‘Huisman’s absorbing study draws on a wide and eclectic range of thinkers, to construct her own account of how people and their narratives experience or negotiate time: its texture, its passing, its inexorable force. Central to the discussion is J.T. Fraser’s thesis that ‘time felt’ and ‘time understood’ are profoundly distinct but interacting phenomena. Along the narrative arc of this study, we meet interesting commentaries on the temporal texture of some great narrative literature, including Middlemarch and ‘Frost at Midnight’, and contemporary poems by Louis Armand and Antigone Kerala.’

—Prof. Michael Toolan, Emeritus Professor of English Language, University of Birmingham, UK

‘Huisman’s monograph is a very timely gift to social-semiotic scholarship – a brilliant, erudite transdisciplinary investigation of how we construe our experience of time by modeling it as meaning – including its manifestation as the texture of time in stories. This investigation is grounded in insights into the theoretical conceptions of different modes of time in an ordered typology of systems operating in different phenomenal realms, with reference to the pioneering work by J.T. Fraser but also to studies by other scholars including M.A.K. Halliday, B.L. Whorf, Vladimir Propp, Mikhail Bakhtin, Gerald Edelman.’

—Prof. Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen, Distinguished Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Hunan University
This book brings together a model of time and a model of language to generate a new model of narrative, where different stories with different temporalities and non-chronological modes of sequence can tell of different worlds of human – and non-human – experience, woven together (the ‘texture of time’) in the one narrative. The work of Gerald Edelman on consciousness, J.T. Fraser on time, and M.A.K. Halliday on language is introduced; the categories of systemic functional linguistics are used for detailed analysis of English narrative texts from different literary periods. A summary chapter gives an overview of previous narrative studies and theories, with extensive references. Chapters on ‘temporalization’ and ‘spatialization’ of language contrast the importance of time in narrative texts with the effect of ‘grammatical metaphor’, as described by M.A.K. Halliday, for scientific discourse. Chapters on prose fiction, poetry and the texts of digital culture chart changes in the ‘texture of time’ with changes in the social context: ‘narrative as social semiotic’.

Rosemary Huisman is Honorary Associate Professor in English at The University of Sydney. She is the author of The Written Poem, Semiotic Conventions from Old to Modern English, six chapters in Narrative and Media, and numerous articles on literary and legal language; she is also a published poet.
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Narrative Worlds and the Texture of Time
A Social-Semiotic Perspective

Rosemary Huisman
for Tony Blackshield
man of law, literature and song
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As the Preface implies, this book owes the generation of its basic ideas to the work of two scholars, the late M.A.K. Halliday and the late J.T. Fraser. Fraser I met once at an ISST conference; Halliday I had the privilege of knowing personally as well as professionally, especially in his later years. In their publications, both combine intellectual acuity with a practical focus on the application of their models of time and of language. I acknowledge their fundamental contribution to my thinking. Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen, who was a close collaborator with Halliday, is someone whose erudite and witty plenaries I have enjoyed in many parts of the globe. I acknowledge my debt to him particularly in his scrupulous accumulation of detailed analyses and examples (as in the fourth edition of Halliday’s *Introduction to Functional Grammar*), to which I turn when flummoxed by some SFL detail.

In the last century (!), in the English department of the University of Sydney, I taught systemic functional grammar with Terry Threadgold, narrative and media studies with Helen Fulton, and reading and writing practices with Judy Quinn (all three women have gone on to senior roles in British universities); I’d like to acknowledge their continuing friendship and academic stimulation. Geoff Williams in Education joined Terry and me for post-graduate courses using SFL; more recently Annabelle Lukin and David Butt have involved me in their linguistics teaching at Macquarie University, Sydney (zooming through 2020 and 2021). I am fortunate to have had all these people as both intellectual colleagues and friends. Locally, many (especially women) who have contributed strongly to SFL in the field of Education remain valued friends. I particularly thank Sally Humphrey for involving me in her courses on language and literacy at ACU (the Australian Catholic University) in Sydney.

