



# Permanent Things

The Russell Kirk Center *Newsletter*

Number 30 ❁ Spring 2017

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## Hope College Students Discover the Kirk Center

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Dr. Jeffrey Polet, a professor of political science at Hope College, in Holland, Michigan, noticed that students were told about liberal or conservative “ideologies” as part of their introduction to political thought, but were not asked to read any conservative writers. When Dr. Polet assigned his students some passages from Russell Kirk, he found they were eager for more.

After reading Kirk’s *The Roots of American Order* with the Tocqueville Forum on Hope’s campus, Dr. Polet arranged to bring twelve of his students to the Kirk Center. Dr. Polet and Kirk biographer James Person led an extended discussion on *The Roots of American Order* during the weekend of April 7-9, 2017. Person also spoke about Kirk the man, the main outlines of his thought, and his impact on the shape of contemporary politics. After the lecture, the group enjoyed browsing in the local bookstore and talking with Annette Kirk about the artifacts throughout the Kirk house. One of the students regaled the group with extemporaneous piano playing while his classmates enjoyed good food and evening conversation.

Polet said that the Hope College students were excited to discover such a rich, imaginative, and intellectually serious conservative tradition.

As universities become more adamant in the defense of progressive orthodoxies, such alternative educational opportunities provide guidance in the search for ordered liberty.



## Progressives and Conservatives Square Off in Grand Rapids

Much has been written about the polarized state of political discussion. In an effort to share common ground in which the ideas of both sides can be debated, the Hauenstein Center hosted the Conservative/Progressive Summit at Grand Valley State University on May 4-6, 2017. Hauenstein Center director and Kirk Center Senior Fellow Gleaves Whitney assembled an impressive group of professors and journalists for what has become a rare event: engaging in civil dialogue at a state university. The Kirk Center was invited to co-sponsor and proved an excellent resource for speaker suggestions, such as Wilfred McClay, Ingrid Gregg, Jeffrey Polet, Gary Gregg, Dan McCarthy, Winston Elliott, and Bradley Birzer.

Some of the topics discussed were: “Intellectuals and Trump,” “Meritocracy, Expertise and the Future of Democracy,” “Politics, Journalism, and the Digital Age,” “From Fox News to Fake News” and “Karl Marx: A Ghost in the American Machine.”

Despite some contentious moments, the three days of talks were remarkably civil as both groups attempted to present persuasive arguments for opposing points of view.

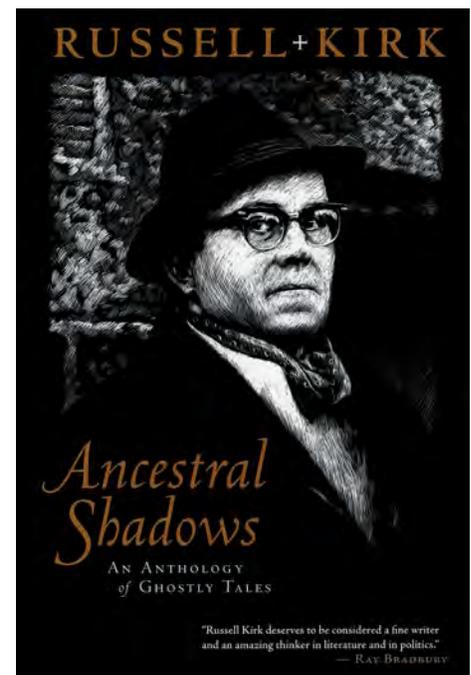


*Hauenstein Center Director Gleaves Whitney with Annette Kirk and Dr. Brad Birzer at the Summit.*

## Kirk's Fiction Inspires Website

As the author of supernatural tales in the tradition of Hawthorne, Coleridge, and Poe, Russell Kirk has gained an enthusiastic audience among readers of fantasy literature, even winning a World Fantasy Award. One such reader, Jeffrey Pearce, a history teacher and writer from Washington State, recently spoke on “Virtue in Two Ghostly Tales of Russell Kirk” at the Kirk library. Pearce explored the virtues of fortitude, justice, and mercy in Kirk’s short stories “Ex Tenebris” and “Sorworth Place,” captivating guests with excerpts from tense moments in the tales.

Pearce has been reading Kirk’s fiction since his college days in the 1980s, and is the creator and editor of the website “Ghostly Kirk.” He is also the president of The Russell Kirk Society of Stanwood and Camano Island (WA). “If I have any regrets about my past as a reader,” Pearce confessed to the audience, “the main one is that I found Kirk’s stories early in my ghost story reading career and am thus relegated for the rest of my life to read ghost stories that will never live up to Kirk’s.”



