

TREASURE AND TROUBLE: THE ROLE OF GENDER IN THE  
RECEPTION OF NEW ARCHIVAL SOURCES

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I was not yet a biographer when I first discovered that Edward Hopper's wife, Jo, had kept diaries.<sup>1</sup> What eventually led me to realize that there was a story to be told about these lives was my discovery of the totally unknown and unsuspected cache of tattered little notebooks in a private collection, where they had narrowly escaped destruction. The diaries had fallen into the hands of an elderly friend of Jo's, who, if she paid them any attention at all, did nothing with them. After the friend's death, they passed to her children who inherited her house with its contents. A construction worker, assigned to clean out the basement, found them jammed into a metal breadbox and inferred that these old handwritten notebooks might be worth holding back from the trash.

The diaries came to my attention as an expert on Edward Hopper's art, not as a biographer. Yet I had long been searching for details about Hopper's intellectual and emotional life that would enable me to interpret his art from a broader cultural and social context. Having studied all the extant interviews with Hopper, I had long been frustrated by the obvious questions that had not been asked. The terseness of Hopper's letters was another source of frustration. The diaries, by contrast, spoke volumes; and, as I began reading and checking their details, I found them reliable. They provided a wealth of information about how Edward painted and about his personal life, and this made it seem both feasible and necessary to write a biography. What I could not imagine was that their centrality to the project would elicit such a wide diversity of response from readers.

That diversity of response has prompted this review of the role the diaries played both in my approach to the biography and in its reception. I have looked again at how I evaluated and established their credibility, at my reasons for giving Jo (her art and her words) such prominence, but only as a preface to asking why the diaries attracted so much attention, why they created so much controversy, why Jo's testimony was resented, and above all what kind of biography of Hopper could be written by an author who chose to ignore or discredit the diaries. I will discuss these issues here without reference to particular reviewers, as it is not my intention to review my critics, even those whom I am certain never read beyond the book's introduction.

The quantity of attention my book received could hardly cause complaint, but I was surprised that the diaries provoked such intense reactions in readers.

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Some agreed with me and found them a fascinating view of a turbulent and intensely close marriage that often inspired autobiographical art, while others attacked me as if I had written the diaries myself. A scholar writing for a major newspaper claimed that I had favored Jo because of the close friendship that we formed while I was researching the book. Yet of course I never met her; she died while I was still an undergraduate. Another scholar accused me of inventing the diaries, claiming that since they remain in a private collection, they are unverifiable. I regret that these fragile documents are not yet accessible to the public. I have been trying to raise money to publish a complete edition of all sixty-three volumes. However, while I am grateful to have had the first opportunity to study them, I do not control their fate.

By the time that I first came upon the diaries, I had already paid some attention to Hopper's wife and her art. I wrote the only article about her work ever to appear in a journal, spurred by the rise of feminist scholarship during the late 1970s, just after I received my doctorate in art history. I was then curator of the Hopper Collection at the Whitney Museum of American Art, charged with producing the catalogue raisonné (definitive reference on the complete body of work) of one of America's greatest artists.<sup>2</sup> Focused on the work of a great man, I thought I should rescue his wife's art from obscurity as my small contribution to the history of women artists. My article appeared in the first issue of *Women's Art Journal* in the spring of 1980, without causing any particular fanfare or fallout.<sup>3</sup> Only recently, in a book called *The Power of Feminist Art*, has this article received any notice.<sup>4</sup>

That the emotionally-charged content of Jo Hopper's diaries inevitably prompted readers to bring their own experiences to bear in reading now in retrospect seems clear. Since so much of her anger was gender-specific, one's own history with gender issues and relationships cannot help but affect how one evaluates what she wrote. There is no question that women who have suffered discrimination because of their gender find Jo's claims convincing. At the same time, men who resent the personal and societal demands that women have been making in the last thirty years find her complaints "tedious," unreasonable, and excessive. In effect, these diaries have become a litmus test of attitudes toward gender relations and the changing role of women in late twentieth-century America.

