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Uchronic, or queer in no time: wilful subjects in historical fiction

Works of historical fiction by and about queer women have been characterised as largely ideological texts, concerned with inserting (imagined) queer stories and queer perspectives into the historical and/or literary landscape. These so-called 'revisionist' texts have persistently been read largely in terms of their relationship to both historical research and scholarship, and the genre of historical fiction.

In this paper, I explore the ways in which reading (and writing) these texts in the context of so-called Uchronia (a neologism combining the Greek prefix *ou-*, meaning 'no' with the *chronos/time*: 'in no time'), or alternative histories, provides a way of understanding such texts not in terms of interpreting or re-interpreting the past, but instead in creating narratives that exist 'in no time'.

Such works can, in this way, be read not as predominantly in conversation with the past, but in conversation with a range of temporalities including but not limited to the past, the present, and the future.

The paper also explores the wilful nature of such writing, drawing on Sara Ahmed's *Wilful Subjects* (2014). The way that queer uchronic writing is both an enactment of wilfulness on the part of the writer, and a narrative embodiment of wilfully queer characters.

Finally, the paper explores the ethical consequences of wilfully writing 'in no time', through an exploration of key works by Sarah Waters and Jeanette Winterson, as well as through an examination of my own Uchronic works and storytelling practices.

Biographical note

Dr Nike Sulway is a writer and academic. She is the author of several novels, including *Rupetta*, which—in 2014—was the first work by an Australian writer to win the James Tiptree, Jr Award. The award, founded in 1991 by Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler, is an annual award for a work of "science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender". Her new novel, *Dying in the First Person*, will be published through Transit Lounge in 2016. She teaches creative writing at the University of Southern Queensland.