

Woman Traveller in the Age of Empire:
Thérèse (Th.) Bentzon and The Politics of Feminist Selfhood
in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World

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Abstract

Woman Traveller in the Age of Empire: Thérèse Bentzon and The Politics of Feminist Selfhood in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World

Throughout the nineteenth century, women travellers influenced ideas about women's rights in three respects: being in motion had a formative impact on their own notions of rights; they would put these ideas to paper; and these travelogues would then be published and circulated, contributing as cultural mediators to meaning-making about women elsewhere in the world. This thesis suggests that through the prism of the life and work of French writer and traveller Marie-Thérèse de Solms Blanc (1840-1907), better known under her pen name Thérèse (Th.), Bentzon, the relationship between an emerging feminist subject and travel can be apprehended. It holds that for Bentzon travel occurred along three axes: temporal, spatial, and imaginative. In considering her travelogues to North America, *Les Américaines chez elles* (1896) and *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre* (1899), this study asks how this tripartite mechanism manifested itself via her travel accounts. More specifically, this thesis examines the ways in which these travelogues serve as practical examples of how ideas about womanhood (even if not specifically operating under the umbrella of the 'feminist' movement) circulated in a transatlantic context; how the production of difference via travel writing along racialized, gendered, classist, and national lines fed into transnational networks of feminist ideas; and finally, how imagination itself served as an anchor for Bentzon's project of centering women's lives and contributions to society, her representations of people and places, space and time, and the very medium and genre she chose to work with, that of the travelogue.

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To my parents, Carole Tait and Walter Di Bartolomeo: I could not have done this without your unwavering support over the years. I love you. To my younger sister Jessica, the better version of me: The bar has been set. It's your move now. To Cassandra Marsillo and Mab Coates-Davies, the two women who know me better than I know myself: you are my saving grace. I can't wait to see where the future takes us. Thank you to Paul Vaudry for being a consistent source of wisdom and level-headedness. To James Leduc, for sticking out this roller-coaster ride in spite of it all: thank you. To the friends made in my time at the Department of History, many of whom are now scattering to the four winds: our group is what allowed me to keep it together in the low points of this project.

Above all, this thesis is dedicated to the formidable women in my life. *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.*

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“Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.”
(Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 29)

“To imagine the future is a political practice.”
(Laurie Penny, *Everything Belongs to the Future*)

Introduction

In *The Mind of the Traveler* (1991), Eric J. Leed makes a case for “the centrality of travel as an activity creative of a human condition, in the past as in the present”.¹ As Leed holds, the mentality produced through travel in part results from the separation initiated upon departure that alienates the traveller from home and from his or her ‘emplaced’ self. At this point “the traveler is ‘objectified’ and becomes a thing persisting outside these relations that identify him,” a state of being Leed regards as an inescapable condition of modern life. Boundaries and frontiers are blurred and reconstituted by what he calls the global society of strangers who form fleeting yet powerful bonds.² In the process, the traveller’s gaze turns not only outwards but also back on oneself and towards home, which suddenly appears as if foreign. In a similar vein, much travel literature, and the extant scholarship examining it, attests to how little these accounts can have to say about the characteristics, salient features, and particularities of the places visited, instead functioning as a reflective surface for a critique of one’s own society.³

¹ Eric J. Leed, *The Mind Of The Traveler: From Gilgamesh To Global Tourism* (S.I.: Basic Books, 1991), 4-5. His line of thinking here bears more than a passing resemblance to certain facets of globalist discourse, proclaiming the dissolution of national borders through the repeated and ever-increasing traffic of goods, labour, capital, people across them.

² Leed, *The Mind Of The Traveler*, 45; 288.

³ The concern for calling attention to gender inequalities in the metropolis appears regardless of country of provenance or language: see for example the writings of British traveller to Canada Anna Brownell Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), or French traveller to the United States Olympe Audouard, *À travers l’Amérique. Le Far-West* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1869).

The writer and literary critic Marie-Thérèse de Solms Blanc (1840-1907), better known under her penname of Thérèse (Th.) Bentzon, was both prolific and popular in her native France.⁴ Leveraging a family connection to novelist and public personality George Sand, who would become a lifelong mentor and friend, Bentzon began contributing literary criticism for the Paris-based magazine *Revue des deux mondes* early on in life and would parlay this position into a career writing both fiction and non-fiction that spanned decades and at least two continents. Her travel writings, while ostensibly about women's lives abroad, were oriented around two central, driving questions: What did the future of her country, and by extension of Europe, look like – and where did women fit into it?

In pursuit of answers she travelled to England, the United States, Canada, and Russia; only ill health prevented her from continuing this information-seeking mission into Egypt and Constantinople as initially intended. Of her two trips to North America she published two accounts: *Les Américaines chez elles* (1896) and *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre* (1899).⁵ Perhaps a reflection of her common goal in writing them, the travelogues read as near-mirror images of one another. To Bentzon the United States offered a glimpse into what she hoped was the future, an example to emulate if the Old World did not wish to be left behind in the vestiges of the past. Canada – and Quebec in particular, as with few exceptions she did not concern herself with the goings-on of English Canada – became precisely the relics of that past to Bentzon's modern French eyes, a living reminder of the *ancien régime*. In each case, women's contributions were foregrounded, whether Bentzon was relating the work of settlement house reformers in nineteenth-century America or stories of women's religious orders that were among

⁴ I have chosen to make use of her penname, Bentzon, instead of her birth name, de Solms Blanc, as the major portion of this thesis will be dedicated to encountering and parsing her thought via her published works.

⁵ *Les Américaines chez elles* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1896); *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1899).

the first to settle what would become the colony of New France.

As a writer who took great care not to overstep the gendered conventions of nineteenth-century France, Bentzon neither participated in the struggles of formalized movements that sought to expand women's political rights in nineteenth-century Europe, nor did she self-identify as a feminist. Her accounts of women's lives in Canada and the United States thus sit uneasily with the socio-political writings of nineteenth-century female intellectuals, writers and activists whom scholars have thus far identified to be of greater import in the emergence of a feminist movement. That said, as Bentzon relayed and mediated information about the countries she visited, she contributed to the work of feminists past and present: by participating in the circulation of transnational ideas about women, she was in the business of imagining an alternative future for the Western world, one in which women would play a central role.

Unlike Sand and other writers who hewed more closely to ideas of the female public figure or intellectual, Bentzon has been quietly and somewhat ignominiously relegated to the dustbin of women's history. Despite her output and the contemporaneous popularity of her writing, she is largely absent from the academic study of either travel writing or women's rights movements.⁶ The 1924 publication of *Madame Th. Bentzon* by Madame Paul Fliche is the only existing full-length biography. Since then, mentions of Bentzon have appeared in a handful of places, almost exclusively in regards to her American travels or connections.⁷ As a result, despite

⁶ In addition to penning over a dozen novels and the two travel accounts studied here, Bentzon published six works of non-fiction: *Choses et gens d'Amérique* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1898); *Femmes d'Amérique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1900); *Promenades en Russie : en Petite-Russie ; autour de Tolstoï ; bains de mer en Crimée ; femmes russes ; docteur et femme de lettres, Anne-Rosalie Sachalsky ; industries de village* (Paris: Hachette, 1903); and with Amélie Chevalier, *Causeries de morale pratique* (Paris: Hachette, 1899). She wrote for *Century Magazine* and *New Prairie Woman*.

⁷ Bénédicte Monicat included her in her bibliography of French women travellers. See her *Itinéraires De L'écriture Au Féminin: Voyageuses Du 19e Siècle* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 1996). Bentzon appears here and there in a handful of other places in the past century, mostly regarding her American travels and connections. See most recently Anne-Caroline Sieffert, "The Good Woman Abroad: Female Travel and French Citizenship (1860-1910)," (PhD. Diss., Brown University, 2016); Rachel Williams, "Therese Bentzon's American 'Other' in New

a substantial body of literature having emerged in the past thirty years that takes as its object of study the writing of women travellers, and the equally rich scholarship on transatlantic women's history in the nineteenth century, Bentzon's life, work and ideas have gone largely unnoticed since her death in 1907. Yet she travelled with the explicit purpose of relaying the role of women in American and Quebec societies back to her reading public in France. As a result, studying Bentzon's work exposes the centralities of the travelogue in the circulation of ideas about women at this time – even if the particular ideas she related and endorse would not have been considered 'feminist' in her day.⁸

Women travellers influenced ideas about women's rights in three key ways. Being in motion had a formative impact on their own notions of rights; they would put these ideas to paper; and these travelogues would then circulate and contribute to meaning-making about

Orleans: Constructing Frenchness and Femininity in Louisiana at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Romance Notes* 56.2 (2016): 281-292, doi:10.1353/rmc.2016.0031; and "Thérèse Bentzon: itinéraires d'une Française aux États-Unis (1840-1907)" in *Le voyage au féminin: Perspectives historiques et littéraires (XIIIe - XXe Siècles)*, ed. by Nicolas Bourguinat, 109-130 (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires De Strasbourg, 2008). Her translation work also has garnered minor attention. Along with a dissertation on her translation activities, these studies constitute the extent of academic engagement with Bentzon's work in the past hundred odd years.

⁸ Bentzon's case makes visible the importance of differentiating between her understanding of women's place in society, which was based on essential notions of womanhood and the many socio-political movements intended to redress inequalities in political and legal status whose objectives and methods she reported on. She could be considered a feminist by today's standards, but it would be more accurate to say that even though Bentzon pontificated about women's place in the world, she would not have thought of herself as a feminist (even if later biographers would assign this category to her). Under the umbrella term of *féminisme* is encompassed a range of definitions, alliances and movements. Gerda Lerner's definition of feminist consciousness is a useful jumping-off point here: "[T]he awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but is socially determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternative vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination." (Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to 1870* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14.) The components of a feminist consciousness, Lerner would argue, include awareness; motivated action; and an ability and desire to articulate a different, egalitarian worldview. Offen notes that "the concept of feminism (viewed historically and comparatively) can be said to encompass both a system of ideas and a movement for sociopolitical change based on a refusal of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society." (Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 20.) These characterizations of feminism include both theoretical and practical components. See also Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14:1 (1988): 119-57.

women elsewhere in the world.⁹ The importance of transatlantic exchanges and connections is well established in women's and gender history. The contours of contemporary feminism are shaped across national, political, and cultural boundaries; the same held true in the nineteenth century. However, although scholars have drawn connections between the modern subject and mobility, in its transnational iterations the historiography has been dominated by the struggles of formalized movements seeking political rights. Even the travelogues penned by influential figures are often overshadowed by their socio-political writings, considered to be of greater import in understanding the emergence of a feminist movement in the nineteenth century. In emphasizing these elements, the significance of these writers' voyages is elided. Much of the literature surrounding transnational feminism is contemporary, geared towards understanding an era of late capitalism and advanced globalization.¹⁰ And so, while feminism itself has gained recognition as a 'travelling theory', the discussion of contemporary global networks has limited value for understanding their earlier nineteenth-century counterparts, as we will see when studying Bentzon.¹¹ This is truly rich territory to explore; the shortage of historical engagement, which places the figure of the traveller at its core, is therefore surprising.¹²

⁹ This is not to say that no form of advocacy of women, on behalf of women, existed prior to the nineteenth century. Joan Kelly argued for the existence of a tradition of vocal feminist theorists speaking out against female subordination that could be traced back to Christine de Pisan. See "Early Feminist Theory and the 'Querelle des Femmes', 1400-1789," *Signs*, 8 (1) (1982): 4-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173479> and *Women, History & Theory: the Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). For a study of feminism in the French context, see Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the 19th Century* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984). For the Victorian context, see Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ On contemporary iterations of transnational feminist networks see Rawwida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Leela Fernandes, *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, and Power* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Valentine M. Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2005); and Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar, eds., *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010).

¹¹ On feminism as travelling theory see Kathy Davis, *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Kathy Davis and Mary Evans, eds. *Transatlantic Conversations: Feminism as Travelling Theory* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011).

¹² Within history proper, Leed's *Mind of the Traveler* remains a rare exception. His call for a history of travel has by and large gone unheeded in his own discipline. Note, by contrast, the preoccupation of geographers with using

Throughout this study I use the expressions of ‘tourist’ and ‘traveller’ somewhat interchangeably to designate a particular kind of being-in-motion, which comes into existence in the nineteenth century. Leed identifies the enjoyment derived from travel as the key demarcation between (ancient) travel and (modern) tourism. A transition occurs from the early medieval period onward in which men cease to wander the world as penance or by divine ordination, embarking instead on quests for the acquisition of fame, fortune, and even identity. Leed’s definition hinges on an understanding of the nature of travel that conceptualizes the individuals’ relationship to the world, and their power to move through it, in very different ways: mobility for the purpose of suffering or satisfaction, to atone for sin or reap worldly rewards. By this measure, Thérèse Bentzon, in chronology as well as in the nature of her travels, was a tourist, not a traveller. But what to make of her successive travels to England, the United States, Canada, even Russia, to further her longstanding interest in reporting on the status of women in these countries? Were these journeys undertaken purely for personal pleasure?

A more nuanced stance reveals that mobility is differentiated according to a range of factors – what geographer Doreen Massey terms the power-geometry of movement.¹³ Massey complicates the idea of voluntary or involuntary travel by asking: Who is doing the moving, who is doing the communicating, and how and why are they enabled to do so? Circumstances converged to enable Bentzon to travel. In terms of technologies and public opinion, the popularization of tourism on a mass scale by the end of the nineteenth century and its increasing accessibility to women permitted Bentzon to make the voyages and write the travelogues

movement and motion, instead of sessility, as the point of departure for any scholarly inquiry, often referred to as the ‘mobilities turn’ or the ‘mobilities paradigm’. On the study of tourism, travel and mobilities within geography see Thomas Faist, “The Mobility Turn: A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences?” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36.11 (2013): 1637-646, doi:10.1080/01419870.2013.812229; Mimi Sheller and John Urry, “The New Mobilities Paradigm,” *Environment and Planning* 38:2 (2006): 207-26, doi:10.1068/a37268 and (as editors) *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹³ See Doreen Massey, “Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place,” in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1993): 60–70.

explored in this project. Social mobility also came into play. She benefited from her aristocratic roots and connections, which she parlayed into a longstanding literary and writing career that ultimately was the impetus for *Américaines* and *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre*. The social relations forged in her time writing for the *Revue des deux mondes* stretched out across the Atlantic, allowing her to play the tourist (in the guise of the observing writer) with ease. If we take into account this power-geometry tourists can be discussed in much the same register as travellers, thereby allowing for a more complex understanding of the different pressures on movement and sessility.