In my own experience, that of an American woman born during the post-war baby boom, Jo's words rang true. Although reviewers who rejected Jo's attitudes labeled me a "strident feminist," those who sympathized with her plight noted that I was not one, using the identical phrase. My "feminism" was clearly a matter of the reader's perspective. In retrospect, before writing this book and reading its reviews, I must admit that I was not a very conscious feminist.

As I gradually digested the diaries and realized that I would have to deal with Jo's anger in the biography, I sought to join a group of women biographers

writing about women, but was informed that I was ineligible because I was writing a book about a man. These women correctly viewed me as a woman who had focused most of her career on male artists. In fact, I would have to say that for most of my career, I was "male-identified." Perhaps I still heard the stinging rebuke that Professor Seymour Slive hurled at me in 1968, when I went to Harvard for an interview while applying for admission to the doctoral program in art history: "Why should we take you? You'll just get married and drop out like all the other young girls." He merely seconded my father's pronouncement that higher education was wasted on women.

Not that I judged the diaries solely by my own experience. Having devoted years to studying Edward Hopper's art and career, I was quite familiar with Jo's handwriting and syntax by the time I came upon the diaries. In my role as the first curator of the Hopper Collection, I had systematically assembled an archive, containing copies not only of *all* the letters written by either Edward or Jo known to be extant, but also copies of their friends' letters to them and to others, whenever the Hoppers are discussed. I had also been collecting exhaustive documentation (the provenance of art works, information about his materials and working process, published and unpublished interviews, diary entries by their friends, as well as exhibition catalogues, reviews, and articles) and photographs of everything he had ever made. I had even searched for the exact sites he had painted and had photographed them.<sup>5</sup> In the process, I had become curious about Jo, her own art work, and her role in modeling for her husband's paintings.

Unfortunately for history, most of Jo's work was destroyed by the Whitney Museum, which without warning received both his and her artistic estates in her bequest of 1968.<sup>6</sup> In the biography's introduction, which I titled "Truth and Pain," I chose to feature this dramatic story, along with my discovery of the diaries, a summary of their content, and a discussion of their veracity.<sup>7</sup> With hindsight, I must admit that since this was my first biography, I failed to understand how many reviewers either never read beyond a book's introduction or form their final judgments based on a brief first impression. Nor did I realize how many men are angry at women such as Jo, who fiercely resist sexism and continue to demand equality. I was even more astonished at how many women feel (either expressly or unconsciously) that since they or their mothers had to accept the role traditionally assigned to women, other women deserve no better.

Although I neither anticipated the depth of Jo's feelings nor the extent of Edward's cruelties, nothing about the content of her diaries seemed inconsistent with what I had already observed from reading their letters and studying his pictures. Much of the incredible wealth of detail that she recorded about her husband's work and career, about the art world, its events, institutions, and personalities, could be corroborated from other sources; her diaries appeared to be extraordinarily accurate. I know of no one who recorded a more complete account

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of the American art world in these years.

Yet creating such a chronicle was probably not Jo's primary objective in keeping her diaries. One study of women's diaries as a genre asked why women keep diaries and concluded: "Dissatisfaction with the way love and work have been defined for the female is the unconscious impulse that prompts many to pour out their feelings on paper and to acquire the habit of personal accounting on some more or less regular basis."<sup>8</sup> Although Jo's diaries were not among the several hundred that the authors of this study considered, their conclusion seems remarkably apt in characterizing her motives. The authors describe the diary form as "an important emotional outlet for women," noting that "Confusion about the conflicting demands of love and work in relationship to the authentic self leads to loneliness, by far the most common emotion expressed in diaries; loneliness stemming either from physical isolation for normal outlets for discourse. . . or from psychological alienation from one's milieu. . ."<sup>9</sup>

Jo suffered physical isolation both while living on Cape Cod when her husband would not permit her to drive their car, and also while she traveled long distances by car with her unusually taciturn spouse, who declined to talk with her. She told an interviewer: "Sometimes talking with Eddie is just like dropping a stone in a well except that it doesn't thump when it hits bottom."<sup>10</sup> Her psychological alienation was far more profound; she struggled to remain an artist in the face of contempt she regularly received from her husband and resentment she encountered from other women who resented her status as the wife of a famous male artist. And while Jo often turned to her diary when she was unhappy, she also wrote much that was positive, including thoughts about her husband, such as: "he is the last word of perfection—with his patience, understanding, delightful humor, sheer goodness, good looks—really handsome & distinguished & was, before got to stooping full 6'4"+, as I measured him when we were married & rejoiced in this magnificent height. . . & E. [Edward] reminds me, he doesn't drink or chase the floozies."<sup>11</sup>

