

THE FAKE, THE NON-FAKE AND THE GENUINE

A work of art is often called 'fake' by us to distinguish it from those which are not so. How, actually, one is to make the distinction, in a particular case is a practical problem. Contrarily, what we intend to do here is only to make an attempt at understanding the distinction in theoretical terms.

1. The distinction between what is fake and what is not fake is not confined to art alone. Numerous other things, none a work of art in any ordinary sense, are also described as fake or as genuine. Such things, include, to mention only a few examples, a document, a cheque, a certain sample of medicine or of cosmetics, and so on. They include also, for example, a *sādhū*, a beggar, a patriot, and, further, even such things as love, sympathy, illness, wisdom, scholarship, and the like. Anyway, we may begin with document as a standard example.

When is it that a document is to be called fake? Is the sense in which it is called fake the same as that in which a work of art is so described? If not, in what might the two senses differ? To be precise, it is these and certain other such matters which, mainly, will be discussed by us.

1.1. Take the examination score-sheet of a student, an instance of a document.

Can it, in any case, become a fake of itself? Exactly as it is, it most certainly cannot. That goes without saying. However, if it is tampered, then we shall of course call it a fake score-sheet.

One, however, might be prone to discount this as an example in point. He would say that with a change of the kind the score-sheet remains no longer itself; it becomes different. Very true. But there is one thing which also should not perhaps go totally unnoticed. Isn't it the case that, the change notwithstanding, the score-sheet remains numerically the same? But it is perhaps better that we do not proceed with the matter further. For, otherwise, I fear, we shall be led very much off our way to the consideration of a far wider problem, namely that pertaining to the conditions of the self-identity of a thing.

Change as such, just by itself, does not make a document

fake. Suppose that the score-sheet is somehow soiled, or that it is crumpled or torn or is damaged in some similar other ways. Do we, on that ground alone, ever proceed to call it a fake of itself? No, we do not. And one explanation of this that the changes do not, in any way, alter the logical content of the document. So far as the score-sheet is concerned, the logical content is supposed to consist mainly in a number of assertions of a kind. Elsewhere, it may well be different. For instance, it may contain orders or requests (as in an office circular), performatives (as in a will), or questions (as in a test paper for students). In some cases, it may be comprised also of an assortment of all the three together, possibly, along with some more varieties of logical entities.

1.2. As it is, a document cannot be a fake of itself. Which is a truism. But what about any particular reproduction of it which, say, turns out to be absolutely exact? May we say that it also cannot be a fake? I think that is possible.

Here there is perhaps some difficulty over the expression 'absolutely exact?'. Strictly speaking, can a reproduction be at all 'absolutely exact'? Some no doubt would be sceptical on the point; so that, for them, the phrase 'exact reproduction' is purely a misnomer. It is said that a copy, however, exact, is after all a copy, and so, obviously, it cannot be the same as its original. And numerical difference, it is further said, does not go alone; other differences, especially those that are relational, are bound to accompany it, whether one can mention them or not.

But all this, i.e., whether or not it is right to talk of an exact reproduction, is, in a sense, not relevant at all. For, the degree of exactitude that is demanded of a reproduction, in order that it may not have to be branded as a fake need not be at all absolute. Take a photocopy of a document. Is it truly an absolutely exact copy? For less so would be a copy of a document which, as it often happens, is handwritten or produced on a typewriter. Yet neither is a fake. Nor said to be so by anybody. What is needed in the case of a reproduction of a document, so that it may not turn out to be a fake, is only that it must repeat faithfully the entire logical content of the latter.

This, however, does not mean that whatever fails to satisfy this particular condition will become, for that reason, an example of the fake. Suppose, while producing a copy, I miss or miswrite,

because of my carelessness, a certain item in the content of the original. Most certainly, the copy would not be true or genuine. But would one, for that reason alone, say that I have produced a fake or forgery? I suppose, he would, as he should, look for a relatively non-committal expression to criticize my copy. The word 'non-fake' or some equivalent of it, I suppose, may serve the purpose. It excludes much of what is meant by 'fake' and, at the same time, includes far less than what is meant by 'genuine'.

An explanatory account of all this is not hard to find. In turning out the copy which, incidentally, is not true to the original, I do not have any desire or design in my mind to deceive or mislead anybody; while this desire to deceive or mislead is always to be present when we have what may be called a fake. *Deceit is an essential dimension of the fake.* No deceit, no fake.

1.3. The analysis of the fake so far in terms of the notion of reproduction happens to presume that there exists an actual original which the reproduction purports to reproduce. But is this necessary?

