from Jena Osman, An Essay in Asterisks Roof Books, 2004, pp. 45-47

## addendum:

## Emily Dickinson wrote

Step lightly on
This narrow spot —
The broadest Land
That grows
Is not so Ample
As the Breast
These Emerald
Seams enclose

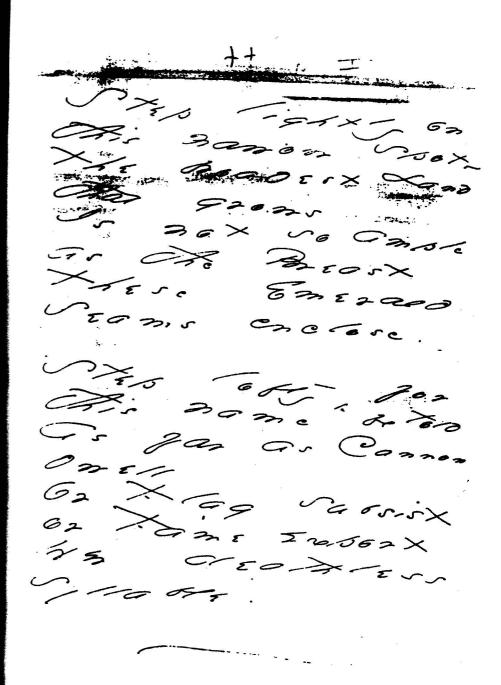
Step lofty, for This name be told As far as Cannon Dwell Or Flag subsist Or Fame export Her deathless Syllable in the fasicle version, this poem appears as a field of X's, due to how Dickinson chose to cross her T's and F's:

SXep lighxly on Xhis narrow Spox— Xhe broadesx Xand That grows Is noX so ample As Xhe Breasx Xhese Emerald Seams enclose.

SXep lofty, for Xhis name be xold As far as Cannon Dwell Or Xlag Subsis X Or Xame ExporX Her deaxhless Syllable

The X's are stitches in the picture of the poem. Letters are actually what sew the "seam," and what they enclose is the dead body in its emerald "spot." What is equally interesting is the apparent discarding of the dash. Thus, the poem has a squarer look to it—a plain, a plot, a field. The more defined/geometric the space, the more it resembles a space enclosed. The dashes signify an opening, but this poem has a concrete and pictorial surface, patched in places by the letter "X."

There's a confession that links a man's name to a body beneath a field of X's. The man attempts to remove his name from the penalty box. He wants to become the X, the blank spot. The court eventually agrees to this, but the mark is still there. The X is both an absence and a presence.



Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>\* &</sup>quot;The abstract term 'equality' took on materiality as we moved towards the church hall polling station and the simple act, the drawing of an X, that ended over three centuries of privilege for some, deprivation of human dignity for others. [...] A strange moment: the first time man scratched the mark of his identity, the conscious proof of his existence, on a stone must have been rather like this." (Nadine Gordimer, "Standing in the Queue")