



Tristana

Benito Pérez Galdós

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Tristana forma parte del ciclo de las obras agrupadas por el propio Galdós bajo el epígrafe de *Novelas españolas contemporáneas*. Este ciclo novelístico está dedicado a pintar la vida madrileña en la que nuestro autor ve concentrada la España del siglo XIX. *Tristana*, no obstante, funciona de una forma totalmente autónoma respecto al resto de las obras de ese ciclo novelístico: no aparece en ella ningún personaje recurrente en el mundo galdosiano, con la excepción de los médicos.

Tristana es representativa, además, del período en que Galdós se interesa más por la verdad de la persona en su sociedad, y en particular de la mujer en su relación con el hombre, que por la realidad de dicha sociedad a través de tipos ejemplificadores. Por primera vez Galdós se plantea en *Tristana* el tema de la emancipación de la mujer. Sin embargo, la soñadora Tristana fracasa en sus intentos. Y el genial novelista pone una vez más de manifiesto su capacidad para ahondar en el conocimiento de la sociedad española de su época y analizar los aspectos negativos que la aquejan.

Tristana Details

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From Reader Review Tristana for online ebook

Raúl says

Triste historia, ésta. Tristana, cuyo nombre deriva de "Tristán" - según parece, Galdós elegía significativamente los nombres de sus personajes -, caballero mítico, ideal. Tristana sueña con ser algo grande y no se conforma con lo que el destino parece deparar a las mujeres en su tiempo, y a ella en particular. Tres cosas dicen que pueden ser las mujeres: devotas esposas, actrices de teatro o... esos elocuentes puntos suspensivos. A Tristana no le gusta ninguno de estos tres destinos, pero, a pesar de su jaula, está decidida a echar a volar. Descrita y definida desde un principio como "señorita" tan solo en el nombre, "esclava" en realidad de un viejo don Juan decadente, un hidalgo de tal, que en hidalguía se parece al famoso manchego de lanza en astillero, encuentra en el amor romántico e idealizado hacia un joven pintor una posible escapatoria del sátrapa que la domina. Entonces, las ambiciones personales y los sueños se van desatando uno tras otro, y pronto el mundo del joven pintor, otrora perfecto, se queda corto para Tristana. Ella no quiere casarse, ni depender del sueldo de nadie: vivirá de sus propios méritos, será escritora, pensadora, mastras de lenguas o pintora. La prosa de Galdós revolotea magníficamente a mitad de la novela, en las originales cartas que escribe la Tristana desatada. Entonces el destino le marca al fin el freno funesto, y la joven empieza a retroceder, conformándose cada vez con menos, precipitadamente y en línea descendente hasta reducirse al mínimo y desaparecer. El final no puede ser más oscuro e interrogante.

Más allá de la lectura en clave feminista, ciertos críticos vieron aquí una denuncia de Galdós al clima social de la Restauración, con el aburguesamiento y el conformismo. Se acabaron los sueños progresistas de la Gloriosa Revolución.

Roger Brunyate says

The Marvelous Margaret Jull Costa

Before saying anything about this particular book, I want to raise my hat to the marvelous translator Margaret Jull Costa. I have read a lot of modern Portuguese and Spanish authors through her pen, but never anything from an earlier era. Here is a passage taken at random from this short novel of 1892 by Spanish writer Benito Pérez Galdos. So perfectly does she capture the perfumed, slightly fusty cadence of late 19th-century literature, that it would be almost impossible to see this as the work of a writer working in the present day:

Captivated by such determination, Horacio became more loving with each day that passed, his love reinforced with admiration. Her exuberant imagination awoke in him new mental energies; the sphere of his ideas grew larger, and so infectious was that powerful combination of strong feelings and deep thoughts that together they reached new heights, experienced a tempestuous intoxication of the senses, filled with daringly utopian moments, both social and erotic.