In the realm of literary criticism, in which the journey as topos is identifiable as early as the composition of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the study of the peregrinations of women has been taken up within the scope of ‘emancipatory research’ aiming to restore women to the historical record. Theories connecting travel, modernity and the displaced self abound.¹⁴ Spurred by the publication of Edward Said’s seminal work *Orientalism* (1979), literary scholars have written extensively about the potentialities of travel and travel writing functioning as avenues for women writers in the nineteenth-century to discover or rediscover the self, break out from gendered constraints on women’s behavioural patterns in the metropolis, or perform gender-ambiguous moves as they slipped into different ‘skins’.¹⁵ Much of this scholarship builds on Sara Mills’

¹⁴ Literary scholars have taken up the question of the constitution of modern travelling subjectivities with particular vigour. Within comparative literature, John Zilcosky has observed a seemingly contradictory belief in the necessity of travel for the ‘wholeness’ of a self – even though departure is indissociable from the fragmentation and the alienation thereof, the severing of localized social articulations, which marks the beginning of the journey. See *Kafka’s Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and (as editor) *Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Dea Birkett’s 1989 monograph *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1989) is frequently taken as an early expression of the project undertaken to ‘recover’ the writings of the titular adventuresses from their relative obscurity. As several studies on women travellers have held, women writers who crossed national and geographical boundaries (and often transgressed sociocultural ones) could also reinforce the goals of an imperial civilizing project. See Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History. British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992). For more on the role of settler women, see Lisa

elaboration of a Foucauldian textual framework in order to study how different discursive pressures, including ones related to gender, produce the travelogue – a key insight which I put to work below.¹⁶ This body of research was initially highly anglocentric in nature, with the majority of research both written in English and concentrating on British travellers to the Orient.¹⁷ There have since been significant incursions into exploring French-language travel, and an increase in comparative studies between the British and French contexts, although in the Canadian context study of the former still dominates.¹⁸ Working parallel to, if not always in concert with, these lines of inquiry, historians of feminism have attended to how proponents of women’s rights in Europe made use of newly opened up transnational paths to feed a growing appetite for social and political change, first through increasingly intricate matrices of correspondence, then through

Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) and Cecilia Morgan, *Building Better Britains?: Settler Societies Within the British Empire, 1783-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

¹⁶ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁷ See Billie Melman, *Women's Orient--English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

¹⁸ The work of French literary scholar Bénédicte Monicat was instrumental in this regard. Two of the 102 women whose works Bénédicte Monicat surveys deal specifically with Canada (although others may include descriptions of the country in their accounts of travels to North America more generally). See *Itinéraires De L'écriture Au Féminin: Voyageuses Du 19e Siècle* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 1996); Pierre Rajotte et al., *Le Récit De Voyage Au XIXe Siècle: Aux Frontières Du Littéraire*, (Montréal: Triptyque, 1997); Isabelle Ernot, “Voyageuses Occidentales Et Impérialisme : L'Orient à La Croisée Des Représentations (XIXe Siècle),” *Genre & Histoire* 8 (2011); Isabelle Havelange, “Les Voyageuses Dans La BAHF, Du Moyen Âge Au XXe Siècle. Bibliographie 1970-2010,” *Genre & Histoire* 8 (2011). For comparative studies between France and Britain see Lisa Lowe, *Critical terrain: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), and Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991). For studies of English women travellers in the Canadian context (including Canadian travellers abroad) see Denise Adele Heaps, “Gendered Discourse and Subjectivity in Travel Writing by Canadian Women” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2000); Lisa N. Laframboise, “Travellers in Skirts: Women and English-language Travel Writing in Canada, 1820-1926,” (Diss., University of Alberta: 1997); Eva-Marie Kröller, *Canadian Travellers in Europe, 1851-1900* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); Cecilia Morgan, *'A Happy Holiday': English Canadians and Transatlantic Tourism, 1870-1930* (Toronto, Ont.; Buffalo, N.Y.: University of Toronto Press, 2008); and Wendy Roy, *Maps of Difference: Canada, Women, and Travel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005). Elizabeth Waterston, who compiled an annotated bibliography of non-fiction works published about Canada between 1577 and 1900, notes 38 publications written by women during that time. See *The Travellers--Canada to 1900: An Annotated Bibliography of Works Published in English from 1577* (Guelph, Ont., Canada: University of Guelph, 1989). Mary F. McVicker’s assertion that French women ‘tended not to travel’ has been heartily challenged by Rajotte et al., among others. See *Women Adventurers, 1750-1900: A Biographical Dictionary, with Excerpts from Selected Travel Writings* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &), 2008.

formalized associations and institutions later in the century.¹⁹ Aligning with much of the early literary study of travel writing, scholars such as Michelle Perrot have argued that women used travel to step out of “assigned spaces and roles” in taking up the opportunity offered to them by the relative opening up of tourism to more than the elite few.²⁰

As with many feminist genealogies, the beginnings of the practice of travel as critique can be traced back to Mary Wollstonecraft, who, four years after *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) published her travel narrative, *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796). Many others across Europe would follow in her footsteps, including Flora Tristan, Frances Wright, Frances Power Cobbe, and Fredrika Bremer. Even when not explicitly travelling to write, the movements of activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, who both visited their European counterparts, also helped shape the networks that reform movements would capitalize on later in the century. The circulation of ideas across borders, resulting in these face-to-face and epistolary exchanges as well as in the publication and translation of important works, served to carry feminism “across national boundaries,” in the words of Anne-Marie Käppeli.²¹ Travel, then, arguably had an important impact in shaping how women saw themselves and facilitating the communication and transmission of ideas, part of which occurred through the publication and reception of travelogues.²²

By virtue of writing about their travels, a doubled move into a masculine-coded public

¹⁹ For excellent studies of such formalized organizations see for example Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movements, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002); and Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). On informal networks earlier in the century see Margaret McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

²⁰ Michelle Perrot, “Stepping Out,” in *A History of Women in the West. Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer, eds. Georges Duby et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1993), 463, 469.

²¹ Anne-Marie Käppeli, “Feminist Scenes,” in *A History of Women in the West. Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer, eds. Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot, and Geneviève Fraisse (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1993), 493.

²² *Ibid*, 494.

sphere, women left themselves open to criticism. They had to creatively construct gendered identities that could both conform to and contravene these boundaries in order to have their writing published and well received by audiences at home. As Sara Mills has pointed out, women travellers tended to focus on other women they met in the course of their journeys. Building on Mills, Dunlaith Bird argues that “[t]ravel has traditionally functioned as a ‘domain of constitutive masculinity’, its language, motions, and conventions associated with ‘men and masculine prerogatives’, despite the fact that women have always travelled.”²³ Women travellers could (and do) collude with, reinforce, and subvert the modalities of mobility and of genre; Bentzon was no exception. Her attempts to recenter past, present and future around the thoughts and deeds of women, all the while operating within a hegemonic discursive framework, speaks to the paradoxical nature of such writings.

As I suggest in this study, through the prism of Bentzon’s life and writings, we can apprehend such a paradoxical relationship between an emerging feminist subject and travel. I argue that for Bentzon travel occurred along three axes: temporal, spatial, and imaginative. In considering *Les Américaines Chez Elles* and *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre* in conjunction with one another I ask: how does this tripartite mechanism manifest itself via these two travelogues? Even if Bentzon’s politics would not have aligned with what she would have considered to be the radical and possibly even dangerous tenets of feminist advocates and suffragists, in what ways do her travelogues serve as practical examples of how ideas about womanhood (even if not specifically operating under the umbrella of the ‘feminist’ movement) circulated transnationally? How did the production of difference via travel writing along racialized, gendered, classist, and national lines feed into ideas about women at home? Finally,

²³ Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender Identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

how did imagination itself serve as an anchor for Bentzon's project of centering women's lives and contributions to society; her representations of people and places, space and time; the very medium and genre she chose to work with, that of the travelogue; and for the cementing of the feminist ideas that I argue she contributed to?²⁴

In order to do so, I adopt first and foremost a biographical approach.²⁵ In *Only Paradoxes To Offer*, Joan Scott argues that a such a historical method "tends to focus too narrowly on the circumstances of individuals, reducing the thoughts and actions of women to their personal life stories, neglecting the complex determinations of language" and "fortifies the notion that agency is an expression of autonomous individual will, rather than the effect of a historically defined process which forms subjects."²⁶ While this may often be true, in this case this biographical sketch is used to extrapolate the kind of feminist subject that becomes visible in Bentzon's travelogues, asking what studying this particular iteration of feminist subjectivities tells us about the formation of ideas about women at this period, all the while without losing sight of the individual at the heart of it all.

²⁴ Theories of the imagination – whether ethnographical, geographical, or historical – puncture the bodies of scholarship I bring into conversation here, although not in a singularly cohesive way. The notion of imaging place manifests itself in Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974); and Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); For a discussion of Said's concept of imaginative geographies within an Orientalist framework see Derek Gregory, "Imaginative Geographies," *Progress in Human Geography* 19, no. 4 (1995): 447-85; For relationships between images of place, travel and the psychic mind see Dean MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (London: Routledge, 1992). The blurred lines between fiction and non-fiction, world-building, and imagining place dates back to medieval 'travelers' tales'. See Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

²⁵ In the hands of the innovative historian, biography can become much more than a tool for the study of an individual life. Rather, it can take the individual life as a window into much larger processes of subject formation and wider networks. Natalie Zemon Davis has made an outstanding case for the usefulness of biography as a historical method with the publication of *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Lois W. Banner has noted that Zemon Davis' approach was instrumental in influencing the formation of a new biographical school in the 1990s. See "Writing Biography As History," *The American Historical Review* 3 (2009): 579-586. On biography as history see also Alice Kessler-Harris, "Why Biography?" *The American Historical Review* 3 (2009): 625-630 and Luisa Passerini, "Transforming Biography: From the Claim of Objectivity to Intersubjective Plurality," *Rethinking History* 4 (2000): 413-416.

²⁶ Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes To Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 15-6.

As such, this thesis briefly sketches out her life and career and how it culminated in her visits to the United States and Canada in the final years of the nineteenth century. What makes a woman, for Bentzon? What position should women aspire to occupy in society? What are the definitive characteristics of the American woman and the Canadian one? In so doing, I borrow from literary studies, especially in my close reading of the discursive and textual production of womanhood. I also draw on what Nicolas Bourguinat, the historian of modern France and French women's travel writing, has suggested about travel. It is "toujours un voyage rêvé," he writes, "sous forme de vestiges, d'images, de traces, de relations intertextuelles diffuses."²⁷ I thus understand the travelogue to be the textual repository of the "voyage rêvé," the written record of Bentzon's lived and imagined experiences, which is then taken up and rearticulated by readers in a continual process of place-making.

In chapter one, I argue that she used travel to articulate a vision of a future grounded in relational, maternalist politics and policies, in which the feminine role in pushing the wheel of progress forward was extrapolated from ideals of essential Womanhood. I assess the reception of *Les Américaines Chez Elles* for Bentzon's French readership, and the role of travel writing as a medium for disseminating ideas about the status of women, acknowledging that the circulation of ideas about women largely exceeded the formal networks of feminist activism. As this narrative took shape in *Américaines*, the silences, omissions and absences intrinsic to her portrait of the United States reverberated in the networks of which she was a key component.

In chapter two, I investigate how the colonial past served as a foil for her conceptualization of American modernity. In *Nouvelle-France*, Quebec operated as a pastiche, a stand-in for the Old World: both French and not, urban and civilized in some respects but also

²⁷ A journey is "always dreamed, in the form of vestiges, images, traces, and diffuse intertextual relations." Nicolas Bourguinat, introduction to *Le voyage au féminin: Perspectives historiques et littéraires (XIIIe - XXe Siècles)*, 14. All translations are mine, except whether otherwise noted.

retaining elements of the wild because of its connections with the past. This becomes particularly evident in Bentzon's description of time spent outside major city centres, such as in Chicoutimi, where she expressed her resentment at witnessing what she considered to be industrial intrusions on the purity of nature. As she embarked upon the ship bound for Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean, as she sailed towards and then past the 'end of all civilization,' Canada seemed to her progressively less bound to France and more still within the purview of the wild.

The juxtaposition of these two travelogues reveals how, as per Leed, travel not only brings fresh perspective onto home and abroad, but also how it fortifies the boundaries of identity. He has noted how the separation from 'the emplaced self' gives rise to the objectification of culture and place. However, once a place identifiable as home becomes "an object, a thing, a unified, describable phenomenon," the opposite occurs for the conceptualization of what is 'away' or 'abroad' – only one short step away from creating and giving credence to "misleading notions of essential belonging and essential difference" which solidify the bedrock of national identities, among other forms of belonging.²⁸ This process of Othering through travelling is reflective of notions of the individual, which coalesced during the Enlightenment and which feminists seeking to claim political rights in the following century were forced to contend with.

