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Limitless Negativity: Feminine Space In/Between/Beyond Virginia Woolf's Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay

Virginia's Woolf's 1927 novel *To The Lighthouse* figures a relationship between the matriarch, Mrs. Ramsay, and her young visitor, Lily Briscoe, as a destabilization of the patriarchal socio--symbolic order, a structural undermining of what the philosopher Luce Irigaray, following Jacques Derrida, calls phallogocentrism.

For Irigaray, patriarchy's homogenizing Logic of the Same structures the male/masculine, unified in the Phallus, as the singular valid mode of being. Woman, as such, does not exist, or only does so negatively, as the lack of the power--granting Phallus. The 'feminine' as a set of gender codes is similarly disavowed. Yet even for Irigaray, the pluralized concept of women is unimaginable as she develops the theory of Woman, singular. Woolf's work supplements the later theories of Irigaray through an exploration of feminine excess which undermines the 'either/or' logic of the Same and opens ontological possibilities that are neither reductive in the patriarchal sense, nor in the inadvertently reductive logic of Irigaray's own theory of Woman.

This paper uses Woolf's work to both exemplify and critique Irigaray's philosophy, while engaging Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic as non--oppositional alternative to the symbolic, and Hélène Cixous' critical notion of women's writing, or "l'écriture féminine." Ultimately, this paper attempts to demonstrate the exciting possibilities of a novel which both thematically and formally reveals the inherent but obscured uncertainties of phallogocentrism's Logic of One and, more specifically, its expression in hierarchical gender categories and the very notion of oppositional identity itself.