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Sarah Bernhardt's presence in Montréal Québec (1880, 1891- 1905 ,1911-1917): reception, historical and cultural context

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Sarah Bernhardt's performances in Canada occurred between 1800 and 1918.¹ John Hare and Ramon Hathorn included in their records her repertoire and the dates of her performances as well as critical opinions from various print sources. Here are their records for Montréal, Québec:

1880 MONTRÉAL L'Académie de Musique

DATES AND REPERTORY December 23 eve *Adrienne Lecouvreur* (Scribe & Legouv) 24 eve *Frou-Frou* (Meilhac & Halvy) 25 mat *La Dame aux Camlias* (A. Dumas) 25 eve *Hernani* (V. Hugo)

CRITICAL OPINION '*Adrienne Lecouvreur*: '...elle a maintenu la rputation qu'elle s'est faite d'tre une des artistes les plus spirituelles et les plus vraies du thtre parisien.' (*La Patrie*, 24 December 1880)

1891 MONTRAL L'Acmie de Musique

DATES AND REPERTORY April 6 eve *Fdora* (Sardou) 7 eve *Jeanne d'Arc* (Barbier, music by Gounod) 8 eve *La Tosca* (Sardou) 9 eve *La Dame aux Camlias* 10 eve *La Tosca* 11 mat *Jeanne d'Arc* 11 eve *Frou-Frou*

CRITICAL OPINION *Jeanne d'Arc*: 'impression profonde' (*La Minerve*, 8 April 1891)

Frou-Frou: 'pice mdiocre' (*La Patrie*, 13 April 1891)

1891-1892 MONTRAL L'Acmie de Musique

DATES AND REPERTORY December 29 eve *Pauline Blanchard* (Darmont) 30 eve *La Tosca* 31 eve *Adrienne Lecouvreur*

January 1 eve *Cloptre* (Sardou & Moreau) 2 mat *Cloptre* 2 eve *Cloptre*

CRITICAL OPINION *Pauline Blanchard*: 'Quant la note morale, elle fait malheureusement dfaut comme dans la plupart des pices modernes.' (*La Minerve*, 30 December 1891)

1896 MONTRAL L'Acmie de Musique

DATES AND REPERTORY February 26 eve *Iyl* (Sylvestre & Morand) 27 eve *La Tosca* 28 eve *Gismonda* (Sardou) 29 mat *La Dame aux Camlias* 29 eve *Adrienne Lecouvreur*

CRITICAL OPINION *La Tosca*: '... la voix d'or est toujours Sarah et Sarah est toujours; la voix d'or; souriante, troublante, toujours matrese d'elle-mme...' (*La Minerve*, 28 February 1896)

Gismonda: 'un des meilleurs succs de Mme Bernhardt Montral.' (*La Minerve*, 29 February 1896)

1905 MONTRAL Thtre Franais

DATES AND REPERTORY November 27 eve *La Sorcire* (Sardou) 28 eve *La Dame aux Camlias* 29 mat *Adrienne Lecouvreur* 29 eve *Anglo, tyran de Padoue* (V. Hugo) 30 eve *La Tosca*

December 1 eve *Fdora* 2 mat *La Femme de Claude* (Dumas fils) 2 eve *Phdre* (Racine)

CRITICAL OPINION *La Sorcire*: 'L'immense talent de Sarah Bernhardt gne normment ... mais enfin, il y a des mrites qui ont toujours leur place.' (*La Presse*, 28 novembre 1905)

1911 MONTRAL His Majesty's

DATES AND REPERTORY January 23 eve *L'Aiglon* (Rostand) 24 eve *Le Procs de Jeanne d'Arc* (Moreau) 25 eve *La Tosca* 26 eve *Madame X* (Bisson) 27 eve *L'Aiglon* 28 mat *Madame X* 28 eve Extraits de *Phdre*, *Fdora*, *Jeanne d'Arc* et *La Dame aux Camlias*

¹ John Hare and Ramon Hathorn, « Sarah Bernhardt's visits to Canada: Dates and Repertory », *Theater Research in Canada/Recherches Thtrales au Canada* 2.2 (Fall 1981), Consulted 10 June 2021: <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7510/8569>

CRITICAL OPINION *L'Aiglon*: 'Pour cette tragédienne les années passent inaperçues et, incapable de progresser parce qu'elle a depuis longtemps la perfection de son art, elle réussit' (*La Patrie*, 24 janvier 1911)

Jeanne d'Arc: 'Sarah Bernhardt a fait revivre hier soir l'immortelle fille de la Lorraine.' (*La Presse*, 25 janvier 1911)

1911 MONTRÉAL His Majesty's

DATES AND REPERTORY June 7 mat *Madame X*; Jean-Marie (Theuriet) 7 eve *Soeur Béatrice* (Maeterlinck)

CRITICAL OPINION *Soeur Béatrice*: 'An undeniable triumph... the audience was stilled into silence and paid the actress the unusual compliment of fearing to break the spell by applause.' (*Montréal Gazette*, 8 June 1911)

1916 MONTRÉAL His Majesty's

DATES AND REPERTORY October 11 eve *La Mort de Cléopâtre*, - (M Bernhardt & Cain) Du Théâtre au champ d'honneur 12 eve *La Mort de Cléopâtre*; Du Théâtre au champ d'honneur. 13 eve *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*; *La Dame aux Camélias*; *La Paix chez soi* 14 mat Du Théâtre au champ d'honneur; *La Mort de Cléopâtre*; *La Paix chez soi* eve *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*; *La Dame aux Camélias*; *La Paix chez soi*

CRITICAL OPINION *La Mort de Cléopâtre*: 'Sarah fait voir l'âme française.' (*La Presse*, 12 octobre 1916) 'La voix de Sarah n'a pas changé.' (*La Presse*, 13 octobre, 1916)

'... le plus admirable voyageur des lettres françaises.' (*La Patrie*, 12 octobre 1916)

