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Material Culture, Identity, and Colonial Society in the Canadian Fur Trade

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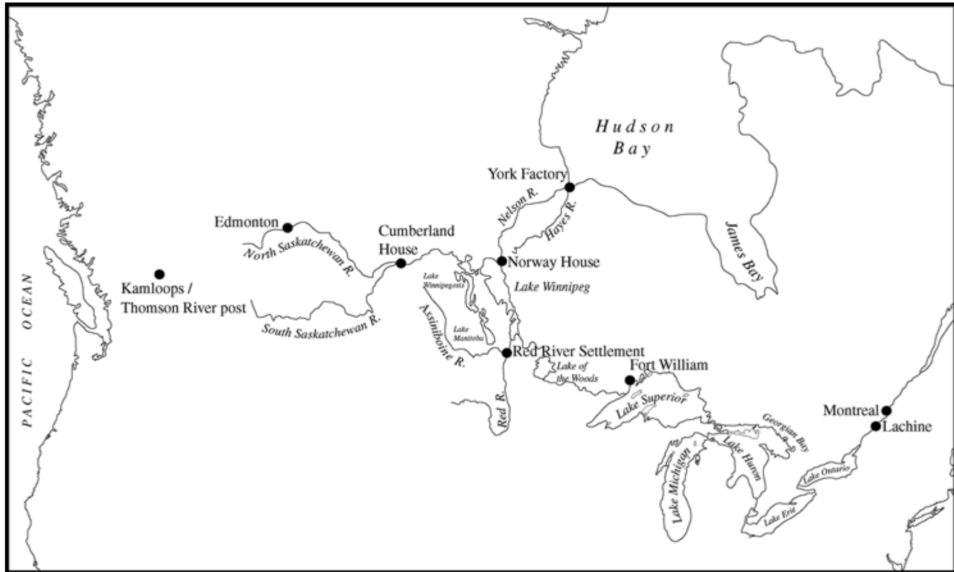
Gender, race, and class were the constituent parts of the British Empire and its manifestations at the local level. Such social categories were made active within the networks of power and influence that the empire brought to bear on local communities within it. There was one further, crucial component of empire, and that was material culture. Objects traded, sold, given, worn, acquired by force or as souvenirs, presented as diplomatic gifts, exchanged in marriage ceremonies, objects coveted and despised, objects used domestically or fetishized, objects misunderstood or appropriated across cultural divides, objects which served to bridge these—in many ways, the empire existed materially, not simply as networks of people and politics but as the things they worked with, traded, made, gave to each other, sold, looted, brought home, commented on, and consumed: an "empire of goods" as much as of political structures.[1] If the modern British nation imagined itself into being through comparison with the many Others it encountered in its imperial experiences, then its encounters with and representations of those Others in material forms was an important part of this process.[2] The deployment and categorization of material culture was a significant part of the negotiation of identities within colonial social systems while also making real the categories of race, class, and gender within colonial society. Objects and their consumption performed and articulated identity and status, proclaimed allegiance and aspiration, and acted as potent symbols within the complex cross-cultural realities of colonial society.

This chapter explores issues of gender, race, and status associated with two very different objects, made by two very different women, within mid-nineteenth-century British colonial society situated in the Canadian fur trade. One of these objects is an embroidered and beaded "octopus" pouch, made by a woman of mixed European and First Nations heritage (see Figures 3.2 and

3.3). We do not know her name, but we know whom she made it for: the bag bears the embroidered name "S BLACK," for Samuel Black of Aberdeen who spent his career in the western fur trade. It was collected in 1841–42 by Edward Hopkins, secretary to the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Sir George Simpson. Hopkins' second wife, Frances Anne Beechey Hopkins, is the other woman at the heart of this chapter. She was the daughter of Arctic naval explorer Rear Admiral Frederick William Beechey, and a successful artist who depicted herself and her husband being paddled by métis voyageurs along trade routes; she exhibited her paintings at the Royal Academy exhibitions and other major venues in London. One of her most well-known paintings, *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall*, is the other object focused on here (see Figure 3.4). In a scene which oddly blends English narrative/moral paintings, pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, and Canadian fur trade reality, the image depicts a demure, blonde Hopkins, accompanied by her husband, in a rocky northern landscape, paddled by swarthy voyageurs, one of whom is plucking a water-lily, perhaps to offer to Mrs Hopkins.

These two objects both function as articulations of identity within a colonial system which was hyperconscious of race, gender, and class. A métis pouch, made for a Scottish fur trader father or husband, and a romanticized painting by the white wife of an extremely powerful man within fur trade society: both objects underscore the fact that identity within colonial society was, as Kathleen Wilson has noted, a social process, contingent on social relations, "bound to a historical social order and both concretised and challenged through the practices of everyday life."[3] The production and reception of these two objects provided material expressions of the identities and relative social and political positions of their makers. But they also speak of challenges to these roles and the social system that sought to enforce them; they suggest cracks and uneven spots in the beliefs about women and race within colonial societies. This chapter explores how an embroidered pouch and a painting illuminate issues of identity within colonial society, and how these two women and their material productions were linked within this system. Material culture here serves as an unusual documentary source and analytical perspective for understanding colonial society, a source often ignored by mainstream historians. This complex topic needs to be approached anthropologically as much as historically, treating all parts of fur trade society and its broader imperial contexts as requiring interpretation. I draw on recent work in material anthropology which explores objects as nexuses for human relationships, as active social agents within webs of relations, and as having biographies, with meanings shifting across time and cultural context.[4] I also bring to bear on these artifacts and their makers work on imperial history and the nature of cross-cultural relations in colonial societies, particularly on the construction and negotiation of race and status. Finally, there is useful work on gender relations across cultural and racial lines within colonial societies,[5]



