



**A STUDY OF TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL ASPECTS IN
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE AND THE TIME MACHINE
AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS ON THE
CHARACTERS' INTERIORITY**

Iqra Fida
iqra.hussain.fida@gmail.com

Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Bakhtawar Amin Medical and
Dental College, Multan, Pakistan.

Abstract

Time and space remain central and recurring concerns in literary studies, shaping narrative structure, character development, and thematic depth. In modern and science fiction literature, these elements are often used to reflect both psychological experience and socio-political realities. Despite extensive critical attention, limited comparative work has been done on how temporal and spatial dimensions operate differently in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, particularly in relation to characters' interiority and ideological commentary. This study aims to examine the use of temporal and spatial constructs in both novels and to analyze how these constructs influence character interiority in Woolf's work and socio-political meaning-making in Wells' narrative. A qualitative comparative literary analysis approach is employed. The texts are closely read using thematic analysis, focusing on representations of time and space and their impact on narrative meaning and character perception. The findings reveal that Woolf employs fluid and subjective time-space structures to explore the psychological depth and inner consciousness of her characters, while Wells uses linear and futuristic spatial-temporal shifts to critique industrial society and highlight social inequality. Both texts demonstrate that time and space function as powerful literary tools for constructing meaning and shaping readers' interpretive frameworks. The study concludes that temporal and spatial elements are not merely narrative devices but essential structures that shape literary reality. Woolf emphasizes internal human experience, whereas Wells foregrounds external societal critique. Together, the novels demonstrate that time and space significantly influence both character interiority and broader ideological interpretation in literature.

Keywords: *Comparative Literature, Interiority, Literary Modernism, Narrative Structure, Science Fiction, Spatial Representation, Temporal Analysis.*

Corresponding Author: Iqra Fida (Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Bakhtawar Amin Medical and Dental College, Multan, Pakistan)
Email: iqra.hussain.fida@gmail.com

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and Background of the Study

Time and space are fundamental dimensions of human experience and literary representation. In literature, these concepts shape narrative structure, influence character development, and contribute to the construction of meaning. Rather than serving merely as settings or chronological frameworks, temporal and spatial elements actively participate in the formation of psychological, social, and ideological realities within literary texts. Recent developments in narratology and cognitive literary studies emphasize that readers understand narratives through their perception of temporal progression and spatial organization, making these dimensions central to literary interpretation (Wilson 124).

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) offer two distinct approaches to the representation of time and space. Woolf's modernist novel employs fragmented chronology, memory, and stream-of-consciousness techniques to explore the inner lives of characters. Time becomes subjective and fluid, while space functions as an extension of psychological experience. Conversely, Wells utilizes scientific speculation and futuristic settings to investigate social evolution, technological progress, and class divisions. Through temporal travel and imaginative spatial constructions, Wells transforms time and space into instruments of socio-political critique (Davis 89).

The importance of studying these novels lies in their innovative treatment of temporal and spatial dimensions. Although they belong to different literary traditions, both texts demonstrate how time and space shape human perception, identity, and reality. Comparative analysis of these works can therefore provide valuable insights into the relationship between narrative form and character interiority.

1.2. Problem Statement

Despite extensive scholarship on *To the Lighthouse* and *The Time Machine*, most studies examine the novels independently within their respective literary traditions. Research on Woolf predominantly focuses on modernist narrative techniques, consciousness, and memory, whereas studies on Wells emphasize science fiction, futurism, and social criticism. Consequently, insufficient attention has been paid to the comparative role of temporal and spatial dimensions in shaping character interiority and narrative meaning across these texts.

This lack of comparative investigation limits scholarly understanding of how different literary genres employ similar narrative mechanisms to explore psychological and ideological concerns. Therefore, there is a need for a study that examines the temporal and spatial aspects of both novels within a unified analytical framework.

1.3. Research Gap

A review of contemporary scholarship reveals a significant gap in comparative literary studies concerning temporality and spatiality. Existing research frequently addresses subjective time in modernist literature and speculative space in science fiction separately (Smith 2025). While scholars have examined Woolf's representation of consciousness and Wells' exploration of future societies, few studies have investigated how temporal and spatial constructs function comparatively across these texts.

Furthermore, recent developments in cognitive narratology suggest that temporal and spatial structures play a crucial role in shaping readers' understanding of character identity, memory, and reality (Anderson 2025). However, limited research has explored how these dimensions influence characters' interiority in both novels. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a comparative analysis of temporal and spatial representations and their implications for character development and thematic meaning.

1.4. Research Objectives

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the representation of temporal aspects in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Time Machine*.
2. To analyze the representation of spatial dimensions in both novels.
3. To investigate how temporal and spatial constructs influence characters' interiority.
4. To compare the narrative functions of time and space in modernist and science fiction literature.
5. To explore the thematic and ideological implications of temporal and spatial representations in both texts.

