed to always extend beyond the present into the past and future” (781). This “tritime focus” positions time travel literature as uniquely capable of engaging with *Sehnsucht* by allowing the possibility of fulfilling such longings regardless of their place in time or how they are temporally experienced by the individual.

The concept of *Sehnsucht*, or life longings, has only been explored within the realm of psychology since around 2007, despite being originally derived from eighteenth century German Romanticism and present throughout cultural and literary spheres since then. Scheibe et al point out in their study “Is Longing Only for Germans?” (2011) that philosophy, art, and culture have, for centuries, evolved around “feelings of longing or yearning for something intensely desired” (603). As such, the life longings of *Sehnsucht*, though a new topic in psychology, are certainly not a new or uncommon topic in literature. Literature’s capacity to fulfil longings for alternative experiences and realities demonstrates its relationship with *Sehnsucht*, with these longings often manifesting as a wish to escape from one’s current reality. Robert B. Heilman, in “Escape and Escapism Varieties of Literary Experience” (1975), comments that there is an “element of escape in reading all kinds of literature” and that “all literature has in it something of the sanctuary, the entering of which resembles an escape from something else” (458, 454). Heilman further comments that literature

allows “escape into [...] a more extensive world [...] than one experiences in actuality” (455). Though Heilman does not specifically mention Science Fiction, connections can be drawn between ideas of “a more extensive world” and the speculative world-building found within this genre.

In addition, with Science Fiction’s ability to literalise the metaphor, so to speak, desires for an alternative life become less unattainable due to the genre’s capacity to fulfil longings that would normally reside outside of reality. This is especially true when these fantasies are centred around escaping one’s current time period, as seen in several works by Alfred Bester. Through time travel, this longing to escape becomes something that can be achieved within the text. However, this fulfilment, due to its speculative nature, can never materialise outside the pages of the narrative, thereby questioning whether these fictional fulfilments can translate to true escapism for the reader. The important role that the individual plays in their own escapism can be seen in the texts discussed in this article. Indeed, it is not so much that these desires are attained, or even that time travel is a valid method of obtaining them, but that the individual, and the role the individual plays in these fulfilments, is key to a satisfied self. The level of control an individual has, the inclusion of fantasy and imagination, and the ability for the individual to alter their surroundings to suit their own desires remains heavily important in whether the fulfilment of *Sehnsucht* is satisfactory or not. Within Bester’s texts, this manifests through the emphasis placed on the significance of the autonomous self and the realisation of one’s true potential through independently enacted escape.

Escaping one’s own reality for an alternative life is a recurrent theme throughout many of Bester’s works, as in Science Fiction more widely. In *Time Machines: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics, and Science Fiction* (1999), Paul Nahin states that “Time travel fiction is, of course, the ultimate in escapist literature” (31). As well, Terri Paul, in the essay “The Worm Ouroboros: Time Travel, Imagination, and Entropy” (1983), refers to time travel as “the ultimate fantasy” (278). The ability of a time machine to fulfil wishes (as Nahin indicates), coupled with Paul’s discussion that time travel offers a way to go against time’s arrow (and therefore against human mortality in a way), highlights Roy A. Sorenson’s assertion in “Time Travel, Parahistory and Hume” (1987) that the fascination with time travel stems from the “frustration we sometimes feel at being confined to the present” (235). The prospect of fulfilling one’s wish of escaping present reality therefore positions time travel as offering that which other speculative elements may not be able to provide. This tripartite connection between time travel, escapism, and fantasy is key to the way in which *Sehnsucht* highlights the relationship between the use of time travel as escape, escape as a longing, and this longing as being rooted in one’s fantasies about alternative realities.

