The Parable of a Village in Decline: Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* and the Politics of Community

Linda Morra
Bishop's University

In *Against the Romance of Community,* Miranda Joseph argues that the discourse of "[c]ommunity is almost always invoked as an unequivocal good, an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging.... [It] has connoted cherished ideals of cooperation, equality, and communion" (xxxiii). As Joseph also observes, however, the discourse of identity politics of the 1980s and 1990s critiqued the underpinnings of national and other incarnations of community; it lay bare the real racism, sexism, and violence that were simultaneously perpetuated and obscured by affirmative attitudes about various communities and their peculiar manifestations. Yet, as she notes, in spite of the critical trajectory that denounced the "romance" enveloping notions of community, "a celebratory discourse" around it "relentlessly returns" (viii). In attempting to address the logic of its persistence, she suggests that capitalism is often complicit:

> Capitalism and, more generally, modernity depend on and generate the discourse of community to legitimate social hierarchies.[...] While identity is often named as the bond among community members, it is a false name in that communal

ESC 35.4 (December 2009): 31–51

> participants are not identical and many of those to whom an identity is attributed do not participate in communal activities. I argue that communal subjectivity is constituted not by identity but rather through practices of production and consumption. (viii)

Such idealization about a "utopian state of human relatedness" averts the penetrating gaze that would expose real inequities. More than a cursory glance would reveal that "communal subjectivity" is not necessarily founded in the "human caring and understanding" that others habitually ascribe to it but, rather, in those practices of consumption.

Indebted to Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* and his discussions of romantic anti-urbanism, Joseph shows how the "romance of community" is often determined, even driven, by these nostalgic impulses: that is, the idealization of a country life, (dis)located temporally from a present moment of discontent and geographically from a heavily industrialized city-centre. "Community" is thus invoked as a model of positive human interaction, from which tenuous ethical values are generated and are held in opposition to the economic pursuits generated by modernity. So Joseph asserts:

> [T]he discourse of community positions community as the defining other of modernity, of capitalism. This discourse includes a Romantic narrative of community as prior in time to "society," locating community as a long-lost past for which we yearn nostalgically from our current fallen state of alienation, bureaucratization, rationality. It distinguishes community from society spatially, as local, involving face-to-face relations, where capital is global and faceless; community is all about boundaries between us and them, boundaries that are naturalized through reference to place or race or culture or identity, while capital would seem to denature, crossing all borders and making everything, everyone, equivalent. (1)

Community is thus endowed with a sense of nostalgia and alleged to be resistant to, rather than complicit with, capitalism. Conversely, the latter is characterized as a destructive entity that disables genuine human interaction and undermines identity.

The nostalgia for community, which Joseph sees as characteristic of critical thought, also marks some of the literary criticism of Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger*. Recent criticism determines the book to be an achievement for its sophisticated, complex, and realistic rendering of this small village located in Quebec (see, for example, New

Linda Morra is an Associate Professor at Bishop's University, where she teaches Canadian and indigenous literature. Her other publications include *Corresponding Influence: Selected Letters of Emily Carr and Ira Dilworth* (University of Toronto Press 2006), *At the Speed of Light There is Only Illumination: A Reappraisal of Marshall McLuhan* (2004, co-edited with John Moss), *Troubling Tricksters: Critical Revisioning Conversations* (Wilfrid Laurier UP 2010, co-edited with Deanna Reder), and articles about writers such as Jack Hodgins, Tomson Highway, Jane Rule, and Mordecai Richler.

47). The criticism more contemporary to the collection's initial date of publication, however, valued its pastoral elements and regarded the community depicted therein as being eroded by the compounded influences of the city, modernity, and industrialization.[1] But even then, Scott's peers perceived his sketches to be realistic. After having read the 1945 edition of the stories, Harold Bring, an associate of Scott, wrote to say on 9 July 1947, that "[y]ou educate me in the comprehension of the French Canadian."[2] From its initial publication in 1896 to more recent articles, moreover, the reception of *In the Village of Viger* quite consistently showcases Viger and its traditional communal values as destabilized and contaminated by, or susceptible to, external technological and modern advances. Instead, however, I would posit that Scott shows that the "infection" comes from within Viger itself. I would add that, in depicting the village as he does, Scott implicitly justifies his vision of a homogeneous national identity, into which a French-Canadian identity and its prevalent Catholic belief system would have uncomfortably fit.

Although there has been a marked critical shift since the 1970s with respect to his literary representation of indigenous persons, his treatment of Catholic French Canada has yet to be scrutinized.[3] Critics have com-

1 See Ira Dilworth's letter to D.C. Scott, dated 30 May 1945, in honour of the 1945 edition: "The characterizations and the sketches of village life are done with great skill and fidelity.[…The] sensitiveness and at the same time realism with which you have depicted the French Canadian characters provide an extremely important counter-balance to some of the things that are being said and written about French Canada these days" (MS 5473, National Archives of Canada); see also William Arthur Deacon's review as it appeared in the *Globe and Mail* on Saturday, 23 June 1945: "*The Village of Viger* presents a man of genuine understanding of French Canadian manners and temperament. Sedan, a tale of how the Franco-Prussian war affected two residents of the village, could only have had its inspiration in Quebec. Similarly, the wooing of Monsieur Cuerrier indicates the writer born in Ottawa and a resident of the eastern Townships in boyhood. The humor in that piece is not merely Gallic; it is distinctly French Canadian."

