Every period of cultural history features a gallery of remarkable forgers and fabricators who have frequently violated customary ideas about the authenticity and sanctity of the artwork. This conference—which features keynote presentations by distinguished scholars based in medieval, early modern, and modernist studies—invites proposals for papers and panels that reveal new research initiatives in our understanding of fakery and fraud across the Middle Ages to our current moment. “Forging Ahead” aims to bring together researchers from different periods and disciplines to discuss some of the conceptual and practical issues raised by the presence of forgeries and other imitative forms in institutional settings, particularly in rare books libraries. We are especially interested in new inquiries into the techniques that forgers have used over time to insert their counterfeit works into the archive as well as the marketplace.

The William Andrews Clark Library is known for several major collections: books and manuscripts produced in England and France from 1650 to 1830; Tudor and Early Stuart printed books; Oscar Wilde and his circle; book arts, with an emphasis on American fine presses; and Montana and the American West. The collections contain many works relating to “Forging Ahead,” including volumes by Thomas Chatterton and William-Henry Ireland, as well as the largest archive of Wilde forgeries in the world. A pop-up exhibition will display examples of some of the Clark’s finest items connected with literary forgery.

At present, the conference is planned as an in-person event on the Clark Library campus, which is based in the historic West Adams District of Los Angeles. The changing nature of the pandemic may dictate that the conference pivots to an online platform.

We invite proposals of 250-400 words for twenty-minute papers. Moreover, we encourage proposals of 750-1,200 words for three-person panels. The conference aims to accommodate ten panels (in two concurrent streams) in addition to the three plenary presentations.

Registration for participants will be $175, which includes breakfast, coffee and tea service, lunch, and a closing reception across the two days.

Conference organizers: Joseph Bristow is Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. His most recent books are (with Rebecca N. Mitchell) Oscar Wilde’s Chatterton: Literary History, Romanticism, and the Art of
Forgery (Yale University Press, 2015) and Oscar Wilde on Trial: The Criminal Proceedings, from Arrest to Imprisonment (Yale University Press, 2022). Gregory Mackie is Associate Professor of English at the University of British Columbia, where he is Norman Colbeck Curator, UBC Library Rare Books and Special Collections. In 2019, he published Beautiful Untrue Things: Forging Oscar Wilde’s Extraordinary Afterlife with University of Toronto Press.

Inquiries about the conference can be sent to jbristow@humnet.ucla.edu and mackieg@mail.ubc.ca

Proposals need to be submitted to forgingahead2022@gmail.com by 5.00pm PDT on Monday, 29 November, 2021. Decisions will made in early January 2022.

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