The search for identity in Michelle Cliff's Abeng

Stephanie F. Brown
Lehigh University

Follow this and additional works at: http://preserve.lehigh.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
AUTHOR:  
Brown, Stephanie F.

TITLE:  
The Search for Identity in Michelle Cliff's Abeng. 
Crossing Gender Lines: 
The Female Voice and Discursive Authority in To Have and Have Not... 

DATE:  May 28, 1995
The Search for Identity in Michelle Cliff's Abeng

Crossing Gender Lines: The Female Voice and Discursive Authority in To Have and Have Not and The Big Sleep

by

Stephanie F. Brown

A Thesis
Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee of Lehigh University in Candidacy for the Degree of Masters of Arts in English

Lehigh University
May 9, 1995
Certificate of Approval

These thesis papers are accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts.

8 May 1995
Date

Thesis Advisor, Paper I

Thesis Advisor, Paper II

Department Chairperson
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Title Page and Abstract of "The Search for Identity in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*".................................1

2. Text of "The Search for Identity in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*"...............................................................2-18

3. Title Page and Abstract of "Crossing Gender Lines: The Female Voice and Discursive Authority in *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*"..............................19

4. Text of "Crossing Gender Lines: The Female Voice and Discursive Authority in *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*".................................................................20-54

5. Works Consulted.................................................................55-57

6. Biography.................................................................58
The Search for Identity in Michelle Cliff's Abeng

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that colonization is the cause for Clare Savage's inability to define herself and to connect her disparate past. Clare struggles to find a source that will provide her with what it means to be black, white and female. She looks to western history, literature, and film as well as to the stories of her mother's "country" heritage to find her own identity in her fragmented world.
Like all children, Clare Savage, the main character of *Abeng*, by Michelle Cliff, asks: who am I and what is my place in society? Although these questions can be complex for any young adolescent (or adult), Clare has a particularly difficult time answering her inquiry because she is a mixed race child in post-colonial Jamaica. Clare is confused by who she is in a world where she sees contradiction, injustice and silence. It is from these bewildering sights that Clare begins to question (her)self and history in order to seek a definition or understanding of who she is and where she belongs.

Clare's knowledge of her own familial past and Jamaican history is fragmented. She is a light "buckra" gal who has a light-skinned father and a darker mother, which means that Clare's history is European, African and Jamaican. In other words, Clare is the product of the colonizer and the colonized. Clare looks to her parents, Boy and Kitty, for guidance as she pieces together all the disparate parts of her historical past in order to define herself: Boy maintains an imperialist position of who she is while Kitty remains silent about her individuality as a black country woman. At first, Clare relies on the colonized accounts of history from Boy and her teachers at St. Catherine's School. But she is also aware of Kitty's actions and beliefs which do not coincide with these lessons. This disparity--Kitty's religious difference, her home in the country and her darker
skin color stand in direct opposition to Boy’s desire to be white and his belief that the colonized past is the only history—become the source of Clare’s confusion and desire to learn more about her origins.

Because her parents are unable to direct Clare through her search, she struggles to find another source that will provide her with a better understanding of what it means to be black, white, and female. Clare looks to western history, literature, and film to discover a self. Anne Frank and Kitty Hart become her role models but because of their Jewish identity and persecution, Clare cannot fully grasp how they influence her life. Like all the women characters from whom Clare seeks direction, they fall short. It is not until Clare encounters Mrs. Stevens that a woman explains to her the disadvantages and the injustices in racial mixture and womanhood. Mrs. Stevens’ valuable lesson distinguishes/differentiates European, African and Jamaican history, thus enabling Clare to understand the complexity of her position and the importance of her mother’s silence.

David Labiosa writes that the fragmented narrative structure allows Cliff to produce a text that incorporates cultures, genres, histories and race:

This practice pervades the text and all its topics, especially in the strands of Black/African and White/European, for the story of these two peoples is, finally, as the text makes clear, the tortured history of Jamaica/Caribbean.¹

The story of these three peoples is also the historical past
of Clare Savage. Learning about the "White/European," the "Black/African" and the "Jamaican/Caribbean" is equally important because each "strand" crossed the other producing a hybrid strand--Clare Savage. Therefore, Clare's preoccupation with the lives of Anne Frank and Kitty Hart---young white, European, Jewish girls--is not an unrelated connection but a part of the fragmented narrative which signifies Clare's history and her "difference."

Clare learns from The Diary of Anne Frank, a "coming of age" Holocaust autobiography, that she and Anne share similar experiences. Both girls suffer from an oppression they do not understand and have no one who can explain the complexity of their victimization, especially from a female point of view. Anne and Clare are unable to communicate with their mothers. That is, neither mother, Kitty Savage nor Mrs. Frank, shares with their daughters what it is to be female.

From the Anne Frank story, Clare learns the intricacy of her identity. Like Clare, Anne is "Other." Although Anne is white, she does not possess the qualities that make her a part of the white-male-centered-German mainstream society because she is Jewish and female. Likewise, Clare is "flawed" with a dual identity; she is not completely allowed or accepted into the western, white culture. Because Clare can see strong connections between Anne Frank and herself, she visualizes the experiences of Anne's
horrific world as identifiable with her own—"Clare had learned that just as Jews were expected to suffer in a Christian world, so were dark people expected to suffer in a white one." Clare makes this connection through her understanding of discrimination; however, she fails to see how the Holocaust and the enslavement of her African ancestors—of which no one speaks—are related. Clare does not question the story of Anne Frank because it explains the history of her "White/European" heritage, or the history of the colonizer, but because Anne’s portrait on the cover of the book reflects a young girl, about her own age, who was persecuted for difference. To Clare, Anne Frank is like her:

Why did they kill her? That was a question whose answer was always out of reach. It was hard for Clare to imagine someone, another girl, who was of her age or near to her age, dying—to imagine her dying as Anne Frank died . . . was impossible.

Questioning the purpose of Anne’s suffering and persecution provides Clare with a context in which to view her own history. Clare wishes to learn more about the death of Anne Frank and the six million other Jews who were brutally killed and tortured; however, her teacher is unable to explain this atrocity because she does not understand the historical events that led to the victimization of the Jews. Her teacher can only inform her of the historical moments in which the British were victorious in battle. Clare’s teacher cannot assess the damage of World War II because she
supports the colonized notions that place the white man in a position of dominance, the "ordained protector". She has been educated by a white imperialist society that sees cultural Others--Africans, Jamaicans, Jews--as impaired people in need of custody and command. As a result, Clare’s instructor reinforces stereotypes and the status quo as she turns the discussion into a reassertion of racist dogma:

The suffering of the Jews was similar, one teacher went on to say, to the primitive religiosity of Africans, which had brought Black people into slavery, she explained, but did not explain how she had reached this conclusion. That is, both types of people were flawed in irreversible ways. And though the teacher could have stopped at this, she went on to stress again the duty of white Christians as the "ordained" protectors of other peoples.4

Clare observes then that both she and Anne deserve the suffering they encounter because they are "flawed in irreversible ways" as cultural Others. Clare’s inquiries about the Holocaust and Anne Frank frame what she really means to ask: why are some people privileged because of their race and others persecuted and where does she fit?

Clare sees race as the determining factor in her search for identity. Her understanding is that society ranks people according to their race, thus placing a person in a certain category; for example, Anne Frank is accepted in the German white community until her Jewish heritage is known. Likewise, Clare receives preferential treatment among Jamaican blacks because of her light skin, yet she is still segregated from the white community. Clare’s inability to
fuse her black heritage with her white history confuses her notions of self-worth and where she belongs, "...[Clare] became compelled by the life and death of Anne Frank. She was reaching, without knowing it, for an explanation of her own life."\(^5\) The link between Anne and Clare is that they both "belong" but only to a degree, in a society intolerant of difference.