The SFL community is widespread; my two most recently published articles, referencing SFL, were first delivered as plenaries in China (at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou) and in India (Osmania University, Hyderabad). My thanks, respectively, to Professors Alex Peng and Geoff Williams, and to Dr Mohammad Ansari for these invitations, and to the editors of the journals, *Language, Context and...*
Text and the *Nalsar Student Law Review*, in which those papers later appeared. The annual international SFL Congress and the annual conferences of national SFL associations have been important places for trying out and extending new ideas; my thanks to the indefatigable organizers of these events.

I must also acknowledge the importance of the ISST community of scholars to the development of my work. I participated in several ISST triennial conferences and inter-conference symposia held in many parts of the world. In particular, Raji Steineck, Claudia Clausius, Sabine Gross, Steve Ostovich, Dennis Costa and Arkadiusz Misztal, all editors of my writing on time published in book chapters and journal articles, have contributed to my thinking. My special thanks to Jo Alyson Parker (Vice-President of ISST) and Emily DiCarlo (Editor of *Times News*, the society’s newsletter) for help with elusive permissions.

This has been an interdisciplinary project and my involvement in other scholarly associations has also contributed to its development; in particular, I acknowledge the relevant focus of PALA, the Poetics and Linguistics Association.

Writing this, I think of my parents, long deceased, who raised me in a home full of books and conversation. Now Penny Huisman (daughter) and her husband, Brian Mariotti, have a similar home, warm and welcoming. I am grateful. A special thanks should be given to their son, Emmett (14 at the time of writing), a helpful adviser on some aspects of digital culture, discussed in Chapter 11.

And Tony Blackshield. He once told me his English teacher told him he was ‘an Augustan who wanted to be a Romantic’. His favourite poem is Hopkins’ *Wreck of the Deutschland* (he wrote a legal article on a constitutional case in the style of the poem …); he can sight-read out loud Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*. For me, he exceeds any literary (or other) categorization.

Finally, I must acknowledge the many voices that speak in quotations in this book. The author and the publisher wish to thank the copyright holders for their permission to reproduce from the following material:


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In 2002 I presented a paper at the International Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Congress in Liverpool, arguing against the relevance of much narrative theory to some texts which, nevertheless, have been called ‘narratives’. My PhD, done many years before, had studied Old English poetry, with a focus on the long poems known as Beowulf and Andreas. The vellum manuscripts of these early poems record the text continuously across the page; that had motivated me to ask the (naïve?) questions, ‘when did we and why do we (usually) print poems in lines?’ – which led to the publication of a book, The Written Poem, Semiotic Conventions from Old to Modern English (1998), which traced the development of visual display as meaningful in English poetry. Now my problem in applying narrative theory to those early texts led me to ask not ‘why is this text an inadequate narrative’ but ‘what does narrative theory assume that is not relevant to this text?’ In that 2002 paper, I concluded: it is the assumption that narrative is axiomatically concerned with ‘time’. (Patently, I was wrong or this book would not be written!) But this ‘time’ was one of chronological sequence (even in Paul Ricoeur’s subtle discussion, ‘real time’, 1985, 25; 100–101). In SFL, an important system of ‘Transitivity’ describes choices of meaning in the grammatical clause. These choices imply three ‘worlds’ of human experience and chronological sequence is characteristic of only one of these worlds, the external and physical world of human experience. Hence I was presenting my arguments on time and narrative to an audience expert in this modelling of meaning and world (though not necessarily thinking about the meaning of ‘time’).

However, two years later (2004), staying in Cambridge, I (almost accidentally) attended the triennial conference of the International Society for the Study of Time (ISST) and was introduced to the polyvalence of time, to temporalities, explored in papers from diverse fields in the sciences and the humanities (subsequently, I was to use this polyvalence in
my study of both legal and literary texts). A different temporality, I realized, might enable a different mode of sequence. And so began, for me, the meaningful juxtaposition of SFL and ISST concepts in my thinking about narrative, now recorded in this book.