Judgments of Jo's diaries, it seems, are not just based on whether she got her facts right or whether her grievances against her husband were truthful from her point of view, but on whether the reader agrees with her attitudes. Based on both my own experience and my awareness of sexist behavior, the kinds of prejudices with which she had to cope seemed all too believable. But more than that, I knew that the diaries detailed some of the same events and emotions that Jo described in her letters to her male and female friends (found in the diverse collections of their recipients). To cite one example, Jo wrote at length in 1946 to her old friend the artist, Carl Sprinchorn, describing what motivated her to go on a hunger strike to force Edward to change his negative attitude toward her having a career as a painter. She admitted that she had the:

memory of a whole tribe of elephants-- what he did in 1925,

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Aug. '33, Nov. '38 etc. now '46 & all to the effect that since he had determined & succeeded in killing off such weakly spark as I had deluded myself into believing myself in possession of—the career had better go too—the easy way—right on thru the good comfortable mattress.<sup>12</sup>

In the same letter, she acknowledged her accumulated resentment toward Edward, admitting she was "rending him limb from limb for his not sobbing like a baby that I've been left out of everything since the day I married him 21 years ago." She complained that he:

Didn't want me to have any spark, urge, what the hell call it—however feeble, pubescent, insignificant. . . . And it's about killing me. As we all know there has to be some loop hole, some inkling where things are brewing, who's gathering them in—&some word of commendation. E. H. [Edward Hopper] has been in the thick of everything, but he'd see me dead before he'd want to let me in. . . . I can't go on living with the bone of one's bone acting that way.<sup>13</sup>

In her diary entry written just ten days later, Jo followed up on the events described in this letter; she gloated that she now had this new weapon in her arsenal, noting the value of her newly invented hunger strike: "This the only thing that would impress E. [Edward] at all. He didn't resort to his customary walking out of the room whenever I insisted on discussing my case—over the years."<sup>14</sup>

While I have indicated that the art world events and personalities in Jo's diaries can be corroborated, the question of whether she could have made up the personal dramas she described needs to be addressed. If she did invent these episodes, then she was also writing fiction in her letters to her friends, an extremely unlikely practice from a depressed woman who was seeking solace from those closest to her. Of course, all diaries are "verbal constructs," subject to the goals and intent of the individual keeping them.<sup>15</sup> While she eventually came to imagine a future audience, there is no evidence that she ever reread what she wrote or gave any thought to organizing her entries (which were usually divided between journals kept in the city and those kept and left in the country in the same year). Even if one were to assume (incorrectly) that Jo was writing fictional accounts of her life with Edward, then it is with her fantasies that he had to cope on a daily basis. Furthermore, these diaries log the most mundane everyday details (shopping lists, sewing projects, travel expenses, etc.) that no one writing autobiography with an eye to publication would care to record.

Even more preposterous is the accusation that I invented these and other such passages written by Jo. If I were so skilled in creating characters and plot, I should certainly have turned to fiction by now. But we also have further evidence about the couple's behavior in comments that she made in published joint

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interviews (where her husband was present) that exclude this possibility. In one comment, Jo bragged how, in the middle of a fight with Edward, she once "bit him to the bone," a battle confirmed at length in her diary entry for May 7, 1946:

I kicked, he swatted, I stretched for a weapon to augment the length of my arm reach & he dragged me across studio by my wrists & continued to swat while I struggled & bit, bit hard right into one of the 2 hands that held me tight & bit til he let go. I drew blood before he'd let go, he'd rather to be bitten than let go, so my teeth went right on in & nothing else would convince him of my utter exasperation & determination to uphold a principle. All very exhausting this interruption. So it was with a bandaged hand that he packed the car & I can't see yet how it could have been otherwise. No one who sees him, so saintly so patient could realize what straights [sic] he could drive a person like me thru.<sup>16</sup>

What woman would choose to be remembered this way? Nor can I understand how anyone could argue that I would make up such behavior if I wanted, as has sometimes been charged, to cast Jo in a good light and demonize Edward.