3.1 Map showing fur trading sites in western Canada. Map drawn by Theodore Papaioannou, owned by author

and an established body of work on fur trade social history in Canada, which is key to understanding these two women and their objects.[6] There is, however, very little work which has attempted to bridge these literatures and to explore the ways in which material culture served to perform colonialism and construct colonial societies.[7] If, as Grant McCracken has noted, "sexism takes some of its power from the fact that it is resident in the material world,"[8] then so does racism. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *The Age of Homespun* shows clearly how relics from the past have been woven into power-laden nostalgic fantasies about colonial relations, transforming "the violence of colonial conquest into a frontier pastoral"—but also how objects can be used to unravel these, to interrupt nostalgia, to put real people and violence and cross-cultural relationships back into history.[9] I hope to show how these two objects, and the women who made them, illuminate both the patterns and complexities of identity in fur trade society.

The "S BLACK" Bag, Métis Women, and Fur Trade Society[10]

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), like the East India Company, played a crucial role in the British Empire, both through its networks of trade, which established and maintained cross-cultural relationships through materiality

and its circulation, but also through the relationships formed between British men and native women. Fur trade society in the northwestern interior of North America was an intensely hybrid milieu, an empire within an empire which depended on cross-cultural networks and relationships. The octopus bag, made within this milieu after two centuries of contact and intermarriage between European men and tribal women, is fundamentally a hybrid piece. Made entirely of materials obtained through the Hudson's Bay Company—woollen trade cloth and yarn from England, glass beads from Italy and Czechoslovakia, and silk thread from China, sewn with linen thread rather than sinew—the bag is fashioned in a form derived from the skin of a whole animal (such as a young or fetal deer) folded in half at the middle with the four legs dangling down.[11] These evolved into flattened rectangular or U-shaped pouches with four pairs of decorative tabs. Tucked under a belt or hung on a wall peg, such bags became standard personal kit for men and were used to hold pipes, tobacco, flint, steel, and other small items.

As Ulrich notes in her explication of an eighteenth-century twined and imbricated wallet made by a tribal woman, such items preserve "a … story of intercultural exchange rather than war … [showing] the complex intertwining of cultures in this period."[12] The S BLACK bag shows such positive relationships to an even greater degree. Within the cross-cultural social networks of the northern fur trade, not only the design and materials of such bags, but their makers and users, crossed cultural boundaries in the course of their lives. Although the trade began in the mid-seventeenth century, white women did not accompany traders into the interior until the mid-nineteenth century. For two centuries, men of British and French origin made marriages "according to the custom of the country" with tribal women, who were essential to the trade for their linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic knowledge and skills.[13] Such relationships were generally treated seriously by both parties and women protected from sexual abuse, although they were often ended when the male partner was assigned to a distant post. Some marriages lasted for a man's entire career, and led him to the decision not to leave the interior after retirement. These relationships led to the creation of a new people, the métis, who were in turn subdivided into the French-speaking, Catholic-syncretic children of French-Canadian (often voyageur) fathers and tribal mothers, and the English-speaking, Protestant children of British fathers and tribal mothers, who sometimes called themselves country-born.[14] By the early 1800s, it became common for fur traders to marry métis rather than tribal women, with senior traders "placing" their daughters with aspiring young men. Arriving from Aberdeen in 1802, Samuel Black married twice successively, once by 1805 and for the second time by 1830. Little is known about these women, but during this period the strong pattern was for up-and-coming young men to look to the mixed-blood daughters of senior traders as eligible marriage partners. By the time of his death in 1841, Black had a family of at least three sons and four

daughters. Black, like many men from Scotland, Orkney, and England who served in the HBC and lived much of their lives with tribal and métis people in the northwestern interior, would have developed an adult identity based on entwined personal and professional experience, a life spent learning tribal customs and a smattering of languages from French to Cree, a life spent in the cultural and racial hierarchy of the Company where men were seated at table according to rank (which largely correlated with race), a life spent amongst the multicultural families of fur posts, where kinship ties crossed cultural and racial lines. The octopus bag bearing his name would have been a fitting symbol of his acquired identity.

The woman who made the bag made it a statement of her own identity as well. Black's wives and daughters, like all such women, would have been exposed to information, material culture, visual inspiration, and technical knowledge across cultural lines. Some traders imported dress and embroidery patterns, fabrics, and appropriate ladies' journals for their womenfolk from England. At least one of Black's daughters was raised in eastern Canada,[15] and would there have had access to many other sources for techniques and design influences. Within the spheres of kin, friends, and colleagues which made up the tightly knit and overlapping sectors of fur trade society, women also passed beadwork and embroidery designs and techniques along kinship lines.[16] Within fur trade communities, they would have accompanied tribal and métis kin in appropriate gender-based activities such as berrying and hide-tanning, would have learned to make moccasins, and absorbed tribal perspectives and beliefs about gender and religion as much as they did from their European heritage. Multilingual, schooled in local cultural knowledge, often retaining tribal spiritual beliefs and perspectives as well as practicing Christianity, and most often illiterate, these women did not perceive their roles or their world in the same way as British men—and, later, British women—did.

