

If you want to cite this page...

Literary news about Mercè Rodoreda on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/merce-rodoreda> >

Mercè Rodoreda



Mercè Rodoreda, The Fruits of Exile

Mercè Ibarz

The novels of Rodoreda are the great novels of modern Catalan literature. As is the case with the works of all the writers of her generation, the novels of Rodoreda show the effects of the Spanish Civil War - a war that broke lives, loves, and families, and that led to uprooting (in the form of exile for many), profound unhappiness, and destruction. Often, nonetheless, her writing allows us to catch a glimpse of hope at the end in such symbolic elements as flowers and jewels. Her work is also a reflection on the female condition and love.

The works of Mercè Rodoreda (Barcelona 1908 - Romanyà de la Selva, 1983) traverse the main areas of that modern Western literature that becomes contemporary through the experience of war and, more particularly, of exile. The experience of exile stretches the limits of literary realism, which are in no way sufficient for reading Rodoreda or sharing the memory of the world from which her books and characters speak. Born together with the cinema, as she liked to say to so many of her contemporaries ([Pere Quart](#), Rafael Alberti), Rodoreda was a self-taught writer whose literary education was obtained through popular and patriotic verse, the emblematic works of [Verdaguer](#) and [Ruyra](#), the literature of book-stalls, and later on, through journalism, by means of which she would come to know the Catalan literary elites of the nineteen-thirties. Nonetheless, it was during the Spanish Civil War (*Aloma*, her first valuable novel, was completed in 1938), and above all after the experience of the Second World War and the exile, that she succeeded in giving form to her project, which can be considered as one of the most ambitious in the Catalan literature of the twentieth century and as part of the cultural heritage of contemporary Europe. It is the result of experience and experiment, or in other words, the result of fragmentation.

From popular culture and the broadening and modelling of the literary possibilities of a language without a modern narrative tradition, from the minor or modish novels (the first four that she published) to the construction of a coherent, complex, all-but-complacent and progressively abstract and mythical fresco of the everyday lives of the twentieth century, assaulted by war and by the tenebrae of love - a fresco of mosaics in which her short stories, along with her posthumous novel *La mort i la primavera* (Death and the Spring), stand out besides her better known books - the works of Mercè Rodoreda should be read, in the words of her friend and mentor in expatriation, [Josep Carner](#), as the most delicate, the most "flavoursome" fruit that her exile has bequeathed to us.

The girl from Sant Gervasi When Mercè Rodoreda was born on 10th October 1908, Sant Gervasi de Cassoles was a quarter that had been annexed only fifteen years before to the capital (an unruly Barcelona in which anarchists and big-business gangsters were embroiled in a struggle for control of the streets. At that time, Gaudí had half-completed what today is known as the Güell Park (one of the future scenarios of *La plaça del Diamant*) (*The Time of the Doves*), the riots of The Tragic Week were just around the corner (1909); and, broadly speaking, cultural life witnessed the battle between the Modernist project, which would shortly be defeated, and the return to order that would take the

If you want to cite this page...

Literary news about Mercè Rodoreda on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/merce-rodoreda> >

polyhedral form of Noucentisme. It was an intense cultural debate that would involve the various layers of Catalan society and that in the years to come would assume a new form both along the pathways that would lead to self-government and through the struggles for social transformation: the most radical ones, those of the popular classes (anarchism, the formation of cultural circles or atheneums, the emergence of self-taught people) and those aiming at the modernisation of the mass media society (newspapers, journals, radio, cinema, the Dictionary by Fabra, novels, publishing-houses, the graphic arts, and photography).

The life and works of Rodoreda are closely linked to cultural and political events. She went to school for only three years between 1915 and 1918, and in that time attended two different institutions. The only child of a housewife and an salesclerk in a gunsmith's shop in the central Ferran Street, she seemed to be destined to married life. Mercè, a solitary girl who, according to her own account in a brief and sketchy memoir, used to write by listening to the conversations of the men working in the garden and then transcribing them, accomplished this destiny at the age of twenty. She was married to the brother of her mother, an emigrant to Buenos Aires who often helped to sustain his sister's domestic economy. Joan Gurguí was seventeen years older than Mercè. One year later, in 1929, a boy was born from this union. Living the life of a married woman awoke in the young mother an increasing desire to be independent, to write, to exercise an occupation. She began to return every day for a while to her mother's house in Manuel Angelon Street, where she would shut herself up to write in the dovecote (a blue dovecote, like the one in *La plaça del Diamant*). She wrote verse, a comic play of which no trace remains, and a novel. Meanwhile, the Second Republic was proclaimed. And as if she were transported on its very own impulse of liberty (like Aloma, who goes down from Sant Gervasi to the Rambla, where she will see what is new in the city and will buy C. A. Jordana's novel *Una mena d'amor*, to read it in secret), Rodoreda also decided to step out of that same quarter. She went to the Catalònia publishing-house and paid (actually, her husband paid) for the publication of her first novel, *Sóc una dona honrada?* (Am I a Decent Woman?) The girl from Sant Gervasi had taken a decisive step. The publication of this book was accompanied by a striking physical transformation, and these two factors make of the young Rodoreda one of the most interesting types of Catalan woman of the nineteen-thirties: upright, daring, unrestrained. She herself began to make her clothes in accordance with the tendencies popularised in magazines and the cinema. She also started to make her mark with contributions to newspapers.

