



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## Self-Portrait as Celestograph

Emma Aylor

Pleiades: Literature in Context, Volume 40, Issue 2, Summer 2020, pp. 144-145 (Article)

Published by University of Central Missouri, Department of English and Philosophy

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/plc.2020.0085>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/759324>

---

# Emma Aylor

## Self-Portrait as Celestograph

*after August Strindberg's series, winter 1893–94*

*But what is it?* It is this initial question that provides  
the first thrill. Cold stone comes to meet the back.

I sharpen for the light above, the light below. Drops  
of dirt and dust fall and rise, fall and rise

to skin, mine a flake of light-sensitive plate  
at slight remove—lifted by the grass, fallen in the grass.

This has often happened to me. I work  
in the same way as nature, without a set goal.

I resist the tendency toward even weight. Gravity  
should work the way it wants on me. It writes

its name along the tuck of my back as it meets the earth.  
My name underneath in a lighter hand.

A habit of sky is hard to break. It must be hard  
to see the earth where you want the night, to be a sign

so constant as to be thought unchanging. I can't just smooth  
a habit over with my palm. But I can look like something else.

I loved the ground best, not the sill; what I loved  
was plating my body open to wait like an eye. I would watch

for the light, but it was the dark that worked me.  
And I continue to develop: they've changed me by their thumbs,

the stars of inks and grease. I remember everything that had its place  
on me. I dip in the developing water, blue and waver,

---

dip one end back, one back. I go vibrant underneath:  
I'm still blue, and green and copper, and at my edges

I red and rust like a sheet of tin. I wanted to be  
or be believed in.

