

Making Something out of *Nada*: An Analysis of Yago and Jaén's Adaptation of Carmen Laforet's Novel as Performed by the Centro Dramático Nacional

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EN Abstract. Adaptation is a dynamic process and useful tool in the study of culture. Carmen Laforet's novel, *Nada*, first published in 1944 and winner of the first Premio Nadal in Spain was adapted for the stage under the direction of Beatriz Jaén at the Centro Dramático Nacional. This study explores what stands to be lost and gained when transforming a prose, with a specific focus on how theatrical techniques such as staging, lighting and characterisation transform elements of prose into features of a live stage performance. It also considers the differing social, political, and cultural contexts and the implications of adapting *Nada* for the modern Spanish stage. The writing of Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation* and Joyce Carol Oates in *A Novelist Finds the Bare Bones of a Play* provide a thorough foundation for this article with Patrice Pavis's performance questionnaire similarly guiding the critical analysis.

Keywords. Narrative agency, domestic violence, post-war Spain, stage adaptation, feminist reinterpretation.

ES Haciendo algo de *Nada*: Un análisis de la adaptación de Yago y Jaén de la novela de Carmen Laforet representada por el Centro Dramático Nacional

ES Resumen. La adaptación es un proceso dinámico y una herramienta útil en el estudio de la cultura. La novela *Nada* de Carmen Laforet, publicada por primera vez en 1944 y ganadora del primer Premio Nadal en España, fue adaptada al teatro bajo la dirección de Beatriz Jaén en el Centro Dramático Nacional. Este ensayo explora lo que se gana y lo que se pierde al transformar una obra en prosa, con especial atención a cómo técnicas teatrales como la escenografía, la iluminación y la caracterización convierten elementos narrativos en recursos propios de una representación en vivo. También considera los diferentes contextos sociales, políticos y culturales, así como las implicaciones de adaptar *Nada* a la escena española contemporánea. Los escritos de Linda Hutcheon en *A Theory of Adaptation* y de Joyce Carol Oates en *A Novelist Finds the Bare Bones of a Play* ofrecen un fundamento teórico, complementado por el cuestionario de representación de Patrice Pavis que guía el análisis crítico.

Palabras clave. Agencia narrativa, violencia doméstica; España de posguerra, adaptación escénica, reinterpretación feminista.

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1. Introduction

Prose-to-theatre adaptation is a dynamic process which bridges the gap between the literary world and the live performance space. Adaptation is repeatedly used to reimagine texts, breathing new life into recognised narratives. The process invites a reimagining of the prose format, with narrative, characters and themes being reinterpreted to suit an on-stage performance.

Nada, Carmen Laforet's seminal work published in 1944, is a canonical text in Spanish literature that deals with identity, gender, and Catholic authoritarianism. Literary reviews claim *Nada* broke Spanish literature free from the cumbersome shadow of 19th-century prose and the cold censored rhetoric of Spanish fascism (Manguel, 2007: 1). In the words of Barry Jordan, whose analysis I return to later in my work, "in the 1940s, *Nada* managed to articulate some of the needs of a reading public anxious to escape post-war privations and recapture the certainties of a more settled, prosperous pre-war society." (Jordan, 1993:10). In his view, *Nada's* success lies in its ability to reflect the lived experiences of its readers.

Under the creative direction of Joan Yago and Beatriz Jaén, the prose, for the first time, was adapted for the stage. Its inaugural performance took place at the Teatro María Guerrero in Madrid, running from the 8th of November until the 22nd of December 2024. The production produced by the Centro Dramático Nacional starred Júlia Roch as the protagonist Andrea and Julia Rubio as her best friend Ena and featured Carmen Barrantes, Peter Vives, Manuel Minaya and Laura Ferrer as the rest of the dysfunctional family living on Calle de Aribau.

This study tasks itself with determining how successfully the prose has been adapted for the stage. With "successfully" defined here not solely in terms of fidelity to Laforet's novel, but in relation to how effectively it reinterprets its themes, narrative voice and characters within the constraints and possibilities of theatrical performance. I analyse the theatrical techniques employed to transport the novel from a page to the live stage. The Centro Dramático Nacional's adaptation presents the opportunity to observe the losses and/or gains that occur when work is adapted eighty years after it was written. The dramatic performance will be examined by what is condensed or omitted from the original work and how dramatic structures such as lighting, set, costume and script are used as tools for the reinterpretation of the text. It gives rise to questions of authenticity and the inevitable "sacrifice [of] gradations of time and the authorial voice" (Babbage, 2019:27) which occur as a result.

The adaptive process is not neutral; it is influenced by the individuals who decide to transform work into a new medium. From this we gain more than just a personal interpretation of a source; the reimagination of the text and its themes in a different temporal context offers an insight on social values and we can analyse how it is recontextualised for a modern audience. This study hopes to demonstrate the social and cultural value that the adaptation of a 20th-century novel into a 21st-century dramatical performance can have. With specific acknowledgement of how Laforet's *Nada* has been interpreted to suit this modern audience.

2. Theories of Adaptation

Defining adaptation is challenging because the word is used to describe both the process and the product (Hutcheon, 2012). The process is not uniform across media; each presents unique constraints and considerations that shape the transformation of content from one form to another. The act of adaptation also reflects the perspective and artistic vision of an individual. To further this, the translation of textual elements into visual, auditory, or performative forms offers insight into the ways in which meaning is constructed, and even challenged, in different artistic and cultural contexts. Existing literature is crucial to this research as it informs the methodology that will be employed to analyse *Nada* and the adaptation. This chapter outlines existing theories of adaptation and subsequently establishes a framework through which I conduct my analysis of Yago's adaptation.