Note the characteristic word order ("awoke in him" and "together they reached"), and even more the big words ("tempestuous intoxication") that seem to promise much but in fact say very little. This is the language of a late-romantic writer portraying two people whose need to act out an ideal of passion may be stronger than the passion itself. Which indeed is Pérez Galdos's point, but it requires the language to go with it, old-fashioned and overheated though it may seem. Kudos, too, to the wonderful NYRB press, not only for

bringing out this lesser-known work, but also for their choice of the cover image, a period painting that suggests a strikingly modern approach to its female subject, yet leaves her ultimately shrouded in shadows.

Which is exactly what I might say of the novel. Tristana is the young ward of Don Lope Garrido, an impoverished Madrileño much in the manner of Don Quixote, a perfect gentleman in every respect—except for a mania for seduction that seems to link him to another Spanish nobleman, Don Juan. After spending much of his money helping an old friend and his wife through hard times, he assumes guardianship of their daughter when both parents die. And before long, takes her to his bed. The story proper starts when Tristana begins to break her bonds, falling in love with a young painter, and finding unexpected talents in herself. The first half of the novel promises a paean to feminism and free love. But the flowery language that Jull Costa captures so well becomes overblown and curdles. We end up liking Tristana a lot less, and conversely thinking more of her erstwhile guardian. There is something of a sick joke in the arbitrary way the author twists the story around, at least according to Jeremy Treglown, whose introduction* sees Pérez Galdos as an ironic satirist. But in my mouth, it left a slightly nasty taste.

* "...but an introduction ought not to give away too much," he writes. Too late; it already has!

James Murphy says

In his "Introduction" to this novel Jeremy Treglown wonders if the title and the character's name isn't meant to suggest sadness. For this is a sad love between Don Lope Garrido, an aging Spanish knight whose fortunes are in decline, and the young Tristana who's his ward and reluctant lover. Both aspire to much more in the world. Tristana wants to taste some of the new freedoms available to women, wants a career as an actor or a painter. And she wants the love of Horacio, a local artist. Don Lope's dreams center around a return of his quixotic past and the gentlemanliness his social position implies. And he wants Tristana. How the gallant in decline wins his lady becomes a kind of folktale about the ends, sometimes monstrous, some will employ to achieve love. There's humor and energy in this 19th century tale of how Don Lope and Tristana are forced to adjust their dreams and settle into a lasting partnership. And that's where the triste comes in.

Irene says

La verdad me decepcionó un poco. Me gusta mucho la forma de escribir de Pérez Galdós y disfruté mucho con otros libros suyos, pero este en concreto me resultó un poco aburrido por momentos. Esos diálogos interminables y delirantes..... Si fuera un libro largo no creo que lo hubiese terminado. Tanta pena y melancolía me han dejado un poco fría, eso sí la crítica al papel social de la mujer es muy buena.

Tony says

I will tell you how this ends. It ends with one word: *Perhaps*.

This is the story of Don Lope, older now, but a notorious womanizer. And not in a good way. Indeed, he could be termed a predator. Yet he is still a man of great dignity and some refinement. He obeys all the other

rules, customs, courtesies. He literally gives the shirt off his back to needy friends and family. He understands and embraces duty.

It is in this context that he sells cherished property to provide for friends, risking his own impoverishment. When the friends die, he takes in their orphaned daughter, Tristana. It isn't long before he takes her to bed.

Soon enough though, Tristana begins to understand that she is sleeping with an old man, and she understands the creepiness. And then she finds a younger lover.

That's plot you could read on the back cover, so I don't feel I've terribly spoiled anything. The first part of the book tells that story, much as I've briefed it above. And in the land of "show, don't tell", I'm afraid this was textbook telling. To the point, actually, of being annoying. The young lovers are separated then, and the novel turns epistolary. Once again, not in a good way. These are love letters, with endearment after endearment, each lover trying to outdo the other in cute nickname. My annoyance turned to gagging.

Then Don Lope re-entered the storyline, never having left completely. But he's reconstructed. It is here the writing sparkles, adding complexity, even humor.

So the reader closes the book, asking questions. Is Don Lope ultimately a good man? Is he a bad man? Are they happy? Did I like it?

*Perhaps.**

*The obligatory nyrb-classic Introduction is actually helpful this time. We are told that the novel, in the original Spanish, ends with *Tal vez*, literally "such a time". It was fascinating, and informative, to learn why the phrase is best translated as "perhaps". Linguists should read this for that alone.