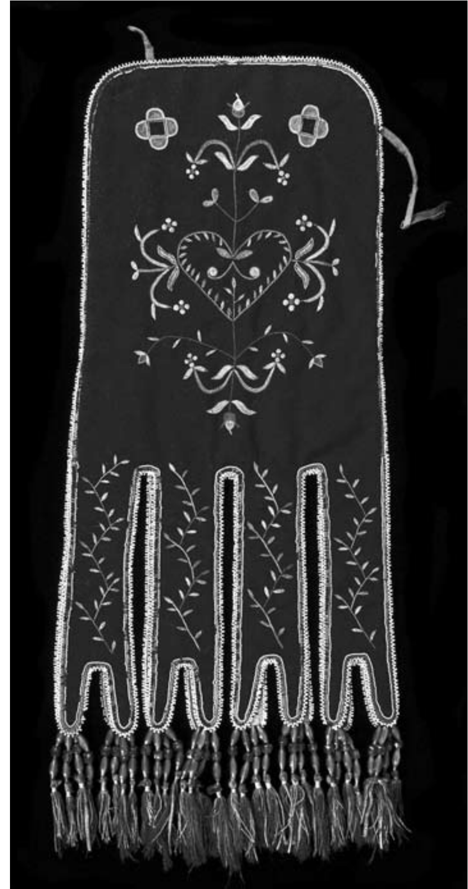
Both embroidery and femininity had very different connotations within this milieu than they did for British women, for whom "the family's [social] position was ensured and protected through the constant exercise and reinforcement of femininity embodied in embroidery … Embroidery represented the bourgeois family's ideal identity drawn from the modes of the gentry and the aristocracy."[17] While middle- and upper-class femininity in Victorian Britain was defined by physical delicacy and submissiveness to male authority, women's identity within Subarctic/Great Lakes tribal and métis societies rested on clothing and feeding one's family, tasks which required hard physical labor (cleaning furs for trade, tanning hides, butchering animals, drying meat and fish, gathering and processing plant foods, gathering firewood, sewing canoes, netting snowshoes, and making clothing and shoes), considerable skill and knowledge, independence, and the ability to obtain trade goods, either through male relatives or by trading moccasins, tumplines, foodstuffs, and other home-produced goods. Skill, knowledge, and success were seen

3.2 S BLACK bag (PRM 1893.67.183), front. Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum

to be manifestations of gifts from powerful spirit beings, so that beautifully embroidered bags signaled not individual skill, but positive relations with spirit beings, and thus spiritual power and well-being. Although most métis became Christian in the early nineteenth century, women who were exceptionally skilled in the decorative arts continued to be regarded as powerful.

Even the leaves and flowers that métis women embroidered and beaded had different iconographic connotations than they did for English women. Whereas floral designs in European societies had connotations of purity and beauty associated with Christian beliefs, métis women were also inspired by women's roles and spiritual beliefs in their own societies and from their tribal kin: women were responsible for gathering berries, roots, and leaves for food and medicinal use, invoking as they did so tribal beliefs about spiritual relations with other-than-human plant beings. While métis women were firmly rooted in native soil, though, they absorbed European material influences along with parentage, language, and material culture. The design on the face of this bag incorporating a central stem with radiating leaves and flowers is common on embroidered, beaded, and porcupine-quilled pouches made by tribal and métis women across the subarctic and its fur trade communities, but is influenced by conventionalized European design seen on textiles, Pennsylvania-Dutch painted chests, altar cloths, vestments, and other imported objects including floral printed cottons from India, painted and transferware china and tea-chests. The design on the S BLACK bag derives from all of these influences and has been nativized in the use of beaded ornaments on the tassels and edging, in the shapes of the flowers and leaves, in the use of floral-motif "eyes"—a remnant of animal forms for these bags—as the anchor points for a cotton twill tape handle. Its fine, careful stitches are entirely European in form, however, as is the embroidered heart on the reverse of the bag. Given the

multicultural heritage of the bag's maker, the cross-cultural influences to which she would have been exposed growing up in a fur trade post as a child (or possibly in an eastern Canadian town), reading the heart for its European meanings and associations seems appropriate: this was a special gift made for a close relative.



3.3 S BLACK bag (PRM 1893.67/184), reverse. Image courtesy of Pitt Rivers Museum

This bag appears to have been made shortly before its collection in 1841–42. It shows no signs of use or wear, no band of chafing where it might have been held to a man's body by a belt, no encrusted dirt from wear or leftover bits of tobacco inside; it is pristine,[18] and was probably never given to its intended recipient. On February 8, 1841, Samuel Black was murdered by one of the tribal men who traded at the Thompson River post he managed in what is now British Columbia. Hopkins, Simpson, and party stopped in Red River as part of their annual tour of inspection of Hudson's Bay Company posts in 1841–42. Red River was a hub for the western and northern fur trade, a key link between the English ships that docked at York Factory on Hudson Bay and the working posts trading pemmican and furs in the interior. Simpson had a residence built there for himself in the early 1830s at Lower Fort Garry, and the community included retired fur traders with their country wives and families, Ojibwa and northern Cree settlements, Scottish and European settlers, and several thousand métis and country-born men and their families, children, and employees of the trade. Black's daughter Jean Black Ballenden was living there in 1840, and the most likely path of the pouch is that she had made it for her father, never had a chance to give it to him living, and—possibly in accordance with tribal heritage, in which the possessions of the dead are given away to aid the mourning process—gave it to Simpson or Hopkins when they came through Red River.[19] The bag existed within Hopkins' collection until his death in 1893. When the bag passed into Hopkins' collection, it moved from being an intimate family

gift to being a memento of a colleague and, given its style, a symbol of what Hopkins would have deemed the "primitive" peoples amongst whom he had traveled. During this shift, it began to embody the problematic issues of race and gender then surfacing within fur trade society.