It is in fact "not a matter of 'writing new' the old novels but, rather, giving the emperor new and more populist clothes." (Mackenzie, 2011: 154). Mackenzie specifically considers whether the theatrical medium offers a deeper understanding of the original narrative, explicitly commenting on the ability of theatrical features such as lighting and sound to construct greater emotional experiences in comparison to prose. Mackenzie provides insight into the challenges that adapters face when reworking novels for the stage, especially the compromise between innovation and fidelity to the source text.

He also points out the stark contrast between the intimate process of writing a novel and the collaborative construction of a play. This view highlights how a text offers space for the reader's imagination to shape a story, whereas a theatrical production is the result of communal artistic creation which takes on a life and dynamic of its own. He acknowledges, however, that the collaborative interpretation of theatrical performance can inspire new, refreshing angles on existing work. It is his view that "not every adaptation can or needs to be ground-breaking... but... it needs to offer difference and newness" (Mackenzie, 2011: 154). He comments on the practical and aesthetic challenges which are inherent to this form of adaptation, particularly the danger of over-dramatisation when adapting for the stage, where the work can become more of a spectacle and the real issues it originally confronted are lost.

Linda Hutcheon's work, *A Theory of Adaptation*, is critical for this study. Her book is dedicated to dissecting adaptation as a process while also considering the distinct conditions of the prose-to-drama format. She agrees, like other scholars, that there is a simplification which inevitably occurs. In her work she emphasises the adaptive process' key role in storytelling across diverse cultures and media, describing the products of adaptations as "complex cultural artefacts" (Hutcheon, 2012: 42) in their own right. Her book is a key source for my own analysis as it moves beyond fidelity criticism, which occupies much of the academic work on the subject¹. Her study outlines that themes are the easiest story elements to adapt across media forms and, similarly, that characters can also be transported from one text to another. Both the novel and the theatre

¹ The term *fidelity criticism* describes academic debate about the degree to which an adaptation remains loyal to its source text, a significant focus within adaptation studies.

are forms in which the human subject is central. This provides the grounds for examining the portrayal of characters and narrative in *Nada* and the adaptation. Murray Smith agrees that characters are crucial to the rhetorical and aesthetic effects of both narrative and performance texts because they engage the receivers' imaginations through what he calls recognition alignment and allegiance (Smith, 2022: 5).

There are disagreements amongst theorists that condensing is a necessary feature of adaptation rather than an artistic choice; arguably, "everything must be dramatised for the eye and ear; nothing can be summarised" (Oates, 1991: 3). Oates implies here that there in fact is not a reduction that takes place in the process but a transformation. Literary elements can be adapted to become visual or auditory; theatrical adaptation is not only a process of what characters say but also of musical arrangements, scenery, and costuming. All elements of a theatrical production play a part in the adaptation process; she considers this not a simplification of the original work but an exploration of how elements can be presented. Oates encourages the view that adaptation is not a summary but a reimagination of original work.

Frances Babbage, in her book *Adaptation in Contemporary Theatre*, provides a well-rounded analysis of existing adaptation theories and how they interact with the specific process for prose-to-stage. She writes about how "drama's necessary attention to action means de-emphasising or sacrificing narratorial perspective," (Babbage, 2019: 26) and how this can be limiting. Her chapter *Performing Books* considers the dimensions that performance, or liveness, can bring to a book; furthermore, it asks what a book might bring to performance. She discusses the explicit articulation of "bookness" across multiple productions, which serves to underline the distinctive qualities of the medium in each play and expose and exploit points of friction between them. She acknowledges that books and theatre operate in different ways when it comes to storytelling and comments on the tension between written literature and stage performance. Specifically, that literature is associated with interiority, narration, and descriptive detail, whereas theatre relies on physical and visual storytelling. Babbage later goes on to categorise three ways that a book can be staged: faithfully, interpretatively, or experimentally. She also gives weight to audience interpretation and how their engagement shapes the meaning of the adaptation, highlighting the communal nature of theatre performance (Babbage, 2017).

3. Establishing a methodology

Prose fiction is often found to be longer in its form of storytelling than theatre. In this way there is a transformation; the plot must be simplified. There arise questions of reduction, absence and erasure which should be examined carefully in this adaptation of Laforet's novel. The question within academic literature of whether adaptation is a reductive process or simply a transformation begs to be discovered within my discussion in the case of Laforet's *Nada*.

By dividing Laforet's novel into four clear sections, I achieve a framework which structures my later comparative analysis of the stage performance. I have decided to look at these elements of the novel as they are highlighted in the work of theorists as being key elements which impact and influence the adaptive process from prose to stage. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the narrative techniques, characters, themes, plot, and structure similarly allows a direct comparison to how these features are presented in Yago's adaptation. The analysis of Laforet's work is followed by a critical commentary of the performance watched at the Teatro María Guerrero. The review of the performance is guided by the features of the novel which are explored in the section that precedes it. I develop a comparison between the presentation of ideas in the novel and the stage performance, deeming whether the adaptation was successful in transferring these to the stage.

To further structure and guide my analysis of the performance, I use the questionnaire published by Patrice Pavis (1985), in which he directs its user's attention to all aspects of theatrical signification. Its purpose is to assist a spectator towards writing detailed notes after watching a performance. Ranging from a general discussion of the performance to specific aspects of an actor's performance, such as the quality of their gestures and mimes, this work has allowed me to form a comprehensive and critical opinion on Yago's adaptation. This questionnaire provides a structured way of approaching an analysis of a theatrical performance which lends to a nuanced analysis of the performance guided by the specificity of questions which draw out a more perceptive opinion.

Finally, by analysing critical opinion, I am able to establish the cultural significance of adapting *Nada* in this modern context. Tom Stroud maintains that imagery used in a novel once adapted to the stage is ultimately dependent on audience engagement because they rely on personal associations such as personal history, common cultural iconography, and familiarity (Stroud, 2009). The reception of this adaptation indicates the 'familiarity' of *Nada* for the modern Spanish audience and informs the cultural implications of this performance.

