

Stamps, Money, Pop Culture, and Marianne Moore

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This essay began as an occasional piece, piqued by the appearance in 1990 of the Marianne Moore twenty-five cents postage stamp (figure 1). The use of the images of literary figures for postal purposes (begun in 1940, with thirty-seven issued to date) is intriguing in itself. And Moore's appearance in the series particularly intrigued me because it employs as sign of the authority of the government the image of a woman who spent her life questioning just such established authority. In achieving stamp status, Moore, whose work tirelessly explores issues of cultural authority and the cultural currency by which it circulates, has herself become an image of authority, with a currency of her own.

Over her sixty-year career, Marianne Moore published twelve books and received many prizes. Her early work, however, though highly regarded by her peers, was little read, principally because it actively impeded reading by any but the most dedicated followers of Art, willing to struggle with a poem in full awareness that they might never arrive at a clear sense of its meaning. Her later poetry was, on



Figure 1. "Marianne Moore: American Poet, 1887-1972." © U.S. Postal Service. Used with permission of the US Postal Service.

the other hand, frequently quite accessible — though I will go on to suggest that its accessibility was itself a coded consideration of the relation between popularity and authority. Its status as metacriticism notwithstanding, the later poetry was more widely read, the publication of the poems "Hometown Piece for Messers. Alston and Reese" and "For February 14th" on the front page of the *New York Herald Tribune* being perhaps the occasions of her widest readership.

The popularity of Moore's later poetry was aided by her public image as a sweet, eccentric old woman who embodied a generalized sense of patriotism in her tendency to dress up as



Figure 2. "Marianne Moore in cape and tricorne under the Brooklyn Bridge, 3 November 1962." Photo: Esther Bubley. Used with permission of The Rosenbach Museum & Library.

George Washington (in cape and tricorne hat) (figure 2) and in her emphatic love of baseball. This image was promulgated through magazines and TV talk shows and became part of the pop-cultural lore of America of the 1950s and 1960s. Both the poetry and the popular persona of the later phase of Moore's career have generally been looked down on by her critics.¹ Though he has since revised his view somewhat, John Slatin, in his 1986 book on Moore, forgoes consideration of the later poetry on the assumption that after 1940 her work began to decline and that the work of the fifties and sixties lacks interest entirely. This lack of interest he attributes to a radically simpli-

fied style which trades subtle parodies and ironies for attempts at straightforward literary mimesis and a new moralistic tone (*Savage's* 13-17).² In more recent work, Slatin has recognized that Moore's later work and her persona respond to constraints placed on her by gender ("What public language could a woman poet speak in the '50s?" he asks). But even his revised view reads the work and the persona as diminutions and as effects over which Moore had "at best minimal control" ("Something" 95).

It is my contention that rather than involving a decline in her poetic capacities, a departure from the concerns of her early work, or a worn-out retirement from the field of real poetic endeavor, Moore's movement into the popular arena represents a complex handling of her paradoxical position as a poet who both aspired to authoritative status and questioned the hierarchical terms on which such authority circulated. In what follows I will explore Moore's attitudes toward poetic authority and the means of its circulation, in work from both her early and later career, and trace out the logic behind the transition from one to the other. I will close with a reading of her recent accession to stardom as a fit symbol of her campaign to cross the high/low dividing line, and in the process to raise questions about the kinds of authority involved on each side of the line and the functions of the line itself.

Moore on Authority

Recent work on the relations between high and popular culture has made their interdependence clear. While each defines itself as separate from the other, the contrast is necessary to the definitions. Andreas Huyssen has pointed to the ways in which high modernism defined itself through exclusion of the popular, and Jonathan Freedman has suggested that while popular culture may seem to ignore its elite counterpart, in fact it refers to established elite authority frequently as guarantor of its own value by claiming a version of that elite status within the popular arena (for example, "Elvis is king").

Relatedly, the role of highbrow poet involves a performance of that part for an audience, an audience whose "high" and "popular" constituencies may be difficult to distinguish at times. For instance, T.S. Eliot became the image of the great poet for both high and popular audiences, in part because his work was difficult, but equally importantly because the difficulty seemed masterable with a little effort. Even if popular

audiences didn't read it, they were impressed by the reassuring suggestion of Eliot's capacity to answer hard questions, his demonstration of authority.³

Wallace Stevens, on the other hand, has played to a basically highbrow audience, and his relative unknownness in the popular world contributes to his continued success with the highbrow set.⁴ (Over time Eliot's decodability and wide audience have led to his loss of status among elite readers.⁵) Stevens performs the role of highbrow for the highbrows in a manner that resonates with the same appeal-through-exclusivity that makes Eliot appeal to the popular world. Part of the appeal of both is the performance of authority.

