

gauntlet¹

Otoniya Juliane Okot Bitek

let's go² write³ the poem⁴ that⁵ marks⁶
marks me⁷ marks my body⁸ marks me⁹ up¹⁰ inks me down¹¹
marks¹² terror¹³ marks¹⁴ nightmare¹⁵ marks¹⁶
discipline¹⁷ marks¹⁸ canon¹⁹

this²⁰ is²¹ where²² that²³ howl²⁴ deepens²⁵ because this²⁶
is²⁷ where if how when & what²⁸ we can²⁹ write³⁰ & now³¹
that³² i've become the script³³ listen³⁴

¹ this is a poem for Our own self

² let's go where neither of us has gone before & let's go see what's what

³ the right write let's go write the right stuff the write rites the right
wrongs write out the right lies of the archive let's rite the forgotten
those determined by who of us you disappeared

⁴ that determines who's who who's what who's when because you
know that you know that you know that that's my face your feet
landed on that last time don't you

⁵ these words mark me mark this page mark this day this time this is
the rest of your life & like a curse like the hail mary like petals of a
daisy you will always return to this moment

6 on this page i got proof of life i got full-throated laughter from
recent days & i know where the red ribbons lay the ones you call
fallacy the ones you call myth i know the ones you said were of no
consequence were lies but after all were ribbons what Dionne Brand
told us were signs of joy

7 as unsettled as we are as uninvited as perpetual guests holding on
to a story clad in dark blue this is how we got here how we got to
this place this is how we left this is where we came from this is why
house yes but never home & this is a canadian passport

8 left we left didn't we we left to survive just so they could never claim
that they got every last one of us

9 that is an acholi name one name two words this mark here is my
birthplace kisumu kenya this is a canadian passport

10 my face in two worlds & the british queen's head still on canadian
money

11 not anthems not flags not the deep blue of a canadian passport this
is canadian citizenship this is me now

12 & this is the point

13 this is what i read

14 this is the rhythm of the page

15 is where my skull hardens out is what keeps me awake in the
archives

16 where the curses are spelled out

17 & where we're marked up

18 the symbol of your power

19 is where we disappear

20 this this this this is a canadian passport

21 where my savage meets yours where my savage is you where my
songs are the text of this economy

22 we're spelled out in musical notes

23 song & i stand

24 to the woman at steam clock in gastown prefaced & gagged by
rhythm

25 the chorus of ancestors at the bottom of the ocean & the ones that
ghost above

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²⁶ this also is a vancouver lyric
²⁷ is this is libelous like gassy jack
²⁸ who often straight out threatens like jack himself not far from
the angel who carries the body of a fallen soldier at the bottom of
granville
²⁹ watch the angel weeps now how she carries on how she drowns out
the keening around a steamed-up jack
³⁰ how we meet at clock tower to ghost him out across time & space
³¹ like petals we're drawn to the centre
³² i could be a single sheet of paper
³³ beneath your writing hand mark me write all over me but i'm no
blank sheet
³⁴ i am the song

“gauntlet” is from Okot Bitek’s chapbook *gauntlet* published by Nomados Literary Press in 2019.