When fantasising about these alternative realities, Heilman comments that “Real trouble and a truly dismal world [...] would compel tougher and more desperate alternatives” (451). The desire to escape “a truly dismal world” is identifiable in numerous texts by Bester during the 1950s that repeatedly engage with the ever-present threat of nuclear war. The inability of many Americans in the 1950s to avoid the prospective certainty of nuclear war inevitably led to fantasies of a different time; one perceived to be absent of the associated state of paranoia or anxiety and the very real possibility of nuclear annihilation. Films that engage with characters desiring to live in other centuries,

such as Roy Ward Baker's *I'll Never Forget You* (1951), or stories in which characters use time travel to escape a war-torn reality, such as Ray Bradbury's "The Fox and the Forest" (1950), reflect the imaginative engagement with these themes during this period. Though there are various methods of escape, especially in speculative writing, time travel ostensibly offers complete removal from this 1950s' fear of nuclear annihilation by physically extracting the individual from their reality in a way other forms of travel/escape would be less capable of. However, while characters and readers may see this process as a complete escape from nuclear anxieties, this method is emblematic of those very anxieties, as this need for time travel as escapism would not be necessary without those fears in the first place. This need to escape the possibility of, or already existing, war-torn reality can be seen in a number of texts by Bester, but the use of time travel and the 'desperate alternatives' mentioned by Heilman are more readily apparent in "Hobson's Choice" (1952) and "Disappearing Act" (1953). The ignorance of expecting time travel to solve all of your problems, with no consideration of the difficulties involved in this process, is central to "Hobson's Choice," while in "Disappearing Act" sheer desperation unlocks characters' abilities to create and escape into their own fantasies.

In these texts, and many others, Bester engages with the idea of escape through psychology, which positions his works not only as relevant for examining them through the lens of *Sehnsucht*, but useful in exploring how Science Fiction, specifically, can engage with this concept. Bester drew upon psychology extensively throughout his works, with a specific focus on Freudian concepts. He comments in various story introductions in *Starlight: The Great Short Fiction of Alfred Bester* (1976) that near the beginning of the 1950s he "became hooked on psychiatry," further stating that it was his habit "to look at characters from the Freudian point of view first" (242, 219). Bester's attention to, and use of, the psyche relates to his championing of the individual throughout his works. As Tim Blackmore writes in "The Bester/Chaykin Connection: An Examination of Substance Assisted by Style" (1990), "for Bester the search for self is central" (120). Bester's focus on psychology and the independent, individual self is reflected in his works discussed here and highlights the importance he placed on psychological longings for escape being enacted and fulfilled by an autonomous self. With the satisfaction gained through the fulfilment of one's longings dependent on the reciprocal nature between that attainment and one's individual autonomy in achieving it, the relationship between Bester's exploration of escape within his texts and the reader's role in engaging in that escapism highlights the importance of autonomous control over one's own longings, on behalf of both the characters and the reader.

The Importance of Autonomous Escape in "Hobson's Choice"

"Hobson's Choice" highlights the consequences of lacking autonomous control through the character Addyer, a statistician who is investigating population counts across the country to find an explanation for the national population increase. The country is revealed to be a near postapocalyptic wasteland, full of radiation and destruction due to nuclear war, making this increase puzzling. When it is revealed that Addyer was inadvertently investigating time travelling individuals, who were causing the increase in population statistics, he is informed that all theories behind the use of time travel are incorrect. Instead, time travel is essentially used as a form of escape and as "[p]sychological

therapy" (*Virtual Unrealities* 120). As Addyer has discovered time travel without invitation, he is told he must now be sent to another time in order to protect the secret. Addyer finds the concept of leaving his own time enthralling as he declares that he lives in "the worst age in all history" (125). Time travel is thus able to enact his longing to leave his own time; without it, Addyer's *Sehnsucht* would remain in the realm of the unattainable.