4. Dissecting *Nada*: Characters, Themes, Narrative and Plot

Jordan points out that the novel is "primarily concerned with the fears and difficulties of growing up and the gaining of an identity" (Jordan, 1993: 10). The authorial choice employed has the effect of heightening Andrea's emotional experiences and observations, and "since the information [in the novel] is limited to what the first-person narrator says, thinks, feels, receives and perceives, factors such as reader intimacy, connection with the character's emotional state, and visualisation of physical setting make the story appealing," (Al-Alami, 2019) for its reader. In Jordan's view:

Andrea's function as protagonist and structuring element is ambiguous, since she invariably drops out of sight and adopts the role of observer, eavesdropper, and voyeur. In this sense she does very little, she is not the sort of active protagonist who influences the course of events. Indeed, they influence her (Jordan, 1993: 14).

This reading of Andrea's role in Laforet's work suggests that her function as narrator is unlike traditional protagonists and encourages a reinterpretation of narrative agency. Although her passivity manifests in her role as an "eavesdropper", she remains subtly influential as the reader's experience is shaped by her internal perceptions which filter the narrative. This aspect of Andrea's narrative interiority becomes particularly significant in its theatrical transposition as the internalised gaze of the novel must be translated into physical presence on stage.

Lorraine Ryan similarly highlights the significance of the narrative choice but with a more nuanced interpretation of how it contributes to establishing themes in the novel. She writes that "the voyeuristic gaze of the main protagonist, Andrea, renders an intimate and sustained portrait of the inversion of gender roles in a post-war marriage in which the wife, Gloria, is the breadwinner and the husband, Juan, is both traumatised and poverty-stricken" (Ryan, 2017: 472). In her view, *Nada*, is one of the rare post war novels in which the institution of family, a fundamental pillar of the Franco regime, is undermined. Laforet's portrayal of the highly violent and economically asymmetrical relationship between Gloria and Juan cements this idea. Laforet's portrait of Juan exposes the detrimental effects of the war on the male psyche, and this demythologisation of post-war Spanish masculine identity contests the idolisation of the Francoist patriarch (Ryan, 2017: 470). The shocking violence of their relationship, which crescendos in chapter eleven, is a significant indicator of this. Its disturbing presentation in the novel challenges the social and historical view that "domestic violence was considered to be a private matter" (Wheeler, 2012: 439). Specifically, under the Franco regime domestic violence was dismissed as a "crime of passion", yet Laforet's portrayal of the abuse rejects this idea (Loewenberg, 2005: 464). The impact of this moment on the protagonist is evident, she can recall the threatening language and includes it as direct speech in her narrative. She notes the threats of "te voy a estrangular and how "le agarraba brutalmente la cabeza, de modo que si abría la boca no tenía más remedio que tragar agua." (Laforet, 2022: 133 and 135). Through the first-person narrative and setting of the house for most of the novel, Laforet exposes the reader to these "private" matters and forces them to acknowledge the abuse that occurs. Laforet confronts domestic violence in her novel, refusing to sanitise the reality of physical and emotional violence that many experienced during the period. The exposure of "private" violence has new implications in performance: what is mediated through Andrea's recollection becomes immediate and visible on stage. This raises questions about spectatorship, complicity, and the ethics of staging such traumas within the shared theatrical space.

One of the repeated motifs in the novel is the paradoxical presentation of oppression and hope. This is immediately introduced by the expression of Andrea's youthful optimism, "me parecía una aventura agradable y excitante aquella profunda libertad en la noche" which is quickly juxtaposed by "tuve la impresión de que al tirar la manta hacia los pies quitaba también de mí aquel ambiente opresivo que me anulaba desde mi llegada a la casa" (Laforet, 2022: 19 and 57). This continues throughout, manifesting through the presentation of dynamics within the house and how spaces are attributed with emotions through Andrea's perspective. The university, for example, is a place where "por primera vez en mi vida me encontré siendo expansiva y anudando amistades" (Laforet, 2022: 67). Similarly, there is tension in the novel between figures of modernity and those of traditional values, a reflection of the social and political landscape in which the publication is embedded. However, Roberta Johnson agrees with Jordan in that "the ultimate message of *Nada* is a conservative one," (Johnson, 1995: 477) recognising that all forms of illicit desire, for example, Román and Gloria's relationship, are contained, and order is restored through Román's suicide.

Laforet's novel works in a tripartite structure which traces the protagonist's journey through time (a year) and spaces (the town, Barcelona, and Madrid) (Servodidio, 1980: 58). The novel follows a chronological time-frame but is constructed through episodic scenes which are snapshots of moments in time, rather than a continuous flow of action driven by a plot. This disruption gives the work a disjointed and unpredictable nature which mirrors the narrator's own disorientation in the reconstruction of her memories. Laforet does, however, provide the reader with a circular narrative which bookends the novel with Andrea's arrival and departure from Barcelona. Jordan dedicates a chapter in his book to the critical analysis of the story and structure employed by Laforet in her work. Noting how the tripartite structure functions as "three broad stages of phases in the gradual development of the main protagonist towards maturity and adulthood," (Jordan, 1993: 15) which characterises the passing of time in the novel. Theatre, operating within real-time, must negotiate the episodic and fragmented structure of the novel and make structural decisions to blend memory-led narration with the dramatic flow of live performance.

