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The Wizard of Mecosta

Russell Kirk, Gothic Fiction, and  
the Moral Imagination

Camilo Peralta



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# The Wizard of Mecosta

*Russell Kirk, Gothic Fiction, and the Moral Imagination*

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*Peralta's brilliant portrait of Kirk's literary themes gives us not only a richer explanation for Kirk's Gothic imagination, love of mystery and permanence, and occupation as an independent man of letters, but also a vivid image of his literary craft which brought forward the rhetorical tradition of Burke, Johnson, Walter Scott, Hawthorne, and Coleridge into the 20th century. Peralta shows that Kirk's Dantesque view of an ordered soul and cosmos and his Miltonic scope for good and evil makes him the literary equal of T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis, with whom he shared a Christian humanist vision for literature and man.*

**Dr. E. Wesley Reynolds, III**

Professor, History | Social Sciences and Humanities  
Northwood University

## About the author

**Camilo Peralta** is an Associate Professor of English at Joliet Junior College. He has been teaching ESL, composition, and literature for over a decade, both at home and abroad, and has worked with students of all ages, races, backgrounds, and abilities.

His research interests include religion, science fiction/fantasy, and conservatism. His work on these and other subjects has been published in, most recently, the journals "Religions," "Mythlore," and "Symbolism". He is currently working on several projects, including a full-length treatment of traditional themes in Shakespeare and a novel set in China during the 1980s.

He has a PhD in the Humanities from Faulkner University and an MA and BA in English Literature. In 2021, he was invited to serve as a Wilbur Fellow at the Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal in Mecosta, MI, which is dedicated to promoting the work of its namesake, who died in 1994.

## Summary

"The Wizard of Mecosta" offers an extended analysis of the fiction of Russell Amos Kirk (1918-1994), a central figure in modern American conservatism who is often referred to as "the father" of the same. Born and raised in Michigan, Kirk was also a prolific writer of fiction, who published almost two dozen short stories and three novels over the course of his long career. At the heart of everything Kirk wrote was what he referred to as the "moral imagination," a phrase he borrowed from Edmund Burke and often used to describe the instructive and enlightening purposes of great literature. Despite his prominent reputation as a public man of letters and the respect of fellow authors including Ray Bradbury and Stephen King, Kirk's fiction was never very popular, and has fallen into almost complete obscurity in the present. "The Wizard of Mecosta" is the first full-length study ever published about Kirk's fiction, and the only work of any length to consider the entirety of his output, including all of the stories and novels he wrote.

By emphasizing how Kirk's fiction illuminates certain aspects of his social and political theory, "The Wizard of Mecosta" distinguishes itself from the half-dozen or more studies of the author's life and work that have been published since his death in 1994. It should appeal to anyone with an interest in American conservatism, as well as fans and scholars of the sort of Gothic horror in which Kirk, unexpectedly, excelled. Through his stories of avenging ghosts and timeless journeys through the afterlife, he reminds us of the existence of "permanent things," the core values and beliefs of Western society, which he strove all his life to preserve. It is high time that his fiction found a more appreciative, and larger, audience.

May 2024 | Hardback 236x160mm | 222 Pages | ISBN: 978-1-64889-853-2

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