In writing this biography, my only preconception was based on what I had already discovered about the couple by reading their letters (some of which I discovered only later, while researching the biography) and interviews and by observing what was going on in the images of couples that appear in Edward's art. Early in his career, before he married, Edward depicted couples who seemed to relate to one another, often in a tender and affectionate manner (as in his etchings, "Les Deux Pigeons" or "Summer Twilight," both of 1920).<sup>17</sup> Before he and Jo had been married for even a decade, his images of couples began to appear alienated (as in "Room in New York" of 1932), where a man is absorbed in reading his newspaper and his female companion is about to strike a key on a piano, disturbing his concentration. As time goes by, Hopper's men and women look away from one another, do not communicate warmth, and often appear to be angry (as in "Cape Cod Evening," 1939, or "Hotel by a Railroad," 1952). Eventually, the woman is depicted shouting at her mate (as in "Four Lane Road," 1956).<sup>18</sup>

Sexual apathy and depression also loom large in some of his pictures, most obviously in two bedroom paintings, "Summer in the City" (1949) and "Excursion into Philosophy" (1959), both of which show a man and woman unable to relate to one another. Jo wrote briefly about her view of their sexual relations in her diaries, remarks that hardly seem irrelevant given her husband's choice of subject matter. Once on October 12, 1944, she recalled the early days of their marriage:

About the first week or so I realized always with amazement, but I knew so little about this basic concern— except to be appalled

at prize hog proportions that the whole thing was entirely for him, his benefit. Upon realizing this— & with the world so new & all & I emerged in such vast ignorance— I declared that since that was the status quo of that— let him take it— but I'd not consent to be hurt *too* much— only a certain amount— I'd not be object of sheer sadism. I was forbidden to consult with other women over the mysteries. If he had drawn a lemon, I needn't advertise his misfortune. Then he set forth to build up as neat a little job of inferiority complex for which I in my ignorance was eligible. I, so subnormal— not enjoying attacks from the rear!<sup>19</sup>

What biographer could ignore this passage! Unnerved when I first came across it, I long grappled with its precise meaning and larger implications. I searched diligently for every hint of Edward's point of view, choosing not to judge either partner, but trying instead to place her remarks in the context of other American couples of their generation at the time they married in 1924.

Although he kept no diaries and wrote only terse letters, Hopper gave his perspective on the couple's sexual relations in caricatures and other sketches that he made and gave to his wife. One of the most poignant comments upon his unusual choice of a bride: a forty-one-year-old virgin. It depicts the goat-god Pan crouching among a group of elegantly attired men and pointing lasciviously at Jo, who shyly walks by, drawing her protective cape around herself. Captioned: "There's a virgin— give her the works," this image raises two perhaps unanswerable questions. How, despite her bohemian associations in Greenwich Village during the first quarter of the twentieth century, did this particular artist-actress manage to hold on to her virginity for so long and how did Hopper happen to pick *her* as his spouse? Jo inscribed in her diary a poignant comment about her unusual status: "I couldn't help being a virgin when he married me & if I hadn't been he wouldn't have wished to marry me anyway. Virgins, Christian ladies all so little prized—but he knows when they're not & feels what lacking."<sup>20</sup> Although Edward eventually threw off his strict Baptist upbringing, he never got over his ingrained Victorian ideals.

In another telling caricature, captioned "The sacrament of sex (female version)," Edward depicts Jo, wearing a bridal veil adorned with flowers and a bow, sitting up in a four-poster bed decorated by lighted candles. She extends her hands in a gesture of command to the humbled, saintly male, none other than balding Edward, dressed in a nightshirt tied with an effeminate sash at the waist and wearing a halo as he bows before her. His image of their life after marriage contrasts dramatically with his earlier romantic view of the two of them embracing on a window seat in Paris (where they had never been together), which he gave Jo for Christmas when they were still courting. Beneath the image of the amorous couple, Hopper quoted lines from Verlaine's poetry, the same verses he had recited

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for Jo the previous summer, when he wooed her on Bass Rocks in Gloucester.