Clare’s dissatisfaction with her teacher’s inability to accurately create a "why?" for Anne Frank’s persecution sends her to Boy. Boy responds to her inquiries without recognizing the similarities that Clare sees between Jewish and black oppression. That is, Jewish and black oppression are cruel and devastating moments in "White/European" history that the people around her cannot explain; their colonized pasts do not allow them to see their oppressor clearly. Instead, Boy reasserts that suffering and persecution is the fault of the victim. He identifies with the oppressor—in some instances, desires to be the oppressor, i.e., white, privileged, dominant—rather than acknowledging the injustices Clare detects. Boy simplifies the Holocaust to "the Jews were smart people and should have known better than to antagonize Adolf Hitler, whom he characterized as a misguided genius in search of a scapegoat."\(^6\) He blames the victims because he cannot explain to Clare the facts of the Holocaust. Like the teachers, Boy’s ignorance perpetuates the myth that the
Cultural Other deserves the oppression he or she experiences.

Clare's desire to draw parallels between the Holocaust and her own identity permeates the discussion with her father. She tries to put the Holocaust into a context she understands by relating it to another Jewish woman from canonized literature, Rebecca, the heroine of Ivanhoe. Boy reinforces the residue that colonization left behind. According to him, the point of Ivanhoe is that the fair-skinned-Saxon, Rowena, is chosen over Rebecca:

"But Daddy, in Ivanhoe, it is Rebecca who is the real heroine, not Rowena."
"Don't be silly, it's Rowena whom Ivanhoe chooses in the end; that's the point of the story...[Rebecca] is an infidel in Ivanhoe's eyes. She is dark and Rowena is fair. Rowena is a lady—a Saxon. The purest-blooded people in the world..."

Boy describes the race theory that favors a "white" appearance over one that is tainted with Jewish blood. Clare is familiar with privileging one race over another but she does not understand why this occurs. She understands that her light skin is favored over dark among blacks, but among whites she is "tainted" like Rebecca, because of her darkness.

The past Boy explains provides Clare with more ideas about her colonized history but not about herself as a "buckra" gal. She tries to assert the legitimacy of the cultural Other through Rebecca; however, Boy questions Rebecca's status not because of her character but because of
"Rebecca is a tragic figure. You know that great writers often create their characters with tragic flaws, so that no matter what happens, they cannot succeed. They will never win in the end. Well, Rebecca’s flaw is that she is Jewish—she is a beautiful flawed woman; and Ivanhoe is frustrated in his love for her. Of course she cannot help what she is."8

Heritage is the flaw for which Rebecca, Anne, and Clare are blamed. These women cannot help who and what they are. Anne is persecuted for her heritage and Clare is segregated because of hers. None of these women characters can assert the importance of their Other-ness. They are manipulated and subjugated by the notion that Saxon blood is the purest in the world. These women have been trained to believe that cultural or racial difference means inferiority, persecution, or servitude. Clare, because she is a twelve-year-old girl, believes in her father’s confining lessons and denies her Jamaican heritage. This denial, however, causes her extreme confusion, for she cannot comprehend "how she could be white with a colored mother, brown legs, and ashy knees."9 But Boy insists that Clare is white, so she accepts this as her identity:

"You’re white because you’re a Savage."
"But Mother is colored. Isn’t she?"
"Yes."
"If she is colored and you are white, doesn’t that make me colored?"
"No you are my daughter. You’re white."10

Boy’s Anglocentrism distinguishes Clare as white. He believes that his family name signifies privilege and
therefore whiteness. Because her light skin allows her to pass into the privileged "White/European" world, Clare can "marry up" and lighten the family line, bringing honor to the Savage name. Discounting Clare’s other histories, however, degrades her true identity. Just as Ivanhoe "chooses" Rowena because of her Saxon blood, Boy defines Clare as "pure" because of her lineage.

European history and literature fail to give her a satisfactory definition or explanation of who she is, or more specifically, the importance of who she is. Clare looks to The Diary of Anne Frank, the film, to help her define black female subjectivity.

In the cinema where Clare sits and watches her heroine, Anne Fränk, "come alive," she is surrounded by the effects of colonization: the white walls, and the art deco decor with Galibi warrior statues "framing" the narrative that unfolds on the big white screen. The warriors are on the periphery of the dominating white images, preserving the same secondary status that Anne and Clare maintain. Clare goes to the cinema to seek an identity which is created by an industry composed of western white males. Clare feels Anne’s story will become real to her on the screen; however, it falls short of her expectations because the industry which created the film is insensitive to the oppressed female experience:

Now, in the cinema, the actors in the movie talked out of the diary, but Clare knew enough of the
book, or had her own by-now-deep ideas about it, that not all of the movie rang true to her. . . . What did ring true—and what had in the diary—was the relationship between Anne and her mother. 11

The mother-daughter relationship in the book and in the film is the most important parallel between Anne and Clare. Both mothers neglect to share with their daughters the essence of womanhood, and as a result, the two girls are vulnerable to the violence and prejudice in their worlds. Clare speculates that if Anne Frank's mother had not been so remote, she could have protected Anne from the Holocaust, like Kitty Hart's mother did. "Did Kitty survive because her mother had confronted the horror and taught her daughter to live through the days?" 12 Likewise, if Clare's mother would have shared the "fallen fruit" 13 she gathered from the island of their past, Clare would be protected from the confusion of her heritage and could come to a resolution about who she is. Kitty Freeman Savage, however, does not share the "fallen fruit" because of the effect of "pure Saxon blood"—the perception that a Jamaican heritage is worthless or flawed. Although she herself treasured her past and will reveal it to Clare's darker sister, Jennie, her silence to Clare comes from her notion that if the lighter-skinned Clare ignores her past, she will progress into the western, white world. Kitty believes that if Clare is too immersed in her black heritage, it will impede her passage to a "better life."

Kitty's lack of intimacy creates a barrier between
mother and daughter. Clare is unable to take the name Kitty for her diary like Anne Frank, or in honor of Kitty Hart or Kitty Savage. The purpose for naming the diary is to write as if she were writing to a friend,

One in whom she had complete trust... Clare did not tell her mother anything which was close to her. She avoided any subject which she thought would make her mother uncomfortable... So she could not take the name Kitty for her diary--she did not know what to call it.14

Clare does not know what to call her diary or herself because the she cannot confide in her mother. She sees Kitty's silence as a remoteness like Mrs. Frank's. Clare blames herself because she does not understand that colonization has created the lack of intimacy between the mother and daughter. Clare believed that close mother-daughter relationships were denied to Anne and her because they were flawed with dual identities, "[f]or that is what she had been taught. She was a colonized child, and she lived within certain parameters--which clouded her judgment."15

Anne Frank becomes an important figure for Clare because she feels a connection with this young Jewish girl who, like Clare, searches for a female identity without guidance. Clare relates her life to the story of Anne Frank because Anne's identity can be read in books when the grown-ups cannot adequately explain her questions of being. Clare fails to see that ultimately she and Anne have distinct experiences exclusive to their different realities, and as a
result, she is unable to fuse their experiences into one female identity for herself.

Unlike Anne's past, Clare's black heritage is not recorded. It is an oral tradition that nobody recites. Kitty remains silent while Clare searches for her black female identity and assumes the colonized preaching from her father as her reality. Clare does not see that she and Kitty have distinct experiences as black females that reinforce their distant relationship. Kitty's black female experience resides in the country people of Jamaica and the religious songs of an African past evokes while Clare's depends on the books and teachings of a western white world.