It is impossible to understand Bentzon's travels without understanding its roots in what Joan Scott described as an ongoing paradox for feminists. In the long nineteenth century

[f]eminism was a protest against women's political exclusion; its goal was to eliminate 'sexual difference' in politics, but it had to make its claims on behalf of 'women' (who were discursively produced through 'sexual difference'). To the extent that it acted for 'women,' feminism produced the 'sexual difference' it sought to eliminate. This paradox - the need both to accept *and* to refuse 'sexual difference' — was the

²⁸ Leed, *The Mind Of The Traveler*, 45; Corinne Fowler, Charles Forsdick, and Ludmilla Kostova, eds., *Travel and Ethics: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.

constitutive condition of feminism as a political movement throughout its long history.²⁹

Scott's assertion is grounded in character studies of four prominent French activists, and she traces how each one attempted to negotiate the prevailing discourses of liberal individualism, even as these shifted in the time spanning post-revolutionary France to start of World War I. The only constants, so to speak, were the exclusionary processes in which their feminist ideologies were grounded. If, as Scott writes, "[t]he history of feminism can be understood as an interplay between a repetitious pattern of exclusion and a changing articulation of subjects,"³⁰ and if it "was not a sign of the benign and progressive operations of liberal individualism, but rather a symptom of its constitutive contradictions," the same contradictions affected Bentzon's expression, through travel and through her writing, of her own vision of the world.³¹ When read in conjunction with Leed's discussion of the objectification of place and self that accompanies physical movement, this hints at links between the nineteenth century travelling subject, feminist subject, and the liberal subject which must be fleshed out. In penning *Américaines* and *Nouvelle-France* Bentzon contributed to drawing the lines in the sand between the 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' worlds, between the 'modern' and the 'pre-modern', between 'past', 'present', and 'future'. Understanding how the circulation of ideas across transatlantic borders at the end of the nineteenth century, accompanied by the crucial coalescence of technologies and loosening of certain gender norms and roles, contributed to the growing momentum of women's movements (in all senses of the term), can cast women's mobility into a new light, set into motion a history in which travel is centered, and thus begin the crucial work of teasing out the connections between travel, feminism and liberalism.

²⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes To Offer*, 3-4.

³⁰ *Idem*, 14.

³¹ *Idem*, 18.

Chapter One

“Thérèse Bentzon and the Women Who Turned The Wheel of Progress”

At the end of 1893, a French literary critic, novelist and travel writer boarded a ship in Le Havre. Its destination: New York City. Aged 53, Marie-Thérèse de Solms, better known by her penname of Thérèse (Th.) Bentzon, was poised to embark on an eight-month journey across the United States of America. The *Revue des deux mondes*, a monthly magazine based in Paris, had tasked her with writing a series of reports about the lifestyles, politics and pastimes of American women.³² In several respects, Bentzon was well suited to gather information about how women’s lives were unfolding in the ‘New World.’³³ By this point in her decades-long career she was an established writer in France, known and respected for her trenchant yet equitable reviews of works published in the English-language world. As a result, she was already used to playing the part of cultural mediator, including in the Anglo-American, French, and German contexts. When she began writing her own works of fiction, they promptly found a reading public.³⁴ During her time in America, Bentzon benefited from the many connections she had forged over the years in literary and intellectual circles, in part due to her voluminous correspondence with the authors whose works she reviewed and whose lives she profiled in the pages of the *Revue*.

The resulting travel account, first published as *Les Américaines chez elles* in 1896, opens with a description of the sea voyage undertaken to reach New York.³⁵ Bentzon spent much of her time in major urban areas, most notably Chicago, where she attended the World’s Fair, Boston,

³² Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1924), 105.

³³ Foucault was referring to “[t]hose seventeenth-century travellers and nineteenth-century geographers” as “intelligence-gatherers, collecting and mapping information which was directly exploitable by colonial powers, strategists, traders and industrialists.” See “Questions of Geography,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 75. According to Mills, women writers, although not overtly positioned in this way, nonetheless could fulfill similar functions. See *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 115).

³⁴ Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 55

³⁵ Thérèse Bentzon, *Les Américaines chez elles* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1896).

Baltimore and New Orleans. She took careful note of the latest developments in women's rights, education, societies and politics in each place, often drawing comparisons to the French context, and commenting on what lessons could be learned for her readership at home. Whether spending time with the illustrious figures that populated women's clubs, commenting on the philanthropic work of settlement houses, praising feminine interventions in poorhouses and single-sex prisons, or discussing the efficacy of women-run adult education movements, she proved to be attuned to the varied ways in which women were contributing to the advancement of American society. The gendered subject and politics of womanhood that are discernible in *Américaines* are grounded in these observations. Bentzon exhorted her readers not to think of a singular 'American woman' (much in the same way they would not think of a pan-European woman), instead attempting to accentuate regional differences and characteristics. She nonetheless presented the country as being 'pushed forward' by the actions of the elite, cosmopolitan, welfare-minded women she met and profiled.

Although her 1893 voyage marked the first of two transatlantic trips, both of which resulted in the publication of travelogues with French house Librairie Hachette (*Les Américaines chez elles* was followed by *La Nouvelle-France et la Nouvelle-Angleterre* in 1899), Bentzon had entertained a fascination with the United States from early childhood onwards. Born into nobility in Seine-Port on September 21, 1840, she was introduced to English and American literature by her English governess, first encountering the United States through the pages of the novels of Washington Irving. As her education progressed she became enamoured with "la grande République," to the point where she eventually would describe her desire to see it with her own eyes in longing terms: "Je n'ai jamais eu envie d'un voyage plus que celui-là," she would tell

Louisiana writer Grace King, with whom she would strike up a longstanding friendship.³⁶ By the time she embarked upon her American journey decades later, she had avidly read about the country for years in the pages of novels, educational and journalistic texts, and transatlantic correspondence. Bentzon's manifold exposures to American literature and culture, part of a decades-long process of imagining place, created a complex, layered image of the country, an example of what French historian Nicolas Bourguinat, borrowing from Théophile Gautier, has called a "géographie fantastique".³⁷ She engaged for years in a form of 'travelling without moving' through these reading practices, ones which would have several consequences.³⁸ As Bentzon moved around the United States in 1893, these mediated ideas were juxtaposed with factors that governed how she wrote the travelogue published three years later: a combination of her longstanding interest in exploring the status of women outside of France, her professional responsibilities as a correspondent for the *Revue*, as well as a gendered writing style. Continuous exposure to representations of the United States throughout her lifetime eventually led Bentzon to think of the country as a second intellectual homeland.³⁹ Her first instance of physical travel to the U.S. can thus be thought of as a homecoming of sorts, one which can explain why many of the women's activities she chronicled were so quickly intelligible to her, and considered worthy of emulation in France.

The same governess who was her entry point into American cultural life, Miss Robertson, made the prescient prediction that Bentzon, then aged nine, would go on to make her name as a writer – a prospect that left her parents, the comte Edouard the Solms (a nobleman of Alsatian

³⁶ "I've never wanted to take a trip as much as this one." Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 105.

³⁷ Nicolas Bourguinat, ed., *Le voyage au féminin: Perspectives historiques et littéraires (XIIIe - XXe Siècles)* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires De Strasbourg, 2008), 14.

³⁸ For a discussion of textual travelling, see John Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³⁹ Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 25.

origin) and Olympe de Bentzon (daughter of the marquise de Vitry and her first husband, a Danish army officer), less than enthused.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Bentzon's intellectual and literary proclivities, already evident at this early age, developed rapidly. Before she made her début in the pages of the *Revue*, two major events shaped her life profoundly: a brief and mostly unhappy marriage to Alexandre Blanc, a young banker, at age 16, which ended three years later; and the sudden death of her father, after which her mother took the comte d'Aure as a second husband, who as the Equerry of the Emperor Napoleon III had ties to the imperial court.⁴¹

D'Aure became a crucial node in Bentzon's fledgling literary career, which by her own account was spurred by her divorce and the subsequent "melting away of what fortune [she] had".⁴² "Consequently, I have always looked upon poverty as an obliging friend, for it placed the pen firmly in my hand," she later related in a series of autobiographical notes to American journalist Theodore Stanton.⁴³ D'Aure introduced Bentzon to George Sand, the woman who became her mentor, role model, and friend in the following years and decades. Both d'Aure and Sand initially attempted to dissuade Bentzon from entering the world of letters. Sand, a novelist and memoirist, knew all too well the potential repercussions a woman taking up the pen and entering public life might face. Bentzon refused to relent, and Sand eventually took her under her wing. Leveraging Sand's standing in the literary world, Bentzon began to write for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, to which she contributed for the next 35 years of her life.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Katharina M. Wilson, ed, *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers* (New York: Garland Pub., 1991), 34.

⁴¹ Thérèse Bentzon, "À Propos du Centenaire de George Sand. Une Correspondance inédite," *Supplément au Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, July 1, 1904; Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 34

⁴² Theodore Stanton, "Autobiographical Notes by Madame Blanc," *The North American Review* 166.498 (1898): 597.

⁴³ *Idem*.

⁴⁴ The *Revue des Deux Mondes* was then under the stewardship of editor François Buloz, who had previously rejected an earlier submission of Bentzon's work before her introduction via Sand. See Thomas Loué, *La Revue des Deux Mondes de Buloz à Brunetière. De la belle époque de la revue à la revue de la Belle Époque* (Lille, Presses du Septentrion, Thèse à la carte: 1999).

In that time, two driving forces shaped her many publications, whether journalistic or novelistic in nature. The first, as described above, was her attention to American and English literary works, which she was in no small measure responsible for introducing to a French reading public. In fact, according to Grace Elizabeth King, her reputation eventually grew to the point that a review from ‘Th. Bentzon’ was considered an *incontournable* for young authors looking to make their name on the international stage, an indispensable milestone to be aspired to among up-and-coming American literary figures.⁴⁵ The second strand was thematic: Bentzon consistently engaged with the topics of womanhood (including emerging ideas of the ‘New Woman’), the rights of women and their sociopolitical roles. A voyage to England in 1891, in particular, had awakened a desire to travel around the world to document the status of women, and she went on to do the same in Russia, although failing health in the final years of her life slowed her pace in North America and prevented her from continuing her project in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire.

As whole, then, Bentzon both travelled and wrote with an eye to the condition of women in the places she visited and a mind to publish her findings. In so doing, she waded into discussions on a matter that was on the tip of everyone’s tongue in the United States, all the while hoping to re-ignite a “stagnating” debate in France.⁴⁶ “Le moment est favorable puisque la grave question de l’extension du droit de suffrage à un sexe qui déjà possède tant de privilèges se discute plus que jamais devant la législature de l’union,” she acknowledged of her decision to broach the subject of the status of women in *Américaines*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 54. As a result of her decision to use the gender-neutral abbreviation “Th.” instead of the full one in print, Bentzon was often the recipient of letters addressed to a “Théodore Bentzon” from unwitting authors.

⁴⁶ William L. Chew III, “Marie-Thérèse Blanc in America: A Fin de Siècle Perspective of the American Woman” in *Re-Discoveries of America: The Meeting of Cultures*, ed. Johan Callens (Concord: Paul & Company Publishing Consortium, 1993), 26; Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 103.

⁴⁷ “The moment is propitious, given that the grave matter of the extension of suffrage to a sex that already possesses

Bentzon was far from the first to deploy travel writing as a means of articulating a particular set of ideals regarding the place of women, and of critiquing her own society. To establish her credentials as a writer, Bentzon qualified *Américaines* as “observations de femme sur tout ce qui touche la condition des femmes.”⁴⁸ In so doing, she established her credibility to speak to the status of women while circumscribing the scope her authority to matters related to her gender. Despite her repeated declarations that she was simply in North America as an observer, an ostensibly objective reporter, her text offered opinions on matters outside a domestic, feminine sphere. These declarations parallel a common strategy which travel writing scholars Sara Mills and Shirley Foster describe for speaking authoritatively on masculine-coded topics, whereby women would go out of their way to dismiss any attempt to politicize their writings – and then go on to offer cogent thoughts on governmental, legislative, or socioeconomic matters of the day.⁴⁹

As a result of this positioning, *Américaines* falls into what has been described as a ‘manners and customs’ category of travel writing.⁵⁰ These impersonal and detached accounts are characterized by the absence of a narrative figure and stand in opposition to sentimental or experiential texts in that respect. Bentzon proved reticent to place herself as narrator within her text, although the distancing between her self-as-author and self-as-narrator is not confined to *Américaines*. Her contemporaries praised her ability to avoid the so-called trap that so many other women writers allegedly fell into: that of attempting to speak of themselves under the pretence of writing about something else.⁵¹ These elements of Bentzon’s text conform to patterns in women’s

so many privileges is being discussed more than ever in the union’s legislature.” Thérèse Bentzon, *Américaines*, 3.

⁴⁸ She qualified the text as “a woman’s observations on everything that touches the ‘condition of women.’” Thérèse Bentzon, *Américaines*, 3.

⁴⁹ Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, eds, *An Anthology of Women’s Travel Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 72.

⁵⁰ Sara Mills, *Discourses*, 74.

⁵¹ Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 54.

travel writing that emerged from the Enlightenment to the late nineteenth century, including appropriate topics to broach as woman travellers, narrative form, and the gendering of space and geographies.⁵² In what ways did Bentzon make use of the gendered space of the travel text to articulate a particular vision of woman's role in society, and what are its contours? How did her views on the role of women fit it into French and international conceptions of feminism at this time?

In her chapter in *Le Voyage au féminin* on Bentzon's travels to the United States, French literary scholar Anne-Caroline Sieffert describes Bentzon as an illustration of "le paradoxe du féminisme français [de son temps]: cette espèce de difficulté à concilier son éducation, l'époque, et sa volonté de "rompre le cercle"".⁵³ Viewed in this respect, Bentzon's confident forays into the world of letters from an early age, her propensities for extended and extensive travel, and her advocacy for women's right to work would appear to be at odds with her exaltation of the woman-in-the-home which appears with differing degrees of forthrightness elsewhere in her work.⁵⁴ However, in historicizing the particular views of woman- and motherhood to which Bentzon subscribes, a different picture emerges.

Karen Offen, a historian of European feminisms who has written extensively about the transnational face of such movements, describes two broad currents of discourse that emerged over the course of the nineteenth century, although the two are not so easily disentangled one from the other. Individualist (or egalitarian) strains grounded their arguments for women's

⁵² Nicolas Bourguinat, ed., *Le voyage au féminin*: 14.

⁵³ "[T]he paradox of French feminism [in her time]: the difficulty to reconcile education, era, and her desire to 'break out.'" Anne-Caroline Sieffert, "Thérèse Bentzon: itinéraires d'une Française aux États-Unis (1840-1907)" in *Le voyage au féminin: Perspectives historiques et littéraires (XIIIe - XXIe Siècles)*, 116.