... on n'y trouve guère de ces pièces où foisonnent les doctrines dissolvantes qui ont fait du théâtre trop souvent une doctrine de démoralisation.' (*La Patrie*, 14 octobre 1916)

1917 MONTRÉAL His Majesty's

DATES AND REPERTORY November 26 eve *Hécube*; *Portia* 27 eve *La Mort de Cléopâtre*; *L'Aiglon* 28 mat *L'Etoile dans la nuit*; *Camille* eve *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (Trial Scene) *Hécube* 29 mat *Hécube*; *L'Aiglon* eve Du Théâtre au champ d'honneur; *Camille* 30 eve *A Star in the Night*; *Portia*

December 1 mat *La Mort de Cléopâtre*; *Portia* eve *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*; *Camille*

CRITICAL OPINION *Hécube*: 'Perhaps no better tribute to the breadth and resourcefulness of Bernhardt's art could be cited than the ease with which she has adapted herself to the limitations of physical movement imposed upon her ... that voice, which no longer the glorious voice d'or of her early years is yet an organ of marvelous quality.' (*Montréal Daily Star*, 27 November 1917)

La Mort de Cléopâtre: 'She sweeps up and down the gamut of histrionic utterance with unchallenged mastery and deceptive ease still....'

M Angelo's Marc Antony remains a noble figure of heroic cast. M Denenbourg repeats his effective portrayal of Pharos and the balance of the company is always in true perspective for the picture.' (*Montréal Daily Star*, 28 November 1917)

Du Théâtre au champ d'honneur: '...It is as if Bernhardt came to us with the smoke of the battlefields still clinging about her, having learned its terrible lessons, and with a genius to mimic death itself with a deeper insight than before.' (The critic refers to Bernhardt's interpretation of the role of a dying French soldier cf. *Montréal Daily Star*, 30 November 1917)

MISCELLANEOUS M^{me} Sarah Bernhardt in Repertoire with complete productions, scenery and effects, and her own company of 24 artists from the Theatre Sarah Bernhardt, Paris. Direction of W.F. Connor.'

Ticket Prices: Wednesday and Thursday matinées: 25¢ to \$1.50 Evenings and Saturday matinée: 50¢ to \$2,00

Sarah Bernhardt's visits to Montréal will be grouped into three temporal ranges: 1880; 1891-1905; 1911-1917. These ranges have been determined in order to take a more isolated look at the reception

she received in Montréal immediately upon her first arrival and performances in 1880, how that developed and changed upon her return in subsequent years (dating from 1891 through 1905) and lastly what effects the increasingly anti-Semitic sentiments leading up to and through the onset of World War I had upon her reception as a Jewish woman in the extremely Catholic city of Montréal.

As referenced above, Hare and Hathron included reactions from reviewers' columns, certain advertisements, as well as ticket prices and other miscellaneous information which informs us upon the implications of how Sarah Bernhardt's performances were received by her contemporaries in Montréal, and we will expand upon this by including other reviews and pieces about Bernhardt, both from the same time and after the fact. A variety of digitized print sources were referenced —those digitized at the Canadiana Collections found online at <https://www.canadiana.ca/> by the Canadian Research Knowledge Network, and those digitized as part of the Plan culturel numérique du Québec (BAnQ) which is a collection of digital resources focused on the documentation Québec heritage found online at <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/>

The variety of print sources consulted were chosen to develop a more holistic understanding of how Bernhardt was perceived by the general public, professional critics, her artistic peers, and the prominent Catholic authority at the time. These sources include: illustrated weekly magazines (*l'Opinion Publique*), a humorous satirical Montréal weekly (*Le Canard*), *The Montréal Gazette*, *La Vie artistique*, French Catholic religious periodicals (such as *La Semaine religieuse de Québec*).

Regarding the overall historical and cultural context of Montréal society at the time the “first steps” timeline constructed by the Plan culturel numérique du Québec (BAnQ) project was referenced. Termed “l'Espace pédagogique de la Ligne du temps du Québec”, the timeline includes a total of 494 distinct events spanning dates ranging from 1534-1607, 1608-1759, 1760-1790, 1791-1839, 1840-1895, 1896-1944, 1945-1917, 1980-2000. The events listed coinciding relative to Sarah Bernhardt's visits to Montréal were consulted.

Immediate reception upon Sarah Bernhardt's arrival in Montréal (1880).

Context: Reflective of the attitudes of Montréal a decade prior to Sarah Bernhardt's first visit to Montréal, Goergette Weiller noted in her study of *Sarah Bernhardt au Canada* that around 1870 “the ultramontane had seized control of the affairs of the nation.”² In her work she noted that the citizens of Québec were controlled with precise direction by the Catholic Church; the arts heavily censored. Novels and theatre were declared pernicious — defamatory of youth.³

Nearly a decade later, in 1879, the Art Association of Montréal established the first art gallery in Canada. The very same year as Sarah Bernhardt's first visit to the city of Montréal, the Art Association of Montréal held its first annual exhibition dedicated to contemporary artists, the *Salon du printemps*. The positive reception of the Montréal population to the initial establishment of the gallery and further expansions of art through programming and exhibits is indicative of the attitude of the public, being favorable towards the arts despite condemnation and criticism from the Catholic Church which continued to very vocally and vehemently protest against the arts and condemn them. The Institut canadien de Montréal, a literary and scientific institution founded by a group of young liberal professionals in Montréal in 1844, was notably criticized and by the Roman Catholic Church. The institution was eventually to close its doors in the 1870s after a lengthy dispute with the Church, largely

² Rome, David. Early anti-semitism - The voice of the media - Part 1 / , Montréal, National Archives, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1984, 1 ressource en ligne (p. 54), Collections de BAnQ. Consulted on June 18, 2021: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3658073>

³ O'Neill-Karch, Mariel. “Le Théâtre à Ottawa 1870-1880: Femmes s'Abstenir.” *Theatre Research in Canada*, 29. 2 (2008): 258–283. DOI:10.3138/tric.29.2.258.

surrounding issues around Church enforced censorship.⁴ In this way, the vilification of Sarah Bernhardt by the Church paralleled the public condemnation of the Institut canadien de Montréal.