2 Letter to D.C. Scott from Harold Bring, 9 July 1947. MS 5473, National Archives of Canada.

3 Scott wrote about the indigenous with an authority that, by the mid-1950s, critics were regarding as entrenched within the English-Canadian literary canon. They applauded his apparently "informed" view of their lives and cultures. J.D. Logan and Donald G. French wrote, for example, that "His connection with the Department of Indian Affairs resulted in those lyrics and legends which have for themes the Indian, the French-Canadian, and the Beauty of Nature" (46); E.K. Brown, as another example, noted that "Throughout all of the Indian poems, the fusion of intensity and restraint is notable" (84). Such responses are relegated to a critical period before his complicity in the implementation of the residential school system and the reservation system was scrutinized.

mented on Scott's understanding of the indigenous as sufficiently "inferior" as to warrant their assimilation, although troublesomely so. In "Shadows in the Soul," D.M.R. Bentley notes that, in poems such as "The Onondaga Madonna," Scott invites readers "to consider the persistence of racial traits as psychologically detrimental to individuals of mixed races and as a possible impediment to the process of assimilation" (754). As the deputy chief superintendent of the federal Department of Indian Affairs between 1923 and 1932, Scott was directly involved in negotiations over indigenous land rights and the residential school system. This facet of his political life has been directly linked to and used to critique his purportedly nostalgic renderings of indigenous persons. At moments, he has been roundly attacked with sound justification for his paternalism and his apparent mourning of the "loss" of an Aboriginal presence, the effacement to which he directly and reprehensibly contributed (see Bentley, "Shadows in the Soul" 754–55). His position as deputy chief superintendent of Indian Affairs made his complicity in the appalling treatment of the indigenous unambiguous. By extension, the nature of their representation in his poetry became much less ambiguous. Perhaps the lack of such a direct link between his political and literary life accounts for the critical paucity in relation to an arguably condescending portrayal of French Canadians in *In the Village of Viger*.[4]

The result is that such criticism has not yet extended to his treatment of these French-Canadian inhabitants, whom Scott seems to depict as lacking the political organization and savvy to resist a new political structure. Apparently, neither a spiritual nor a national sense of cohesion assured their sense of "community." First, then, I will cursorily examine the critical history of *In the Village of Viger* to demonstrate how critics and scholars have generally approached this collection of stories.[5] Then, I will identify some of the characteristics and indicators of the collapse of the seigneurial system as they appear within the collection and as evidence of the political decline of French Canada.[6] I will also reference the material stipulations exacted by Scott in relation to the physical appearance of the stories: specifically, the subtitle he chooses to omit and the illustrations

4 The prevalent Catholic references and the naming of the characters, such as the Desjardins family and Paul Arbique, indicate that Viger is indeed a French-Canadian rather than an English-Canadian village in Quebec.

5 All references from *In the Village of Viger* will be from the 1945 edition, the last one of which Scott approved and which included the illustrations to which I make reference.

6 This paper will use the spelling of "seigneurial," although Scott titles his story "The Tragedy of the Seigniory," because the former is the more common usage of spelling in the historical documents I have employed.

that were commissioned to accompany an edition of the stories.[7] Finally, I will use direct textual evidence to demonstrate that Scott's sense of regret for a passing way of life, for Viger's value-system, scarcely exists within the book. In this section of the paper, I will highlight Scott's employment of Christ's parables and biblical allusions, which offer a scathing and critical subtext. In so doing, I will make more of the "ironic pastoral" to which both Tracy Ware and W.H. New refer (186). The result will be to show that the "romance of community" is sometimes at work in the critical interpretation of Scott's collection rather than in the collection itself. Nostalgia expresses or embodies regret, which is infrequently evinced by the stories themselves ("The Bobolink" is one exception). Nor is regret implied in the narrative tone. In fact, the nostalgia attributed to *Viger* is belied by the political implications of its content. As Ware puts it, Viger is "anything but Arcadian" (22). This paper, then, invites a re-reading not only of *In the Village of Viger* but also of some of its critical reception.

The result will be to show that the "romance of community" is sometimes at work in the critical interpretation of Scott's collection rather than in the collection itself.

Of those critics who address Scott's *In the Village of Viger*, the early critics tended to characterize it as a pastoral. New observes that Scott was disappointed when *Viger* was reviewed in a newspaper under the section titled *Country Life*. So New concludes that its "reputation as a sketchbook of bucolic French-Canadian Arcadia was reborn, and managed to persist for three decades more" (179). Other recent critics tend to suggest that Scott captures a community negatively affected by the processes of modernization and technology, which challenge its already failing, destabilized spiritual core (see Johnston 36; Dyer 87; Lynch 33).[8] Gerald Lynch, for example, who provides an excellent and thorough reading of the collection, sees Viger as having embodied the potential to have carried forward traditional family and humanitarian values into a modern world:

> This story cycle also suggests *Scott's hope that the fictional representation of what was being lost and precariously preserved*

7 Scott was committed to the textual order and integrity of his work. As New notes, Scott was "irritated when readers missed *Viger's* realism and its coherence; it was not simply a random assemblage of 'capital sketches' but a book, asking for recognition of its textual integrity and formal arrangement" (178).

8 Johnston regards the village as capturing Scott's nostalgic yearning for "an age of innocence" and its French-Canadian inhabitants of Viger as straddling two different worlds (39): "an idyllic rural past and a materialist, industrialized urban future" (36). Klay Dyer notes that Viger is "challenged from without by modernity and the advancing industrialized urban sprawl from the south," which is however facilitated by Viger's own "coincidental" degeneration related to "the disintegration of the traditional foundations of community and communal spirit" (87).