As a female American modernist poet hoping to negotiate a position of authority for her own voice, Moore met four impediments, each one corresponding to a word in that description. In the first place, as a *poet* she struggled against a sense of secondariness to those who went before her, and attempted to establish that combination of difference and traditionalism that lends authority to new voices. In the second place, the *modernist* period was characterized by a strong sense of temporal secondariness. Through its explicit reference to temporal position (modern is specifically not ancient), the name "modern" both signals anxiety about that position and attempts to assuage it. In the third place, *American* modernists, aware of the dependence of their culture on European cultures, experienced a further sense of secondariness, requiring even greater attention to the methods of winning authority. And finally, *women* poets in this period received the special secondary treatment that feminine gender has always won them.

For all modernists, the achievement of authority involved some sparring with predecessors. Pound, for instance, begins the second of his *Cantos* with "Hang it all, Robert Browning, / there can be but one 'Sordello.'" Here the reference is to Browning's *Sordello*, a poetic "biography" of the troubadour. But this lament about Browning's greater authority modulates in the next line into "But Sordello, and my Sordello? / Lo Sordels si fo di Mantovano" (6). In citing a text about Sordello in Provençal, Pound suggests that his version of Sordello would be closer to the original than Browning's and so would have authority equal to or greater than Browning's.

The achievement of modernist authority also involved some self-conscious inquiry into the methods of authority. For instance, in *The Waste Land* Eliot constructs a primer on the processes of poetic succession and points out that poetic au-

thority is always in flux. This insight then works as the basis for his claim to some of that authority. Both Pound and Eliot encroached upon the authority of their predecessors, but they did not go on to bring their own authority into question once it was established. Once admitted to the club, they then worked to maintain its exclusivity.

This exclusivity worked in a wider frame as well. Gilbert and Gubar as well as Huyssen have suggested that high modernism developed as a masculine preserve, defended against what were felt to be the encroachments of women on the literary field. Modernism's difficulty — its mechanical quality, its abstraction, and its learnedness — all worked to enforce this exclusion. Like her peers, Moore inquired into methods of authority in order to claim a portion for herself, but her gender complicated the process. To win admission to this group, Moore presented herself as a spinster without traditionally "feminine" interests (her lifelong interest in the technical aspects of baseball participates in this presentation) and refrained from any "feminine" expression of emotion or even of apparent interest in human relations in her poetry. These qualities, in concert with her difficult, abstract, and peculiarly learned work, brought her early inclusion among the high modernist set. But in spite of her success in numbering herself among this elite, Moore remained a woman of course, one of those against whom the barriers had been constructed. As such, she was caught in a paradox that made security in her elite position impossible and ensured that she continue to identify with the outside in some measure. As a result, where Eliot and Pound stopped questioning the bases of authority once they achieved it, Moore continued to be invested in such questioning throughout her career.⁶ She never abandoned her pursuit of authority, but it was continually complicated by her simultaneous critique of authority's means and its limited circuit.

Moore's early work displays an absorption with both those who wield authority and the methods of its expression. Over and over, these poems find the grounds on which authority is established to be arbitrary and its means of expression duplicitous. Perhaps the most telling example comes in the history of the poem "Poetry." This poem, in its longer versions, works to distinguish poetry from nonpoetry on the basis not of form (no distinction between poetry and prose is admitted) and not on the kind of image employed ("nor," we are told, "is it valid / to discriminate against 'business documents and / school-books'; all these phenomena are important"). Instead, the criterion is genuineness:

Poetry

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all
 this fiddle.
 Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one
 discovers in
 it, after all, a place for the genuine.
 Hands that can grasp, eyes
 that can dilate, hair that can rise
 if it must, these things are important not because a
 high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because
 they are
 useful. When they become so derivative as to become
 unintelligible,
 the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
 do not admire what
 we cannot understand: the bat
 holding on upside down or in quest of something to
 eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf
 under
 a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that
 feels a flea, the base-
 ball fan, the statistician—
 nor is it valid
 to discriminate against "business documents and
 school-books"; all these phenomena are important. One must
 make a distinction
 however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the
 result is not poetry,
 nor till the poets among us can be
 "literalists of
 the imagination"—above
 insolence and triviality and can present
 for inspection, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them,"
 shall we have
 it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,
 the raw material of poetry in
 all its rawness and
 that which is on the other hand
 genuine, you are interested in poetry.
 (Complete Poems 266-67)

What the genuine consists of is never stated explicitly, but it becomes apparent, as Slatin has argued, that the genuine

represents for Moore exactly what has not become hackneyed, what has not already won the authority of belonging to the realm of "poetry in general" (*Savage's* 46). Once an image has been used or presented in a particular way, it becomes familiar and, in Moore's terms, is no longer eligible to be poetry. As a result, the category of the genuine is always in flux. The argument of the poem continues in the interplay between the poem and the notes that Moore provided to two of its phrases, which she borrowed from attempts by established literary authorities (Tolstoy and Yeats) to define the field of poetry. Both Moore borrows (slightly transformed) in order to disagree:

Diary of Tolstoy, p. 84: "Where the boundary between prose and poetry lies, I shall never be able to understand. The question is raised in manuals of style, yet the answer to it lies beyond me. Poetry is verse: prose is not verse. Or else poetry is everything with the exception of business documents and school books."