## Villanova University's Kirk Society hosts Sir Roger Scruton to Packed Audience



*Student officers Tony Triggiano, Isabel Nelson and Laura Spence greet Roger Scuton.*



Members of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute's Russell Kirk Society, a student reading group at Villanova University, sponsored a lecture this past semester by Sir Roger Scruton, an English philosopher who was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 2016. Sir Roger's talk on Western Civilization was titled "Defending What We Are."

The Kirk Society was formed in 2014 by Villanova undergraduate Kelly Leahy, with the guidance of Humanities professor and poet James Matthew Wilson, a former fellow at the Kirk Center. The Society attracted the Villanova Honors Program, Humanities Department, Center for Liberal Education, and Matthew J. Ryan Center as co-sponsors for the 2nd annual Kirk lecture. The event was so well attended that it was standing-room only. During Sir Roger's time on campus, he also met with students over lunch and joined a faculty gathering. The Society looks forward to hosting a similar event in the next academic year.

## Graduate Students Explore Liberal Education and Liberty

For more than fifty years, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) has been awarding fellowships to outstanding graduate students who demonstrate the potential to be leaders in academia or public affairs. This past April 27-30, fifteen of these ISI graduate fellows gathered in Mecosta to explore the relationship between liberty and liberal education. Students from George Mason, the University of Chicago, Baylor, the University of Minnesota, Catholic University, Boston University, City University of New York, Marquette, and the University of Texas, Austin, were led by faculty mentors Mark Shiffman (Villanova) and Bradley C.S. Watson (St. Vincent's) in an exploration of classic texts from Plato, Aristotle, and Hugh of St. Victor to Cardinal Newman, John Dewey, and Allan Bloom.

It was an opportunity to discuss important thinkers,

consider the meaning of the teaching vocation in the modern age, and establish new friendships among the fellows that often last a lifetime. The Kirk Center provided the ideal setting for such active contemplation and many hoped to return to the Center for future programs or for an academic retreat.



### Forthcoming EBook from The University Bookman:

## "How Should Conservatives Think about Immigration?"

*The Bookman's* popular recent symposium on conservative thinking about immigration will soon be available as an eBook. Contributors include well-known writers Daniel McCarthy, Yuval Levin, Brad Birzer, and Bruce Frohnen, with Gene Callahan and Josh Blackman adding new essays to the collection.

In the introduction, editor Gerald Russello writes, the issue of "immigration concerns profound questions of who we are as Americans, and what our culture and society represent both to citizens and to those who wish to come here." Unfortunately, debate over immigration is often innocent of any knowledge of history, culture, or demographics, and proceeds almost solely on the basis of the immediate political points to be made. To remedy this lack of serious thought, *The University Bookman* has invited a number of scholars to consider how conservatives should think through approaches to immigration.

Visit the *University Bookman* online at [KirkCenter.org](http://KirkCenter.org) for information about availability.

### IN PRINT

## New Edition of an Orestes Brownson Novel Available

Cluny Media has just published a new edition of *Like a Roaring Lion*, by nineteenth-century thinker Orestes Brownson, with an introduction by Gerald Russello. Brownson, whom Russell Kirk admired greatly, has been praised by figures from Lord Acton to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. as one of the nation's most important social, political, and literary figures.

Originally titled *The Spirit Rapper*, the novel traces the fascination with and temptations of spiritualism and the occult, in ways very resonant with today's post-religious "spiritual" era. According to scholar Richard Reinsch, "This

republication of *Like a Roaring Lion* is a story of a soul wrestling with evil and its false promises of liberation, and finding through grace and a properly-guided freedom the means to resist it."



*Hillsdale College honors students enjoy conversation in the Kirk library during their semi-annual conference.*

### A Note on Our New Design

As Edmund Burke once commented, "change is the means of our conservation." In that spirit, we offer you a fresh format for this newsletter. This new design was created by Glenn K. Pierce, a seasoned graphic designer who has recently changed mediums to hand-drawn fine art. As a youth, Mr. Pierce often visited his uncle Russell Kirk in the village of Mecosta and explored the lakes and swamps of central Michigan in a small motorboat. We hope this lively design better illuminates the Center's many activities.

**We encourage you to help support our mission.** Tax deductible donations may be sent to:

The Russell Kirk Center, P.O. Box 4, Mecosta, MI 49332

[www.kirkcenter.org](http://www.kirkcenter.org)