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QUEERING HISTORY: ALTERNATE TIMELINES AND THE EFFECTS OF QUEER DIVERGENCE IN CONNIE WILKINS' *TIME WELL BENT*

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Introduction

The focus of the paper is queerness in alternate history and speculative past. While queering the future in popular fiction has become more and more common in the last decades, queering the past remains rare. The genre of science fiction has proposed visions of the future portrayed from LGBTQ+ perspectives, including utopias or dystopias. Common representations include all-female lesbian worlds (Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*), all-male gay societies (Lois McMaster Bujold's *Ethan of Athos*), gender fluid or genderless worlds (Ursula Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness,* Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*), alternative dystopian future realities where homosexuality is the norm (Anthony Burgess's *The Wanting Seed*, Rafael Grugman's *Nontraditional Love*) or simply stories where a main character is not heteronormative, e.g. transgender, non-binary or bisexual. Due to the fact that speculative fiction provides authors and readers with flexibility to imagine societies that are different from the existing ones, such an opportunity is frequently used to examine gender, sexuality or sexual bias by challenging readers to reexamine their heteronormative cultural preconceptions. Therefore, speculative fiction gives both authors and readers the freedom to reflect on the past, present and on the possible future that can be improved for LGBTQ+ individuals. However, even though many authors

have attempted to conceive queer futures or alternate queer realities, LGBTQ+ communities have been excluded from those fictional representations which speculate about the past. Queerness has been overlooked in both recorded history and in contemporary speculative past fiction. In her anthology *Time Well Bent: Queer Alternative Histories* published in 2009, Connie Wilkins ventures to correct this omission by projecting queered alternate history.

Alternate History

Alternative histories present speculative past and, thus, they are often misclassified as science fiction. Both science fiction and alternate history are genres of change, possibilities and uncertainties; however, the relationship between fiction and history in speculative literature deserves deeper insight.

Nicholas David Gevers describes three modes by which science fiction appropriates the concept of history: historical extension (extrapolation), historical imitation, and historical modification (16). Historical extension is the most common within the genre of science fiction as it simply focuses on extrapolation and continuation of current reality or trends into the future. The aim is thus to present the future as the extension of the author's present times and recent history. There is also a strong reciprocal relationship between future and reality, as those images very often focus on precautionary or predictive visions in reference to the existing world. Historical imitation, on the other hand, provides direct appropriation of historical details or patterns and the modelling of futures on historical antecedents and past civilisations. Historical modification is in many ways similar to imitation as it is also based on the historical models. However, it entails both a sustained use of past paradigms and a deliberate departure from them (18). The most prominent application of this technique is the creation of *alternate histories*, in which some historical facts are counterfactually changed.

Any example of science fiction literature will be built using one or more of these three models of historical modification as the world depicted in science

fiction narratives must originate somewhere in the past even though certain precedents can be altered. These techniques of historical modification coexist at times, but they separate the general trends of science fiction's appropriation of history. Each mode accomplishes a unique sort of historical commentary, in which some events or elements of the story appear in the text unexpectedly. Therefore, the reader may be presented with elements of the future in the past or features of the past in the future. Such a combination of familiarity and dissonance is at the core of science fiction and, thus, history serves as an inevitable element in the genre.

An interesting point on the relationship between science fiction and history is also made by a historian, Edward James, who proposes four ways in which science fiction implements history in the text: the investigation of history (e.g., through travel in time), historical theory in practice (future as the extension of the past), historical theory as a theme, and alternate histories (10). A similar idea is also developed by Gevers, who identifies four varieties of history (Gevers 20). Those four modes of history are the items of different methodologies of verifiable allotment, which serves to divide the genre of science fiction. The first, *future histories*, is the broadest category of the science fiction genre as it includes texts set in a fictional future. *Future History* refers to any text that projects a future which is imagined on the basis of current reality and, therefore, it inevitably necessitates borrowings from history, whether through historical extension or historical imitation (Gevers 20). *Secret history,* which represents a rather small category within the genre, is a kind of narrative that presents a different explanation for previous or current history's documented facts without changing the history's recorded specifics. Therefore, it depends on historical modification and imitation (Gevers 21). The third category is *Renarrated History*, which is a type of historical imitation, as the text is situated in the past but the history remains unchanged. The past is directly recreated and retold, with all of the original features preserved (Gevers 20). The last category, which serves as the main focus of this paper, is *Alternate*

History. This particular mode is strongly influenced by some historical modification. It arises from historical events but imagines their different outcome. Therefore, it incorporates the element of counter-factuality, with its alternate world resembling ours, occupying an equivalent position in space and time, but varying from it due to some minor or major differences. In discovering and evoking places where history might have been modified, alternate history is implicitly based on historical imitation, but due to the disruption on the timeline the divergence occurs, and the historical modification governs the events from that point onwards (Gevers 20).