"Literalists of the imagination." Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil* (A.H. Bullen, 1903), p. 182. "The limitation of his view was from the very intensity of his vision; he was a too literal realist of imagination, as others are of nature; and because he believed that the figures seen by the mind's eye, when exalted by inspiration, were 'eternal existences,' symbols of divine essences, he hated every grace of style that might obscure their lineaments." (*Complete Poems* 267-68)

Moore aims to claim authority for the unauthoritative, a complex move with the principal purpose of maneuvering herself into a position of authority. This is not merely a cynical move, nor is it unfamiliar; in fact the move has an authority of its own, which Moore points to obliquely via her footnote to Yeats on Blake. In aligning herself with Blake against Yeats, Moore lines up on the devil's team; that is, the team of literary insurgency represented in Blake's cosmology by Milton's Satan. For Moore, as for Blake, established authority is by definition a fraud. As with money, the value of which is dependent on its circulation, in the model Moore presents here, poetic authority maintains its cultural currency only when it too is in motion, from generation to generation, from poet to poet. But where money may move in limited circuits and maintain its strength, Moore's model specifically insists that the circuits of poetic authority be opened wide. Her refusal to rank kinds of poetic material applies by analogy to kinds of poets as well. This model contrasts

with the kinds of authority she speaks against in poems like "To a Steamroller," where authority's circuit is limited and asserted by force.

"Poetry" was well known and well liked, in all its subversive playfulness. But its argument created problems for its creator. For if it was "genuine" on first publication, once it became well known, by its own lights, it lost some of its genuineness. For later publications, Moore revised the poem substantially and managed in so doing to disperse some of the familiarity. Finally Moore cut the poem again, to three lines, and printed one of the longer versions in the endnotes. This version reads:

Poetry

I, too, dislike it.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one

it, after all, a place for the genuine. (*Complete Poems* 36)

By relegating the well-known longer version to the endnotes, Moore again brings into question this and any poem's claims to stability and authority. At the same time, she creates a sense of alienation for the reader, who does not know how to take a poem exiled to the notes, and this unfamiliarity allows for (though it does not ensure) the prerequisite genuineness.⁷

The habit of publishing different versions of poems in different collections is just one of the means by which the authority of Moore's own poems comes under investigation at a structural level within the poems. In addition, as I have mentioned, many of the poems have notes appended, the reading of which makes readers' experiences of the poems differ. The networks of quotations Moore builds into many of her poems also complicate the poems' ability to speak for themselves. By constructing her poems as patchworks of borrowed phrases, Moore speaks while seeming not to speak; she claims the authority of originality by literally renouncing *authority*. In so doing she skirts the cultural prohibition against women poets. To the extent that she cannot avoid some identification with femininity, Moore's frequent association of herself with unauthoritative texts works to make that identification non-threatening: throughout her *oeuvre* she borrows phrases from pointedly "unvaluable" work coded feminine — such little-regarded texts as inscriptions on park monuments, conversations overheard, books of the sort we generally consider "secondary material" (like biographies and religious commentaries), and

ad copy. The presence of such materials is emphasized in the notes, where their bibliographic origins are carefully cited (for example, a note to a phrase in "People's Surroundings" gives precise details of publication and then goes on to cite in full the eleven-line ad).

A fourth complication of the structural kind comes via another function of the quotation marks, which also work to mark statements as ironic. Each use of the marks introduces the possibility that the line they enclose is offered ironically. As a result, the poems' relation to all the phrases in quotations becomes irresolvably uncertain. Moore's use of irony thus differs from the most simple use of the device to mean the opposite of what is said, a use which specifies a definite meaning, though indirectly. And the irony spreads beyond the quotation marks: the status of the words not set in quotes becomes equally uncertain, since no relation of contrast to those that are in quotes is established. By pointedly opening the poem to all possible readings, Moore ironizes the possibility of certainty about meaning *per se*. This stance points up the uncertainty inherent in every text. At the same time that it denies the authority of any single reading, this method emphasizes the extent to which each reader has authority to determine for herself the meaning of all texts. And the example of the poet's femininity suggests that the larger social contexts in which her readers construct their existence are also open to alternative readings.

Thus the critique of authority in Moore's early poetry works within a context of elite authority that both defends against the critique and provides her with some of what she questions. But in the latter stages of her career Moore partially abandons this position of elite authority — in the poetry itself and in her development into a popular "personality."