Sarah Bernhardt's Arrival: To the chagrin of the displeased clergy at the time, the 'Divine' Sarah's initial arrival in Montréal was met with huge crowds heavily anticipating the famous French actress' performances scheduled at *l'Académie de musique* the 23rd, 24th, and 25th of December 1880. The repertoire she was set to perform — *Adrienne Lecouvreur* in the evening of the 23rd, *Frou-Frou* the eve of the 24th, *La Dame aux Camélias* in a matinée showing on Christmas day and *Hernani* the very same eve — was considered especially immoral by the Church amidst the religious celebrations surrounding Christmas. Monseigneur Édouard-Charles Fabre, then Bishop of Montréal, was among the many calling for faithful Catholics not to attend Bernhardt's performances, having published a scathing review of her first performance in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*.⁵ The strong public opposition of the Church towards the arts at the time, Madame Bernhardt in particular, did not have the desired effect as huge crowds still turned out. Some authors have attributed the large positive reception of the public to the strong patriotism of the French-Canadian people who sought connection and with their motherland.⁶

During her 1880 American tour dates in Montréal, Sarah Bernhardt found accommodation at the Richelieu Hotel – an “elegant meeting place of the francophone community”⁷ at the time.

⁴ Lamonde, Yvan. *Gens de PAROLE: Conférences Publiques, Essais Et DÉBATS à L'Institut Canadien De montréal* (1845-1871). Boréal, 1990.

⁵ Rome, David. Early anti-semitism - The voice of the media - Part 1 / , Montréal, National Archives, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1984, 1 ressource en ligne (p. 54), Collections de BAnQ. Consulted June 18 2021: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3658073>

⁶ Zatzman, Belaire. “Yiddish Theatre in Montréal (Review Essay of Jean-Marc Larue, *Le Théâtre Yiddish à Montréal/Yiddish Theatre in Montréal*).” *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études Juives Canadiennes* (1998): 91.

⁷ 443 Rue St-Vincent, Montréal, QC, photographed by Amanda Lee, on the 30th of August, 2021.

CET EDIFICE CONSTRUIT EN 1861 PAR JOSEPH BILODEAU,
FUT L'HOTEL RICHELIEU. SARAH BERNHARDT Y DESCENDIT
LORS DE SA TOURNÉE AMERICAINE EN 1880. LIEU DE RENDEZ-VOUS
DE LA COMMUNAUTE FRANCOPHONE ELEGANTE, IL ABRITA PLUS
TARD "LE DEVOIR" ET L'INSTITUT MEDICO-LEGAL

THIS BUILDING, ERECTED IN 1861 BY JOSEPH BILODEAU,
WAS ONCE THE RICHELIEU HOTEL. SARAH BERNHARDT FOUND
ACCOMODATION HERE DURING HER AMERICAN TOUR IN 1880.
ELEGANT MEETING PLACE OF THE FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY,
IT LATER HOUSED "LE DEVOIR" AND THE MEDICO-LEGAL INSTITUTE

At the time of her initial visits to Montréal and through her following visits, theatre critiques received increasing prominence among the public and in journalism. A transition was taking place in the public discourse of the primacy of art over religious morality among the people of Montréal. The inclusion of art into the public space through both art itself and commentary of art included a variety of sources as evidenced by the development of the *l'Opinion publique*, a weekly paper that followed more of a magazine format and transitioned from focusing on political and literary reporting to an independent arts and literary review.⁸

However, even in these commentaries, particularly through the use of political satire, papers such as *Le Canard*, which published multiple pieces on Bernhardt, shows evidence of anti-Semitic sentiment in the distinctive choice to distort Sarah Bernhardt to Sara(h) Bernhardt, as well as referring to the actress as “la fille d’Israël”, placing the emphasis on Israel.⁹

Despite these sentiments, overall public opinion about the actress was at a high: many papers, such as *l'Opinion Publique*, an illustrated journal which described Bernhardt as “notre charmante compatriote”, discussed her tour plans overall, glamorizing the legs through the United States. Montréal writers who were unable to make it to her performances publicly bemoaned their loss at having missed such impressive artistry.¹⁰ In the critical opinions recorded by Hare and Hathron, *La Patrie* published a review on her performance in *Adrienne Lecouvreur* on December 24th 1880, which held that she lived up to her famed reputation of being one of the most spiritual and true artists in Parisian theatre. Later recounts of Sarah Bernhardt’s North American legacy in Montréal papers were also of note as they, again, highlighted her performances in the United States, New York in particular, where she was widely successful in amassing a veritable fortune through her North-American tours despite condemnation by the Church as a “parisienne pervertie” and a “femme sans pudeur et sans morale”.¹¹

Finally, in discussing the initial reception of Sarah Bernhardt’s very first visit to Montréal, on the 23rd of December 1880, it should be noted that this historical event was distinctly marked in the “first steps”¹², in the timeline constructed by BAnQ. This marker really highlights the long-lasting cultural impact and importance of Sarah Bernhardt’s performances in Montréal and to the French-Canadian population of Québec as a whole.