If Hopper's romantic preconceptions about marriage proved unrealistic, the public's image of Hopper was equally absurd. Based on the wide popularity of the images he painted, Hopper seems to have obtained an iconic status in American culture. The angry pronouncements in Jo's diaries revealed a side of Hopper never before acknowledged, although his grumpy, depressive personality had certainly been noticed. The actress Helen Hayes, who with her husband, Charles MacArthur, commissioned Hopper in 1939 to paint a canvas of their home in Nyack, New York, where he was born, remarked of their encounter: "I had never met a more misanthropic, grumpy, grouchy individual in my life, and as a performer I just shriveled under the heat of this disapproval. I backed into a corner and there I stayed in the dark, lost. . . . Really I was utterly unnerved by this man."<sup>21</sup> Decades later, the younger artist, Raphael Soyer, for whom Hopper posed for a portrait observed: "There is a loneliness about him, a habitual moroseness, a sadness to the point of anger."<sup>22</sup>

Other evidence makes clear that Hopper's misery was not a product of his marriage, however turbulent. As early as 1918, Hopper's neighbor, the artist and illustrator Walter Tittle observed Hopper's recurring bouts with depression, which he described as "semi-funereal solemnity." He described how Hopper "suffered from long periods of unconquerable inertia, sitting for days at a time before his easel in helpless unhappiness, unable to raise a hand to break the spell."<sup>23</sup> That same year, the artist Guy Pène du Bois, who, like Tittle, had known Hopper since they attended art school together, recorded in his diary how unhappy and repressed his close friend was:

The best man we had at school. A Capable man still— but in the present condition not an artist. Not free enough for that.

To [o] much Anglo-Saxon reserve. And he does not like it a bit. Loves the freedom of the Latins rather.

Should be married. But can't imagine to what kind of a woman. The hunger of that man. . . . the hunger of him! I'd [like] to see him out of his present condition. I'd like to see him happy.<sup>24</sup>

The critic Forbes Watson, who came to know and admire Hopper during the early 1930s, remarked rather candidly: "Personally the charm of Hopper lies hidden in his intelligence and in his palpably awkward honesty. It is not merely that he cannot lie but that he could not conceive of any reason for lying, such for instance as the saving of a fellow mortal's feelings. He is uncouthly honest—a great handicap in political circles. . . ."<sup>25</sup> Watson's comment underlines how painful it must have been for Jo to live with Hopper's brutal candor about her art, which he disliked. She could never accept his repeated suggestion that she should abandon all her efforts as an artist, a career to which she had dedicated herself long before

they married.

While available evidence amply proves that Hopper's misery antedated his relationship with Jo, the somewhat more scanty documentation of Jo's earlier life suggests that she was somewhat more resilient. She was acknowledged by all who knew her to be a great deal more sociable and gregarious than her reclusive spouse, both before and during their marriage. During the 1910s, when Edward was reportedly so miserable, Jo kept very busy, supporting herself as an elementary school teacher, making and showing her art, and acting with the Washington Square Players, an avant-garde theater group, where she met a wide circle of friends.

Neither Jo's nor Edward's activities before they married had been documented before I began to investigate. Although I had uncovered the story of Hopper's long struggle for recognition, none of the previously published literature on Hopper, including my own books and articles, prepared the public for the startling revelations about Hopper's personality and behavior contained in Jo's diaries. In retrospect, looking back at the book I wrote to accompany a major retrospective exhibition of Hopper's work that I organized for the Whitney Museum in 1980, I see that although I had not yet discovered Jo's diaries, I was just then beginning to focus on what became the central theme of the biography. I first quoted Hopper himself: "I believe that the great painters, with their intellect as master, have attempted to force this unwilling medium of paint and canvas into a record of their emotions. I find any digression from this large aim leads me to boredom."<sup>26</sup> He also tried to explain why he chose certain subjects over others: "I do not exactly know, unless it is that I believe them to be the best mediums for a synthesis of my inner experience."<sup>27</sup> I then argued:

It is important to keep in mind that Hopper was directly concerned with emotional content in his art, even though he may not have intended that content to be clearly interpretable. And while the meaning of his paintings may not always be accessible to us, Hopper's admitted search for personal expression invites our investigation into the nature of his personality as a key to the understanding of his art. In his interviews, in his letters and those of his wife, in the large body of unexhibited work stretching from his childhood drawings to his last sketches, in the comments he made in his ledgers, and in the memoirs and reminiscences of those who knew him, are the clues to the real personality he camouflaged out of a sense of privacy and self-protective anxiety.<sup>28</sup>

Finding Jo's diaries, I was at last able to uncover some of the hidden autobiographical element that I sensed was lurking in Hopper's pictures.

My disclosure that this beloved American painter was not only chronically

depressed, but that he routinely disparaged and even occasionally abused his wife was simply too shocking for some to accept. Perhaps the tendency to blame the messenger bringing the bad news would have kicked in no matter who had first published these diaries. But I suspect that there might have been less controversy if a male author had been the first to report on Jo's diaries. Indeed, what would have happened if someone, man or woman, unsympathetic to women's demands for equal rights, were the first reader of Jo's diaries? Perhaps the latter would have met the same fate as her art work after she left it to the Whitney Museum: destruction.

My suspicions are raised by one reviewer of the biography who concluded, presumably despite reading excerpts (such as those cited above) about the couples' sexual relations, the brutal physicality of their battles, and his often-expressed desire that she give up her career as an artist, that Jo's chief complaint with her husband was that he did not want to let her drive their automobile. While she repeatedly complained about Edward's reproach when she wanted to drive, I clearly introduced this issue as a metaphor for resistance to the changing role of women in the larger society:

Driving in the 1920s meant more than just convenient transportation. The introduction of the automobile coincided with a time of rapidly changing roles for women in the workplace, the family, and politics. The auto became a frontier in the women's struggle for equal rights. Driving symbolized female independence and signaled a new assertiveness. But the prospect that women might abandon traditional supportive and subordinate roles was so threatening to men that they promoted a whole folklore with negative stereotypes calculated to discourage women drivers by linking them to poor driving.<sup>29</sup>

For Jo, driving the car on her own would also have meant that she could seek out vistas that she wanted to paint, without being dependent on her spouse to take her there.

From what remains of Jo's paintings, it is clear that she was not the major talent that her husband was. What then justified my decision to reproduce examples of her art in a biography about her husband? During their forty-three-year marriage lasting until his death in 1967, the Hoppers were virtually inseparable. Jo and her artistic career remained an important and unresolved issue, creating tension in both their lives. This tension presented itself in the content of some of Edward's paintings. Since the couple's frequent travels and painting excursions together meant that they occasionally painted the same views, it was also necessary to look at how her work diverged from her husband's.<sup>30</sup>

Color reproductions of Hopper's paintings and illustrations are readily available in books and articles, on postcards, posters, and even calendars, yet his

wife's art was virtually unknown (and unpublished) and could not be easily seen by interested readers, as most of the originals have been lost. Thus, out of one hundred and two images reproduced in black and white (with the exception of the cover, a painting by Edward, reproduced in color), I devoted eleven to Jo's art, sixty-four to Edwards's art, and twenty-seven to photographs, documents, or work by other artists. Since the publisher determined that color reproductions would make the book's price prohibitive and the total number of images was limited, I could not justify taking up space with black-and-white reproductions of Hopper's best-known paintings.

Instead, I preferred to concentrate on many of the intimate cartoons and sketches that Hopper made of and for his wife, along with his etchings, illustrations, and drawings (those produced during his boyhood and later, as studies for his major paintings). Looking back, I now realize that the average journalist assigned to review my biography had little or no familiarity with Hopper's paintings and may have resented the absence of convenient reproductions of his most famous works while reading about them in my lengthy text. Having written so many other books on Hopper, I envisioned that most readers would have reproductions of Hopper's work on hand. Instead, some reviewers had to accept looking at working drawings, which stood in for finished canvases.