The changes evolved gradually. During the forties, in response to the Second World War, Moore's work became more explicitly antiauthoritarian. Some critics have felt that this work represents the beginning of Moore's movement into easy moralism and sentimentality. But in fact, as Charles Molesworth points out, moral issues had structured Moore's work all along (232). Moore came from a deeply religious background, and she linked all aspects of her life, including the aesthetic, to her moral and religious concerns. Her moral focus animates the concerns with fairness and with a just distribution of authority that characterize both her poetic methods and her choice of subject matter. The moral focus of her poems was never entirely disinterested, however, since her own relation to author-

ity — either in seeking it or in exercising it (for instance, during her tenure as editor of *The Dial* [1925-29]) — was always an absorbing concern.

In 1951, Moore's *Collected Poems* won the Pulitzer, the Bollingen, the National Book Award, and the National Institute of Arts and Letters' Gold Medal for poetry. This bouquet of honors defined Moore in the public eye as a champion poet and attracted reporters, who found in Moore's eccentric speech and manner an appealing subject. And Moore played to her fans, allowing herself to be put into cute situations for interviews and emphasizing her eccentricity by adopting the cape and tricorne to look "like Washington crossing the Delaware" (Holley 135). In the fifties and sixties, Moore developed a reputation as a daffy, intense spinster poet. Her photo was taken at baseball games; she even threw out the first ball at the opening day Yankees game in 1968 (figure 3). She was the subject of a feature article in *Sports Illustrated* and appeared with Cassius Clay (figure 4), with whom she wrote a poem. Moore's correspondence with Ford Motors about a name for the car that finally, on the suggestion of someone else, was named Edsel was later published in the *New Yorker*. (Moore suggested several possibilities, among them Utopian Turtletop and Mongoose Givique, both names that demonstrate an ironized awareness of the animal range from which car names often come.) On the cover of *Esquire*, she was anointed an "unknockable," defined as someone who "in a time when everybody hates somebody — nobody hates" (figure 5). She appeared on talk shows, including Johnny Carson's; endorsed products; and wrote essays for such popular magazines as *Vogue* and *Seventeen*. These appearances won their piquancy from the incongruity of the match between a figure associated with high culture and these popular contexts. Through such appearances she created herself as a parody of a great artist — as the image of a great artist performed for a popular audience.

Moore's image reaffirmed the world of popular culture in its opinion that the world of "high" culture was out of touch, at the same time that her apparent kindness stilled lingering fears of high culture's judgmental elitism. Moore's age and status as a single woman also fed her appeal: insofar as she seemed sweet and a bit befuddled, she acted as a reassuring counter to the dread that old women, especially spinsters, sometimes engender as reminders both of death and, in their apparent sexlessness, of the possibility that women may escape the sex-work hierarchy.

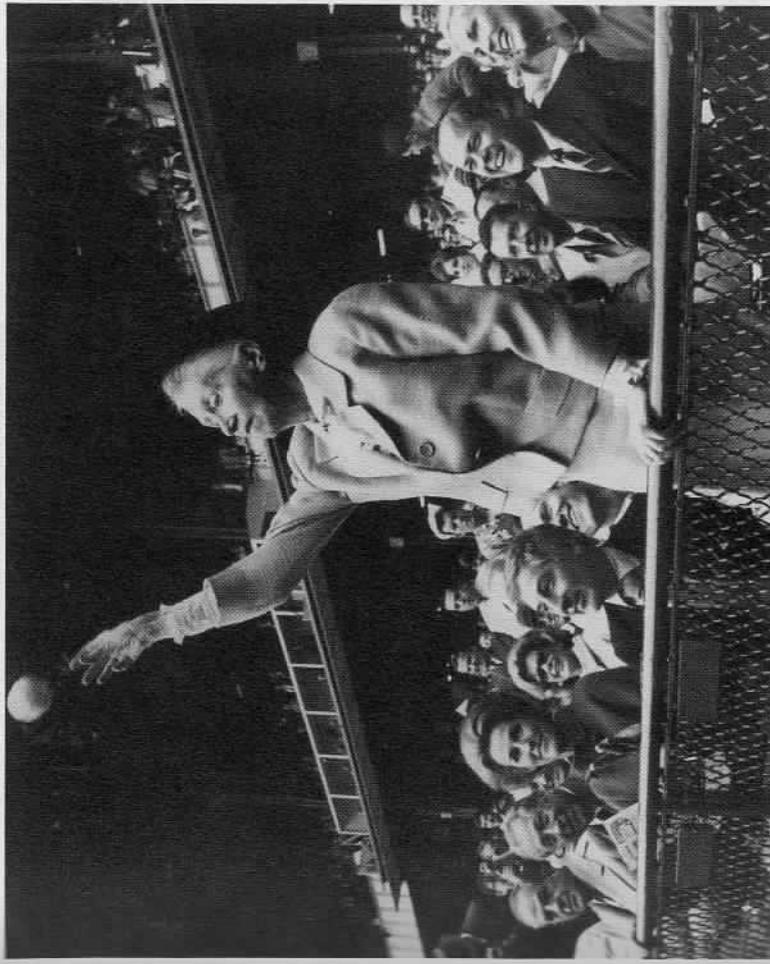


Figure 3. "Marianne Moore throwing out first ball at Yankee Stadium." Photo: Bob Olen. Used with permission of The Rosenbach Museum & Library.