Clare longs for a relationship with her mother that teaches her about heritage, about (her)self; however, Kitty's inability to convey to her daughter the essence of race and womanhood leaves Clare to look to history, literature, and film for answers about her lineage and gender. Defining a self for Clare is problematic because her life is so disparate. She is uncertain where to show allegiance: to the white history she learns from teachers, from Ivanhoe, from Boy; or to the Jamaica about which she knows nothing. When Clare turns to Anne Frank for guidance she discovers that her identity is complex and contingent on many factors she does not understand, like colonization and prejudice. Even at the end of the novel, Clare does not fully understand who she is or where she fits into society,
but she does meet one woman, Mrs. Stevens, who speaks candidly to her about womanhood. Mrs. Stevens becomes an example to Clare. She warns Clare that "beauty is, of course, as beauty does, and you must mind what happens to you. So don't let them cross you up." Mrs. Stevens advises Clare not to believe what the "grown ups" teach her. Because Mrs. Stevens allowed the friendship and love of a black man into her life, the adult world "crossed her up." Her parents, her community, and her friends bought into the colonialists' prejudice against blacks, punishing her for mixing with a darker black man. These are the same beliefs and ideas that Clare's teachers and parents drill into her. Mrs. Stevens did not permit the social and racial lines to keep her from her lover, nor did she escape the punishment that this bigoted tradition inflicts:

All the water in the world cannot wash away what I did. My sad life. Which made another sad life. All the salt in the world cannot draw out the infection I carry in me. I live in repentance for my sins. I am not what I was meant to be.

Mrs. Stevens was meant to reap the benefits of her "buckra" heritage and to be "somebody." But by mixing her near-to-pure blood with a man of a darker color and a lower class, she ruined her chances of being "somebody"—of lightening up the race and bringing honor to her family. Similarly, Clare is to take advantage of her light skin in order to be "somebody"; however, this "advantage" hinders her relationship with Kitty.
Mrs. Stevens is a victim, like Clare, Anne, and Rebecca, of a society intolerant of difference. Mrs. Stevens, like the other women, blames herself for her victimization: "But what I did was wrong, you see. I knew better. I knew that God meant that coons and buckra people were not meant to mix their blood. It's not right. Only sadness comes from mixture. You must remember that." The sadness she suggests is reflected in Clare's inability to find an identity because she is a product of a dark-skinned woman and light-skinned man. According to traditional island beliefs, the mixture between Kitty and Boy is wrong, thus suggesting Clare's very existence is wrong. Mrs. Stevens is an example of someone who challenged, rebelled against the traditional beliefs of the colonized island and was punished. She reiterates these traditional values but at the same time shows Clare the prejudice and where it all began. Cliff uses her to show the limitations placed on light-skinned people and the consequences of mixture in this racist society.

When Mrs. Stevens explains the origin of these colonized beliefs to Clare for the first time Clare receives the Jamaican history lesson that neither Kitty nor her teachers could provide. Mrs. Stevens exposes the truth about her native history instead of giving praise to the motherland for "discovering" Jamaica and reforming its barbaric ways: "They brought people here in chains and then
expected to prosper. They killed off all the Indians and all the snakes and believed they were doing good." Mrs. Stevens portrays the imperialists as reckless, careless people who fail to see the value in human life. The westerners were the ones who set up the distinction between colors and classes in order to maintain their power. Then after they exploited the people and the island’s resources, they left Jamaica alone to solve the problems: "They are all gone now—the ones who did these things—gone to their reward. But the afterbirth is lodged in the woman’s body and will not be expelled. All the waste of birth. Foul-smelling and past its use." Mrs. Stevens defiantly imparts to Clare that the "afterbirth" of imperialism is the reason she is labelled insane and Clare cannot identify herself. The colonized minds left to solve the problems caused by the white man continued the racism. Clare cannot have a strong relationship with her mother or have an allegiance to Jamaica and her African history because of the prejudice that says darker-skinned people hold the "buckra" class back, preventing them from being somebody—from "lightening up the race." Colonization has divided the race against itself. Life in Jamaica, according to Mrs. Stevens, has been wasted by the devastating effects of colonization: the continuation of poverty and prejudice and the loss of resources and histories.

Mrs. Stevens then becomes the woman who introduces
Clare to the complexities of womanhood, colonization, and prejudice. For the first time a grown woman speaks to her about heritage and about the facts of life as a "buckra" gal in Jamaica. The history Mrs. Stevens provides places Clare’s search for a black female identity into a context she does not totally understand. However, it is with this knowledge that Clare will eventually fuse the importance of Anne Frank’s persecution and the holocaust of her own black heritage with her mother’s denial of herself and her heritage in order to keep Clare white. Once Clare can understand the lessons of Mrs. Stevens, she will realize that it is the racism in the world that put Anne Frank to death, that silenced her mother into self-hatred, and made Boy identify with the oppressor and insist they were white. Until then, Clare will struggle with who she is and where she belongs. Her search for a self and her yearning for a relationship with Kitty will continue along with her desire to make connections to Anne Frank. The hope, however, in Michelle Cliff’s Abeng, is that Clare will draw from these experiences to better "understand her dream" and assert a strong "buckra" identity that is distinctly her own.
Notes


3. Cliff, 68.


5. Cliff 72.

6. Cliff 72.

7. Cliff 72.

8. Cliff 72.

9. Cliff 73.

10. Cliff 73.

11. Cliff 79.

12. Cliff 80.

13. Cliff 80.


15. Cliff 76-77.


17. Cliff 164.

18. Cliff 164.

19. Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. Phillips are equally ugly representations of racism--Mrs. Phillips is the oppressor, who is herself black; Mrs. Stevens is the victim because she did not try to be white.

20. Cliff 164.


22. Cliff 166.
Crossing Gender Lines: The Female Voice and Discursive Authority in To Have and Have Not and The Big Sleep

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that both films--To Have and Have Not and The Big Sleep--do not completely challenge the patriarchal gendered discourses of the mainstream film industry because, eventually, both the female and male characters return to the assigned, gendered narrative space expected within dominant culture. The vocally blurred gender positioning of the characters does temporarily disrupt the narrative, however, and provides these films with a subtext which could be read as "queer."
Traditionally in classical cinema, male and female roles have been culturally determined: male characters are the central focus, or subjects of the narrative, while the female characters play subordinate and, most often, secondary roles. Male characters hold this privileged position because the industry constructs and codes the text to reflect male unconscious desires and pleasures. The female character is viewed in terms of her sexuality and body. In feminist psychoanalytic theory, the straight male spectator, as well as the "straight" male character on the screen, finds the original threat of castration experienced as a child re-emerging in face of women characters/women's bodies which causes that initial childhood anxiety of seeing women's genital "lack" to reoccur. To overcome this fear, the film industry objectifies and spectactularizes the female image so that the straight male spectator can dismember and fetishize her body while narrative centered on the male subject punishes any female character who interrupts the narrative by stepping out of her silent, passive, objectified role. The woman character is ultimately "put back in her place" to compensate for her anatomical deficiency and the threat she poses to the phallus.¹

Similarly in film sound theory, the same culturally determined gender rules apply--low-pitched, forceful voices, which signify masculinity, occupy the discursive authority
in the film, whereas high-pitched, soft voices, which are coded as feminine, are marginalized. The female character with a deep, husky voice disrupts the traditional workings and understandings of the narrative because she can temporarily assume a dominant vocal position. As a result, the privileged status she occupies positions her character as "unnatural," a biological "freak," because this woman has a masculinized voice without the accompanying penis. The husky-voiced woman character can exist, however, as long as she ultimately remains confined within the traditional visual and narrative spaces for women on the screen--where straight male desire lies. Thus positioned, the straight male spectator can dismember the voice from the body to avoid "seeing" himself in the female character, and the possible pleasure/un-pleasure that may arise from this. To ensure against castration anxiety, the woman possessing the low-pitched voice is punished, "put in her place," or she is transformed so she can return to the traditional female position within the narrative, typically through marriage or motherhood.

