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## Galdós's *Tristana* and Giuseppe Verdi

Thomas R. Franz

Galdós's musicianship, interest in music, early journalistic work as a reviewer of operas, familiarity with composers' lives, and use of musical motifs in his novels are all well known. Franz has shown how the plotting and characterization of *Doña Perfecta* echo those of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* ("Doña Perfecta" 127–33). Chamberlin has detailed the parallel structure of *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886–87) and Beethoven's Symphony no. 3 (*Galdós and Beethoven*) and related details of the same novel to the life and work of Rossini ("Echoes" 91–103), continuing a line of investigation initiated years earlier by Nimetz (189–90). This same critic has more recently identified a series of nicknames appearing in Galdós's novels—*Fortunata y Jacinta*, *Lo prohibido*, *Casandra*—that proceed from nineteenth-century operas, particularly ones by Giuseppe Verdi and Gioacchino Rossini ("Cultural Nicknames" 16–18).

Regarding *Tristana* (1892), R. Gullón ("Introducción" 12–13) finds significance in *Tristana*'s late-developing interest in music, and Chamberlin ("The Sonata Form") has located a sonata structure in the novel. López further sees a parallel between the novel and the 1970 Buñuel film of the same title and a very different Dalí-like vision of the declining years of the aged Wilhelm Tell (311–13), whose heroic deeds of young adulthood were the subject of the famous 1829 opera by Rossini. Though unmentioned by critics, there is additionally a strong parallel between the characters of the novel and those of Verdi's opera *La Traviata* (1853), which is many times the object of allusion throughout the text. Finally, Barroso, speaking of *Tristana*'s lover, the painter Horacio Díaz, states that the "pintor vivió bajo el fuerte dominio de su padre, que trató de desviarle de su vocación artística" (222), an incompatibility of vision and character that might recall to us—given our chosen musical context—the situation of many composers and their fathers, particularly that of Giuseppe and Carlo Verdi (Southwell-Sander 72; Weaver 217). It is not, however, *Tristana*'s lover, Horacio Díaz, who primarily interests us in Galdós's 1892 novel, but the scandalous, (originally) self-seeking Don Lope Garrido and even *Tristana* herself.

Galdós had a prolonged exposure to and interest in the details of Verdi's creative life. In 1861 he attended a production of Verdi's *Ernani* as a teenager in Las Palmas and afterward parodied the performance in impromptu dramatizations and in a written

sketch (Berkowitz, *B. Pérez Galdós* 30). During his first years in Madrid (1862–63) the Teatro Real gave performances of *Il Trovatore*, *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, and *La Forza del Destino*, of which Don Benito reviewed *Rigoletto* for the newspaper *La Nación* (Pérez Vidal 24–25). In a review published by the same newspaper in 1865, Galdós praised Verdi over all other operatic composers (34). A few years later he witnessed productions of *Luisa Miller* and *Un Ballo in Maschera* (42). He owned the musical score of *Otello* (211). In *Doña Perfecta* (1876) Galdós has Pepe Rey compare Verdi’s musical passion to the fires of Vulcan, while having the cathedral organist prefer the secular passions of *La Traviata* to the dated spirituality of liturgical hymns (Willem 35, 39). Ribbans, in fact, suggests that allusions to both *La Traviata* and the Dumas fils novela and play that inspired it occur additionally in the novels *Rosalía* (written ca. 1872), *Lo prohibido* (1884–85) and *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886–87) and in the 1907 *episodio*, *La de los tristes destinos* (531–36). In *El doctor Centeno* (1883), the law student Alejandro Miquis compares a powerful theatrical scene with the music of Verdi (Montesinos 83). How much did Galdós actually know about the life of the composer whose work had such a strong impact on his own musical orientation and writing? The present study hopes to provide the beginnings of an answer; however, the ways in which Galdós used minute biographical details of Beethoven and Rossini in novels like *Doña Perfecta* and *Fortunata y Jacinta* (Franz, “*Doña Perfecta*” 127–33; Chamberlin, “Echoes” 91–103) give a glimpse of what he was capable of doing when both professional chatter and written source material were at hand. An excellent view of Galdós’s use of informed gossip involving operatic personalities is provided in his 1886 biographical sketch of the Spanish prima donna Adelina Patti, where he writes of her marriage, separation, and eventual divorce from the Marqués de Caux; her sexual relations with the tenor Nicolini; the tenor’s ensuing divorce from his own wife; and the awaited marriage of the tenor and the soprano (“La Patti” 171). The Phillips-Matz bibliography on Verdi’s life, moreover, offers the following sample of sources Galdós could have consulted prior to the publication of *Tristana*: Caterina Pignorini-Beri, “Una visita a Verdi,” *Illustrazione italiana*, 44 (1881); E. Checchi, *Giuseppe Verdi, il genio e le opere* (1887); A.G. Barrili, *Giuseppe Verdi, vita e opere* (1892); plus many others (898, 901, 911). Here to follow are some remarkable parallels between *Tristana* and Verdi’s life and work.