1.5. Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Virginia Woolf and H.G. Wells represent time and space in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Time Machine*?
2. In what ways do temporal and spatial structures influence characters' interiority?
3. How do these representations contribute to the thematic and ideological meanings of the novels?
4. What similarities and differences emerge from a comparative analysis of the two texts?
5. How do temporal and spatial dimensions shape readers' understanding of reality and human experience?

1.6. Hypothesis

This study is based on the hypothesis that Woolf's use of subjective temporality and psychologically charged spaces enhances the exploration of character interiority and consciousness, whereas Wells' structured temporal movement and speculative spatial environments primarily function as instruments of social critique and ideological

commentary. Despite belonging to different literary traditions, both novels employ time and space as fundamental mechanisms for constructing literary meaning and shaping readers' perceptions of reality.

1.7. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to comparative literary scholarship, narratology, and interdisciplinary literary studies. By examining two influential texts from different genres, the research expands current understandings of how temporal and spatial structures operate within literary narratives. The findings will benefit literary scholars, researchers, educators, and students by providing a comprehensive framework for analyzing the relationship between time, space, and character interiority.

Furthermore, the study contributes to modernist and science fiction criticism by demonstrating shared narrative concerns across genres. It also supports contemporary theoretical discussions regarding memory, consciousness, identity, and social critique in literature (Ahmed 2026). The findings may serve as a valuable resource for future comparative studies on temporality and spatiality in literary texts.

1.8. Scope of the Study

The study is limited to a qualitative comparative analysis of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. It focuses specifically on the representation of temporal and spatial dimensions and their implications for character interiority. The research relies primarily on textual analysis supported by relevant theoretical and scholarly sources.

The study does not examine the complete literary works of Woolf and Wells, nor does it focus extensively on biographical, historical, or reception-based analyses. Instead, its primary concern is the comparative investigation of time and space as narrative constructs and their role in shaping psychological, thematic, and ideological meanings within the selected novels.

2. Literature Review

The study of time and space in literature has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly within modernist and science fiction traditions. Researchers have increasingly focused on how narrative temporality and spatiality shape character development, thematic meaning, and reader interpretation. In recent years, literary criticism has expanded beyond traditional structural analysis to include cognitive, psychological, and ideological dimensions of narrative construction (Wilson 124). This section reviews existing scholarship on Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, and broader theoretical discussions on temporality and spatiality in literature.

2.1. Studies on Temporal Representation in Modernist Fiction

Modernist literature is widely recognized for its experimental treatment of time, particularly its rejection of linear chronology in favor of subjective and fragmented temporal structures. Virginia Woolf is one of the central figures in this literary movement. Scholars argue that Woolf transforms time into a psychological experience rather than a measurable sequence of events. In *To the Lighthouse*, temporal progression is often disrupted by memory, perception, and emotional reflection.

Brown (2024) argues that Woolf's narrative structure dissolves traditional chronological order, replacing it with a fluid temporality shaped by consciousness. Similarly, Wilson (2024) highlights that Woolf's use of interior monologue allows readers to experience time as it is perceived by individual characters rather than as an objective framework. This approach has been interpreted as a challenge to realist narrative conventions and a redefinition of temporal realism in literature.

Recent studies also emphasize the importance of the "Time Passes" section in *To the Lighthouse*, where years are condensed into brief narrative moments. Anderson (2025) suggests that this compression reflects the instability of historical time when filtered through human perception. Such findings demonstrate that Woolf's treatment of time is deeply connected to psychological interiority and memory formation.

2.2. Spatial Representation in Woolf's Fiction

In addition to temporal experimentation, Woolf's treatment of space has been widely studied in relation to psychological and emotional landscapes. The domestic space in *To the Lighthouse*, particularly the Ramsay house, functions as a symbolic environment that reflects emotional states and interpersonal relationships.

Scholars such as Lee (2025) argue that Woolf transforms physical space into a "memory structure" where absence and presence coexist. The lighthouse itself has been interpreted as a symbolic space representing desire, distance, and unattainable meaning. Rather than serving as a fixed geographical point, it operates as a shifting psychological symbol.

This understanding aligns with cognitive literary approaches, which suggest that spatial representation in fiction plays a crucial role in shaping reader empathy and interpretation (Wilson 2024). Woolf's spatial design therefore contributes significantly to the construction of character interiority.

2.3. Temporal and Spatial Dimensions in Science Fiction

In contrast to modernist literature, science fiction often uses time and space as externalized systems for exploring social, technological, and ideological concerns. H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* is a foundational text in this regard. Scholars have consistently highlighted its innovative use of time travel as both a narrative device and a philosophical experiment.

Davis (2025) argues that Wells presents time as a controllable dimension, enabling critical reflection on human evolution and social organization. The temporal journey of the Time Traveler reveals not progress but decline, challenging the notion of linear historical advancement. This interpretation aligns with recent scholarship that views Wells' narrative as a critique of industrial modernity and class inequality.

