

## Ten Years of American *Chronicles* (September 1977 - September 1987)

If Rockford, Illinois, was an unlikely place to launch a serious magazine of literature and the arts, it was so much better for Leopold Tyrmand, a man who appreciated life's ironies. Having once escaped from Warsaw's Communist rule, Tyrmand had more recently fled from an oppressive New York literary scene. Now, he was to make Middle America the home for his assault on a decadent liberal culture.

At a time when conservative magazines were building their circulations around the political comedies staged by the Carter administration, Tyrmand's new magazine was to have a different focus. Partisan politics and economics were only symptoms of a larger battle over the control of Ameri-

can culture. A reader of *Chronicles of Culture* would clearly see "how a book, its meaning and success, affects his life, his economic activities and his sense of social order which is indispensable to carry out these activities."

*Chronicles'* scope has greatly enlarged since its first issues, but the *raison d'être* remains. There have been no truces in the war of ideas. And in an era when new buzzwords like "cultural conservatism" easily roll off the lips of political operatives, *Chronicles'* long-standing dedication to serious discourse is needed more than ever.

Two years ago, Thomas Fleming took the reins of the magazine and never looked back. Under his editorial leadership, *Chronicles* has entertained thousands of readers who have thirsted for rigorous thinking and clear writing. As publisher I am pleased but humbled that during this time, *Chronicles'* influence has grown even faster than its circulation.

Over the last 10 years, many others have helped shape, manage, and market the magazine. Some are currently on the masthead. Some were only with the magazine briefly. Almost all had at one time been seduced by Tyrmand's vision for the magazine, its promise and possibilities.

Without Nancy Mohrbacher, the first two years of *Chronicles* would have been far less accurate and grammatical, and we shall not forget Rebecca Woosley, whose editorial and organizational skills made her invaluable. Or the ever-sunny Lindy Ellingwood, who did just about everything at one time or another. Most recently, Theresa Lillibridge said good-bye after helping to introduce the tools of modern management and technology into our publishing office.

*Chronicles'* former alumni of associate editors began with James J.

Thompson Jr., a brilliant historian who possessed the courtesy and high sense of honor we used to expect from Southerners. Many of our readers will remember the hardworking professionalism of Gary Vasilash, who smoothed our transition from a bimonthly to a monthly. (Gary never really left: He is still writing for us as a contributing editor.) Bryce Christensen, whose writing and editing recently earned him the editorship of The Rockford Institute's newsletter *The Family in America* also continues to make his presence felt. Finally, the magazine is already beginning to show the thumbprint of its newest managing editor, Momcilo Selic. The current staff is the strongest team we've ever had, and we should not neglect to mention the superb covers designed by Anna Wo-decki and the patient hard work of Cynthia Calvert and Leann Manning.

*Chronicles* would not have been possible at all if it were not for John Howard. As president of The Rockford Institute during its first decade, Dr. Howard found the financial support needed to sustain the magazine's publication. His devotion to Leopold Tyrmand and his dreams for *Chronicles* were another testament to his noble character.

I've admired those I've had the pleasure to work with over these first 10 years—especially the editors of this magazine. They possess that rare ability to make sense out of the complex realities of modern life. Frankly, I've always thought that the editors at *Chronicles* have been able to use that ability a little bit better than anybody else.

I can happily report to our readers that I expect this to be true for the next 10 years as well.

—Richard A. Vaughan

Founding Editor, Leopold Tyrmand.









# The Illuminators

Armed with steel pen instead of sword, our first illustrator, Warren Chappell, served *Chronicles* like a knight. Elves, charging horsemen, centaurs rampant came forth under his hand to spread beyond the hundreds of his books, into a world of cultural polemic. Chappell did not fade away—resplendent in the blaze of his joyous covers he still follows us, writing praise or admonition as he sees fit.

Our first art director, Barbara De Witz, redesigned the magazine in 1985 to give it its present look, while at the same time providing illustrations. When Emilia and Zbigniew Fitz became regular illustrators, the visual

frame was set.

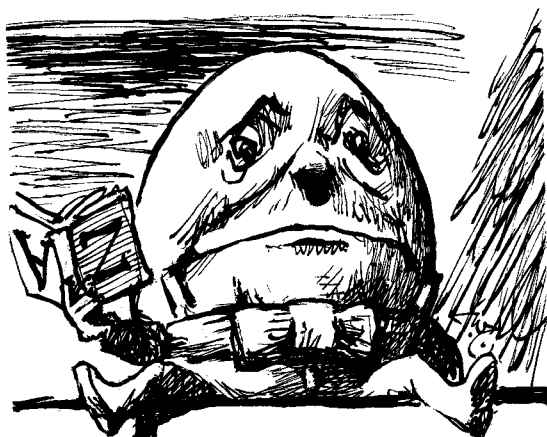
In her professional biography, Emilia Fitz, born in 1943 in what is now the USSR, and living and working in France, wrote *Americaine*. Her husband, Zbigniew Fitz, also formerly of Poland, wrote the same. Loving may not be incompatible with leaving—the chagrin of Poles, who sing, “There will always be a Poland, as long as there are Poles,” has enriched the U.S., and *Chronicles*, immensely. Draped men, shuffling before unbearable light; humanoids climbing the convoluted DNH spiral; weeping figures mourning a threatened America—these Eastern European interpreta-



tions constitute a *cri du coeur*.