> might slow that modern clock, allowing for a more reasonable progress in the transitional period, a progress which would carry with it into the future those conservative-humanist values. (34, italics added)[9]

Although Lynch claims that he himself is not arguing "that the fictional Quebec village of Viger figures as a haven of some family ideal in opposition to the nefarious big city," he does claim that "Viger shows how apprehensive of materialistic definitions of progress [Scott] was at the turn of the last century." He sees Viger as striking a note of regret: it embodies Scott's "hope" that its inhabitants would be equipped with an appropriate value system before crossing the city/country boundary into the modern world. Most striking, however, is one facet of D.M.R. Bentley's "'The Thing is Found to be Symbolic': Symboliste Elements in the Early Short Stories of Gilbert Parker, Charles G.D. Roberts, and Duncan Campbell Scott." Therein, he elaborates upon how Viger participates in a "discourse of therapeutics that encouraged writers to produce books set in such spaces that would medicine the minds and nervous systems of the victims of modernity" (28).[10] Implied in this assertion is the binary opposition that Joseph claims informs the romantic discourse surrounding community: that is, the virtues with which *Viger* has come to be associated and its positioning as an antidote to "the enervating conditions of modern life" (29).

Such presuppositions about *Viger*'s function as "therapeutic" or "spiritual," its purported bucolic delights or adherence to traditional values relates to larger critical attitudes. These attitudes revel in notions of "community" and in the concomitant sense of regret for a value-system in decline, almost out of reach, or later destroyed by the onslaught of capitalist machinations. A critical approach to these short stories thus needs to be problematized by questioning the values ascribed to community. In responding to the collection, one must raise questions such as what and whose values are being represented? Similar questions arise when, in his afterword to the collection, Ware argues that Scott recognized "the danger of [Canada's] colonial status," which was "balanced by his belief that European traditions, when properly understood and adapted, can sustain Canadian culture" (121). The generality of "European traditions"

9 This critical response is a slight shift from his article, in which he argues that "the primary thematic concern of this story cycle [is] the threat that the advance of metropolitan modernity poses to the traditional conception of family and, by extension, to the ideal of community itself" (70).

10 He predicates this part of his argument about *Viger* upon the collection's prefatory lyrics, which, as he notes, "invite the reader … to see the stories that follow as a therapeutic equivalent of 'a few hours spend among summer fields'" (29).

in relation to the specificity of French-Canadian culture in this collection invites further questioning: Why did Scott focus upon a community in decline that is distinctly French Canadian?

The textual evidence contradicts some assessments made about Viger's esteemed value system and shows why Viger's infection came from within. In part, critics like New and Klay Dyer addressed this point by gesturing toward the decline of the community's Catholic Church, St Joseph's. I would also suggest that Scott was pointing to the period following the official abolition of seigneurial system, of which the Church was one central component, the other being the mill. That both are no longer central to the "community" being represented in Scott's collection indicates why the village will be subsumed by the nation-state, which Scott espoused. The nation-state was driven by the imperative to absorb and assimilate differences, including religious and political ones. The seigneurial system, introduced in New France by Cardinal Richelieu in 1627, divided land in long strips, called *seigneuries*, mostly along the banks of the Saint Lawrence River. Not precisely a remnant of the feudal system in France, the seigneurial system was designed for the purposes of settlement and colonization in New France (Trudel 58). Each piece of land belonged to the king of France and was maintained by the landlord, or *seigneur*, who was essentially a "promoter of colonization" (Trudel 56). The seigneur might divide the land further among his tenants, known as *censitaires* or *habitants* ("cultivators of the soil"), who worked the land. The seigneurs were responsible for building roads for the habitants. The habitants, in turn, were responsible for paying taxes to the seigneur and for working a number of days per year to develop the said roads (Parkman 52).

For the moment, there are two points related to the seigneurial system that are of interest to this paper. First, the seigneur was responsible for "building and operating a flour mill. If he neglected to do so, the state could either authorize a censitaire to build it and to receive the toll as recompense or it [the state] could itself build the mill, paying the cost from the toll which the seigneur had forfeited by neglecting his obligation" (Altman 63). Of particular note is the fact that a seigneur "who operated a mill could demolish all other grist-mills in his seigneury." If, however, the seigneurial mill "produced a defective product, the habitant could grind his wheat elsewhere" (63). It was through the mill that the seigneur registered his power. The rest of his power was otherwise largely expressed symbolically. Second, the system used the Church to create stability, especially since the seigneurs "found control expensive, and equally difficult to administer" (Harris 59). The Church was of importance in its provision of a more

"traditional source of authority" (Harris 59). Richard Colebrook Harris argues that, although the habitants did not seem to have "quarreled with [the Church's] dogmas,… its controls and interdictions may have sat lightly on them" (60). Their ensuing independence from religions governance and control, from the institution of the Church, apparently had a bearing on the system's coherence (59–60). The result was that the seigneurial system, "one of the sources of control in France, quickly disintegrated in Canada" (60).

The decline of the mill and the Church in *In the Village of Viger* indicates that Viger is temporally located just after the seigneurial system's formal abolition in 1854 (if the reference to the Franco-Prussian War, which took place between 1870-71, had not in itself made that fact sufficiently clear). In so doing, he tracks the decline of a French political system that allowed for the space for a new political system with its ties in imperial Britain.[11] His portrait of these villagers, arguably sympathetic as some critics suggest, actually shows how he also saw them as "complicit" or engaged in practices that engendered the village's decline. From the outset of the book, Scott uses both the mill and St Joseph's Church to show how those two stabilizing forces of the seigneurial system (in economic, spiritual, and political terms) had become obsolete. The mill, for example, is no longer in use, and so the habitants go elsewhere—specifically, to the city—where flour can be purchased more cheaply. That practice of going elsewhere had been permissible only if the mill malfunctioned or if the seigneur had abdicated from his duties. Scott notes in "The Little Milliner" what might conceivably be another reason: the "miller" had died and, since no one replaced him, "who would trouble to grind what little grist came to the mill, when flour was so cheap?" (1). The mill had not malfunctioned but, rather, had become defunct because the authority figure that once maintained the system no longer attended to his responsibilities by finding another miller. It is a register of the seigneur's—and the corresponding political system's—loss of power.