Synchronizing the sound track with the visual spectacle on the screen, however, reinforces the film's "realism," particularly in regards to the aforementioned representation of gender roles. Without this unity between sound and vision, the film lacks the illusion of "reality," as it denaturalizes the dominant cultural codes and conventions
within the narrative. When viewing a film, the spectator is trained to see and hear the narrative in a coherent way; that is, when a sound is heard, the viewer looks for the source on the screen to confirm the object's presence. Most often, the source of the sound reflects what the spectator culturally perceived the object to be; however, when the sound emitted does not coincide with the culturally determined definition of the object--such as a tenor female voice coming from a conventionally glamorous Hollywood star like Lauren Bacall--the film's meaning becomes complicated by the tensions this aural-visual disjunction produces.

There are two positions from which we can study the function of the female voice within a film. Kaja Silverman's psychoanalytic approach asserts that Hollywood "deposits" the female body into the voice by mixing and training women's voices to imitate certain accents, speech impediments, timbres or 'grains.' She believes that the gender of the body is heavily connected to the gender of the voice:

This vocal corporealization is to be distinguished from that which gives the sounds emitted by Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, or Lauren Bacall their distinctive quality, since in each of these last instances it is a "male" rather than a "female" body which is deposited in the voice. Otherwise stated, the lowness and huskiness of each of these three voices connote masculinity rather than femininity, so that the voice seems to exceed the gender of the body from which it proceeds. That excess confers upon it a privileged status vis-a-vis both language and sexuality.

According to Silverman, basing voice theory on the
culturally determined definitions of the masculine and the feminine, allows certain women's voices, like Bacall's to go beyond the gendered body into a more privileged "male" space. However, the advantages that Silverman suggest really do not exist because the entire woman--voice and body--cannot permanently maintain a dominant linguistic or sexual position in the visual and narrative regimes of mainstream films. Indeed, the very presence of a "feminine" body with a "masculine" voice disrupts the cultural order of the film and, in psychoanalytic theory, causes castration anxiety within the male subject--and more generally, might cause un-pleasure for straight male viewers. In order for the male subject to overcome this threat, he is often positioned as the discursive authority in the diegesis in order to finally subordinate these vocally transgressive female characters/stars.

Mary Ann Doane is one feminist theorist who refutes Silverman's point and warns other feminist theorists against politicizing or theorizing the female voice solely in terms of straight erotics.\textsuperscript{5} Similar to Silverman, some theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Pascal Bonitzer see the female voice as an alternative to the image, as the means by which woman can "make herself heard."\textsuperscript{6} However, we must not forget here that the voice is also a medium through which the patriarchal order uses language to subordinate women. So to designate the voice as an "isolated haven" within the
patriarchy, or having a distinctive feminine quality, is not completely accurate because the female voice can still be considered another part of the woman's body that can be dismembered from the female image to produce straight male pleasure through mixing, training, or dubbing. For the female voice to be manipulated in this technical and controlling way, is to position the woman's voice as another form of "otherness." Doane claims studying the female voice places feminist film theorists in a "doublebind":

on the one hand, there is a danger in grounding a politics on a conceptualization of the body because the body has always been the site of woman's oppression, posited as the final and undeniable guarantee of difference and a lack; but, on the other hand, there is a potential gain as well--it is precisely because the body has been a major site of oppression that perhaps it must be the site of the battle to be waged.

Deploying a political agenda regarding gender differences (whether by feminists or patriarchy)--that is, determining if the female's voice is "masculine" or "feminine"--is rendered problematic by Doane. Using such binary positions to understand the uses of the voice in cinema--and spectators' understandings of it--limits the reading of the film and narrows the range of interpretative possibilities regarding such female stars as Bacall and West, to name a few.

The intention of this paper is to argue that the Hollywood woman with a low, resonant voice can occupy a visually and aurally dominant position in the narrative;
however, she cannot maintain her narrative authority. The male subject uses his discursive authority and his privileged cultural status to regain control of the narrative from the tenor-voiced woman whose very presence is disruptive and jarring to the straight male spectator. Because the culturally determined ideologies of the "masculine" and the "feminine" limit the transgressive nature of the low-pitched female voice in classic cinema, she cannot permanently exceed through her voice into the privileged linguistic, or visual, position Silverman claims she can. Further, the alternative reading Doane offers warns against dismembering the female voice by viewing it fully apart from the body but, at the same time, Doane does not extend her argument into new discursive spaces in which to read the voice of a star like Bacall as not "masculine" but as another kind of feminine, or possibly as "queer." That is, both theorists provide us with ways to read the female voice within straight gender positions, however, they do not explore how disruptive and transgressive a deep female voice can be to the narrative, if only temporarily.

By looking at the two films--To Have and Have Not and The Big Sleep--directed by Howard Hawks, an autuer who likes to play with gender discourses, we can see exactly how far the deep-voiced woman can go in the male world of traditional Hollywood narrative and the consequences she must face for transgressing traditional female roles. These
two films are especially rich in gendered discourse because they are the two films which made Lauren Bacall legendary for her low-pitched voice, especially in comparison to Humphrey Bogart's speech impediment—a lisp—which can suggest something of a "feminine" position. By positing these two vocally interesting film stars against each other, Hawks is able to extend his play with the gendered traditions and conventions of film codes. But, more importantly, these texts are fascinating for studying gendered discourse because Hawks questions the culturally determined gender roles employed in classic cinema by examining who can "pass" into the realm of the opposite sex while maintaining a dominant position in the narrative. In *To Have and Have Not*, for example, the Lauren Bacall character, Marie Browning, is situated in a narrative consisting mostly of men. Her understanding of male codes, in addition to her trained, "male-sounding" voice, allow her to cross over into the privileged male space, but only temporarily, on a "male pass." Like almost all women stars who possess a low-pitched voice (with the possible exception of Mae West), the husky-voiced Browning must be confined to the space on the screen, and ultimately, to a feminized role so she does not totally challenge the patriarchal order both in- and outside the diegesis. In *The Big Sleep*, however, the Humphrey Bogart character, Philip Marlowe, is positioned in a text occupied predominantly by women. In the same way
Bacall’s voice is "masculinized," his lisp somewhat "feminizes" his voice. Beyond this, in The Big Sleep Bogart’s Marlowe impersonates a feminine homosexual in one sequence in an attempt to gain information. Unlike Browning, however, Marlowe cannot cross over into the feminized realm because he does not understand feminine/effeminate codes in the same way Browning understands male codes. Instead, Marlowe must finally pursue a traditional position to obtain the information needed for his investigation—he must maintain discursive authority. Both films--To Have and Have Not and The Big Sleep--do not completely challenge the patriarchal gendered discourses of the mainstream film industry because, eventually, both the female and male characters return to the assigned, gendered narrative spaces expected within dominant culture. The vocally blurred gender positioning of the characters does temporarily disrupt the narrative, however, and provides these films with a subtext which could be read as "queer." However, Browning’s and Marlowe’s inability to permanently transgress culturally determined gender does not provide new queer spaces in which to consider the "masculine" and the "feminine" within straight gender positions.