The Fitzes will be with us for a long time—if nothing else, their whimsical vignettes may keep the Devil puzzled, long enough for us to take his measure.

(continued on page 14)



Illustrations by Warren Chappell

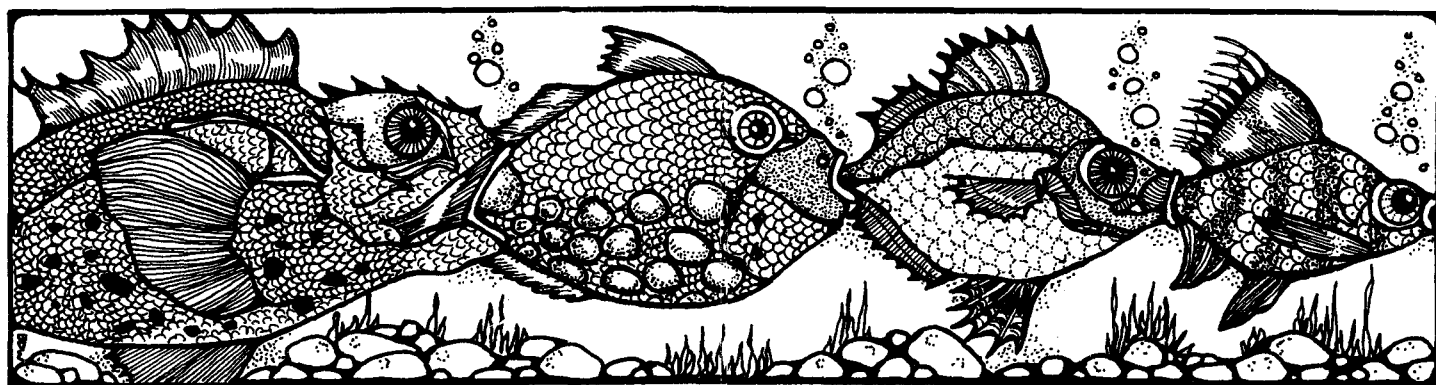


Illustration by Barbara De Witz

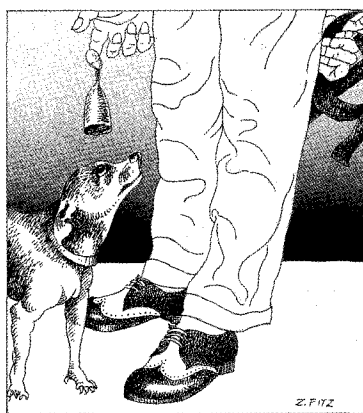
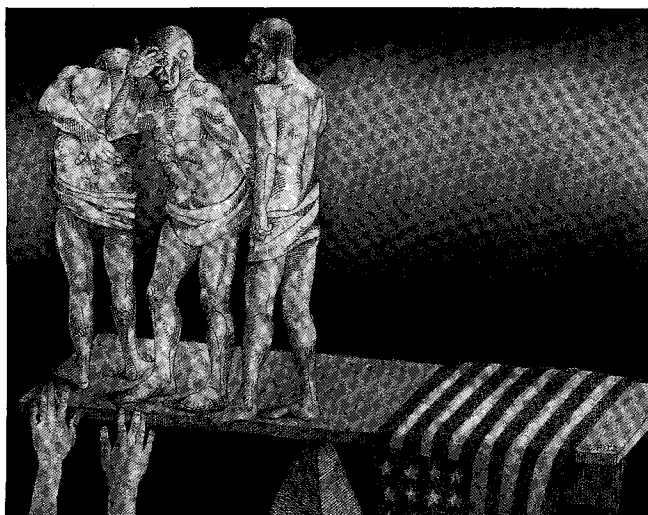