Figure 4. "Marianne Moore and Cassius Clay at Toots Shor." Used with permission of AP/Wide World Photos.



Figure 5. "The Unknockables." Used with permission of Esquire.

Hilton Kramer has suggested that Moore "may very well have been the last spinster type created by the communications industry before the women's movement radically altered the terms of media mythmaking." Whether or not this radical alteration has occurred, the myth about Moore persists in elite literary circles. Moore's critics often assume both that the persona coincides with the later Moore and that the two deserve condensation. As a result, her later work is seen as a decline rather than as a move into a different arena, in which different criteria rule.⁸

I would argue that Moore's move into the popular arena does involve a continuation of the methods and concerns of her earlier work — only where before she created models of fluctuating authority in her poems, in her popular incarnation she puts herself in play. The woman who felt free enough to relegate "Poetry," her own most authoritative poem, to the notes in the back of the book (across the tracks, so to speak, from the poetry itself), then did the same with herself.

The openness of her poetry to many readings that Moore stressed is a prominent feature of the popular, mass cultural realm into which she moved. While different readers of literary magazines will understand the same text variously, the fact that they have chosen to read the magazine at all suggests that they share some interests and assumptions and that their various readings will have much in common as well. In moving beyond the realm of the literary magazine, where if her texts were ambiguous her own position was fairly clear, Moore moved into an arena where she was the text, open to multiple readings.

At the same time that Moore made a performance piece of her persona, she produced poems that moved in the opposite direction, toward a greater stability of meaning. While her poems continued to *look* much as they had, their narratives became more continuous and their messages more summarizable. They were frequently occasional works, directed to a popular audience; for instance, "Hometown Piece for Messers. Alton and Reese" celebrates the 1955 and 1956 Brooklyn Dodgers in the language of sportscasters (to be sung to the tune of "Hush Little Baby"). At one level, these simpler poems operated as a warranty for her public persona: like that persona, they seemed eccentric but kindly. At another level, their accessibility supported the principle behind the move out of the elite literary realm: while complexity may model the undoing of hierarchy effectively, it may also serve opposite purposes and exclude readers.

Moore's reversal of emphasis is suggested in "The Arctic Ox (or Goat)" (1958), a poem vaunting qiviut, a wool Moore had read about in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Toward the poem's end we are told, "If you fear that you are / reading an advertisement, / you are" (*Complete Poems* 195). Where before she turned ads into art, here Moore turns art into ads, both refusing the hierarchical model that marks one as essentially more valuable than the other and suggesting that there may be ways in which the two modes overlap. Moore's work thus presages later developments in visual art that recognize in art and ads a mutual concern with the circuits of aesthetic and financial authority and with the relations between those circuits.

The move into the popular arena, while it represented a move away from the authority of the modernist position, also offered Moore a new kind of authority, one she sought not only because it seemed equitable but because her success in the world of high modernism seems not to have been as great as she might have hoped. While she was respected among poets, her books were remaindered. Even Eliot's introduction to her *Selected Poems* (1935) could not save it from a chilly reception. The eventual self-exclusion of several of those few women who did achieve some success within the high modernist ranks (Mina Loy, who turned to making ephemeral street sculpture in the Bowery, is another example) suggests their recognition of the basic contradiction of their situation.⁹

By the time the *Collected Poems* won its awards, Moore's focus had already changed. Instead of using the awards to reinforce her position as modernist, Moore chose to employ the publicity to establish her authority in the new arena — an authority not associated with great accomplishment (since no one in this realm had much idea of what she had done, only in a vague way that she had done it), but with celebrity. This kind of authority, because it is fleeting and because it can circulate throughout its audience, has at least the potential that Andy Warhol pointed to of accruing to everyone, briefly, and so would seem to accommodate ideally Moore's paradoxical attempt to achieve authority within a framework of circulation. In fact, of course, such authority does not accrue to everyone equally, and there are obvious difficulties with viewing a system so thoroughly embedded in capitalism as representative of a revolution in authority structures. Still Moore's efforts can be viewed as operating out of a spirit of Benjaminian optimism about the possibilities of mass culture.