⁸ Consulted on July 10, 2021: http://collections.musee-mccord.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tablename=theme&tableid=11&elementid=77__true&contentlong

⁹ *Le Canard* [journal humoristique et satirique], 4e année, no. 14 (déc. 1880): 3, 31. Consulted on June 12, 2021: https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06547_170/4?r=0&s=5

¹⁰ *L’opinion publique* [weekly journal], 11.51(16 déc. 1880): 606-608. Consulted on June 20, 2021: https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06274_570/3?r=0&s=4

¹¹ *Le petit journal*, 1950-03-26, p. 18. Collections de BAnQ. Consulted on June 5, 2021: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4249709>

¹² “Première visite de Sarah Bernhardt à Montréal.” Consulted on June 3, 2021: <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/ligne-du-temps?eventid=534>

Figure 1. Photograph of Sarah Bernhardt from 1882, Silver salts on paper mounted on paper - Albumen process, 15 x 10 cm, Purchase from Associated Screen News Ltd. II-65871.0.1¹³

Sarah Bernhardt's return to Montréal: Performances in 1891, 1892, 1896 1905

Context: The period of the mid-1890s till 1905 in Montréal was characterized by a number of events that signified the reduction of Catholic control over the city and changing public sentiments regarding the access and position of both the arts and women in society.

On November the 30th, 1893, The Montréal Local Council of Women (MLCW) was founded, a local chapter of the National Council of Women founded a month before in Toronto by upper class women to support the actions of women across the country. This organization faced strong opposition from the Catholic Clergy which vilified its existence and forbade its members from joining French-speaking associations under the banner, a judgement almost parallel to the vilification of Sarah Bernhardt herself and calls for faithful Catholics not to attend the performances. The Church feared that Protestant influence would erode the values associated with the traditional Catholic family. Measures the MLCW championed included: the eight-hour workday, pay equity and women's access to all professions. Given the conflicts of French nationalism and the strong Clerical hostility at the time, the Catholic authorities struggled to rally French women. These very same French women would later go on to create *La Fondation de la Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste*.¹⁴

The popularization of increasing mediums of theatrical art that enjoyed an overwhelmingly positive reception from the Montréal public contributed to the slow erosion of the Church authority and censorship over the realm of the arts. On June 27th, 1896, the first cinematographic screening in Canada was held in Montréal at *Le Palace Theatre* of 19 boulevard Saint-Laurent.¹⁵ The French speaking reviews of the event were overwhelmingly positive.¹⁶ Notably, no English-speaking journalists

¹³ Photograph from: <http://collections.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/II-65871.0.1>

¹⁴ "Fondation du Montréal Local Council of Women." Consulted on June 7, 2021: <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/ligne-du-temps?eventid=550>

¹⁵ "Première projection cinématographique au Canada." Consulted on June 7, 2021: <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/ligne-du-temps?eventid=162>

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

mentioned the event at the time which has been attributed to their lack of attendance at the event.¹⁷ As a result of Anglophone coverage however, Canada has long believed the country's first cinematographic screening took place in Ottawa the following year and not in Montréal. The development of local cinematography in Québec continued to progress despite vigorous opposition from the Catholic clergy in the person of Monsignor Paul Bruchési, the then Archbishop of Montréal.

Similarly, on August 12th 1900, at 1220 rue Sainte-Catherine Est in Montréal, *le Théâtre national français*, today dubbed *Le National*¹⁸, opened its doors as the first building in the province of Québec for the express purpose as serving as a venue for a professional troupe performing plays in the French language.¹⁹

For reference, prior to the said construction 85% of all plays performed in Montréal at the time were in English.²⁰ This tangible construction was another milestone marking a turning point in the cultural landscape of Montréal, offering up to 10 performances per week, the composition of Anglophone to Francophone performances saw a massive shift, even if the most popular plays remained French-language adaptations of American Broadway hits.²¹

The 20th of June 1899 marked another milestone which would be a turning point in Montréal's history.²² The first municipally funded, fully publicly funded, library in Québec opened in Westmount just 3 kilometers away from Montréal. While the concept of public library's had previously existed in Québec, these included only subscription libraries, commercial libraries and parish libraries.²³ There was no equivalent to the publicly funded entirely open-to-the-public libraries found in contemporary English-Canadian cities. A fact which at the time, was lauded by those rebellious of Clerical control in Québec as "mediaeval". In 1901, the then Mayor of Montréal, Raymond Préfontaine requested financial support from *la Fondation Carnegie*, purposing the establishment of a public library similar to contemporaries in America or other English-Canadian cities. His proposal faced bitter backlash from the Catholic Clergy and the French-Canadian intellectual elite who feared the harmful influence of "bad books" — novels especially. The proposal was abandoned but following in these steps, in 1903, a technical library was opened at Monument-national in Montréal, a compromise between the city and Catholic clergy, the technical library only comprised scientific and technical reference works — no novels.²⁴

With the historical context of the tensions in Europe at the time which ultimately culminated in the outbreak of WWI (1914-1918), between the years of 1900 and 1909, Québec saw an increase of more than 20,000 individuals to its Jewish population through a wave of immigration by Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews.²⁵ Most of these immigrants settled in-between Anglophone and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Consulted on August 13, 2021: <https://www.bonjourQuébec.com/fr/fiche/quoi-faire/loisirs-et-divertissements/salles-de-spectacle-et-theatres/le-national-6829900>

¹⁹ Bourassa, André-Gilles et Jean-Marc Larrue, "Le Monument National (1893-1923): trente ans de théâtre dans la salle Ludger-Duvernay." *L'Annuaire théâtral*, numéro 10 (automne 1991): 69–100.

²⁰ "Inauguration du Théâtre national français." Consulted on June 17, 2021: <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/ligne-du-temps?eventid=142>

²¹ Nardocchio, E. F. "Jean-Marc Larrue. Le Théâtre à Montréal à La Fin Du XIX^e siècle". *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales Au Canada*, 3.2 (June 1982): <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/TRIC/article/view/7490>.