Miriam says

This novel of a woman struggling to free herself from her confining domestic status consists mainly of the protagonist's introspections. Galdos examines the theme of liberty and seems to conclude, perhaps with some disillusionment at the results of the Revolution of 1868, that the individual is responsible for his or her own actions and achievement of personal freedom; by implication, he rejects the idea of collective social responsibility. The evolution in Tristana's understanding of freedom -- from her initial simple desire for personal independence to spiritual aspiration -- and the rejection of social and moral norms on the part of her foil, Don Lope, allow Galdos to explore various conceptions of liberty and their relationship to other important social and religious questions of the day.

Galdos' style is ornate and figurative. He uses allusions to mythology, literature, and the arts to convey the manner in which the characters are trapped by culture and history. Tristana describes her situation through references to other doomed lovers, such as Dante's Francesca and the the unfortunate lover/victims of Don Juan, whose role is assigned to the aging Don Lope. Through Tristana, Galdos expresses an almost inevitable sense of the helplessness of these figures, and of his own characters, to escape from inherited social and

cultural forces. Even Horacio, the artist who disregards conventional morality by taking Tristana as his lover, remains bound by the desire for conformity. He prefers to share her favors with another man than to face the ostracism of elopement:

Oyo Diaz estas cosas con indignacion primero, con asombro despues, y lo unico que se le ocurrio decir a su amaba fue que romper cuanto antes aquellas nefandas relaciones, a lo que contesto la nina muy acongojado que era esto mas facil de decir que de practicar... Con todo, fuerza era dar un gran tiron para arrancarse de tan ignominiosa y antipatica vida.

Horacio's proclaimed liberation from social mores reveals itself to be far weaker than his fear of society's disapproval, which constrains him even though he does not believe in its moral validity.

This is just one example of Galdos' interest in contemporary changes in or doubts concerning religion. For Tristana, the arts supplant the role of conventional Christianity. She becomes obsessed in turn with painting, theater, literature, and music; throughout the course of the novel these arts become increasingly central to her concerns, with human relationships undergoing a corresponding devaluation. Indeed, even life with Horacio appeals most strongly to her when he presents it in artistic terms, describing their future rural abode as if it were a painting. When Tristana's interest moves from painting to music, the painter Horacio also loses his place in her affections. Tristana's artistic yearnings are not meant to show her natural inclination for art, but rather her unfulfilled need for a higher spiritual meaning. This need was shared by many of Galdos' contemporaries, educated men who could no longer reconcile their Christian faith with the evidence of reason and science, but who also rejected the spiritual and emotional emptiness of materialism. Many of these individuals turned to philosophical systems to provide an ethical base.

The general *zeitgeist* of uncertainty and flux caused by the social, political and intellectual changes occurring in Spain at this time is reflected by the changes in the opinions and goals of the characters throughout the course of the novel. Aside from Tristana, this is most overtly manifested in Don Lope, her guardian and suitor, who begins the story filled with confidence in his social and sexual position. At the beginning this patriarchal Don Juan possesses absolute control over his ward's actions, and to a great extent even controls her thoughts. For the first half of the novel he is certain that she and everything else in his life will behave exactly as he commands. Only during Tristana's severe illness and subsequent refusal to continue her role as his mistress does he begin to be uncertain of his ability to regain her. At this point his treatment of her becomes kinder and more respectful, as he is forced to take her wishes and thoughts into account. After her recovery and their marriage he returns to a considerable degree to his paternal stance and earlier egoism, but their relationship retains some equality due to his realization that he is no longer young and could end his life alone and uncared-for. This personal fear returns him to the social fold as a married church-goer.

This aspect of the novel is clearly influenced by contemporary changes in gender relations, which, in Spain as elsewhere, were being challenged by increasing demands for women's liberation. The protagonist's situation illustrates the plight of women who have no male defenders to provide for them or protect their virtue. Not only is Tristana forced to become Lope's mistress, but once placed in this spiritually destructive position, she quickly loses her concern for her virtue and embarks on an affair with a second man -- a man who also belittles her burgeoning intellectual interests and attempts to reposition her the mandated domestic role.