As pointed out by Karen Hellekson, alternate history dates back to 1836, when the first novel-length text of this particular genre was published by Louis-Napoléon Geoffroy Chateau (Hellekson 3). His *Napoléon apocryphe* (1836) provides an alternate history of Napoleon, in which he never fails but annihilates all opposition and becomes emperor of the known world (3). Since then, alternate histories have become increasingly popular, especially in the last decades.

By definition, alternate histories are based on historical modification. When history is altered to construct a counterfactual chronology, it creates a dissonance between imagined and real histories. As a result, the reader who is aware of historical facts notices anachronisms in the parallel reality. Therefore, in general terms, alternate histories are hypotheses based on historical facts that propose other scenarios regarding pivotal events in human history and depict results that differ significantly from the historical record (Hellekson 5). Such texts simply propose an alternative development of historical events which emerge due to some change in one exact point of time. As the known timeline is disrupted in such stories, the reader is presented with an outcome that differs from the one that they are familiar with. Alternative histories propose to investigate what the reality would look like if one thing happened differently or *if* history had taken a different course from one point onwards. Moreover, these scenarios also try to address the issue of how such alteration

can influence the present and the future. Authors can use distortions to speculate about history or actuality, and to reflect on reality as we know it. Furthermore, the paths that history did not follow contextualize the course that it did take. The reflection upon the possible consequences of historical modification is the core element of alternate histories, as acknowledged by one of today's most prominent authors of this genre, Harry Turtledove:

> Establishing the historical breakpoint is only half the game of writing alternate history. The other half, and to me the more interesting one, is imagining what would spring from the proposed change. It is in that second half of the game that science fiction and alternate history come together. Both seek to extrapolate logically a change in the world as we know it. Most forms of science fiction posit a change in the present or nearer future and imagine its effect on the more distant future. Alternate history, on the other hand, imagines a change in the more distant past and examines its consequences for the nearer past and the present. The technique is the same in both cases; the difference lies in where in time it is applied. (7)

Therefore, after all, it may be assumed that any kind of alternate history requires three conditions: a point of divergence from the historical timeline (however, it must be introduced before the time in which the author is writing), an alteration that would change the course of the known history, and, finally, an examination of the consequences of that alteration to history.

Andy Duncan in his article on alternate histories points out that the genre should not be classified as a history due to the fact that it is indeed a work of fiction in which the past that we are familiar with is defamiliarized, usually for dramatic or ironic effect (209). Therefore, as he claims, "[o]ften an alternate history dramatizes the moment of divergence from the historical record, as well as the consequences of that divergence" (209). Hence, at first sight, such a story or novel may appear to be a classic work of historical fiction depicting people or events that are known and familiar to the reader. However, the point of divergence, which appears on the timeline at the beginning of the text, introduces the alteration in the course of events. An example of such alternate history, provided by Duncan is *The Lucky Strike* (1984) by Kim Stanley Robinson, in which at first the reader is introduced to the real historical context

of the last month of the Second World War when US forces are ready to drop atom bombs on Japan, but as the story progresses we learn that the plane exploded and the bomb was never dropped on Hiroshima. This event is the story's point of divergence as from the moment the reader knows it is not a historical fiction but an alternate history.