As a few critics have shown, it is the Church and not just the mill that is also no longer of use to the villagers. In part, its omission might have been related to Scott's desire, as New suggests, to "minimize the pastoral conventions" (51). The Church's omission from the illustrations accompanying the 1945 edition of *In the Village of Viger* may also be seen to reflect Scott's interest in demonstrating the villagers' lack of commit-

11 See Carl Berger's *Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867–1914* for his rendering of Canada's political allegiances to and departures from the British imperial system (170).

ment to a spiritual and political system. In his letter dated 17 July 1944 to the illustrator, Thoreau MacDonald, Scott wrote that he "wanted to omit the Church from all these designs" and that he "wanted the words, Stories of French Canada left out" (quoted in New, 178–79). He then argued with MacDonald about the placement of the Church in the drawings and ironically noted that the latter had not quite "rid himself of the sense that all this was somewhere north of Chicoutimi." Nonetheless, its setting in French Canada conveyed itself to readers: E.K. Brown, with whom Scott corresponded, wrote on 29 May 1945 to say that he thought the stories "suggest[ed] a more southern and more congenial setting, perhaps that of the eastern townships" (quoted in McDougall 140). That the stories seem to take place in a Quebec village is also conveyed by the characters' names, place names, and the prevalence of Catholic markers in the text.

New explains Scott's use of the setting in Quebec and the omission of the Church by highlighting a couple of his key decisions about the book design and title:

> *In the Village of Viger* is set in Quebec, and follows a string of nineteenth-century English-Canadian fictions (by William Kirby, Gilbert Parker, and others) who used Quebec as a symbolic landscape, at once familiar and foreign, in which to explore the enticements of corruption. By and large these were Protestant versions of Catholicism, celebrating British restraint but covertly fascinated by that which they found most alien. By minimizing the presence of the Church, and by rejecting the label "French-Canadian stories," Scott signalled that he was doing something different—not portraying *then and over there* so much as he was finding an external design for the world *now and right here*, the otherness being part of "here" and demanding to be recognized as self, not an exotic worthy only to be watched and excluded. (181)

It is puzzling that New disentangles the politics of previous attempts to delineate French Canada from Scott's own rendering, from previously "exotic" to an unexotic self "demanding to be recognized as self." But whose version of "self"? Scott avoided making French Canadians look "picturesque and quaint." Yet it may be that he too, like his Protestant counterparts, registered his fascination for such a community in his very decision to depict them. This tendency remains consistent with what his other peers believed of Protestant English Canada:[12] that the latter was superior in

12 Although considerably less vulnerable to Anglo-imperial colonization than their indigenous counterparts, French Canadians were often represented as inferior.

character to the "corruption" of Catholic French Canada. Although I would agree that Scott sidesteps the stereotype of a "bucolic French-Canadian Arcadia," I would argue that deviations from depictions of a bucolic French Canada are not necessarily markers of increased respect. He arguably relinquishes one stereotype only to make use of another.

Scott's decisions about the subtitle and illustrations might thus be interpreted in another fashion. These decisions might be related to his sense that national ties might be forged according to language (English, French) and to religion (Protestant, Catholic): that is, the two markers for this "community" are language and religious belief. The decline of real, meaningful faith in the Catholic Church and linguistic difference, the two greatest forces for communal integration, effectively demonstrate why such a French-Canadian village would be subject to erosion and vulnerable to being subsumed by another political force. Even without direct evidence of Scott's attitude toward French Canadians in his political life, *In the Village of Viger* must ultimately be re-evaluated by locating it within Scott's larger imperial vision of Canada; that vision was by nature homogenous and exclusionary and was part of a larger discursive strategy of the period.

Even without direct evidence of Scott's attitude toward French Canadians in his political life, *In the Village of Viger* must ultimately be re-evaluated by locating it within Scott's larger imperial vision of Canada.

The textual evidence gestures toward a village that was not only in peril but also already condemned. By contrast, characters from the city in a number of instances show greater compassion, understanding, and virtue than their Vigerian counterparts. In "Josephine Labrosse," it is Victor from the city who offers real and meaningful love to Josephine that, in

---

Such an attitude hearkens back to such literary works as Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) in which the hero, Colonel Rivers, decisively chooses his bride, Emily Montague, in part because of her obvious High Church proclivities, rather than the compelling and thoroughly Catholic Madame Des Roches. So one of Brooke's characters writes that "the superior increase of the British American settlements compared to those of France" is a result of a religious system that encourages those from the latter country to "idleness." And even beyond *In the Village of Viger*, Ralph Connor's *The Man from Glengarry* (1901) shows how the villain, the French-Catholic Le Noir, experiences a religious conversion and comes to profess his life-long subservience to his former nemesis, his Scottish and Protestant counterpart, Ranald MacDonald. These were attitudes maintained by Scott's peers and to which he was not completely invulnerable. Scott's stance, for example, toward religious deviations from more mainstream Protestant religious thought is evident in a casual, if somewhat ironic, remark he makes about W.H. Clarke, the founder and manager of the Canadian branch of Oxford University Press: "It pained me to hear that Clarke [...] was an *Oxford-group* adherent, but as he loves books we will overlook his fault" (Scott to Brown, letter dated 5–6 March 1945 [132]).