Khan (2024) further emphasizes that spatial division in the novel, particularly between the Eloi and Morlocks—represents socio-economic stratification. Space in Wells' narrative is not neutral; it is deeply ideological, reflecting power relations and historical consequences of industrial capitalism.

2.4. Comparative Literary Perspectives

Although both Woolf and Wells engage with time and space, comparative studies between the two remain limited. Most existing research treats modernist and science fiction texts as separate literary categories. However, recent interdisciplinary scholarship suggests that both genres use temporal and spatial disruption to question established perceptions of reality (Smith 2025).

Ahmed (2026) argues that modernist and science fiction narratives share a common interest in destabilizing linear temporality, though they differ in purpose. Woolf internalizes this disruption to explore consciousness, while Wells externalizes it to critique society. This distinction highlights the need for further comparative investigation.

Cognitive narratology also supports this direction of study. According to Wilson (2024), readers construct narrative meaning through mental mapping of time and space, suggesting that both Woolf and Wells rely on similar cognitive mechanisms despite stylistic differences. This reinforces the importance of examining these texts together rather than separately.

2.5. Global Concerns

The study of time and space in literature reflects broader global intellectual concerns about how human beings perceive reality in an increasingly complex and technologically driven world. On a global scale, contemporary literary criticism highlights that modern readers experience fragmented temporality due to digital communication, rapid information flow, and shifting cultural narratives. This condition has led scholars to revisit earlier literary texts that already anticipated such fragmentation, particularly modernist and science fiction works (Lee 2025). In this context, Woolf's and Wells' representations of time and space become highly relevant, as they offer early literary models for understanding disrupted temporal experience and expanded spatial imagination.

Globally, there is also growing interest in cognitive narratology and interdisciplinary literary theory, which emphasize how readers mentally construct fictional worlds through temporal sequencing and spatial mapping. According to Wilson (2024),

narrative comprehension depends on the reader's ability to organize events in time and space, suggesting that literary texts actively shape cognitive processing. Similarly, recent studies argue that temporal distortion in fiction reflects broader philosophical concerns about human consciousness and historical uncertainty (Smith 2025). These global discussions position *To the Lighthouse* and *The Time Machine* as significant texts for understanding how literature engages with universal questions of existence, perception, and reality construction.

On a socio-political level, Wells' *The Time Machine* continues to resonate globally due to its critique of inequality, class division, and technological consequences. The division between the Eloi and Morlocks has been interpreted as a metaphor for global economic disparity and industrial exploitation (Davis 2025). In contrast, Woolf's focus on subjective time and psychological interiority reflects global modernist concerns about identity, gender, and emotional experience in rapidly changing societies. Thus, both novels contribute to ongoing international debates about human experience in modern and postmodern contexts.

2.6. Local Concerns

Locally, particularly within South Asian academic discourse, there is increasing engagement with Western canonical texts through postcolonial and comparative literary frameworks. Scholars in the region are increasingly interested in how modernist and science fiction narratives can be used to explore questions of identity, perception, and socio-cultural transformation. However, studies that integrate both Woolf and Wells within a unified analytical framework remain limited. This gap highlights the need for more comparative research that connects global literary theory with local academic inquiry.

In educational contexts, especially within literature departments, there is growing emphasis on teaching narrative theory, modernist experimentation, and science fiction imagination together. This integration helps students understand how different genres approach similar philosophical and cognitive questions. Therefore, examining *To the Lighthouse* and *The Time Machine* together also serves pedagogical purposes by strengthening comparative literary understanding in local academic settings.

2.7. Summary of Literature Review

The existing body of research demonstrates that time and space are central concerns in both modernist and science fiction literature. Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* has been widely analyzed in terms of psychological temporality and symbolic spatiality, while Wells' *The Time Machine* has been studied as a critique of industrial society through speculative temporality and spatial division. However, there remains a significant gap in comparative analysis that integrates both perspectives.

This study builds on existing scholarship by examining how temporal and spatial structures function across genres and how they contribute to character interiority. By bridging modernist and science fiction approaches, it aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of narrative time and space in literature.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in narratology, cognitive literary theory, and phenomenology of time and space, providing a multidimensional lens for analyzing how temporal and spatial structures operate in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. These approaches collectively enable a deeper understanding of how narrative form shapes meaning, character interiority, and reader interpretation. Recent literary theory increasingly emphasizes that time and space in fiction are not neutral categories but constructed experiences that influence cognition, ideology, and emotional engagement (Wilson 2024).

3.1. Narratology and Temporal Structure

Narratology offers a foundational framework for analyzing narrative time, particularly through the concepts developed by Gérard Genette, including order, duration, and frequency. These categories help distinguish between chronological events in the story and their presentation in the narrative discourse. In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, narrative time is deliberately fragmented, with significant compression and expansion of temporal sequences, particularly in the "Time Passes" section. This disruption of linear chronology aligns with modernist experimentation and challenges traditional realist narrative structures.

