

FIRE POND AND NEW POEMS

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ABSTRACT

The creative portion of this dissertation consists of one full-length manuscript of poems called *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. I argue that Dickinson tells 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. The narrative and temporal indeterminacy to which the conditional can give way provides Dickinson with a site where she imagines the interior life of the speaker 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 poems as well. Her habit of superimposing time and space in strange, ecstatic ways has been a primary influence on my poetics.