The book ends ambiguously with the question, *Eran felices uno y otro? ...Tal vez*. This ambiguity may reflect Galdos' feelings toward the revolutionary project of his Generation of 1868, which, like Tristana's desires, went through rapid changes without achieving a clear success in its goal of delivering a new social order.

Guy says

Tristana from Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) is a subversive novel that takes a sly look at the power structure in the relationships of its three main characters: Don Lope, an aging, dissolute roué, his 'ward,' the beautiful Tristana, and the handsome, wealthy young man she falls in love with, a painter named Horacio. This is the sort of novel guaranteed to elicit a range of responses from its readers, and that would make this relatively short book, clocking in at just under 200 pages, a great choice for book groups who'd like to sink their teeth into complex characterisations and slippery morality.

When the book opens, one of the main characters Don Lope Garrido, now well past his prime, is living in "*cheap plebian rooms, with, as noisy neighbors, a tavern, a café, a shop selling milk fresh from a goat, and a narrow inner courtyard with numbered rooms.*" That quote creates a cacophony of sounds surrounding Don Lope as he emerges from his surroundings as a rather slippery character:

The first time I encountered this gentleman and observed his proud, soldierly bearing, like a figure in a Velázquez painting of one of Spain's regiments in Flanders, I was informed that his name was Don Lope de Sosa, a name with more than a whiff of the theatre about it and worthy of a character in one of those short tales you find in books on rhetoric; and, that, indeed was the name given to him by some of his more unsavoury friends; he, however, answered to Don Lope Garrido. In time, I discovered that the name on his baptismal certificate was Don Juan López Garrido; so that sonorous Don Lope must have been his own invention, like a lovely ornament intended to embellish his person; and the name so suited the firm, noble lines of his lean face, his slim, erect body, his slightly hooked nose, his clear brow and lively eyes, his greying moustache and neat, provocative goatee beard, that he really could not have been called anything else. One had no alternative but to call him Don Lope.

Even though Don Lope Garrido (and the name is explained in the footnotes) is 57, it's still possible to see this dapper aging womanizer as the dangerous threat he used to be. Some of the measures he takes to hang onto the shadow of his vigour are laughable.

The age of this excellent gentleman, in terms of the figure he gave whenever the subject came up, was a number as impossible to verify as the time on a broken clock, whose hands refuse to move. He had stuck fast at forty-nine, as if an instinctive terror of the number fifty had halted him on the much feared boundary of the half century.

He's spent his lifetime pursuing women while evading the consequences of his actions, but now living on an "*ever-decreasing income,*" he floats on his past glory as a supreme seducer of women with a manufactured morality "*which, although it seemed to have sprung solely from him, was, in fact, an amalgamation in his mind of the ideas floating around in the metaphysical atmosphere of the age, like invisible bacteria.*" The situation with Tristana is perfect for Don Lope. She's beautiful, innocent enough to fall for his manipulative arguments and as his ward, she's entirely dependent upon him.

Don Lope IMO is the main character of the book—in spite of the fact that its title is the name of Don Lope's 'ward' Tristana. The term 'ward' is applied sarcastically as beautiful, young Tristana, who fell initially into Don Lope's power through the poverty of her parents and Don Lope's generosity, is her guardian's mistress. Locals theorize that Tristana is Don Lope's niece or even his daughter ("*there were even some who claimed to have heard her say 'papa', just like one of those talking dolls*"), but in time it becomes clear that "*she was*

nothing [...] an item of furniture or an article of clothing, with no one to dispute his ownership.” Tristana, who has a great deal more power than she realizes (or is able to exercise) is, however, the celestial body that the other two main characters, Don Lope and Horacio orbit. Too young and naïve to initially understand her vulnerability, she grasps her situation in her guardian’s home too late, and when she begins to put up resistance to Don Lope’s despotic power, he, a lifetime seducer of women, unscrupulously checkmates her at every point.