Take an example of a document which is *totally* fabricated. One would no doubt call it a fake. Yet, interestingly, there is no actual original of which it might be said to have been a copy. But is it, in every sense, really free of reference to the original? We cannot perhaps say so. At least an imagined or hypothetical original functioning as the object of some spurious claim has to figure in the situation. That is to say, with the document there must go a claim to such effect that it is itself the original document or that it is an authentic copy of the latter.

2. So far, taking a document as a typical example, we explored the distinction of the fake from the genuine and the non-fake in the range of objects which are not works of art. Let us now move to art and explore the corresponding distinction. Here picture will be our singular example. In fact, it has to be so, because, interestingly enough, it alone is 'fakable': nothing else in art is, be it music or theatre, poem or fiction, or any of their other cousins. None yields characterization in terms of 'fake' or its synonyms. The point is suggested to us by Nelson Goodman who has dwelt on it at some length. To quote Goodman:

...in music, unlike painting, there is no such thing as a forgery of a known work. There are, indeed compositions, falsely

purporting to be by Haydn as there are paintings falsely purporting to be by Rembrandt; but of the *London Symphony*, unlike *Lucretia*, there can be no forgeries.¹

There is no such thing as a forgery of Gray's *Elegy*. Any accurate copy of the text of a poem or novel is as much the original work as any other.²

The fake and the non-fake in art and those in non-art tend to provide an interesting study in contrast. For, it bears on certain truths about art *vis-a-vis* non-art and about picture in particular *vis-a-vis* other forms of art.

Anyway, let us get into the elucidation of the alleged contrast.

2.1. Take *P*, a picture. Suppose a dishonest dealer, having got it done by an expert, falsely attributes it to Picasso or Chagall to secure a respectability for it in the eyes of an inexperienced customer, though, in reality, neither of the two artists has ever done anything remotely similar to it. Outwardly, this would seem to be a parallel of the fabricated document in (1.3). But should it, on that basis, be also said to be a fake like the latter? Preferably, not. Not at least in an identical sense. For there is a disanalogy between the two; and the disanalogy is not only far deeper but also far more relevant than the peripheral analogy.

The document of our example makes a claim to be genuine; and the claim is spurious. And that, precisely, is what has been said to make it a fake. Now compare *P* on this point. Yes, it also makes a claim to be genuine. The claim is only indirect. But it is, at any rate, valid. It indeed is a genuine work, I mean the genuine work of the ghost artist. What, really, goes wrong with it is another claim, a direct one. It is a deceptive claim about the *author of the picture, not the picture itself*. Thus *P* and the document are on different footings. The latter concerns the genuineness or otherwise of a particular item of work itself, the former only the author of the work. So, if 'fake' is our word to describe the document, then accuracy demands that we should, withholding the word from *P*, find an alternative expression for it. One may call it a 'fraud', 'an instance of lying or cheating', and the like. Terminologically, that would be more appropriate.

2.2. An analysis now in the light of the results obtained in (1.2), will take us to a deeper layer of contrast.

We have said that a genuine document or a substitute for it need not have to be the document itself : a copy of it faithfully depicting its logical content will do. Interestingly, this provides hardly any working-model in the case of the picture. Here genuineness and reproduction tend to exclude each other. In other words, the genuine picture is just one, the picture itself; no copy of it, howsoever exact, can function as its substitute. In linguistic terms, this implies that, while it makes perfect sense to call a picture a 'perfect fake' (the expression is Goodman's), to say that a document is so would be totally nonsensical.

A copy of a picture, just because it is a copy, is to be a fake of the picture. The copy may be exact or inexact; but that is immaterial. However, in saying so we must make room for one exception which is this.

Suppose that a picture of Leger or of Matisse or of some other artist is reproduced in a book for the purpose of illustration, or on a post-card or calendar for decoration, or elsewhere for similar purposes. It is not genuine, and nobody says that it is so. But can we, on that ground, rush to the other extreme and say that it is a fake? How can we? There is that one thing which tends to cast a restraint on us. The reproduction is admittedly so. It makes no claim to genuineness and, in that sense, does not function as an instrument of deceit. Whereas this element of deceit, as we have said, is distinctive of a fake, and there is no fake apart from it. The reproduction is, in fact, to be assigned to a third category, already named 'non-fake' by us.

But how come that the genuineness of a document can withstand reproduction, while, contrarily, a picture is so sensitive to the process that, the particular exception apart, reproducing it tends to become only another name of producing a fake? What is it that explains this difference?

Finding a full and satisfactory explanation is a job by itself which, however, we cannot at the moment afford to undertake. So, all we shall do is to hazard a passing conjecture with the intention that we shall elaborate it on a different occasion elsewhere.