Given the small scale and dense kin ties within fur trade society, Hopkins and Simpson must have known the name of the bag's maker; she may have given them the bag herself. Her name has not been preserved, however, and this is significant. In part, the loss of the maker's name has been part of the processes through which tribal and métis material culture has been Othered within European scientific and museum contexts, subsuming the productions of individual women or families into the anonymizing trope of primitive, and later tribal, art. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, it signaled more directly the rising anxiety across colonial societies about race, and the ways in which women symbolically fuelled this anxiety. During this period, discourses borrowed from other parts of the empire (particularly India) and from emergent racialist thought within science, began to consider the potential "problems" of native women as mothers of children by British men, and to reify white British wives and mothers as symbols of racial purity. Such debates were influenced by widespread ideas within Victorian society: the development across the mid-nineteenth century of ideas about physical and moral differences between whites and others, and the idea of racial hierarchies; by the establishment of missionaries in Rupert's Land in the 1820s, and the joining of ideas about race to those about sin and morality; and by the circulation of magazines and books across the Company's territory which reinforced and diffused such ideas and reported on developments in other colonial situations.[20]

As Ghosh states: "Colonial societies were deeply anxious about maintaining racial boundaries and hierarchies of colonizing groups; managing sexual behavior and policing racial transgression were critical aspects of this colonial disciplinary regime."[21] Within the Canadian fur trade, such anxieties came to be expressed in the rejection of native women as suitable marriage partners after 1830, in racist attitudes deployed against native and métis women, and in the glorification of imported white British brides of senior HBC officials. Colonial anxieties in this situation, as in others, were linked to status and power, with skin color and morality being deployed as boundaries between social groups. Stoler notes that while cross-cultural marriages and relationships were indeed "tender ties" between peoples, they were also "tense ties," "sites of production of colonial inequities" where the racial politics of empire were created and enforced.[22]

Historian Sylvia Van Kirk has described the processes through which racist attitudes affected fur trade society, beginning in 1830, when the Governor of the HBC, George Simpson, imported his English bride to the northwest.[23] Simpson had earlier had a series of native and métis mistresses,

and had repeatedly failed to treat them as partners or wives "according to the custom of the country;" instead, he referred to them by terms such as "bit[s] of Brown" or "the commodity."[24] Other senior HBC officers followed Simpson's example over the next several decades, creating a racial hierarchy of women (white British women at the top, married to senior white British officers; mixed-blood children of senior traders below them, generally of English-speaking, Protestant backgrounds; francophone Catholic métis below them; followed by tribal women, including the remaining wives of Company officers) which followed the strict male hierarchy and social demarcations within the Company. By the early 1840s, in the Red River settlement where Jean Black Ballenden lived, all parts of the métis community were discriminated against by certain white, upper-class figures, and certain parts of the métis community (notably those with British fathers) actively aspired to British identity. Mixed-blood daughters of senior British fur traders were under especial pressure to acculturate and adopt a British identity and way of life; material culture and dress, as signals of such acculturation, played a crucial role in this system of expectations. By 1854, Henrietta Ross Black—the mixed-blood daughter of a senior Scottish trader, married to the first Presbyterian minister in Red River—wrote to her brother James Ross (then at law school in Toronto): "I would rather not go to [eastern] Canada; how would I an uneducated dark halfbreed look among the fair and accomplished ladies …"[25] Increasingly, across the nineteenth century, wearing moccasins, leggings, or embroidered and beaded bags carried negative connotations and made one a target for racism. Other mixed-blood women found themselves increasingly restricted in their choice of marriage partners, relegated to a racially based social and political category which was increasingly politically and economically marginalized over the remainder of the nineteenth century. The extent to which such women faced racist attitudes and their very real implications is expressed in a comment made in the 1860s recalling Samuel Black's second wife, Angelique, as "a Nativ[e] bitch": not a comment on her character, but a phrase used in the older, technical meaning and thus comparing her to a female dog.[26]

Within such contexts, the loss of the name of the maker of the S BLACK bag must be seen as not accidental, but as part of this pattern. As Durba Ghosh has noted for India, native women were often recorded in colonial documents without names, and the consistent act of "unnaming" these women must be seen as deliberate and revealing:

> By their very absence [from colonial records], it was apparent that local women were the grounds on which boundaries of colonial communities were formed. When native women were recorded without names, they were stripped of their positions as mothers of elite mixed-race men and women who were considered subjects worth recording. Indeed, … mixed-race elites moved up the social scale by erasing any trace of an indigenous past and suppressing their maternal heritage.[27]

However anonymized she was by such dynamics, though, the maker of the S BLACK bag was not suppressing her indigenous heritage; its designs and its conformity to a genre of bags made and worn only within fur trade, métis, and tribal societies signal that she was actively situating herself within the mixed-blood fur trade community. The bag she made expresses her cultural hybridity. One is reminded of Kathleen Wilson's discussion of identity within British imperial contexts of the long eighteenth century, and her insistence that identity is performative: "that is, a citational social practice."[28] The S BLACK bag, with its hybrid material and visual references, is a tour de force of performative identity. It was precisely this hybridity and its material expressions which became threatening to the white upper echelons of fur trade society.