⁵⁴ Her fictional characters also took a strong stance when it came to questions of maternity, woman's education and her role in marriage and in public life. By Mme Fliche's estimation, Bentzon "se refusait à détourner la femme de ce foyer où seront toujours ses meilleurs joies et ses premiers devoirs. Les romans où elle a traité ces questions, aboutissent tous à cette conclusion." (She "refused to divert women from the hearth where her best days and her primary duties were located. The novels in which she broached these questions all come to this conclusion.") *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 136.

equality in discourses of rights of the individual.⁵⁵ Others, like Bentzon, could be categorized as relational, believing that the essential qualities of womanhood would and should be extended to all spheres for the benefit of society at large.⁵⁶ Early French agitators espoused this mode of thought, and it proved to be influential among many early nineteenth century feminist activists in Europe. Between 1870 and 1890, the age which heralded the internationalization and formalization of feminist movements, the baton was passed from the French to the English-speaking world. The brief surge of French activism that had coincided with the revolutionary periods of 1789 and 1848 had been squashed or repressed; the war between France and Prussia had a dampening effect on feminist organizing; and the Communards were proving unreceptive to demands concerning women's rights.⁵⁷ In short, the pendulum was swinging from French feminist activities to the Anglo-American world, which "now carried the torch in the suffrage issue."⁵⁸ American feminism, in particular, assumed a position at the vanguard, with wide-ranging effects.⁵⁹

It would be to elide the important nuances and subtle shifts in her views to state that Bentzon supported all feminine 'incursions' into the masculine public and political realms, or conversely that she was in the end simply a proponent of rigid separation between spheres.

⁵⁵ Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 91.

⁵⁶ Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms*, 97. There are strong similarities between Offen's definition of relational feminism and Seth Koven and Sonya Michel's understanding of maternalism, a term which they use to describe "ideologies that exalted women's capacity to mother and extended to society as a whole the values of care, nurturance, and morality". Koven and Michel do suggest caution when ascribing 'feminist' motives to all manifestations of maternalist politics. See "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920," *The American Historical Review* 95.4 (1990): 1079. For a biographical treatment of women's political culture in the United States see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1995) and Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). See also Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005).

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 148.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 154.

⁵⁹ Käppeli, for example, notes the "reputation and symbolic power of American feminism" which was reflected in places such as Norway and Sweden at this time. See "Feminist Scenes," 493.

Instead, for Bentzon “le féminisme sérieux est une insurrection de la femme contre elle-même et contre ses propres défauts.”⁶⁰ The ‘New Woman’ best involved in public initiatives was one who could vanquish her internal flaws – including that of displays of emotionality over reason – and prioritize the development of the many essential qualities that were unique to or predominant among women, namely their maternal character.

This stance is noticeable in Bentzon’s affirmation of her own objectivity and the divide she created between her self-as-author and her self-as-woman. As it is reasonable to infer that one of the reasons she was given access to many of the places she visited in her travels resulted from her standing as an elite, white woman with a noble lineage and an intellectual pedigree, as an author Bentzon did not (and could not) exist in an ungendered state.⁶¹ This helps us understand her nuanced praise of American women, including the latter’s ability to access high-quality education and labour markets, which rendered her more ‘liberated’ than her French counterpart, even though these greater freedoms occasionally resulted in women “forgetting their domestic duties and neglecting their feminine *persona*.”⁶² Taking another look at Bentzon’s descriptions of the various Women’s Clubs and settlement houses with these trends in mind, her understanding of the maternal nature of the women’s work exhibited there seems somewhat less paradoxical.⁶³ In fact, it can even offer a possible explanation as to why these aspects of American women’s activities and efforts appear to be so readily intelligible to her.

In this sense, Bentzon opining about women and progress added yet another layer to the

⁶⁰ “[S]erious feminism is woman’s insurrection against herself and her own faults.” Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 135.

⁶¹ See Madame Paul Fliche’s notes on relationships between man and woman in *Émancipée* (137) and *Tchelovek* (139).

⁶² William L. Chew III, “Marie-Thérèse Blanc in America,” 49.

⁶³ Settlement houses were charitable organizations run by pre-eminent women across America concerned with solving the social problems of the time. See Margaret Tims, *Jane Addams of Hull House, 1860-1935; a centenary study* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961); Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

historical imagination of the United States which informed her exposure to, and representations of, that country. In 1893, the country was nearly three decades removed from the end of the Civil War. The abolition of slavery and the emancipation and enfranchisement of black men that accompanied the end of the war had incited renewed calls on the part of women's rights activists for equality in voting rights. Moreover, the country was entering the second year of a serious depression that would last until 1897. It was also in the midst of a second industrial revolution that would reshape the face of American society.⁶⁴

Travelling within this context, Bentzon presented America as both the progeny of France and England and a harbinger of modernity from which there was much to learn. "Du reste les notes qui suivent, quoique prises à bâtons rompus, auront peut-être le mérite de jeter quelques lueurs sur la destinée future de notre vieux monde," she wrote in the opening pages of *Américaines*.⁶⁵ The enduring English influence on Americans and life in the United States becomes apparent at many points in the travelogue, as evidenced by what she called the Anglomania of the blue-blood Americans she encountered on the crossing to New York and by the many lingering English traces in New England she remarked upon while travelling through.⁶⁶

Her point of view was not without precedent in women's rights activist circles at this time. American journalist Theodore Stanton dedicated almost half of his 1884 collection of essays *The Woman Question in Europe* to England and France, "though England – as the 'Mother Country' – was accorded a place of particular honour, as was the quest for woman's suffrage, which had developed most strongly in England and the United States."⁶⁷ Bentzon's description of time spent

⁶⁴ Leon Fink, *The Long Gilded Age: American Capitalism and the Lessons of a New World Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 3; See also Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: from the death of Lincoln to the rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

⁶⁵ "The notes that follow, even though they were taken at random, will perhaps have the merit of shedding some light on the destiny of our old world." Thérèse Bentzon, *Américaines*, 3-4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁷ Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms*, 153.

in New England, which makes up core portions of her travelogue, read as a ‘who’s who’ of Bostonian high society.⁶⁸ The details of her encounters with prominent Bostonian women highlight their impact from the colonial period onwards: in lending their efforts to abolitionist struggles, the Civil War, educational science and pedagogy, and the suffrage movement, women became part of the project of American progress in ways highly specific to their gender: “[E]lles poussent incessamment à la roue du progrès.”⁶⁹ Bentzon cast America as an iteration of what Europe (and, in particular, France) could be, more advanced even in its imperfections. In this vision of the future, women (mostly well-to-do, socially minded benefactors who dedicated their energies to charitable causes) became essential in two key spheres: philanthropy (both in advancing reform movements and aiding the ‘worthy’ poor) and education.⁷⁰

Bentzon’s concern with tracing the contours of the juncture of gender, civilization, and Western paradigms of progress was far from unique. The subordination of woman to man was the bedrock of Lockian and Hobbesian philosophy, even if, as the historian of German and Western European feminisms Ann Taylor Allen points out, both thinkers acknowledged what they believed to be a natural primacy of the mother-child bond. In the late nineteenth century, predominant social scientists viewed the move from matriarchy to patriarchy as logical and desirable. John Stuart Mill, who in addition to being an influential political economist was also a fervent proponent for the suffrage movement in Victorian England, nonetheless subscribed to this ideological stance, even as he “saw the improvement of women's status as the necessary outcome

⁶⁸ See Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the city: gender, space, and power in Boston, 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). This influence is not limited to Boston, however: in each American city she visited, Bentzon encountered “des femmes serieuses, qui dans chaque ville travaillent consciencieusement à créer l'avenir”. *Américaines*, 402.

⁶⁹ “They are constantly turning the wheel of progress.” Thérèse Bentzon, *Américaines*, 123.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 123.

of a general pattern of progress in Western society.”⁷¹ These ideas did not go uncontested: for example, American suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage drew on the information gathered by anthropologists and ethnographers to argue for the establishment of a matriarchate in the Western world, although they were ultimately unable to win over their compatriots with this line of thinking.⁷²

Bentzon took a slightly different tack: instead of using the treatment of women as a barometer of a society’s status, or proposing an overthrow of social structures, she chose to make women intrinsic to the success of these structures, recentering a narrative of progress around the ability of women to be the best versions of themselves. This speaks to the character of many of the maternalist welfare movements at the time, of course. However, Bentzon went a step further in performing this reorientation, allowing for what could be described as a subversive potential to emerge in her travelogue – albeit one which existed in a state of tension.

From the opening pages of *Américaines* onwards, Bentzon proves to be a shrewd observer of the human condition. She did not hold back from pointing out inconsistencies in what she saw of the Great Republic, as she wryly made clear in describing interactions between old-money families she encountered on her transatlantic crossing: “J’ai maintenant la mesure des divisions sociales qui existent au pays de l’égalité.”⁷³ Old (world) roots paid dividends: having a Dutch or Swedish name, or ancestry that pre-dated American Independence, distinguished the upper crust from the nouveau-riche bourgeois stratum. Nor did she refrain from articulating her disagreement

⁷¹ Ann Taylor Allen, “Feminism, Social Science, and the Meanings of Modernity: The Debate on the Origin of the Family in Europe and the United States, 1860-1914,” *The American Historical Review* 104.4 (1999): 1089.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1095.

⁷³ “I now understand the extent of the social divisions that exist in the country of equality.” Thérèse Bentzon, *Américaines*, 6-7. For an examination of class divisions in Gilded Age New York, see Eric Homburger, *Mrs. Astor's New York: Money and Social Power in a Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Edwin G. Burrows, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

with certain social practices. The most scathing of these indictments was reserved for the poorhouses outside of Boston and on Long Island. By way of justification for the existence of these institutions, she was treated to an explanation of the ethics of social progress, which in the pages of the travelogue are attributed to an unnamed but ostensibly pre-eminent professor. The latter described situations in which state authority is deemed to supersede that of the nuclear family unit, and ascribes the responsibility for the education of poor children to the state, which has a duty to step in when parental supervisions are inadequate. Limits on the individual freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution – conditions for the legitimate enslavement of others – were articulated: Society (synonymous here with the state) reserved the right to “enslave all those who voluntarily choose a life of vagrancy”.⁷⁴ Pursuant to this right, all those who could work must work, even if they must be forcibly put to productive use.

Bentzon’s response was both condemnatory of the practice and revelatory of the paradox created in this instance:

“Voilà donc comment s’achète, au détriment de l’indépendance et de la fantaisie personnelles, ce que les meilleurs et les plus intelligents parmi les citoyens d’une république appellent la liberté de tous. [...] Le vieux moyen âge concevait une sorte de liberté que n’ont point les pays purement modernes, et nous devons souhaiter d’en garder toujours les vestiges au milieu de nos acquisitions démocratiques.”⁷⁵

She arrived at a critique not only of this treatment of the poor, but also of those who conceive of the betterment of one and all as strictly within the purview of the modern. The implication is that the narrative of progress encompassing and justifying the existence of these

⁷⁴ Ibid, 116.

⁷⁵ “This is how what the best and the brightest citizens of a republic call freedom for all, at the expense of personal independence and whim. [...] The old middle ages conceived of a kind of freedom that purely modern countries do not have, and we must hope to always keep the vestiges thereof at the heart of our democratic acquisitions.” Ibid, 116-7.

facilities contains certain fundamental inadequacies, not least of which is a distorted sense of personal and collective freedoms and well-being. Within the American model, the freedom of some came at the expense of others; in this case, effectively rendering them invisible by removing them from the sight of the public. This, to Bentzon, was unacceptable. Even as she condemned confinement to the poorhouse, however, she offered up a possible solution, one she had been building up towards throughout her travel account. In relating the case of a scandal caused by mistreatment within such an institution, she highlighted how it was a female reformer who shed light on this scandalous treatment.⁷⁶ It is the figure of the enlightened woman that emerges as the key to the liberated (liberal) subject, one that does not fall prey to this paradox of American freedom.

Despite this masterfully articulated assessment, and the opening it created for a more radical critique of Americanized notions of freedom and progress, Bentzon went on to reassert a linear view of a unified human history in which civilizations advanced from 'less' to 'more' civilized. She cast Native American populations as either amenable to civilization, and therefore assimilation, or as unredeemable.⁷⁷ Both of these perspectives channel the ways in which narratives of progress, in particular, were constructed: with colonial encounters with indigenous peoples used as foils for ideas of more 'advanced' civilizations. Most of Bentzon's information about Native Americans came to her second hand from the people she had visited; as a result, the silenced figure of the Native was paradoxically present in its absence throughout her tales of technological innovation, architectural wonders, feminine education and acts of charity. This lingering spectre becomes most apparent when Bentzon relates her visit to the Carlisle Indian

⁷⁶ Ibid, 118.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 189.

School, an off-reservation boarding school for Native children in Pennsylvania.⁷⁸ She largely endorsed the Carlisle method, consisting of total separation of the students from their communities, families and cultures, which was considered to be necessary for successful re-education – a system which has since come under harsh criticism.⁷⁹ In her endeavor to bring to light alternative feminist perspectives on the family, Ann Taylor Allen rightly points out that “accepted characterizations of an era and its culture often do not include the experience of subordinated or silenced groups.”⁸⁰ So too can feminist viewpoints simultaneously make the case for wide-ranging revolutionary change, while reinforcing or perpetuating structural inequalities. In *Américaines*, Bentzon oscillated between liberatory and restrictive perspectives, positioning herself as a political subject caught between radical and conservative reconfigurations of society along the lines of social progress.

Understanding the impact of Bentzon’s representations of the American woman to the French public becomes doubly important in this regard. Within the scope of this chapter, I have only begun to delve into this complex process, which encompasses the forms and methods of absorption and diffusion of her ideas in France. However, given the laudatory reviews of her book in the American and French press, we can already garner a sense of the impact of her travels, in particular by reading her literary acquaintances, as well as her own musings on relations between the United States and France. Bentzon was conscious of her ability to influence French public opinion in writing about the United States. She articulated as much in a letter to Boston writer Sarah Orne Jewett: “The young girl in France shall be transformed by the influence

⁷⁸ See Peter Hayes Mauro, *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian School* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011).

⁷⁹ See Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2004).