²² "Ouverture de la première bibliothèque municipale au Québec, à Westmount." Consulted on June 17, 2021: <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/ligne-du-temps?eventid=534>

²³ *Clerical control in Québec*, Ch. 5, Consulted on June 18, 2021: <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.77803/127?r=0&s=4>

²⁴ "Ouverture de la bibliothèque technique au Monument-National." Consulted on June 17, 2021: <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/ligne-du-temps?eventid=187>

²⁵ "Nouvelle vague d'immigration de Juifs est-européens au Québec." Consulted on June 20, 2021: <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/ligne-du-temps?eventid=560>

Francophone communities but leaned towards learning English to integrate into North-American culture. In 1903, ratified by provincial law, an agreement was made that their children would be admitted to the English-language school system, not the French-language one.²⁶ While they would later go on to integrate more with the Francophone communities in Québec by way of business and economy through investments in textile, retail and itinerant sales practices, there was much more disconnect between the Francophone Catholic communities of Québec and these new immigrants than their Anglophone peers. The gradual yet increasing anti-Semitic sentiment²⁷ pervading its way into Montréal's public discourse can be attributed in part to this disconnect.²⁸ The Dreyfus Affair, which spanned from 1898-1906 in France, similarly highlighted the crystallization of this anti-Semitic sentiment at the end of the 19th century. As an exemplar of the high tension at the time between the Catholic Church and those of Jewish descent, the Affair also brought the public discourse around said tense political tensions outside of the realm of politics into the arts and culture as well with the famous French novelist and playwright Émile Zola's open letter *J'Accuse...*²⁹ Many notable cultural figures wrote letters to Dreyfus himself as well, such as Edvard Grieg, Henry James and Sarah Bernhardt herself.³⁰

Sarah Bernhardt returns to Montréal: After having returned to France in 1882 following her success abroad, Bernhardt eventually purchased the *Théâtre l'Ambigu* in the name of her son Maurice. Unfortunately, this would ultimately lead to a managerial disaster and eventually resulted in her move to the Porte Saint-Martin theatre which she leased. News that reached Montréal by 1885, reporting under legal news headings of the *Montréal Gazette* of how she was unable to pay off debts to creditors in full and even had to substitute payments partially through the salaries of her troupe as well as ticket sales. She eventually rebounded back to success through her performances of *La Dame aux camélias* and eventual cooperation with Félix Dusquesnel.³¹ It was not until 1891 that she once again embarked on a world tour which would turn out to be a very lucrative endeavor for the famed actress.

Upon her return to Montréal in 1891, the advertisements announced that she would offer a series of performances, indicating the breadth of the repertoire and roles she would be showcasing in the city. Great turnouts of large crowds were again highly anticipated at the *Académie de Musique*.³²

Her 1896 visit was similarly more advertised and highly anticipated by writers in *Le Monde illustré*, a paper which sought to replace the void left by *l'Opinion Publique*, which ended its publication at the end of 1883.³³ The paper would continue to praise both theatre itself as well as Sarah Bernhardt.

Critical opinions of Bernhardt's various performances through 1891 recorded by Hare and Hathorn show a range of receptions to her work with respect to her performance in *Jeanne d'Arc* which critics from *La Minerve* deemed as leaving an "impression profonde" to *Frou-Frou* which *La Patrie*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cahm, Éric. "Zola et l'Affaire Dreyfus vus du Canada au tournant du siècle." *Excavatio*, XV, nos 3-4, 2001, p. 265-283. Viveiros, Geneviève De. "From far away: les lettres du Canada à Zola pendant l'Affaire Dreyfus." *Les Cahiers naturalistes*, no 94, 2020, p. 331-340.

²⁸ Hathorn, Ramon. "Sarah Bernhardt and the Bishops of Montréal and Québec." Consulted on June 14, 2021: <http://www.cchahistory.ca/journal/CCHA1986/Hathorn.pdf>

²⁹ Götde-Baummanns, Beate. "Visions contemporaines et postérieures de l'affaire Dreyfus en Allemagne." Denis, Michel, et al. *L'affaire Dreyfus et l'opinion publique : en France et à l'étranger*. Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1995. (pp. 229-243) Web. <http://books.openedition.org/pur/16524>.

³⁰ Gross, J. (1987, September 20). New York; In France's Dreyfus Affair, The Artists, Too, Asked, 'Which Side Are You On?' *The New York Times*, p. 43.

³¹ Consulted on June 20, 2021: <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/bernhardt-sarah>

³² *L'Almanach du peuple illustré*, 1892, p. 15. Consulted on June 10, 2021: https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_00423_6/15?r=0&s=3

³³ Consulted on June 18, 2021: http://collections.musee-mccord.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tablename=theme&tableid=11&elementid=77__true&contentlong

described as a “pièce médiocre” and *Pauline Blanchard* which was deemed as “unfortunately lacking” again by critics from *La Minerve*.³⁴

Contrary to the critical opinion at the time, Catholic critics were particularly condemnatory and chagrined by Bernhardt’s performance in *Jeanne d’Arc*. Notably, they mentioned overall the “rotten” works she was performing.³⁵ Catholic authority’s bemoaned that such a woman would dare to play “la chaste et bonne Lorraine”³⁶ and were increasingly agitated by the fact that she was representing such characters when they wanted to see what they termed as the original purity associated with French patriotism and to have their values as Catholic French Canadians represented and respected in theatre.³⁷

Following her visit to Montréal in 1905, *La Vie artistique*, a liberal leaning weekly paper, as it featured advertisements for *La Patrie* within its pages, and covering topics of theatre, politics, and literature, also published multiple columns featuring Sarah Bernhardt in their November 25th 1905 issue. The first, being a recount of an actress, Madame Henriette Moret of Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, who joyfully recounted her experiences touring in Canada.³⁸ The second was a column by Jules Lemaître, a French critic and dramatist of *l’Académie Française* which featured an in depth and laudatory review of the actress’ performance in *Fédora*, where he expressed his admiration and well wishes towards Sarah Bernhardt.³⁹ Her perception from theatre critics and artistic peers remained largely positive.

However, in criticisms of Clerical control in Québec in the 1990s, it was noted how Sarah Bernhardt herself could not go to Québec without enduring indignities. *La Vérité* and the *Canada-revue* were named as particularly defamatory papers towards the actress.