Giuseppe Verdi for sixteen years lived with a mistress, the prima donna Giuseppina Strepponi, whom he eventually married to the surprise of all who knew his opposition to both the institution of marriage and (for Verdi) its odious imposition by Italian society and the church. This well-known event in the composer’s life parallels the character Don Lope Garrido’s belated marriage to his long-time mistress Tristana near the conclusion of Galdós’s novel, an occurrence that surprises the groom’s acquaintances due to its violation of Lope’s own rules for the conduct of a secular free thinker. Verdi himself sent away the village priest after his marriage to Strepponi not only because of an inveterate agnosticism, but because he, like the shuffling Don Lope—adorned in his ubiquitous threadbare slippers (1565, 1567; ch. 12)—was so miserly that he wanted to pocket the customary honorarium (Phillips-Matz 395). More about this financial obsession later.

Verdi had met Strepponi at the 1836 Milan rehearsals for his opera *Oberto* (Southwell-Sander 19), two years after his earlier marriage to Margherita Barezzi. Barezzi was the daughter of Verdi’s patron and best friend, the widower Antonio Barezzi, a situation that will later impact both Verdi’s life and, seemingly, Galdós’s novel. At the outset, our

interest is piqued by noting that both Strepponi's pathetic father and the father of Tristana, Antonio Reluz, have the same given name, and we feel an urge to explore the Lope/Tristana and Verdi/Strepponi relationship in greater detail. The intended performances of *Oberto* in Milan never took place, but through the influence of Strepponi, the opera received a moderately successful premier three years later in the same city. The next year Verdi's wife, Margherita Barezzi, died in childbirth and he was free to deepen his relationship with Strepponi (20).

The following year Verdi with little fanfare presented his opera *Un giorno di regno*, much of which critics found musically derived from Rossini, a composer to whom *Tristana* repeatedly alludes (e.g. 1561; ch. 10). However, in 1842 Strepponi persuaded La Scala *empresario* Bartolomeo Merelli to premier *Nabucco*, Verdi's first big success. Though her voice was almost gone, due to the strain of her many *bel canto* roles, Strepponi sang the female lead and began her long affair with Verdi that same year (Phillips-Matz 89, 150). By 1847 Verdi had been living near Paris for two years, owed to his continued involvement with the now retired soprano. This situation curiously parallels the middle-period, *Ile-de-France* living arrangements of the unmarried couples in Dumas fils's *La Dame aux camélias* and Verdi's *La Traviata*, works that form strong intertexts with *Tristana*. By 1848 the *de facto* union of Verdi and Strepponi was apparent to many (Weaver 175), and by 1851 word had reached Verdi's former father-in-law, Antonio Barezzi, who sent the composer a bitter letter complaining about his loss of honor (Weaver 184). Verdi's own father felt much the same way (Phillips-Matz 279), leading to considerable discord between father and son. The situation is worked into Germont's fatherly preaching to Violetta about her scandalous life with his son Alfredo that the father sings in Act II of *La Traviata* (Verdi, *La Traviata* 117). Like Don Lope (1543–44, 1547; ch. 2), Verdi had early in life lost all religious belief and rarely looked back in cases where his personal feelings came into conflict with church teachings (Southwell-Sander 12). Barezzi's sense of betrayal at Verdi's infidelity to the memory of his first wife would appear to be the inspiration for the shocking situation in *Tristana* in which Tristana's dying mother leaves her to Don Lope's care only to experience the horror of Lope thrusting himself upon the daughter. Verdi's response was to fire off a letter to Barezzi demanding his birthright to absolute freedom, an attitude perennially visible in Lope's flouting of sexual and religious conventions and defense of similar actions on many occasions.