In To Have and Have Not, Marie Browning is a young runaway who has escaped an abusive past and falls in love with Steve Morgan, an American sea captain living in
Martinique. Vocally and narratively, Marie occupies the "privileged status" Silverman discusses and therefore, she does not fit neatly into the traditional definitions of the "feminine" or "masculine." In one sense, Browning is masculinized because she does maintain a dominant position in her discursive interactions with the male characters--the low-register of Browning’s voice has an empowering quality which enables her to interrupt dialogue and startle her male counterparts so that they listen to what she has to say. She also seems to be allowed to participate in their secret meetings and operations because her voice situates her as "masculine." Besides, her attitude and understanding of male codes places her as "one of the guys." Despite her "male" voice and her cool and distant exterior, she cannot maintain her status; instead, she is ultimately contained and relegated to occupying traditional feminine spaces in the narrative--singer, nurse, "tramp"--and from producing erotic pleasure for the straight male spectator. Therefore, we cannot commit to the argument that Browning is a totally transgressive female character, vocally, visually, or narratively, because she is made to adhere to the limited parameters established by cultural ideologies in To Have and Have Not. There are moments in the film, however, that are worth examining as vocally and narratively important because Browning suggests that there could be new queer spaces within straight narratives in which gender roles are not so
neatly categorized.

To begin, Browning is first seen coming out of her hotel room situated across the hall from Morgan's. As he enters his room, we hear her deep voice introduce herself for the first time, "Anyone gotta match?" The camera pans to the doorway to look for the source of the sound. Once discovered, Steve (and the spectator) is surprised to see an attractive woman who is cool, composed and unimpressed. Her female body does not represent the gender of her deep voice; but at the same time, we recognize that her untraditional voice does match her image because of her strong presence.

In her next scene, Marie surprises her audience in the narrative and in the theater when she sings at the hotel bar. Her tenor voice visibly astounds Cricket, the piano player, just as it shocked Morgan a few scenes earlier. But what makes this deep voice believable and not comic is her visual image. Browning is presented with "masculine" characteristics--quiet, cool and distant. Her masculinity is not in her features or the way she is dressed, but in her actions: she does not knock on the door to ask for a match, she intrudes; Morgan throws a book of matches at her, she catches them with one hand then throws them back. This interaction represents how Browning plays with the gendered regime of the narrative: just as easily as she caught the book of matches, she can take the discursive authority and assume a "masculine" position, and when she no longer wishes
to occupy that space, she subordinates herself to Morgan because the dominant position "rightfully" belongs to him just like that book of matches. In other words, Browning’s image can be read as "masculine"—masculine, that is, to the point at which she decides to subordinate herself to feminine positions later in the film.

Culture depends on the definitions it imposes on objects through the use of language such as what is "masculine", what is "feminine." It is because of these culturally constructed limitations that Browning’s "masculinity" disrupts the film’s narrative. Christian Metz claims that "ideologically, the aural source is an object, the sound itself a 'characteristic.' Like any characteristic, it is linked to the object, and that is why identification of the latter suffices to evoke the sound, whereas the inverse is not true." In other words, Metz would argue that because sounds are classified according to the objects which transmit them rather than by their characteristics, Browning’s low-pitch would not necessarily distinguish her, the object, as "masculine", but as "feminine" because her body—the source of the sound—is distinctly female. But, for many people, because her body clearly defines her as female, Browning’s voice should take on the "corresponding" (stereo)typical aural characteristics; however, her image and voice depict "male" features, and thus sets up many audience expectations for
Browning to possibly transgress traditional female roles. But in doing this, do we necessarily need to read her as "masculine"? She may just represent a different kind of "feminine." Seeing Browning as a different kind of feminine, however, does not necessarily give her access to narrative power.

In the film, Browning's voice and image do seem to grant her access to the "male world," but there is some question about whether this confers male privilege upon her. She can participate in the male discourse of the film because the male characters view her as "one of them," which might indicate an element of the homoerotic. 15 In opposition to Metz's point, after Marie speaks, the male characters do see a common vocal feature within her and define her within the masculine. When the Martinique loyalists come to inquire about hiring Morgan's services, for example, they ask "what about the girl?" he replies, "It's okay to talk in front of her. Isn't it, Slim?" Steve assumes that because Browning's voice is "masculine" and she has a distant and cool exterior—not the typical crying, nagging, gossiping female of adventure films—she is "okay." Morgan asks the question so that she can speak and prove to the other men that she is trustworthy. Nevertheless, in this instance, Browning still needs the "okay" of a "real" man to participate in, or overhear, the discussion—she is admitted into the "club" upon the recommendation of Morgan.
Marie's uncommon participation in the patriarchal order does not go unpunished, however. When the hotel owner, Frenchie, Morgan and Browning are called into police headquarters for questioning, the inspector and his men are toughest on her because her deep voice could potentially upset their power. The inspector interrogates the two men and then Browning:

Inspector: Why did you get off here?
Browning: To buy a new hat.
Inspector: Why?
Browning: To buy a new (Browning slapped by French officer) hat. Read the label (throws hat on the desk)—maybe you will believe me then.
Inspector: I never doubted you, Mademoiselle. It was only your tone that was objectionable. I'll ask you again: why did you get off here?
Browning: (changes tone) Because I didn't have money enough to go any further.
Inspector: That's better.

Marie's tone here is objectionable because it is threatening to the male hierarchal order, and thus punishable. In a small circle of men, she can be trusted and somewhat assimilated as "one of the guys." In a situation like the above interrogation, however, Browning cannot be accepted as "honest" because she does not occupy traditional female vocal roles. The French authorities show her with physical abuse that if she wants to sound like a man, she will be
treated like one. To protect herself from further physical pain, Browning softens her voice and subordinates herself to assure the inspector that he has the vocal and narrative power in the scene. So, in some ways, Marie is not believably feminine nor masculine; her aloof image and deep voice are not easily understood by all the men in the film. Instead, we can say she occupies a new feminine space for women in noir—a place in which she can have both female and male qualities but with the ability to return to the "safety" of the more familiar and traditional feminine space within the narrative when necessary.

Despite her return to the feminine space, Browning’s position allows her to gain—at least temporarily—the discursive authority from the male subject more easily than the other more traditionally feminine sounding female characters. After the police questioning, she and Morgan stop to get a drink. Steve remembers the police confiscated his passport and wallet so they cannot order. Thirsty, Marie asks for permission to seek out another gentleman to buy her a drink; once the man is found, Morgan returns home and allows her to continue her flirtatious behavior. When she returns with a bottle of liquor, Steve is bothered and remote because of the power she derives from her sexuality. Ironically, it is this power that allows Marie to occupy the dominant discursive position and compare herself to men:

Browning: Would you rather I wouldn’t?
Morgan: Wouldn't what?

Browning: Do things like that.

Morgan: Why ask me?

Browning: I'd like to know.

Morgan: Well, of all the screwy thing...

Browning: (interrupting Morgan) All right. All right. I won't do it anymore.

Morgan: Look, I didn't ask you...

Browning: (interrupting Morgan) I know you didn't. Don't worry. I'm not giving up anything I care about. It's like shooting fish in a barrel anyway--men like that. They are all a bunch of... I'm a fine one to talk. The pot calling the kettle...

In moments like these, Browning's position is marked as neither strictly feminine nor masculine--she defines her own position. Marie does not allow Morgan to gain the discursive authority in this conversation as she decides for herself what she wants--him. She takes what some feminist theorists have called a "transvestite" position by staking a possessive claim on him similar to a customary scenario in which the male subject marks the woman as his\textsuperscript{16}. She does not assert herself as completely masculine in this scene, however; she acts as if she is giving up her flirtatious behavior for Morgan because it makes him angry, which is a passive-aggressive attempt at gaining control usually associated with women.

Further incongruities of Marie's femininity or masculinity occur here when she compares herself to other
men. Because Browning herself sees her sexuality as possessing a certain quality of male-ness, she hesitates before she insults the type of man she teases, "the pot calling the kettle." Like the men she seduces, Marie falls prey to the advances of "masculine" charms,17 and in some ways, consciously subordinates herself to the traditional feminine narrative space. I say consciously here because Marie does blur the distinction between what is, vocally and sexually, masculine or feminine by occupying space in both realms and therefore, from this experience, she possesses the knowledge of both gendered discourses and general gender expectations when she falls in love with the male subject. Her visual image in this scene depicts a strong, unrepressed sexuality not normally seen in women on film, which strengthens her own comparison between herself and men sexually.

