

Context for “My God,” by Catherine Roux

Roux was born in Lyon, France in 1918. This poem was written in the Ravensbruck concentration camp, where Roux was imprisoned from 1944-45 as a member of the French resistance.

(Poetry of the Holocaust, An Anthology, edited and introduced by Jean Boase-Beier and Marian de Vooght)

My God

My God,

I've no shoes

I've no bag, no notecase, no pen,

I've no name, I've been labeled 35282.

I've no hair, I've no hanky,

I've no photos of mother and my nephews now.

I've not got the anthology from which every day in my cell in Fresnes I learnt a poem.

I've got nothing now. My skull, my body, my hands are naked.

Boche (German soldier)! Search, Strip, Rob, Shave, Degrade my person.

Arm my hands with shovels and pickaxes.

Make me into a woodcutter, a ditch-digger, a tipper of excrement, a snow-sweeper, a convict laboring in the bog.

Sculpt my face, my wrinkles, my body so I look like thousands on thousands of woman prisoners.

Give my eyes that frightening fixed glare that I often see, with horror, in the eyes of my companions.

Deafen my ears with your shouting.

Wield your bludgeon.

Kick with your booted feet.

Murderess, pile our starved bodies by day and night into your crematoria.

Show our eyes the inhuman spectacle of women dying like animals, there in a corner!

Without ever stopping: beat, wound, hang, shoot.

Boche, since childhood, my Country, which is France, has clothed me with wool of its sheep, flax of its fields, silk of its insects.

To my ear, it has granted the sea's music and the wind's breath, soft or stormy. It has brought me to its mountain peaks, to the purity of eternal snows.

I've seemed to rediscover the faraway soul that I had when the world began.

It has made me into a girl walking in the wind, my hair and spirit free; it has etched my brain, raised it up to the great voice of the masters.

It has civilized my heart, rid me of brute violence, educated my instincts, tuned my sensibility, molded my courage, peopled my head with music, with poems, with words from books I love.

It has given me a mother and ringed me with sweet smiles of children.

My Country, which is France, has spread above me the gentleness, the tenderness, the calm of its sky.

In my heart, hated criminal *Boche*, wild beast still slobbering our blood, it has put a love so deep that in this place,

Imprisoned,

Unarmed,

Mother-naked,

I feel rich as a queen and I hold up my head with pride.