turn, also guarantees her family's economic stability and survival. Indeed, the spiritual potential and other ideals critically ascribed to this village are contradicted by many of the stories. If "identity is often named as the bond among community members," as Joseph argues, that bond is consistently weakened throughout the text as Vigerians often work against each other rather than with each other. In "The Little Milliner," for example, Mademoiselle Viau is held by some as representative of market-driven competition and thus as threatening to the status quo of the village (Lynch 43). Madame Laroque, conversely, is regarded as operating in the best interests of Viger. The latter, however, might be seen not only as zenophobic but as a jealous and self-motivated individual who does not stand by her family members. Instead, in "The Wooing of Monsieur Cuerrier," she locks her niece, Césarine Angers, in her room because she competes with her for the love interest of Monsieur Cuerrier (31). By contrast, Mademoiselle Viau herself protects her brother, even though he is a thief in trouble with the law (8–9).

Such fidelity is in marked distinction from the behaviour of Eloise Ruelle, a character from "No. 68 Rue Alfred de Musset." As described there, rather than protect her vulnerable and sickly brother, she manipulates and exploits him to secure the attentions of Pierre Pechito, another figure from the city. Pierre is moved by compassion for the seeming distress of Eloise (57). New astutely reads this exchange as a "parody of the Christian virtues" (183), since her brother, Maurice, sacrifices his well-being for his sister's self-interested desires. He acts the part of the monster at his sister's behest and almost faints "with [the] exertion" that is demanded by the role (58). Scott's biblical and religious training shows itself here. Maurice arguably "lays down his life" for his sister in a manner that is a striking perversion of Christ's injunction: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He sacrifices his comfort and security to succour, not his sister's spiritual well-being, but her gross ambition, which entails exploiting both her own brother's vulnerability and Pechito's gullibility. Upon agreeing to move to the city and to marry Pechito, the son of "one of the richest of the city merchants" (54), she declares that she has "gained all—everything" (61). The phrase is an ironic parody of the New Testament indictment of the single-minded pursuit of social prestige or material success: "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?" (Mark 8:36). Eloise is evidently prepared to forfeit all ties with her adoring brother and a purportedly ideal Viger in order to "gain everything"—to acquire the social and material advantages that her marriage to Pechito would offer.

The son of a Methodist minister, Scott would have been extraordinarily well educated in and sensitive to Christian precepts and biblical narratives. His allusions to biblical parables show that the system that informed Viger's way of life—the seigneurial system and its Catholic underpinnings—might have at one time governed how Vigerians lived morally but also governed that by which they will instead be judged and condemned. Although some of Scott's fiction has thus been interpreted as spiritual allegory, most notably "Clute Boulay" (see Johnston 39), the stories of *In the Village of Viger* have not. As already shown, "No. 68 Rue Alfred de Musset" might be read as a perversion of Christ's imperative to be altruistic, to relinquish one's own interests for someone else's spiritual gain. So it is in the story "Paul Farlotte," in which biblical allusions showcase a village that operated far from communally and in which meaningful human interaction and faith were questionable. The titular character of that story has been modeled upon the New Testament figure, Paul (see Lynch 56 and Stow, as examples). His altruistic gestures save the St Denis family from their looming demise because their father and then his son, Guy, become obsessed with the creation of a matchbook-making machine rather than attend to their duties as familial providers.

As such, Lynch judiciously reads Farlotte as "lov[ing] his neighbours as he—more than he—loves himself" (56). He embodies the message of Christ in this manner, but, as a gardener, he is also seen as emulating the "Gardener," Christ himself. It is true that, like Christ in the Garden of Gethsamane, he "fix[es] his duty so that nothing could root it out" (113). He "walk[s] in his garden" the night before he decides to abandon his last opportunity to return to France to see his mother (113). It is also true that he offers a stabilizing counterbalance to the dangers implied in the machinery, which a desperate Marie St Denis tries to destroy but before which she finds herself prostrate and praying ineffectually because "It seemed like a human thing that cried out with a hundred tongues" (111). Lynch likens the machine to "a modern mechanical Babel," not only because of the "pride of its male occupants" but also because the "hundred tongues" suggests the breakdown of communication of the Old Testament story (54). The confusion of languages is punishment for those who in their arrogance build the Tower of Babel to compete with rather than emulate God. Vigerians, Scott seems to suggest, are as wayward as those striving to build the Tower of Babel. But Paul is not the man to save them, although he is a loving and nurturing figure that temporarily relieves the family of their suffering. The suffering is occasioned by Guy St Denis, who like his father descends into obsessive madness. Scott seems to suggest as he did

with indigenous populations, moreover, that that weakness is genetically passed down or that the trait is part of a racial inheritance. Those Vigerians who do suffer from obsession and madness—the father of the Desjardins, for example, and the St Denis father and son—almost all share the same physical trait: they have "long arms, out of proportion to [their] height" (108; 18). Scott seems to suggest their fallibility is genetically manifested, not necessarily brought about by the contaminating effects of the city. As such, Farlotte recognizes that Guy will be like his father and does what he can to alleviate the family of their troubles. In this capacity, Farlotte is indeed a Christ-like, communal figure.