*To the memory of Leopold Tyrmand //*  
*Warren Chappell '87*

*Illustration by Warren Chappell*

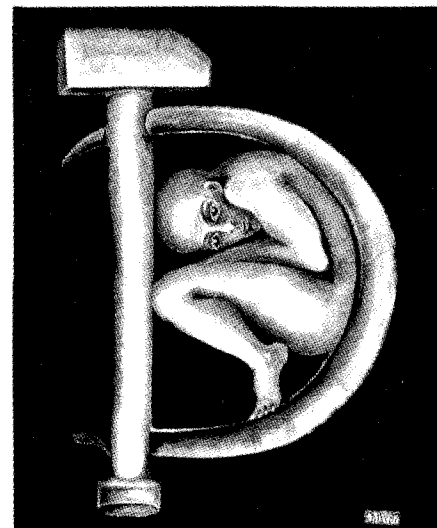
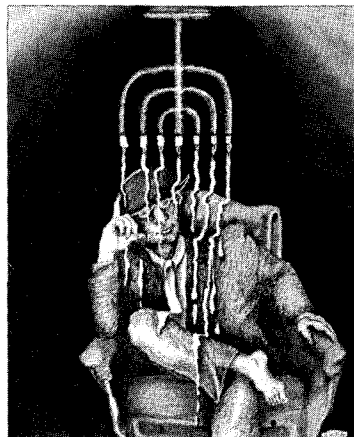
SEPTEMBER 1987 / 13





Our latest ally, Anna Wodecki, has turned out to be among our best recruiters—her plumed men and enigmatic women have hooked more readers on *Chronicles* than some of our wiliest advertising. *Chronicles*, Anna knows, being another exile from Communism, must be its own best herald; and like good gardeners, we hope to provide delight as well as nourishment. (MS)

Illustrations by Zbigniew & Emilia Fitz



Illustrations by Anna Mycek-Wodecki



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## *A World Without Heroes*

### *The Modern Tragedy*

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## A (PARDON THE EXPRESSION) BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS by George Garrett

*The irrepressible John Towne tells us what he really thinks of higher education. Something to offend nearly everyone.*

I want you to know I share your disappointment that nobody you really care about and wanted could be here to make this speech. Sorry that Gary Hart is indisposed. Alan Alda was too busy and so was Gloria Steinem. As for all the others, I am almost as sorry as you are that you couldn't get Klaus von Bulow or Jean Harris, Jody Foster or Brooke Shields, Mother Teresa or Maya Angelou, the Refrigerator or James Baldwin, Gordon Liddy or Gordon Lish, Fawn Hall or Donna Rice. I am especially sad you couldn't get yourselves a Norman—Norman Mailer or Norman Podhoretz or Norman Lear, singly or as a kazoo trio. Believe it or not, there just aren't enough famous people out there to be everywhere these days. Same old

faces in *People* and *W*. . . .

Whoever came up with the idea of inviting a fictional character is either an inspired genius or a Woody Allen copycat. Anyway, here I am and I'm glad to be here, free for a while from the printed pages of a minor novel. I am not Joe Bob Briggs. Joe Bob is out on assignment. And some of you may already have guessed, on account of my preppy, slightly down-at-the-heels WASP appearance (actually, appearance-wise, if you'll pardon the expression, I am a dead ringer for the brilliant young novelist Madison Smartt Bell) that I am not Nathan Zuckerman. Sorry about that. The odd thing about Nathan is, all things considered and not excluding the success of the books *he* gets to live in, that he and his author get along pretty well. You can't even invite one without the other, and you can't afford either of them, anyway.

My name is Towne, John Towne, and I don't get along at all with my author. We aren't speaking to each other, not since he exposed me to outrage and ridicule in a novel called *Poison Pen*. Boy-oh-boy, the critics! Here's how they described me to potential readers (if any): *Publishers Weekly*—"a vulgar scapegrace"; *New York Times Book Review*—"a low-life crank"; *National Review*—"a coke-befuddled red-neck"; *Book World*—"a full-time con artist, misanthrope, and lecher"; *Chicago Tribune*—"a lecherous, misanthropic, failed academic"; *Village Voice*—"an exceptionally sleazy picaro"; and, best of all, Fred Chappell's description of me in the *Greensboro News*, "a loathsome, racist, crude and gruesome creep." Enough stuff like that could eventually hurt a guy's feelings, you know? Anyway, I'm pleased to be here with you instead of back in that book hiding from critics. Thanks for thinking of me.

First thing, I want to congratulate all of you who have managed to win prizes and awards. I hope you enjoy them to the fullest, if only because irrefutable statistics prove most of you will never win another blessed thing as long as you live. For most of you, this is it. The rest of you, the huge majority who didn't win anything, aren't going to change your luck out there. And no amount of weeping and wailing, praying and fasting, goals, guidelines, and Affirmative Action is going to change the odds against you very much. Relax. We are all mostly destined to be losers

*George Garrett is a novelist and poet whose most recent books include *Poison Pen* and *The Succession*.*

