



Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920) was born in Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. His masterpiece is generally considered to be the vast and wonderful *Fortunata and Jacinta*, but equally impressive are such works as *Doña Perfecta*, *Misericordia*, *La de Bringas*, and *Miau*. Luis Buñuel based three of his movies—*Viridiana*, *Nazarín*, and *Tristana*—on three Galdós novels, perhaps recognizing in Galdós a fellow subversive.

Jeremy Treglown is a writer and literary critic known for his work on Spanish culture, film, and literature. His books include several biographies, most recently *Franco's Crypt: Spanish Culture and Memory Since 1936*.

Margaret Jull Costa is a translator of Spanish and Portuguese literature. Among the authors she has translated are José Saramago, Javier Marías, and Eça de Queiroz. She has won many prizes, including the PEN Translation Prize, and in 2014 she was awarded an OBE for her services to literature.

TRISTANA

by **Benito Pérez Galdós**

Introduction by **Jeremy Treglown**

A new translation from the Spanish by
Margaret Jull Costa

\$14.95 US • \$16.95 CAN • £8.99 UK • Paperback
ISBN 978-1-59017-765-5 • eBook 978-1-59017-792-1

“*Tristana* is a treasure that should not be overlooked. Pérez Galdós barely breaks a sweat as he weaves a tale of intelligence and emotional richness comparable to the works of Charles Dickens and Gustave Flaubert... At its heart, it’s about how we should hurry up and become who we are. Or else.” —Juan Vidal, NPR

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Don Lope is a Don Juan, an aging but still effective predator on the opposite sex. He is also charming and generous, unhesitatingly contributing the better part of his fortune to pay off a friend’s debts, kindly assuming responsibility for the friend’s orphaned daughter, lovely Tristana. Don Lope takes her into his house and before long he takes her to bed.

It’s an arrangement that Tristana accepts more or less unquestioningly— that is, until she meets the handsome young painter Horacio. Then she actively rebels, sets out to educate herself, reveals tremendous talents, and soon surpasses her lover in her open defiance of convention. One thing is for sure: Tristana will be her own woman.

And when it counts Don Lope will be there for her.

Benito Pérez Galdós, one of the most sophisticated and delightful of the great European novelists, was a clear-eyed, compassionate, and not-a-little amused observer of the confusions, delusions, misrepresentations, and perversions of the mind and heart. He is the unsurpassed chronicler of the reality show called real life.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator compares Tristana to inanimate objects several times but notes that one day “that pretty little paper doll” would “show that she had the character and consciousness of a free woman” (p. 8). When do you think Tristana first truly displays such independence?
2. Don Lope is portrayed throughout the novel as embodying an ambivalent mixture of rogue and hero. The narrator accuses him of possessing a sort of “pseudo-knightliness” (p. 10), yet he does some rather generous things for Tristana later in the story. Does Don Lope remain only a vain “pseudo” knight even to the end of the book?
3. In a letter to her beloved Horacio, Tristana declares, “I want to be married to myself” (p. 95), a statement no doubt revolutionary when the novel was written in the late 19th century. Could Tristana be considered an early feminist, or are these merely the words of a flighty young woman?

NYRB Classics are available
from all booksellers and at
www.nyrb.com

4. How does the theme of the theater and playacting work in the story, especially in relation to Horacio and Tristana's relationship? Is "playacting" a positive or detrimental act in the novel?
5. Pérez Galdos' tale meditates in several places on the relationship between love and art. Does one nurture the other in this story, or does one only diminish the force of the other?
6. At one point, we learn that two of Horacio's many pet names for Tristana are "Beatrice" and "Francesca" (p. 83), references to two seemingly opposed characters from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*: Francesca, though charming, is banned to hell for adultery while Beatrice is Dante's virgin guide to heaven. Which character, if either, does Tristana most resemble by the end of the novel?
7. The overarching theme of possession is most clearly embodied in Tristana's relationship with Don Lope, but in what other circumstances is the idea of one person "possessing" another important? Does any character "possess" another by the end of the book?
8. It is noted throughout the book that Tristana has a tendency to fixate on "the ideal," to the point of rendering Horacio almost divine in the language of her letters to him (p. 123). This considered, do you think it inevitable that Tristana eventually devoted herself to religion, or was this devotion merely a product of her physical suffering?
9. By the end of the novel, both Horacio and Tristana have abandoned their pursuit of art. Do they seem better off for it, or do you think they should have continued their creative enterprises?
10. Tristana wails against the "rope of matrimony" throughout the novel (p. 122), though she agrees to marry Don Lope at the end of the book. Is this submission a violation of her prior convictions, a matter of being forced into marriage for the sake of necessity, or something else entirely?
11. The book ends asking whether Don Lope and Tristana, finally joined in matrimony, are happy, and the narrator answers the question only with "perhaps" (p. 169). How would you answer this question? Is one happy? Both? Neither?
13. What do you make of Don Lope's bewildering declaration near the end of the novel, "I don't believe in character. There are only facts, accidents. The lives of others provide the mold for our own life and the patten for our actions" (p. 141)? Is this true in regards to Tristana's fate? Don Lope's?