

*Ancestral Shadows: an Anthology of Ghostly Tales* by Russell Kirk was published in 2004 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Russell Kirk is considered to be one of the giants of the modern conservative movement. He died in 1994. He wrote the short stories which comprise the anthology between 1960 and 1985.

The most outstanding feature, which the short stories share, is that they are boring. I wonder, since his short story “There’s a Long, Long Trail A-Winding” won a World Fantasy Award in 1977, what the competition must have been like. It seems Russell Kirk had no use for the modern world and his disdain for all things modern seems to include the notion of *not* telegraphing the plot line of a story.

Another fault of the stories is that the writer apparently has no interest in ghosts and ghostly tales. He is interested in God, Christianity and the finer points of some theological arguments. I can empathize with Kirk’s dismissal of the modern world. He doesn’t like modern architecture, modern industries, modern music or modern morality. The introduction presents an apt description of the stories, “In order to challenge effectively modern man’s unbelief, his resistance to grace, and his blindness to mystery, Kirk creates stories that aim to penetrate the thick wall of naturalism and secularism that shut people off from mystery and grace.”

There is a literary tone to Kirk's writing. The stories are sprinkled with quotations from the Bible, Wm. Shakespear, T.S. Eliot and Edmond Burke among others. Also there are unattributed quotations the authors of which I don't recognize. The villains of the stories are people who don't believe in Christianity or who are only nominally Christians. This flies in the face of the modern notion that Christian Believers shouldn't feel superior to non-believers or believers in other religions or cults or whatever.

The above factors make it the kind of book that would most likely have virtually no audience. It would be interesting to find out how many copies of it were actually sold and if somewhere there's a garage full of unsold copies. If anyone is interested in the book let me know. Perhaps an aficionado of the genre would find the tales compelling.