

Childhood (1908-1921)

Reproduction of the text: Carme Arnau. *Mercè Rodoreda: un viatge entre paraules i flors (Mercè Rodoreda: a Journey through Words and Flowers)*. Girona; Foundation Caixa de Girona, 1999. P. 7-16.

A Happy Childhood

“I remember the feeling of being at home and, leaning over the rail on the roof terrace, I would see the blue jacaranda flowers falling on the lawn and the hydrangeas. I’ll never be able to explain it; I’ve never felt as at home as when I lived in my grandfather’s house with my parents.”

Mercè Rodoreda, “Images from Childhood”

In the 1974 prologue of *Mirall trencat (Broken Mirror)*, Mercè Rodoreda wrote: “Linked to flowers, without flowers for years, I felt the need to talk about flowers, and to make my main character a gardener.” And the thing is that, as this character says, “a gardener is different from other people, and this comes from dealing with flowers.” The author is referring to the fact that the first novel that she finished, after her long exile, was precisely, *Jardí vora el mar (Garden by the Sea)*, whose main character is an old gardener, a story mainly set in a splendid garden, where all sorts of flowers proliferate, some normal ones and others exotic, which the author shows that she knows well. And like so many things about Mercè Rodoreda, this “link” comes from her childhood.

In fact, Mercè Rodoreda, the most widely acclaimed author in contemporary Catalan fiction, was born in October of 1908, in a house with a garden in the neighbourhood of Sant Gervasi. She was the only child of a couple who enjoyed literature and the theatre, and she lived in a happy, somewhat bohemian atmosphere, dominated by the figure of her maternal grandfather, Pere Gurguí, former writer for *La Renaixença* and *L’Arc de Sant Martí*. In fact, the figure of her maternal grandfather was very important for Mercè Rodoreda because he instilled in her a deep sense of Catalan identity that accompanied her throughout her life, even in very difficult times far from her country, as well as an intense attraction to flowers, flowers that presided over her childhood and would play a significant role in the short stories and novels that she wrote. In 1910, her grandfather built a monument to Jacint Verdaguer, who had been a friend of his, in the family garden, where it became the centre of parties and gatherings: “a hill of big stones, with pans of dirt in between, where rosemary plants and other typical Mediterranean plants grew, surrounded by a strip of pink cement that wound around the rocks and had the titles of Verdaguer’s main works engraved in it, *El Canigó*, *L’Atlàntida*, etc.,” wrote Mercè Rodoreda in “Images from Childhood.” Marked by her upbringing (her father was fond of books, as she herself mentioned in an interview), she was a great reader, especially of classic and modern Catalan authors: Lull, Verdaguer, Maragall, Sagarra, Carner, etc. When she was twenty, she married her uncle, an “American,” (as emigrants to the were called), Joan Gurguí, a man of his time, who had been sent at the age of fourteen to make his fortune in ; a year later her only son was born.