Journalism, revolution, and warA portrait of the young Rodoreda is to be found in the novel *Aquest serà el principi* (1986) by [Anna Murià](#), a subtle work on exile as a phenomenon understood as the end of a period and as the beginning of all things: a beginning not just of another period but of everything that the generation of these two writers would be able to achieve, as much in the vital as in the creative sense. It was a generation that had a great deal to do when the war or, as Rodoreda always used to say, the revolution, began. [Agustí Bartra](#) and [Pere Calders](#) also belonged to this generation, and the book by Murià includes depictions of them. In it, Mercè becomes Berta, a journalist. Between 1933 and 1934 she wrote political articles for newspapers. She also wrote for the catalanist journal *Clarisme*, which supported the new orthographical and grammatical norms of Pompeu Fabra and was in favour of a thorough debate on the limits of self-government. Together with the director of this publication, Delfí Dalmau, she signed a book entitled *Polèmica* (Polemic) (1934). In that same journal she published a series of very interesting interviews with the literati of the time. In 1934 she also put to the press two more novels, *Del que hom no pot fugir* (From What You Cannot Hide) and *Un dia en la vida d'un home* (One day in the Life of a Man). Doors began to open to her, and in 1935 she started to publish stories in "Una estona amb els infants", the children's section of *La Publicitat*, where she worked with the artist [Tísner](#). She also published short stories in other acknowledged standard-bearers of Catalan-language press: *La Revista*, *La Veu de Catalunya*, *Mirador*. In 1936 her

If you want to cite this page...

Literary news about Mercè Rodoreda on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/merce-rodoreda> >

fourth novel, *Crim* (Crime) made its appearance.

The war overturned everything. And it awakes in Rodoreda her true narrative self, which appears for the first time in *Aloma*. This is a novel inspired by her own life, and one that the author would subject to a radical re-writing thirty years later on. The version that we know today (1969) represents an exhaustive pruning of details and characters of the period: the doll created after the free-thinking and scandalous manner of the black singer and dancer Josephine Baker, the witty conversations of the writer who so resembles Trabal and which fascinate Aloma. And this is, above all, and in a way that is very significant in the understanding of the role of exile in Rodoreda's work, an exercise in anti-nostalgia. Through the self-censoring of her youth the author seems to grasp that the pre-war period contained, as well as the seed of revolution, the irreducible spark of the condemnation of personal liberty and of the destruction of free morality that the case of Rodoreda herself, as a woman, clearly exemplifies as in the censure that she had to endure for her extra-marital love affair with Armand Obiols. Very rarely is a writer so willing to mutilate the written and created memory (the first *Aloma* had certain virtues that the author annihilated) in order to rescue poignancy.

Exile, writing, and painting If the re-writing of *Aloma* in 1968 can be read as one of the fruits of Rodoreda's exile - a fruit from which neither the pulp nor the juice has yet been extracted - it is because it forms part of a literary project, one to which Rodoreda was radically committed. Apparently, the novel that made her famous, *La plaça del Diamant* (1962), has nothing to do with exile, because Colometa, the protagonist, forms part, justly, of the anonymous mass of people that did not go into exile. But the novel was, on the other hand, the result of the lived intellectual and political experience and the literary apprenticeship that Mercè Rodoreda had undergone step by step: first in France, and afterwards in Geneva, in Switzerland. In France she lived in Bordeaux, Limoges, and Paris, either writing short stories in the time that she had free between making one shirt and another (she earned a living for quite some time as a seamstress), creating poetry to show it to [Carner](#) and eventually to win the [Floral Games](#) in exile (she became Mestre en Gai Saber in 1949 in Montevideo, which means that she had won three prizes in the Floral Games), or painting when a strange paralysis of her arm prevented her from writing. Armand Obiols was often her sole reader in those years in which, as she herself would say long afterwards to [Montserrat Roig](#), "Writing in Catalan in a foreign country is like wanting flowers to bloom at the North Pole".

