

Open Forum 3

Web Site Transcript

Chapter 2

A = Host

B = John Myatt

C = John Drewe

A: Good evening, everyone, and welcome to *Film Strip*. Tonight, we go behind the scenes on the new movie, *The Forger*, which will be in cinemas later this year.

The Forger is a remarkable true story about one of the biggest art forgery crimes in history. The hero of the film is John Myatt. When the film starts, Myatt is a school teacher in Staffordshire, in central England. Myatt is a frustrated artist—he went to art school, but was never able to make enough money from his painting. One day, he comes home early to find his wife with another man. She leaves him and their two children, and Myatt soon finds himself overworked and broke.

Now, Myatt is not a great painter, but he's a brilliant imitator: he can copy the paintings and styles of famous artists. So, he puts an ad in a magazine. Let's hear the clip:

B: Yes, hello. I'd like to put an advertisement in next week's issue. It reads: "Genuine fakes from 150 pounds." Yes, that's all. And my phone number...

A: There's nothing illegal about copying art—a genuine fake, as Myatt called it—as long as you sign it yourself and don't pretend that it was really painted by someone else. Myatt's business was doing well for a few years. He copied paintings by Monet, Klee, Nicholson, famous 20th century artists, and he was able to spend more time with his children, Amy and Sam.

One of his best customers was an art collector in London called John Drewe. Drewe had bought many genuine fakes from Myatt, and the two Johns had become friends. Then, one day, Myatt received a phone call from Drewe that changed both of their lives:

C: John, do you remember the copy of the Albert Gleizes painting that you did for me recently?

B: Yes, of course. It took me a long time. I thought it was rather good.

C: You're not the only one. Someone at Christie's yesterday thought it was very good.

B: Christie's? The auction house in London? That's where real paintings are bought and sold, not my fakes.

C: Not any more, my friend. I sold your Gleizes as a genuine Gleizes for 25,000 pounds.

B: You did what? But, they'll find out it's a fake!

C: No they won't, John. I wrote some documents to give the painting a history. Old paper, old typewriter—who cares? The buyer likes the painting, he thinks he has an original, and you've earned 12,500 pounds. Come to London. I'll give you your money—cash, of course—and we can discuss our next project.

B: I don't know, John. This can't be legal.

C: How much do you earn as a teacher, John?

B: About 13,000.

C: You've just nearly doubled your salary.

A: How can Myatt resist an offer like that? Almost \$25,000 for a forgery?

He can't, and over the next few years, Drewe and Myatt sell 1 million pounds—that's nearly \$2m—of fake art to dealers and museums all over the world, including a Giacometti which sold for \$300,000 in New York.

Drewe is the brains behind the operation. At one point, he tells Myatt that he's not doing it for the money. For Drewe, forgery is a game. He wants to trick people into paying for a fake as if it were genuine. He goes to extraordinary lengths in his deception. For example, he tricks his way into two top art museums in London and leaves photographs of the fake paintings in old catalogues. Then, when he's auctioning the painting, he can go to the museum and "prove" that it's the real thing.

But, of course, it has to end. You might remember the court trial in late 1990s. Drewe was so good at forgery that he faked two heart attacks to delay the trial! Eventually, though, both Drewe and Myatt were sent to prison. Drewe was there for 6 years, but Myatt cooperated with the police, and he was only imprisoned for 4 months. The judge recognized that Drewe was the one who was really committing the forgery.

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I won't tell you the twist in the story after Myatt gets out of prison—it's almost too good to be true, but it is. We will tell you that Myatt became more famous because of all the publicity and that he now sells his genuine fakes, properly labeled, for up to \$10,000.

How much money did Myatt make for his forgeries? About \$26,000 a year—about the same as his teaching salary! *The Forgery* hits the big screen later this year.