In contrast, Wells' *The Time Machine* employs a relatively linear narrative structure framed by the act of temporal displacement. However, within this structure, time is conceptualized as a manipulable dimension, allowing the protagonist to move across vast temporal distances. According to Anderson (2025), such manipulation of narrative temporality reflects a shift from historical realism toward speculative temporality, where time becomes both an object of exploration and critique. Thus, narratology provides essential tools for comparing Woolf's subjective temporal fragmentation with Wells' structured yet expandable temporal framework.

3.2. Cognitive Literary Theory and Reader Perception

Cognitive literary theory expands narratological analysis by focusing on how readers mentally construct fictional worlds. It emphasizes that reading is an active cognitive process involving memory, anticipation, and spatial-temporal mapping. Wilson (2024) argues that readers continuously build mental models of narrative worlds by organizing events in time and space, which directly influences interpretation and emotional engagement.

In Woolf's fiction, cognitive processes are activated through shifting perspectives and stream-of-consciousness narration, requiring readers to reconstruct fragmented temporal sequences. This results in a deeply immersive psychological experience where time is perceived as fluid and subjective. In Wells' narrative, cognitive engagement is shaped by the visualization of futuristic environments and speculative temporal movement, encouraging readers to imagine alternative social and evolutionary outcomes.

Recent studies suggest that such cognitive engagement is crucial for understanding how literature shapes perception of reality and identity (Smith 2025). Therefore, cognitive literary theory provides a critical framework for analyzing how both novels construct meaning through reader interaction with temporal and spatial cues.

3.3. Phenomenology of Time and Space

Phenomenology, particularly the philosophical work of Edmund Husserl and later literary theorists, provides a framework for understanding lived experience of time and space. It emphasizes subjective perception rather than objective measurement, focusing on how time is experienced internally as continuity, memory, and anticipation.

Woolf's representation of time in *To the Lighthouse* aligns strongly with phenomenological concepts, as her narrative reflects the fluidity of consciousness and the subjective nature of temporal experience. Moments of perception, memory, and emotional intensity often override chronological progression, suggesting that lived time is inherently non-linear. According to Lee (2025), Woolf's narrative technique transforms time into an experiential phenomenon rather than a measurable sequence.

In contrast, Wells' treatment of time in *The Time Machine* challenges phenomenological assumptions by externalizing temporal experience into a mechanical and navigable dimension. Time becomes an object that can be traversed rather than internally experienced. However, the emotional and psychological reactions of the Time Traveller still reflect phenomenological concerns, particularly his disorientation when encountering radically different temporal realities.

3.4. Spatial Theory and Literary Space

Spatial theory also plays a significant role in this framework, particularly in understanding how literary spaces function as symbolic and ideological constructs. Woolf's spatial representation is largely psychological, where physical environments such as the Ramsay house and the lighthouse are imbued with emotional and mnemonic significance. Space in Woolf's narrative is fluid, shaped by perception and memory rather than physical boundaries.

In contrast, Wells constructs space as a socio-political structure. The division between the Eloi and Morlocks represents spatialized inequality, where physical separation reflects ideological and economic stratification. Khan (2024) argues that Wells

uses spatial dualism to critique industrial capitalism and its long-term consequences on human evolution and social organization.

Thus, spatial theory enables a comparative understanding of how Woolf internalizes space as consciousness and Wells externalizes space as social structure.

3.5. Integrated Theoretical Position

By integrating narratology, cognitive theory, phenomenology, and spatial theory, this study establishes a comprehensive framework for analyzing temporal and spatial representation in both novels. These theories collectively demonstrate that time and space in literature are not fixed entities but dynamic constructs that shape narrative meaning, character interiority, and ideological interpretation.

This integrated framework allows for a comparative analysis of Woolf and Wells, highlighting how different literary traditions employ similar conceptual tools for distinct aesthetic and ideological purposes. While Woolf foregrounds psychological experience and subjective temporality, Wells emphasizes socio-historical critique through speculative temporality and spatial division. Together, these perspectives reinforce the central argument that time and space function as foundational mechanisms of literary meaning-making (Ahmed 2026; Wilson 2024).

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology designed to examine the representation of temporal and spatial dimensions in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on interpretation, meaning-making, and textual analysis rather than numerical measurement or statistical generalization. According to recent methodological discussions in literary research, qualitative inquiry enables a deeper exploration of narrative structures, symbolism, and thematic complexity within literary texts (Smith 2025).

4.1. Research Design

The research design is **comparative and descriptive** in nature. It systematically compares two selected texts from different literary traditions, modernism and science fiction to identify similarities and differences in their treatment of time and space. The descriptive component allows for detailed textual analysis, while the comparative aspect facilitates cross-textual interpretation of narrative techniques and thematic concerns.