The biblical Paul, originally named Saul of Tarsus and later considered an apostle of Christ, was so named after his conversion to Christianity. On the road to Damascus, he experienced a vision of the resurrected Jesus and, thereafter, responds to Christ's call by disseminating the message of the New Testament. Paul, the protagonist of Scott's story, hears voices and, like the New Testament Paul, has visions:

> He would be working in his flower-beds when he would hear it over his shoulder, "Paul;" or when he went to draw water from his well, "Paul;" or when he was reading by his fire, someone calling him softly, "Paul, Paul;" or in the dead of night, when nothing moved in his cottage he would hear it out of the dark, "Paul." (103–04)

Unlike the biblical Paul who responds to the urgency of the call of Christ by converting others to Christianity, he hears a voice that offers "a sort of companionship" for him alone (104). The one clear vision he has, that of his mother's death, does not engender a radical transformation of his character that then gives way to the rise and spreading of a new faith. Farlotte makes one great sacrificial gesture: to remain and watch over the St Denis family rather than go to France to see his mother before she dies. In this sense, he may be regarded as a prototype for a loving, altruistic, communal figure. As becomes clear, however, what he is able to do, what he hears, and what he knows will not likely be imparted to others within the community (see Dyer 100). Instead, as Madame Laroque spitefully observes, "if Monsieur Paul Farlotte had been as successful in planting knowledge in the heads of his scholars as he was in planting roses in his garden Viger would have been celebrated the world over" (103). Unlike the New Testament's Paul, Viger's Paul fails in his mission to "spread" the word to other members of the community. As a number of critics note

(see Lynch and Dyer), his communal gestures of generosity and kindness, his knowledge, and his skills will likely die with him.

Of all stories in the collection, however, "The Tragedy of the Seigniory" is most arresting in its rich use of biblical allusions that underscore to what extent Scott depicted a village that was on the brink of annihilation and ultimately "damned." Seen by New as operating in the more benign mode of the "romantic tale" (182), I see "The Tragedy" as a scathing allegory. The story's biblical intertextuality renders it perhaps the most complicated of all the stories in the collection and suggests Louis Bois's lack of faith both in spiritual terms and in his master, as it also makes plain his preoccupation with money. A servant indeed cannot serve two masters; the results of doing so are dire (see Luke 16:13). Critics have observed neither the direct allusions to Christ's parables nor how their diction and structure bear upon this story (122). If interpreted in such a context, "The Tragedy of the Seigniory" may be seen as pivotal to the larger framework and meaning of the collection and revealing of Scott's attitude toward French Canada. The allusions gesture toward how the stories might be read as an indictment of these French-Canadian who, like their apparently morally weak indigenous counterparts, allow for—indeed, are in need of—modernity's incursions. The real threat, Scott seems to suggest, emerges from their own weakness, from their drifting away from a (albeit corrupt) religious centre, and from their lack of a coherent political will. In this respect, Vigerians are the source of the problem, not the city itself.

"The Tragedy of the Seigniory" commences with a description of the house called "by courtesy, the Seigniory," and of its whereabouts on the outskirts of Viger (69). The narrator draws attention to the political decline of the seigneurial system and explains that the house and three acres of land are all that remain of the former glory of the "Estate of the Rioux family" (70). In like fashion, "of the retainers that once held allegiance to this proud name, Louis Bois was the last" (70). The last surviving member of the Rioux family, Hugo Armand Theophile, must leave his property and his wealth in the hands of his purportedly faithful servant, because, as he discovers, he is without the financial means to secure his own living. After contemplating his situation for three (symbolic) days, Theophile sells seven of the remaining ten acres of the Estate before departing from Viger. The narrative continues thus:

> Then [Theophile] shook off the dust of Viger, but not before swearing Louis Bois, who was old enough to be his father, and loved him as such, to stay and watch the forlorn hope of the

> Rioux Estate until he, the last of the line, should return and redeem his ancient lineage. He would be gone ten years, he said. (71)

As his name, "love of God," suggests, Theophile is a Christ-like figure whose anticipated return would revivify his family line. Yet the "love of God" leaves Viger—and an unfaithful servant—behind. The narrative thus shifts its attention upon that servant, Bois, his character, and his unresponsiveness to his master's bidding. He is reputed to be an "old soldier" (70). This distinction is earned by the fact that he has a wooden leg and that he uses "the heavier English oaths with some freedom," a tendency that wins the admiration of the villagers and suggests their conflicted sense of French-Canadian identity or their deference to English-Canada (70).[13] The villagers also hold Bois in high esteem because he lives alone as if "guarding some secret" and because he "was supposed to have money of his own" (70). If his reputation is tenuous, so are the reasons for which the villagers admire him. His "bravery," Scott notes, "having never been put to proof, rested securely upon these foundations": that is, not securely at all, especially given a wooden leg literally susceptible to giving way (70).

The structure of the relationship between Theophile and Bois is that between master and servant. That relationship and Scott's use of biblical diction call to mind at least three of Christ's parables in which an authority figure provides instructions and allocates responsibility to his servants, some worthy of their post and others considerably less so. One of these is the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins who await the return of the bridegroom, delayed by undisclosed circumstances. Like Bois, they are instructed to "watch therefore," since they "know neither the day nor the hour" of his return (Matthew 25:13). Of the ten Virgins, only five remember to prepare their oil lamps; the other five are subsequently damned. The second one is the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25), in which a "man travelling into a far country" allots each of his servants a portion of his goods, the amount determined by his respective servant's abilities. Each servant takes and invests the talents provided, significantly increasing the profit. There is one exception: he who buries the talent and, in so doing, fails in his obligations.[14] The third appears in Matthew 21:33, the Parable

One of these is the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins who await the return of the bridegroom, delayed by undisclosed circumstances.