In his work Jordan proposes that critics of the novel interpreted the characters as abnormal and eccentric. He argues that this view derives from an assumption that Laforet set out to produce a realistic work and that the presentation of characters strayed from this intention (Jordan, 1993: 28). It is reasonable to presume that Laforet experienced censorship during the time of writing; however, her work paints a vivid social portrait of Spanish society. Laforet's characters are symbolic and are representative of the broader social and political issues during the forties. In particular, Angustias is a quintessentially Francoist figure representing the authoritative nature of the regime through her own control of Andrea, notably in that "cuando... le parecía yo triste o astusada, se ponía muy contenta y se volvía autoritaria" (Laforet, 2022: 40). Her disciplined approach embodies the Francoist conservative morality and domestic duties of the female. Through the narra-

tor Andrea, Laforet critiques the lack of agency afforded to women in the repressive society. As the observer, she symbolises the isolation experienced by many during the transitional period and under the dictatorship, whereas Ena, her best friend, is the archetype for the progressive woman. Undeclared by society, she is a symbol of freedom; for Andrea, she represents an alternative reality, yet ironically it is Ena's own familial complexities which bond the two women. Román embodies the idealised patriarchal male stereotype, full of charm and charisma, yet still a threat to Andrea "con la bella y tirante sonrisa" (Laforet, 2022: 262). Juan is symbolic of the post-war male, broken and full of anger. His insecurities and violent tendencies stem from the tensions of domestic life under Franco's rule, representing the wide-felt misery which festered behind closed doors.

The narrative strategies, symbolic constructions, and thematic tensions embedded in Laforet's novel collectively generate the central problem of its adaptation: how to translate interiority, fragmentation, and ideological critique into embodied, visual, and temporal form. It is within this intermedial negotiation that Jaén and Yago's production situates itself.

5. Theatrical interpretations: A Review of *Nada* on Stage

The debut theatrical performance of Laforet's seminal novel *Nada* was staged and produced at the Teatro María Guerrero in Madrid. This production aimed to inspire conversations and hoped to connect the young people of contemporary Spain with those of the post-war period.

Stepping inside the auditorium of the Teatro María Guerrero immediately evoked an experience of time travel to the 1940s with dimmed lighting and music from the time playing subtly in the background. In his set design, Pablo Menor Palomo utilised cluttered and randomly assembled furniture to bring to life the oppressive nature of the flat. His choice emphasises the overwhelming tension and distressing atmosphere that Andrea experiences in the home on Calle de Aribau. Precariously balanced objects such as lamps, chairs and items of clothing formed a substantial portion of the onstage props and scenery which physicalised the problematic relationships within the family dynamic. The furniture occupied the entire back section of the stage, forcing the action between the characters to occur downstage under the spotlights. Palomo reproduced Laforet's descriptive language and transformed these ideas into physical representations of what Andrea describes on first arriving as "el hedor" (Laforet, 2022: 26) of the flat, constructing a setting which encapsulated her sentiment that "la casa fue envejeciendo" (Laforet, 2022: 30). Through his designs, Palomo has reinterpreted the language used by Laforet in the novel and generated physical objects and presented them in such a way that they recreate the atmosphere which she constructs in the opening of the prose.

Spatiality is key in the novel, something which Mirella D'Ambrosio Servodidio acknowledges when writing that "the anatomy of the house, described in substantial detail, is of central importance to the work for it serves as the metonymic expression of Spain as well as the symbol of particular lives" (Servodidio, 1980: 59). It is able to recreate the oppressive atmosphere which is detailed so specifically in the novel when the flat has "un calor sofocante como si el aire estuviera estancado y podrido" (Laforet, 2022: 23). Set design is a crucial element in theatre performance, going beyond aesthetics, it shapes audience perception of context and atmosphere. Spatial arrangements have an emotional impact and the ability to reinforce thematic depth; here it served its purpose of representing "microcosmic emblems of the havoc wrought by the Civil War" (Servodidio, 1980: 59). The set of the house, including the staircase up to Román's room, is a unit set, fixed in its position for the entire show. This had the effect of emphasising the inescapability of the protagonist's environment. Through the flat's omnipresence the audience similarly experienced the claustrophobia of the house; it was inescapable even when scenes were set on the streets of Barcelona or at the university, the flat continued to have a looming presence. Live theatre performance offers a unique experience which engages its audience in real time through visual and sensory elements, something that prose fiction cannot replicate.

The pursuit of Gloria by Juan in the second act is a notable example of the effective usage of staging in this performance. This chase and the streets of Barcelona were represented using the upper stage rigging; this was effective as the cast were still using the main stage to continue dialogue and action, which created a layered performance. The expansive space meant that events could overlap each other, which added immediacy to the plot progression of the performance. This sustained focus on action emphasised the emotional intensity by the visual contrast of events on stage. Furthermore, this stands in contrast with the novel's greater emphasis on emotional depth, which Frances Babbage highlights as one of the challenges of adapting prose for the stage. The tension between the emotional introspection of the novel and the visual stimulation of theatre is one of the most significant challenges of the prose-to-stage adaptation process. This accentuates the limitations of the stage format for these elements of the novel and necessitates a transformation of Andrea's perspective into a shared physicalised experience.

Palomo uses the central common room as the sole focal point of action; there is no physical space on stage for other rooms. Other locations, such as bedrooms, are created by a new interpretation of space; for example, Angustias' room is implied by the presence of a dressing table. The minimalistic approach transforms the apartment into a symbolic portrayal of the psychological entrapment and oppression experienced not only personally by the protagonist but also as a larger reflection of the social reality during the period. Constructing the "ambiente de tensión permanente y atmosfera irrespirable" (Centro Dramático Nacional, 2024) the creative team aimed to reproduce, simplicity of design became a strength for this production. The oppression and tension were further alluded to in passive moments. For example, in scenes where characters were gathered around the table, there were not enough chairs for all the characters. Who was sat and who stood hinted at the power dynamics within the family. Juan, Román and Andrea's grandmother, symbols

of traditional values and authority, were seated, yet the other women were forced to stand. Stage design in this production created both a literal space filled with conflict and a psychological landscape. This production used only what was necessary to convey a meaning, with set and props serving deeper metaphorical functions. This focus on simplicity proved effective in creating impact without overwhelming the audience with numerous settings and props. Further reinforcing the idea that this production prioritised the themes and narrative rather than theatrical spectacle.