⁸⁰ Ann Taylor Allen, “Origin of the Family,” 1086.

of the American young girl. The latter's example has quite enchanted French society."⁸¹ Relying on the opinions of her contemporaries, it is possible to establish that she succeeded in that goal at least to some degree. According to her biographer, "Thérèse Bentzon fit désormais autorité sur toutes les questions se rattachant au mouvement social et intellectuel des États-Unis. Aucun Américain connu ne visitait Paris sans se présenter chez elle; tandis que de nombreux Français venaient solliciter pour l'Amérique des recommandations qu'elle accordait avec générosité."⁸² This would indicate that she became a key node in French-American relations at the turn of the century. She certainly believed as much, writing to Theodore Stanton that she thought *Américaines* had "not done a little to advance in France the moderate and rational side of the woman cause."⁸³ The success of *Les Américaines* would prompt her to return to North America four years later, accompanied by the editor of the *Revue des deux mondes*. From the notes collected during her visits to Quebec and New England, she would compose her next travelogue, *La Nouvelle-France et la Nouvelle-Angleterre*, which is the subject of the next chapter.⁸⁴

Much is yet to be said about Bentzon and her influence, even as I attempt to remedy the lack of academic consideration of her as an important figure in the history of transatlantic feminism. This chapter has demonstrated firstly how Bentzon was not only a well-established writer and novelist with extensive connections by the time she travelled to the United States in 1893, but also that she had entertained a healthy interest with America since childhood, which crystallized into her career as a reviewer of Anglo-American works of fiction for the *Revue des deux Mondes*. She travelled with the explicit purpose of reporting back on the state of

⁸¹ Sarah Orne Jewett, "Impressions of Th. Bentzon," *New York Times*, January 14, 1894: 21.

⁸²"Thérèse Bentzon henceforth became the authority on all questions concerning the social and intellectual movement of the United States. No well-known American would visit Paris without calling on her, while many Frenchmen came to solicit recommendations about the United States, which she dispensed generously." Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 117-8.

⁸³ Theodore Stanton, "Autobiographical Notes," 600.

⁸⁴ Richard Cary, "Miss Jewett and Madame Blanc," *Colby Quarterly* 7.11 (1967): 475.

womanhood and women's rights in America to her French audience. In writing, Bentzon composed a vision of the United States that contributed to the historical imaginary surrounding the U.S. in which the country became a glimpse into the future of Europe, and in which women were an integral part.

How did the process of travel itself, and Bentzon's assumption of the position of the traveller, become central to this?⁸⁵ As Dean MacCannell notes, "[t]he actual act of communion between tourist and attraction is less important than the *image* or the *idea* of society that the collective act generates [...] A specific act of sightseeing is, in itself, weightless *and*, at the same time, the ultimate reason for the orderly representation of the social structure of modern society in the system of attractions."⁸⁶ The use of sight as the primary sense through which to absorb information about and understand the world is a marker of MacCannell's modern tourist; the gaze becomes an essential component of the consumptive mechanism of tourism. If that is the case, where does the 'destabilizing potential' of travel truly reside?

It is clear that there remains much to investigate to understand the link between a rise in women travelling, women's movements, and a particular form of Western selfhood, which has been hinted at but not fleshed out in the histories of industrial development and modernity. In *Les Américaines chez elles*, Bentzon provided a space in which to rethink feminism through travel.

She plants the seeds of this radical reconfiguration when she describes an exchange between her

⁸⁵ Although most of the discussion in this study has focused on the formative impacts of *travel*, the nineteenth century was also the period that marked the beginning of mass tourism and the primacy of sight as the primary sense through which to understand the world. See John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), Barbara Korte, "Western Travel Writing, 1750-1950" in *Travel Writing: Reception and Readership*, ed. Carl Thompson (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 173-184 and Joan Adler, "Origins of Sightseeing," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 16 (1989): 7-29.

⁸⁶ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 15. For the implications of tourism and sightseeing for imperial projects see Tamara L. Hunt and Micheline L. Lessard, eds., *Women and the Colonial Gaze*, (New York: New York University Press, New York, 2002) and Susan Bernardin, *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880-1940* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

and the attendees of a Women's Club meeting at the Fortnightly of Chicago:

“Lorsque je répons que l'habitude de parler en public me manque absolument, elles prennent l'air apitoyé que les dames turques affectèrent en découvrant que lady Wortley Montague était emprisonnée dans un corset, ou que nous pourrions avoir nous-mêmes devant les pieds mutilés des Chinoises.” Je dis à la présidente que les clubs américains sont tout près de rivaliser avec les anciens salons de France, tant on y montre d'esprit; seulement ils se ferment aux hommes, que nos salons avaient au contraire pour but unique de réunir et de faire briller. A quoi elle me répond gaîment, mais avec un éclair singulier dans les yeux: — Oh! quant à cela, peu nous importe; nous tenons à briller pour notre propre compte!⁸⁷

Much of what I have explored in this chapter is contained within this brief, yet eloquent, passage.

Bentzon refers to a genealogy of readership that informs her travel and the historical imaginary thereof. She deploys travel to hold up a mirror to her readers in which an image of France is refracted, not simply reflected. She demonstrates an awareness of the Other without in the same breath assimilating it; and, perhaps most importantly, she is experiencing a moment in which “[l]e regard de l'Autre se retourne sur elle-même,” to use her own words. Finally, she ends on a note of hope, one which allows her to cement her understanding of the feminist subject as one who vanquishes one's internal flaws, through which women's potential, and contributions to society, can be realized, but one that is also reminiscent of the ‘utopian potential of travel’ of which Schlick writes. As such, it is clear that Bentzon allowed the reader brief insight into how movement, travel, and being in motion, can create a space in which a different feminist subject could take shape.

⁸⁷ “When I respond that I absolutely lack the habit of public speaking, they take on the pitying look that the Turkish women affected when they discovered that lady Wortley Montague was imprisoned in a corset, or that we might ourselves have in the face of the mutilated feet of Chinese women. I said to the president that the American clubs were close to rivalling the ancient salons of France, so much spirit is exhibited there; with the exception that they close themselves off to men, whereas our salons had the contrary goal of bringing [people] together and making them shine. At this she respond to me gaily, but with a singular look in her eyes: ‘Oh! When it comes to that, we do not care. We intend to shine on our own behalfts!’” Thérèse Bentzon, *Américaines*, 28.

Chapter Two

Travels Through Space and Time: Th. Bentzon Goes to ‘New France’

In the spring of 1897, inspired by the success of *Les Américaines Chez Elles*, and aching to return to the U.S. once more, Bentzon accompanied Ferdinand Brunetière, her editor at the *Revue des deux mondes*, as he embarked on a speaking tour of major North American universities on the topic of contemporary French literature.⁸⁸ They parted ways in Canada, as Brunetière and his wife Sylvie returned to France following his engagements at the Université Laval de Montréal and McGill University. Meanwhile, Bentzon pursued her project of assessing the ‘condition of women’ abroad. The America Bentzon had become enamoured of four years earlier was not only the land of promise but the future made real, a harbinger of what lay in store for France if it could navigate the pitfalls of modern life and civilization. The French Canada she visited offered the exact opposite: a window onto her nation’s past and an opportunity to re-tread the footsteps of her forebears, the echoes of whose voices she could still discern in the ‘seventeenth-century accent’ and vocabulary of the *habitants*.⁸⁹

A chance encounter with the abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain on board the steamer *Le Champagne* did much to shape her perception of Québec. *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre* (1899) opens with an expression of thanks for Casgrain’s guidance and his generosity in sharing his knowledge of Canadian history and culture. It is not difficult to see why the two would have connected so readily. They shared an inveterate love of literature that manifested itself in their personal and professional lives. Casgrain was a prolific writer, known for both his

⁸⁸ Madame Paul Fliche, *Madame Th. Bentzon*, 113; 115. On Ferdinand Brunetière’s North American speaking tour in the spring of 1897 see Antoine Compagnon, “Brunetière au Québec,” *Études françaises* 323 (1996).

⁸⁹ She would also compare the accent to the sounds of “a market in Lower Normandy” (Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 117). She was interested to note that the accent transcended class lines. Even the abbé Casgrain exhibited signs of this “l’accent du XVIIe siècle,” according to Bentzon. *Idem*, 2.

novels and historical writing.⁹⁰ His passion in this regard was matched only by his commitment to burnishing the reputation of French Canada abroad, especially in his successive voyages to France. In more than one sense, he had dedicated himself to defusing the colonialist view articulated by British politician Lord Durham in his report on the Lower Canada Rebellions of 1837 and 1838: far from being “a people with no history, and no literature” Quebec exhibited a distinct national culture in Casgrain’s eyes, one which he considered imperative to promote abroad.⁹¹ Literature became the tool for his patriotic mission, spreading an agriculturalist and moralistic image of French Canadians as fervently Catholic and inhabiting an ideal pastoral setting.

These views would leave a mark on Bentzon’s own articulation of French Canadian life, especially given her relative ignorance of the province before undertaking her trip. Hearing him speak of Quebec and then-Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, she confessed that these were “[des] noms qui, pour moi, ne représentaient rien encore”.⁹² This stood in contrast to her longstanding intellectual love affair with, and extensive knowledge of, the United States.⁹³ Casgrain was eager to fill in those gaps, and his influence is discernable in the places she opted to visit and dwell on

⁹⁰ Jean-Paul Hudon, “Casgrain, Henri-Raymond,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13, University of Toronto/Université Laval, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/casgrain_henri_raymond_13E.html. Casgrain also wrote extensively on prominent figures both historical and contemporary for Canadian and French publishing houses. The subjects of his biographies made their marks in fields as varied as painting and law (*Biographies de A.S. Falardeau et A.E. Aubry* (Montréal: Beauchemin & Valois, 1886)); poetry (*A. Gérin-Lajoie d'après ses mémoires* (Montréal: C.O. Beauchemin, 1885) and *Octave Crémazie* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1912)); and history (*F.X. Garneau et Francis Parkman* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1912)). Bentzon relied on his *Histoire de l'Hôtel-Dieu du Québec* (Québec, L. Brousseau: 1878) in penning *Nouvelle-France* and praised his history of the Acadian exile, *Un pèlerinage au pays d'Évangéline* (Québec: L. Demers, 1887). Bentzon also mentions having read his *Légendes canadiennes* (Montréal: Beauchemin & Valois, c1875); given what Hudon has called Casgrain’s “macabre accounts of the ferocity of the Indians,” it is not unlikely that these depictions could have influenced Bentzon’s thrilled descriptions of the ‘savageness’ of settler colonial encounters with the Iroquois. For an extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources on Casgrain see Jean-Paul Hudon, “L’abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, l’homme et l’œuvre” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 1977).

⁹¹ John George Lambton Durham, Charles Buller, and Charles Lucas, *Report on the affairs of British North America* (Ottawa: s.n., 1839), 95.

⁹² They were “names that, for me, represented nothing yet.” Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 3.

⁹³ Although in characteristic Bentzon fashion, she would devour local literature, history and poetry when on site, as her references to nationalist historian François-Xavier Garneau, author of *Histoire du Canada : depuis sa découverte jusqu'à nos jours* (Québec : N. Aubin, 1845-1848) and poet Octave Crémazie attest to.

and in her final portrait of a charmingly traditional and rural Quebec, one that retained elements of seventeenth-century wilderness. It was Casgrain who encouraged Bentzon to visit the convents and nunneries of Quebec as she continued to chronicle the status of North American women, and he provided Bentzon with privileged access to these places.

Her meeting with Casgrain was fortuitous in more ways than one. His presence on the *Champagne* on that spring day in Le Havre was indicative of ongoing attempts undertaken by prominent French Canadian businessmen, politicians and public figures to reconnect the severed link between France and Quebec. This break in historical continuity becomes salient in *Nouvelle-France* through Bentzon's colourful, rich re-telling of colonial history, from the arrival in 1639 of the Ursulines and the Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph, to the fall of Quebec to the forces of Major General James Wolfe in 1759.⁹⁴ These events are then juxtaposed, as if flipping from one chapter of a novel to the next, with her firsthand accounts of female religious life. These parallel descriptions flatten the historical trajectory of the colony-turned-province, in ways that both mirror and depart from impressions left by previous writers and travellers.

In addition to being invested in her project of assessing the characteristics and status of French Canadian women, as with her visit to the United States four years earlier, Bentzon was intent on making a case for how necessary women had been to the functioning of society, at any given point in time. This required that she skilfully weave descriptions of first-hand experiences and her historical narratives of settlement and colonization from the seventeenth century onwards. In so doing she crafted an image of Quebec that was, as Janet Noel puts it in her study of the first

⁹⁴ For the history of the Ursulines after their establishment in New France see Guy-Marie Oury, *Les Ursulines de Québec, 1639-1953* (Sillery, Québec Septentrion, 1999). For an overview of the history of New France see Peter Moogk, *La Nouvelle France: The Making of French Canada: A Cultural History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000) and Chapter 1-3 of Peter Gossage and Jack I. Little, *An Illustrated History of Quebec: Tradition and Modernity* (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press Canada, 2012).

female settlers of New France, “frozen in time.”⁹⁵ Bentzon’s rhetorical decision to consistently refer to the province as New France further served to ‘freeze’ it by tacitly denying the passing of nearly 140 years and the existence of four polities – the Province of Quebec, Lower Canada, Canada East and finally the Province of Quebec once more – whose contours grew and receded to contain a territory as narrow as the banks of the Saint-Lawrence and as sprawling as to include the Great Lakes, the Ohio River Valley and part of Rupert's Land. The outdated territorial designation belied the territory’s ‘newness’ and bolstered her assertion that “[au] fond c’était et c’est encore en miniature la société française de l’ancien régime”, contrasting it with its progressive, more advanced counterpart to the south.⁹⁶

As a travel writer, Bentzon performed the work of the cultural mediator: she was in no small part responsible for the formation of ideas in France of ‘at home’ of ‘abroad’, and her representations of Canada as charmingly backwards can be located within a genealogy of French perspectives of the country. The hold that this particular idea, as formulated and transmitted by a small but ideologically cohesive body of travel accounts, would have on the French mind speaks to the historical caesura between the two polities – as a result, it would take almost a century for differentiated images of Canada to imprint themselves in this French cultural imaginary.

