# A Cynical Look at Washington

*Reviewed by*

*Edwin M. Yoder Jr.*

***The reviewer is editorial page editor of The Greensboro Daily News.***

Walter Trohan, who for many years ran The Chicago Tribune's Washington Bureau, serving as Col. Robert McCormick's envoy to the capital, has moved to Ireland. That may explain why this shrewd and often amusing memoir blends its captious judgments with a free-wheeling approach to fact. The leprechauns appear to have been whispering in Trohan's ear as he worked in the Celtic twilight, where history so easily fades into mythology. The reader who signs on for the Trohan tour, from the New Deal through the Kennedy years, should stay hard by his reference books and keep his blarney detector at hand. For like many political memoirs this one will loose a good many doubtful revelations into the apocrypha of Washington history, and perhaps more than the usual quota.

Certainly Trohan's general view of Washington verges on cynicism, leaving him with only one genuine hero—Sen. Robert A. Taft—and a host of culprits. Even the portrait of Col. McCormick, his boss, is less than worshipful. But of all the figures he encountered, Trohan least admired President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Col. McCormick's prep school classmate and the grand heresiarch of the era.

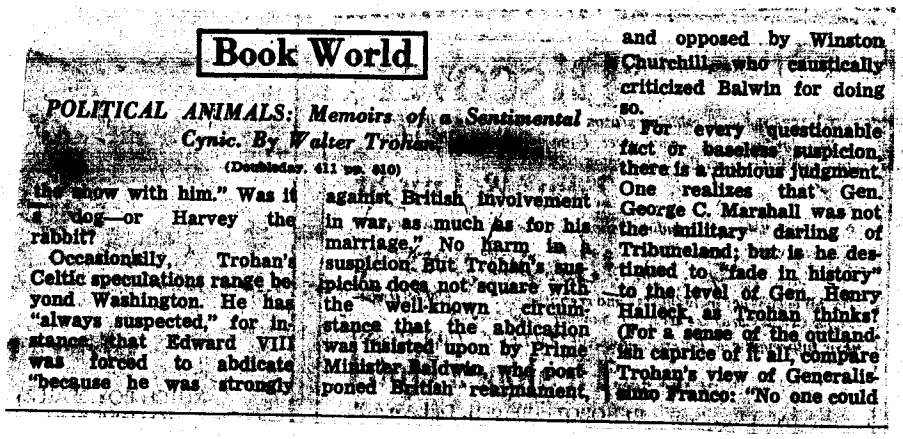
Fair enough. FDR was unquestionably devious, as charged. But what of Trohan's casual assertion that FDR "changed the face of government" by "encouraging the courts to legislate by decree" and by "borrowing from Hitler's socialism"/ What is the evidence? That FDR by 1937 was actually trying to rearrange the makeup of the Supreme Court (to strip it of the ability to do just what Trohan says he encouraged courts to do) rather contradicts the first assertion. As for the second, to say that FDR "went so far as to exhibit an ersatz suit made of wood fibers at a press conference" is hardly proof of galloping fascism. And by what measure did Trohan determine that the New Deal was more proccupied with sex than other administrations, or that Missy LeHand was FDR's "mistress" as well as secretary? One may fairly ask keyhole historians to name their keyhole.

The junior culprit of the piece is President Kennedy, allegedly "beset by Addison's Disease." That has been denied. But if Trohan is right, what are we to make of the assertion that such events as "the hapless Bay of Pigs and the erection of the Berlin Wall" may have revealingly coincided with JFK's "stimulatory shots of steroid hormones"/ Has Trohan a log of the shots? And if he does, the suggestion that pivotal events may be explained by hormone highs in the White House reaches new excess in Cleopatra's nose history—perhaps the most remarkable excess since one medical historian ventured to blame Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo on a Vitamin C deficiency.

By the way, lest I give the contrary impression, Trohan's output of bizarre information is not partisan. I thought I had read everything that could be said about Nixon's Checkers speech of 1952 until I found Trohan saying that Nixon's "love for political cuteness prompted him to bring his daughters' cocker spaniel on

# Politics With a Touch of Blarney

THE WASHINGTON POST
*Wednesday, April 30, 1975* B 5



# Book World

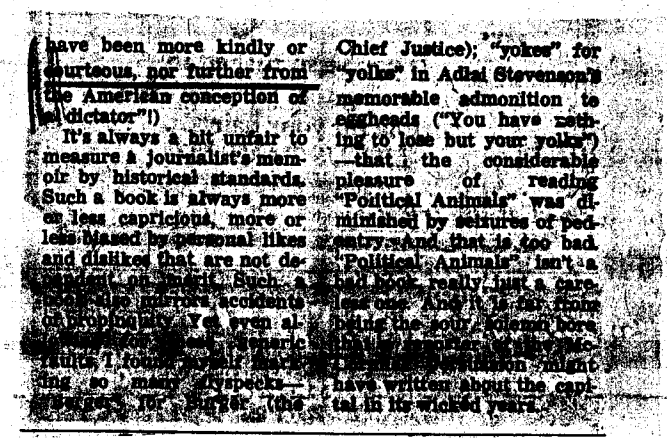
***POLITICAL ANIMALS:*** *Memoirs of a Sentimental Cynic. By Walter Trohan.*

(Doubleday. 411 pp. $10)

the know with him." Was it a dog—or Harvey the rabbit?

Occasionally, Trohan's Celtic speculations range beyond Washington. He has "always suspected," for instance, that Edward VIII was forced to abdicate "because he was strongly against British involvement in war, as much as for his marriage." No harm in a suspicion. But Trohan's suspicion does not square with the well-known circumstance that the abdication was insisted upon by Prime Minister Baldwin, who postponed British rearmament, and opposed by Winston Churchill, who caustically criticized Baldwin for doing so.

For every "questionable fact or baseless suspicion," there is a dubious judgment. One realizes that Gen. George C. Marshall was not the "military" darling of Tribuneland; but is he destined to "fade in history" to the level of Gen. Henry Halleck, as Trohan thinks? For a sense of the outlandish caprice of it all, compare Trohan's view of Generalissimo Franco: "No one could



have been more kindly or courteous, nor further from the American conception of a dictator"!)

It's always a bit unfair to measure a journalist's memoir by historical standards. Such a book is always more or less capricious, more or less biased by personal likes and dislikes that are not de-

Chief Justice); "yokes" for "yolks" in Adlai Stevenson's memorable admonition to eggheads ("You have nothing to lose but your yolks") —that the considerable pleasure of reading "Political Animals" was diminished by seizures of pedantry. And that is too bad. "Political Animals" isn't a bad book, really just a care-

have written about the capital in its wicked years.