Lighting was also significant for the portrayal of hope in the adaptation. Characters such as Ena and Andrea, who symbolise the hope for future, were highlighted in bright spotlights, whereas Román and Juan, for example, were lit by a darker light; they always were hidden in the shadows which further perpetuates their character roles. The use of lighting was critical in this performance, capturing Laforet's descriptions of places and settings that featured in her original work, most notably the "débil bombilla" and "las paredes tiznadas" (Laforet, 2022: 24) which were key to constructing the psychological discomfort that Laforet details in her novel. Enrique Chueca designed his lighting as a storytelling tool to support the construction of mood and atmosphere.

The prose develops characters which, as Jordan highlights in his book, are viewed as abstract; however, the act of performing the prose alters this perception. One of theatre's strongest assets compared to the novel is its ability to reimagine the text as alive and ever evolving; using actors to portray characters invites a more immersive experience and a subsequent delivery which is more nuanced and personalised than reading would allow. Júlia Roch as Andrea was compelling; she delivered her lines with honesty and was not overly performative in the role. She was an engaging narrator who was able to capture the complicated emotions of the coming-of-age character, and the audience was captivated by her portrayal of the protagonist. In her interpretation of the character, she felt that "la Andrea de hoy sería feminista, pues ella lo era de manera intuitiva, sin hacer ruido" describing her character as "libre, independiente y rebelde" (García, 2024: 2). Like the prose Andrea, she was both naïve with her innocence and mature in her analysis and commentary of events. Her interactions with the audience felt necessary as relief from the tension inside the house on Calle de Aribau, which was the main setting for this production. In breaking the fourth wall and communicating with the audience in a way which was comparable to a Shakespearean soliloquy, we felt invested in her journey, as part of it rather than just as an observer. In this way, using dramatic techniques, the adaptation was able to recreate the intimate relationship between the protagonist and the reader that is developed through the first-person narrative in the novel. This adaptation decision is a key example of the transformation of the prose form and how Yago stayed loyal to the dynamic relationship between Andrea and the reader but utilised theatrical techniques to make it suitable for stage performance. He understood the constraints of the internal narrative and how this needed to be modified to operate effectively in the theatre setting. Although the narrative was dramatized, it maintained the same intimacy that Laforet generates using Andrea's interior monologues in the novel transformed and reimaged to benefit the theatrical setting and audience.

Roch was able to effectively convey the character's introspections, desires, and uncertainties. Her interpretation of Andrea captured the essence of a young woman navigating the challenges of post-war Barcelona. She was able to embody the vulnerability of her character, highlighted specifically in her hunched shoulders and attempts to cover her body when changing on stage, a reflection of her young character's discomfort with her own changing body and the character's internal struggles with identity. Again, here description and emotion developed by the interior narrative of the novel have been transformed into an external physical representation on stage through the actress. The physical presence and authentic human emotion portrayed by Roch brought Andrea's emotional experience to the forefront of this performance, an addition made possible by the act of live performance. Her performance was heartfelt and emotive, specifically during the final moments of the play where she was physically brought to tears by the emotional content of her speech to Ena, declaring her unwavering loyalty to her friend. Watching this experience generated greater pathos which is harder to access in Laforet's prose. Her character was further realised through the costuming, which adopted the monochrome colour palette of the 1930s and 1940s. Dressed plainly in long skirts and dresses, the colour scheme of her wardrobe blended with those used in the set design. This further implied her role as the observer. She was positioned at the edge of scenes, the physical distance mirroring the passive role she embodies in the novel. Much like the character in the novel Roch, maintained a physical distance from the action which allowed her to watch character dynamics unfold as a witness rather than a driver of events.

Speaking on the way that her character has been adapted for the stage, Roch herself comments on the opportunities that arise from interpreting the novel within the contemporary context. "En eso hemos avanzado: las *Andreas* de hoy somos más conscientes de las violencias que nos rodean... es curioso, porque Laforet no escribió una novela disruptiva, pero leída hoy resulta profundamente feminista" (Vidales, 2024). This perspective gives context to her artistic choices as an actor in her portrayal of Andrea, her feminist reading of the character. The feminist intentions of the show were highlighted by the final scene where both Roch and Rubio stood under falling rain in a cumulatively powerful dialogue exchange. It overshadowed the violence and danger experienced in the second act. Finishing on such a symbolic moment of prosperity and female empowerment was symbolic as it highlighted female unity over the toxicity of other relationships within the performance. It implied that Ena and Andrea had the most functional relationship in the show. Something which Jaén discussed was her intention with this work, commenting that "la relación de Andrea con Ena se aleja del cliché de la rivalidad femenina; es la amistad entre ellas lo que las salva. Nos enseña que puedes encontrar tu fuerza agarrándote a la mano de una amiga. Eso es la sororidad" (Vidales, 2024). For her it was important that she replicated how "Laforet también rompió moldes. No metió a su protagonista en el típico argumento de 'chica conoce a chico,' sino que esto es una historia de chica conoce a chica" (Vidales, 2024).