Contrary to widespread belief, following British victory in the Seven Years War and the cession of New France in the 1763 Treaty of Paris the transatlantic connections between France and its former colony did not peter out to the point of non-existence.⁹⁷ But how can one measure the strength of such exchanges? The perception of their paucity well into the nineteenth century would be accurate if considering the economic or political spheres, inasmuch as these ties were

⁹⁵ Janet Noel, *Along a River: The First French-Canadian Women* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 2013), 22.

⁹⁶ “In the end it was and still is a miniature version of French society of the *ancien regime*.” Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 149.

⁹⁷ See Timothy J. Shannon, *The Seven Years' War in North America: A Brief History With Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014).

mostly absent or weak; despite valiant efforts on the part of French Canadian businessmen and entrepreneurs, French investment in their projects would never come close to matching the money pouring in first from Britain and then from the United States.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, the advent of the French Revolution provoked a sea change in Canadian opinion about its former metropolis. The scholar of comparative French Canadian literature David M. Hayne put it in no uncertain terms: the Revolution “devint aux yeux des Canadiens un mouvement satanique et régicide, et le conflit entre la France et l'Angleterre assumait les proportions d'une guerre sainte.”⁹⁹ Far from despairing of the British hold on Lower Canada, representatives of the Church began to refer to the Conquest as “providential”, given that it had allowed the *habitants* to escape the “satanic” influence of the Revolution.¹⁰⁰ And if the revolutionary stirrings overseas put a damper on Lower Canadian enthusiasm for the mother country, the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars temporarily eliminated the possibility of travel to France altogether.¹⁰¹

Under these strained conditions, then, it is difficult to overstate the importance of the intellectual, cultural and literary realms in feeding and maintaining ideas about Canada in France. Between the time of British Conquest and Bentzon's travels these artistic and literary exchanges,

⁹⁸ The volume of exchange between France and North America was 5.5% of the total French exchange in 1895, down from 8.6% in 1850 and up from 2.6% in 1835. Foreign investment in Canada was dependent on the United Kingdom until 1922, after which point most investment came from the United States. See Bruno Marnot, “Les relations commerciales entre la France et l'Amérique du nord au XIXe siècle,” in *La Capricieuse (1855): poupe et proue : les relations France-Québec (1760-1914)*, ed. Yvan Lamonde and Didier Poton (Lévis, Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 1-15.

⁹⁹ The Revolution “became in the eyes of Canadians a satanic and regicidal movement, and the conflict between France and England adopted the guise of a holy war.” David M. Hayne, “Conquête providentielle et Révolution diabolique : une constante de la littérature québécoise du XIXe siècle,” in *Révolution française au Canada français*, ed. Sylvain Simard (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press/Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2000), 324. On Canadian perspectives on France at the turn of the nineteenth century see also Claude Galarneau, *La France devant l'opinion canadienne (1760-1815)* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval; Paris: Armand Colin, 1970).

¹⁰⁰ Fernand Harvey, “Les relations culturelles entre la France et le Canada (1760-1960),” in *France-Canada-Québec: 400 ans de relations d'exception*, ed. Serge Joyal and Paul-André Linteau (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal), 97.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

facilitated by improvements in communications technology, became the medium of exchange between France and Canada that trade ties, official politics, and migration could not be.¹⁰²

Sylvain Simard's survey of French works written about Canada comprises a source base of nearly 700 books and brochures (as well as 643 periodical articles), of which he classified approximately 20 per cent as travel accounts. He concluded on this basis that French interest in Quebec slowly increased throughout the nineteenth century, even as he noted an uptick in the second half of the century onwards.¹⁰³ This sluggish growth accelerated during the time of the Second Empire. It was between 1875 and 1900 that the French became most widely aware of French Canada. However, we should not mistake equate the increased attention with a positive, nuanced, or even an evolving opinion. As Jan Noel writes, "well into the nineteenth century European visitors continued to exclaim how much it reminded them of old, pre-Revolutionary France."¹⁰⁴

Broadly speaking, the tone of these writings oscillated between less-than-enthused, *voir* indifferent, and downright negative. Canada was either considered a waste of time and mental energy – as in Voltaire's infamous dismissal of the British conquest of New France as the mere loss of "quelques arpents de neige" – or an afterthought.¹⁰⁵ In the writings of François-René de Chateaubriand and Alexis de Tocqueville, whose travelogues about North America (published in 1826 and 1831, respectively) were widely read in France in the early nineteenth century, descriptions of Canada took up a few pages at best.¹⁰⁶ Isidore Lebrun's highly technical *Tableau*

¹⁰²As printing technologies developed and the transatlantic post arrived with increasing regularity, the flow of print materials and information to and from France improved. See Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, and Jean-Claude Robert, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Cie, 1992), 282.

¹⁰³ See Sylvain Simard, *Mythe et reflet de la France : l'image du Canada en France, 1850-1914* (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1987).

¹⁰⁴ Janet Noel, *Along a River*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Voltaire, *Candide, ou, L'Optimisme*, ed. Frédéric Deloffre, (Paris: Gallimard, [1759] 2007), 119.

¹⁰⁶ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Voyage en Amérique*, (Paris: Librairie d'éducation, [1826] 1870), accessed July 31, 2017, <http://0-eco.canadiana.ca.mercury.concordia.ca/view/oocihm.90682>; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, transl. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1835] 2012). See also Pierre Guillaume and Laurier Turgeon, eds., *Regards croisés sur le Canada et la France : voyages et relations du XVIIe au*

Statistique et Politique des Deux Canadas (1833) could be considered the first “substantial” work about Canada, but for the most part it would appear as little more than a footnote until French newspaper coverage of the Lower Canadian Rebellions in 1837 and 1838 began to drum up interest once more.¹⁰⁷

The unrest and violent outbreak of the Rebellions was reported with increasing zeal by republican daily *Le National*, which saw in the conflict a perfect demonstration of the still quintessentially French spirit of the Patriotes. On that basis, its editorial board formulated its demand that the monarchy intervene in order to promote both “les valeurs françaises et l’honneur national.”¹⁰⁸ These efforts to rouse French concern for the state of its former colony resonated little and found no echo in political discourse. The crown considered the Rebellions to be a fundamentally British affair in need of an internal resolution. There was also little incentive to justify the risk of upsetting peaceable relations between Britain and France by interfering in the former’s colonial affairs.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, much of France (which here must be interpreted as ‘those with the means and inclination to access information about abroad’) was taken with nineteenth-century America.¹¹⁰

XXe siècle (Paris: Éditions du CTHS; [Sainte-Foy, Canada]: Presses de l’université Laval, 2007), Ebook version. Guillaume and Turgeon note enduring suspicion that Chateaubriand based his descriptions of the Niagara Falls on hearsay, and that Tocqueville spent only a short amount of time (a week) in Lower Canada. (13)

¹⁰⁷ Isidore Lebrun, *Tableau statistique et politique des deux Canadas* (London: Treuttel et Würtz, 1833).

¹⁰⁸ “French values and national honour.” Françoise Le Jeune, “Les relations France-Bas-Canada entre 1837 et 1855: Le Canada reconquis par la France ou la France reconquise par le Canada?” in *La Capricieuse (1855): poupe et proue: Les relations France-Québec (1760-1914)*, 109. As disregard slowly faded away, the burgeoning interest in French Canadian affairs would appear along such ideological lines: “[C]e sont surtout les milieux traditionalistes, le plus souvent monarchistes et catholiques conservateurs, qui s’intéressent au Canada,” notes Fernand Harvey. “D’où cette image d’un Canada français traditionaliste et campagnard qui finit par s’imposer dans l’opinion française.” See “Les relations culturelles entre la France et le Canada (1760-1960),” in *France-Canada-Québec: 400 ans de relations d’exception*, 106.

¹⁰⁹ See Françoise Le Jeune, “La France et le Canada du milieu du XVIIIe au milieu du XIXe siècle: cession ou conquête?” in *France-Canada-Québec: 400 ans de relations d’exception*, 57-94.

¹¹⁰ Some (including, arguably, Thérèse Bentzon) succumbed to what Gilbert Chinard referred to in 1925 as *le mirage américain*, a blind idealization of America and its affairs. See *Les réfugiés Huguenots en Amérique; avec une introduction sur Le mirage Américain*, (Paris, Société d’Édition “Les Belles-Lettres”, 1925).

For an extensive bibliography of French-authored publications about the United States see Frank Monaghan, “French travellers in the United States, 1765-1932: a bibliography” (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., [1933] 1961),

Canada, on the other hand, did not quite generate the same levels of fervour, whether as a topic of discussion or a travel destination. Following the Rebellions, French knowledge of and attention to Canadian affairs was generated and sustained in part by isolated efforts on the part of French Canadian politicians, businessmen, clergymen and bureaucrats to promote their commercial and political interests: Casgrain, who was returning from one of twenty-odd trips to Paris when Bentzon encountered him on *Le Champagne*, was one in a line of prominent men attempting to ‘make Canada known’ in France; another was Louis-Joseph Papineau, the erstwhile leader of the Patriotes, who made his way to Paris in 1839 on the occasion of his exile from Lower Canada to advocate for French intervention in the Rebellions.¹¹¹ 1855 was a landmark year for such efforts, marking the participation of Canada in the *Exposition universelle* in Paris; the publication of *Le Canada reconquis par la France* by lawyer and journalist Joseph-Guillaume Barthe; and the envoy of French naval ship *La Capricieuse* to Quebec City, all in that same year.

Historians have emphasized the arrival of *La Capricieuse* as an emblematic gesture of renewed solidarity and political interest. The characterization of the event as a *lieu commun de mémoire* has given credence to a narrative of a sudden surge in connections that has overshadowed other, subtler forms thereof. The visit did mark a rediscovery of sorts, and was seen as the precursor for the establishment of a French consulate in Quebec City; it was the first time a French ship had sailed the waters of the Saint-Lawrence since 1759.¹¹² However, to overemphasize its importance as a signifier of a sudden surge in French attention to Canada would be to ignore the trip’s primary purpose, which was commercial and not political in nature,

https://archive.org/stream/frenchtravellers00mona/frenchtravellers00mona_djvu.txt. Despite the popularity of the United States as a travel destination, Monaghan only lists three female-penned travelogues, including Bentzon. No comparable list exists for French travel to French Canada or Quebec that I have been able to locate.

¹¹¹ See Yvan Lamonde, “L’exil dans l’exil: le séjour de Louis-Joseph Papineau à Paris (1839-1845),” in *La Capricieuse La Capricieuse (1855) ; poupe et proue*.

¹¹² See Patrice Groulx, “La Capricieuse en 1855 : célébrations et significations,” in *La Capricieuse (1855) ; poupe et proue*; as well as Jacques Portes, “La Capricieuse au Canada”, *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 31 (1977).

and to dismiss the slow but steadily growing transatlantic activity in other spheres of life described above in the intertwined realms of literature and travel. Even when interpreted as a primarily symbolic gesture, it took on outsized importance for French Canadians, who saw it as a sign of metropolitan acknowledgment of their ‘familial’ relations.¹¹³ This *engouement* with the French was not quite reciprocal. As Françoise Le Jeune, a historian of women in nineteenth-century British Empire and Canada, has noted, the visit “appartient davantage à l’histoire des Canadiens qui en font une ‘fête de famille’, qu’à l’histoire des Français pour lesquels ce moment est [...] un non-événement.”¹¹⁴

This imbalance did not deter the flow of French Canadian men and attention to France. Joseph-Guillaume Barthe, a clerk at the Court of Appeal of Lower Canada took up the national cause, penning *Le Canada reconquis par la France* (1855) in an attempt to spur commercial investment, cultural exchange and emigration. As the title suggests, his argument was couched in imperial terms. He wrote in order to provide “des perspectives nouvelles *de profitable colonisation*, d’offrir l’opportunité pour la France de s’ouvrir cet immense débouché *pour son commerce et sa littérature*” (emphasis mine), highlighting parallels between his proposed industrial and literary investment and emigration and earlier settler colonial patterns.¹¹⁵ Despite what has now been established as French lack of interest for such appeals, it is nonetheless worth dwelling on what Le Jeune termed Barthe’s appeal to French imperial pretensions: “Barthe flatte

¹¹³ Françoise Le Jeune, “Les relations France-Bas-Canada entre 1837 et 1855: *Le Canada reconquis par la France* ou la France reconquise par le Canada?” in *La Capricieuse* (1855) ; *poupe et proue*, 101.

¹¹⁴ The visit “belongs more to the history of Canadians, who make it ‘a family celebration’, than to the history of the French, for whom this moment is [...] a non-event.” *Ibid.* Le Jeune regards this visit as only one of a series of events that, had they garnered French attention and intervention, could have redefined relations between France and Canada as well as the perception of the latter in France: the Seven Years War, the American Revolution (1775-1783), the cession of Louisiana (1804-1805), the Rebellions or the *La Capricieuse* visit could have ushered in such a recalibration. At each turn, however, France chose not to re-implicate itself in the affairs of British North America.

¹¹⁴ See Françoise Le Jeune, “La France et le Canada du milieu du XVIIIe au milieu du XIXe siècle: cession ou conquête?” in *France-Canada-Québec: 400 ans de relations d’exception*.

¹¹⁵ Barthe conceived of his work in such a way as “[to offer] new possibilities of *profitable colonization*, to offer France the opportunity to open up for itself this huge market for *for its commerce and its literature*” (emphasis mine). Joseph-Guillaume Barthe, *Le Canada reconquis par la France* (Paris: Ledoyen, 1855), 297.

l'aura impériale de la France en mettant en avant sa mission 'civilisatrice' à travers le monde : étendre sa langue et ses idées, ses lois et sa religion."¹¹⁶ Through Barthe, then, are revealed the ways in which the 'civilizing mission' can be understood as being promoted when operating within and without specific colonial frameworks. French travel to North America in the second half of the nineteenth century exported ideas about civilization and barbarism to the metropolis, an indirect manifestation of the dominant ideology driving the 'mission civilisatrice' which directed French attitudes towards their colonial holdings elsewhere as in the Orient and Africa. Here, this manifested as the urge to order the world from 'most' to 'least' civilized – a project to which travel is entirely necessary and one that, as we will see, Bentzon actively partook in. In short, what Bentzon wrote about Canada figured into an already existing framework of referential knowledge, a "conceptual and textual grid constituted by travel books," among other forms of print material.¹¹⁷ The prevailing and enduring image of Canada, when people cared to think about it at all, was that of a backwards colony.

