Guest Editor’s Note for J. T. Fraser Centenary
Special Issue: Recalling the Past, Assessing the Present, Predicting the Future

I first met Julius Fraser, along with his wife Jane, in late summer 1995. A few weeks prior, my husband, Thomas Weissert, had attended the Ninth Conference of the International Society for the Study of Time (held in St. Adèle, Québec), and he had returned home extolling the stimulating interdisciplinary presentations and the collegial atmosphere he had experienced. He had also returned home with a task to bring the ISST online – and with an invitation from Julius and Jane to pay them a visit during our vacation trip to Maine. We were welcomed like old friends, and, by the time we left the next morning, Julius had thrust a book on me and made me promise that I would review it for the “Time’s Books” column in Time’s News, the aperiodic newsletter for the society that Julius had initiated in 1974. Although he was ever the gracious host, Julius was always engaged in forwarding the work of the ISST.

Over the years, our family would return many times to the Fraser home, a modest ranch-house, situated on the felicitously named Winding Lane West in Westport, Connecticut. It was something of an intellectual hub, where throughout the years the Frasers hosted a variety of scholars from a variety of disciplines. For over a decade, the Frasers also hosted the ISST Council, converting the living room into a meeting room by the addition of kitchen chairs and dining-room chairs to accommodate all the members.

The study, however, served as the true center of the intellectual ferment – the hub of the hub, if you will. It was lined on three sides with bookshelves (with one bottom row filled with books that Jane had accumulated over her years as a second-grade teacher and that delighted small guests). The bookshelves contained multitudes of time-centric tomes, of course, but also an eclectic assortment of various books that appealed to Julius’s polymathic mind – collections of Borges’s fictions, Synge and Griffeth’s Principles of

1 “Time’s Books” migrated to KronoScope in 2002 (vol. 2). Time’s News, now at issue 53, has evolved from a typewritten, two-page sheet on ISST letterhead (called “An Aperiodic Newsletter” until 1987), to a substantial, visually captivating, full-fledged publication, edited by Emily DiCarlo.
Mechanics, John Fowles’s The Aristos. A computer sat on one desk extending into the room (and Tom was usually enlisted to fix some computer problem when we visited), but the real site of activity was the desk opposite, which held the manual Olympia typewriter on which Julius typed his voluminous correspondence. Many ISST members no doubt have in their possession a typed postcard (part of the collection that Julius amassed during his travels) in which greetings and well wishes were interspersed with directives regarding ISST tasks. My collection of such postcards makes me smile.

I turn now from my friend Julius Fraser to time scholar J. T. Fraser (as he was known professionally) – although, as the above may indicate, the two are intertwined. Fraser was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1923, and this issue celebrates the centenary of his birth. Although he passed away in 2010, his legacy has lived on in the exciting work on time being done by the ISST.2 Since 2010, three conferences have taken place in settings throughout the world, and the 2023 conference, postponed for a year due to the pandemic, is imminent; three volumes of The Study of Time series have been published; and KronoScope, now in its 22nd year, continues to thrive. Evidence of this latter appears in this issue, wherein six time scholars address such matters as Fraser’s integrated theory of time and the evolution and future of time studies.

Two former presidents of the ISST provide illuminating discussions of Fraser’s work and the new directions in which time studies has evolved (appropriate in light of Fraser’s evolutionary theory of time). John Michon, who served as president from 1983–86, provides a comprehensive exploration of, as his title suggests, “Versions of Local Time.” Noting the ongoing influence of J. T. Fraser’s work, he demonstrates the shift from Fraser’s physicalistic paradigm to a cognitive-theoretical approach and even draws on recent controversies regarding artificial intelligence by referencing ChatGPT. Impressively, Michon’s work appeared in the very first ISST publication, The Study of Time, vol. 1 (1972); his ISST time work thus spans over 50 years.

