

## History stranger than (science) fiction: Exploring verb tenses in *The Green Glass Sea*

Ellen Klages's *The Green Glass Sea* (2006) tells of 11-year-old Dewey Kerrigan whose father is assigned to work on developing the atomic bomb in Los Alamos, New Mexico, during the second half of World War II. The book earned the 2007 Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction for its depiction of the community of people—adults and children—who lived at Los Alamos during World War II. But little attention has been paid to aspects of the book that suggest it also is a work of science fiction. This oversight may be because readers who live on the future side of Dewey Kerrigan's present don't see the science underlying the book's plot as speculative, which often is one characteristic of science fiction, but instead see it as part of a dated and historic past.

Before *TGGS*, Klages was known primarily for her science fiction work. In her April 2007 O'Dell acceptance speech, for instance, Klages said “up until last October” – meaning October 2006 when the book was published, but not when the book was written – “I was primarily a science fiction writer.” Klages also said her perspective as a science fiction writer helped her view all historical fiction as a sort of “time machine” taking readers into past times and places. But Klages's work does more than give readers insight into a slice of history. Rather, the reader enters a time warp where past, present, and future mingle, creating an historic science fiction that is unsettling in its foreshadowing of present-day realities and of future uncertainties.

Klages achieves this effect by mixing verb tenses throughout *TGGS*. Some chapters are written in present tense, other chapters are written in past tense, and one chapter is written in both. In this paper, I examine Klages's mixing of tenses that creates an environment in which the reader is walking with characters at one point, observing them as objects of study at other points, and finally becoming aware that the reader is as much trapped in the story as are the characters.

Keywords: Historic science fiction, narrative time, Los Alamos, World War II, verb tenses

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### Notes:

Moffat (1968/1983) writes about tenses in *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* p. 62 – tense as a relation of speaker to events – Look at pp. 42-43 also pp. 33-34