
Pro Rege

Volume 37
Number 2 *Fine Arts Issue 2008*

Article 22

December 2008

Simple Breath

Howard Schaap
Dordt College, howard.schaap@dordt.edu

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Recommended Citation

Schaap, Howard (2008) "Simple Breath," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 37: No. 2, 32 - 33.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol37/iss2/22

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A Simple Breath

Howard Schaap

A simple breath is rather uneventful
if silent.
One only notices
when there's a grate in the action,
some gristle that the in-rush rasps against
or phlegm that the out-rush causes
to ripple in the ear.

Corroded sinuses,
where the wind must seep
through narrowed passages
whistling
and we say
nuisance,
mouth-breather,
slack-jawed Darth Vader.

In smokers, though,
it becomes death-sexiness.
Take movie trailers:
the throaty depth,
the earthy resonance of tar-coated vocals
says how scared we'll be
come October,
the voice
speaking from out the very grave,
unmistakeably sexy.

Newborns teach us better:
"sleeps like a baby" is at best misnomer,
the first days of the little fish
spent in varied face contortions,
round bellies pulsing erratically
in this new breathing business,
crib death,
that inexplicable soul-grip
lurking at the end of every long nap
when silence prevails in the house
and one enters the child's room,
slightly tensed against oneself,

to hear the slightest
rhythmic click
of beautiful air:

A simple breath is victory
over desert sands
whirled forever
into different dunes
with no one to whisper
of their shifting shapes.