

***El soplón and the Alegoría moral of the Ribera Collection as Context for El Greco's El entierro del Conde de Orgaz***

Abstract: Art critics have argued that El Greco deployed Neoplatonic symbolism in a series of paintings, variously entitled *El soplón*, *Alegoría moral*, and *Fábula*, which depict a boy—alone in *El soplón*, framed by a monkey and a man in the *Alegoría* and the *Fábula*— lighting a candle by blowing on an ember. When thinking about the philosophical significance of these paintings it is important to recognize that a copy of each type belonged to Juan de Ribera, Archbishop and Viceroy of Valencia, as revealed by an inventory of his collection made on his death in 1611. At the simplest level the inventory suggests that the series has moral meaning. I will argue further that the Neoplatonic symbolism of these paintings is related to Ribera's historical role as the most passionate advocate of the expulsion of the Morisco population from southern Spain. Moreover, the Ribera series offers clues for understanding El Greco's greatest painting, *El entierro del Conde de Orgaz*. The explicit theme of light, the juxtaposition of the monkey and the man framing the boy, and the *mise en abyme* effect of the multiple versions, indicate a crucial relationship between the Neoplatonism of the Ribera series and the hagiography of *El entierro del Conde de Orgaz*. Finally, the structural and thematic aspects shared by the Ribera series and *El entierro del Conde de Orgaz* lend support to, as well as an explanation for, El Greco's possible use of Ribera as the model for Saint Augustine in the masterpiece at Toledo.