In “Time, Conflicts and Chance,” Rémy Lestienne, who served as president from 1998–2004, considers Fraser’s theory of time as conflict as it is manifested in each of Fraser’s hierarchical levels of time. Throughout his essay, Lestienne sets up a sort of dialogue between Fraser’s writings and his own. By extending Fraser’s discussions of chance and drawing on the work of Alfred North

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2 For more on the integral part Julius played in the establishment of the ISST, see my 2013 essay “A Brief History of the International Society for the Study of Time.” KronoScope 13 (2) and 14 (1) both feature assessments of the hierarchical theory of time. For more on Julius as a person, see the moving “In Memoriam” section in KronoScope 10 (1–2): 9–14.
Whitehead, Lestinne explores the essential role that chance plays, as he notes, “in the evolution of the world towards its complexification.”

In “The Temporal Challenge of Hope,” Steve Ostovich, a former ISST council-member and a former editor of this journal, also addresses Fraser’s theory of time as conflict by focusing on the idea of hope. Regarding hope as oriented toward a future in which time is conceived linearly, he explains the difficulties that can arise as we try to defend our hope in the face of our lived experience. As Ostovich explains, Fraser’s theory “helps us to recognize the complexity of our temporal condition and serves as a framework to at least begin to work through the temporal challenge of hope.”

Like Ostovich, Rosemary Huisman shows how Fraser’s work can serve to enhance our critical thinking – in this case, concerning narrative temporalities. In “J. T. Fraser and the Temporal Texture of Narrative,” Huisman describes the theoretical impasse that she experienced as she wrestled with the supposed incoherent temporality of the long Old English poem Beowulf; an incoherence that arises if the poem is seen only through the lens of a monovalent understanding of time. She was able to break through this impasse when she discovered Fraser’s nested hierarchical model, which enabled her to assess different kinds of narrative sequences according to different temporalities. Her article thus demonstrates the applicability of Fraser’s model to our understanding of narrative.

In “Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Time in Fiction,” Alexandra Ksenofontova similarly focuses on narrative temporality and traditional narratological studies that imply a universal way of measuring time. Questioning how the study of time in fiction might tie into Fraser’s work on the integrated interdisciplinary study of time, she provides a detailed exploration of the various schisms that have riven the study of time in literary fiction and makes a compelling argument for a re-integration of approaches that might be truly interdisciplinary, that would acknowledge different temporalities, and that would offer, in her words, “an integrated, aesthetically and politically informed analysis of time in fiction.” It is a model that Fraser would applaud.

In his writings, Fraser was as likely to quote William Shakespeare and Samuel Taylor Coleridge as Immanuel Kant or Albert Einstein, regularly bringing together the poetic and the philosophical/scientific. The issue thus concludes, fittingly, with an eloquent poetic appreciation of Fraser’s work and the ISST. “In a Different Cup of Time,” Frederick Turner, a long-time ISST member and former council member, provides passages from what he calls his “semantic autobiography” that give poetic form to Fraser’s hierarchical theory of time. Next, an excerpt from his epic poem Apocalypse offers a mythical, futuristic version of “a global university” akin to the ISST; a sestina deals
with the Fraserian evolution of time; and a metapoetic musing upon “tempo-
genesis” recalls the emergent process of time through its “fractal self-similar
process of emergence,” as Turner points out. The final sonnet, upon the Great
Clock of Strasbourg brings us back to Turner’s title and the vivid image of a
“cup of time.”

Fraser’s final published work was his Founder’s Lecture “The Origins and
Future of the Integrated Study of Time,” read by Frederick Turner at the open-
ing of the 14th Triennial ISST Conference, which took place in Monteverde,
Costa Rica. Declining in health and unable to attend in person, Fraser pondered
the future of the organization to which he had devoted most of his life. He
explained that, “to help arrange the bewildering memories of my World War II
life,” he had been led “to search for the broadest organizing principles,” which
he “found in the idea and experience of time” (2011, 15). As for the future of
time studies, he argued,

To appeal to those organizing principles, one must proceed through all
known fields of human knowledge. Therefore, the future of our theme
will depend on the progress of mutually useful advances in the explora-
tions of time felt and time understood. (2011, 15; Fraser’s emphasis)

As the following essays powerfully demonstrate, such mutually useful advan-
ces continue apace.

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