As it clicks for me, the explanation lies in the differences exhibited by the content of the document, on the one hand, and that of the picture, on the other.

What may a document be said to contain ? As said earlier, statements, orders, requests, questions, performatives and such other semantic entities. And there is little, if anything, beyond the range of these. Now, look into certain peculiarities of these entities. For one thing, their identity is too hard a matter to be affected in the slightest way by even the most drastic change or variation in the media. Take the English sentence 'Smoking is injurious to health'. It goes on stating what it purports to state, no matter whether it is uttered or written, translated in Sanskrit or in Latin, written in capital or in small letters, written by me or by you, and so on. Likewise, your request to vote for a certain candidate does not lose or gain anything whatever in respect of its logical content whether you communicate it to me in a whisper or over a microphone, in English or in Bengali, in print or handwriting, or with such other variations in the media.

Comprised of entities of this kind, the document, by nature, is *materially* amenable to authentic reproduction. But what goes to ensure that such entities are all that the document stands for ? Is there no non-logical element also in it ? Yes, there mostly are, e.g. some stylistic or metaphorical matters, some emotive or conative elements, and such like. But they have a place only in the logically redundant periphery of the document, not in its core.

But the anatomy of the core and of the periphery is just the reverse in the case of a picture. A picture also may ask or state or perform similar other jobs. But that is not a part of its being. What goes to define its being and make it impervious to authentic reproduction is possibly a degree of *uniqueness* or *individuality* arising, *inter alia*, from the personality or biography of its author being a part of it. A picture is not shared in the way a document is. And that way, it is far less social than the latter.

The above contrasts have been spelt out predominantly in conceptual terms. And unless there has been anything grossly wrong with the process of spelling out, the contrasts would be their own justifications : factual corroboration is inessential. But, still, is their any ? I suppose there is at least one. It is obtainable from a comparison of our experience of the picture as opposed to that of its fake, on the one hand, and our corresponding experience in connection with the document, on the other.

A document and its forged copy differ *materially*. So do the

picture and its fake. This follows definitionally. But that certainly is not the end of the matter. The slender point of similarity would appear to break down as one reads it in terms of our actual experience.

Our experience of document and that of its forgery are alike in being cognitive. However, that is not of much importance. Suppose that the two experiences happen to be thorough, you do not miss anything relevant and can say in explicit terms in what the document and its fake differ. Then the contents of the two experiences would naturally be diverse. We may illustrate this, taking the examination score-sheet and its counterfeit copy, once again, as the example. Take the experience of the former. It comprises, among other things, the perception of, say, the figure '20' being there in it. Contrarily, this does not figure in our experience of the latter which contains, in its place, a perception of, say, the figure 200.

With the picture and its fake the position however would be very different.

Take, for instance, this picture in my room by Jamini Roy. Suppose, in my absence tomorrow, it is neatly replaced by an imitation of it and the imitation is to such a degree perfect that it is not distinguishable from the original even by an expert, let alone by me. Would the content of my experience of the fake in the case be the same as that of my present experience of the original? Indeed, we do not know what might come to make for any difference between the two.

..it is obvious,

says C. J. Ducasse,

that if a copy or an imitation of Rembrandt, for instance, is so faithful that only the most distinguished expert detectives, or perhaps not even they, can tell it from the original, it is thereby proved to be just as good for aesthetic purposes as the original would be.³

But can we take this for granted? Should we not give a second thought on it, in view of what might appear to some as good counter-examples on the point?

The first counter-exmples. Let the original be returned to my room the next day. I shall then see the two pictures together,

though I shall have no idea whatever as to which one exactly is the fake. Will, even in a situation like this, the content of my aesthetic experience of the picture as it is today remain unaltered? Will it not be dialuted or disrupted by an experience of some disastrous uncertainty and unhappiness very much analogous to that which rocked the father of the Maupassant story on being told by his wife that one of her children was not his.

The second counter-example. Suppose, on being told by the man who removed the picture, I can now identify the fake. Does the content of my experience of it now remain exactly like that of my previous experience of it when I took it for the original? Let us ask a Hamlet how, exactly, he would feel, if his 'fair Ophelia', all on a sudden, stoops to speak the language of the slum.

The alleged change in the aesthetic experience as one proceeds from the original picture to its fake is indeed a fact which one cannot deny. But must it be understood to point to a possible change in the content of the experience as the cause of it? Not at all. To my mind, the change of experience is formal rather than material. It is to be understood as having taken place on account of a shadow being cast on the original aesthetic experience by some incompatible parallel experiences. These parallel experiences are often moral or cultural, often social or personal, and so on.

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NOTES

1. *Languages of Art*, London, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 112.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 114.