On the surface, Addyer is notionally trying to escape the destruction wrought by war and the subsequent deterioration of the country. However, Bester's exploration of the psyche throughout the text indicates that what Addyer is actually trying to escape, unconsciously, is his psychological inability to come to terms with the consequences of war. Bester engages with the concept of psychic numbing by having Addyer take the scale of nuclear destruction across the country seemingly for granted. Psychic numbing is referred to as "mental anesthetization" by Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk in *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case Against Nuclearism* (1982), where they state that this apathetic approach to nuclear annihilation is a form of psychological defence designed to override fear, depression, and anxiety (276). Descriptions of Addyer simply being "annoyed" by the destruction or of him "creeping between the deadly radiation glows and only occasionally butting his head against grave markers" without further explanation reflect Addyer's resulting numbness (118). As such, he relies too heavily on physical escape in his longing for an alternative life experience. As his psychological repression of the war travels with him, his ideal alternative life becomes unrealisable as what he is unconsciously avoiding will always remain with him.

Addyer's ignorance of this, coupled with his lack of independence in enacting his escape, further compounds the unsuccessful fulfilment of his desire for an alternative reality. Though Addyer is able to choose which time period he travels to, he is not able to choose the fact that he travels in the first place (though, crucially, he does desire to). The importance of retaining control over one's own escapist longings in Bester's texts becomes evident when considered in conjunction with specific ideas pertaining to *Sehnsucht*. The longings that characterise *Sehnsucht* are based on aspects that an individual has "low or moderate control" over, but that they have a strong desire to change, such as their living conditions or environmental context (Kotter-Gröhn et al 428). However, when Science Fiction renders the unattainable possible, longings which are rooted in fantasy can become reality, granting the individual control over fulfilling them. As Scheibe et al explain, "If life longings are too [...] uncontrollable, a sense of frustration and despair may prevail" but if individuals "felt in control of the occurrence and experience of life longing-related feelings," then those negative associations disappear ("Is Longing Only for Germans?" 605). Therefore, whether these longings are attained depends on whether characters feel they have maintained autonomous control over the experience; a process also connected to the degree to which escapist fantasies allow the audience to maintain a sense of control over their own longings. As Addyer lacks the necessary overall illusion of control, his longing for escape moves into the realm of the uncontrollable and he experiences those emotions of "frustration and despair" as this process is enacted by an external force rather than through his own self.

Addyer being unable to escape the psychological effects of war simply by escaping his own time period causes him to realise that “he had in truth departed from the only time for himself” (126). Addyer’s ignorance reflects the disadvantages of living in another time period, most notably the idea that one would be unable to adjust, especially culturally, to their new surroundings. This inability to assimilate in time is likely why many of the time travellers in the text are said to be “Never satisfied. Always searching,” with the text claiming that they are going “Anyplace but where they belong” (124). In embarking on his journey, “Addyer traveled to the land of Our pet fantasy. He escaped into the refuge that is Our refuge, to the time of Our dreams” (126). The capitalisation of ‘Our’ recalls the opening line that “you and I and Addyer are identical” (113). This idea of escape is therefore supposedly everyone’s idea of escape, with the implication being that everyone wants to be somewhere, and sometime, else. As Jad Smith comments in *Alfred Bester* (2016), “Hobson’s Choice” enables the reader “to reflect on the wish-fulfilment tendency within themselves,” asking them what year they would choose to escape to (120). Though Bester acknowledges that these longings may be universal, he also invites readers to critique their own idea of escape and whether they and Addyer are identical. Particularly as it is covered here, Bester questions the reader’s desire for, and control over, their own escape by implying that they should also gauge how realistic their expectations of literary escapism are and whether they are actually gaining the escape they desired.

With the idea that everyone is entertaining these ideas of escape, it is important to note that Scheibe et al write that Ernst Bloch “deemed the yearning for utopian dreams of a better life” to be a driving force in people’s lives (“Is Longing Only for Germans?” 604). With a focus on the possibility of “something better,” as Bloch indicates in *The Principle of Hope* (1954), and his exploration of how humanity wishes and dreams for these utopian states, Bloch’s approach to longing for an alternative reality can be linked, both culturally and psychologically, to the desire for escape from one’s current reality (vol. 1, 46). However, Bloch notes that even fulfilment that “appears to be sufficiently perfect” in satisfying our longings will still bring melancholy, claiming that, if an individual were required to state absolutely what it is they desire and wish for, they would be “at a loss for an answer” (vol. 1, 193; vol. 3, 1313). Similarly, Kotter-Grühn et al ask, “What do people think will make them feel happy and meaningful?”, further stating that individuals “might have overly positive conceptions” of the ideal, alternative reality they long for, making the “realization of such utopias [...] difficult, if not impossible” (429, 433). Addyer embodies this concept, both in terms of the resulting lack of satisfaction once what he thought he desired is granted, and his misunderstanding of what he actually longed for.

