

## Two Poems · Sandra McPherson

### SIX MOVEMENTS FOR PORTRAITS OF ERZULIE

*Spirit Flags, Sewn in Haiti, 1990*

Two images of love: one, a child artisan's, abstract,  
with antennae, feelers; the other, something a child  
couldn't make—

sharp swords to the heart.

The child's swords float loose, exterior, aim toward earth—  
crutches that don't reach.

Vapors from a rum cup. Flash from rectangular goat's eyes.

Child's goddess of love. Adults' salty deity.

In the child's, the heart is the face.

When the initiate rolls awake on the bed in her sanctuary,  
goose quills working through the pillow  
scratch her eyelids and cheeks. Erzulie looks  
brokenhearted, sinister.

As the boy sewed on her fingernails  
(each a sole clear sequin  
fixed with a glass bead,  
the same as tears only  
tears are pinker and more drawn out,  
thinner in the calipers)  
he glittered.

Who gores her heart seven times?  
I think she does, working the cutlery in  
as one inserts thermometers to cook,  
then folding her hands crisply away, blood  
on her cuffs.  
Oh that color—of blood rinsed  
from a man's shaving sink.  
Never far from her hand,  
busy gold hilts collect no dust.

Pleasurable, promiscuous, passionate—  
the heart that doesn't know  
how to be a widow.

But sunset reflecting in the face  
shows otherwise—there's a scowl  
to sensuality.

When the heart and the face are separate,  
you have to keep your eye on both.  
Modestly, the flame of love's candle blows to the side.  
It is never clear and pure, never straight ascension.  
And it's not because we're breathing on it  
that it slants away.  
Flame has to be our sloping, dwindling mirror,  
our exact wax features  
burning up.

Maybe you think it makes a difference  
how she is expressed: as a heated human figure  
or, vaguer, as pigment and power.  
What kind of portrait did you go to bed with,  
wife, cheat on, and miss as a symbol  
of your promising years?

And for women it is the same:  
she is the idea  
that beauty is rich, love poor and bare,  
she is thinking that way,  
trying to get out of  
the single life of doctrine.

Finally she leaves you.  
Only her abstraction is coming home.

NOTE: Erzulie (sometimes spelled Ezili) is the Haitian deity of beauty, luxury, and love. “Coquettish, sensual, pleasure-loving and extravagant” (Metraux), she derives from the Yoruba goddess Oshun and is also a version of Our Lady of Sorrows.