The moment of divergence does not necessarily have to be dramatized. As Duncan continues:

> Often the story or novel begins many years after that moment has occurred. The reader is immediately in a different world, so that a pleasure of the reading becomes the discovery not only of what *will* happen but also of what *already* happened, to make this 'alternate world' the way it is." (210)

Such a technique is visible in the novel *The Signaller* (1966) by Keith Roberts. The story depicts life of Rafe Bigland and introduces us to a strange image of twentieth-century England in which radio is unknown, church and state are one and medieval trade guilds dominate the economy. Gradually the reader gets to know that the Spanish Armada conquered England and gave an end both to English Reformation and English Renaissance. Moreover, some alternate histories focus on the portrayal of the disturbances in history that were deadly and chaotic, like *Dispatches from the Revolution* (1991) by Pat Cadigan. The novel consists of fragmented documents from 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago during which, according to the story, President Lyndon Johnson and all the Democratic presidential candidates were killed. As a result the election never took place and thirty years later civil rights don't exist. On the other hand, some of them are more ironic and playful as the alteration seems quite mischievous. In Howard Waldrop's comic book *Ike at the Mike* (1986) the author portrays an alternate world in which Dwight Eisenhower is a famous jazz musician while Elvis Presley becomes a US senator. Notwithstanding some puckish cases of alternate histories, most such texts focus on dystopias and nightmarish worlds that might have existed. An interesting exemplar of such dystopian counterfactuals is *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) by Philip K. Dick. The novel portrays the world fifteen years after

the Second World War, in which the Axis Powers actually won and Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany have become the superpowers.

Even though alternate histories may take variety of forms, the inevitable rule of the genre is that the reader must be able to distinguish between the fictitious and real-life histories. For that reason, many alternate histories clearly indicate the parallels between real and fictional timelines by bringing them together through science fiction devices, most commonly time travel (Duncan 212). Furthermore, it is presumed that parallel worlds with divergent timelines can coexist. Even if the author proposes only one timeline, the alteration in the course of history and the point of divergence must be obvious to the reader, so that they are able to understand not only the changes introduced but also the consequences of those historical modifications. The historical events or a particular period should be known to the reader as only then will it be possible to grasp the meaning of the alteration and its importance. As mentioned by Isaac Asimov, commenting on the process of creation of alternate histories: "You have to know the times, and not only be able to present them clearly and plausibly, but you must trace the consequences of some small change and make that clear and plausible, too" (7).

A concept which is very similar to alternate history, and sometimes even considered as a synonymous term, is *uchronia.* The word itself was coined as a neologism combining the word utopia (*u-topos* in Greek meaning "not-place") and *chronos* (time). Therefore, the term expresses the idea about a "not-place" in time; accordingly, it may be understood as a place not existing in time. *Uchronia* was first coined by French philosopher and writer Charles Renouvier in his novel *Uchronie (L'Utopie dans l'histoire*).[1] Even though the term *uchronia* is not explained by the author himself in the novel, the introduction provided by the editor elucidates the neologism which appears in the title:

> But this story, mingled with real facts and imaginary events, is in short pure fantasy, and the conclusion of this bizarre book is moving away from the sad truth. The writer composes an *uchronia,* utopia of times gone by. He writes history, not as it was, but as it might have been, as he

> believes, and he warns us neither of his willful mistakes, nor of his purpose."[2] (Renouvier 3)

Therefore, in contrast to entirely imaginary lands or universes, the term *uchronia* refers to a hypothetical or fictional time period derived from our reality. The concept is akin to alternate history, although uchronic times are not easily defined, and they are sometimes reminiscent of a constructed world. They are typically set in some remote or indeterminate moment before contemporary times. However, the term uchronia is used by some to refer to alternate histories.

Queering the History in *Time Well Bent*

Non-heteronormativity has been largely omitted in speculative past. Whereas numerous authors have attempted to imagine queered futures or alternative queered realities, few have tried to portray queerness in alternate histories. In 2009, Connie Wilkins, an American author of lesbian themed science fiction and fantasy, edited the collection of stories entitled *Time Well Bent: Queer Alternative Histories*, which strived to inscribe queerness into the genre. In the introduction to the book, she points to the fact that queerness has been left out not only in alternative histories but also in the actual historical records: "We have always been here, in every era and every area of society. So why have we been so nearly invisible in recorded history?" (11). This is why she decided to work on the volume. *Time Well Bent* features fourteen different short stories of alternative past, written by different authors, in which historical figures or events are queered. As the editor also explains in the introduction:

> In *Time Well Bent*, the perspectives are those of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender characters, some entirely fictional, many based on figures from history. Since these are short stories, not novels, the chief emphasis is on the differences, the points of divergence from "known" history, leaving the reader to ponder the long-term consequences. (12)

Thus, the stories present alternative visions of some factual historical events, in which the alteration is caused by queering historical figures. The introduction of a point of divergence to the timeline causes the process of changing the

history as we know it to the one that is *queered*. I call this particular change on the timeline that happens due to the introduction of a queer character or queered event and the consequent modification in historical record—the queer divergence. Alternative histories that implement queer divergence also leave the reader with reflection about the possible consequences of queer divergence. In general terms, these stories contemplate what our present reality would look like if some historical figures had been queer or some historical events queered.