However, this raises questions of whether entertaining escape fantasies that cannot be achieved is fruitless. Rather than implying this, Scheibe et al indicate that these longings, even when unattainable, can have a positive effect on the individual. They acknowledge that, even when longings are beyond reality, searching for utopia helps individuals realise the “fundamental unattainability of optimal states and the essential imperfection of human life” (“Towards a Developmental Psychology” 779). As such, even unattainable longings allow the individual to gain control over their own expectations of life while also, perhaps unintuitively, uncovering one’s own true potential. By encouraging individuals to understand just what the degrees of that potential are,

this process acknowledges that not attaining utopia is not a failure of the self, but a recognition of one aspect of what it means to be human. As this positive aspect of 'failed' longings still requires a degree of control and an understanding of one's own desires, it becomes again not whether one does or does not attain fulfilment, but whether they retain a sense of control.

"Disappearing Act" and the Value of Anachronistic Escape over Historical Reality

In contrast to the unsatisfactory fulfilment of Addyer's longings in "Hobson's Choice," the satisfactory realisation of escapist desires in "Disappearing Act" offers an alternate view of escapism by highlighting the importance of self-enacted escape. While time travel in "Hobson's Choice" is enacted upon the protagonist, the characters in "Disappearing Act" autonomously create their own time travel and, subsequently, their own alternative realities. The satisfactory fulfilment of their longings is thus directly linked to the level of autonomy the characters have over their escape, reflecting Bester's adherence to the importance of the autonomous self.

"Disappearing Act" centres around a war for the 'American Dream' that ultimately ends up destroying the very aspects of society it was meant to be protecting – aspects such as "Music and Art and Poetry and Culture" (*Virtual Unrealities* 4). This destruction is revealed in the narrative when a poet is needed to understand why patients are disappearing from Ward T, but no poets can be found. It is eventually discovered that the patients are disappearing into their own escapist fantasies by travelling into the past of their own imaginations. Essentially, escaping a war-torn reality, a similar desire to Addyer's, induces such a strong desire to leave their own time that people are forcing themselves to develop the ability to enter their own dreams; they have created an alternate reality based upon their imaginative conception of the past and, through willpower, have made those alternate histories real and enabled themselves to time travel into them.

Fiona Kelleghan, in "Hell's My Destination: Imprisonment in the Works of Alfred Bester" (1994), comments that Bester uses themes such as confinement or imprisonment to explore how these concepts cause "human beings to discover the unknown resources within," with his focus on the individual's potential for greatness a "warning against self-imprisonment by inertia and lack of ambition" (362). The two texts explored here use confinement to a war-torn reality to emphasise this difference between discovering individual capability through breaking free of constraints versus being complicit in passively allowing the self to be acted upon by the external world. Though for both texts the means of escape is time travel, how characters subsequently utilise it to fulfil their longing differs drastically. Characters in "Disappearing Act" successfully achieve their longing for escape when they "discover superhuman abilities in rebelling against their confining circumstances," reinforcing the importance Bester places on the individual imagination while also advocating that one must retain control in order to uncover one's latent potential (Kelleghan 358). Patrick A. McCarthy writes in "Science Fiction as Creative Revisionism: The Example of Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*" (1983) that Bester's works often explore "the unfettered imagination" and its relationship "to various forms of control" (63). In "Disappearing Act," the escapist foundations of the characters' time travel relies on altering, and thereby controlling, the past, with their 'unfettered imagination' literally creating the ideal, alternative reality they longed for.