It was natural that Strepponi accept Verdi's attentions and financial ministrations. Like Tristana, she had lost her father and mother and was consequently a complete orphan, having no other family on which she could rely (Phillips-Matz 88). Though she had saved some money from singing, it was less than enough to guarantee her lifelong security. She also apparently had few qualms about liaisons, having already produced two illegitimate children with the tenor Napoleone Moriani and two with her manager, Camillo Cirelli (Southwell-Sander 57; Phillips-Matz 89, 120, 279). Like Galdós's Don Lope, Verdi himself was a confirmed rake, having engaged in many affairs before his marriage to Strepponi (Phillips-Matz 159, 287, 289). Even after he and Strepponi were legally united there were constant rumors of his affairs with women of the opera, most of all with a younger soprano named Teresa Stolz, who eventually came to Strepponi's attention and caused her considerable grief (Southwell-Sander 130; Weaver 187, 235; Phillips-Matz 597–600). In a series of letters written to his librettist Francesco Maria Piave between

1844–45, Verdi continually referred in an almost childish manner to a secret lover with the words “l’angelo” (Phillips-Matz 159), while in chapter 24 of *Tristana* Don Lope writes a mock letter to his consort’s lover, Horacio, in which he addresses Horacio as “ángel mío,” but upon further reflection decides, “No, esto de ángel es un poco cursi” (159).

When Strepponi and Verdi moved to Verdi’s home town of Busseto, their unmarried situation gave rise to considerable scandal, resulting in a very confined and solitary life for Strepponi that may prefigure Tristana’s social isolation in her Madrid life with Lope Garrido (Southwell-Sander 62; Phillips-Matz 278–79). The shame Tristana feels is demonstrably congruent to everything we know about Verdi’s lonely soprano (1570; ch. 13). A few years later the couple moved to a country farmhouse where they had “practically nothing to do with Busseto and very little with the rest of the world” (Southwell-Sander 71). As Verdi wrote years later: “In my house there lives a lady [. . .] who, like myself, prefers a solitary life. [. . .] Neither I nor she is obliged to account to anyone for our actions. But who knows what our relations are?” (Southwell-Sander 75). The statement comes close enough to stating both Don Lope’s attitude (though clearly not Strepponi’s or Tristana’s) and the public’s—to some extent also the reader’s—toward the lack of reliable knowledge concerning Tristana and Lope’s intimate life (Gullón 18–19; Lowe 110–11).

Unemployed and with Verdi frequently engaged in other matters, Strepponi in reality had few friends beyond the composer. Like Tristana, she regretted her inability to live in more normal circumstances (Southwell-Sander 73; Weaver 187). Much later (1869) this growing sense of a wasted life became more acute, leading to acrimonious letters to Verdi that suggest the progressively bitter retorts that Tristana gives Lope (Weaver 222; *Tristana* 1548, ch. 4). In chapter 10 of the novel, before the relief of her affair with the painter Horacio, this acrimony of Tristana reaches its peak: “La desavenencia entre cautiva y tirano se acentuaba de día en día. [. . . D]on Lope llegó a inspirar a su cautiva un aborrecimiento sordo y profundo, que a veces se disfrazaba de menosprecio, a veces de repugnancia” (1561). We already know that Galdós utilized the letters of his mistress Concha-Ruth Morell as a basis for these statements on the part of Tristana and that Morell recognized herself in the novel (Smith 91–120), but it could very well be that the Strepponi-Verdi acrimony served as a catalyst and guide to their use. However, when Strepponi is older and physically and emotionally housebound, she has a change of heart, recognizing her emotional dependence on Verdi and tries to do all in her power to make the best of her remaining life with him (Weaver 234). This, too, recalls Tristana following her incapacitating amputation and the sudden end to her affair with the painter Horacio Díaz, whose perfections she had fantasized beyond all hope of fulfillment and who now seems like a chimera compared to the practical solution of adjusting to a life with Don Lope (Engler 97).