The domestic situation in Don Lope’s house is at once bizarre and pathological, and gradually as the story develops we see how Tristana was initially under Don Lope’s thumb and how she now chafes under his control. Don Lope, once the great seducer, entranced women with his words, his wiles and his caresses, but now he alternates various roles to keep his control on Tristana, his *“last and, therefore, dearest trophy,”* so in one moment, he sits her on his knee and fondles her, and in the next he’s her caring, but authoritative parent who sends her to her room. This leaves Tristana, who’s a neophyte when it comes to manipulation, always one step behind her aging lover/protector/guardian, and while she knows she’s being manipulated and used, she can’t ever quite challenge the various arguments that seasoned seducer Don Lope sends her way. As a result, her resentment and desire for freedom grows, and then she meets Horacio, a young painter who understands her plight....

There were so many ways this novel could have ended, but Benito Pérez Galdós delicately constructs the most subversive route to his story’s conclusion. There’s love and tragedy but there’s also irony, domestic comedy and the massive egos of two of the three main characters, and that’s as much of the plot as I’m prepared to discuss.

A section of the novel takes the form of an epistolary as mushy love letters pass back and forth between Tristana and Horacio. At this juncture the novel lost some of its momentum, and yet at the same time, these letters were essential to question the nature and authenticity of love while showing how the three characters inhabit necessary roles for each other.

Balzac was an enormous influence on Galdós and you can see this in **Tristana** in the way the author dismantles the layers of his characters with each new event as jealousy, rivalry, and tragedy challenge the triangular relationship between Don Lope, Tristana and Horacio. In this parable of power, self-deceit and ego, who will emerge the victor? And what will victory look like? Don Lope, the seducer, Tristana, his victim, and Horacio the lover begin by inhabiting the lives stock characters, but as the tale continues and the layers of this tale unfold, Galdós does not let his reader make easy moral judgments.

Teresa says

Nella Madrid degli ultimi anni del XIX secolo, nei quartieri fuori mano perché più economici, si svolge la vicenda raccontata da Pérez Galdós. Il primo personaggio che viene presentato è Don Lope, con dei tratti che richiamano direttamente i personaggi principali della letteratura spagnola: da una parte è un seduttore come Don Giovanni, dall’altra un idealista generoso come Don Chisciotte. La storia narrata, infatti, ha inizio con un atto di generosità: Don Lope prende con sé Tristana, figlia di un amico rimasta orfana e senza mezzi di sostentamento. Tuttavia presto sappiamo che Don Lope ne ha fatto la sua amante, come un vero dongiovanni ha una conquista in più di cui vantarsi. Se questi riferimenti diretti potrebbero far pensare ad una creazione macchietistica, il continuo oscillare del protagonista da uno all’altro estremo lo rende alquanto umano.

Tristana è una ragazza davvero moderna per la società della Spagna restaurata di Alfonso XII. Quando riesce ad opporsi, almeno psicologicamente, al suo “benefattore”, cerca per sé una strada che la società non le offre. Come emanciparsi?

In questa sua ricerca Tristana si innamora e le sue ambizioni si moltiplicano. Totalmente fuori dagli schemi imposti, vuole vivere il suo amore senza doversi sposare, vuole essere indipendente, vuole diventare pittrice, poi professoressa, scrittrice, musicista...

Mi è sembrato di incontrare una differenza importante tra la prima parte delle aspirazioni di Tristana, quando la sua volubilità sembrava dettata dall'incertezza di una strada nuova, difficilmente concepibile; e la seconda parte, dove i continui cambiamenti di proposizioni sembrano dipendere dal fatto che Tristana non è in grado di appassionarsi a nulla veramente. Pérez Galdós avrebbe potuto fare della sua protagonista un simbolo ed invece resta fedele alla psicologia del personaggio, in fondo l'incostanza di Tristana è verosimile.

La lingua usata dall'autore è ricchissima: i personaggi sono caratterizzati da parlate differenti a seconda della loro cultura e del loro status (la domestica, ad esempio, usa un linguaggio popolare, gli amanti inventano ed usano una lingua loro propria...), i neologismi -spesso usati con fine ironico- sono numerosissimi e non mancano passaggi poetici. Come già in altre occasioni, l'edizione Cátedra mi ha aiutata ad orientarmi in tanta varietà.