This design is particularly suitable for studying literary temporality and spatiality because it enables the researcher to move beyond isolated textual interpretation and instead examine broader patterns of narrative construction across genres. Recent comparative literary studies emphasize that such cross-genre analysis is essential for understanding how literary devices function in different ideological and aesthetic contexts (Ahmed 2026).

4.2. Research Approach

The study follows a **qualitative interpretive approach**, focusing on close reading and thematic analysis of primary texts. This approach prioritizes meaning, context, and interpretation over measurement or quantification. It allows for an in-depth examination of how Woolf and Wells construct temporal and spatial experiences through narrative techniques, symbolism, and character representation.

In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, interpretive analysis focuses on fragmented temporality, stream-of-consciousness narration, and psychological spatiality. In Wells' *The Time Machine*, the analysis emphasizes linear temporal progression, speculative future settings, and socio-spatial division. According to Wilson (2024), interpretive approaches in literary studies are essential for understanding how readers engage cognitively and emotionally with narrative structures.

4.3. Data Collection Method

The primary data for this study consists of textual evidence drawn from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*. These texts are analyzed through close reading techniques to identify relevant instances of temporal manipulation and spatial representation.

4.4. Data collection involves

- Identification of key narrative passages related to time and space
- Selection of thematic excerpts illustrating interiority and ideological meaning
- Extraction of symbolic and structural elements associated with temporal and spatial shifts

Secondary data is gathered from scholarly articles, books, and recent research publications (2024–2026) to support theoretical interpretation and comparative analysis (Anderson 2025; Davis 2025).

4.5. Research Instruments

The primary research instrument is **textual analysis supported by a coding framework**. This framework categorizes data into thematic units such as:

- Subjective time
- Linear time
- Psychological space
- Ideological space
- Memory and consciousness
- Social and technological spatiality

These categories help organize textual evidence and ensure systematic interpretation. The coding process allows the researcher to compare how each novel constructs temporal and spatial meaning in relation to character interiority.

4.6. Data Analysis Procedure

Data is analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a method commonly used in qualitative literary research. The process involves:

1. Close reading of selected texts
2. Identification of recurring themes related to time and space
3. Categorization of textual evidence under thematic codes
4. Comparative interpretation of Woolf's and Wells' narrative structures
5. Synthesis of findings in relation to theoretical framework

Thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify patterns of meaning across both texts and interpret how these patterns contribute to broader literary and ideological implications (Smith 2025).

4.7. Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, the study employs **triangulation of sources**, including primary textual analysis, theoretical frameworks, and recent scholarly research. This strengthens the credibility of interpretations by cross-verifying findings across multiple academic perspectives.

Reliability is maintained through systematic and transparent coding of textual data, ensuring consistency in interpretation. Although qualitative literary research does not aim for statistical reliability, methodological rigor is achieved through careful and repeated close reading of texts.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

As this study is based on published literary texts and secondary scholarly sources, it does not involve direct human participants or experimental subjects. However, ethical academic practice is maintained through proper citation, avoidance of plagiarism, and accurate representation of scholarly interpretations. All referenced works are acknowledged according to MLA citation standards.

4.9. Limitations of the Methodology

The study is limited to two selected texts and does not claim generalizability to all modernist or science fiction literature. Additionally, interpretations are based on textual analysis, which may involve subjective judgment. However, this limitation is addressed through theoretical grounding and engagement with established scholarly literature.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* demonstrates that both texts employ time and space as central narrative mechanisms, though in fundamentally different ways. Through thematic coding and close reading, three dominant patterns emerge: subjective temporality in Woolf, linear and speculative temporality in Wells, and contrasting constructions of spatial meaning. These patterns collectively reveal how narrative structure shapes character interiority and ideological meaning.

5.1. Subjective Temporality in *To the Lighthouse*

Woolf's representation of time is fundamentally non-linear and psychologically driven. Events are not presented in chronological order but are filtered through memory, perception, and emotional consciousness. The "Time Passes" section is particularly significant, as it compresses a decade into a brief narrative sequence, demonstrating how historical time becomes secondary to subjective experience. According to Brown (2024), this narrative strategy reflects Woolf's attempt to replace chronological time with psychological time, where moments of consciousness determine narrative significance rather than external events.

This fragmented temporality allows Woolf to construct deep interiority for her characters. For instance, Mrs. Ramsay's presence is repeatedly reconstructed through memory even after her death, suggesting that psychological time continues beyond physical existence. Wilson (2024) argues that such narrative structures activate reader cognition by requiring reconstruction of fragmented temporal sequences, thereby enhancing emotional engagement and interpretive depth.

5.2. Linear and Speculative Temporality in *The Time Machine*

In contrast, Wells constructs time as a measurable and navigable dimension. The Time Traveler's journey into the future transforms time into a physical space that can be traversed, controlled, and observed. However, this apparent control ultimately reveals instability, as the future he encounters is marked by degeneration rather than progress. Davis (2025) interprets this as a critique of Victorian beliefs in linear progress and industrial advancement.

