SONNET CONTEST

In connection with the Shakespeare commemoration that LIU Post will be hosting this spring, The Poetry Center is announcing a sonnet contest open to undergraduate and graduate students. We welcome entries of sonnets on all subjects and composed in any sonnet form. There will be cash prizes and the winners will read their sonnets at a Poetry Center event on March 2, 2016 and at the Closing Ceremony of the Shakespeare Festival. Become a bard! Most people have never written a sonnet. Most 21st century-poets have never written a sonnet, so you may just as well try your hand.

ENTRIES (up to 3) MUST BE SUBMITTED AS EMAIL ATTACHMENTS TO jdigby@liu.edu

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 1, 2016

It helps to know what a sonnet is, so here are some basic definitions and forms. A sonnet is a 14-line poem written in iambic pentameter. It is easiest to understand this rhythm as having five beats or stressed syllables in each line. Here is an opening line from one of Shakespeare’s sonnets written in iambic pentameter: “That time of year thou may’st in me behold.” The stressed syllables are in bold. Now here is a line of ordinary speech also in iambic pentameter. “If I can meet you I’ll arrive at ten.” In fact, ordinary English tends to fall into iambs very naturally, so you can write your sonnet in ordinary speech without striving to be particularly “poetic.” Some lines may have fewer or extra beats.

Once you have the rhythm, you need to think about how the lines rhyme. There are basically three different sonnet forms. The first is the Italian sonnet (Italian poets originated this form). The second is the Shakespearean sonnet, and the third is the Spenserian sonnet (named for another English Renaissance poet). They differ in the pattern of end rhymes. We indicate each new rhyme word at the end of a line by a letter of the alphabet. Here are the sonnet patterns:

**Italian Sonnet:** ABBA ABBA  Only two rhyme sounds are used in the first 8 lines (called the octave) of an Italian sonnet. The next 6 lines (called the sestet) may use any combination of any 3 new rhyme sounds: CDE CDE, CDE CED, CDE EDC.

**Shakespearean Sonnet:** This form uses three different groups of four lines or quatrains: ABAB CDCD EFED and then a final couplet (pair of rhymed lines) GG.

**Spenserian Sonnet:** This form uses three quatrains that are linked together by a repeated rhyme and then ends like the Shakespearean sonnet in a couplet: ABAB BCBC CDCD EE

Anyone who enjoys playing games can enjoy writing sonnets because they are so geometric. You can find examples of all three forms on line just by Googling the format.