Interestingly, alternative histories in Wilkins' anthology frequently break with traditional conventions of the genre. First of all, the chosen events are not the ones we could classify as the well-known parts of our history. Spanning from candid recorded history to more subtle mythological threads, the authors span centuries, cultures, countries, and continents. Most of the readers would be aware of some of the recounted historical events, for example the Second World War or the introduction of the American Bill of Rights. Nevertheless, the detailed history of Mayans, the work of E.M. Forster, the story of Roanoke colony or of the Hesperus ship may not be widely recognized in the common consciousness. Therefore, the reader is challenged to carry out research in order to understand the context of a given narrative. The stories are just excerpts from history that might not be easily identifiable for the reader. Consequently, the stories' divergence from historical events may be elusive. The reflection upon the possible ramifications and outcomes of the queer alterations in the narratives is ultimately up to the reader who interprets the effects of queer divergence. The subsequent analysis of two short stories from the anthology scrutinizes how alternative histories can be queered by employing queer divergence.

i. "Sod 'Em"

A simple but at the same time interesting example of queer alternative history is the story by Barry Lowe, author of numerous short stories and screenplays,

entitled "Sod 'Em." The tale is set in a monastery in a desolate region of Ireland around the ninth or tenth century. The main focus of the story is the relationship between two homosexual monks: Brother Francis and Brother Finan. The author proposes quite an accurate depiction of the life of a queer monk in the monastery. The relationship between Brother Francis and Brother Finan is constantly being referred to as "unhealthy" and "against nature" (72) by an abbot. The plot concentrates on Brother Francis' being entrusted with the task of copying old manuscripts of the Bible. He transcribes the text of the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah from the book of Genesis. In this biblical tale God reveals to Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed because of their inhabitants' sins and heinous deeds. Abraham, who wishes to save the righteous people of the cities, especially his nephew Lot, pleads God to spare the cities if ten righteous inhabitants could be found. Two angels, appearing as men, are sent to Sodom and stay with Lot but are met with a crowd of men who ask to meet the newcomers. Lot offers them his daughters instead, but this only causes further frustration in the gathered people. Realizing that only Lot and his family are righteous, the angels warn Lot to leave the city. While they are escaping Sodom and Gomorrah, God destroys it.

The biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, as mentioned by Robert Gnuse, is "used by Christians to condemn homosexual behavior" (70). The same issue is acknowledged by Holly Joan Toensing who writes:

> Associating the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with homosexuality is common among the Christian Right. More specifically, many associate God's annihilation of these cities with the idea that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were gay, engaging in sodomy. Verbal expression of this association is used against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals. (62)

Therefore, this tale has traditionally been used to condemn homosexual behavior of both men and women, homoerotic love being called the sin of Sodom. As Gnuse adds, this connotation comes from the fact that inhabitants of the cities did not want to meet the two visitors, but they demanded to have sexual intercourse with them (71). It is caused by the interpretation of the verb

know as *direct sexual activity*: "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them" (Genesis 19:5 in Gnuse 71).

In the alternate history, after finding this tale, Brother Francis reflects on its message: "Oh, how he wished God had not found it necessary to destroy Sodom. What had the men done, after all?" (Lowe 75). This is when the point of divergence emerges in the short story. Brother Francis decides to change the tale while rewriting the manuscript. The monk creates a vision in which Lot is visited by an angel—an exact reflection of his beloved Brother Finan. Brother Francis creates his own version of Sodom and Gomorrah, introducing the element of love between Angel and Lot:

> He invited the beautiful angel to his house and there prepared for him a great feast. They conversed as brothers and Lot vowed never to be parted from his angel friend. (…) The men and boys of Sodom, having heard of the beauty of the angel, came to Lot's door to see for themselves the perfection that God had wrought. (76)

Thus, in the version of the monk not only is Lot in love with the angel but also the inhabitants are amazed by his beauty and perfection. The love of Lot and Angel is so strong that the two cannot imagine parting:

> "I have come to love you as no other creature," Lot said. "I cannot bear to part with you. I will end my life and join you in heaven." The angel was saddened to hear this. "If you take your own life," he said, "then you are damned, and I will never see you hereafter." (…) And Lot wept. And the angel wept. And God saw that their love was good and he opened his heart. He allowed the angel to stay with Lot until it was time to take him to his reward in heaven. (77)

What Brother Francis creates is an emotional and sentimental tale of love, in which God, amazed by the strong feeling shared by Lot and Angel, decides to support their love appreciating the beauty of it. Therefore, in Lowe's story, God actually advocates for homosexual love, realizing how deep and indestructible the feeling and affection of the men are. At the point when the Monk is about to finish the manuscript, the monastery is attacked. Brother Francis decides to replace the original tale of Sodom and Gomorrah with his script and burn the remaining original copies.

This alternate history brings two main conclusions. First of all, it puts forward the idea that the Bible as we know is the result of centuries of translations, transcriptions, and interpretations and thus, may be seen as something dubious. Secondly, the reader is free to imagine what our reality would look like if the biblical story, instead of condemning homosexual relationships, praised and appreciated same-sex love. The queer divergence leads to the reflection on how a simple act of rewriting the story of Lot and Angel could change the history of Christianity or how our society would perceive queerness if *the sin of Sodom* never existed.

ii. "A Spear Against the Sky"

The second short story under analysis relies more on historical record, introducing only a minor divergence. "A Spear Against the Sky" by M. P. Ericson, who holds a Ph.D. degree in philosophy and the author of numerous short stories, is an interesting proposition of alternate history set in Roman Britain. The text focuses on the lives of two queens and warriors of Britannia: Boudicca and Cartimandua. Once again, before interpreting the short story and realizing its point of divergence, one needs to meticulously revisit historical record of that period.

Boudicca was a queen of the British Celtic Iceni tribe and is often called Britain's warrior queen, as she was the one who led an uprising against the invading forces of the Roman Empire in AD 60 or 61 (Collingridge 24). Importantly, Boudicca's husband Prasutagus, with whom she had two children, governed as a nominally independent ally of Rome. In his will, he wished to hand his kingdom jointly to his daughters and the Roman Emperor. When he died, however, his last wish was disregarded. The Romans annexed the kingdom and confiscated his property. Boudica was flogged and her two daughters raped. As a result, Boudica organized the uprising and led the Iceni and the other tribes of Britannia to revolt against the Romans. Even though the rebellion was not successful, according to historical records, Boudicca's rebels

caused the death of approximately seventy to eighty thousand Romans and pro-Roman Britons. After the rebels lost the final battle, the Roman Empire confirmed its control of the province, whereas Boudicca either took poison or died of illness (245). The other heroine, Cartimandua, was the queen of Brigante tribe from AD 43 to 69, and her rule depended mostly upon support from the Roman armies (256). She concluded a treaty with the emperor Claudius in the early period of his conquest of Britain, which began in AD 43. From that point onwards, the queen was considered pro-Roman and loyal to the Roman emperor. The two Celtic queens lived in exactly the same period, but their choices differed diametrically. There is also no historical record confirming that the two women ever met.

The story offered by M. P. Ericson is directly based on that historical moment. In "A Spear Against the Sky," the reader is introduced to the setting where Cartimandua is loyal to Rome and Boudica, disgraced by the conquerors, seeks revenge. Since the story offers an exact reiteration of historical events, Cartimandua is also portrayed as pro-Roman. However, the narrative introduces a modification—before she marries her husband, she has a secret romance with Boudica. Therefore, the alteration implemented involves homosexual relationship between the queens.