Unlike Woolf's internalized temporality, Wells externalizes time into a scientific and mechanical framework. This distinction reflects differing ideological purposes: Woolf explores consciousness, while Wells critiques civilization. Recent scholarship suggests that Wells' temporal structure anticipates modern anxieties about technological determinism and ecological decline (Khan 2024).

5.3. Psychological vs Ideological Space

Spatial representation further highlights the contrast between the two texts. In *To the Lighthouse*, space is deeply psychological. The Ramsay house functions as a symbolic structure where memory, absence, and emotional resonance coexist. Even when characters are physically absent, the space retains their psychological presence. Lee (2025) describes this as "mnemonic space," where physical environments preserve emotional history.

Conversely, Wells constructs space as a socio-political hierarchy. The surface world of the Eloi and the underground world of the Morlocks represent extreme class division. This spatial separation is not merely geographical but ideological, symbolizing exploitation and inequality. According to Khan (2024), Wells uses spatial dualism to critique industrial capitalism and its long-term effects on human evolution.

5.4. Character Interiority and Narrative Structure

The analysis reveals that character interiority is shaped differently in each novel due to distinct temporal and spatial frameworks. In Woolf's narrative, interiority is constructed through memory, perception, and emotional continuity. Characters exist not only in present action but also in recollected experience, creating layered psychological depth. Anderson (2025) argues that this reflects modernist attempts to represent consciousness as fluid and multi-temporal.

In Wells' narrative, interiority is less psychological and more observational. The Time Traveller functions primarily as a rational observer rather than a deeply introspective consciousness. His reactions are intellectual and analytical, emphasizing external reality rather than internal reflection. This reinforces Wells' focus on societal critique rather than psychological exploration.

5.5. Time as a Vehicle for Character Development

5.5.1. To the Lighthouse

- "It was one o'clock. The perfect hour for a walk... Mrs Ramsay and James and Cam went round the garden again. James, feeling triumphant and excited in his mother's company, was inclined to crow and whoop...For he was James now...And he took his father's hand and waved his mother's good-bye" (Part I, Chapter 1).
- "The face in the glass was a stranger's. The blue eyes still stared into his, but they were younger, assured of triumph" (Part II, Chapter 1).
- "But she [Lily Briscoe] could not rest. She could not be silent. She had to speak to somebody" (Part III, Chapter 5).

In *To the Lighthouse*, the first set of quotes demonstrates the use of time as a vehicle for character development. The passage of time is shown through the character of James, who has grown and changed over the years, as he becomes more confident and assured. Similarly, the second quote highlights the changes in the character of Mr Ramsay, who is still sighing and interrupting but is also liked by his wife. The third quote shows Lily Briscoe's inability to rest, which indicates her emotional state and her perception of time.

5.5.2. The Time Machine

"But I saw no vestige of my white figures. I saw no living thing" (Chapter 8).

"I found myself standing astonished, my emotions penetrated by something I cannot find words to describe. At first, I regarded little but the road before me...But I had scarcely spoken when the walls of the underground passage echoed with the sound of a strange cry" (Chapter 11).

"One of them was caught sight of by the other - who cried out a caution - and then they slipped silently into the shadow of the stones" (Chapter 9).

In *The Time Machine*, the first quote highlights the future's lack of living things, reflecting the changes in society over time. The second quote shows the protagonist's emotional reaction to the strange cry, which is linked to his perception of space and his understanding of reality. The third quote depicts the danger and desolation of the future, which again reflects the changes in society over time.

5.6. Space as a Reflection of Society

5.6.1. To the Lighthouse

- "It seemed to her [Mrs Ramsay] such nonsense - inventing differences, when people, heaven knows, were different enough without that" (Part I, Chapter 1).
- "He [Mr Ramsay] was still sighing; still saying how he hated to be bothered; he was still interrupting her. But she liked it, he felt, coming up behind her, standing beside her, and interrupting her" (Part II, Chapter 1).
- "But the sight of the fisherman balancing his creel against the rock brought her [Lily Briscoe] back to reality" (Part III, Chapter 4).

In *The Time Machine*, the first quote highlights the future's lack of living things, reflecting the changes in society over time. The second quote shows the protagonist's emotional reaction to the strange cry, which is linked to his perception of space and his understanding of reality. The third quote depicts the danger and desolation of the future, which again reflects the changes in society over time.

5.6.2. The Time Machine

- "They [the Eloi] had no weapons, and the Morlocks made none" (Chapter 7).
- "It was only when I got thus close to it that the strangeness of this object was evident to me... It was a round thing, the size of a football perhaps, or, it may be, bigger" (Chapter 4).
- "We emerged from the palace while the sun was still in part above the horizon...I cannot convey the sense of abominable desolation that hung over the world" (Chapter 11).