SFL was initially developed from the work of M.A.K. Halliday (1925–2018). The subtitle of this book, ‘a social-semiotic perspective’, comes from Halliday’s understanding of the relation of language and the social system: ‘the social system [is] a social semiotic: a system of meanings that constitutes the “reality” of the culture. This is the higher-level system to which language is related: the semantic system of language is a realization of the social semiotic’ (Halliday 2007, 197). An early collection of his papers, written between 1972 and 1976 and, in Halliday’s words, ‘linked by a common theme’, is entitled Language as Social Semiotic, the Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning (1978). In the last 40-odd years, Halliday’s modelling of language, with its focus on meaning as functional within social context, has developed into ‘systemic functional linguistics’ (SFL) and to wider applications to non-linguistic modalities. Chronicles of this development are now written, extending into the past and future: for example, see Lukin’s account of the relevant work of scholars preceding Halliday (Chapter 2, ‘The Quest for Meaning in Twentieth-Century Linguistics’, in War and Its Ideologies, a Social-Semiotic Theory and Description, 2019) and Jewitt, Bezemer and O’Halloran’s account of work extending a social semiotic approach beyond language (Chapter 4, ‘Social Semiotics’, in Introducing Multimodality, 2016). Most closely associated with Halliday in the detailed grammatical development of the linguistic theory is Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen; in this book I take my theoretical linguistic bearings from the work, singular and joint, of Halliday and Matthiessen. Beautiful minds, both of them, in action in the world.

ISST is similarly born from the initiative of a profoundly thoughtful scholar, J.T. Fraser (1923–2010), an engineer and inventor, who in 1966 founded the international society. I had the privilege of being introduced to his ideas by his own talk at the Cambridge conference and was struck by his easy movement between the sciences and the humanities, in explanation and examples. The audience was similarly eclectic and one consequence – I realized when writing my own contributions to later ISST conferences and publications – was that one could assume an educated hearing/reading but not the jargon of one’s own disciplinary discourse. Fraser had emigrated from Europe to the United States after WWII and his motive in establishing a society focused on ‘time’ was at least to promote interdisciplinary communication and cooperation through a concept given meaning in many scholarly contexts. ISST publications include the annual journal, Kronoscope, and the book series, The Study of Time, published by Brill (Volume 17 in 2021).
In bringing a juxtaposition of SFL and ISST concepts to bear on narrative theories I had not anticipated a reverse effect: that narrative concepts would bear upon my understanding, in particular, of SFL. As discussed in Chapter 2, on ‘spatialization’ in language, Halliday did considerable work on ‘grammatical metaphor’, which effectively removes/reduces meanings of time. This strategy Halliday studied initially as it emerged in scientific discourse; more generally it is important in literate writing practices and has been incorporated into some teacher education. ‘Everyday language’ uses this strategy less and this can give the impression that such language is inherently ‘simpler’. But narrative theorists sometimes talk about different ways of ‘knowing and being’, and it struck me that the language of narrative, for which temporal meanings are so important, enables different, not simpler, ways which deserve close attention. Chapter 6, on ‘temporalization’ in language explores such ways.

Because my academic location has been in an English department, the texts discussed in this book are in English and are, for the most part, the ‘highly valued’ works of prose fiction and poetry. Because I was in that area of the department that taught both mediaeval literature and language of any period, the historical sweep of ‘narrative as social semiotic’ particularly interests me; I principally use my model of ‘narrative worlds and the texture of time’ to compare the texture of narratives from different contexts of English cultural history.

Dramatic changes in language technology produce consequences that those in the changing social context have not predicted. Like Darwinian evolution, they can be described only retrospectively. The first is the change from oral to literate culture, the second the change from manuscript to print culture, the third the change from print to digital culture. The Beowulf poem I studied is the written record we have of what, in part, originated in pre-literate culture, its stories spoken and respoken. Yet the questions of narrative and temporalities provoked by that study turn out to be relevant to later and different social contexts – even, lightly touched on in Chapter 11, to the still evolving digital culture that we humans will adapt even as it adapts us.

Rosemary Huisman (née Lowe)
Sydney, January 2022
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References


