

Public Abstract

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This dissertation is a collection of poems made up of my first book, *Fire Pond*, which won the Agha Shahid Ali Prize in Poetry and was published by the University of Utah Press in 2009, plus a shorter manuscript of new poems, written in the last two years. The poems are prefaced by a critical introduction entitled, "On the Inside of Language: Dickinson's Conditional." This essay focuses on how Dickinson's use of the conditional allows us to enter her poems' strange sense of time at the level of grammar. Dickinson seems to tell the temporally distorted story of the conditional as a way of navigating the troublesome complexities of life and death, love and loss, and where they overlap. She imagines the interior life of some of her speakers in terms of the internal life of language. It's precisely this sort of linguistic and ontological complexity that has instigated a conversation with Dickinson's work in my own poems. Her habit of superimposing time and space in strange, ecstatic ways has been a primary influence on my poetics, and I hope the essay will illuminate Dickinson's poems in a new way, even for long admirers of her work.