In the alternate history, Boudica pays a visit to Cartimandua after her daughters have been raped and asks the queen to join her in the rebellion against the Romans: "I have the Iceni, I have the Trinovantes, and I want the Brigantes as well. Together we will destroy the Romans and all who support them, and set this island free" (Ericson 65). However, Cartimandua does not support that decision, especially that the visit awakens the old emotions and memories of her past relationship with Boudica:

> They stared at each other, hot eyes meeting cold. In Cartimandua's chest an old rage sparked and burned. "You left me," Cartimandua said. "You made a choice. Now you are reaping the harvest, and it is not to your taste. So you want me to sweeten it for you with the blood of my sons." (66)

The reader learns from the conversation that the two were involved in an intense and romantic homosexual relationship and, moreover, that Boudica left Cartimandua not because she wished to but because she knew that it was inevitable: "It was necessary. You know that. We both had to marry, sooner or later, and Prasutagus was a good catch. Besides, I wanted children" (67). After all, Cartimandua rejects the proposition of Boudica but asks her to stay the night so that her daughters can rest peacefully. When the women lie down together, one close to another, it brings back the feelings and affection they used to have for each other: "The touch awoke memories of laughing together, holding hands in the sunshine, secret caresses in the night. It had been a glorious summer, full of promise and joy" (68). Finally, they let the emotions take over and spend a passionate night together: "Boudica kissed the skin at the nape of Cartimandua's neck (…) They made love quietly, breathlessly, while all around them the household slept" (69). After the alteration is introduced, divergence occurs: Cartimandua joins Boudica in her rebellion and consequently Britain's tribes crush Roman forces: "It was over. In far-off Rome such slaughter might now make the conquest of Britain seem more trouble than it could be worth, or it might not, but for now, they could claim victory" (70). Consequently, Rome does not conquer Britain in that particular moment of history. The alternate story proposes that the invasion of Romans in Britain never takes place, as they fail to stop the rebellion led by Boudica. Interestingly, such a potential course of history is mentioned by Vanessa Collingridge, the author of Boudica's biography, who claims that if Cartimandua had joined Boudica in the revolt, it would have stopped the Romans once and for all:

> Only the client kingdoms such as those of Cogidubnus and Cartimandua escaped the widespread retribution, for they had been amongst the few who had remained steadfast in their loyalty. Had they joined with Boudica, the potential for removing the Romans from Britain once and for all would have been almost boundless, for the rebels would then have had both the manpower and the money to keep the resistance fighting for years. (259-260)

In this alternative history, the course of events is changed by important historical figures being depicted as queer. It is the relationship between Boudica and Cartimandua that leads to the alteration and historical modification. Hence, the queer divergence produces the far-reaching effect of ending Roman occupation in Britain.

Conclusion

The two examples above serve as the illustration of what queer alternate histories may look like, what queer point of divergence is and how the process of queering the history emerges. The anthology may be seen not only as an example of queer alternative histories but also as a way to claim the place of LGBTQ+ individuals in general history. In the stories the authors use LGBTQ+ individuals as fantastic elements that leads to the creation of counterfactual timeline. However, many of those figures are historical ones, also placed in real historical context which emphasizes the assumption that queer individuals may have been erased from the recorded history. Therefore, such representation affirms the place and importance of LGBTQ+ individuals in the history, present and future. As the editor of the book points out:

> We have always been here. For as long as there has been such a thing as sex, even before we late-coming humans began etching a record of our existence into stone or clay. (11)

Hence, the process of queering the history does not only provide an opportunity to reflect upon the possible consequences of the divergence and upon the fragility of the course of history, but it also aims at making people realize that those who were invisible in the recorded history have in fact been there all along and could influence the present as we know it.

Endnotes

1. English: *Uchronia (Utopia in History), an Apocryphal Sketch of the Development of European Civilization Not as It Was but as It Might Have Been.*

2. Translated by the author. Original text: “Mais, cette histoire, mêlée de faits réels et d’évènements imaginaires, est en somme de pure fantaisie, et la conclusion de ce livre

singulier s'éloigne on ne peut plus de la triste vérité. L'écrivain compose une uchronie, utopie des temps passes. Il écrit l'histoire, non telle qu'elle fut, mais telle qu'elle aurait pu être, a ce qu'il croit, et il ne nous avertit ni de ses erreurs volontaires, ni de son but."

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Abstract

The article explores the genres of alternative history and speculative past from the perspective of queerness. The analysis focuses on the elements of queer divergence in *Time Well Bent* (2009), an anthology edited by Connie Wilkins. Short stories in the volume offer reflection on how the world might be different if some of the historical figures had been queer or some historical events queered. The fourteen contributors retell history from the point of view of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered characters. The main emphasis is put on difference, divergence from known history,

and long-term global consequences of those alterations. The ideas of queering the history and of queer divergence are examined alongside the relationship between history and fiction.