As well, unlike "Hobson's Choice," fulfilment of the patients' desires in "Disappearing Act" remains outside the realm of our reality (namely, our timeline) and characters have complete control over both their fantasies and the method used to enter them. As one of the characters states, "These people have discovered how to turn dreams into reality" ("Disappearing Act" 20). Demonstrating the strength of their longing to escape, patients are not only altering their external world in terms of when they exist temporally, but they are also creating a pocket reality where they are altering history to suit their own longings. As such, the alternate realities that they escape to are full of anachronisms. As the text states: "Nathan Riley has his own picture of what America was like in the early twentieth century. It's faulty and anachronistic because he's no scholar; but it's real for him" (20). Though nostalgic notions of the past are often misrepresentations of history, this biased view enables the patients to create a reality that suits them, regardless of its inaccuracy. Removing the self from reality is said to be "a new fantastic syndrome brought on by the [...] horrors of war" and that, as war intrudes upon the self, the individual must find new routes of escape (14). Reminiscent of Heilman's comment about a dismal world requiring more "desperate alternatives," the characters in "Disappearing Act" are explicitly enacting this form of escapism. As such, the patients in Ward T have quite literally created their "personal utopia," reflecting ideas that "having a controllable sense of *Sehnsucht*" enables individuals to make their desire for a utopian life part of their own self and life story (Scheibe et al, "Toward a Developmental Psychology" 781, 780).

Altering history to fulfil personal longings echoes ideas by Scheibe et al that American culture continuously encourages individuals to "attempt to alter realities to achieve what they want" ("Is Longing Only for Germans?" 605). Sigmund Freud's understanding of 'phantasy' becomes useful when considering the ability of Science Fiction to grant control over what is believed unattainable in *Sehnsucht* (but made real by time travel). Freud, in his essay "On Dreams" (1901), refers to adults as having learned how to "postpone their desires until they can find satisfaction by [...] altering the external world" (119). As well, Scheibe et al report that older adults were more likely to feel a sense of control over their longings, stating that "older age gives an advantage in the mastery of" longings ("Towards a Developmental Psychology" 789). Though it is, of course, unlikely that Freud imagined that mastering these longings meant literally altering the external world by time travelling into one's own alternative reality, it raises interesting ideas about the relationship between fulfilling one's longings and the ability of Science Fiction to grant the unattainable.

The anachronisms present in the characters' alternate realities identify not only how they have altered their external world, but equally relates to the expectation that one's *Sehnsucht* is likely to reside in the realm of the realistically impossible. Scheibe et al claim that, in the longings associated with *Sehnsucht*, "the imperfect present is mentally contrasted with imagined [...] and often counterfactual alternatives of one's life that are idealized and unrestricted by the limits of reality" ("Toward a Developmental Psychology" 781). This echoes not only those ideas of *Sehnsucht* involving imagination but demonstrates how time travel has the unique ability to grant the impossible. While Western readers may be attracted towards speculative fiction due to its potential to engage with the impossible, when imagining alternate realities or histories it is important to note that the ethos of the United States "allows people to start over and pursue a new dream, irrespective of their

history" ("Is Longing Only for Germans?" 605). The patients in "Disappearing Act" do pursue a new dream, rather literally, which is not only irrespective of their own history but of history in general. Bester's representation of the individual self-maximising the potential of their own imagination and taking control of their escape from an unpleasant and confining present, by altering both time and history, reflects the importance of autonomy in not only enacting one's own longing, but in successfully achieving escape from a negative external world.

Nostalgia, Control, and Self-driven Utopian Escapism

This focus on history and the past indicates the interrelatedness of *Sehnsucht* with the notion of nostalgia. A key difference between nostalgia and *Sehnsucht* is the temporal nature of the longings involved. As mentioned, *Sehnsucht* has a "tritime focus." Svetlana Boym writes in "Nostalgia and Its Discontents" (2007) that nostalgia may be affected "by the needs of the present" and have an "impact on the realities of the future," but it is still "fantasies of the past" (8). Boym goes on to say that nostalgia can feel "stifled within the conventional confines of time and space," prompting the possibility that longings may need to look outside reality for fulfilment (9). Echoing previous discussions of the ability of time travel to ease dissatisfaction at feeling confined to the present, the role of nostalgia in encouraging temporal escapism becomes clearer. Though nostalgia may only fulfil one temporal aspect of *Sehnsucht*, further considerations of nostalgia can highlight exactly how this aspect is engaged with in "Disappearing Act."