Given that the ethno-religious tensions were at an all-time high at the time, criticisms of the actress seemed to come to a head in 1905, resulting in the now infamous retaliatory and hugely inflammatory interview Bernhardt herself was reputed to have given Mr. Ulric Barthe, who was said to be present on behalf of numerous reporters, at the Château Frontenac. She was reputed to have said the following:

But I understand nothing of your population. You have English Canadians, Irish Canadians, French Canadians, Iroquois Canadians! But can you tell me why you are called French Canadians? ... You have hardly a drop of French blood in your vein ... [this country] has no painters, writers sculptures, poets — except Fréchette perhaps ... You have progressed in 25 years but ... backwards. Ah, yes, I understand, here you are still under the yoke of the clergy. You owe to the church that backward progress that makes you resemble a Turkey.

The interview was published in *L’Événement* on December 5th, 1905, just three days after her last performance in 1905.

³⁴ John Hare and Ramon Hathorn. “Sarah Bernhardt’s visits to Canada: Dates and Repertory.” *Theater Research in Canada/Recherches Théâtrales au Canada* 2.2 (Fall 1981), Consulted on June 10, 2021: <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7510/8569>

³⁵ *La famille*, 1^{ère} année, No. 17, p 265-266, 26 avril 1891. Consulted on June 16, 2021: https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06252_17/10?r=0&s=1

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *La vie artistique* [weekly journal], 1^{re} année, No. 1, 25 nov. 1905. Consulted on June 16, 2021: https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06829_1/3?r=0&s=1

³⁹ *Ibid.*

It should be noted that some papers such as *Le Soleil* refused to publish this “conversation.”⁴⁰ The *Montréal Gazette* published an alternate version of this so-called interview from Mr. Barthe’s side where he categorically denied Bernhardt’s controversial statements saying that: “The French actress didn’t apply the nickname of Iroquois to the French-Canadian race... She did not say we were a priest-ridden population.” The *Montréal Gazette* was thus going a step further to suggest *L’Événement*’s piece was “pure hearsay and gossip.”⁴¹

Nevertheless, the Québécois took her words to heart, and roused by patriotic and religious resentment, a body ranging from 200 to 400 of primarily Laval university students followed her from Chateau Frontenac to the train station throwing eggs, tomatoes, all the while shouting “A bas la Juive! Mort à la Juive!”⁴² Conflicting accounts of the event both through various print sources at the time and even in tertiary sources citing the happenings long after the fact have been partially attributed to the ethno-religious affiliation of sources which differ in terms of describing the severity of the event. Some claim that she was protected the whole way by police officers, others that there were no officers present. The severity of the mobbing itself differs depending on the accounts: some including that eggs, tomatoes, snow and ice were also thrown, and another actress from her troupe was injured as a result.⁴³ Others claim that only two eggs were thrown and that it was a single voice that shouted “Down with the Jews!” It was later claimed that the police report trivialized the incident, describing it as less serious than it actually was, with no mentions of eggs or ice thrown, and no injuries taking place; it also claimed that Sarah herself laughed at the cries of “Down with the Jews!” saying that she, herself, was a Roman Catholic.⁴⁴ The only key consistency among the reports seems to be that even in the most violent descriptions of the happenings, Sarah Bernhardt herself remained physically unscathed.

The underlying anti-Semitic sentiments motivating criticisms of her person and performances during earlier visits to Montréal culminated during her departure from the city in 1905. It was characterized by blatant and aggressive anti-Semitic speech, following her hasty and somewhat violent departure from the city. Father Zacharie Lacasse, a Roman Catholic priest at the time was quoted as saying that Bernhardt had come to “sadden Our Lord”, and that “her stay in Montréal launched thousands of arrows into the sacred heart of Jesus.”⁴⁵ As a result, Sarah Bernhardt’s presence in Montréal has not only been studied in regards to her contributions to the artistic and cultural landscape of the city, but also as a figurehead of the vilification of the theatre by the Catholic Church at the time.⁴⁶ Various Jewish Canadian scholarships such as the seminal work, *The Immigration Story*⁴⁷, compiled by David Rome – describe the crystallization of a period of strong anti-Semitic rhetoric evident through her own treatment by the Montréal public nearing the onset of WWI.

Following Bernhardt’s departure from the city, the actress continued to face criticism and condemnation from the Catholic Church, issues of *La Semaine religieuse de Québec* through the end of December 1905 included multiple piece’s denouncing theatre and Bernhardt and calling her plays

⁴⁰ Hathorn, Ramon, “Sarah Bernhardt and the Bishops of Montréal and Québec.” Consulted on June 14, 2021: <http://www.cchahistory.ca/journal/CCHA1986/Hathorn.pdf>

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Sait, Edward McChesney. “Clerical control in Québec.” (1991 Toronto: The Sentennial Publishing Co.), Consulted on June 20, 2021: <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.77803/127?r=0&s=4>

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Rome, David, The Immigration story /, Montréal, National Archives, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1986, 1 ressource en ligne (3 vol.), Collections de BAnQ. Consulted July 18 2021: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3658076>

“immoral.”⁴⁸ The shareholders of the theatre were equally condemned along with Bernhardt herself: they were decried as valuing monetary gain and greed over morality and the preservation of Catholic values.⁴⁹ Bernhardt herself was continually criticized for her choice of repertoire, though acknowledged as a talented actress, and the Church saw her selections as a personal affront and disrespect.⁵⁰ Another piece published on December 23rd, 1905, quoted a previous piece from 1892 by Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, the second archbishop of Westminster published in *The Weekly Register of London*, calling Bernhardt’s performance in *La Dame aux Camélias*: “a provocative outrage against all that there is of instinctive modesty in both men and women” an example of how immoral, poisonous and dangerous Bernhardt’s theatre was viewed in the Protestant city of London England, not solely the Catholics of Québec. Chamberlain’s refusal to grant Bernhardt’s French rendition of *Salomé* performance license in England in 1892 was also cited as an example of necessary censorship. New York also refused her performance of *Camille*.