But as hinted earlier, this complication between masculine and feminine position in To Have and Have Not can also be read as Hawks' deliberate attempt to create a homosexual subtext for the film. By associating Browning with male sexuality, her seduction of Morgan implies a queer reading. As noted earlier, when men consider Marie as "one of them" vocally, yet find her attractive as a woman, they might be seen as transgressing straight male codes and entering into a homosexual position. This "homosexuality" is the disruptive force in the main narrative because the
straight male viewer unconsciously desires Browning, not solely for her femininity, but also for her "masculine" voice and image. Browning threatens more than the initial castration anxiety but also questions the sexuality of the straight male, and therefore she must be subjugated to her non-threatening "feminine" woman space within the diegesis.

In *The Big Sleep*, however, Hawks does not allow the Bacall character, Mrs. Vivian Rutledge, to have the same amount of narrative freedom as Marie Browning. Because Vivian is one of many women characters in *The Big Sleep*, her voice and visual image are not as disruptive as Browning's, who is the only major woman character in *To Have and Have Not*. Vivian's voice and visual image here do not maintain her character in a privileged status in the male world. All of the female characters in *The Big Sleep* initially challenge Bogart's Marlowe vocally; however, the discursive authority is finally held by him. This inconsistency between Bacall's two films indicates that even a deep, resonant female voice, unfortunately, is not necessarily the vehicle through which women "can make [themselves] heard" in traditional cinema.

*The Big Sleep* establishes Philip Marlowe as the authority who has the privilege of defining the narrative and commanding an active role in the discourses that defines him and his female counterpart(s). The narrative largely unfolds through his eyes and his dialogue. Philip Marlowe
is the smooth-talking private detective hired to solve a blackmailing scheme for the Sternwood family. In his pursuit, the women he encounters aid, hinder, and confuse his investigation; yet, he does not lose his central authority. Each woman represents a means to an end for Marlowe and his narrative. Each is narratively positioned as secondary to Marlowe’s needs and, as a result, they provide him with the assistance he requires. These women are the bookstore clerk, Vivian Rutledge, and Agnes.

At the beginning of his investigation, Marlowe tries to obtain information from the clerk at a bookstore across the street from Geiger’s Antique shop (Geiger is the man blackmailing the Sternwoods). The woman clerk initiates the dialogue between her and Marlowe with an assured tone:

Clerk: Is there anything I can do for you?
Marlowe: Could you do me a very small favor?
Clerk: I don’t know. It depends... on the favor.

At the beginning of the dialogue, the bookstore clerk does not give into Marlowe’s male authority. She uses her voice and language to define herself as confident, competent, and intelligent. Marlowe goes on to question her about Geiger and her knowledge of rare books. Throughout his interrogation, the bookstore clerk remains assured.

It is not until Marlowe compares her to Agnes, the unhelpful and unknowledgeable clerk at Geiger’s, that she is moved into the traditional, feminine, verbal position.
Marlowe informs her that "the girl in Geiger’s didn’t know that," about a particular first edition. Her movement to the passive, more "feminine" position comes when she replies, "Oh, I see. You begin to interest me, vaguely."

From this comparison, Marlowe manipulates the bookstore clerk with his verbal charms. Wisely, understanding her intelligence from what she says, Marlowe simultaneously compliments her on her knowledge and rates her in comparison to other women. Soon the bookstore clerk surrenders her position as a confident, competent woman over to Marlowe and to assisting his narrative subjecthood. She provides him with the information he needs and a warm, dry place in which to hold his stakeout. In short, the bookstore clerk ultimately allows Marlowe to define her and transform her into a culturally attractive, vocally-subservient woman—finally without her reading glasses, her hair unpinned, and her voice modulated to a whisper and a few words.

Another more narratively central woman, who succumbs to Marlowe’s manipulative charms and his discursive authority, is Mrs. Vivian Rutledge. She initially challenges Marlowe’s position as the discursive authority by her mysterious participation in the case and her social position. 18

Mrs. Rutledge also uses this "inside" narrative advantage to challenge Marlowe’s access to the patriarchal authority represented by her father: General Sternwood. After his first meeting with the General, Marlowe must go
through Vivian in order to gain access to him. Vivian separates Marlowe from the General because she needs to find some way to have control of the discourse--and of Marlowe. Judith Mayne believes that Vivian and other women in the film are first used to divert Marlowe's attention; each of these women try to disrupt his position as the controlling, active subject before they succumb to his charms:

Woman becomes an object of spectacle in *The Big Sleep* to complicate but ultimately to facilitate the private detective's access to the various sites signifying patriarchal authority....Woman represents a difficulty of access, a diversion, an obstacle, before she is contained within the conventions of Hollywood romance.19

Vivian allows Marlowe to get close to the General by permitting him passage to her bedroom or the hallway or even herself. She becomes an "adjacent room" to the patriarchy, like the bedroom or the hallway. She is a secondary room, one that stands close to the main room, but never acquires the central position. That is, in films like *The Big Sleep*, woman is like a room you must go through to get to the space of patriarchal authority--it is a position which can potentially thwart certain patriarchal activities, but one which finally reinforces them.

By masking her involvement in the Geiger/Brody plot and the disappearance of Shaun Regan, as well as limiting access to her father, Vivian threatens to divert Marlowe's narrative. Her participation in these plots problematizes Marlowe's narrative and threatens his position as the male
subject because he cannot identify her as innocent or guilty. During his briefing with General Sternwood, Marlowe questions him on Vivian's involvement in the matter, "your other daughter, Mrs. Rutledge, is she mixed up in this?"

Marlowe's inquiry foreshadows Vivian initial position as the film noir femme fatale whose gendered placement in his narrative is difficult to define, and therefore threatening.

Marlowe first meets Vivian Rutledge in her bedroom. She has asked to see him so she can find out exactly why he was hired. The scene opens with a shot containing the bed in the background, Vivian at the bar cart, and Marlowe entering the room saying, "You wanted to see me?" The shot then cuts to Vivian's image without a voice. Her silent hesitation emphasizes her role in the narrative as enigmatic spectacle. Silverman writes that "to permit the female subject to be seen without being heard would be to activate the hermeneutic and cultural codes which define women as a 'dark continent,' inaccessible to definitive male interpretation." Because Marlowe finds Vivian "inaccessible" to an explicit definition or placement in his narrative, the audience also perceives her as mysterious. But her silence can also be seen as a rejection of Marlowe's linguistic power as the male character by hesitating silently, she refocuses the center of attention in the narrative towards her, and temporarily establishes herself as the discursive authority.
Like the bookstore clerk, Vivian enters her verbal interaction with Marlowe confidently. But perhaps it is as much her upper class status\textsuperscript{22} as her "masculinized" vocal qualities which allows her to step into the male role of defining Marlowe through her dialogue, tone, and gaze:

Vivian: So you’re a private detective. I didn’t know they existed except in books, or they were greasy, little men snooping around hotel corridors. My you’re a mess, aren’t you?

Marlowe: I’m not very tall either. Next time I’ll come on stilts, wear a white tie, and carry a tennis racket.

Vivian: I doubt if even that would help. Now, this business of Dad’s, think you can handle it for him?

