

Shortt adopts a much broader scope in his other chapters and places Bucke in the intellectual framework of the nineteenth century. His conclusions about the evolution of psychiatry and, in particular, the secularization of physiology are worth reading. Finally, the notes should not be overlooked; they are fairly readable and occasionally contain some information which ought to be in the text.

The less controversial parts of the work are also intriguing. The section of the work which deals with life in the London Asylum is particularly informative. In it, the lives of inmates and employees are examined with an impressive array of statistics balanced with literary evidence. The misery of asylum existence and exceedingly difficult circumstances led to some abuse of patients and to one patient's observation that it was often "difficult to distinguish the sane from the insane, the officer from the inmate."

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Kurelek. PATRICIA MORLEY. Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1986. 338 p., illus. ISBN 0-7715-9748-7.

William Kurelek was a popular Canadian painter and illustrator who died in 1977. His distinctive work became familiar to many Canadians through reproductions in *The Canadian* magazine in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Perhaps most individuals who know of his work associate him with *A Prairie Boy's Winter*, a book of illustrations with text that celebrates a child's pastoral existence on a prairie farm of a few decades ago. William Kurelek was not, however, a Canadian Norman Rockwell, depicting on canvas the pleasures of a simpler time. Much of his work was devoted to spiritual themes and to the dark messages of a coming apocalypse. Kurelek, at about the mid-point of his fifty-year life, converted to Roman Catholicism and from that time believed his painting to be a tool by which he could spread a Christian message to a secular world almost past the point of saving. The simplicity and pristine nature of some of his better known works, such as *Children's Games in Western Canada*, belie a complex and troubled artist. This paradox serves as the centrepiece of Patricia Morley's biography.

Morley is a professor of English literature. She is not by profession an art critic or an art historian, nor has she in the past attempted a full-scale biography. Her credentials to undertake a story of Kurelek's life then, are not obvious. She appointed herself to the task when she discovered that the artist's dealer, Avrom Isaacs, possessed "bags" of correspondence from Kurelek, collected over their seventeen-year relationship. Morley appears to have embarked on the project primarily because of the enormous number of documents available. After securing the Isaacs correspondence, she convinced the artist's widow to allow her the use of Kurelek's journals and manuscripts. Morley's study of the artist also depends heavily on interviews, discussions of some of his canvases but, most importantly, on Kurelek's published autobiographies. More than anything else, what this study shows is that a wealth of sources does not by itself ensure a definitive work.

In the case of *Kurelek*, regardless of the amount of material consulted, the biography does not fully illuminate the life of its subject. Rather, the author is at times too sympathetic to her subject and shies away from a critical analysis of what Kurelek saw as the central event in his life: a Christian conversion which "cured" his deep psychological

problems and allowed him to live a productive and positive life as a messenger of his God. While his Christianity may have provided a primary focus for his art work, Morley, herself a Christian, does not make clear that Kurelek after his conversion remained a deeply troubled and often difficult individual. His conversion did not and could not alter his fundamental psychological problems.

In examining Kurelek's life, Morley uses a strictly chronological approach in covering the first thirty years, beginning with his childhood on his parents' farms. She believes that a difficult relationship with his father, whom Kurelek admired but could never please, led to deep-seated psychological problems for the artist as a young man. Morley traces his progress, both as an artist and as an individual self-consciously searching for a cure to his mental illness. Morley seems to have difficulty in focussing on the truly important events in this part of the artist's life as she typifies his public school days in Stonewall, Manitoba, his time spent in British psychiatric hospitals, as well as certain intervening years, as crucial to his development as an artist and an individual. By describing all three periods in his early years as crucial, Morley blunts what might have been an incisive analysis of this half of the artist's life. Much in these first chapters relies heavily on Kurelek's autobiographies as framework, while interviews with contemporaries and teachers are used to provide counterpoint to the artist's own memory of a time which he worked and reworked in manuscript form over the course of his lifetime. After describing Kurelek's achievement of commercial, if not wholehearted critical success, Morley's study becomes more thematic as she examines his obsession with imminent nuclear holocaust, his spiritual art, and his relationship with his dealer, as well as with the publishers of his books. Throughout these years, his paintings became more and more commercial in an effort to generate funds for the creation of his more religious works and to support their attendant Christian causes.

The "bags" of documents with which Patricia Morley began her task as Kurelek's biographer have allowed her to provide the reader with an intriguing story of the artist's life. The completeness of that documentation has not, however, ensured a strong analysis of that life. It is perhaps not simply an oversight that the artist's widow is not mentioned in the three pages of acknowledgements included at the outset of this study. When Kurelek died in 1977, he left a wife and young family. Much of what Morley records concerning Kurelek's personality, his work, and their effect on the family is obliquely written. While Morley states that Mrs. Kurelek gave her a free hand in her use of the artist's writings, the ownership of most of those papers remains with the widow. Undoubtedly Morley's concern for how a critical discussion of the artist's personality would affect his family makes her depiction of Kurelek's life something less than pointed at times. Patricia Morley has demonstrated that William Kurelek lived a life which bears the weight of a biographical study. But the story would not have suffered had more time passed before it was told. The fact that Morley worked mainly with documents which were in private hands at the time of writing affects the nature of the book she has written. Perhaps this study should have waited until the majority of the documents had been placed in an archival repository. The records so placed might have indicated that the family was truly ready for a biographer to deal in a meaningful and scholarly way with some of the issues Morley has skirted — intentionally or not — in this study.

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