The idea that nostalgic desires have the ability "to turn history into private [...] mythology," as Boym writes, reflects the characters' tendency towards 'counterfactual alternatives' as their longing for the past, even an inaccurate past, is so strong that it enables the creation of a reality that never existed. Boym further states that nostalgia can also turn history into "collective mythology," highlighting the potentially damaging aspect of a nostalgia that looks to erase a problematic past and the context that created the undesirable present (8). The tension between private reality and collective reality highlights the tension Bester explores between conformity and individuality by noting the need to ensure the individual is not subsumed by the collective, especially a collective which seeks to disadvantage the individual. In the case of "Disappearing Act," the governmental elite and its desire to win wars no matter the cost ignores the harmful present which they have created, thereby forcing individuals to separate themselves from collective history in order to fulfil themselves as individuals.

Anachronisms within the characters' idealised versions of the past reflect not just the level of control the patients have over their escapist reality but emphasises the idealised aspect of their longings. Though their anachronisms are not intentional, they do highlight how our memory of history operates and the dependency on this subjective understanding. Boym further comments that nostalgia "has a utopian dimension," similar to *Sehnsucht*, but it also indicates a connection to Bester's focus on the individual self (9). A personal reality, created through nostalgia and enacted by the individual involved, promises a more utopian dimension due to its subjective nature as separate from objective history, thereby allowing the self a more successful fulfilment of longing due to the

control over the reality to which they are escaping; something that reflects Bloch's ideas on individual longing.

Considering the concept of control and relative lack thereof in "Hobson's Choice" in comparison to "Disappearing Act," it is key that, in exploring escapism, these two texts present a distinction between passive and active participants. While the patients in "Disappearing Act" actively create and enact their method of escape via their own imaginations, Addy is a passive recipient of time travel as it is forced upon him. Though he does desire to escape his own time period, the underlying lack of a choice still puts him on the receiving end rather than being fully in charge. The aspects of control seen in each text – and the connections Bester is drawing between self-realisation, imagination, control, and individual autonomy over one's own longings – is reflected in wider ideas regarding reading itself as a form of escape, such as how much involvement a reader has in creating and imagining the textual world to which they are escaping.

Through these stories, Bester utilises Science Fiction in a way that fits with what Nahin and Paul state time travel narratives are: escapist fantasies. However, these two stories work well as contrasting examples of unsuccessful versus successful escape; consequently, they reflect Bester's own ideas about escapist fantasies. In "Science Fiction and the Renaissance Man," Bester writes that Science Fiction is "not Escape Fiction; it's Arrest Fiction" (418). Smith comments that Bester considered escape fiction to encourage reader passivity, while arrest fiction required an active reader, reinforcing the concept of the reader as "a free and individual agent" (14). Considering Roland Barthes' assertion in *S/Z* (1970) that texts should "make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text," Smith notes that Bester's texts are "writable"; they invite the reader, through active imagination, to co-create meaning and thus co-produce the work being read (Barthes 4; Smith 14). Regarding this need for reader engagement in co-producing literature, Bester wrote that he believed "that somehow reading should be more than mere reading" (*Starlight* 344). Bester's expectations for readers reflects the autonomous individual he champions within his writing and aligns the reader with the characters of "Disappearing Act" while cautioning the reader about falling into the same trap as Addy. As Smith writes, "Hobson's Choice, for those who might not be familiar with the phrase, is the illusion of choice when no choice really exists, and escapism is just that sort of illusion" (120). The difference with "Disappearing Act" is in Bester's reflection on the importance of individual control and autonomous engagement with one's own escape. Smith writes that "Disappearing Act" "presented escapism in a different light," wherein Bester "recognizes escape as an active, creative impulse akin to writing," further aligning the creative nature of the characters within the text with the creative nature Bester expected of his readers in co-creating (and thereby, co-writing) his fiction, and, by extension, their own literary escape (122, 120).

