

October 2022

Photographs of the Insane: A Suicide

Corrinne Clegg Hales

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate>

Recommended Citation

Hales, Corrinne Clegg (2022) "Photographs of the Insane: A Suicide," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 14.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol1/iss2/14>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

HONORABLE MENTION
MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE FOR POETRY

Photographs of the Insane: A Suicide

by Corrinne Clegg Hales

*The Photographer secures . . . and exhibits . . . the well-known
sympathy which exists between the diseased brain and the organs
and features of the body.*

Dr. Hugh Diamond, Surrey Asylum, 1850s

Calm has spread like a slack blanket
Over her features. He's always hated
How funeral-goers like to imagine

The dead as peaceful, but her
Half-closed eyes and slightly
Smiling mouth make her appear

Almost content. Is this her illness?
Or her cure? Maybe it's the record
Of final communication

Between brain and body. Or maybe *calm*
Is simply our name for absolute absence
Of expression. He has taken

Other images: one with bruises
From an unsuccessful death-leap
Out a third floor window; one with tangled

Hair, clenched fingers, wide eyes; one
In recovery with smooth skirt and raised chin;
And there is also the likeness made

At her admission—in the throes
Of her illness, where her bare throat
Reveals a broad, new scar.

The doctor spreads
Photographs across his desk
Like tarot cards. He can place them

In any order he likes: life
To death, progress and regress
Of disease, even death to life—a miracle

Of technology, imagination, light.
He shuffles them. What difference does it make?
They are all history. Reflection insists

On looking backward, against
The paradigm of progress. He chooses
The earliest image, where the brain

And the body still speak,
Where the muscles in her face
Are so tense, her bones

Seem about to burst
Through her skin.