On the one hand, it is unsurprising that upon arrival Bentzon would describe Quebec as "française autant pour le moins que la France elle-même", or that her experiences visiting convents and houses of refuge would lead her to cast French Canadian life in the 1890s as highly religious and operating under the watchful eye of the Church.¹¹⁸ In this regard, she did not depart from narratives circulating in French travel text and cultural opinion at the time. Yet although *Nouvelle-France* in many ways mirrored the impressions left by other writers and travellers, her

¹¹⁶ As Françoise Le Jeune observes, "Barthe flatters France's imperial aura by putting forward its civilizing mission around the world: extending its language and its ideas, its laws and religion." See "Les relations France-Bas-Canada entre 1837 et 1855: *Le Canada reconquis par la France* ou la France reconquise par le Canada?" in *La Capricieuse* (1855) ; *poupe et proue*, 119.

¹¹⁷ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 73.

¹¹⁸ "At least as French as France herself." Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre*, 5.

diverging motivations for traveling ended up colouring her writing significantly. The places she chose to visit reinforced this.

Following her pattern of travel in the United States, the time she spent in the major cities was mainly distinguished by her visits with women-led organizations. She appeared uninterested in visiting or learning about English Canada, and her time spent in Quebec can be discussed in two portions, broadly segmented along an urban-rural divide: time spent in Quebec City and Montreal and her nautical voyage along the Saint-Laurent Seaway and the Saguenay River to Chicoutimi. Thanks to the leverage of the abbé Casgrain, in Quebec City Bentzon was privy to the activities of the Augustinian nuns at the helm of the Hôtel-Dieu de Québec and granted access to the innermost sanctuaries of the Ursulines convent and of the Soeurs grises de la Charité à Québec. Then on May 11, she boarded a ship from Quebec City that traveled along the Saint-Lawrence and Saguenay rivers to Chicoutimi.¹¹⁹ She then returned to Montreal, where she met with high-ranking members of city society, such as Lady Aberdeen, who had been named the first president of the International Council of Women and had founded the National Council of Women of Canada four years earlier, and French Canadian journalist and feminist Josephine Dandurand.

Generally speaking, her description of Canadian women was as glowing as her opinions expressed in *Américaines*, but she honed in on their overtly religious character as distinctive: “les Américaines du Canada ont exercé et exercent encore une influence sociale tout aussi grande que leurs soeurs des États-Unis; mais les plus intéressantes d’entre elles sont assurément les religieuses,” she wrote.¹²⁰ Religious life had long been a locus for women aspiring to lives of

¹¹⁹ Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 80.

¹²⁰ “The Americans of Canada have wielded and continue to wield a level of social influence as high as that of their sisters in the United States; but the most interesting of them are surely the *religieuses*.” Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 5.

influence, especially in cases where pursuing public life was not a feasible pursuit, and the realm of politics offered no avenue for advancement.¹²¹ Taking the veil was particularly appealing to women aspiring to positions of power in Quebec. As Marta Danylewycz noted in her study of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame and the Sisters of Misericorde in Montreal, the prominence of female religious communities in the realms of healthcare and education, the limited possibilities for advancement in lay society, and the pervasive tenets of Marianism all worked to convince women “that the ‘heavens were their domain’ and that religion was their specific calling.”¹²² As a result, the number of women entering religious life rose sharply from the 1840s onward in Quebec. By the time Bentzon visited in 1897, over 30 new female religious orders had been founded across the province. This increase accompanied the solidification of ecclesiastical responsibilities for providing healthcare, education and social services to the population of Quebec in the second half of the nineteenth century, in addition to ensuring the eternal salvation of the province’s flock.¹²³ Contrary to assertions which posit the church as the province’s anchor in the pre-modern era, the church was no antiquated structure preventing post-Confederation Quebec from keeping pace with the age of industrialization and modernization; rather, it worked in conjunction with both the state and French Canadian business interests in order to “become the dominant social and cultural institution in French Canada” and thus reinforce “the fortress of French Canadian nationalism.”¹²⁴ Danylewycz convincingly argued that

¹²¹ This is not limited to the Quebec or Canadian context: In Europe as well, “[w]omen’s striving for emancipation was acted out in the arena of religion long before women could conceive of political solutions for their situation.” Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to 1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11.

¹²² Marta Danylewycz, *Taking The Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec: 1840-1920* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 70. For more on religious communities in Montreal see Micheline D’Allaire, *Les communautés religieuses de Montréal - Tome 1: Les communautés religieuses et l’assistance sociale à Montréal 1659-1900* (Montréal: Méridien, 1997).

¹²³ Marta Danylewycz, *Taking The Veil*, 25.

¹²⁴ Marta Danylewycz, *Taking The Veil*, 22; 30. On how the clergy were also part and parcel of the transition to industrial capitalist society between 1816 and 1885, see John A. Dickinson and Brian J. Young, *A Short History of*

the salience of female religious communities forestalled the feminist movement in Quebec that would not gather force until the early 20th century. As in many other places, formalized feminist organizations began to coalesce around the turn of the century. Some frontrunners included the Female Benevolent Society (founded in 1815 by English Montrealers, eventually becoming the Montreal Ladies Benevolent Society), with more generalized movements and calls for equal political rights to follow.¹²⁵ As historian Denyse Baillargeon writes in her *Brève histoire des femmes au Québec*, feminism was regarded with suspicion by the church as ideologically foreign, “une importation anglosaxonne”: in other words, a potential threat to the traditional familial unit and the integrity of a French Canadian society anchored in the nuclear family.¹²⁶ This stance further slowed the pace of development for such movements.¹²⁷

It therefore makes sense that Bentzon would approvingly position the religious orders as counterparts to the lay organizations and women she met with in the United States. However, because she was most interested in understanding the ‘Frenchness’ of Quebec, she focused on the efforts of women in religious life. And, although she mentioned the mix between “des deux nationalités anglaise et française” in convents, she mostly discussed the English presence in order to emphasize distinctions and differences between the two linguistic groups. Her narrative thus accorded prominence to Quebec City over Montreal.¹²⁸

Quebec : A Socio-Economic Perspective (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1993). Even beyond her interactions with the abbé Casgrain, Bentzon remarks admiringly on the breadth and depth of knowledge of clergy members she encounters, as on her trip to Saguenay in May 1897 in which she proceeded “sans savoir très bien où j’allais. N’importe! les guides intelligents et courtois ne manquent pas en Canada, et ces guides-là portent presque toujours une soutane.” *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre*, 80. This reveals a radically different view on French Canada from that elaborated by British travel sources; see R.G. Moyles and Doug Owrarn, *Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada, 1880-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

¹²⁵ See N. C. Pearce, *A History of the Montreal Ladies Benevolent Society* (Montreal: Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society, 1920).

¹²⁶ “An Anglo-Saxon importation”. Denyse Baillargeon, *Brève histoire des femmes au Québec* (Montréal: Boréal, 2012), 51-2.

¹²⁷ *Idem*, 116.

¹²⁸ Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 6.

Her favourable stance towards the *religieuses* did not only extend to the women she met in person. Part of Bentzon's process of imagining place, of the "voyage rêvé," involved intertwining past and present throughout her travel narratives in order to reinforce her argument about the indispensability of women to the survival of a society.¹²⁹ This is demonstrated in her first stop in Quebec City, where she spent time with the Hospitalières. For Bentzon, visiting the Hôtel-Dieu was as much about connecting to the past as it was observing the present: "je sentis qu'une occasion unique se présentait pour moi de pénétrer au coeur même de la Nouvelle-France", as shaped by the triumvirate of the Jesuits, the Ursulines and the Augustinians.¹³⁰ While she brought up the Jesuit presence in, and influence on, New France, it was the women-led religious orders that comprised the 'heart' of New France, spatially represented by the Hospitalières' establishment, which then transported her back to colonial times. As she entered the building, she saw portraits of the venerable women who had served there in centuries past as mother superiors, lined up one next to the other with care: here was mère Juchereau de Saint-Ignace, the first Canadian-born woman to assume the head of the Augustine order; next to her hung the portrait of the mère Duplessis de Sainte-Hélène; and, of course most prominently featured was the portrait of the mère de Saint-Augustin, who was along with Marie de l'Incarnation, founder of the Ursulines convent in Quebec City, venerated as "les deux saintes de la Nouvelle-France," Bentzon commented.¹³¹ These great women "se trouvèrent réunies à différentes époques dans cette maison de la charité", were housed under this one roof, keeping each other company for eternity.¹³²

¹²⁹Ibid, 34.

¹³⁰ "I felt that a unique opportunity was presenting itself for me to enter into the very heart of New France." Ibid, 7.

¹³¹ They were "the two saints of New France." Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 31-2.

¹³² They "found themselves reunited in different eras in this house of charity." Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 34.

The Hôtel-Dieu became a jumping off point in Bentzon's travelogue, one which she used to recount the arrival of the female missionaries in 1639 to the shores of what would become New France. She tied their desire in her to travel to the New World to the *mission civilisatrice*, describing the settlement from the point of view of the religieuses qui "ne demandaient qu'à les rejoindre pour secourir les pauvres filles et les pauvres femmes des sauvages."¹³³ She went on to relate an eventful history of New France through the eyes of the Hospitalières. Throughout, she had high praise for their fortitude, their devotion to caring for the sick, and their seemingly endless capacity for self-sacrifice, qualities which for her appeared to transcend time and trickle down to the religieuses she met in 1897.

Bentzon identified these same traits when, following her time with the Hospitalières, she visited the asile du Bon-Pasteur in Quebec, founded by the Servantes du Coeur Immaculé de Marie in 1850 to house recently released female prison inmates. She was admiring of the ongoing work the order, "cette personnification féminine du bon Pasteur de l'Évangile", was accomplishing in carefully removing these susceptible women from the temptation of vice and sin.¹³⁴ They are described as "des épaves de tous les coins du globe", unable to prevent themselves from succumbing to drink or licentious in nature.¹³⁵ Bentzon dwelled in particular on the 'foreign' presences in their midst: Mary-Jane, a woman of colour of Nova Scotian origin, who ostensibly brought 'comedic relief' to the community and who the *religieuses* described as "notre vieil enfant gâté"; in so doing, they reinforced her inability to fend for herself and connecting it back to her blackness.¹³⁶

¹³³ Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 9.

¹³⁴ She described the Servantes du Coeur Immaculé de Marie as "this feminine personification of the Good Shepherd of the Gospel." Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 49.

¹³⁵ The women reunited there were, in her words, "shipwrecks from all corners of the globe." Ibid, 54.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 56.

While Bentzon observed with a certain curiosity the mix of English and French present in the convents she visited in Quebec City, in Montreal Saint-Laurent Boulevard appeared as a chasm dividing the city into the English West and the French East. The two solitudes found a temporary meeting point in the works of the National Council of Women in Canada, founded in 1893 by Lady Ishbel Aberdeen and which purported to represent the interests of Canadian women regardless of language until the feminine chapter of the Association Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal was created in 1902, among other people by writer and activist Joséphine Dandurand. This cohabitation of sorts enabled Bentzon to apprise herself of Lady Aberdeen's role in creating the Council of Women, and to briefly meet Dandurand. This meeting was enough for Bentzon to comment admiringly on the 'moderate' nature of the Dandurand's feminism ("J'ai causé avec elle, et elle m'a conquise, plus encore par sa prudence et pour ses réserves que pour ses revendications, car, d'abord, cette féministe modérée est épouse et mère, catholique et Française")¹³⁷. On that basis she could make the assertion that there did in fact "exister des femmes de lettres canadiennes".¹³⁸

Of course, Bentzon's encounters with the elite intellectual circles of Quebec society did not exhaust the variety and range of women's life experiences in the province. Despite the popularity of the religious life for women (accounting for as high as 2.5 per cent of the general provincial population by some estimates), most did not spend their lives in a cloister or veil.¹³⁹ Even when in Montreal, Bentzon's social calls involved sitting in on the meetings of the society

¹³⁷ "I spoke with her, and she conquered me, more so with her cautiousness and her reserve than her demands, because first and foremost this moderate feminist is a wife and mother, a Catholic and French woman." Ibid, 204.

¹³⁸ Simply put, "Canadian women of letters do exist." Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 205. Andrée Levesque has written several monographs about such 'women of letters', journalists as well as activists, including *Chroniques d'Éva Circé-Côté: lumière sur la société québécoise, 1900-1942* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-Ménage, 2011); *Madeleine Parent: activist* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2005); and *Red Travellers: Jeanne Corbin and Her Comrades*, transl. Yvonne M. Klein (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

¹³⁹ Heidi Macdonald, "Who Counts? Nuns, Work, and the Census of Canada," *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 43 (2010), doi: 10.1353/his.2010.0027.

of antiquarians at the Château Ramezay, not touring the factories of working-class neighbourhoods like Pointe Saint-Charles, which would have presented her with a starkly different view of the role of women in the province. Even if Quebec did bear the influence of France in some respects well into the nineteenth century – as the historian of New France Janet Noel has argued, “the colony retained ancien régime (old order) gender practices for an unusually long time,” – a substantial body of literature on Quebec women details how their lives and stories were shaped drastically by urbanization and industrialization.¹⁴⁰

Thus far I have detailed how Bentzon saw and described life in Quebec; I have also demonstrated how in many ways her travel writings mirrored and imitated an image of Canada firmly cemented either by dismissive reports about it, or even by its absence in French public discourse. However, to cease probing the foundations of her work on that basis – to infer that Bentzon was simply parroting her intellectual forebears – would be too facile a conclusion, one that obscures the ways in which she departed from the patterns of thought and of travel carved out by her predecessors.¹⁴¹ As this study posits, it was Bentzon’s intent to focus on women that set her work apart. Herein lies one important reason to delve into the particularities of women’s

¹⁴⁰ Janet Noel, *Along a River*, 6. For an overview of Quebec history, see Gossage and Little, *An Illustrated History of Quebec*. For women’s history in Quebec, see Denyse Baillargeon, *Brève histoire des femmes au Québec*; Micheline Dumont et al., *L’Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles* (Montréal: Le Jour, 1992); Andrée Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939*, transl. Yvonne M. Klein (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994). On the lives of women and families in Montreal across socioeconomic strata see Bettina Bradbury’s extensive body of work, including *Wife to Widow: Lives, Laws, and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011) and *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993); Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); and Mary Anne Poutanen, *Beyond Brutal Passions: Prostitution in Early Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015).