Tuck says

delightfully modern and picaresque take, for a novel of the 1880's(?) of a don juan who through kindness and perfidy ends up with a young girl who is neither daughter, wife, slave, but at same time is all three. but she has other ideas, inchoate ideas, but ideas to be: free, independent, in love (with somebody other than this monstrous old man who "saved" her [though he did save her]). she just is at an impasse as to HOW to be free, independent, in love, in these days and times, all impossible for a woman to be unless she is in the theater or on the street. what choices?!

this considered a classic just for that honesty of author. women were people! who deserved human rights! in spain this eventually did happen, in the republic of early 1930's, then brutally quashed by dictator franco, then re-asserted by king john charlie and the new democracy of 1978, and now Spanish women have full and asserted human rights.

a 100 years

Gina says

Warning: the well-known Buñuel movie interpretation is terrible.

A brilliant, cutting edge, richly textured, historically relevant, compelling melodrama from the Naturalist movement in late 19th century Spanish literature. Pre-feminist. Satisfyingly subtle symbolism.

Cphe says

It was the character of the aging and manipulative lothario Don Lope who held my interest in this novel more

so than Tristana the main character.

Don Lope of the lofty ideals who would give the shirt off his back to friends in need but at the same time had few qualms about seducing a beautiful and naive young woman placed in his care.

At times I felt very little empathy for the characters, sometimes I felt downright contempt but such was the author's skill that I did come to appreciate them with all their foibles.

In some aspects I found this a bittersweet read. Tristana was a tragic character, a product of time and circumstance who was ill equipped to deal with what life dealt her.

The story did flow due to the wonderful translation and I really enjoyed the inclusion well known poetry/novels in some passages.

I don't think that this would be a novel that would appeal to every reader but on reflection can appreciate why it has been included in the New York Review Classics List.

Miquel Reina says

Tristana is one of the most famous classic novels of Spanish literature. It's a novel with a strong dramatic, sometimes even too dramatic, tone. But without a doubt it's a masterpiece of Spanish literature that's worth reading.

Spanish version:

Tristana es una de las novelas clásicas más famosas de toda la literatura española. Es una novela con una fuerte carga dramática, a veces incluso demasiado dramática para mi gusto. Pero sin lugar a duda es una obra maestra de la literatura española que vale la pena leer.

Hugh says

This is another book and writer I heard about thanks to **The Mookse and the Gripes** group. It is a curious mixture - a classic novel in style with some rather modern attitudes, especially for a book written in the nineteenth century.

There are three main characters. Don Lope is an ageing seducer with a diminishing fortune. Tristana is the orphaned daughter of his best friend who he is supposedly caring for and Horacio is her charismatic and apparently altruistic lover. The story concerns the awakening of Tristana's consciousness, her affair with Horacio and its aftermath. Much of it centres on the lack of choices faced by women of the time who are not interested in marriage, and much of the book is written from Tristana's perspective. There is also quite a lot of gentle humour, and some linguistic invention which must have presented a challenge to the translator. This edition has a modern translation by the estimable Margaret Jull Costa.

An intriguing book, and a very readable one.

Kapuss says

"Y entre las mil cosas que aprendió Tristana en aquellos días, sin que nadie se las enseñara, aprendió también a disimular, a valerse de las ductilidades de la palabra, a poner en el mecanismo de la vida esos muelles que la hacen flexible, esos apagadores que ensordecen el ruido, esas desviaciones hábiles del movimiento rectilíneo, casi siempre peligroso."

Glenn Russell says

"Young, pretty, and slender, and her skin was the almost implausible white of pure alabaster; she had the palest of cheeks and dark eyes more notable for their vivacity and brightness than for their size; her remarkable eyebrows looked as if they had been drawn with the tip of the very finest of brushes; her delicate mouth, with its rather plump, round lips, was so red it seemed to contain all the blood that her face lacked; her small teeth were like pieces of concentrated crystal; her hair, caught up in a graceful tangle on the top of her head, was brown and very fine, and had the sheen of plaited silk. This singular creature's most marked characteristic, however, was her ermine-white purity and cleanliness."