In her short stories, and afterwards in her later works - *Viatges i flors* (Travels and Flowers) (1980), *Quanta, quanta guerra...* (So Much War) (1980), *La mort i la primavera* (1986) - there appears an extraordinary assortment of exiles, soldiers, and unprotected people who find expression in a no-man's-land. Rodoreda uses the first person, and monologues in particular, a great deal, but it is perhaps in the short stories that this confessional and discursive formula is more profuse, as the unrestrained expression of these cast-aside characters who dare to speak. Her three collections were published in 1958 (*Vint-i-dos contes* [Twenty-Two Short Stories]), in 1967 (*La meva Cristina i altres contes* [My Cristina and Other Stories]) and in 1978 (*Semblava de seda i altres contes* [It Seemed to Be of Silk and the Other Stories]). From where do the characters speak? From their home country? From where the author lends them a voice: Bordeaux, Paris, Geneva? From no-man's-land, seems the more likely answer.

Exile traverses the whole of Rodoreda's work and gives it a meaning. In this respect, there is no way to avoid thinking of the Rodoreda who in the nineteen-fifties was writing in Paris and immediately afterwards in Geneva, where she settled in 1954 and would remain for twenty years: she was working, at that time, on the first versions of what in due course would be *La plaça del Diamant* (1962), *Jardí vora el mar* (Garden by the Sea) (1967), *Mirall trencat* (1974), *La mort i la primavera* (1986). The

If you want to cite this page...

Literary news about Mercè Rodoreda on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/merce-rodoreda> >

prose of *Flors i viatges* was written in two stages: the first, *Flors*, in Geneva, and the second, *Viatges*, some years later in Romanyà de la Selva, where she also finished *Mirall trencat* and wrote the whole of *Quanta, quanta guerra...* (1980), and left all-but finished *La mort i la primavera*. But in the fifties, Rodoreda decided to carry on with *La plaça del Diamant* rather than with the latter work. It was a literary option that allowed her to use exile as a territory of reconstruction: the reconstruction of the narrative memory and of the reading public. In the seventies, and after the death of Obiols, she returned once and for all to Catalonia and began on the rescue of her imagination from beyond the frontiers of literary genres. This is the second great period in her creativity, one that culminates in the extraordinary *La mort i la primavera*.

If Rodoreda had made in the nineteen-fifties a choice that in one way or another can be considered realistic, in the nineteen-eighties she opted for the responsibility that return, as a territory on the other side of the coin of exile, required of her if she wanted to continue to make use of her creative freedom. This was a kind of relationship with her own work that allows us to think of other contemporary literary projects such as that of the Russian writer Nina Berberova (1901-1993), of the Italian Italo Calvino (1923-1985), or of the Ukrainian-Brazilian Clarice Lispector (1917-1978), both in what they have in common - the transit through literary genres and their transformation - and in what separates them or what they resolve in different ways - the meaning given to exile and its literary expression, or interior exile.

Mercè Rodoreda transformed her first exile by making use, in the personal domain, of the freedom to alter the concept of family and motherhood, and in the creative realm, of a reduction or avoidance of delusions about the past. She celebrated her second exile, at Romanyà, by awarding herself the most radical creative freedom of which she was capable without thoughts of success - a success which she as a writer had so desired and had so fully obtained.

Copyright © 1999 Ediuoc/ECSA

The author

Life

 **WEB: In Wikipedia**

Biography, works and links on the author in the free encyclopaedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercè_Rodoreda

 **WEB: In Words Without Borders**

Biography and four pieces of fiction translated into English by Martha Tennent.

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.wordswithoutborders.org/contributor/merc-rodoreda>

 **WEB: The author in the Catalan Encyclopaedia**

<http://www.grec.cat/cgibin/hecangcl2.pgm?&USUARI=&SESSIO=&NDCHEC=0056324&PGMORI=E>

Works and translations

 **WEB: Mercè Rodoreda's translated works**

In the TRAC database, from Institut Ramon Llull.

If you want to cite this page...

Literary news about Mercè Rodoreda on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/merce-rodoreda> >

https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.llull.cat/english/recursos/trac_traduuccions.cfm

 **WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya**

http://catalog.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Rodoreda+Merc%C3%A8&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D

 **WEB: The author in The European Library**

<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28%22creator%22+all+%22rodoreda+merc%C3%A8%22%29.query>

 **WEB: The author in the Congress Library (US)**

<http://catalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>

 **WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)**

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Merc%C3%A8+Rodoreda>

 **WEB: Mercè Rodoreda in WorldCat**

Bibliographical information in the union catalog from the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC).
https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.worldcat.org/search?q=%22merc%C3%A8+rodoreda%22&qt=result_s_page

A selection of texts

Text

 **WEB: The Time of the Doves**

Information on the English translation of *La plaça del Diamant*. Including a biography and an extract from the novel.