Having a hand in creating one's own escape allows for subjective input on the part of the reader, similar to the patients in "Disappearing Act" subjectively altering reality to suit their own expectations. As such, the patients of Ward T achieve subjective expression of their *Sehnsucht*, something Scheibe et al conclude to be an important aspect of this psychology, as they assert that *Sehnsucht* shifts individuals from operating on the level of "behavioral (objective) to imaginary

(subjective) expressions" ("Toward a Developmental Psychology" 790). Nahin discusses the idea that the past does not really exist as it is only a creation of our own imaginations, with Paul stating that "we create the world we live in by imposing our subjective point of view upon it" (61; 275). This idea that reality is subjective is a key aspect of the method of time travel produced by the patients in "Disappearing Act" and reflects the importance of the creative impulse mentioned by Smith, as seen in the anachronistic alternate realities created from the dreams and imaginations of the patients in Ward T.

Bloch, in discussing individual longing, claims that "Bare desire and its drive principally hold on to what they have, but the wishing in them that pictures intends more" (47). The difference in "bare desire" and "wishing" that "intends more" can be seen again in contrasting the two texts. Addyer remains firmly in the reality of his timeline, as for him time travel is literal with no expression of the imagination or altering of the timeline to suit fantasies about a utopian existence. On the other hand, the patients in "Disappearing Act," in their wish to escape, create more than "what they have." Bloch further states that this bare desire, in contrast with the wishing, "remains unsatisfiable, that is, nothing that exists gives it proper satisfaction" (47). If nothing exists in reality to satisfy a longing, one may have to look outside reality; it is here that literature can offer a means of escapism not found elsewhere. Science Fiction, and time travel especially, has the ability to create a reality where something that can satisfy that longing does exist. Unlike Addyer, who remains rooted in reality (regardless of his temporal position) where his *Sehnsucht* cannot be fulfilled, the patients in "Disappearing Act" instead create that which will satisfy them rather than expecting external reality to provide it for them. The importance Bester places on the power of individual imagination when the self is pushed to maximise its full potential becomes evident. "Hobson's Choice" draws the conclusion that Addyer is not satisfied by time travelling because he has left the time in which he belongs for a time in which he does not. As Smith writes, the time travellers' "idealizations never match the actual conditions of their chosen realities" (119). When the patients in "Disappearing Act" time travel, they do not suffer the same consequence, as, since they have created their own time, they must belong in it, as it was subjectively designed by them, for them.

However, if literature about escape is equally literature as escape, it also asks the reader to reflect on whether, and why, they may tend to use literature to fulfil their own longings for escape. Bester's creation of fiction that is 'writable' means that he is quite literally asking the reader to co-create their own escapist literature. This subsequently gives the reader some semblance of control and creative input over the already written narrative of the fiction, similar to how characters in "Disappearing Act" have some level of creative control over the already written narrative of history. As such, it can be questioned whether Bester may have seen writable texts as more successful literary acts of escapism than purely 'readable' texts, considering his belief that they encouraged reader passivity and a lack of imaginative input. However, just as Bester invites the reader to be complicit in Addyer's wish-fulfilment fantasies in "Hobson's Choice," he also implicitly invites the reader to be complicit in the author's creation of a literary world; one which may have instigated a longing the reader was not previously aware of until given the opportunity to fulfil it.