Figure 2. Photograph of Sarah Bernhardt – BANQDate: 1905⁵¹

⁴⁸ *La semaine religieuse de Québec*, Vol. 18, No. 18, p.275-276 16 déc. 1905, Consulted June 4 2021: https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_04729_902/4?r=0&s=3

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *La semaine religieuse de Québec*, Vol. 18, No. 19, 23 déc. 1905, Consulted June 4 2021: https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_04729_903/8?r=0&s=3

⁵¹ Photograph of Sarah Bernhardt 1905: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/banq/34539693865/in/album-72157681681252480/>

Sarah Bernhardt's Presence in Montréal: Preceding and through the onset of WWI

Context: Preceding Sarah Bernhardt's final visits to Montréal from 1911-1917 through the end of the 19th century, the city saw a period of liveliness and excitement in the literary scene as the city opened itself to modernity and new aesthetic trends from Paris.

In the month of May 1907, *La Fondation de la Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste* was established in Montréal, highlighting the strength of the opinions and public presence of upper-class French-Canadian women. They sought to advocate for women paralleling earlier work mentioned through the MLCW but with an emphasis on Catholic values.

On March 24th, 1911, just a few months before Bernhardt's visit in June, the Québec government sanctioned the Act to promote the development of musical art, and for the first time in Canada, a scholarship for students of the performing arts was created, highlighting the importance of musical art to the population of Québec at the time.

With the official commencement of WWI in 1914 and Canada's joining on England's behalf, public discourse at the time was heavily saturated with topics related to the war. Consequently, criticisms of the arts largely died down. To the French-Canadian nationalists of the time, the closure of French-language schools in the neighboring province of Ontario divested more of their indignation and interest than the far away Germany. The focus of governing institutions, both Church and State, turned away from artistic pursuits as conscription was enforced through the Military Service Act which nearly every Francophone member of the Canadian Parliament opposed, contrary to their Anglophone peers who almost unanimously supported the Act.

Following previous developments of public libraries outside of the direct influence of the Church, on September 2nd, 1915, the library of Saint-Sulpice was opened to the public, and on September 4th, 1917, the Civic library of Montréal was inaugurated as well.⁵² These developments contrasted with the earlier criticisms of Catholic censorship and lack of public library in the metropolis of Montréal. The control and influence of the Catholic Church was limited to religion whereas in previous years, it meant to dominate public opinion and ideology. Instead, the public tempered its influence over its arts and entertainments.

Sarah Bernhardt's last visits: As recorded by Hare and Hathron, the *Montréal Daily Star* offered positive critiques of Bernhardt's performances in *Hécube*, where her limited physical movement and age was acknowledged, but comments were circumscribed to the marvelous quality of her voice; *La Mort de Cléopâtre* is the occasion to extoll her "unchallenged mastery"; *Du Théâtre au champ d'honneur* is the occasion to praise her dying French soldier impersonation. Similarly, *La Tribune*, a French-Catholic daily founded in 1910 which interestingly enough quickly revealed itself to have more liberal leaning, included a brief but impactful column praising Bernhardt's performance in *La mort de Cléopâtre*, and it advertised for the fact that "the Gazette" ("qui n'est pas plus libérale dans ses opinions théâtrales que politiques"⁵³) was not the only paper that praised her performance, as all other Montréal newspapers did not spare compliments for her acting in this role.⁵⁴

However, given the turbulent political climate at the time with the Military Service Act having just passed, her November performances in Montréal were the first time where, the theatre was only half full, and French Canadians were notably absent. This was attributed to the actions of Harry Lauder, who had played at His Majesty's Theatre the week prior to help the Victory Loan campaign via Victory Bonds and urged all Canadians, especially French Canadians, to fight for the "Mother Country" of

⁵² "Inauguration de la bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice." Consulted on June 15, 2021: <https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/ligne-du-temps?eventid=203>

⁵³ *La tribune*, 1917-11-30, p.3, Collections de BAnQ. Consulted on June 21, 2021: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3505054>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Britain.⁵⁵ The Québec papers were all outraged at this and even the Mayor demanded a retraction of Lauder for his insult to the French citizens of the province of Québec for insinuating that they should fight for the country of Britain. The manager of the theatre expressed public support for Lauder's criticism leading to French Canadians boycotting the theatre entirely even during the 'Divine' Sarah's visit. *La Presse* and *La Patrie* both refused to even publish advertisements announcing Bernhardt's final performances leading the famous actress to play to largely empty houses.

Of the scant mentions of Bernhardt in the public discourse at the time, even at 72 years of age, she was named as one of "d'admirable danseurs, au sens grec du mot", along with Mounet-Sully, in a piece by Yvette Guilbert, a French cabaret singer at the time, giving prominence to how impactful and well respected she was by peers of the artistic profession.⁵⁶

In a similar fashion, Bernhardt did develop relationships with individuals prominent in the French-Canadian theatre scene through the course of her visits. The following is a figure of an amicable telegram sent by Sarah Bernhardt to Louis Fréchette from the records of Fréchette's correspondences between 1859-1908. Fréchette was a prominent Canadian author, politician and playwright.⁵⁷

Figure 3. Telegram from Sarah Bernhardt to Louis Fréchette⁵⁸

⁵⁵ "Sarah Bernhardt and the Montréal Fiasco of 1917," *Canadian Drama/l'Art dramatique canadien*, 7.1 (Spring 1981): 29-43.

