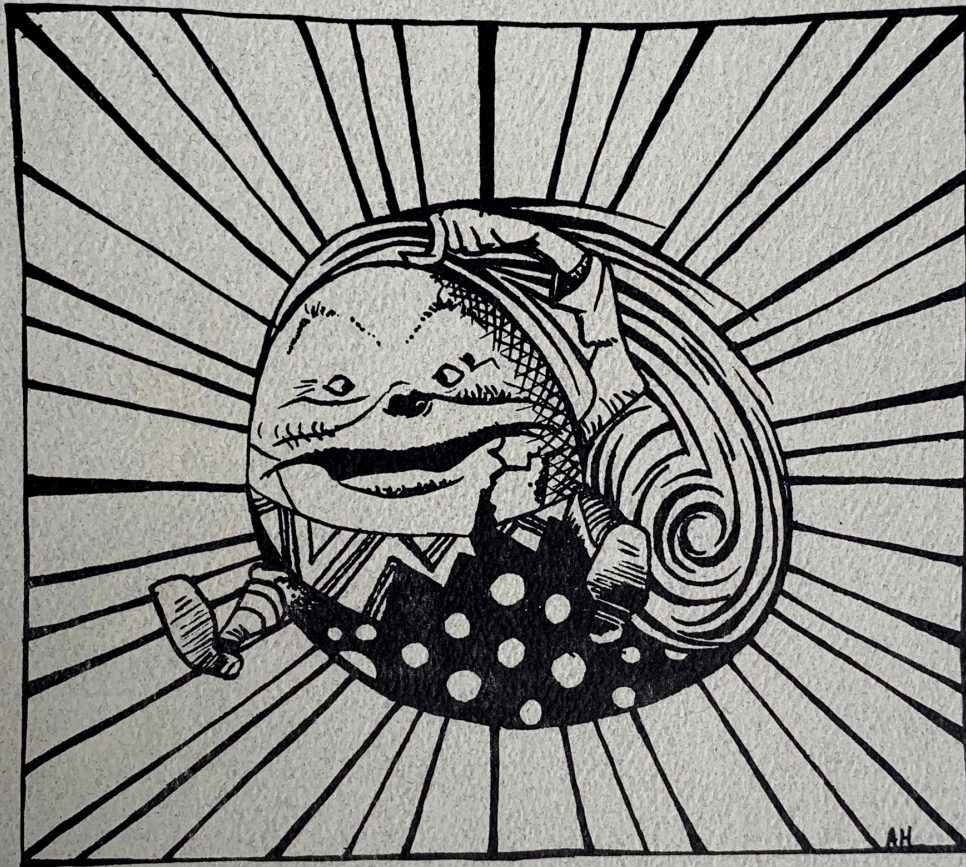


**THE SOUTHWESTERN
REVIEW**



Spring 1994

Losing My Skin

I have often thought about the waiting,
the sitting still amidst the ravages of want.
I have considered the absence
which is really a lie
since there is too
much of everything, too much
of baggy clothes and doors closed of
paper clips and potato chips
of shuffling feet, of more things of
everything except of you. Of you
there is absence. A simple absence
that translates into wait and into want.

I have been ravaged by want.
I, lying limp without my fighting limbs,
scoured and prodded by want;
from above I have watched it
devouring me in
several, unrecoverable mouthfuls.

The waiting accompanies me
as I walk in circles
in my living room,
marking time by the
couch as I pass, reminding the lamp
of your promise at each revolution.
I consider whether
I am a stone sundial with
no markings or simply
the mickey-mouse arms
of a toy wrist watch.

They have thinned my skin,
these thoughts of wait and of want.
As I dissect the pinned-down hours
into those moments of
pause and those of ache,
I see myself atrophy, struggling
to flex my memory of when I lived
without absence or hours,
and wonder when it was
that you stole my skin.

Deborah Lynn Owen

After Fish

I.

They rescind themselves
as I do
into oceans as
into a deep bath—
ears underwater just
for the silence.
We all made promises,
or I did, of dedication.
No, they really promised nothing,
metal skin glinting.

I know myself unlike them, pliable.
No fault of my own:
my sides were born soft.
I tried to build armor
also, to hide the indecision
and how easily I am redirected,
tried to make scales,
metallic fish shingles,
rain-worthy and of
tenacious thin strength.
But my scales
were merely skin,
butternut skin and as liquid
I take the shape of my container.

II.

We are fooled by plastic discs
posing as water droplets,
which are really contact lenses.
We eat dyed-pink fish flesh
and call it crab.
We aim to cultivate
fish with no bones.
We want fish with no bones
to get stuck in our throats.

III.

He said I'd love them,
but I said dad this is no pet.
He said the colors would
amaze me and bought me
a tank. Look, he said, it's like
a cube of the ocean in your room.
He swore they liked the plastic plants
and the wheel that turned.
But I saw them know it
wasn't the ocean.
They faded, knowing
it was only table salt water
with glass walls.
When they floated to the top
one by one, I fished them out
With my miniature net
that came included.

IV.

They dive and
disorient into waters
not ours, no promises.
They tempt.
We try to lure them too, with hooks and
painted plastic. And we do even
fool them, but it is never the same.
They do not swim to our directions,
will never become fish with no bones.
Fish won't ever agree
to teach us about definition.
Instead, they lie limp in our nets.

Deborah Lynn Owen