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Award-winning Indiana author drawn to 'non-form' of prose poetry

PITTSBURGH—*Kimonos in the Closet*, David Shumate's third collection of prose poetry, has just been released by the University of Pittsburgh Press. "These are enormously arresting, odd, wryly humorous, gripping poems," stated David Budbill in praise of the work, "and the variety of subject matter is astounding. I don't know when I've enjoyed reading a book so much."

Prose poetry is a form of verse that ignores the well-established convention of line breaks, Shumate explained. Most people can tell a poem is a poem by its presentation on the page—vertical. "A prose poem looks like a paragraph abandoned by its brethren, left to fend for itself," he said.

"I am drawn to this humble form, or non-form, as some would have it, because it forces a poet to rely perhaps more heavily on other poetic conventions in its exploration of a subject," Shumate explained in an interview on the blog Randomly Ray. "It also does not force a particular kind of reading of the poem on a reader, which can give the reader a more open entrance into the poetic experience."

Shumate noted that the prose poem had its origins in nineteenth century France, but you can go back as far as early Chinese literature and find poets working in somewhat similar forms.

The Indiana resident spent about ten years writing fiction, "but I keep returning to the prose poem," he said. Shumate's advice to writers? "Write frequently. Find the form that suits you. Play with images and words. Let them guide you into some glowing core where you never expected to arrive."

Shumate is the author of *The Floating Bridge* and *High Water Mark*, winner of the 2003 Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize. His poetry has appeared widely in literary journals and has been anthologized in *Good Poems for Hard Times*, *The Best American Poetry* and *The Writer's Almanac*. Shumate is poet-in-residence at Marian University and lives in Zionsville, Indiana.

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