A minimal cast of ten performers carried this performance, and therefore playing multiple characters was necessary. The limitation of double casting is that it typically applies to smaller roles in a production, which causes the part to be underdeveloped, as the actor would be required to leave the stage to return in the following scene as a different character. In this adaptation this caused confusion at moments, as there was a short changeover; I was only able to recognise which character was being portrayed when Andrea mentioned their name. Without strong differentiation, characters began to blend, which made them less distinct, particularly, for example, Carmen Barrantes, who played Angustias, Gloria's sister, and the Pons' mother. Many of the characters she played were characterised by their age, and therefore the mannerisms and gestures she used were similar. This meant that there was not enough distinction between each of the parts that she played. Although her roles were not substantial and not vital to the overarching plot of the performance, this confusion tainted and distracted from the creative visions for the production. This, unfortunately, had the effect of diminishing the role that the character Angustias plays in the novel. She represents tradition and embodies an authoritarian style in disciplining Andrea; however, due to the dual casting, this was not developed as I had anticipated. Her characterisation felt rushed and less complex than others in the play; I felt her role could have been nuanced with more care, which was surprising for a role which played such a significant role in Laforet's work. Although in the novel her role was cemented as one of the overarching authorial figures in Andrea's life, in this adaptation her symbolism was lost. Instead replaced by short allusions to her religious and conservative lifestyle, for example, she recited a whole prayer and made continuous references to "Dios" throughout her short stage time. This aligns with the view taken by Stuart Green, in his work *From Silver Screen to Spanish Stage*, that there are practical decisions which occur within the adaptive process (Green, 2011,76); condensing Angustias' role was a necessary consequence of adapting the novel for the stage.

As I have previously outlined, Laforet's novel follows the tripartite structure. In its original prose form, the work is divided into twenty-five chapters which narrate a year of the protagonist's life. In the adaptation, the performance was divided, as expected, into two acts separated by a short interval. The novel deals with the transition of time using temporal markers; it is also implied using light and dark. Andrea frequently references "al amanecer" (Laforet, 2022: 24) and describes the nights which indicate the passing of time. The production struggled to present the chronology of events in such a direct way; however, the use of lighting signified the time of day, which helped to present the idea that time was passing. Similarly, Júlia Roch changed her costumes on stage, usually in the middle of her monologues, which helped to propel the narrative and drive home the idea that time had passed between scenes. In this sense we again lose the opportunities that the novel allows concerning time to maintain audience engagement and develop an engaging performance. The play ran for a total of three hours, not including a short interval. By the end of the second act, most audience members had begun to fidget in their seats. Small whispers indicated a growing restlessness, which implied the performance was too long to sustain the audience's invested interest. In this case the adaptation would have benefitted from compressing or taking out certain scenes which were not pivotal to plot development.

In this production Andrea was played with more obvious agency in comparison to how it is presented in Laforet's novel. Although the performance still maintained the character's perspective, it felt broader and less confined. The presence of other characters on stage and the inclusion of their own dialogue removed the need for such an omnipotent narrator, perhaps due to the visualisation of events, perhaps due to the limitations of the theatrical form for a character who plays both the narrator and the protagonist in the story. Whereas the narrator of the novel is obviously recalling events, on stage the protagonist seemed to be interjecting her own thoughts on events. At times, her narration even appeared to act as a stage direction, most notably in the introduction of Pons friends. As a spectator this started to become repetitive and seemed unnecessary. The audience was watching the action play out and did not need the descriptive commentary of the character to describe what was happening. This distracted from the events of the play and had a habit of being disruptive to the dialogue between other characters. Whilst the introspective narrative was effective in the novel for developing the narrator's character it did not translate effectively onto the stage.

The performance opened with a flashback to the violent fight scene which is the culmination of Juan and Gloria's tumultuous relationship. This was an interesting directive choice as it set up the theme of violence very differently to the novel. Violence in Laforet's prose is alluded to but steadily built up, whereas on stage the audience were immediately introduced to it. This had the impact of haunting the rest of the play until we returned to that scene again in Act Two. The creative team manipulated and adapted the structure of Laforet's novel to serve a purpose, which here was to forebode the themes and issues which are presented later in the performance. Here the opportunities of adaptation are fully realised with the creatives transposing the themes of Laforet's novel and exaggerating their presentation to resonate with a modern audience. The presentation of domestic violence serves as a reminder of the little progress that has been made in dealing with social issues since the novel was published.

In this sentiment the audience were also privy to the violent nature of Juan and Gloria's turbulent relationship. Unable to escape and turn away from it, moments of unsettling violence within the play were followed by murmurs of shock and distress throughout the auditorium, an unsurprising response from a society which only introduced the first law combatting intimate partner violence against women in 2004 (Vives-Cases, 2006). It was purposeful that we experienced these moments of discomfort in order to encourage reflective conversations of the continued occurrences of domestic violence in the present day. Using physical theatre heightened the emotional impact of this scene. The visual effect of the fake blood demonstrated the brutality of the punch, which, combined with the vocal intensity of shouting contributed to the shocking nature of this moment in Act Two. It is more confronting when you are watching something happen, you feel complicit in the action, whereas when reading you are able to control how you receive it. In the case of domestic violence

specifically, here is an example of how adaptation can achieve more than the original work does. I argue that these issues are dealt with more effectively, they are more shocking in this form. As previously discussed Laforet was purposeful in her presentation of domestic violence in her novel. It is significant that both Jaén and Yago chose to include this scene in such a shocking way as it informs the relevance of *Nada* in this modern context. Although women gained the right to divorce and contraception in the 1980s Enriqueta Chichan Javega, president of the Progressive Women's Foundation in Madrid, argues that the rest of society has not moved on (Loewenberg, 2005: 464). In this way adapting *Nada* in the modern context critiques the lack of social development surrounding the issues of gender violence and forces introspective reflections from its viewer. This performance was uncompromising in its portrayal of current social issues in the same way that the novel was unapologetic in its presentation of the same theme.

In an interview with *Cadena Ser*, Yago responded to the question of how he made *Nada* relevant for a modern audience, expressing that “yo creo que la novela habla de la España de hoy. Habla de unos elementos historiográficos que siguen afectando a la España en la que vivimos, que la continuamos teniendo en nuestra actualidad política” (García, 2024). He later went on to state that one of their challenges throughout the adaptive process was “qué haremos para que apele al espectador de hoy para que hable de la España de hoy” (García, 2024). Here he outlines his adaptive strategy, which was to recontextualise Laforet's past narrative for his modern audience. The promotion of the novel's feminist themes and struggles with identity encourages reflection on the ongoing political and social struggles which continue to affect Spain today. Yago commented on how he envisioned the adaptation being able to connect with a contemporary audience, saying that “obviamente la realidad hoy es otra, pero muchos de los conflictos a los que se enfrenta Andrea en 1939 no están superados. La violencia machista, por ejemplo (Vidales, 2024).