Vivian speaks down to Marlowe when she is in control of the discourse. She uses her "high class" linguistic power to subjugate Marlowe as a low status character and to reinforce the potency of her social position. In short, Vivian constructs Marlowe as the object, but, as noted earlier, via class here more than any vocal gender transgressiveness. Mrs. Rutledge, however, cannot maintain her dominant position in the dialogue as the scene goes on because she cannot overcome the gendered cultural conventions of verbal and narrative film coding that privileges Marlowe’s masculinity as the center of narrative agency. The disintegration of Vivian’s verbal power begins as she becomes more frustrated with Marlowe’s indirect responses to her inquiries:
Vivian: ...I don't see what there is to be cagey about, Mr. Marlowe, and, I don't like your manners!

Marlowe: Well I'm not crazy about yours. I didn't ask to see you. I don't mind if you don't like my manners. I don't like them myself. They're pretty bad; I grieve over them on long winter evenings. And I don't mind you ritzing me, or drinking your lunch out of a bottle, but don't waste your time cross-examining me.

Vivian: People don't talk to me like that!

Marlowe: Ohhh.

People don't talk to Vivian like that because she usually establishes and maintains the discursive authority. With Marlowe, however, two things, in addition to the gender norms of patriarchal society, are working against her ability to successfully construct Marlowe in a passive, more silent space: 1) Marlowe's suspicions of her probing questions and odd behavior, and 2) Vivian's entrapment in the "Hollywood Romance"—meaning, that Vivian is contained in a conventional Hollywood narrative that situates men and women in love. We know from reading similar romantic film codes that the man will "fall" for a woman in the narrative, and since Marlowe indicates his indifference towards Carmen, Vivian's sister, the scene earlier, the audience can assume that Vivian will be Marlowe's romantic partner in the film. Therefore, Mrs. Rutledge quickly falls into the traditional female role of the passive receiver as she gets angry and verbally "loses control" of the scene. Although her
attempts at controlling the discourse are valiant, she ultimately fails and reinforces Marlowe's masculine discursive authority.

Agnes, Geiger's secretary, is another woman who threatens the male's dominant discursive authority, but one who also ultimately reinforces it. When Agnes and Marlowe first meet, he tries to connect with her by assuming an effeminate vocal and visual role. Marlowe chooses this particular guise once he discovers that Geiger's store is an antique shop specializing in rare books with an "Oriental" decor. To Marlowe and a 1940s audience, the subtext of this scene, which originates from the stereotypical assumption that antique shops are owned and frequented by gay men, suggests that Geiger is probably gay, and the clerk inside will either be a homosexual or a woman. Marlowe believes his disguise will guarantee temporary access to the world of feminine gayness in order to obtain the information he needs. Therefore, he uses the same principles used by women who gain admission into the patriarchal order, Marlowe tries to be like the desired group—he tries to be one of the "boys." By crossing over, Marlowe tries to gain admittance into an unknown and forbidden realm for straight males; however, he sees his crossing over as humorous. Marlowe laughs as he prepares his transformation into one of "them" because he is taking on "feminine"-coded vocal and visual characteristics which make him look "queer," and, therefore,
to straight male culture, silly.

But Marlowe's attempt to manipulate Agnes by using the "feminine" fails. Instead, she places him in the subordinate figure because of his perceived effeminate/feminine homosexuality, and establishes her straight linguistic dominance. So, the incongruity of the "feminine" voice in a masculine body places the person in a less powerful position than either the "masculine"-voiced woman or the feminine-voiced woman in dominant culture. During this encounter, she moves with confidence from behind the desk, stands directly in front of him and says in her refined, uptown voice, "Can I be of any assistance?"

Marlowe tests her knowledge of rare books and realizes that Agnes is a fraud. But Agnes, unlike Vivian, does not allow her discursive power to collapse as Marlowe challenges her position:

Marlowe: (with a pronounced lisp) You do sell books, hmmm?

Agnes: What do those look like, grapefruit?

Marlowe: From here they look like books. Maybe I should see Mr. Geiger.

Agnes: He's not in just now.

Marlowe: That's a pity I...

Agnes: (interrupts Marlowe) I said, Mr. Geiger is not in.

Marlowe: I heard you. You needn't yell at me.

But Agnes maintains the dominant position in the discourse as Vivian does for a time, by blockading access to
a patriarchal figure--Geiger. Agnes acts as a filter who sifts through Geiger’s visitors and clientele. Just as Marlowe asks to see Geiger, another man walks into the shop and gains entrance to Geiger’s office. Agnes allows this man to enter the office because he does not pose a threat to her power.

As Marlowe presents a threat to her narrative agency, Agnes reinforces her dominant verbal position through tone, volume, and word choice. The tone of her voice changes from the refined, uptown lady to that of a working class woman from Brooklyn while the volume of her voice increases in order to maintain her dominant position. Furthermore, Agnes corrects Marlowe’s mispronunciation of "Argentine Ceramics," by informing him that "they [ceramics] ain’t Argentine, they’re Egyptian." By using the word "ain’t," Agnes shows that she is a class impostor. So in face of Marlowe’s perceived homosexuality, which is even lower on dominant cultures’ hierarchy than that of a "real" woman, Agnes can only lose her discursive authority on some basis other than gender. So whereas Agnes’ accent does not threaten her position in regards to the "gay" Marlowe, it does expose her "true class self." However, for the moment, Marlowe must leave Geiger’s frustrated because in the role of a feminine gay man he cannot gain the discursive authority which is "rightfully" his in order to confirm that Geiger’s operation is corrupt.
Agnes is the only woman who plays the "male game" with any degree of success in The Big Sleep. Only by situating Agnes as the traditional *noir* femme fatale/"bad guy," however, can Hawks allow this one woman in the film to transgress cultural female codes and thus provide her with more narrative freedom in her discursive positioning. Like Marlowe, Agnes consciously constructs herself discursively as a fraud or an impostor to gain authority, she challenges the traditional male subject by asserting that she possesses the ability to gain verbal subjecthood in her interactions with the male characters. The false female subject she creates from her discourse takes on the authority of upper-class and male positions. She is unable to maintain her position as a speaking subject throughout the film, however. Her aural position is not completely transgressive because she ultimately has to suffer the fate of all female "bad guys" and be confined, undermined, devalued or replaced into traditional feminine position by the narrative. But before she suffers this fate, Agnes fraudulently poses herself before Marlowe one last time. She believes the symbolic order established earlier between Marlowe and her privileges her narratively—particularly as he is taken on the role of feminine gay man. Marlowe recognizes, however, that they both want the same thing: money for information. He points out this similarity to Agnes after she refuses to reveal any information about Geiger or the case: "Drop the veil,
sister, I'm in the business myself." Because they are both "in the business," Agnes and Marlowe are equally aware of the established codes and thus, suggests a bond beyond gender, or perhaps between femininity/masculinity, contained within a "professional" discourse.

But Agnes refuses to reveal any information that is necessary for Marlowe's investigation because it would be detrimental to her position in the narrative. If Marlowe gained the discursive authority in their verbal interactions, Agnes would be an object in the narrative and subject to Marlowe's (and the straight male audiences') uses. Agnes, more than even the Bacall character Vivian, does not fit into the traditional female role defined by a male center. She can maintain the linguistic dominance in her interactions with Marlowe because she is not confined by her attraction to him, and because she is a secondary character, marked as "not nice" or "bad girl" by the narrative; so therefore, she is allowed to do what she does. We are trained by the classic conventions and codes of the mainstream detective film to recognize that Agnes does represent the "bad guy"/femme fatale, and therefore, we view/read her character as a manipulator and a barrier to what Marlowe needs: Geiger and Eddie Mars' wife. Her position as his equal is hard for Marlowe to accept because patriarchal society does not allow women to sufficiently define themselves through their own discourse. Agnes uses
her status as transgressive (class, gender) woman to obtain the assistance she needs, i.e., from Harry Jones:

Agnes: What happened to Harry?