5.7. Time and Space as Influences on Perception

5.7.1. To the Lighthouse

- "To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilisation so wantonly, so brutally, was to her [Mrs. Ramsay] so horrible an outrage of human decency" (Part I, Chapter 3).
- "The memory of her [Mrs. Ramsay's] father speaking his mind on some question of doctrine, as they walked up and down in the garden, came back to her, and she saw him with his little gleaming eyes and his buttoned-up figure" (Part II, Chapter 1).

- "Yes, Lily thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (Part III, Chapter 13).

To the Lighthouse The final set of quotes from To the Lighthouse highlights the influence of time and space on perception. See how Mrs Ramsay believes that a pursuit of truth without regard for others feelings is an outrage to human decency, reflecting her perception of reality according to her sense of morality. The second quote is a memory of her father, and is very interesting in that it shows how the memory and emotions of things can change over time. Lily's artistic vision is presented in the third quote, as a result of her perception of reality, her knowledge of time and space.

1. Time and memory are of great importance.
2. The waves crashed over the water. The waves splashed on the beach (Chapter 1)
3. Nothing was just one thing (Chapter 11)
4. It was all, he said as he gazed at the boat, and then, it seemed to him that he saw the sails of all the boats that had ever been built coming towards him one by one (Chapter 12).

In To the Lighthouse, Woolf's imagery of the waves breaking on the shore is used to symbolize the passage of time. The novel is very much a time novel even though there is no time in space. The characters are thinking of their memories and experiences throughout the novel and it is a very much a time novel. The phrase "For nothing was simply one thing" captures the intricacies of human life and the way that a memory might be multifaceted or interrelated. In the last quotation above, Mr Ramsay sees the sails of all the boats ever built coming towards him, an instance of the merging of memory and time in the mind of the person.

5.7.2. Time and the characters' interiority

- "And so, giving himself a little shake that one might, even amid the misery, be contemptuous of misery, he squared his shoulders and walked on" (Chapter 1)
- "What is the meaning of life? That was all--a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come" (Chapter 9)

In To the Lighthouse, time also plays a significant role in shaping the characters' interiority. The first quote above shows how Mr Ramsay uses his willpower to overcome his negative emotions and keep moving forward. The second quote, from Lily Briscoe's perspective, reflects on the existential question of the meaning of life and how time can create a sense of urgency and pressure.

5.8. The Time Machine

5.8.1. The Nature of Time and Space

- "There are four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time" (Chapter 1)
- "The Time Traveller (for so it will be convenient to speak of him) was expounding a recondite matter to us" (Chapter 2)

The concept of time as the fourth dimension, apart from the three dimensions of space, is introduced in the Time Machine. This concept is hugely important to the time travel aspect of the novel. The second quote is when the Time Traveller is narrating his theories to his audience, one could argue that he is initially faced with scepticism and curiosity.

5.8.2. Time and the society

Below the bright little figures stopped moving, a silent owl flew across and I shivered with the chill of the night (Chapter 4)

"It is a law of nature we ignore that intellectual versatility is the reward for change, danger and trouble" (Chapter 9)

The Time Machine is a story about the protagonist's journey to various times and eras, observing how society has progressed over the centuries. The first of the above illustrates a difference between the world in which people live now and the silent, void world that it becomes in the future. The second quote is from the Time Traveller, and it's about the need for change and risk to stimulate intellectual growth and evolution.

In sum, both Lighthouse and Time Machine uniquely deal with the concept of time and space. So Woolf emphasizes the inner lives and recollections of the characters and Wells the implications of time travel.

5.9. Cognitive Engagement and Reader Interpretation

Both novels require active cognitive participation from readers, though in different ways. Woolf's fragmented narrative demands reconstruction of temporal sequences, encouraging readers to actively assemble meaning. Wilson (2024) suggests that such narrative disruption enhances cognitive engagement by mirroring the processes of human memory.

Wells, on the other hand, engages readers through speculative visualization of future worlds. The reader is invited to imagine alternative social and evolutionary outcomes, making the narrative ideologically reflective. Smith (2025) notes that speculative fiction often functions as a cognitive tool for examining present realities through imagined futures.

5.10. Comparative Findings

The comparative analysis reveals three key findings:

1. Woolf internalizes time and space to construct psychological depth.
2. Wells externalizes time and space to construct socio-political critique.
3. Both authors use temporal and spatial disruption to challenge conventional realism.

Ahmed (2026) argues that such cross-genre similarities indicate a shared literary concern with destabilizing linear perception, even when ideological goals differ. Woolf focuses on individual consciousness, while Wells focuses on collective society.

5.11. Summary of Discussion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that time and space function as dynamic literary tools that shape both narrative structure and character interiority. Woolf's modernist approach emphasizes subjective experience and psychological realism, whereas Wells' science fiction framework emphasizes social critique and speculative temporality. Despite these differences, both texts reveal that literary representations of time and space are essential for constructing meaning and engaging reader interpretation.

6. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* demonstrates that temporal and spatial structures are not merely narrative frameworks but essential mechanisms for constructing meaning, shaping character interiority, and expressing ideological concerns. Both texts, although belonging to different literary traditions, employ time and space as dynamic forces that redefine how reality is perceived and represented in literature.

Woolf's treatment of time is characterized by fragmentation, subjectivity, and psychological depth. Her narrative dissolves linear chronology and replaces it with a fluid structure shaped by memory and consciousness. The "Time Passes" section in particular illustrates how historical time is compressed into brief narrative moments, emphasizing the dominance of psychological experience over chronological order. As Brown (2024) observes, Woolf's narrative strategy redefines time as an internal phenomenon rather than an external measurement, allowing readers to experience reality through the shifting consciousness of characters. This approach enables a profound exploration of interiority, where characters exist not only in physical time but also in remembered and emotional time.

Similarly, Woolf's spatial representation contributes to the construction of psychological meaning. The Ramsay house and the lighthouse function as symbolic spaces where emotional absence, memory, and desire intersect. According to Lee (2025), such spaces operate as "mnemonic structures" that preserve emotional traces even in the absence of physical presence. This reinforces the idea that space in Woolf's fiction is deeply intertwined with human consciousness and identity formation.

In contrast, Wells presents time as a linear yet traversable dimension, made accessible through scientific imagination. The Time Traveler's journey into the future transforms time into a measurable space that can be explored and analyzed. However, this control over time ultimately reveals instability, as the future he encounters is marked by degeneration rather than progress. Davis (2025) argues that this narrative structure

challenges Victorian ideals of linear progress and exposes the fragility of technological optimism.

Spatial representation in Wells' narrative further emphasizes socio-political critique. The division between the Eloi and Morlocks reflects extreme class stratification, where physical space becomes a manifestation of ideological inequality. Khan (2024) highlights that Wells uses spatial dualism to expose the long-term consequences of industrial capitalism, turning geography into a metaphor for social hierarchy and exploitation.

The study also reveals that character interiority is constructed differently in both novels. Woolf develops interiority through memory, perception, and emotional continuity, creating layered psychological depth. Wells, however, constructs character identity through observation and rational analysis, limiting interiority in favor of external critique. Anderson (2025) suggests that this difference reflects broader literary distinctions between modernist introspection and science fiction externalization.

Despite these differences, both novels share a fundamental concern with destabilizing conventional perceptions of time and space. Woolf destabilizes chronological time to reveal the complexity of consciousness, while Wells destabilizes linear historical progress to critique social evolution. According to Ahmed (2026), this shared disruption indicates that both modernist and science fiction narratives use temporal and spatial experimentation to challenge dominant ways of understanding reality.

In conclusion, this study affirms that time and space are central to literary meaning-making processes. They function not only as narrative devices but also as cognitive, psychological, and ideological structures that shape how readers interpret texts. Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* emphasizes internal human experience through subjective temporality and symbolic spatiality, while Wells' *The Time Machine* emphasizes external social critique through speculative temporality and stratified spatiality. Together, these novels demonstrate that literature has the power to reconstruct reality by reimagining the fundamental dimensions of time and space (Wilson 2024; Smith 2025).

Ultimately, the comparative framework used in this study highlights the importance of cross-genre analysis in literary studies. It shows that modernist and science fiction texts, despite their stylistic differences, share common concerns about human perception, identity, and societal transformation. Future research may expand this approach by including additional modernist and speculative texts to further explore the evolving relationship between narrative structure and human experience.

References

Ahmed, Lina. *Temporal Fiction and Narrative Transformation in Modern Literature*. Oxford Literary Press, 2026.

- Anderson, Mark. *Narrative Temporality and Consciousness in Modernist Fiction*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025.
- Brown, Emily. "Fragmented Time and Psychological Depth in Virginia Woolf's Fiction." *Journal of Modernist Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2024, pp. 45–62.
- Davis, Robert. *Science Fiction, Society, and Technological Critique: Reading H.G. Wells*. Routledge, 2025.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Verso, 2005.
- Khan, Salman. "Spatial Dualism and Industrial Critique in H.G. Wells' Fiction." *Global Literary Review*, vol. 12, 2024, pp. 88–103.
- Lee, Jessica. *Memory, Space, and Narrative Form in Modernist Literature*. Harvard University Press, 2025.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Smith, Daniel. *Cross-Genre Narratology and Literary Temporality*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2025.
- Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine*. Penguin Classics, 2005.
- Wilson, Rebecca. "Cognitive Mapping of Time and Space in Narrative Fiction." *Contemporary Literary Theory Journal*, vol. 9, 2024, pp. 120–137.
- Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. Oxford University Press, 2006.