Edward Hopkins, who collected the bag, was part of these processes. Hopkins followed Simpson's example and had an affair with a 15-year old Blood [Kainai] girl on the 1841 trip.[29] Hopkins' first wife, Ann Ogden, died of cholera at Montreal in 1854, leaving three young sons. In 1858, on furlough in England, Hopkins married Frances Anne Beechey (1838–1919), and she came out to live with him in Montreal. The daughter of Rear Admiral Frederick William Beechey, who had explored the Northwest Passage in 1826, Frances Anne came from a tight circle of senior naval and military officers' families and entered a tight circle of senior fur traders' families, many of whom were settled in the "civilized" area of Montreal and Lachine rather than being taken into the interior.[30] This group differentiated and emphasized their rank through their fashionable homes and clothing, their subscriptions to current periodicals, and by socializing almost exclusively amongst themselves, with non-fur trade families of similar status, or with visiting dignitaries: in 1860, the Hopkins attended the "Grand Canoe Reception" given by Sir George Simpson for the Prince of Wales at Lachine, and they went on various excursions with Alexander Grant Dallas, then Governor of Rupert's Land, in the early 1860s. In 1861, Edward Hopkins was appointed Chief Factor of the HBC's Montreal Department, further establishing his position in fur trade society. Frances Anne accompanied him as far as Fort William, on the western edge of Lake Superior, on his travels into the western interior in 1864, 1866, and 1869.[31]

In this setting, the S BLACK bag and the rest of Hopkins' collection functioned as exotic decorations. Its broken red cotton twill tape strap, in contrast to the bag's otherwise pristine condition, suggests that it hung on the wall in the Hopkins' home as a decoration for decades. Many fur traders possessed such collections, and their existence in Montreal or overseas served to authenticate the exotic experiences and special collective identity such individuals acquired through their careers in the interior. Other pieces in Hopkins' collection also appear in several of Frances Anne's later paintings, and one item, a cradleboard, appears to have been modified after construction, possibly for use by the Hopkins' children, with the addition of a doll's head

constructed of Victorian kid gloves and stuffed with the remnant of a fine linen garment.[32]

Frances Anne Beechey Hopkins' relationship with fur trade society, and with this collection, was complex. She was precisely the kind of upper-class English bride of a senior trader whose presence acted as a catalyst in fur trade society to harden imperial attitudes of racism and sexism against tribal and métis women. On the other hand, one needs to beware of imposing a stereotype common in literature on colonial societies, of white women wrecking idyllically portrayed cross-cultural colonial relationships, "a pervasive stereotype that blames British women for disrupting and eventually losing the empire."[33] Discussing Margaret Strobel's work, Malia Formes has argued that across the empire, British women:

> were not solely responsible for intensifying racism or creating wider social distances between colonizers and colonized. Rather, their arrival coincided with other developments in colonial society such as increasing, more virulent racism, the rise of evangelical Christianity, and intensified exploitation of indigenous land and labor.[34]

This was entirely true for the fur trade. Formes goes on to argue that white women themselves had little power as active agents in the process of colonial change (however powerful they were as symbols) because of their own socially disadvantaged position as women within British society:

> European women occupied a more ambiguous position as members of the inferior sex within the superior races. As wives, mothers and hostesses, they participated more indirectly, and possibly with less choice than male officials, in the construction of patriarchal colonial communities and paternalist imperial ideologies.[35]

This seems simplistic, though, as if white women in colonial societies had no power to exercise. Recent work on power in colonial processes emphasizes the dispersed nature of power within such situations and the negotiation of identity as entangled with networks of power and hierarchy.[36]

As the daughter of Admiral Beechey and the wife of Chief Factor Hopkins, Frances Anne was not without power within British society: she was mistress over many domestic servants, would have been lifted into and out of the canoes she painted by métis laborers, and was linked to very powerful and wealthy elements of Victorian society in London. However, the social position which empowered her also constrained her: as was expected of an upper-middle-class adult woman within Victorian society, she acted as a wife, stepmother, mother, and hostess in Lachine and Montreal. She frequently depicted herself in her paintings at her husband's side, "properly" attired in Victorian travelling dress and bonnet (including a light blue draped hatpiece in *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall*, which gives her something of the

appearance of a wilderness Madonna). At the same time, as the granddaughter of a famous portraitist, the daughter of an Arctic explorer, and the wife of a senior fur trader—with opportunities to accompany her husband "into the wilderness"—Frances Anne Beechey Hopkins had perhaps more chance than most women of her generation and station to defy expectations, and she took every chance she had.[37] On these expeditions, as at home, Frances Anne developed her artistic talent, sketching intimate domestic scenes and those of what must to her have seemed exotic Canadian ones. Like embroidery, sketching and painting in watercolors was commonly taught to British women of social status as appropriate activities to perform ideals of feminine behavior and submissiveness—activities which "could be managed within the constraints imposed by household duties and childbearing" expected of such women.[38] Frances Anne was presumably trained within these expectations, and her step-grandson recalled that "her own family disapproved of a woman 'taking up art' in any but the most genteel and amateurish way."[39] However, she negotiated and defied such expectations in adulthood as she began to pursue her own artistic career at a level seldom sought for or attained by women. Perhaps because of her own family background—her grandfather, Sir William Beechey (1753–1839), was acknowledged as an important portrait painter, and her Arctic explorer father was also an artist,[40] so perhaps she saw herself as coming from an artistic family and thus somehow entitled to defy convention—and perhaps because of her own character, Frances Anne took her art increasingly into the male realm over time, moving into oils—traditionally a men's medium—and into the professional arenas of exhibition and sales.[41]

