

Romanyà de la Selva (1972-1983)

A Progressive Return Beginning in the 1970's: Romanyà de la Selva

“The town is sensational. The houses are relatively spread out, located at the top of a light mountain from which you can turn your eyes either to the sea or to the white crest of the Pyrenees.”

Mercè Rodoreda. “Journey to the Village of Fear,” from the collection *Viatges i flors* (Travels and Flowers).

In fact, her return to Catalonia was not made to Barcelona, a bilingual, noisy city that she no longer liked, without greenery and especially without gardens, but rather to this quiet little village in the Gavarres, which is located at the top of a permanently green mountain, where she built a house with a garden in a secluded spot at the end of the 1970's. In *Mirall trencat* (Broken Mirror), Rodoreda already created a myth, that of "her" Barcelona, or Catalonia, which extended in time from the turn of the century until the Spanish Civil War, which destroyed it, razed it. This is a beautiful image, focused on a wealthy family that lives in a splendid mansion in the neighbourhood of Sant Gervasi, with a garden that is magnificent, but also surrounded by mystery and death, at the centre of which grows a majestic laurel; once again, a tree appears, full of classical connotations. A symbol of immortality. It was the peace of Romanyà, an isolated spot with houses and gardens spread out over the mountain, with holm oaks and dolmen, which favoured her being able to finish this complex novel, as well as two other works, her last. One was a collection that is difficult to classify, begun in the 1960's, and the other was a singular novel, both published in 1980: *Viatges i flors* (Travels and Flowers) and *Quanta, quanta guerra...* (So Much War). Both followed a more cryptic, imaginative vein, works of great quality that also show the profound originality of their writer. In the collection, in fact, Rodoreda creates a fantastic flower, in the section “Real Flowers,” a significant title in and of itself, or imaginary villages where the narrator walks, here a faceless, nameless narrator who is only a guide for the reader, in “A Trip to a Few Villages.” Villages and flowers are metaphors for people, and especially their feelings, but also for the difficult, oppressive, and gregarious society in which she must live imprisoned. And the parallels between this work and her last novel, *Quanta, quanta guerra...* (So Much War...) are evident. The plot of the novel follows the trip taken by the main character, a young, innocent boy, through places that may remind us of Romanyà de la Selva, with typical Catalan country homes, greenery, and the sea close by. Decidedly far from the city and the realism, the daily life which characterised Rodoreda's early works. The tree clearly becomes an archetype symbolising the connection between man and the world, a sort of beneficial, positive metamorphosis, clearly permanent; the novel ends, significantly, with the return of the main character to the cottage with a garden and flowers that he left at the beginning of the work in order to see the world and gain experience:

“I'd go back home to work in the field of carnations, with water running through the ruts and the sound of the trains at night, with the rose bush with yellow roses climbing up to the roof.”

The trip is also imaginary, taking place over the course of a single night, a special moment in Rodoreda's works, and this path reflects a tragic view of the world and life, without the humour and irony of the collection. A novel of initiation, written in first person, what the main character is searching for is knowledge. The work, in fact, shows that Mercè Rodoreda's interests are closely linked to her own life, and to confirm this, in this work she reflects on the transcendence of man and death, which was soon to come to her. And death caught Mercè Rodoreda in full creativity, in the place that she especially liked, Romanyà de la Selva, surrounded by luxuriant evergreen forests, where she was laid to rest in a small cemetery in April of 1983. This was a place that she wrote about, insisting on the importance of trees in her life and works:

“I admire the majesty of the cypress, the well-drawn shape of the oak leaf, the tenderness of the poplars, and the ruffling of the weeping willow; but my tree, for its discretion, for its perennial leaves, its rough cork trunk, is the holy holm oak. The Gavarres is a whole grove of holm oak, which look like velvet at dusk, kissed by the slanting light of the setting sun.”

Like a circle, a perfect circle, a recurrent symbol in her work used to reflect perfection, her life starts with a garden in Barcelona, full of flowers, and ends amidst the greenery, ripe with age, of the Gavarres. From reality to myth, life and work advance following the same itinerary, the same evolution, always linked to flowers, to vegetation.