

I would have gained little, while the loss would have been enormous. I would have lost the opportunity to talk with hundreds of Kurelek's contemporaries, relatives, and friends whose memories of the man were still fresh and vivid. Had I begun even five years later, I would not have been able to talk with his father, with several British physicians, and with other central players in the life drama.

McMahon claims that I have failed to write the "definitive" work. There is, in the opinion of this working biographer, no such thing, although the cliché is beloved by reviewers. Each biography is *one individual's view* of another individual life. This is true no matter how much documentation is available or how many years are devoted to studying it. I have provided not *the* view but *a* view of Kurelek's life, one supported by a wealth of contemporary evidence which attempts to make sense of the conflicts and paradoxes within that evidence. All future biographers will be heavily indebted to my book and to my research papers. Only a strong personal interest in the subject could have sustained me through the arduous labour involved. I have tried to convey some of that passionate concern to my readers.

**Patricia Morley**  
Manotick, Ontario

### ***The Reviewer Responds***

Patricia Morley does not address the key points I raised in my review of *Kurelek*. I suggested that Morley's discussion of William Kurelek's conversion to Roman Catholicism is too accepting of the artist's belief that religion provided a cure for his psychological problems. I pointed out that Morley fails to discriminate among important causal factors in the artist's development in the first half of his life. I also argued that because the author does not analyze the importance of the artist's relationship with his wife, to whom Morley is indebted for the use of manuscript sources, her treatment of the second half of his life lacks balance and critical acumen.

Morley distorts my review and, upon reflection, I concede neither errors of fact nor interpretation nor personal naiveté. I will address her points briefly in turn:

1. I did not deny that passion and commitment to her subject served Patricia Morley as motivating factors in writing this book. What I contended was that the opportunity and timing of the biography rested on a previously unknown cache of documents. Morley's words in her own preface support my original assertions rather than her attempted rebuttal. Therein she clearly states that her discovery of Kurelek papers was the pivotal event which led her to write a biography. She describes attending a Kurelek exhibition at The Isaacs Gallery where she heard an individual say that Avrom Isaacs possessed bags of William Kurelek's writings. Patricia Morley writes,

*Bags of his writings* [original italics]. It was a curious, not to say an extraordinary phrase. The effect on me was startling. My interest in Kurelek, which had been growing quietly for nearly two decades, suddenly

crystallized into the conviction that I should write his biography. After this point there was no turning back and no release from the pressures of the project for the next six years. (p. ix)

Morley writes of her discovery of the documents as though it were a religious experience. I hardly distorted "the facts."

2. I did say that the contradiction between Kurelek's cheerful painting and troubled life served as "the centrepiece" or central theme of the biography. I made the point in order to discuss how Morley fails to develop or explore that central paradox effectively, let alone definitively. The first paragraph of my response above indicates why.
3. I noted that Mrs. Kurelek's name does not appear in the acknowledgements (several other relatives are acknowledged there) because it seemed representative of the oblique treatment of the nature of Kurelek's relationship with his own family. Whether her name appears in the preface is a quite different point. I did recognize in my review that Patricia Morley made a conscious attempt to respect the privacy of Mrs. Kurelek and her children when she decided to write the biography. My point in mentioning this fact was that Morley should accept that, as a consequence, her book presents a somewhat weak analysis of the family relationship and its impact on his art. Given the extent of Morley's attention to the relationship between Kurelek and his father, it is striking that she does not bring the same level of analysis to bear on the relationships in Kurelek's own household. Morley's letter indicates she either misread my review or fails to recognize the validity of my point.
4. Patricia Morley's assertion of the value of oral history and personal contacts in constructing a study of this type is a sound one, and I did point out in my review the variety of sources she used. As I argued, however, it tends to render her study in that sense a memoir as opposed to a complete biography. Documents used while still in private hands rather than in an archives may lead to compromised analysis and sympathetic bias, a point I make clearly in my review and which Morley continues to miss entirely.

I certainly do agree with Patricia Morley's conviction that she has written a book which represents "one individual view" as she puts it. I simply observe that a different, more analytical work might be written if the majority of the Kurelek papers are out of private hands and in an archives.

**Nancy McMahon**  
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