Frances Anne's first major exhibition in London was at the Royal Society of British Artists Exhibition in 1867, showing a woodland landscape and two distinctively "Canadian" scenes, one of a native canoe guide and one a canoe encampment. Edward Hopkins retired in 1869, and the Hopkins returned to England, a moment which coincided with her professional career's upswing. In May 1869, only a few months after the death of a child, she exhibited her painting *Canoes in a Fog, Lake Superior* at the Royal Academy. Between 1869 and 1918 she had 13 works accepted for exhibition at the Royal Academy (which did not admit women as full members in the nineteenth century) and other major shows in England.[42] After Edward's death in 1893, Frances Anne "was actively involved in the business of art, as a means of providing herself with additional income. As indicated by her letters, she had a studio, commissions, and sales, and sent work to commercial galleries." *Canoes in a Fog, Lake Superior* was engraved by Charles Mottram, who also did Landseer's engraving, and was widely sold in North America.[43] Unlike the maker of Samuel Black's bag, Frances Anne signed her paintings with the initials FAH, signaling her literacy, her professional status, and her participation in British society at the upper echelon of wealth and power.

3.4 Frances Anne Beechey Hopkins, *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall*. Oil on canvas, 1869. Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1989-401-1

Frances Anne Beechey Hopkins thus both existed within and defied conventions of Victorian gender roles. She dutifully step-parented, bore (and buried) children, and acted as a "proper" wife and hostess for her husband, and her career did not develop until after she had fulfilled those expectations: although she had major exhibitions during the course of her marriage, her career did not take off until her husband retired, and she did not become "professional" until after she had been widowed.[44] She shifted from watercolor and graphite, deemed appropriate for "ladies' accomplishments," to oils, the medium of the professional male artist; she exhibited at "important" venues, arenas of power and status firmly controlled by men. She never achieved the fame that Elizabeth Butler, another late-nineteenth-century woman painter, did, but she was one of a relatively small number of professional women painters during the period who showed at the Royal Academy and venues of similar status,[45] and she enjoyed a certain amount of professional and commercial success during her lifetime.

Hopkins' paintings were, like her, an equal mix of convention and defiance of it. *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall*, which exemplifies her best-known works, uses the realistic detail and narrative framing of much English painting of the mid and later nineteenth century. The viewer's eye roves along the figures, focusing on details of clothing and material culture: the artist in Victorian dress and hat, her husband's tailored coat, hat, and full beard, the voyageurs' shirts and finger-woven *ceintures*, a painted hide robe, the paddles and the canoe itself. In demure blue and white, Frances Anne seems the vision of Victorian respectability, oddly transposed to the wilderness. She holds one

water-lily, and a voyageur is plucking another. We wonder: who are these people, and where are they going?

As Janet Clark has noted, Hopkins' canoe and voyageur paintings:

> are very much a part of the Victorian narrative tradition, which … called for clarity and a high degree of realism, in order for the viewer to be able to "read the picture" … [It] was a very constructed and detailed version of reality that the artists depicted. These were studio paintings, composed carefully and executed slowly, built up, using models, props, and preliminary drawings and sketches. There is little immediacy associated with this type of painting, which did not represent "a slice of life" but rather approximated theatre sets with a drama being enacted for the entertainment (and often for the moral edification) of the viewer.[46]

Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall is not, however, the usual pastoral English landscape; the rock and water, and the canoe, are the essence of the iconography of the Canadian wilderness.[47] Nor is it narrative in the sense of retelling a myth or historic event; rather, it "tells" the story of the ideals of British colonial society, in which British people bring the light of civilization into the exotic wilderness, aided by friendly but swarthy natives. As in several of Hopkins' paintings, *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall* exoticizes and romanticizes "wilderness" scenery and juxtaposes this with strong referents to English cultural norms which reinforce the Othering of local peoples. In this image, Hopkins' depiction of herself as "properly and decently" attired, and as the literal and metaphorical center of the image, provides the point against which the darker-skinned, exotically (and rather less) attired voyageurs act as counterpoint, and sets herself as an English flower in the Canadian wilderness. The overall effect is to reify the exoticism of fur trade society and to naturalize its racial hierarchies, showing Hopkins both physically part of and socially distanced from the mixed-blood population at the heart of the trade. While the Hopkins in the painting are clearly dependent on the métis paddlers, that they are not paddling themselves underscores the racially based dynamics of power which characterized the fur trade after mid-century.

Situated firmly within a genre we might call the Exotic Colonial, this is also a nostalgic image, a characteristic feature of Hopkins' work which fits classically within anthropologist Renato Rosaldo's explication of "imperialist nostalgia," a longing for what has been destroyed by those whose actions have led to its destruction.[48] Janet Clark has noted that by the time the Hopkins retired to England and Frances Anne began exhibiting and painting in earnest, the HBC had transferred title of Rupert's Land to the Crown in 1869: the fur trade empire had become a shadow of its former self.[49] Even the canoe system that had been the key to the movement of vast quantities of goods and furs was giving way in many areas to steamers.[50] Hopkins' paintings are not so much documentary as re-enactment, romantic evocations of former exotic

glory. They are part of the many forms of representation which translated "the violence of colonial conquest into a frontier pastoral," in Ulrich's words.[51] They take the British fascination with the Other, and with the penetration of British people into exotic settings, and depict the processes through which British people came to control and to possess colonial situations, in the most beautiful way possible.[52] All this racially based discrimination can be read from a painting by someone who struggled against many of the gender-based social conventions and dynamics of power of her time.