13 His last name, translated from the French to mean "wood," and his first name, perhaps a historical reference to Louis Riel and the failed 1885 North West Rebellion, indicate that Bois was likely unsuccessful in his martial endeavours.

14 In this sense, as Arland J. Hultgren observes, the parable is like that of the Ten Virgins, in that it also pertains to wisdom and its application in relation to one's duties (274)—that is, that diligence will be rewarded and that fear and laziness will be punished.

of the Last Judgment. Christ refers to "a certain householder" who plants a vineyard, "let[s] it out to husbandmen" and, like Theophile, goes "into a far country" (see also Mark 12:1–2 and Luke 20:9–19). At the time of harvest, the householder sends his servants to receive the fruits of the vineyard, but they are killed or stoned to death by the husbandman. The householder, believing that the latter "will reverence my [only] son" presumably because he has greater authority, proceeds to send him also, but he too is killed. The husbandman is subsequently punished and the vineyard distributed to others. The meaning of the parable may be broadly interpreted thus: when the servant does not fulfil his obligations, or when he betrays his master, he will be replaced and his responsibilities given to another.

Bois ultimately comes to be associated with these series of foolish or reprehensible servants. Theophile is associated with the heir of the husbandman, or Christ, but also with the husbandman who will be away for an extended period of time. Initially, Bois might be seen as a good servant—dare I say "wise virgin"—whose "first three years of his stewardship" are described as uneventful (72). He vigilantly keeps his post, avidly prepares for his master's return, and, as required, duly deposits the "bill[s] of exchange" his master sends him to a notably French institution, the "great and safe bank of Bardé Brothers" (72). At the end of the third year, things go awry: "An emissary of the devil, in the guise of a surveyor, planted his theodolite, and ran a roadway which took off a corner of his three acres" (72). For this foray onto the property, Bois receives "only an arbitrator's allowance," which is the second indication that his position as entrusted servant might be misplaced. The reference to "his three acres" might just as easily gesture toward Bois himself rather than Theophile. The allowance, moreover, is not clearly deposited into the Rioux account at the bank. Bois begins to confuse his *stewardship* over the Rioux property with *ownership*.

In the fourth year when Bois hears no news of his master's whereabouts, he is tempted by a lottery, in which he invests first his own financial resources, which he loses, and then his master's money, with which he wins the lottery. His triumph seemingly parallels the good servant in the Parable of the Talents, who invests his master's goods and effectively doubles or triples its value. Scott suggests, however, that one of Bois's motives is suspect. He resolves "to make money after a fashion of his own" (72) and, in so doing, does not emulate what Theophile likely would have done with his own investments. Bois's initial reasons are as uninformed by a Protestant work ethic as they are self-interested. Instead, he sees "himself a suddenly rich man, the winner of the seventy-five-thousand-

dollar prize" (72). That Bois is a "foolish servant" is most evident in the fact that he entrusts his winnings to a stranger from the city, a messenger of Bardé Bank, Jacques Potvin. Bois may here justify those who argue that the city is the tempting and corrupting force. Yet Bois has, by this point, already gone morally astray. Second, Potvin, as a representative of a French-Canadian bank and a man "full of dissimulation," may himself already represent a corrupt French Canada (76). Potvin places the money in a strongbox and promises to hold it for him. When Bois asks for the money, Potvin provides him with an empty box and a mismatched key. Theophile, unbeknownst to Bois, has just returned to Viger. In trying to intercept Potvin, Theophile is mistaken by Bois as a thief and is murdered by the latter—albeit unwittingly.

Two of the three parables are part of a larger eschatological discourse: the virgins and the servants responsible for the talents must face a day of reckoning. The ending of "The Tragedy of the Seigniory" suggests, however, that not only Bois meets with his day of reckoning: it is also Viger itself. The story has larger political and spiritual implications. If this story, as New suggests, were entirely about the "failure to recognize the stranger as their own" (180), the repercussions would not have been so dire. This failure is only part of the equation. Ironically, those who are strangers are often more than welcome to Viger, especially when these strangers bear promise of wealth. In "The Tragedy of the Seigniory," Bois does not repudiate Potvin but wholeheartedly trusts him because he too worships money. Like the foolish servants of the Parables, Bois does not have the wisdom to discern who is to be properly trusted.

Bois, like other Vigerians, is also depicted as "foolish" because he has chosen Mammon over God, money over fidelity to Theophile, and greed over political or communal identification. Such foolishness leads to his individual demise and, more largely, to that of the community because his behaviour is endemic. Like Bois, many of the other characters have apparently long abandoned spiritual matters for material or technological ones. So, for example, the young Henri Lamoureux attempts to swindle the pedlar for (revealingly) a little "red purse" by offering him a counterfeit coin (99). In a profoundly disrespectful gesture, Lamoureux knocks away the goggles that cover the "seared, fleshy seams where [his] eyes should have been" (98).

The implications, then, for Theophile's "[shaking] the dust" from his feet when he departs from Viger are clear. The allusion to Christ's words suggests not only Theophile's likeness to one of Christ's disciples but also what Scott might have anticipated as Viger's future. The passage to which

Scott alludes has two components: the first about how to treat those who are ill or poor and the second about to respond to those who are not receptive to the message of salvation. Christ's words are as follows:

> And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.
>
> Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement, than for that city. (Matthew 10:14–15)

The implications for this kind of re-visioning approach, then, are three-fold.

When Theophile, whose position and nature is indicated by his name, shakes the dust off his feet, the gesture seems to suggest that Viger is a community so miserable and so desolate that even Christ Himself would abandon its inhabitants. The community, rather than being "invoked as an unequivocal good, an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, belonging," is conjured up as its opposite (Joseph xxxiii). Instead, Viger is likened to Sodom and Gomorrah, a place doomed because it is unreceptive to Christian values.

