Keynote Lecture: Shakespeare, The First Folio, and the Birth of Modern Literature

When: Thursday, March 3, 2016
12:30 p.m.-1:30 p.m.
Where: Hillwood Commons Lecture Hall, LIU Post

The publication in 1623 of William Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, commonly known as the Shakespeare First Folio, was one of the most remarkable events in literary history. At a time in England when some intellectuals looked down on vernacular drama, this publication confirmed Shakespeare’s position as a central figure of the Western tradition and, began the process that would make him the most famous and important writer in the world today. It is in this volume that, seven years after Shakespeare’s death, we find Ben Jonson extolling him as a writer who excelled even the ancients, and about whom Jonson ventured his prophetic words: “He was not of an age but for all time.” Almost half of the plays attributed to Shakespeare today were first published in the First Folio. Shakespeare’s fame as a writer had been building steadily from the late 1590s, when his drama began to be reproduced in smaller quarto versions. The First Folio was consequently less of an unprecedented beginning than the culmination of a process that began earlier in Shakespeare’s career, when his name came to have value as a sign of genius. With the publication of the First Folio, modern literature had arrived.

Speaker: Dr. James P. Bednarz, Professor of English, LIU Post

Dr. Bednarz has served as a member of the advisory committee on Shakespeare for PMLA. His work focuses primarily on William Shakespeare and his contemporaries, especially Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Marston and John Donne. His study Shakespeare and the Poets’ War (Columbia University Press, 2001) was selected as an International Book of the Year by The Times Literary Supplement. He has recently completed Shakespeare and the Truth of Love an examination of the political, religious and literary contexts that shaped Shakespeare’s perspective as a dramatist and poet at the height of his career in 1601.

Shakespeare Music Performance: 1:30 p.m. – 1:50 p.m.

Romeo and Juliet Suite by Sergei Prokofiev (excerpts) Victoria Schwartzman, piano
Shakespeare Suite by Nancy Wertsch
LIU Post Chamber Singers, Dr. Mark Shapiro, Director

Please note:
This event is free and open to the public. The event is sponsored by the LIU Post Library, Hutton House Lectures, the English Department and partners. The lecture is supported by a grant from the New York Council for the Humanities.
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