Conclusion

On Edward Hopkins' death in 1893, the S BLACK bag was donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford, along with several hundred other items also collected on Simpson's 1841–42 voyage. The bag was categorized within scholarly emphases as made by a tribal woman, conforming to expectations of cultural purity and the denial of hybridity then in vogue in museums. *Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall* exists as an oil painting in the National Archives of Canada, an iconic image of a mythic Canadian history.

The stories we tell about ourselves and Others within colonial situations matter: they create and reflect relations of power. The insistence by museum scholars of the cultural purity and authenticity of the maker of Samuel Black's bag, and the romantic nostalgia of Frances Anne Beechey Hopkins' paintings, say a good deal about the nature of the stories which have been told about fur trade society and its role in the establishment of settler society in Canada. We are now telling rather different stories, prompted in part by a re-examination of material culture and its production and consumption. Objects are nexuses for social relations; paying careful attention to their meanings, production, uses, transfer to other societies, offers important clues to the nature of historical relationships. Their deployment within the cross-cultural dynamics of colonialism serves to perform colonialism, to bring it into being.[53] Flags, dress clothing, sacred objects, and objects denoting rank were the stuff of colonial societies, and were used, adopted, enforced, or rejected in the processes of establishing colonial rule to indicate allegiance, defiance, conformity to or rejection of expectations of gender, race, and rank. Material culture became a series of "social performances of nationality, freedom, gender, and rank … [which functioned as] acts of resounding political importance" in the construction of identities within the empire.[54]

Looking more closely at these two objects and the women who made them suggests some of the complexities of identity in fur trade society. The meanings of the S BLACK bag in its contexts of production, as a loving gift to a close relative, its place within a history of domestic relationships between British traders and native and métis women, with its potential function as

a marker of Samuel Black's complex, acquired identity—these meanings continue, to include the bag's later function as a marker of colonial anxiety focused on the "taint" of native and métis women and the increasing racism these women faced across the nineteenth century. They resonate with the meanings of Frances Anne's painting within her constrained life as a Victorian woman and her defiance of those constraints to work professionally, as well as her complicity with colonial processes in her nostalgic images and her participation in a racial hierarchy which affected the lives of women such as the maker of the S BLACK bag—all of these realities significantly complicate and open up earlier stories about these objects, and help us to understand fur trade society as part of British colonial society as it was experienced in lived detail. Material culture can serve as important evidential sources for such situations, including aspects of colonial society which have otherwise been deliberately erased or unrecorded. The very physicality of objects, their survival in museums and archives, provides opportunities for analysis which are both uncomfortable and profitable in terms of existing evidential sources and narratives.

In the end, both of these objects materialize the identities of their makers within a complex social system in which race and gender mattered deeply.[55] Intriguingly, their makers—women who occupied very different parts of fur trade society, who would never have socialized together—were linked by relationships between their male kin, and their work inspired by these men. Rather than reading this simply as an issue of gender, it is a stark reminder that the most "intimate frontiers"[56] of empire were very much those of the home, the family, and the things one made and used within those spaces.

Notes

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1. Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 33. The work of Wilson and others on the long eighteenth century and the processes of empire across it is highly relevant to the Canadian fur trade, which developed across that period.
2. Wilson, *The Island Race*.
3. Kathleen Wilson, "Introduction," in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1600–1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.
4. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
5. On gender relations across cultural and racial lines within colonial societies, see, for example: Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *Journal of American History* 88 (2001): 829–66; Durba Ghosh, "Decoding

the Nameless: Gender, Subjectivity, and Historical Methodologies in Reading the Archives of Colonial India," in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1600–1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson, 297–316 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Nupur Chauduri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (London: Routledge, 1995).

6. Overviews of and major works on fur trade social history include: Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980; reprinted, 1998, University of Oklahoma Press/UBC Press); Brown, "Partial Truths: A Closer Look at Fur Trade Marriage," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada: Essays in Honour of John E. Foster*, eds. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. MacLeod, 59–80 (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001); Brown, "Names and Metaphors in Metis Historiography: Old Categories and Nouvelles Eclaircies," *Recherches Amerindiennes au Quebec*, 2007 (in press); Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670–1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, "What if Mama is an Indian? The Cultural Ambivalence of the Alexander Ross Family," in *The Developing West: Essays on Canadian History in Honor of Lewis H. Thomas*, ed. John E. Foster, 125–36 (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983); Michael Payne, "Fur Trade Historiography: Past Conditions, Present Circumstances and a Hint of Future Prospects," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, 3–22; Kenneth Coates, "Writing First Nations into Canadian History: A Review of Recent Scholarly Works," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 1 (March 2000): 99–114.

7. But see important exceptions: Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles, *Collecting Colonialism* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Nupur Chauduri, "Shawls, Jewelry, Curry and Rice in Victorian Britain," in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, 231–46 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

8. Cited in Katherine A. Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames, eds., "Introduction," in *The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture* (Winterthur, Delaware: Winterthur Museum, and Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 2.

9. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 250.

10. An earlier analysis of the S BLACK bag's history was published as Laura Peers, "'Many Tender Ties': The Shifting Contexts and Meanings of the S BLACK Bag," *World Archaeology* 31 (1999): 288–302.