Scott seems to gesture toward the extinction of Viger in part because many of its members are engaged in "practices of consumption" that extend beyond the community. Yet even these practices, which Joseph sees as enjoining participants to work together co-operatively, create divisiveness. The collection as a whole might be seen to show that those communal ideals embodied by the likes of Farlotte are too inconsistently held or maintained to read it as such. So Viger is not only doomed by its own inherent flaws but is also ready to be taken over by a larger and a more able political system in which new practices of consumption would redefine the community. The decline and eventual abolition of the seigneurial system, and more largely the decline of French Canada, seemingly necessitates being taken over by a more able, Anglo-Canadian construction of the nation; one form of colonization will be replaced by another apparently more efficient form of colonization.

The implications for this kind of re-visioning approach, then, are three-fold. First, if one were to accept Joseph's proposition and acknowledge that practices of consumption hold the community together, one might logically conclude as follows: that those practices would extend beyond Viger when its inner resources have been thoroughly exhausted and there remains no internal consensus about how those practices ought to operate. Second, one might conclude that counterpoising the idealism of the village against the corruption of the city is misleading. This reading shows

how early critical interpretation might be seen as "relentlessly returning" to "community" and as imposing such yearnings onto the collection. Such idealism largely does not emanate from the collection itself. Third, in suggesting that Scott might have shared a similar attitude with his peers by depicting Viger as yet another example of corrupt Catholic French Canada, one might consider some probable political implications. There were two political systems in contestation with each other, which resulted in the justification of the subsuming of the French-Canadian seigneurial system and its corresponding religious institution into a modern English Canada. In reading it as such, the collection invites further critical investigation into what indeed "holds" the village together and why it falls apart: perhaps the lack of a coherent political will. Rather than offering an alternative to other literary depictions of French Canada of the period, then, this collection of stories may be seen as another Protestant rendering of French Canada; it casts the book in a new critical light, as it also suggests that this community was depicted from an Anglo-Canadian perspective that had determined that French-Catholic Canada would wane and disappear because of its intrinsic aberrancies. This approach offers another example of how English Canada was reading French Canada in late nineteenth-century Canada.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Eastern Townships Research Council for its support as I conducted archival research for this article. I would also like to thank Sylvie Côté and Jean Manore for their assistance and the peer reviewers whose reports were helpful in re-shaping the article.

Works Cited

Altman, Morris. "Seignorial Tenure in New France, 1688–1739: An Essay on Income Distribution and Retarded Economic Development." *Historical Reflections* 10.2 (1983): 335–43. In *Interpreting Canada's Past: A Pre-Confederation Reader*. 3rd edition. Eds. J.M. Bustead and Len Kuffert. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 61–64.

Bentley, D.M.R. "Shadows in the Soul: Racial Haunting in the Poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75.2 (Spring 2006): 752–70.

———.“‘The Thing is Found to be Symbolic’: *Symboliste* Elements in the Early Short Stories of Gilbert Parker, Charles G.D. Roberts, and Duncan Campbell Scott.” *Dominant Impressions*. Eds. Gerald Lynch and Angela Arnold Robbeson. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999. 27–46.

Berger, Carl. *Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867–1914*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.

Brooke, Francis. *The History of Emily Montague*. London: J. Dodsley, 1769.

Bustead, J.M., and Len Kuffert, eds. *Interpreting Canada's Past: A Pre-Confederation Reader*. 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.

Connor, Ralph. *The Man From Glengarry: A Tale of the Ottawa.* Toronto: Westminster Company, 1901.

Dyer, Klay. “Passing Time and Present Absence: Looking to the Future in *In the Village of Viger*.” *Canadian Literature* 141 (Summer 1994): 86–97.

Harris, Colebrook Richard. Excerpt from *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966. 193–98. In *Interpreting Canada's Past: A Pre-Confederation Reader*. 3rd edition. Eds. J.M. Bustead and Len Kuffert. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 58–61.

Hultgren, Arland J. *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Logan, G.D., and Donald G. French. “Duncan Campbell Scott.” *Duncan Campbell Scott: A Book of Criticism*. Ed. S.L. Dragland. Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1974. 43–64.

Johnston, Gordon. *Duncan Campbell Scott and his Works*. Downsview: ECW Press, 1983.

Joseph, Miranda. *Against the Romance of Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Lynch, Gerald. *The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Story Cycles*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

———. “In the Meantime: Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger*.” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 17.2 (1992). 15 December 2009. Web.

McDougall, Robert L., ed. *The Poet and the Critic: A Literary Correspondence Between D.C. Scott and E.K. Brown*. Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1983.

New, W.H. *Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

Parkman, Francis. Excerpt from *The Old Regime in Canada*, vol. 2. Toronto: George N. Morang, 1899. 40–55. In *Interpreting Canada's Past: A Pre-Confederation Reader*. 3rd edition. Eds. J.M. Bustead and Len Kuffert. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 50–55.

Scott, Duncan Campbell. *In the Village of Viger*. 1896. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996.

Stow, Glenys. "Of North and South: D.C. Scott." *Journal of Canadian Fiction* (1973): 123–24.

Trudel, Marcel. Excerpt from *The Seigneurial Regime. Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association*, 1971. 12–17. In *Interpreting Canada's Past: A Pre-Confederation Reader*. 3rd edition. Eds. J.M. Bustead and Len Kuffert. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 55–58.

Ware, Tracy. Afterword to *In the Village of Viger*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996. 119–25.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.