As it happened, while Moore's popularization, in tandem with her simpler poems, won her a wider audience, she did not

lose her "highbrow" audience as a consequence, though the dynamics in which her "high" audience viewed her did change. The factors in play in the evolution of Moore's reception include a change in the makeup of the "high" audience (high and popular audiences having become even less distinguishable in spite of modernist efforts) and a sentimentalization of her status as literary veteran. In the forties her poems began to move out of exclusively literary magazines and into more general interest, though still elite, journals, like the *Nation* and the *New Yorker*. While this move did respond in part to the disappearance of some of the little magazines, the change in venue seems to have suited the changes in Moore's poetry and image. Whether the audience itself changed to a less literary one or whether the expansion of the influence of popular culture changed the concerns of the audience, or some combination of both, Moore's popular renown seems to have reinforced her position in these magazines rather than undercutting it. Having published her first *New Yorker* poem in 1953, Moore went on to publish at least one per year from 1958 through 1970, her popularity feeding on her associations with the elite and vice versa.

With the lowering of the fence of difficulty that had blocked general access to her work, the concern with a fair distribution of authority present in the work all along became more obvious. "The Arctic Ox (or Goat)" offers an example here, too. In it Moore takes a stand against fur coats, on the grounds that

To wear the arctic fox
you have to kill it. Wear
qivvit — the underwool of the arctic ox —
pulled off it like a sweater;
your coat is warm; your conscience, better. (*Complete Poems* 193)

The poem argues against the deadly relation of man over beast in terms that, if they do not undo hierarchy, offer at least a less repressive alternative.

Another poem, "Rescue with Yul Brynner" (1961), combines concern with generous uses of power with particular interest in the power of celebrity. Commemorating Brynner's UN refugee work, this poem offers images of his tour of camps in Europe and the Middle East:

Mysterious Yul did not come to dazzle.
Magic bird with multiple tongue —
five tongues — equipped for a crazy twelve-month tramp
(a plod), he flew among
the damned, found each camp
where hope had slowly died
(some had never seen a plane).
Instead of feathering himself, he exemplified
the rule that, self-applied, omits the gold.
(*Complete Poems* 227)

The poem ends with a paean: "Yule — Yul log for the Christ-mas-fire tale-spinner — / of fairy tales that can come true: Yul Brynner."

Obviously this is a very different poem from "Poetry." It has a clear subject, and in a context of punning play (you'll / yule / yul) it clearly makes its point that Yul Brynner is to be lauded for helping these refugees. While maintaining the form of a "modernist" poem, it is accessible — it accommodates an audience *not* willing to wrestle with much complexity and in so doing backs up Moore's performance of the "great" or "difficult" poet played for a popular audience. Like Brynner, whom it lauds for not calling attention to himself and for making himself available to those in need, this poem takes off the "feathers" of the world in which the poet's authority was won and goes to those thousands (not millions) in need — the readers of, in this case, the *New Yorker*. And what the poem has to tell them is again a lesson about authority. Brynner has a special authority because he is famous, and that authority is in some measure increased by the fact that he is best known for playing a king. But he uses that authority best when he obscures it and puts it in the service of the unauthoritative. Brynner enacts the role Moore aspires to by having authority but employing it unoppressively.

In crossing the line from high modernist to popular poet, Moore does not abandon the ironic playfulness of her earlier work, as has too frequently been suggested by her critics. Instead, she follows through on the awareness of the arbitrary nature of authority and pushes her irony to new frontiers. Her work is an exploration, not an endorsement or an idealization of the modes of authority at play in the popular arena. This movement into the realm of fluctuating authority is the fruit of her gendered awareness of the problematic nature of authority in its familiar circuits.

Moore, Money, and Stamps

Though Moore's specific locus of inquiry was literary, her work has a wider frame of reference, since her critique of the limited circuit of literary authority and the hierarchical structure of the concept of value on which that authority builds — both essentially patriarchal — raises similar questions about parallel structures in other realms of culture. Perhaps the most visible parallel realm in which issues of value and authority are paramount is the economic realm. Like literary authority, goods and money travel in a limited circuit, though they may appear to be available to all, given certain superable constraints. The stops on this circuit are determined in large part along lines of class, sex, and race.¹⁰

While Moore did not write about money specifically, she was keenly aware of its power — in her life, in the art world, and in the world of mass culture, where the advertisement, a favorite genre of hers, is the essential form. I would argue that her impersonation of George Washington (figure 2) worked as an oblique remark on the structure of authority behind the circulation of money. Her costume consisted of a black tricorn hat and a black cape, fastened with a silver dollar clip. While the hat and cape refer to images of Washington other than those on money (where we see only his hatless head), they are the signs by which we can recognize the reference to him and to the currency on which his image is featured. Moore's adoption of his image suggests both her desire for the kind of authority Washington embodies and her awareness of the impossibility of her achieving it. By its very incongruity her impersonation highlights the authoritative role certain images play in the operation of currency and, relatedly, stamps.