¹⁴¹ This may provide a piece of the puzzle as to why Bentzon and her work has been overlooked – of the French travel accounts of Canada which have been reviewed by scholars there have been little accounting for women’s writings. Initially it would appear that French women visiting Canada were few and far between; Bénédicte Monicet, in her bibliography of nineteenth-century women’s travelogues about North America, listed only three who visited Canada, including Bentzon. However, some of these may have been overlooked. As a whole the state of French scholarship (both of francophone travelogues and published in French press or journals) has lagged behind British and anglocentric scholarship of travel writing. Moreover, although the BANQ and the Bibliothèque nationale de France has an otherwise extensive collection of writings about Lower Canada and Quebec, Bentzon herself does not feature in the collection – it is therefore not unreasonable to believe that others may have been overlooked as well.

travel writing in general, and of Bentzon's work more specifically. Hidden underneath the veneer of these dominant travel discourses was her underlying aim of prioritizing women's accomplishments and their centrality to history. *Nouvelle-France* offers a fascinating example of how women often cleverly devised and used strategies to re-appropriate such discourses for their purposes, a phenomenon which holds true regardless of locale, region, style and genre of travel writing. In this sense, her travelogues can be read partially as belonging to a project to recover and recenter women's contributions to past and present, reconstituting history by filling in the gaps left where knowledge about women's lives and stories should appear, and then using this history as basis for her imagination of the future.

What are the foundations of this recovery project? I have suggested that the idea of Quebec served a very particular purpose for Bentzon, operating as a foil for her vision of modernity. Indigenous populations were firmly located within that purview. Generally speaking, in French writings about New France, “[l]e personnage omniprésent est l’Indien” and “l’Indien est bien, en règle générale, le ‘Sauvage’”.¹⁴² Bentzon certainly was no exception; even though by 1897 most indigenous people had been confined to live on reserved land, and she did not encounter any First Nations or Métis while travelling, that did not prevent her from writing about them. They remained an enduring object of fascination for Bentzon as she applied herself to the task of vividly recreating scenes from the history of New France for her readers: the arrival of the Ursulines and Augustines created an “[a]ffluence émerveillée de Montagnais et d’Abénaquis autour des filles blanches, de celle surtout qui apparaît comme leur reine, madame de la Peltrie”; as she gazed upon Cacouna, a town on the south shore of the Saint-Laurent in Eastern Quebec, she shivered in excitement at the thought of the “théâtre de terribles faits de guerre entre sauvages

¹⁴² “[T]he omnipresent character is the ‘Indian’” and “the ‘Indian’ is generally [depicted as] ‘the Savage.’” See Pierre Guillaume and Laurier Turgeon, eds., *Regards croisés sur le Canada et la France : voyages et relations du XVIIe au XXe siècle*, 15-16.

Iroquois et Micmas” (perhaps a reference to sixteenth-century conflicts at the Battle at Bae de Bic or Trois-Pistoles, which are located nearby).¹⁴³ From one page to the next, Natives would appear as savage warriors, then as grateful recipients of the mission. In sum, part of the values Bentzon assigned to what it means to be “French” and “Non-French” involved the attributions of civilized and barbaric qualities, respectively. The characterization of her views that subtly emerged in *Américaines* is aligned with many elements of what some scholars have called ‘maternal feminism’. However, Bentzon’s perspective on the Canadian past sheds light on her views on women’s roles in society in a way that her descriptions of illustrious American women do not: her writing seemed to be as motivated by the need to make a case for women’s contributions to the advancement of civilization in a national context as by the project she had taken on of making known to a wider audience their crucial interventions in the past and present. In her account, women therefore also functioned as a major civilizing influence, responsible for imprinting the ‘human’ onto the ‘savage’: “D’où vient que les sauvages les plus hostiles à la France épargnaient parfois leurs prisonniers? C’est que quelqu’un des leurs, une femme peut-être, avait été instruite chez les Ursulines ou bien avait pénétré dans les salles de l’Hôtel-Dieu. De loin, les filles blanches dictaient les sentiments d’humanité à ceux-là mêmes qui n’en savaient pas le nom.”¹⁴⁴ To Bentzon’s mind these women performed the role of white saviours, doling out lessons in humanity to those who otherwise would never have known the meaning of the word.

¹⁴³ When Bentzon writes of “[a] marvelling crowd of Montagnais and Abenakis around the white girls, [especially] around the one who appeared as their queen, madame de la Peltrie.”, or refers to “the theatre of terrible acts of war between the savage Iroquois and Mi’kmaq”, her account bears more than a passing resemblance to the way Jesuit missionary Paul Le Jeune described their arrival in the *Relations*: “It seemed ‘almost a dream,’ a bystander reported, for ‘from a floating prison were seen issuing these virgins consecrated to God, as fresh and as rosy as when they had departed from their homes.” See Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 38; and Paul Le Jeune, cited in Jan Noel, *Along A River*, 53.

¹⁴⁴ “Why did the savages that were most hostile to France sometimes spare their prisoners? It was because some of them, a woman perhaps, had been educated by the Ursulines or had entered into the chambers of the Hôtel-Dieu. By far, the white girls dictated the sentiments of humanity to those who did not even know the word.” Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France*, 37.

When travelling the United States a few years prior, Bentzon had made little mention of Native populations, with the exception of relating a few stories she had heard secondhand and a brief visit to the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Why, then, was the figure of the Native foregrounded in *Nouvelle-France*? Whereas in the major American cities her gaze often dwelled on the demonstrations of social progress and technological prowess, her view of Canada seemed to perceive the lingering presence of the past wherever she went. The figure of the Native was buried in the past, excavated in order to highlight the benefits of the influence of women on the social order.

Despite Bentzon's elegant prose, her keen eye for detail, her predilection for intensive reading and meticulous research and her expansive social networks – all of which allowed her to craft rich portraits of the places she visited, not only chock full of information for her reader but also intensely pleasurable to read – the specificities of the lives of the individual women she met were flattened out in order to fulfill the requirements of this grander narrative. Quebec was indeed 'preserved' as an ahistorical New France; the contemporary Ursulines and Augustinians she encountered became the living embodiments of Marie Guyart de l'Incarnation or Madame de la Peltrie, their seventeenth-century counterparts. To borrow the words of Brian Young and John A. Dickinson in their *Short History of Quebec*, in the nineteenth century there existed not one but "several Quebecs" alongside one another.¹⁴⁵ Bentzon's carefully crafted image of staid, religious, traditional French Canadian life purposefully glossed over the lives of women working in heavily industrializing sectors around Montreal, for example, and assimilated the presence of any other ethnic or linguistic groups besides the French and, on a nominal basis, the English, into this same narrative.

Nouvelle-France does not seem to have made waves in the same ways that *Américaines*

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 177.

impacted French discourse on women's emancipation, education and behaviour. More research is necessary to discern the exact ways in which *Nouvelle-France* contributed to this conversation. This speaks to the need to continue the study of Bentzon's work, investigating the links between the networks formed through travel and movement, and the informal and formal exchanges of ideas about the 'condition of women' which occurred through the use of such networks.

Conclusion

When Laurie Penny penned the words “[t]o imagine the future is a political practice,” in 2016 she was referring to a particularly contemporary context.¹⁴⁶ She had been investigating the ideological underpinnings of the ‘alternative-right’ in the United States, a far-right movement, which gained notoriety for its support for the presidential campaign of then-Republican nominee Donald J. Trump. This latest foray into the minds of self-described ‘alt-righters’, in the form of an article in *The Baffler* magazine, was attempting to tap into and make visible the fear of a world in which women did not live under the thumb of men. As this study of Bentzon has attempted to show, the act of imagining the future has been at the heart of work done by feminist thinkers stretching back to the nineteenth century, if not further. Once distilled, radical politics and feminist politics – not that the two must necessarily coincide – can be considered acts of imagining alternative futures for the world, ones which necessarily do not, cannot correspond to the path being tread. Historians have long chronicled this phenomenon in its myriad manifestations, although perhaps not in as many words: among other places it can be located in the utopian socialist enclaves in France and England;¹⁴⁷ it underlay the mobilization of suffragists on both sides of the Atlantic; and it suffused the rhetoric of the lesbian separatist movements of the 1970s, which declared that “The Future is Female” long before the adage was coopted as a neoliberal slogan and emblazoned onto sweat shirts.

This thesis has argued that writer and literary critic Marie-Thérèse de Solms Blanc (1840-1907), known professionally as Thérèse (Th.) Bentzon, contributed to forging transatlantic networks and circulating ideas about women, making visible an emerging feminist subject despite

¹⁴⁶ Laurie Penny, “Everything Belongs To The Future,” *The Baffler*, October 17, 2016, <https://thebaffler.com/blog/fear-feminist-future-laurie-penny>

¹⁴⁷ On connections between utopian socialism and feminism see Leslie F. Goldstein, “Early Feminist Themes in French Utopian Socialism: The St.-Simonians and Fourier,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43.1 (1982): 91-108.

not participating in, or approving of, formalized movements for women's rights. It has further suggested that Bentzon's travels unfolded along three axes – temporal, spatial, and imaginative – and that her travelogues *Les Américaines Chez Elles* (1896) and *Nouvelle-France and Nouvelle-Angleterre* (1899) exhibit the signs of these three forms of travel. In addition to describing her physical movement from big-city Chicago in 1893 to remote Quebec region of Saguenay four years later, they bear the marks of the grid of knowledge she had formed in reading, learning and hearing about the United States and Canada even before seeing those places with her own eyes. *Américaines* is a testament not only to a personal fascination with the country, but a widespread French enchantment with the promise of the American nation. Similarly, her relative disinterest in Canada prior to her visits spoke to the ways in which connections between the two countries have endured in the cultural and intellectual realms.

Conceiving of the travelogue as a textual repository of what French historian Bourguinat termed the “voyage rêvé,” hinting at dreaming, or the imagination, as a necessary component of travel, allowed insight into how Bentzon mapped her ideas of history onto the places she visited – much in the same way that author Italo Calvino imagined a series of encounters between Marco Polo and the Kublai Khan. In Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972), Khan asked Polo to describe the cities he had visited on the course of his extensive sea voyages and travels. In a series of fictionalized conversations, a cartography of cities and places takes shape that readers would not recognize. Nor would they be able to locate them on a map, as a matter of fact, for these sites do not exist, except in the minds of Polo, the storyteller, and Khan, the audience of one. “The maps Calvino envisions are the effects of a social imagination rooted in an imaginary cathexis of projected spaces,” comments Gabriele Schwab in *Imaginary Ethnographies*, her exploration of the fabrication of a “cross-cultural imaginary.” “They are maps that encode a vision of the

future.”¹⁴⁸

Bentzon created such maps, just as she crafted an ideal of woman both in the United States and in Canada. In the former, she envisioned a place for women in the public sphere within set parameters, related to her abilities as a mother and divorced from the question of suffrage or political rights. In Canada, she mapped out her desires for women in the future onto the colonial past, describing the act of charity, patriotism and education performed by religious women in helping to found New France, “dans un temps qui n’était pas celui des revendications féministes” as a feat that “sera difficilement surpassée, en quelque lieu que ce soit, par la femme-homme dont nous menace l’avenir.”¹⁴⁹

In so doing Bentzon negotiated both the constraints of the genre of travel writing and the prevailing discourses surrounding gender in *fin-de-siècle* France. At the same time, the effect that travel had on Bentzon’s thought is manifested in how the ‘Other’ was represented in the pages of her non-fiction work. It is through this opposition to the Other – whether made visible through her praise of work to assimilate indigenous populations, past and present, the erasure of the figure of the Native in her work, or the caricatures of non-white or non-European people she encountered – that she was able to objectify France, her home, as modern, and place it on a continuum of modernity and civilization alongside the other countries she visited.

Despite the promise offered by the study of Bentzon’s life, there is much left to explore. Given that this thesis was constructed primarily as an intellectual biography of sorts, how can broadening the scope of research position her ideas within a wider transatlantic context? Even as historians and literary scholars have moved away from simplistic understandings of mobility

¹⁴⁸ Gabriele Schwab, *Imaginary Ethnographies: Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 46-7.

¹⁴⁹ “... in a time that was not that of feminists demands” as a feat that “will be surpassed with difficult, wherever that may be, by the woman-man that the future threatens us with.” Thérèse Bentzon, *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre*, 179.

associated with freedom and progress, there remains an enduring fascination with locating the radical potential of travel, with what Yael Schlick called “its ability [...] to revise and reimagine the world, to question and destabilize.”¹⁵⁰ By juxtaposing two late-nineteenth-century travelogues, *Les Américaines* and *Nouvelle-France*, this study has revealed how Bentzon ended up reinforcing categories of identity in many ways, most notably in her rigid understanding of societal occupations appropriate for women, her staunch insistence on national characteristics, and her subtle but persistent hierarchization of societies according to their presumed level of civilization.

As such, this study has explored the intersection between travel and iterations of modern individuality and subject formation, Enlightenment theories of liberal individualism, and the circulation of feminist politics and ideas. It was at this very intersection that Thérèse (Th.) Bentzon, lived, worked and wrote, travelling not only through space and time, but also via the imagination – the crucial node between thinking past and present places into being and dreaming up new ones.

¹⁵⁰ Yaël Rachel Schlick, *Feminism and the Politics of Travel After the Enlightenment* (Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press, 2012), 3.

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