⁵⁶ *La Bonne Parole*, 5.4 (mai 1917): 9. Consulted on June 20, 2021: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2224914>

⁵⁷ Consulted on August 20, 2021: http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/frechette_louis_13E.html

⁵⁸ Telegram from Sarah Bernhardt to Louis Fréchette: https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c13987

Of note, an atypical mention of Bernhardt from the time is a satirical full page spread in *Le Canard* which, credited to Marie Colombier, a childhood friend turned envious rival to Sarah Bernhardt, who chronicled Bernhardt's first visit to Montréal and her perspective of it as a member of the troupe. Where she claims that "il faut décidément que Sarah se fasse au rôle de persécutée."⁵⁹

Development of the spatial/geographic distribution of French theatres in Montréal

The three theatre's Sarah Bernhardt performed at over the course of her visits to the city of Montréal recorded by Hare and Ramon were: L'Académie de Musique, His Majesty's and Théâtre Français — all three of which were all situated along the central street of Rue Saint-Catherine spanning across the Southern to Northern points of the city of Montréal. While all three theatres have since closed their doors and have since been repurposed, the new establishments located on the central street of Rue-Saint-Catherine continue to be places of importance with high cultural and entertainment value. What was once L'Académie de Musique was demolished in 1910 to allow for the expansion of the Goodwin department store (which today is the location of the Centre Eaton de Montréal)⁶⁰, His Majesty's has been replaced with Concordia University's Engineering and Visual Arts building,⁶¹ and the former Théâtre Français is now known as Metropolis, a prominent nightclub and concert venue in Montréal's Quartier des Spectacles area.⁶²

A Google Earth rendering⁶³ of the three locations in their present day form allows us to see how central to the city their spatial distribution on the street of Rue Saint-Catherine is. Similarly, the Montréal Gazette has electronically published a series of comparative photographs⁶⁴ of "the grand old theatres of Ste-Catherine St." where the historic buildings are contrasted with their current developments.

Throughout the 1800s-1900s these prominent theatres spanned much of the city across Rue Sainte-Catherine, in the present day, Montréal has continued to develop its entertainment district around this central street.

In 2003, the City of Montréal officially defined the area known as the Quartier des Spectacles (of which the former Théâtre Français resided in). Largely overlapping the city's former Red Light district, the area was redefined as a district of culture and entertainment. Presently, the Quartier des Spectacles district includes notable venues such as the *Place des Arts*, the *Centre Cinéma Impérial*, the *Théâtre Sainte-Catherine* and many others.⁶⁵

While the overall geographic area of the Quartier des Spectacles is smaller than the range of the three theatres Sarah Bernhardt performed at, the district is also located around the central street of Rue Saint-Catherine, highlighting the continued value of the street as a location central to many places of theatrical value.

⁵⁹ *Le Canard* [journal humoristique et satirique], 39.50 (octobre 1916): 6, 8. Consulted on June 15, 2021: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3730137>

⁶⁰ Consulted on August 4, 2021: [https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/academy-of-musicacademie-de-musique-emc#:~:text=Opened%20in%201875%2C%20the%20100,\(which%20later%20became%20Eaton's\).](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/academy-of-musicacademie-de-musique-emc#:~:text=Opened%20in%201875%2C%20the%20100,(which%20later%20became%20Eaton's).)

⁶¹ Consulted on August 4, 2021: https://imtl.org/edifices/his_majestys_theater.php

⁶² Consulted on August 4, 2021: <https://mtltimes.ca/Montréal/metropolis-formerly-theatre-francais/>
⁶³ Consulted on August 23, 2021: <https://earth.google.com/earth/d/1FoFnq-V0aAKb1wA2EEo-PfbO0AiAAMJn?usp=sharing>

⁶⁴ Consulted on June 29, 2021: <https://Monrealgazette.com/gallery/0228-extra-theatres-gallery>

⁶⁵ Consulted on June 22, 2021: <https://www.quartierdesspectacles.com/en/about/history-and-vision/>

Parallels of Sarah Bernhardt's Reception in Montréal with the Development of Yiddish Theatre in Montréal

The development of Yiddish theatre in the city of Montréal can be compared and contrasted with the reception of Sarah Bernhardt throughout the years as the two highlight the period-typical “assimilationist responses” to theatre received in the city throughout the 1800s. Early immigrants were nostalgic for artistic experiences representative of the theatre of their homelands. Yiddish plays were staged as early as 1969 in the city, with the acclaimed story of *The Megilla of Itzik Manager* being staged in the city for the first time that year.⁶⁶ The relationship between the immigrant experience and theatrical representation for both French and Jewish immigrants was quite representative in this context. Interestingly enough, contrary to the increasingly negative reception of Sarah Bernhardt's performances in the early 1900s, Yiddish theatre saw a massive and fragmented growth between 1905-1910.⁶⁷ By 1913, there were a total of three permanent professional Yiddish theatre troupes in the city.⁶⁸ Further cementing its place in Montréal's theatrical scene, the Dora Wassermann Yiddish Theatre was founded in 1958.⁶⁹

Limitations

In choosing to reference an already previously established timeline of historical events constructed by the BAnQ project after the fact, there is bias in what events have been purposefully included and what events purposefully excluded. The benefits of this choice are that the historical and cultural context established by the events included in the timeline are ones that have been evaluated by BAnQ as being fundamental and impactful in the development of Québec history. Future work can look to build off this by expanding the contextual construction of 1880s-1917 Montréal with regards to Sarah Bernhardt's visits through a variety of other resources.

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⁶⁶ *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, Feb 20 1969 p. 2. Consulted on June 19, 2021: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2998934>

⁶⁷ Zatzman, Belaire, “Yiddish Theatre in Montréal (Review Essay of Jean-Marc Larue, *Le Théâtre Yiddish à Montréal/Yiddish Theatre in Montréal*).” *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études Juives Canadiennes* (1998): 91.

⁶⁸ Larrue, Jean-Marc. *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal/Yiddish Theatre in Montréal*. Tr. Catherine Brown. Montréal: Editions Jeu, 1996, p. 166.

⁶⁹ Consulted on June 28, 2021: <https://jwa.org/thisweek/apr/21/1993/dora-wasserman>

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