



While preparing her complete works, Mercè Rodoreda chose only *Aloma* from among her pre-war production. Still, the revisions she made changed the novel into one quite different from that of the thirties, much more in consonance with the writer's new interests and the new paths her fiction was following. The two published versions of the book represent a unique case within Rodoredan literature, and they allow us to see their evolution textually, on paper. *Aloma* establishes in this way a diaphanous link between Rodoreda's two basic creative periods: the Republican phase and the post-war.

### **A literary link between two times**

In April 1936, Mercè Rodoreda finished the first version of *Aloma*. The book, which wasn't published until 1938, with some modifications suggested by important critical voices once it won the Joan Crexells prize in 1937, represents a first point of arrival in the process begun by the author in 1932. With this psychological novel centered on the question of sexuality and a young woman from Barcelona as heroine--situating it at the height of literary modernity as much from a thematic as a formal point of view and thus responsive to the critical slogans of the day--Rodoreda offers a well-wrought product, effective both in narrative and cultural terms. The book satisfied the most demanding critics and was a commercial success despite the exceptional circumstances of the war. Indeed, *Aloma* portrays the era's crisis of values through a familiar character and structure: an eighteen-year-old girl, naïve mimic of the modern women of film, living in a Republican neighborhood of Barcelona prior to the war and after the events of October of 1934.

The first *Aloma*, like a good daughter of her time, is very connected to the literary-cultural context of the thirties. When Rodoreda decided to include it in the Complete Works, in the latter half of the sixties, she submitted it to a rigorous revision that eliminated all trace of this connection. The author found herself in a different creative moment, had other literary interests, and had greatly advanced in her profession. From that position, between 1967 and 1968 she erased the elements that were most clearly linked to the cultural and sociopolitical reality of the Republican period, reinforced the lyrical and symbolic components of the text, and nourished as much as possible the aspects of the novels that concerned the human condition. The result is a narrative no longer subject to specific circumstances and places, but one that tells a very generic story, whose interest hinges on the heroine's experience. Here, it does not (nor, to some extent, should not) matter that she is a girl from Barcelona in the nineteen-thirties. The novel's roots in 1938 and the ground where it is planted constitute a lost world, due to the Franquist victory and the imposition of an iron dictatorship over the course of four decades.

The Barcelona the writer had portrayed melts away in favor of a narrative subtlety that goes beyond the record of a specific time. The objective is to update the text and improve its literary excellence with the poetic quality characteristic of Rodoreda's other stories of the time. In particular, she tunes the narrative itself, making its words more fluid, with a perfect awareness that words--the how, more than the what--are what make a difference in literature. This aim, defined in her first phase as writer, becomes consolidated and reinforced during the post-war period with constant work, reading, and a high degree of self-discipline.

The second *Aloma* is a novel that the mature author always considered minor. However, we should not forget its unquestionable value in as much as it gives us the opportunity to witness, by comparing the 1938 and 1969 texts line by line, the Rodoredan *modus operandi* in the decade

delimited by the publication of La plaça del Diamant and La meva Cristina i altres contes.

Translated by Robin Vogelzang