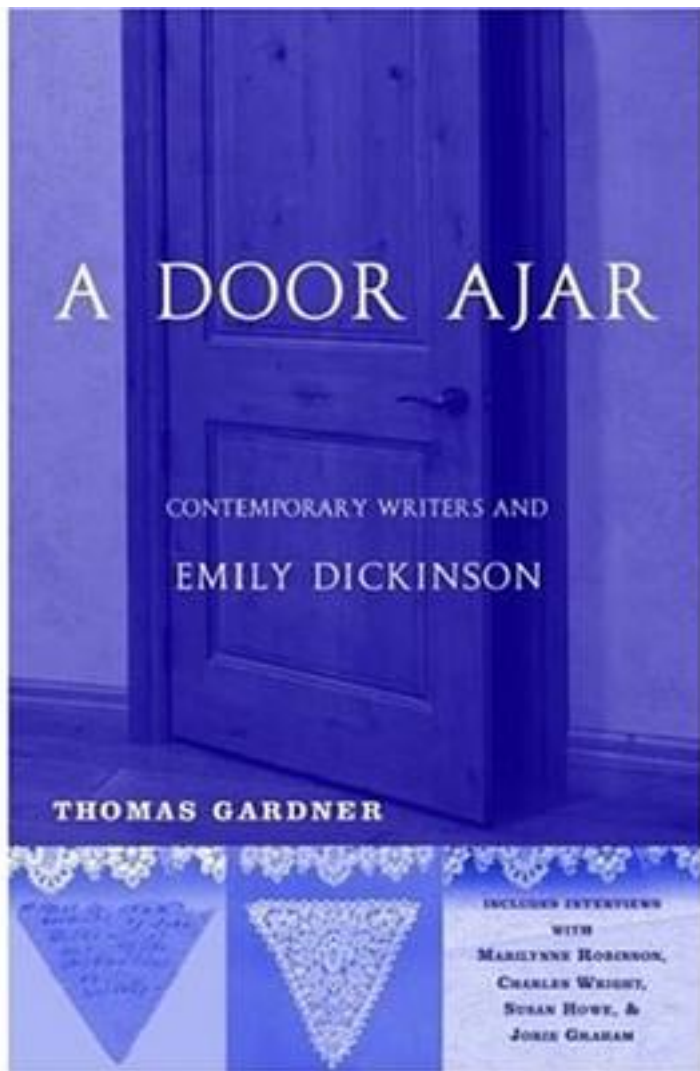


A Door Ajar



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Critics have said that Emily Dickinson has no heirs, that her poetry represents the zenith of the experimental method she developed in the mid-nineteenth century. Thomas Gardner disagrees. In this original study, he takes up conversation with four contemporary writers in whose work he finds an extension or expansion of Dickinson's literary legacy. The book, which includes interviews with Marilynne Robinson, Charles Wright, Susan Howe, and Jorie Graham, is also an intimate look at writers at work and an exploration of the twin forces of influence and originality that animate literary writing. Over the last twenty-five years, writers have returned to Emily Dickinson's work, Gardner argues, powerfully extending what he calls her poetics of broken responsiveness--her demonstration of the way an acknowledgment of limits leads, paradoxically, to a deep engagement with a world beyond our capacity to master or possess. In the hands of our most important poets and novelists, Dickinson's "emptying of the articulate self" has become a potent means of addressing some of our culture's fundamental erotic, religious, philosophical, and social questions. As this book argues in four analytical chapters, and as the interviews that follow each chapter strikingly dramatize, Dickinson still matters. The conversation brought to the surface here opens up the work of a number of our most distinguished contemporary writers and makes newly visible the Dickinson that will most matter to writers and readers over the next several decades.

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