Marlowe: There’s no use going into that. You don’t really care anyway. Just put it down your little man deserves something better.

Her behavior is unacceptable to Marlowe because she has broken the boundaries of what it means to be the female object. Agnes steps outside the "safe places within the story" and uses the men as props to aid her. But like all female "bad guys," she does not prevail. Agnes is the real femme fatale of this noir--not Vivian--who was an earlier candidate along with her sister, Carmen.

So even Agnes is defeated by the male discursive authority of Marlowe and ultimately loses her dominant position. Marlowe’s unwillingness to accept a woman as his discursive equal places her as a subordinate character by questioning the one thing that brings a girl down: her reputation. As in Duel In the Sun, once a woman’s respectability is questioned, she is destined to ruin.

Marlowe regains his discursive authority from Agnes with a cheap shot that immediately places her in a subordinate position or a secondary role for most viewers:

Agnes: Well, so long copper. Wish me luck. I gotta raw deal.

Marlowe: Yeah. Your kind always does.

Although Agnes is successful in her pursuit of train
fare from L.A., she is narratively defeated. Her defeat represents the old double standard that it is acceptable for the male subject verbally and physically to manipulate women and place them in passive positions, but it is intolerable when a woman is verbally forceful or aggressive. Any attempts at female verbal subjectivity are thwarted by the cultural codes of patriarchal society and punishable with "raw deals."

Patriarchal cultural codes embedded in traditional narratives allow Philip Marlowe to subjugate his female counterparts and define their places in his narrative. Through the discourse, each woman, the bookstore clerk, Vivian, and Agnes, function as the objects of the narrative. Each woman begins her relationship with Marlowe verbally aggressive; however, at some point in the film she resumes her position as the silent, passive, objectified feminine space of the discourse. The bookstore clerk loses her assertiveness when Marlowe plays on her attraction to him. Similarly, Vivian no longer remains cool and collected because she falls in love with Marlowe and her involvement in the case is resolved. And finally, Agnes returns to the position of objectified female when Marlowe punishes her for playing the male role as the discursive authority and defines her position as a manipulating, conniving woman.

In both films, To Have and Have Not and The Big Sleep, Director Howard Hawks experiments with voice, gender and
discursive authority. By blurring the masculine and feminine characteristics as they are commonly understood in classic cinema, he tries to produce subtexts revolving around "masculine" women and homosexuality, which expose the straight male spectator's unconscious desires. In the main narratives, however, he explores straight gendered discursive authority and what constitutes "privileged" status and secondary positions, examining who can hold these positions and why. In To Have and Have Not, although Browning's vocally and visually transgressive attempts to disrupt male discursive authority are striking, she is finally relegated to a secondary, traditionally feminine position because her very presence represents her anatomical lack. Her subordinate role maintains the culturally determined dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine and reinforces the dominant male position we also see in The Big Sleep. Finally, we also learn that the low, resonant voice of the two characters played by Bacall does not privilege either of her characters over other more "feminine"-voiced women who also temporarily maintain their authority in the diegesis. But perhaps if we read more fully the homosexual subtexts of the two films, in conjunction with the women characters' attempts to gain discursive authority, we might develop a theory of how to permanently transgress the gender of the body in narrative films to create a "new" space that blur and deconstruct
gender lines. These two films, when viewed closely, suggest that there could be a new queer space between straight masculine and feminine poles. But, most often, and most obviously, *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep* uphold the vocal and visual traditions contained in mainstream adventure films. For most spectators—and theorists—to view *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep* in any other way would be too disruptive to the straight (male) spectator, who like the male character on the screen, still hold the dominant position.
Notes


2. Desire here is defined as the space between the real and imaginary. The film resides in the gap of desire because it acts as the imaginary signifier.


9. For the purposes of this paper, I use the phrase new queer spaces as defined by Alexander Doty in his book Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture, (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1993). He writes that "new queer spaces open up (or are revealed) whenever someone moves away from using only one specific sexual identity category--gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight--to understand and describe mass culture, and recognizes that texts and people's responses to them are more sexually transmutable than any one category could signify..." (xviii-xix).


12. Before Hawks would allow Bacall to do a screen test for his films, she had to train her voice to have a lower, more resonant pitch. For a year, she drove out to the country to practice her vocal exercises and strengthen her voice.

13. In addition to the vocal characteristics, it is also interesting to examine how Bogart and Bacall's off-screen relationship influenced their work together. Bacall has
cited in her two autobiographies, *By Myself* (New York: Knopf, 1978) and *Now* (New York: Knopf, 1994), that Bogart offered insightful advice as she prepared and studied for her characters.


15. If the male characters see Browning as "one of the guys" vocally (and to some extent narratively) yet find her attractive as a woman, they are in essence transgressing into a queer zone, where what constitutes the masculine and the feminine becomes blurred.

16. We see this with Browning and Johnson a few scenes earlier. When she and Morgan go to return Johnson's wallet he says to Morgan, "You're a fine one, running off with my girl." Like the wallet she gives him, Johnson marks Browning as his own.

17. Here again Browning is associated with "male" sexuality. Her seduction of particular men implies a subtext that can be read as queer.

18. In *The Big Sleep*, Philip Marlowe is hired by General Sternwood to solve a blackmailing operation involving his younger daughter, Carmen. Through the course of the investigation, Marlowe begins to uncover another mystery including the General's older daughter, Mrs. Vivian Rutledge, and his friend, Shaun Regan. Marlowe begins to fall in love with Vivian as the case proceeds, however, he cannot fully trust her until he understands her participation in the plot. Once he discovers that Shaun Regan is dead and that he was murdered by Carmen, he can concentrate on his relationship with Vivian. But to do this, he must protect the Sternwoods so he makes the Regan murder look like Eddie Mars, the gambler, killed Regan for running away with his wife. Marlowe demands that Carmen be sent to a drug rehabilitation center to be treated for her opium habit.


20. Silverman's use of the "dark continent" metaphor is a good example of white, middle class feminists overlooking the racial Other. Historically, the phrase "dark continent" referred to Africa. It represents difference, exoticism, mystery, danger and inferiority to white mainstream culture. Vivian can be seen as different from Marlowe or man, mysterious, dangerous and "inaccessible to a definitive male
[Marlowe] interpretation" but the metaphor does not take into account the two-fold meaning when applied to a black female "subject."


22. The detective story in classical cinema usually contained a working class private detective hired by an upper class figure to investigate a case involving an attractive, upper class woman. The Big Sleep fits this formula. The class distinction between Vivian and Marlowe allows her to assume the discursive authority and define his status.

23. Mayne 27.

Works Consulted

The Search for Identity in Michelle Cliff’s Abeng


---. "If I Could Write This in Fire, I Would Write This in Fire." Holeton, Encountering Cultures 405-19.

---. "A Journey into Speech." Holeton, Encountering Cultures 12-16.


Crossing Gender Lines: The Female Voice and Discursive Authority in To Have and Have Not and The Big Sleep


Doane, Mary Ann. "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing." Weiss and Belton 54-62.

---. "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space." Weiss and Belton 162-76.


Biography

Stephanie F. Brown was born in Wellsville, New York, on November 5, 1970, to Thomas E. and Jacqueline A. Brown. Ms. Brown attended Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, where in 1992 she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communications with minors in English, Philosophy, and Management. In the fall of 1994, Stephanie team-taught Composition and Literature at Lehigh University. Also at Lehigh, Ms. Brown acted as Dr. Robert Harson’s teaching assistant in the spring of 1994. Currently, she is employed at the Philip Rauch Center for Business Communications at Lehigh University where she is the Publicity Coordinator and a Business Writing Associate. Ms. Brown will receive her Master of Arts in English from Lehigh University in May 1995.
END
OF
TITLE