This consideration reflects the discovery of time travel in “Hobson’s Choice” as Addyer was not aware it was an option and so did not entertain it as a possibility until it was revealed to him. Here, speculative modes of writing offer the same thing – choices which readers may not have even been aware were choices and, as such, inviting readers to entertain increasingly grander expectations towards what literary escapism may entail. Non-speculative fiction, in contrast, conventionally only offers escapist fantasies that are at least possible, even if not likely, and it is here that speculative writing expands upon and widens not just the possible worlds that readers can escape to, but the very limits of how imaginative those escapist fantasies can be. Time travel fiction encompasses this especially well as it removes the imagination from the confines not only of space, but of time, allowing the reader to imagine not only another time period, but the method of actually visiting it. Readers looking to experience a different time period to satisfy temporal longings of *Sehnsucht* for ideal, alternative experiences have, for example, the option of reading Period fiction and thus temporarily and vicariously experiencing that alternative reality. Time travel fiction, however, though conveying a similar experience, further provides an escapist fantasy that would have to be neither temporary nor vicarious, thereby offering to fulfil temporal longings in a way that non-speculative fiction cannot. Additionally, Period fiction, if realist, can only offer fulfilment of a longing for the past, unlike time travel fiction, which can deliver fulfilment of longings for the future as well, and, specifically in terms of Alternate History fiction, also fulfilment of longings for an alternative present, thus satisfying the “tritime focus” of *Sehnsucht*. Science Fiction therefore offers a fulfilment of longings not likely to be attained in non-speculative works, for both the characters and the readers of that text. Darko Suvin comments in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979) that Science Fiction “has always been wedded to the hope of finding in the unknown the ideal environment” (5). Speculative writing, perhaps more than other genres, is thus indicated to be uniquely linked to these idealised longings within the individual.

The Role of Science Fiction and its Consequences for the Reader

The texts discussed here emphasise not only Bester’s championing of an individual in control of their own self and their own escape, but also reflect the way in which Bester envisioned this escape happening in the ‘real world,’ not just the world of his texts. Though Bester offers “a more extensive world” than the one we experience in actuality, as mentioned by Heilman, he also envisions that the reader, in choosing to escape to these grander worlds through reading, would find their longings better satisfied if their control extended beyond simply choosing what book to read (455). If it did stop there, it would end in a similar manner to where Addyer’s control ends – with picking the time period but not able to engage with enacting that choice.

Heilman questions whether the desire to escape through literature reveals a malfunction in ourselves and whether retreating from reality, a common symptom of many psychological disorders, is symptomatic of a “psychopathological state” (441, 442). However, he does point out that escape is not always from something but can also be towards something; that readers may not be running from life, but rather seeking it (453). This desire to seek life ties in well with Bester’s repeated return to the importance of escaping confinement to discover one’s latent potentiality; seeking life requires

the ambition mentioned by Kelleghan in order to find release from the constraints of one's normal reality and rebel against self-imprisonment via inertia. While any fiction may place the reader in a reality that does not reflect their own, speculative fiction requires particular leaps of imaginative and creative impulse, on the part of both the writer and the reader, in order to co-create successful fulfilment of a longing for escape. Thus, Bester's version of speculative escapist literature is a team effort where both parties are engaged with, and have a stake in, that escape.

As these texts show, desire and longing can be satisfied by the mechanics of time travel but are best achieved subjectively and individually, in conjunction with a sense of control. As the struggle between conformity and individuality was a key aspect of Bester's writing throughout his career, it is not surprising that the satisfaction gained by attaining one's *Sehnsucht* depends heavily on the relationship between that attainment and independent autonomy in bringing it about. Connections drawn between the texts themselves and the way in which Bester envisioned the reader engaging with those texts highlights not just the relevance within fiction of longings but the importance Bester placed on having some level of autonomous control over them, with the reader literally enacting what Bester depicts in his characters. As a result, reading his texts becomes a real-world application of the themes explored through his characters, particularly regarding the role of control and creative input in realising longings by uncovering latent individual potential and allowing release from confinement. The expectation that readers will recognise and emphasise with the satisfaction of control over one's own longings reflects *Sehnsucht's* depiction of the universal nature of the desire for an ideal, alternative reality, even if not admitted to the self, and even if only enacted through reading. As Bloch claims, longing is "the only honest state in all men" (vol. 1, 45).

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BIONOTE

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