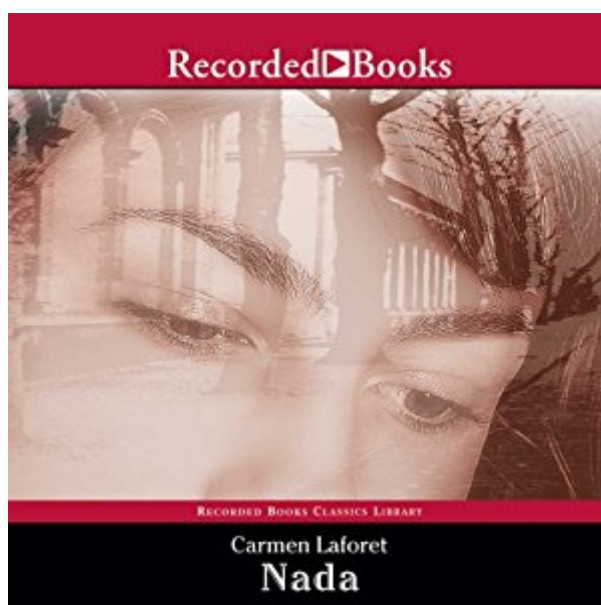


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Nada



Synopsis

Nada has been acclaimed as one of the best accounts of life in post-civil war Spain. It is a work that reflects the psychological and sociological effects of war on a society, particularly on its youth. It also represents the bittersweet reality of life: the price paid and the sacrifices made for personal freedom. Its setting is in 1939 Barcelona but its story is universal, for it depicts the hopes, the anxieties, and the frustrations of our time, portrayed by a young woman in search of her own identity in a society rocked by changing mores. This novel is imbued with such an array of expressionistic, impressionistic, and even some surrealistic descriptions that a literary critic states, "The finished product is a work of art, not a slice of life." In reality, it is both of these. Although Nada is narrated in the first person, Laforet compensates for the limitation of a first-person narration by interposing dialogues among characters, thus giving the reader insight into matters that would otherwise be unknown. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The setting is around 1941-42, after the Spanish Civil War, when Spain is not involved in World War II but feeling the claustrophobic and repressive aftermath of their national implosion. Other readers will have told you the plot of this novel, but the grand metaphor you need to know about Nada is that Andrea arrives in Barcelona at midnight, and the following year leaves in broad daylight. What joy! The setting might be Barcelona, Spain, but there is something alarmingly universal about a girl's attempt to overcome the limitations of her family and discover who she is through university-level study. How does a young woman create herself under adverse circumstances? (It's a kind of third-world story that also happens in the so-called first-world.) Early in the novel, Andrea's Aunt Angustias notes that Andrea went to a sort of high school run by nuns, but that it was in a village

(one assumes where scholarly achievement was not expected); and we learn that the Barcelona home of her grandmother (with miserable aunt and uncles) is her only chance of creating herself, of attending a university, and escaping through studying literature. In the course of the year, Andrea must navigate some extremely uncomfortable emotions; she loses her best friend, Ena (but finds her again, later). Boyfriends elude her. The irony of all such novels is that it's the horrible family who gives the author the story (in which case there are no villains, only fellow victims). This notion is fully realized in her often vile Uncle Roman, who plays the violin so poignantly that you can hear it in Laforet's words, Grossman's elegant translation.

It's disgraceful the way Laforet's legacy has been treated. I once spoke with a Professor of Spanish Literature about how remarkable I found the work, and he thought of it fondly but was under the false impression that this was the only thing she wrote. She wrote a great deal, but *Nada* is undoubtedly the most widely-read and available of her works. This is a first novel that shows a depth that even undisputed genius authors like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce didn't achieve with their first works. It's a combination of a domestic examination and war-time story that also manages to work in elements of the picaresque, though the last one is incorporated in a wonderfully subtle way. It's certainly fair to call the novel existential, but Laforet's existentialism is even more exponentially experiential and viscerally unique than other staples of this type of philosophy in the form of fiction. Though like Camus, Sartre and de Beauvoir, it perhaps more closely relates to the philosophies found in Kafka's fiction. While I want to impart the importance of the novel's cultural critique, it is very easy to see so many influences acknowledged and thoughtfully re-examined. One such example would be Virginia Woolf's subversive takes of the novel of manners. There's also many beautiful parallels between Laforet and her contemporary Simone de Beauvoir, primarily sharing the technique of using less abstractly oriented social analyses. I'm using these cross-cultural references to help frame the novel for those who might not be familiar with war-time Spain (and, perhaps more importantly for understanding the novel, the war's aftermath), which the writer uses to create the sublimely border-line phantasmagorical atmosphere and structure the thematic exploration at work in the narrative.

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