This adaptation emerged 80 years after the publication of *Nada*, serving as a tribute to this milestone. Its production feels like a celebration of the novel's enduring legacy. This adaptation underscored the relevance of *Nada* in this modern context and was able to draw parallels between the challenges experienced by the youth of the 1940s and those that are faced in 2024. As an individual production, it was innovative and modern in the way that it presented themes, using projections and technical features. Where this performance is let down, somewhat, is that it tries too hard to maintain loyalty to the original work. Especially with the amount of dialogue, it felt redundant in the theatrical form, particularly because the audience did not rely on Andrea in the way that the reader of the novel does.

6. Critical reflections: Reactions to *Nada* on the Modern Stage

Studying the audience response to Jaén's production allows us to consider the relevance of Laforet's work in a modern context. Critical reviews, though inherently subjective, provide a window through which public opinion can be evaluated and are useful indicators as to why *Nada* remains culturally significant, even 80 years after its initial publication. Considering critical opinion of this performance is important because readers and critics reflect the views of their cultural moment and inform how the production was received by this modern audience.

It is widely acknowledged in press interviews and marketing materials for this production by Jaén and Yago that they aimed through the adaptive process to maintain a powerful association with the original work. This is commended by critics who write that “podemos decir con rotundidad que la esencia de la novela está brillantemente plasmada en el texto y en la puesta en escena” (Ruiz, 2024) and “la versión de Joan Yago mantiene el carácter narrativo del original” (Beltrán, 2024). Different reviews highlighted “el exceso de las descripciones y la dilatación de algunas escenas algo forzadas,” (Raúl Losáñez, 2024) and “el abuso de la narración,” (Ruiz, 2024) as weaknesses of the performance. There were times that commentary by the protagonist seemed excessive, especially when stage direction can be, and was, used to physicalise moments, making this performance somewhat repetitive. In this view, this production would have benefitted from a more summative adaptive approach, specifically in refining the quantity of dialogue used. To further this, it should be said that from a critical perspective, such a faithful reconstruction of Laforet's original work was unwarranted in this case and harmful to audience reception.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the reviewer for the *Huffington Post* considered this to be a positive feature of the performance, writing “si cerráramos los ojos podríamos pensar que estamos escuchando un audiolibro con todas las garantías de su calidad literaria” (Morate, 2024). In this review, the critic draws parallels between Yago's adaptation and Laforet's original writing, assuring the reader that if you were to remove the visual stimulus of the performance, the content would be similar to its original literary influence.

Discussing the effectiveness of the staging and lighting used in the theatrical production, one critical response writes that “esta adaptación teatral retoma las tensiones y atmósferas originales, destacando además la relación entre Andrea y Ena, su amiga y confidente, como un espacio de resistencia ante la desolación” (Domínguez, 2024). Paula Villagra Domínguez, in her review for *Cinemagavia*, commends this production on translating the essence of Laforet's work into technical elements whilst simultaneously captivating the modern audience with a creative interpretation of its themes.

There is a collective view amongst critical opinion of this adaptation that it has successfully managed to transport the themes of the post-war novel into the contemporary theatre setting, creating a performance which is both reminiscent of the past and current in its presentation of themes. Paula Corroto writes that “la modernidad de la novela reside en el despertar de Andrea a la vida en medio de toda la catástrofe. Y con todas las perturbaciones que suscita” (Corroto, 2024).

El País praised this performance on its ability to connect the post-war themes of the novel with contemporary struggles, writing that “fieles a eses espíritu ‘intuitivo’ de la novela, los responsables de la adaptación no han querido hacer subrayados en su versión” (Vidales, 2024). Raquel Vidales, in her review, also highlights the feminist attitudes of the adaptation and commends both Yago and Jaén on presenting contemporary visions of the novel without jeopardising the integrity of Laforet’s work.

Critics also commented on the symbolism of the setting, acknowledging the ominous presence of the house on Calle de Aribau throughout the show and how Palomo’s design meant that “se convierte en un personaje más en este espectáculo” (Vidales, 2024). Palomo’s set design has also been credited for its stark portrayal of the post-war era. With one critic commenting that his scenery was “una escenografía que se podría describir como abstracta-concreta” (Nieto, 2024). Abstract in that it could capture the multiple overlapping spaces in which the story unfolds and concrete “por los elementos específicos con los que se connotan los lugares” (Nieto, 2024). With the specific example of the party scene in Act 2 which is the same space as Calle de Aribau “pero connotado por lámparas de araña y la iluminación y la vestimenta y actitud de los invitados” (Nieto, 2024). He is praised for the simplicity of his designs and how their versatility functioned well in the production. Palomo’s ability to transform Laforet’s descriptions of settings into physicalised visual elements for this theatrical production had a considerable influence on capturing the historical context of the work and received resounding critical success.

Aldo Ruíz in *El Teatero* raises an interesting opinion on the quality of the script, complaining that “pasados ya 45 minutos de función y, poco a poco, las piezas van engranando y es entonces cuando el espectador se puede sumergir de lleno en el universo de Laforet y disfrutar de la consistencia dramática de la obra.” In this review, Ruíz blames Yago’s adaptive process, specifically the transformation of the prose into a script, for the delay of experiencing the “world” of *Nada*. However, this is the only commentary in this review which speaks negatively of the production, later going on to highlight the “elenco fabuloso en el que brilla con luz propia Júlia Roch,” the “magnífico diseño de luces... la espléndida música” and ending his review calling it “sobresaliente” (Ruiz, 2024). Evidently, the script work was not detrimental to his positively inclined review of the production.