11. Kate Duncan, "The Evolution of Two Algonquian Bag Forms," in *Out of the North: The Subarctic Collection of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University*, eds. Barbara Hail and Kate Duncan, 87–95 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989).

12. Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 259.

13. The origins and development of fur trade marriage "à la facon du pays" are discussed in Brown, *Strangers in Blood*; Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*; and reviewed in Brown, "Partial Truths."

14. In accordance with current historiographical convention in Canada, I will use "métis" with a small "m" to designate all persons of mixed European and Aboriginal descent, including those whose fathers were of British origin (and were generally Protestant and English-speaking), and Métis with a capital "M" to indicate the historic Métis Nation, a francophone and largely Catholic population based around the Red River Settlement.

15. See Black's will, PRO Prob.11/1980, Image ref. 213, proved June 13, 1843.

16. This statement is based on conversations and interviews with First Nations and Métis women about historic artifacts; on the work of Sherry Farrell Racette. Duncan and Hail also began to document this pattern in their book *Out of the North*.

17. Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984), 159.

18. Pristine, that is, except for its worn tape handle where it was probably hung on a peg for display in the Hopkins' home.

19. The bag's maker might have been Black's then wife, a métis woman known as Angelique who was presumably living with him at the time of his murder. Since Black's daughter was living in the Red River settlement, through which Simpson and Hopkins are known to have passed on their trip, it is perhaps a better possibility that she made it and then gave it away to her father's senior colleagues. There is very little documentation on the circumstances of the bag's acquisition by

Hopkins and Simpson, which rather muddies the waters about the question of its maker. We know that Angelique married a métis man shortly after Black's death; she then disappears from fur trade records. Jean Black Ballenden lived in Red River until her death. Intriguingly, she is known to have been illiterate, raising the question of the name on the bag: did she copy it from the stencil on a travelling trunk?

20. See Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, and "What if Mama is an Indian?"
21. Ghosh, "Decoding the Nameless," 302.
22. Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties," 831–2.
23. Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 185–7.
24. Ibid., 201, 161–2.
25. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Ross Papers, no. 495, *circa* 1854, Henrietta Black RR to James Ross Toronto.
26. HBCA B.134/c/95, fos.90–91, H. Maxwell to [unknown], July 17, 1864. Black's Scottish family, who were unaware of his fur trade wives and children, also contested his will, claiming that his children were illegitimate.
27. Ghosh, "Decoding the Nameless," 303.
28. Wilson, "Introduction," in *The Island Race*, 3, citing Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
29. HBCA D 5/7, fos. 102–3, John Rowand to George Simpson, July 12, 1842.
30. Both Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, and Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, note senior traders retiring to "civilization" in these areas.
31. Janet E. Clark, "Frances Anne Hopkins (1838–1919): Canadian Scenery," in *Frances Anne Hopkins 1838–1919: Canadian Scenery*, eds. Janet E. Clark and Robert Stacey (Thunder Bay, ON: Thunder Bay Art Gallery, 1990), 19, 21.
32. The cradleboard is in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum.
33. Malia B. Formes, *"Beyond Complicity versus Resistance: Recent Work on Gender and European Imperialism," Journal of Social History 28 (Spring 1995): 629–41, 630.*
34. Ibid., 631.
35. Ibid., 631.
36. See, for example, Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, "Introduction," in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850*, eds. Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, 6–10 (London: UCL Press, 1999); Wilson, *The Island Race*, 3, considering issues of identity and power within the imperial system.
37. In July 1863, for instance, Frances Anne was in Governor Dallas' canoe when it shot the Lachine Rapids, an early bit of tourist excitement she later recorded in her painting *Shooting the Rapids*; she also gave birth to a daughter that year and may well have been pregnant during the event. See "Chronology," in Clark and Stacey, *Frances Anne Hopkins*, 105.
38. Clark, "Frances Anne Hopkins," 17, see also 15.
39. Ibid., 15, citing Grace Lee Nute Papers, University of Minnesota.
40. Ibid., 15.
41. Susan P. Casteras, "'The Necessity of a Name': Portrayals and Betrayals of Victorian Women Artists," in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art*, eds. Antony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 209; Casteras notes that oils were a men's medium.
42. These included the Royal Society of British Artists, the Royal Society of Artists, Birmingham, and the Society of Women Artists. See Robert Stacey, "Frances Anne Hopkins and the Canoe-Eye View," in *Frances Anne Hopkins 1838–1919: Canadian Scenery*, eds. Janet E. Clark and Robert Stacey (Thunder Bay, ON: Thunder Bay Art Gallery, 1990), 57.
43. Clark, "Frances Anne Hopkins," 17, 23.

44. On the careers of women artists, see Casteras, "The Necessity of a Name," 207; and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women's Press, 1987).
45. Clark, "Frances Anne Hopkins," 17; Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*.
46. Clark, "Frances Anne Hopkins," 27.
47. Ibid., 26.
48. Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," in *Culture And Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, 68–90 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).
49. Clark, "Frances Anne Hopkins," 26.
50. Ibid., 27.
51. Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, 250.
52. Wilson, *The Island Race*, 67. Wilson has explored issues of desire and possession in representations of earlier exotic settings and natives, specifically of Omai who accompanied Cook back to England from the Pacific voyages.
53. Gosden and Knowles, *Collecting Colonialism*.
54. Wilson, *A New Imperial History*, 6.
55. See Wilson, *The Island Race*, 3: "identities were, and are, inextricably bound to a historical social order and both concretized and challenged through practices of everyday life."
56. Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties," 830, citing Alberto Hurtado.