

**“Le noir Valencian”:
Ribera, Gautier, and the French Taste for Violent Painting**

Paintings by the Spanish Baroque artist Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652) prompted a range of contradictory responses in the nineteenth century. Poets, travel writers, critics, and artists reacted to his work, especially his striking depictions of violent subjects, with both admiration and displeasure. In his epic poem *Don Juan* (1823), Lord Byron declares that “Spagnoletto tainted / His brush with all the blood of all the sainted,” and in 1845, Théophile Gautier published two poems on the artist, referring to Ribera as “le noir Valencian,” and “plus dur que Jupiter.” While Byron and Gautier are often quoted in the Ribera literature, scholars have been swift to dismiss these responses as “muddying the waters” of the artist’s oeuvre, and thus his reception during the nineteenth century has, until recently, received scant scholarly attention.

Through a close, comparative study of Ribera’s paintings and Gautier’s poems, this paper will explore nineteenth-century attitudes towards extreme imagery in the context of the revival of the Spanish School in France. It will provide a more contextualized and nuanced account of Ribera’s reception during this period, and demonstrate that Gautier’s poetic responses are *not*, in fact, distorting, but revealing. The paper argues for the significance of these poems by suggesting that Gautier calls attention to the problematic relationship between art-making and bodily unmaking, a tension which is central to an understanding of Ribera’s violent imagery, and also to the mythmaking of Ribera as a violent artist.



Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652), *Tityus*, 1632
Oil on canvas, 227 × 301 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid