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digression" from her literary career. Walker's books, McKibben reflects, "represent a serious attempt at maturity in another way" than raising offspring. Perhaps so—but they also represent a far greater waste of natural resources, particularly trees, than any number of children could have caused.

McKibben also underrates the political dangers in his proposal. A professed believer in "radical democracy," he fears that a more populous nation would be less free. But we are already far past the size limit of the New England-style town meetings that

are his ideal of self-governance. On the other hand, a society of only children might be more sentimental, and thus less skeptical of political rhetoric. Only somebody who has grown up without siblings can really believe that "fraternity" has any necessary connection to "liberty" or "equality." A shared childhood, with all its elements of Darwinian struggle, may be the best preparation for civic life. If only for that reason (though in fact I have a few more), I would be grateful that my parents gave me two brothers. ❧

## Death Comes to the Arch President

### The Dying President: Franklin D. Roosevelt 1944-1945

Robert H. Ferrell

University of Missouri Press /

185 pages / \$24.95

REVIEWED BY

Joseph Shattan

**A**lthough Robert H. Ferrell's study of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's final year is short, it packs a powerful punch. His main thesis—surely correct—is that when the American people elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt to a fourth term, he was a dying man, but they didn't know it, because Roosevelt went to great lengths to hide his heart condition, even ordering the FBI to prevent chatty cardiologists from revealing what they knew. But what makes *The Dying President* so fascinating is Ferrell's evocation of the White House—a place where an incompetent doctor, an uncaring wife, and four self-seeking sons almost brought about FDR's death in 1944. This would have placed Roosevelt's pro-Soviet vice president, Henry Wallace, in charge of the country; and with the besotted Wallace as its chief executive, the United

JOSEPH SHATTAN, a Bradley Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, is writing a book tentatively titled *Heroes of the Cold War*.

States probably would have lost the Cold War even before it properly began.

Roosevelt's health went into irreversible decline in December 1943, shortly after his return from the Teheran Conference, where he met with Stalin and Churchill to plan a new world order. Usually, whenever Roosevelt wasn't feeling well, a brief stay at his Hyde Park home in upstate New York would revive him. But this time, despite frequent weekend visits there, FDR continued to complain that he felt like a "boiled owl." His personal physician, an eye-ear-nose-and-throat specialist named Ross T. McIntire, assured him, and the public, that it was nothing serious, just a touch of bronchitis. But Dr. McIntire—despite being the surgeon general of the U.S. Navy, a position that carried with it the wartime rank of Vice Admiral—was not exactly at the top of his profession. Certainly the way he looked after his distinguished patient was nothing short of ludicrous. As Ferrell describes it:

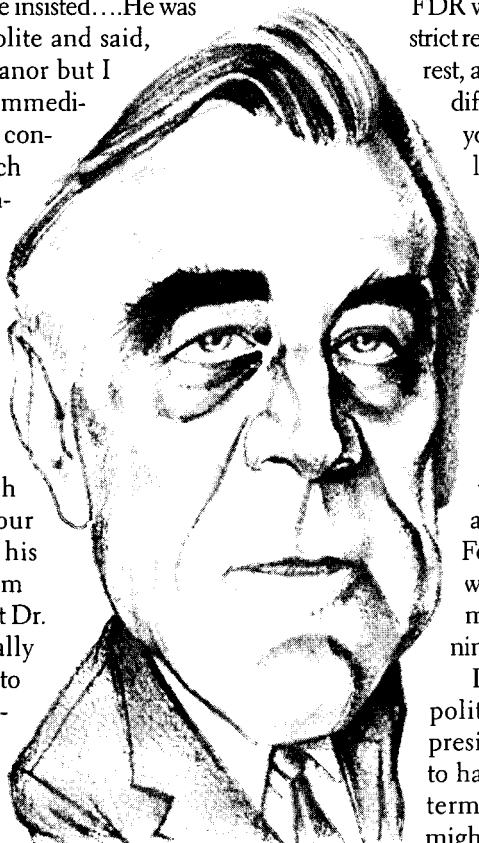
He was accustomed to park his car before the White House each morning at half past eight or thereabouts, and go to the president's bedroom on the mansion's second floor "for a look-see." He produced neither thermometer nor stethoscope, nor looked at the presidential tongue nor felt the pulse, and rarely asked a question. He sat while the president ate breakfast or looked at the morning papers, which it was FDR's custom to do

while lounging in bed. This procedure “told all I wanted to know.” By this he meant the presidential color, tone of voice, tilt of the chin, “the way he tackled his orange juice, cereal, and eggs.” Satisfied on such points the Admiral went off to his other duties, which during the war were many, an enormous number of administrative tasks.

In most families, when a husband feels persistently unwell, it is the wife who sounds the alarm. But “the truth was,” writes Ferrell, “that Eleanor Roosevelt was insensitive to her husband’s rapidly declining health.” Indeed, according to Dr. Howard Bruenn, the cardiologist who eventually diagnosed FDR’s heart disease, Mrs. Roosevelt had a lot to answer for. Bruenn happened to be present at Hyde Park one evening when Franklin took a call from Eleanor. “They were always very polite to each other,” he later recalled. “She had been to a meeting called ‘Young Yugoslavia’ and she had been really greatly moved by the deplorable condition of the partisan group... fighting the Germans. She insisted that the president send supplies and arms to help them. He explained to her very calmly and clearly that there was no way of getting the stuff in there.

Impossible. She insisted.... He was always very polite and said, ‘I’m sorry Eleanor but I can’t do it.’” Immediately after the conversation, which lasted 45 minutes, Bruenn took the president’s blood pressure. It had shot up fifty points.

But it wasn’t until March 28, 1944—four months after his return from Teheran—that Dr. Bruenn finally had a chance to examine Roosevelt, and the opportunity only came about



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because FDR’s daughter Anna, the oldest of his five children and the only one who cared for him, became so alarmed at her father’s deteriorating condition that she insisted he undergo a general physical. According to Ferrell, this was probably FDR’s first comprehensive examination as president. He was sent to Bethesda Naval Hospital for the standard tests, and it was there that Dr. Bruenn, the head of the Electrocardiograph Department, diagnosed hypertension, hypertensive disease, cardiac failure, and “the sole instance in which Admiral McIntire had been correct—acute bronchitis.”

FDR was immediately put on a strict regimen of digitalis and bed rest, and told to avoid stress—a difficult thing to do when you’re running a war. Publicly, Admiral McIntire assured the American people that there was nothing wrong with the president that a bit of exercise and sunshine wouldn’t cure. Privately, Roosevelt’s daily work schedule was cut back drastically—to no more than four hours, and usually between one and two. For practical purposes, writes Ferrell, “the government [was] virtually running itself.”

Inevitably, Democratic politicians got wind of the president’s ill health. Eager to have him run for a fourth term, but fearing that he might not live through it and

that Wallace would succeed him, they organized a “conspiracy” to prevent Wallace from being renominated. Through FDR’s appointments secretary, General Edwin “Pa” Watson, they saw to it that only Wallace’s critics gained access to Roosevelt. As a result, by the Democratic convention in July 1944, the president had pretty well soured on Wallace, and he opted for Truman instead. The nation, and the world, were saved, but it was a close call.

**F**errell argues that Roosevelt’s declining health had serious foreign policy consequences: “The cost to the Republic was surely great.” He grants, however, that at the February 1945 Yalta Conference, Roosevelt’s behavior was “unexceptionable,” and that whatever mistakes he made there stemmed from FDR’s general approach to foreign policy, not from heart disease. By contrast, Ferrell attributes Roosevelt’s support for Treasury Secretary Morgenthau’s bizarre plan to “pastoralize” post-war Germany, and destroy her industrial capacity, to his declining physical and mental powers. “It is clear,” he writes, “that only an ill president... would have advanced such a scheme.”

Actually, it is far from clear that illness is the only possible explanation for Roosevelt’s signing on to Morgenthau’s plan. Conceivably, he was motivated by a desire for vengeance against Germany, along with the hope that such a draconian policy would cement his budding friendship with “Uncle Joe” Stalin. In any event, Secretary of State Hull and Secretary of War Stimson soon convinced Roosevelt to drop the idea.

Contrary to Ferrell, my guess is that there is no reason why a president—even a dying president—can’t run the country reasonably well while putting in no more than one or two hours of work per day, provided that the right policies and personnel are securely in place. The problem with FDR’s presidency was that his policies were seriously flawed—particularly his assumption that he could charm Stalin into becoming a nice, responsible, well-behaved head of state. That, and not his long-undiagnosed heart condition, was the real tragedy of Roosevelt’s final years.

Still, the picture of FDR that Ferrell paints—of a sick, lonely, secretive man in

no shape to assume the burdens of the presidency for another term, yet terrified of leaving the White House since that would mean being cooped up with Eleanor for the rest of his life—is affect-

ing. It almost makes you willing to forgive Roosevelt for the way he deceived, manipulated, and generally snookered everyone he came across. Almost, but not quite. ❧

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# First-Class Second Banana

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## Harvey Keitel: The Art of Darkness

Marshall Fine

Fromm International / 288 pages / \$25

REVIEWED BY

Joe Queenan

**A**bout five years ago, I was walking past a newspaper kiosk on 14th Street in New York when I spotted a copy of *Esquire* magazine whose cover I will never forget. The magazine carried a picture of the enduringly creepy actor Harvey Keitel accompanied by a headline which read: “This Man Is Ready to Explode.” At the time, I was sure that the magazine was a *Spy* or *National Lampoon* parody, because if there was ever an American actor whose career was not ready to explode, and would never, ever be ready to explode, it was Harvey Keitel. Shortly thereafter, the editor of *Esquire* was redeployed into another part of the work force, and Keitel himself went about his business: steadily working, garnering kudos here and there, continuing to entertain his tidy cult of *film noir* aficionados, but never actually exploding. Ironically, shortly after the story ran it was Tommy Lee Jones, the other somewhat sinister, perennial second banana, whose career did explode.

Keitel is the subject of a respectful, informative, and sometimes highly amusing new biography by Marshall Fine, entertainment writer and film critic for Gannett newspapers and former chairman of the New York Film Critics Circle. Fine, like theater critic Jacques le Sourd and a hand-

ful of others, is a very bright spot in an otherwise substandard chain of publications. One thing I like about the author of *Harvey Keitel: The Art of Darkness* (who has written favorably about me on several occasions) is that he has fashioned a fair, open-minded book about a subject who refused to cooperate with him. Many critics would have used Keitel’s unhelpfulness as an excuse to tee off on him. Instead, Fine has written a book that goes a long way toward making the reader respect, admire, and even like an actor who has spent virtually his entire career playing characters who are not even vaguely likable.

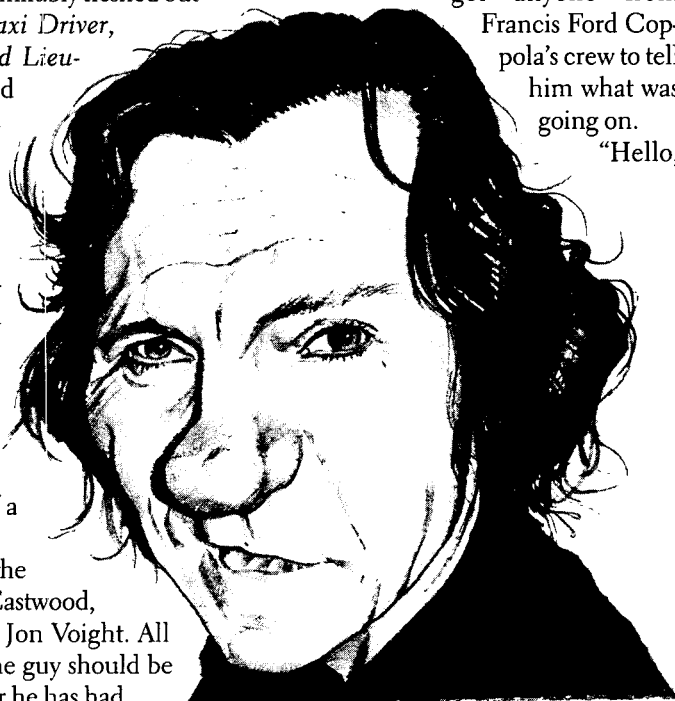
Now 59 years old, Keitel has passed the better part of the past three decades in pursuit of an elusive, and probably unattainable, goal: winning mass public acceptance as a leading man. Hamstrung by average looks, Keitel is the kind of actor who, while born to play the types of small-time hoods he has admirably fleshed out in *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Bad Lieutenant*, *Sister Act*, and *Pulp Fiction*, has always hankered after the kind of fame Al Pacino and Robert DeNiro have garnered playing big-time hoods. Keitel either does not know, or has never been able to accept, that he does not possess the magnetism and range of a Pacino or a DeNiro, and does not possess the charisma of a Clint Eastwood, a Bruce Willis, or a Jon Voight. All things considered, the guy should be grateful for the career he has had.

Especially considering where it started out. A Brooklyn native, a U.S. Marine, and a New York court stenographer for eight years, Keitel toiled in the vineyards through the early part of his career, repeatedly failing his audition at Lee Strasberg’s prestigious Actor’s Studio, and did not gain entry to that elite institution until he had already made a name for himself in Martin Scorsese’s classic *Mean Streets*. Convinced that this was his breakthrough, Keitel spent the next few years waiting for telephone calls that never came. Memorable roles such as Sport, the vile pimp in *Taxi Driver*, served only to further typecast the already aging actor, and then when his luck seemed to turn—when he was cast as the star of *Apocalypse Now*—he got dumped from the role in favor of Martin Sheen after shooting had begun.

But Keitel kept working. He made them good (*Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*), he made them bad (*Mother, Jugs and Speed*, *Blue Collar*, *Saturn 3*), and quite often he made them ridiculous (a Napoleonic hussar in *The Duellists*, a concert pianist who doubles as a mobster in *Fingers*, Judas Iscariot of Flatbush in *The Last Temptation of Christ*). He was not always treated with respect. Fine reports that during the filming of *Apocalypse Now*, he was once stranded in a Philippine river with a walkie-talkie, and couldn’t

get anyone from Francis Ford Coppola’s crew to tell him what was going on.

“Hello,



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JOE QUEENAN is the author most recently of *Red Lobster*, *White Trash* and *Blue Lagoon*: Joe Queenan’s America (*Hyperion*).