But the larger issue is just how much attention the spouse of a famous creative individual deserves in any biography. In the Hoppers' case, Jo not only struggled with her husband to maintain her own career, she kept all of the records of his work, took care of most of his correspondence, kept the press at bay (at his behest), and served as his only model. She also shared his intellectual life, going with him to movies and the theater; they regularly read aloud to one another. Even if we view her as just a thorn in his side, she was there pricking him daily.<sup>31</sup>

The Hoppers' highly interdependent relationship calls to mind other such creative couples, where the wife played a crucial role in her husband's art, from Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald to Vladimir and Vera Nabokov. Now that both Zelda and Vera have been featured in biographies of their own, it is hard to imagine that subsequent biographies of their famous husbands could give the wives anything other than "co-starring" roles.<sup>31</sup> Vera Nabokov's self-effacement and complete refusal to take any credit for her indispensable contributions to her husband's work are unthreatening to those who have deplored Jo Hopper's and Zelda Fitzgerald's demands that their husbands recognize and support their own artistic efforts. Indeed, my biography of Hopper prompted an attack on Jo for not being the kind of wife an artist (male) needs, while the same readers praised her only for diligently keeping the records of her husband's work.

In fact, the most revealing records of her husband's paintings are not the official ledgers that Jo maintained, but the accounts of work in progress that she recorded in her diaries. There we find reports of his sources of inspiration, his

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working process, the obstacles thrown in his way when he chose to work on location, his struggle to find subjects worth painting, and much, much more. Yet no one has objected to this aspect of Jo's diaries, instead their complaints have been focused on the grievances she aired about her husband's bad behavior.

Like Fitzgerald, Hopper's attitude toward his wife's accomplishments was that on her own, she could produce nothing of value. This, in a sense, allowed Jo complete freedom in keeping her diaries. They were no secret; she even wrote in them while sitting in the car next to her silent husband, as he drove them across the country, refusing to converse or let her take the wheel. Once, she asked Edward for a foreword during a trip and recorded his reply: "Record of a woman's wandering mind & wandering thru the U.S. and Mex. There is no excuse or justification for such an effusion, only God will be allowed to see what has there been written & I think it will not please him greatly."<sup>32</sup> He saw no reason to record his own thoughts, for as he cynically quipped about the prospect of enduring fame for artists: "Ninety percent of them are forgotten ten minutes after they're dead."<sup>33</sup>

In sharp contrast, the famous London diarist Samuel Pepys, writing in January 1663, had a very different attitude toward posterity and his wife's writing. When she read to him her accounts, he reports that she:

was so piquant, and wrote in English and most of it true, of the retiredness of her life and how unpleasant it was, that being writ in English and so in danger of being met with and read by others, I was vexed at it and desired her and then commanded her to tear it— which she desired to be excused it; I forced it from her and tore it, and withal took her other bundle of papers from her. . . I pulled them out one by one and tore them all before her face, though it went against my heart to do it, she crying and desiring me not to do it.<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately Hopper's own entrenched attitudes disparaging the accomplishments of both his wife and all women permitted his wife's accounts to escape early destruction. That they later saw the light of day owes a debt to the feminist movement of the late 1960s, when I was coming of age.

Today, when we still speak of working women (in corporate America and elsewhere) who come up against an invisible glass ceiling keeping them from further advancement, the issue of male dominance raised by Jo Hopper in her diaries remains unsettled and unsettling. Although we occasionally hear of superwomen who somehow simultaneously manage a career, marriage, home, and child rearing, we also know that there are angry men and women who would like to turn back the clock to the way things were in the 1950s. Affirmative action seeking to redress gender-based imbalances in employment opportunities has been repeatedly challenged in the courts. Thus, no reader in today's world comes to Jo Hopper's diaries as a neutral party. Instead, the way we read, evaluate, and

interpret such angry, revolutionary writings reflects the experiences and values we bring to the page.

By now many readers will have recognized that this essay might well serve as a case study for a theorist of reception. One receptionist has written: "We all approach the reading of texts with the baggage of our values and our experience with certain categories, assumptions, prejudices and 'fore-understandings.'"<sup>35</sup> As Hans-Georg Gadamer argued in his book *Truth and Method*, the meaning of whatever we write or create is contingent upon the lives and circumstances of our audience.<sup>36</sup> My own experience in discovering and presenting Jo Hopper's diaries has made this abundantly clear.

## NOTES

1. Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995; University of California, 1998).
2. See Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995).
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