

Barcelona (1921-1939)

As an escape from a life that was too closed and suffocating for her, Mercè Rodoreda began to collaborate with newspapers and magazines, generally with stories, some of them for children: *La Publicitat*, *La Veu de Catalunya*, *Mirador*, etc. Flowers often appear in these stories, as is the case of “The Girl with the Bouquet of Camellias,” where camellias lead to memories, to youth, which would be a constant in Rodoreda’s writing. She also wrote four novels that she later rejected because they reflected her inexperience, showing her strong desire to write, but not much more, as she emphasised in an interview. She only accepted *Aloma* (1938), which won the 1937 Crexells Award, although even in that case, she completely rewrote it and published a new version in 1969, showing how demanding she was. In the novel, a work of interior analysis, focused on a female figure, an adolescent, Aloma, who lives in a Barcelona that is growing and expanding, but also conflictive, there is a scene that, with variations, would be constant in her writing: a modest home with a garden in the Sant Gervasi neighbourhood, a garden full of flowers. In fact, Aloma’s entry into the world of adults, a world that is always disenchanting for Rodoreda, is represented by the identification of the girl with a wilted flower, and also with the loss of the garden, the only space for happiness, dreaming. It is as if this were a sort of expulsion from an earthly paradise, a garden, as well.

And this tie, this identification of female characters with flowers (sometimes they are even named after flowers) would be another constant in Rodoreda’s fiction. The story of a failed first love, Aloma is characterised by some features that would be persistent in her writing: emotion, poeticism, an attempt at symbolism, often focused on flowers and greenery. But this exemplary development, keeping in mind that the author was self-taught, was brought to a halt by the Spanish Civil War, when Rodoreda had to go into exile, which was particularly hard due to the later outbreak of World War II.