

The collection of short stories *Viatges i flors* (1980) usually comes way down the list of works by Mercè Rodoreda. It is considered a “minor work”, a kind of “smile” by the writer to her readers or a prelude to her more “serious” writing that presents a more direct reality. The places described in “Viatges a uns quants pobles” and the unusual world of “Flors de debò” seem like the product of a rampant imagination that creates wonderful worlds but shuns any recognisable references to time and place.

Similarly, the striking images in *Viatges i flors* have their origin in a direct experience of reality and constitute a comment on it. Various critical appreciations point to the relationship between this book of short stories and the author’s experiences in exile that had such a profound effect on her. The traveller’s surprise at the life in the villages he visits, and particularly his alienation, the lack of any attachment to the places he passes through, define him as an immigrant, as “someone who doesn’t belong”. The world of “Flors de debò” also awakens in the reader a sense of otherness, the result of an encounter with something different. The aesthetic and linguistic experiments that we find in this collection emphasise the links with the period in which it was written. The author’s boldness when it comes to creating such unreal and unlikely characters and places is possibly based on a firm belief in the power of language, seen as an instrument able to describe any fruit of the imagination, even the most unexpected. The solutions the writer uses exemplify (and also confirm) the possibilities of literary Catalan, a subject that is hard to dissociate from the limitations imposed by the Franco regime in the post-war years. The confrontation between two worlds that we find in “Flors de debò” is of a similar nature: unusual botanical creations raise objections, albeit implicitly, to the “false flowers” that are paradoxically the real flowers known to the reader. Similarly, the universe of marvellous plants holds itself out as an alternative to the real world, while at the same time questioning the true nature of reality.

*Viatges i flors* is a book that unveils a number of secrets of Rodoreda’s writing. It shows in particular how the period during which she lived infiltrates her stories, and how reality is combined with fiction not only through the anecdotes that attempt to imitate life. The reader who wants to find evidence of this is invited to explore in greater depth those parts where the imprint of reality is most profound, which is invisible at first glance.

The collection also reflects the importance of detail in the author’s work. There is no epic dimension to the places the traveller visits; on the contrary, they are characterised simply by one or two features, sometimes as incorporeal and intangible as that sense of unease that comes from fear, or the colours of the rainbow on the body of a newborn animal. The flowers as described in minute detail: the way in which they twine round a branch or quiver in the wind, a colour that is hard to define, or even a weakness in their nature. With these minimal elements, Rodoreda constructs unforgettable worlds filled with a profound expressivity and with beings who are no less fascinating. We find this quality too in her novels: *La plaça del Diamant*, *El carrer de les Camèlies* and *Mirall trencat*. Even in this last book, the most “epic” of them all since it is the saga of a family over several

decades in the history of Barcelona, attention to detail seems to be the starting point for the construction of the story and of the characters, who remain in the reader's memory linked to some small object that is the expression of the principal feature of their fictional life. *Viatges flors* in fact exemplifies the essence of Mercè Rodoreda's writing.