Though we often identify our national currency with an essential Americanness, it did not come into use until 1861.¹¹ It is my contention that the images on the notes are neither mere decoration nor arbitrarily chosen. While the design of the national currency has developed piecemeal in the past 130 years, the tendency has been consistently to create a sense of stability. Most bills have borne the images of powerful men: presidents in particular and a few generals, bankers, and counsellors. The one-dollar note we are familiar with was inaugurated, in its essentials, in 1934. In 1957 the national motto, "In God We Trust," first appeared on it.¹² By 1962 all notes bore this motto, a phrase that makes explicit the intersection between faith and economics that operates in all currencies. While the motto may be read as a sign of piety, it also works

pragmatically to represent Americans to themselves as having a basic (though importantly unspecified) religious grounding. This representation is received as a sort of compliment: as individuals Americans may not go to church regularly or live laudably, but they do know themselves qua Americans as worthy of God's interest. And this self-image contributes to a general faith in *themselves*, which is essential to the operation of the economy. Also at work is the suggestion that God backs the currency. It can be argued that all currency systems assume the existence of God, as unreasonable but dependable guarantor. Such an argument points to the patriarchal basis upon which the monetary system is constructed.

Long before direct mention of God was engraved on bills, the notion of God as a backer of currency ran the logic behind the setting on bills of images of kings and queens, a frequent occurrence in countries that have them, since royalty function on an association (though vague) of their right with a god's will. In the US, where royalty and their links to the gods are disavowed, the complicated invocation of authority without such grounding is effected by substituting the faces of presidents for those of monarchs. These men are credited with an authority of their own, but this authority proves insufficient alone and so is propped up on the quasi-religious cult of the Founding Fathers, and more recently on the religious-sounding motto.

These reassuring images are there to distract us from awareness that the money itself is pure symbol, without inherent or guaranteed value. Relatedly, the many images of buildings and the use of perspective to imply depth themselves suggest that each bill, like a strong box, contains actual value. The eyes at the center of the front side of all bills and on the back of the one-dollar bill deflect the questions of the onlooker by reflecting him back to himself and so implicating him in the operation of the currency, which he can then no longer afford to question.

While the circuits in which money moves abundantly are limited, constant circulation is essential to its functioning and the functioning of the economy as a whole. At a very practical level, this purpose is assisted by the post office, which circulates ads and goods as well as letters. In addition, stamps assist the circulation of money in more imagistic ways.

From their inauguration in 1842 until 1893, US stamps bore only the portraits of the same statesmen as appear on folding money and an occasional patriotic symbol (for instance, the Shield and Eagle).¹³ Like money, stamps are produced by

the government and have their value printed on their faces, an essential part of their function. Stamps are sometimes accepted in payment of bills. And while both could conceivably involve no other information than a statement of the value they represent, both involve images, which contribute to their effectiveness. Though stamps are not money *per se*, they work as a kind of assistant currency, their likeness in form bespeaking a likeness in function.

Insofar as they bear the same images as appear on currency, stamps — halfway between commodity and currency — work as a parallel system, backing up the authority of the government and so of money, at the same time that they assist in carrying out of business. But unlike money, the set of images on stamps expanded early on and has continued to do so. As the number of images has increased, the interaction between stamps and money has evolved. While images of statesmen and patriotic symbols (called definitives) have remained in circulation, in 1893 the post office introduced commemoratives, which feature a wider range of images and are printed in smaller runs. The first of these were sixteen images from the legend of Columbus. This series was the first of many, each keyed to an occasion or theme presented as patriotic. In 1940 the pattern expanded again. A series of portraits of "Famous Americans" was issued, including ten literary figures. The process of setting these nonpolitical individuals on stamps politicizes them; their individual accomplishments become representative of the American spirit. And in the years since 1940 the possibilities for stamp images have widened further. The range attempts to suggest the natural and cultural complexity of the American experience, insofar as it is noncontroversial.

Part of the background to this expanding set of stamps is philately. The post office made money by increasing the number of stamps and the appeal of their images to collectors. At the same time, the abundance of the commemoratives itself suggests the plethora of the nation's riches and so augments the effect of the monetary images. Where the images on bills, rarely changing and linked to fatherhood and religion, provide a reassuring image of the culture as stable and solid, the images on stamps represent the culture's range and tell us that it continues to flourish and proliferate.¹⁴

The selection of writers to represent this flourishing self-image constitutes a kind of canon building, and as such there are questions about whom to include. Where monetary images have been exclusively male (with the exception of a Martha Washington silver certificate, another bill on which George

and Martha both appeared, and the recent Susan B. Anthony silver dollar, which the public has roundly rejected), stamp images have included women since 1893, when Queen Isabella appeared in the Columbus series. The literary stamp canon includes nine women. This canon overlaps extensively with the conventional secondary school canon. Its thirty-seven members fit the popular notion of high culture and are generally realistic, often populist, writers whose work is not very hard to follow. Exceptions to this rule, along with Moore, are Faulkner and Jeffers, who have appeal as regional writers, and Dickinson and Eliot, whose poetry is complicated but nonetheless widely read because the difficulty of their work has come to define "high" literature in the popular mind. There is also a bias toward prize winners: all six of the US winners of Nobel Prizes for literature have stamps.

