

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 11 | Issue 1

Article 37

June 2011

Portrait of a Laryngologist

Chelsea Henderson

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

Recommended Citation

Henderson, Chelsea (2011) "Portrait of a Laryngologist," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 37.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol11/iss1/37>

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.

Portrait of a Laryngologist **OF A** **LARYNGOLOGIST**

**CHELSEA
HENDERSON**

Call it an excavation site, the human throat. Call it proof of our flawed anatomy, the many buttons, pendants, clothespins, and nails I've removed from one throbbing esophagus or another, the roadblocked windpipes. The history of swallowed objects is a tragic collection. Each X-ray tells the same story—the bright negative of ribs ebbing away from the darkened sternum, the various centerpieces: a pencil lodged perfectly vertically, sharpened; an open safety pin; a quarter suspended as if in mid-air, Washington in profile, 1979 in faintly raised relief, the reeded edge thumbed smooth. Call it an accident, but it never is. It's a kind of intimacy to swallow the odds and ends of your beloved, I tell people, like sex. Like the woman who, in her grief, swallowed the bullet that had killed her husband. Or the man who came to me, unable to speak for the agony of his wife's car key—to keep her from leaving, he confessed when I'd pulled it free, the metonymic object lying

CHRISTINA
HENDERSON

Call it an excavation site, the human
front. Call it proof of our flawed
anatomy, the many buttons, pendants,
tobaccoes and nails I've removed
from one flapping esophagus or another.
The roadblock windpipes. The history
of swallowed objects is a tragic collection.
Each X-ray tells the same story –
the bright negative of ribs chiding away
from the darkened sternum, the various
contours of a pencil lodged partially
vertically, splintered, an open safety pin,
a quarter suspended as if in mid-air,
Washington in profile, 1978 in faintly
coiled relief, the toothed edge blunted
smooth. Call it an accident, but it never is.
It's a kind of intimacy to swallow
the odd and ends of your beloved.
I tell people like me, like the woman
who in her grief, swallowed the bullet
that had killed her husband. Or the man
who came to me unable to speak
for the agony of his wife's car key –
to keep her from leaving, he swallowed
when I'd pulled it free.
The anatomical sheet being