In 1850 Verdi was preparing his opera *Rigoletto* and was having serious problems with the censors. One such problem involved his tenor character, the Duke of Mantua, whom Verdi wished to portray as a veritable gigolo. Verdi was forced to tone down the licentiousness of the Duke but still insisted that the aristocrat be shown as a libertine who eventually seduces Gilda, the daughter of one of his most loyal subjects (Southwell-Sander 69). This detail comes close to the situation of the aristocratic Don Lope, who in Galdós’s

novel seduces the daughter of one of his oldest friends. It is not only that Tristana's moribund mother had pleaded with Lope to take care of her daughter but that Rigoletto had encouraged the Duke to develop a romantic relationship with his daughter Gilda. In both cases, the irony of this misplaced parental devotion points up the ways in which physical affliction (Josefina Reluz is old and decrepit, Rigoletto a grotesque hunchback) affects sound judgment.

By 1852 Verdi was already suffering from rheumatism (Southwell-Sander 78), a situation that recall's Lope's progressive inability to move about (1551; ch. 5) and eventual rheumatic condition (1582; ch. 18). However, Verdi still had a long life ahead, and we may assume the same of Don Lope, whose shadow seems forever cast on Tristana at the novel's conclusion. Verdi had recently (1851) seen Dumas fils's play *La Dame aux camélias* in Paris and envisioned writing an opera based on it (Southwell-Sander 80; Weaver 184), a work that eventually saw life as *La Traviata*. Both the play and the opera would later contribute important elements of plot and characterization to *Tristana* as they had done previously to Valera's *Pepita Jiménez* (1874; Franz, "Pepita Jiménez and La Dame" 61–68). In 1863 Verdi and Stroppioni went to Madrid for a series of performances of *La forza del destino*, based on the 1835 play *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* by the Duque de Rivas (Phillips-Matz 456). Galdós began writing reviews of the Madrid opera productions one year later, in 1864 (Pérez Vidal 41–42, 85–92) and therefore did not review *La fuerza del destino*, but there can be little doubt that he both saw the production and perhaps got a glimpse of the composer and his mistress. Doubtless he also later read of the production in the book *Crónica de la ópera italiana en Madrid desde 1738 hasta nuestros días* (1878) by Luis Carmena y Millán, a volume he had in his library (Berkowitz 35). Hanging about the Teatro Real, he may have overheard gossip about Verdi's treatment of his companion or about unpleasant scenes between the two.

Verdi would eventually become known as the "operatic Shakespeare" for the operas he based on individual plays or combinations of plays of the English bard: *Macbeth*, *Otello*, *Falstaff*, and the projected but never-written one to be based on *King Lear*, a play Verdi intensely liked. In a letter to Horacio in chapter 18, Tristana alludes to Shakespeare as "Don Guillermo," "[e]l inmenso poeta, el que más ha creado después de Dios" (1583), and mentions that she has begun reading *Macbeth*. It is possible to read these allusions as a writerly wink to the reader to the effect that his heroine and her captor are operating within a Verdian paradigm. The fact that Don Lope successfully overcomes his initial feelings of jealousy toward Horacio and Tristana could be read as a reversal of Verdi's *Otello*, while Tristana's thespian speeches of admiration for Lady Macbeth speak for themselves. (It is interesting to note that Galdós had a copy of the sheet music for act IV, scene 2 of Verdi's *Otello*, the scene in which the Moor accuses Desdemona of unfaithfulness and kills her [Nuez 112].) Finally, there is Tristana's willingness to call Lope "papá" but her inability to pour forth on command the affection he wants, which recalls Cordelia's similar incapacity in *King Lear*, the tragedy that Verdi had tried to set to music.

