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Book Review: Narrative as Performance: *American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes, and Trial of Patty Hearst* by Jeffrey Toobin

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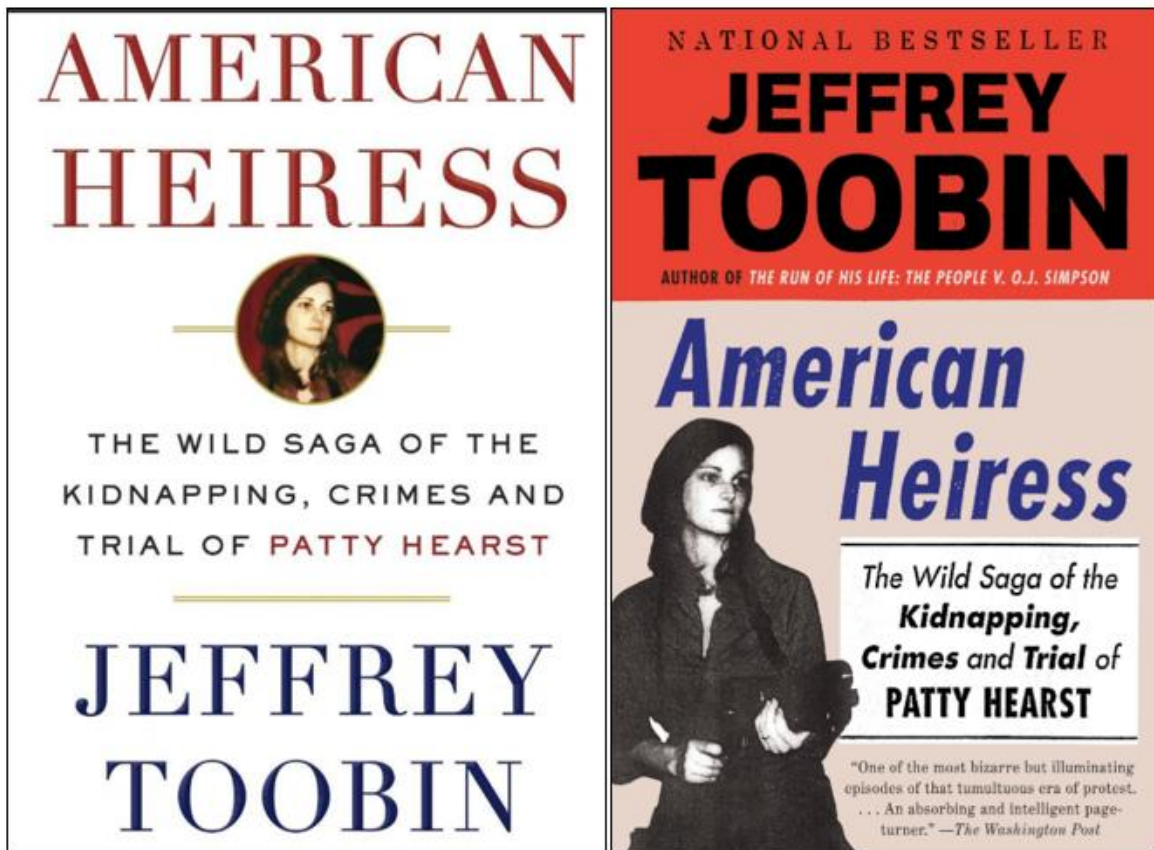
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American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes, and Trial of Patty Hearst by Jeffrey Toobin. Doubleday, 2016. pp. 471, \$28.95 (hardcover). Anchor, 2017. \$16.95 (paperback).

Most Americans have heard of the Patricia Hearst story and are vaguely familiar with the list of players. She is an American heiress who was kidnapped at nineteen by the SLA. Her great grandmother was philanthropist Phoebe Hearst, who single-handedly turned “Berkeley into a university worthy of the nation’s biggest state” (Toobin 17), and to whom staff and faculty still pay tribute (Toobin 16). Her grandfather, Randolph “The Chief” Hearst, was the owner of the *San Francisco Examiner* and the inspiration for *Citizen Kane* (Toobin 4). He was famous for building a newspaper empire and for his rivalry with Joseph Pulitzer (Toobin 18). Her parents were notable for shying away from the public. They moved into the spotlight to help rescue their daughter. Her father, Randolph Hearst, devoted himself to a life of leisure and was, in title only, publisher at the *San Francisco Examiner* (Toobin 20). He became actively engaged in the Hearst Corporation and chairman of the Hearst Board during his attempts to save his daughter. Her mother, Catherine Hearst, was on the Board of Regents at the University of California

(Toobin 21). In contrast to her parents, Hearst was rebellious from a young age. At the time of her kidnapping, she had been expelled from several schools and was engaged to her high school math teacher, Steven Weed.

Jeffrey Toobin's 2016 *American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes, and Trial of Patty Hearst* is the most recent attempt to provide a definitive historical account of Hearst's kidnapping and its aftermath. Typical of a five-act play, Toobin has structured his book in five parts with a list of players and an epilogue. This structure is a nod to Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA)'s focus on dramatics: the members' acting backgrounds, Toobin's interest in the media, and his own current part in re-examining the story. He notes that Patty Hearst preferred the name Patricia, and he lists every member's SLA code name; he tries to honor all naming preferences throughout the text to show he wants to meet these radicals on their own terms, even if he does not agree with them. He also notes that SLA political tracts prioritized dramatic language over analysis. As with the larger narrative, his intent to stay impartial sets the scene.

The SLA formed in Oakland after DeFreeze broke out of Vacaville prison. Their first major act was assassinating Marcus Foster, a school superintendent in Oakland. Their second was kidnapping Patricia Hearst in her Berkeley apartment. After being held in a closet for over fifty days, she joined the SLA and continued to release ransom tapes. Her new comrades were Donald DeFreeze, the escaped convict turned SLA leader; Angela Atwood, the actress; Bill Harris, the veteran with a background in theater; Emily Harris, his wife; Camilla Hall, the poet and sometimes-lover of Mizmoon; Nancy Ling Perry, the sex worker; Willy Wolfe, the boyish radical; and Patricia "Mizmoon" Soltysik, the researcher and sometimes-lover of Camilla. With Hearst in the group, the SLA robbed banks, participated in one of the most violent shootouts with the LAPD, and were responsible for several bombings. Their violent politics led the SLA to relocate often, mostly in California, but later included fleeing authorities by moving to a farmhouse in Pennsylvania. Over time, new recruits included college athlete Steve Soliah, the actress Kathleen Ann Soliah, aspiring sportswriter James Kilgore, and Willy Wolfe's girlfriend Wendy Yoshimura. The conflux of the massive FBI investigation, the new Los Angeles Police Department Special Weapons and Tactics (LAPD SWAT) team (Toobin 157), and the local television stations' innovative live technology set the stage for a new era of public interaction with media coverage (Toobin 159). The nation watched in real time as events unfolded. Before the saga finished, six SLA members died in a shootout with the LAPD (Toobin 177), several eluded authorities for decades, and everyone involved had dramatically altered the national dialogue about the media.

The haunting question that opens act one of Toobin's history is whether Hearst did all of this of her own free will. As his title suggests, this is a central concern for Toobin, but he frames it in the larger context of a longer narrative involving a series of loosely connected incidents in 1970s America, centered around Hearst. Toobin attempts to present the final word on her story in an unbiased account using boxes of archived materials purchased from Bill Harris, older recorded interviews, and his own new interviews with people connected to the case (Toobin 343). In a public statement, Hearst refers to Toobin's request for an interview with her as "arrogant and egotistical" (Evans). In addition to this final word in print, Toobin's book was the basis for a

podcast and television series with CNN and a Twentieth Century Fox biopic, which was canceled after Hearst spoke out against it (Desta). Hearst references having already written about these events in a 1982 memoir in her public statement. She challenges the idea that any man can have the last word on a woman's trauma. Intentional or not, Toobin highlights the fact that Patricia Hearst's story is never her own because he uses these materials after she refuses his request for an interview. Lacking her voice and support, Toobin's impartiality is a tone-deaf performance of her captor's words.

The first four acts read in part as a detective narrative following Hearst. Toobin focuses on the Hearst family history, connected media portrayals, the role of the FBI, and technological changes in the media. As the scope is so large, many of the chapters read as a string of vignettes exploring layers of the overall narrative. Steve Weed's role and ongoing relationship with the Hearst family is an example. Through Weed, Toobin highlights Randolph Hearst's increasingly active role in the Hearst Foundation, Patricia Hearst's public responses to assumed questions on the SLA tapes, and the Hearst family's response to public perception as Weed continued to provide media interviews without the family's permission. Here, as elsewhere, Toobin portrays each member of the Hearst family as maintaining very intentional control over their public narrative, whatever the cost. Even today, Patricia Hearst continues to speak out whenever her family finds themselves at the center of the media, including when Toobin published *American Heiress*.

Toobin presents leftist articles and radio announcements throughout the book. In particular, he details the eulogy broadcast from KPFK. Hearst wrote it with Bill and Emily Harris about the six members of the SLA who lost their lives at 1466 East Fifty-Fourth Street during the police shootout. It was, "The biggest police gun battle ever to take place on American soil" and thanks to the new technology, it was live on television (Toobin 171). The eulogy emphasizes that the comrades were martyrs for the revolution. Toobin provides in-depth analysis of the SLA's setup for having Patricia Hearst appear in front of a camera during a bank robbery as a political statement, even if there are looming questions about whether Hearst's participation was voluntary. In this way, he presents the SLA as masters of dramatic political statements who understand the formula being developed, even as they're exploiting it. From this iconic photo to the first ever live car chase on the news, the SLA and mainstream media created a dramatic, out-of-control saga.

Toobin frames the story as a set of movements away from captivity. Initially, he presents it as a partial political awakening, presumably because Hearst herself initially made this claim, but he rejects this interpretation. He begins by detailing her modest life with Steve Weed. She has a "modest political awakening" through her experience working at an Oakland department store. There, she discovered that to prevent employees from receiving benefits, employers kept their hours down by requiring them to work off the clock (Toobin 23). Another movement away from captivity occurs when Hearst declared she had joined the SLA. She renames herself Tania "after a comrade who fought alongside Che in Bolivia for the people of Bolivia" (Toobin 123). Hearst's final transformation is in re-acclimating to her previous life complete with marrying her

bodyguard. He offers her no escape from circumstances here as she completes each scene and act of the play.

Toobin repeatedly highlights an ongoing question between investigators and prosecutors about whether Patricia Hearst remained a hostage in any way after she publicly proclaimed her support for the SLA or was fully complicit. To answer this question, Toobin focuses on her adaptability. He continuously references her actions without pretending to know her intentions. He is honoring her refusal to work with him by ensuring he doesn't assume to know what she was thinking. She becomes a fierce revolutionary as described by living SLA members Bill and Emily Harris. She is enthusiastic about calisthenics and weapons drills. At a few key points, Toobin slows down the narrative to clarify questions about Hearst's relationship to the SLA. One question he addresses is Hearst's relationship with SLA member Willy Wolfe. Toobin does not state whether Hearst initiated a sexual relationship with Wolfe. Instead, he presents two tales with an authorial voice declaring no matter what happened, at best, this is an instance of rape because she was a hostage and feared for her life. Even after she decides to join the SLA, Toobin is certain it is not possible for the relationship to be consensual. He references this with her sexual relationship to Wolfe, DeFreeze, Bill Harris, and even Steve Soliah. He notes Harris's sexual involvement with Hearst for the duration of her involvement with the SLA, despite the fact that Harris is one of his sources. On this issue, he understands Hearst's viewpoint, the #MeToo movement, and a basic definition of rape. He is trying to tell Patricia Hearst's story, even as he undermines it, for example, with frequent references to Wolfe's attractiveness.

A different instance of Toobin focus on telling Hearst's own story is in recounting a well-known incident in a van outside the sporting goods store (Mel's) in Los Angeles. The group had relocated to the area, and Bill and Emily Harris along with Patricia Hearst had been running errands. Emily and Bill Harris were in a store leaving Hearst alone in the van. A store clerk caught Bill Harris shoplifting, and Harris was "determined to be neither arrested nor frisked" (Toobin 148). Toobin emphasizes that she was alone with the keys in the ignition and stayed. No one was anywhere near her. She not only stayed, but she opened fire on the store and employees who assaulted her comrades Bill and Emily. He asserts this is a turning point where if anyone was unsure, she had now willingly joined the SLA. Later in the text, he says Stockholm Syndrome wasn't a known condition until after the events of August 23, 1973 (Toobin 298). He mentions that they never used this in any of the psychological profiles presented in the courtroom, but it did become a term used frequently with this kidnapping. In the book, he frames the Stockholm situation as parallel to Hearst's experience in captivity. Yet, in the van Toobin presents Hearst with the chance to escape in his slowed narrative without offering any details on where she would go in Los Angeles, a city she did not know, or what else she could have done with "the greatest number of options before her" (Toobin 149). The dramatic tension he builds here carries readers to the next act.

If Patricia Hearst represents America held captive by the radical left, then she is a conflicted symbol. Hearst was the well connected and, as Toobin showcases, shifted her politics in reaction to her given situation at every turn. Even so, in Toobin's narrative, Patricia Hearst represents 1970s America, San Francisco in particular. He represents the period as a wild time

in American politics. He details the increased number of bombings, shootings, attempted assassinations, and even kidnappings. Active groups included Your Black Muslim Bakery (Toobin 86), the New World Liberation Front (Toobin 329), the American Revolutionary Army (Toobin 85), and the Black Panthers. These groups challenged the political status quo through direct action. Many of them, such as the Black Panther Party, also focused on ensuring quality food was available to anyone in their communities who needed it. Sara Jane Moore, who attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford, tended the books of People in Need (PIN) created to provide food to poor people in the Bay Area with money raised as part of the Hearst ransom (Toobin 78). During this same event, the Delancey Street Foundation provided security using their group of reformed drug addicts, gang members, recently release prisoners and other individuals with street-smart histories (Toobin 88). Later, the New World Liberation Front, which Toobin calls a “place-holder name for all bombers in the bay area,” used the SLA tagline in a letter claiming responsibility for a bombing in the Bay Area, writing “Death to the fascist insect that preys upon the life of the people” (Toobin 239-40). Each of these groups and individuals were carrying out separate radical agendas, but maintained loose connections with the SLA and Patricia Hearst. Hearst exemplifies the interconnected politics of the state of California. She is a magnet for the network of radicals.

Toobin focuses on this list of important names, but leaves out references to lesser-known periphery organizations. He makes a case throughout the text that this was a group more concerned with theatrics than politics. By not providing a general sense of the political climate around the SLA, including what other similar sized cells were doing, he fails to offer the reader any real context for the group. Instead, he lists the names of important groups without detailing their radical community work in at risk populations to improve the lives of their neighbors. He focuses on groups such as the New World Liberation Front as their violent dramatics outweigh their radical politics.

As the heiress of one of America’s largest media empires, Hearst is a problematic symbol in this landscape. As an heiress, she has not lived a life similar to a majority of Americans. Patricia’s mother Catherine Hearst had connections to Ronald Reagan, and Jimmy Carter later took a personal interest in her case. During an interview with Larry King, she expressed regret that President Clinton would not be signing her full pardon because he was leaving office (King). President Clinton pardoned her as one of the 140 he issued his final day in office (Toobin 338). Very few individuals have had this access to positions of power.

One political aspect Toobin points to throughout is the SLA’s feminism and approach to sexuality. He references an interview from Bill Harris saying the group had no room for exclusive sexual relationships in their developing collectivity (Toobin 107). Toobin describes a feminism framed by sexual liberation and the end of monogamy, but nothing more. He doesn’t specifically point out how hetero-normative these relationships are, but describes Camilla Hall as the only lesbian in the group in a dismissive tone calling her, “the least likely revolutionary” (Toobin 81). Despite her relationship with Mizmoon, he focuses on DeFreeze’s relationship with Mizmoon calling it, “a kind of prototypical couple for their milieu in Berkeley (Toobin 81). He highlights women as the backbone of the group, but reminds readers how often they defer to the

men. He interrupts the story to highlight the group's division of labor by gender on multiple occasions.

DeFreeze was one of the six dead comrades in the Los Angeles shootout. Bill Harris replaced him as the SLA leader as he fled with surviving members Emily Harris and Patricia Hearst. Peripheral members, including Wendy Yoshimura, helped the group evade authorities. Yoshimura was a peripheral character throughout the SLA's history and became one of the primary caregivers to the grief-stricken group. Toobin pays special attention to her heritage. She was born in the WWII Japanese internment camps. When released, her parents returned to Japan before eventually coming back to America. Unlike DeFreeze, whom Toobin criticizes for his preference for dramatics over politics, Yoshimura receives no further analysis. Yoshimura brings radical feminist literature to the group and Patricia Hearst, and begins to exert stronger feminist ideals, including an end to hetero-normative sexual expectations and a desire for women to be active leaders within the group. In his portrayal of Hearst embracing feminism as a larger ideal, Toobin decides this is part of the real Patricia Hearst. He shows Hearst and the SLA as they move away from Bill Harris' interpretations of feminism and collectives and return to planning bank robberies and bombings.

Act five is stylistically different from the rest of the text. Toobin is sympathetic to Hearst while framing her new captivity. Others remain in control of every aspect of her life. Toobin is smooth in his writing. He changes from the detective vignettes to a narrative of power-obsessed attorneys and a family's desperate attempt to keep their daughter safe. In the legal system, he trusts his readers to understand many details he didn't expect them to follow earlier. He references famous names without explanation, courtroom proceedings without detailed explanations of procedure, and character sketches without detailed lists of attributes. This final act reveals his writing strengths. Hearst's is not a traditional captive narrative in that her affluence gives her some power to control her own narrative. In other ways, this is a very traditional form as Toobin bases his telling of the story on interviews with Bill Harris, despite the fact that he was one of her captors and the leader of the SLA after DeFreeze's death in Los Angeles. While Toobin never emphasizes this, Harris is also one of Hearst's rapists. Left without access to Hearst's own voice, Toobin instead uses the narrative of her rapist. She still has no real choice in the narrative others are creating for her.

In this context, it is not surprising that Patricia Hearst refused to work with Toobin. Her story is fascinating, but it is obvious that Toobin is capitalizing on it. His focus is on the larger context of the media portrayal of her abduction and trial, the political climate of the time period, and long-term cultural implications for news cycles. All of that is very interesting, but it is not Patricia Hearst's story. Toobin's history of the Hearst case, which was supposed to be the final word, is already vanishing into obscurity with a canceled movie deal (Desta) and Amazon offering deep discounts on all copies of the book. The Hearst family's determination to control the narrative and the #MeToo movement changing the national conversation around rape and women's rights has had an impact. Given the Hearst family's power and connections, it is likely their impact was larger than the #MeToo movement. Even so, Toobin himself fell short in honoring a woman's own voice and traumatic story. Patricia Hearst and the #MeToo movement only referenced what

he was doing in their public statements. Without the #MeToo movement, Toobin's account would have received few challenges in the contemporary landscape other than Patricia Hearst herself.

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