https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.graywolfpress.org/index.php?page=shop.flypage&product_id=141&category_id=58fe665254b9537f9c81d5c1529e6c8f&option=com_phpshop

 **WEB: Summer**

A short story by Rodoreda translated by Martha Tennent. In *Words Without Borders Magazine* (December 2008).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/summer>

 **WEB: Happiness**

A short story by Rodoreda translated by Martha Tennent. In *Words Without Borders Magazine* (December 2008).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/happiness-merce-rodoreda>

 **WEB: Ice Cream**

A short story by Rodoreda translated by Martha Tennent. In *Words Without Borders Magazine* (December 2007).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/ice-cream>

 **WEB: Afternoon at the Cinema**

A short story by Rodoreda translated by Martha Tennent. In *Words Without Borders Magazine* (October 2007).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/afternoon-at-the-cinema>

If you want to cite this page...

Literary news about Mercè Rodoreda on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/merce-rodoreda> >

 **WEB: Fragments**

Prose fragment in Catalan, German and English.

http://www.escritors.cat/autors/rodoredam/pagina.php?id_sec=1801

Reviews and interviews

Reviews

 **WEB: Website of the AELC**

Biography, information, works.

http://www.escritors.cat/autors/rodoredam/pagina.php?id_sec=1803

 **WEB: Rodoreda, translated**

Information about the author and the translations of her works. It includes a presentation by Carme Arnau and reviews and extracts of her works. In Visat (Catalan PEN Club).

<http://www.visat.cat/traduccions-literatura-catalana/eng/autor/10/merce-rodoreda.html>

 **WEB: In The Modern Novel**

It contains a brief biography, links about the author as well as reviews of some of her works: [The Time of the Doves](#), [Camellia Street](#), [A Broken Mirror](#) and [Death in Spring](#).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.themodernnovel.org/europe/w-europe/catalonia/rodoreda/>

 **WEB: Something fled**

An article by Colm Tóibín on the dazzling complexities of Mercè Rodoreda. In *The Times Literary Supplement* (04/04/2018).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/merce-rodoreda-colm-toibin/>

 **WEB: Paul Doyle on *The Selected Stories of Mercè Rodoreda***

A review in *Asymptote*.

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.asymptotejournal.com/criticism/the-selected-stories-of-merce-rodoreda/>

 **WEB: The Civil War of Memory**

A review of *War, So Much War* by By Bécquer Seguí. In *Los Angeles Review of Books* (13/02/2017).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://lareviewofbooks.org/article/merce-rodoredas-war/#!>

 **WEB: Mercè Rodoreda and the Style of Innocence**

An essay by Paul Kerschen. In *The Quarterly Conversation*, 27 (March 2012).

<http://quarterlyconversation.com/merce-rodoreda-and-the-style-of-innocence>

 **WEB: A Domestic Existentialist**

An essay on Mercè Rodoreda by Natasha Wimmer. In *The National* (16/09/2009).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://www.thenation.com/article/domestic-existentialist-mercegrave-rodoreda/>

 **PDF: My Dear, These Things are Life: a Hundred Years of Mercè Rodoreda**

Georgetown University (April 2008).

<http://www.catalansdc.com/documents/Rodoreda%20Georgetown.pdf>

If you want to cite this page...

Literary news about Mercè Rodoreda on Lletra, the UOC's virtual space devoted to Catalan literature

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/merce-rodoreda> >

Miscellaneous



PDF: Mercè Rodoreda à Geneve

This work by Mariàngela Vilallonga follows the literary geography of the writer through the city of Geneva during the years she lived there from 1954 to 1979 to the intermittent last seven years. In *Le Globe: revue genevoise de géographie*, 156 (2016).

<https://lletra.uoc.eduhttps://dugi-doc.udg.edu/bitstream/handle/10256/13891/MerceRodoredaGeneve.pdf>



WEB: Mercè Rodoreda's work around the world

A map and a graph by Mercè Rodoreda's Foundation showing the translations of her works.

<http://www.mercerodoreda.cat/translations>



WEB: Mercè Rodoreda Private Foundation

Mercè Rodoreda Private Foundation official website. Including biography, bibliography and publications.

<http://www.mercerodoreda.cat/>



WEB: The Rodoreda Foundation in Barcelona

Information about the Mercè Rodoreda Foundation at the website "Espais escrits. Xarxa del Patrimoni Literari Català" [Written Spaces. The Catalan Literary Heritage Network].

<http://www.espaisescrits.cat/home.php?op=6&module=escriptors&ides=9&idioma=eng>



WEB: A highly translated author

A list of works by Mercè Rodoreda translated into a number of languages.

<http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/rodoredam/obra.php#1326>
