

# 'Maud Sulter: Passion', by Deborah Cherry

Review by Esraa Husain

As Deborah Cherry has observed, Maud Sulter's work highlights the interconnections between her birth country, Scotland, and her Ghanaian heritage.<sup>1</sup> Sulter's art, journalism and critical and creative writing are anchored in Black women's experiences, exploring the intersections between land, race and

In the interview featured in *ad : Pa io* Mark Haworth-Booth asks Sulter about the reasons behind her choice of titles for her poems: The word that you've found, Zabat, suggests some of this lost history, but where did you find that word? Sulter's answer is intriguing and reveals the depth and richness of her thoughts:

o o pa o d a pa i a o d a i a a g  
o a d o op dia o a d ( a  
9 ) a di a d i i o a gi a a a d da p o d b  
g o p o i a o a i o po po ib o igi o i  
abba a d a d o a a o i o po a d o i o a  
B a o a i o pa ag a d o p iod o g p ia  
d a i a o o d po a o i i o (p )

Cherry's project is a tribute to Sulter's legacy and aims to reach a wider creative community to further promote the importance of exposure essential in the case of creators whose work is not easily pigeonholed that leads to empowerment and liberation of the marginalised. Cherry's volume carries a selection of poems, photographs from exhibitions, and an interview with Sulter recorded at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Sulter navigates the space between Ghana and Scotland in a poem called 'Circa 1930':

R p i i o b i g a o a d a a ai i i  
P ap o i app op ia o a a igid  
A d o o i o a a a d o a d  
A bo a ba d o i i i o g o i  
A d g o b a dia po a (p 9)

In her creative journey and journalism, Sulter collaborated extensively and frequently with other African artists, musicians and poets to amplify the voices of the diaspora. As Cherry notes: There is a double movement in Sulter's work: African artworks collected and cherished in diaspora speak back to appropriated images and stolen objects (p. 15). To give well-deserved space to Sulter's photography, Cherry features imprints in black and white colours from *HYSTERIA* where Sulter and other young Black models are posing to the camera and dressing elegantly (pp. 126-129). Sulter was aware of the revolutionary blueprint she was developing in her work, and her self-actualised journey is

featured in her poems and photography in ways that offer a profound example of a community space which uplifts and is devoted to advocating for the justice for the excluded and overlooked. Sulter states:

a oi po a d do a o o i A d o o  
 i d a d i doi g o appa o ig d o a oo o i i o A d  
 o o o i a i oi o d do i agai a o d gi a  
 da (p 9a)

When Scottish African literature has been explored in recent years, it is primarily through the lens of the great work of the Scottish Nigerian lesbian poet Jackie Kay. Sulter arguably offers a more confrontational critical approach to the narratives of Black women that is geared towards accountability, empowerment and a radical exposure of the practice of racism in Scotland, with the support of her partner, Tanzanian British artist and professor Lubaina Himid. Sulter is clear about her creative and political purposes:

a d o a a o di a o di a i i  
 p d i o d o og d b a o B a o  
 a i i P o j a d B a o a i a d i a i o  
 o d i o ibi io o p ap p o a a d  
 i a o a o o do a io o o d i g 9 0  
 i i a d o p b i a io a d Pa io : Di o o B a o  
 a i i i di d a d i a j b p b d (p 2)

In addition, Sulter's poetry speaks strongly of self-validation, agency and Black feminism. The longing for intimacy and physical touch is expressed vividly in her poetry collection *A a B a o a*. There is a call for liberation and active emotional and mental healing on every page. Sulter has an exceptional way of capturing the selfhood of Black women and their legacy:

A a B a o a  
 a i a p o a a  
 a i a p o i i a a  
 A a B a o a  
 p o a i p o i i a  
 o d o p o i

In *Piggyback: On the Road with Black Women Writers*, Rebecca Wilson interviews a range of Scottish and Irish women writers. In an attempt to showcase the wide variety of voices, Wilson as an interviewer builds her questions around the notions of selfhood and culture, and the relationship between race and writing. Through Wilson's witty approach she manages to conduct insightful and provocative interviews. In her conversation with Sulter, Wilson asks the author about her ties to other Black writers:

Sulter's reply is beautifully weighted and deserves to be quoted at length:

... a i g a o o a o o p a o o i o d a  
... a d a i b o i i a O a d o  
... a o a i o i o a o o o b a i o o  
... a i i a p i i a i d i d A i a A i a a  
Ba A d o d a d Pa Pa o i o a p p o i g i a a  
... i a i d o o a d o i a a d o o b a i a  
... i i d o o i d a d a d i a B a o a i o o g a i o  
A d i o o B a o i b i g o a a i a b d  
... i o o o o i o i i p o o i p a

subjected to. The aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade haunts everyone regardless of their skin colour, thus it is crucial to question the images and intentions of colonialism and empire when dealing the writings of the diaspora (p. 115). Sulter's creative work encourages us to think of the Scottish African field as offering a fresh perspective on writing, identity and community. On the question of history in Sulter's work, Jim Mabon comments:

i i g i o i o d i i a i a p o i i a i B i a i A i a  
i a g i B a i o i o o a a d i o o i i  
i o o o i i i d g a d a i g a o a i o a i d i  
9 0 i i g a i o a i b b a a d A i a p o p a p i a b  
o o i d a a p o i i i o d a i d p o p i  
a i d B i a i O i i B i a i a i b b a a d o A i a  
a d o i o i a o d o o a a a i a  
a d a d a a a i a d i o b i i a p i i a  
o i p a p i a p a o a o a o a i  
o p o a i

There is an ethical duty to broaden such conversations on race in Scotland and the UK and to shed a light on creativity of the BAME community. Sulter herself argued that further research needed to be conducted on the creativity of Black women and their enormous web of activity, and in her work she promotes and encourages activities that aim to research, reclaim and make public our herstory

addition to local libraries in Scotland, affording readers an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the legacy of Scottish Black women writers. These

women's experiences and life journeys where she creates a fictional adaptation of the real life of the nineteenth-century artist Edmonia Lewis (p. 13).

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HYSTERIA where Sulter and other young Black models are posing to the camera and dressing elegantly (pp. 126-129). Sulter was aware of the revolutionary blueprint she was developing in her work, and her self-actualised journey is featured in her poems and photography in ways that offer a profound example of a community space which uplifts and is devoted to advocating for the justice for the excluded and overlooked. Sulter states:

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 o d i o ibi io o p ap p o a a d

□ □  
A a B a □ o a  
p o a i p o i i a □ □  
□ o d o p o i 9 □

In *Piggyback on a Horse: Poems of the American South*, Rebecca Wilson interviews a range of Scottish and Irish women writers. In an attempt to showcase the wide variety of voices, Wilson as an interviewer<sup>□</sup> builds her questions around the notions of selfhood and culture, and the relationship between race and writing. Through Wilson's witty approach she manages to conduct insightful and provocative interviews. In her conversation with Sulter, Wilson asks the author about her ties to other Black writers: o do o

The crux of Sulter's work has its roots in trauma-informed recovery, as she advocates for a collective sense of healing from the atrocities committed during the slavery trade, and the constant abuse that marginalised communities are subjected to. The aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade haunts everyone regardless of their skin colour, thus it is crucial to question the images and intentions of colonialism and empire when dealing the writings of the diaspora (p. 115). Sulter's creative work encourages us to think of the Scottish African field as offering a fresh perspective on writing, identity and community. On the question of history in Sulter's work, Jim Mabon comments:

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i a g i B a i o i o o a a d i o o i i  
i o o o i i i d g a d a i g a o a i o a i d i  
9 0 i i g a i o a i b b a a d A i a p o p a p i a b  
o o i d a a p o i i i o d a i d p o p i  
a i d B i a i O i i B i a i a i b b a a d o A i a  
a d o i o i a o d o o a a a i a  
a d a d a a a i a d i o b i i a p i i a  
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There is an ethical duty to broaden such conversations on race in Scotland and the UK and to shed a light on creativity of the BAME community. Sulter herself argued that further research needed to be conducted on the creativity of Black women and their enormous web of activity, and in her work she promotes and encourages activities that aim to research, reclaim and make public our herstory for ourselves.<sup>12</sup> Crucial to this process is the actions and politics institutions. The University of Glasgow has recently established as ArtsLab initiative entitled Decolonise Glasgow that delivers constructive talks and workshops on issues related to empire, diversity, and institutional representation. In light of the Black Lives Matter movement, many BAME individuals are targeted because of their anticolonial views, and amongst them is Professor Priyamvada Gopal. However, The University of Cambridge showed public solidarity to Prof Gopal which helped eliminate some of the cyber abuse she was facing on social media. More libraries, schools and universities need to take a step further in decolonisation and add more resources and books on Black literature and history, and make them

accessible to the public. Celebrating BAME artists and writers will evidently delve the way in which institutions and governments can work on reparations and