From the above quote, you would think Spanish novelist Benito Pérez Galdós was describing Parmigianino's 1525 painting *Portrait of a Young Woman*; but, alas, he is not writing about a wealthy sixteenth century aristocrat but a poor nineteenth century orphan by the name of Tristana, who, at age nineteen, is placed in the care (and clutches) of one Don Lope Garrido.

Make no mistake, this is a tale of fire and passion –I can vividly picture all the señoritas in the author's day relishing every page of *Tristana*, a romantic Spanish female heart on fire, yearning for love, for artistic expression and, above all else, yearning for freedom. True, at age nineteen Tristana comes to live with Don Lope Garrido, a seasoned Don Juan who uses all his stock repertoire of sweet words and caresses to seduce his young charge but then at age twenty-one it happens - Tristana awakens to how her womanhood has been violated and thus her rebellion against what she now regards as an evil, lecherous tyrant.

But this novel is much more than unadorned melodrama, for Benito Pérez Galdós is a true literary master, creating complex, rounded characters, as when he writes of Don Lope being a generous, noble gentleman, a throwback to the courageous knights of yore, an expert in all affairs of honor, ready to make every sacrifice in the name of duty and friendship, as when he rescued his dear friend, Don Antinio Reluz, Tristana's father, from financial ruin, and later after Reluz's death, making sacrifice after sacrifice, even selling his treasured weapons collection, to fund Tristana's mother in her continuous insane moving from lodging to lodging right up until the day of her death. Is Don Lope a good, even saintly man, or is he a bad, evil man? Given the author's ample information and many examples, a sound case could be made for either or both together.

No sooner does Tristana leave the rapidly aging fifty-six-year-old Don Lope at home to join maid Saturna on afternoon walks out in the countryside and around town, then the plot thickens: Tristana meets and falls in love with Horacio, a handsome young painter. Of course, finding her beauty irresistible, Horacio, in his turn, falls in love with Tristana. The two lovers take their romantic afternoon walks together; they share both their

tragic backgrounds and romantic dreams of life and art. However, there is one thing they will never share - Tristana boldly proclaims to Horacio that under no circumstance will she ever surrender her freedom and be bound to a man as his wife.

This *New York Review Books (NYRB)* edition features the author's fluid prose rendered into clear, elegant English by translator Margaret Jull Costa. A real joy to read. And I must say, this novel brings to the fore two sets of pressing philosophical questions. Firstly, since Tristan's life and dreams are so entwined with art, music and literature (as the story progresses, we discover she is exceptionally gifted in both language and music) how far can the arts go in transforming a woman in Tristana's position? Drawing, foreign languages and letter writing each serve Tristana as a catalyst in propelling and expanding her sense of freedom but, ultimately, other forces are in play.

Secondly, we have the issue of feminism. Saturna tells Tristana that in this society of ours women have but three alternatives – to be wives, to be actresses or to be something too low to be mentioned in polite society. Tristana will have none of it - by turns she envisions herself as a painter, an author, an actress, even a political leader; not to mention she argues with Horacio in a decidedly modern way how, if she has a child and lives as a single mother, she has more rights to her child than the father. One can easily imagine men - journalists, politicians, heads of households - who looked askance at Benito Pérez Galdós putting such scandalous ideas into the heads of women.

These philosophical questions move into yet again another dimension. In speaking of Don Lope's sense of morality, Benito Pérez Galdós writes: "Despite being very much his own, was also quite widespread, the abundant fruit of the times we live in; a morality which, although it seemed to have sprung solely from him, was, in fact, an amalgamation in his mind of the ideas floating around in the metaphysical atmosphere of the age, like the invisible bacteria that inhabit the physical atmosphere." With these words we hear echoes of the fatalism and social and cultural pressures molding men and women articulated by such as Émile Zola and his literary school of naturalism. So, it's Tristana versus her society, culture and fate. What a riveting story. Highly recommended.

Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) - Leading literary voice of nineteenth century Spain, author of dozens and dozens of novels and many plays and short stories, frequently compared to Dickens, Balzac and Zola. *Tristana* was published in 1892.