It goes without saying that, if Galdós modeled the dramatic situation of Tristana, Lope, and Horacio on that of Stroppioni, Verdi, and their lovers, he had to do some violence to the facts at the same time that he highlighted details that were all too true. Stroppioni was

not nearly so bitter with Verdi as Tristana is with Lope. She was a lot older, more experienced, and clearly foresaw some of what she was getting into with the composer. She already had children, while Tristana, as far as Galdós takes things, would not seem a likely candidate for motherhood, much like Strepponi after her marriage to Verdi. Verdi's anticlericalism was far more pronounced and uncompromising than that of the aging Andalusian. Don Lope, while slipping progressively into a poverty that forces him to reign in his expenditures, is much more generous than Verdi.

Notwithstanding these discrepancies, an exaggerated following of the Verdi model would have solved a lot of problems and saved considerable time in the early stages of *Tristana's* composition. It would have provided a pretty thorough sketch of the novel's two major characterizations, Tristana and Lope. Excepting Tristana's fling with Horacio—which only tangentially suggests Strepponi's scandalous series of involvements—and the amputation of Tristana's leg—which does not resemble anything in the life of Strepponi—the Verdi paradigm would provide a relatively complete plot for the entire novel. It also would provide the powerful chauvinistic note that Pardo Bazán, in her famous review of the work (Pardo Bazán 49–53), finds both a necessity and a distraction to the clear novelistic development of Tristana's feminist consciousness. It would additionally serve well to model what López so perceptively finds in *Tristana*: the raw material for a highly visionary ontological scheme in which the accumulation of life “experience [. . .] is a cause of physical depletion” (295ff). That is, a psycho-social scheme in which Don Lope gradually becomes more attached to possessions (including Tristana) than to his convictions, thus surrendering his original avant-garde social vision to embrace “bourgeois values” and a fundamental conservatism, a shift that Galdós presents as a natural evolution but in which Buñuel finds only loss and hypocrisy (296, 301, 311–13).

Could Verdi be seen to surrender his pluralistic creativity and convictions for a life of conservatism, possessions, and wealth? The appendix to the Phillips-Matz biography of the composer lists three pages of corporate and land purchases Verdi made as investments during the final twenty-five years of his life. During the same period he mercilessly pursued his creditors (Southwell-Sander 135). The Phillips-Matz appendix also lists Verdi's major musical compositions of the period, among which we find *Messa da Requiem* (1874), “Pater Noster” and “Ave Maria” (1880), *Quattro pezzi sacri* (1897), “Stabat mater,” “Laudi alla Vergine Maria,” and “Te Deum” (1898). All of this by a man with a life-long history of no religious beliefs but who nevertheless subsequently married his mistress of some sixteen years in a Catholic church with a prominent cleric officiating (Phillips-Matz 394–95). Is this hypocrisy or a gradual mellowing and cultural assimilation? Is it an effect of the inevitable compromises of domestic life, as Chamberlin (“The Sonata Form” 94–95) judges in the case of Don Lope and Tristana? Verdi's many biographers scarcely hazard a guess and, true to form, Galdós leaves the reader to decide the ultimately unknowable motivation of Tristana and Lope.\*

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**Notes**

- \* Clarín merely terms the ending of the novel the result of a vague “destino gris,” implying that answers to questions of motivation lie outside any details Galdós could have but did not include (212). Lope’s marriage to Tristana is simply one more sign of submission to “la tristeza real de la vida” (211). Pattison suggests as a motive Don Lope’s desire for security in old age and, with a shrug of the shoulders, refers the reader to the last sentence of the novel, in which the narrator asks whether the couple was happy and answers “maybe” (125). Berkowitz explains the vagueness of the ending by theorizing that the novel, completed during the staging of Galdós’s *Realidad*, was really “unfinished” (314).



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