Since, generally speaking, her work is not read in secondary schools, Moore's appeal would seem to lie in her prizes (a list of her awards comprises most of the promotional material for her stamp; her poetry is not discussed) and in her celebrity. The stamp does not offer an image of Moore the celebrity, however. Instead we get a demure Moore at thirty, perhaps because the stamp ostensibly honors Moore's early work. Whatever the rationale, the decision against the tricorn also makes practical sense. In costuming herself thus, Moore impersonates authority in a way that suggests that all authority is a costume. If stamps support the currency, and the currency is based on the myth of the stability of the authority of George Washington, it is clear that the post office could not let Moore appear in cape and tricorn without endangering the government, in principle.

But even without the hat, it seems fitting that Moore have a stamp. The poet whose work reflects a tension between desire for authority and dubiety about the terms of its exercise, the poet who developed a notion of authority in flux to accommodate that tension, is rewarded, in stampdom, with authority of a qualified, fleeting kind. Stamp authority does not undo hierarchies (indeed it supports them), and Moore's move into this realm does not alter the circuits of established authority. But it does mark them and, if we let it, it can continue to raise questions about the operation of authority in our culture, as Moore did throughout her career, and perhaps lead to a reworked concept of value. One avenue of questioning lies in the reconsideration of Moore's later work. My point here has been to suggest that the exploration of contradictory desires for authority and its overthrow that occupied Moore in her early

work did not end there. Instead it entered a new phase, which has been neglected because it stood outside the field of "high" culture and because Moore in this phase was not just a woman but an elderly woman. The charting of both the workings and the possibilities for reworkings of value and authority have far to go. Moore pioneered that wilderness.

Notes

¹"Rescue with Yul Brynner," copyright © 1961 by Marianne Moore, renewed © 1989 by Marianne Craig Moore, from *THE COMPLETE POEMS OF MARIANNE MOORE* by Marianne Moore. Used by permission of Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc.

²"Poetry," by Marianne Moore. Reprinted with permission of Macmillan Publishing Company from *COLLECTED POEMS OF MARIANNE MOORE*. Copyright 1935 by Marianne Moore, renewed 1963 by Marianne Moore and T.S. Eliot.

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³Exceptions are the work of Holley, and Slatin's later work ("Something").

⁴Slatin cites all of Moore's major critics to that date in defense of his contention that "there is no question at all about the work of the 1950s and 1960s, whose slightness is universally conceded" (*Savage's* 13, 260n28). Charles Molesworth, Moore's biographer, also reads her relation to her popular persona and to the media that represented it as essentially unironic, a reading which suggests a major departure from the Moore of the earlier period.

⁵A line from *The New Faces of 1952* suggests his fame: "T.S. Eliot writes books for me; King Farouk's on tenterhooks for me."

⁶For a portrait of the evolution of Stevens's reputation, see Newcomb.

⁷See Freedman on Eliot's attraction for English majors and rock lyricists.

⁶DuPlessis also discusses Moore's work in terms of its questionings of authority, from the perspectives of gender, culture, otherness, and sexuality.

⁷Elsewhere Moore develops a different though similarly anti-authoritarian model of authority. In these poems, Moore presents a variety of armored animals who protect themselves but do not attack others (see Gregory).

⁸Slatin does acknowledge that the persona was a kind of poem — and he rates it as more effective than most of her literal poems of the period — but his basic attitude is disapproving (*Savage's* 16).

⁹Slatin has suggested that Williams's degrading images of women artists in *Paterson* (1946-63) dismayed Moore, and that her unsympathetic responses to *Paterson IV* sprang from this ("Something" 98-101). In this respect Williams exemplifies the chilliness of the modernist climate toward women.

¹⁰Goux explores in detail the intersections of patriarchy and capitalism and the connections between hierarchies of authority and the monetary system.

¹¹Facts about the history of American paper money are gathered from Hessler.

¹²This phrase has appeared on various coins since 1864.

¹³Facts about stamps are gathered from *The Postal Service Guide to Stamps*.

¹⁴The recent Elvis stamp represents a cross between these two functions. It both speaks to a wide audience about the proliferate strength of the culture and reverts to the definitive/monetary mode in representing a king.

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