Júlia Roch has been praised for her standout performance as the 18-year-old protagonist. Her successful portrayal of the internal conflict and resilience of Laforet’s original character was an integral part of the adaptation’s success, “deleitando al público con una memorable actuación llena de luz, sensibilidad, consistencia y mucha verdad” (Ruiz, 2024). Critics were particularly complimentary of how she, “de forma estupenda,” (Lucas, 2024) played both the role of the narrator and Andrea and carried the play with her extensive dialogue. She was well deserving of “el aplauso de sus compañeros y del público puesto en pie” (Nieto, 2024).

The general critical opinion is that this production has successfully managed to adapt the novel to suit the theatrical form without excessively sacrificing the integrity of its source text. Yago and Jaén are largely commended for their ability to resonate the themes of Laforet’s work with their modern audience and similarly for how they were able to remain consistent with their creative visions for this piece. Whilst some critics highlighted the issues with the script and expressed their view that some of the dialogue was unnecessary and repetitive, this performance was largely greeted with glowing reviews which praised the creative team on their decisions throughout the adaptation process.

7. Conclusion

This work has explored the dynamic process of prose to stage adaptation. Drawing from existing theories of adaptation, I have explored the losses and gains which occur as a result of this process using the adaptation of Carmen Laforet’s canonical text as the object through which my opinions are formed. Through my own analysis of the theatrical performance and the critical opinion published, I have developed a comprehensive study of the adaptation which considers the success of the work in the context of its ability to reshape Laforet’s text suitably for the stage environment.

One of the most considerable successes of this adaptation is its ability to resonate, through its transformation, with both a contemporary audiences and the readership of the 1940s. As Linda Hutcheon outlined in her work, the process of adaptation is not solely the act of translation from one medium to another but the act of interpretation, which reflects broader cultural considerations. *Nada* succeeded, both in its original form and in this adaptation, at raising questions about gender and violence in post-war Spain. Particularly Joan and Yago’s production offered its contemporary audiences a way to engage with the historical trauma of this period. To further this, the adaptation succeeded in simultaneously commenting on the conditions of these issues in the current time. The fact that these issues remain relevant to the modern audience reads as a social critique on the lack of social development, specifically regarding the treatment of women and attitudes towards domestic violence within Spanish society.

Although current theorists are correct that elements of the prose form must be reduced to suit the theatrical setting, I disagree that this is detrimental to the portrayal of Laforet’s work. The transformation of Laforet’s writing for the stage amplified the post-war setting, particularly in the instance of physicalising her descriptive writing. In both the critical response and my own review of the performance, Palomo’s designs are credited with transporting the narrative descriptions of the setting and are highlighted as one of the outstanding successes achieved by the adaptation.

The question of authenticity to the original prose is used to categorise this adaptation as a successful reimagination of Laforet’s text for the stage. Jaén, Yago and their creative team brought fresh and unexpected angles to the work and employed theatrical elements to replace and recreate the metaphors and moods of

the prose. This occurs without the sacrifice of Laforet's original narrative structures, which embed a uniquely personal perspective within the novel's writing. Aligning with Hutcheon's theory, this adaptation told the same story but from a new perspective.

The adaptation achieved much in transforming Laforet's work for the stage; though offering a fresh perspective and a reimagination of themes, it maintained the essence of her original novel. This work succeeded in highlighting the emotional and psychological struggles of characters and was innovative in its presentation of these through the visual format. There are elements of the adaptation which I propose achieve more than is possible of Laforet's text. The act of live performance brings physicality and human emotion to the forefront of the production, generating greater empathetic responses which are harder to access in a written text.

The theatrical adaptation faced challenges presented by specific features of the prose form, in keeping with Stuart Green's conclusion that there are practical amendments which are necessary within the process. Most simply, the structuring of the performance, from a tri-partite to a two-act performance. Significantly for this adaptation of the novel, it required practical amendments such as character condensation and the use of visual symbolism. As previously discussed, the use of multi-casting in Yago's production inflicted a reduced impact of character symbolism, especially regarding the casting of Angustias. With characters in Laforet's text symbolic of greater social issues, the reduction of their roles in this performance inhibited Yago's ability to recreate this sentiment.

Specifically in this case, the narrative voice of the protagonist in Laforet's novel Andrea's interior monologue forms the basis of the entire plot, symbolic of a psychological exploration of emotion rather than filled with action. The stage version dealt with the challenges of externalising such an intimate narrative by employing soliloquys and long dramatic monologues to replicate the relationship between the character and reader which is central to the novel. *Nada* thrives on this internal voice which dictates the way that the reader interacts with the themes and issues of the text. Yago and Jaén appear to follow Babbage's theory of faithfully adapting the novel, supported by their discussions in interviews promoting the performance. Although it is necessary to take into consideration Mackenzie's theory which outlines the compromise between fidelity and innovation that is required when adapting for the stage. It is true in this example that Yago and Jaén have reimagined aspects of the novel so that it suits the new form, particularly in the presentation of themes. They have transposed Laforet's descriptions into physical representations so as to preserve the aesthetics of the original novel. Linda Hutcheon's theory supports the cultural significance of this adaptation the feminist intentions and particularly explicit portrayal of the disillusionment faced by the characters during the 1940s highlighted that Laforet's work is just as pertinent as it was in 1944.

This adaptation has demonstrated the dynamic interplay between a written text and performance. Proving how the process of adaptation has the ability to connect past literature with a modern theatre audience. The adaptation of *Nada* in particular proves the successful transferal from novel to the stage and showcases how this process actually offers opportunities for a more explicit and engaging reading of the text. It proves how meaning can be maintained even across different forms which each have their own constraints and restrictions, facilitating a dialogue between historical moments. It has enabled Laforet's work to transcend its original context and extended its legacy, allowing it to resonate with both audiences of the past and of the present.

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