Goya: The Terrible Sublime
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"Goya lo sublime terrible" is a graphic novel which imagines the source of Francisco Goya's dark subjects expressed in his paintings following a serious illness. In fact the story begins with Goya hallucinating at times on his sick bed, where he is visited by friends Asensio Julia and the Duchess of Alba.

Francisco Goya has been known as a painter at the vanguard of the Vanguard. He has been credited as the father of modern painting in Spain and the style of many of his works serve as a precursor to impressionism. Much of his subject matter is a departure from the themes of the romantic age through depiction of images of death, demons, monsters or the disfigured or grotesque.

Following his recovery, one evening with Asensio, Goya falls asleep and dreams that he is shown demonic images by his friend, which include his future painting "The Witches Sabbath" and a sexual encounter between his wife and another woman, among others. Asensio explains in the dream that art must not be restrained by reason, but it must reflect the truth, which includes horror and our "darkest desires".

A graphic novel proved to be a good vehicle for this story because in a very provocative way actual Goya's paintings were woven into the story. In addition to his actual paintings, many of the characters are like the grotesque and disfigured images in his works. The visions which came to Goya in the story while he experienced hallucinations induced by sickness, sunstroke or dreams are works he painted in life such as "The Witches Sabbath" or "Man Mocked by Two Women".

In the story Goya discovers that his friend, patron and possibly muse, the duchess of Alba, experiences the same visions of monsters and demons that he does. In this regard they understand each other. She has even enlisted them in a devil's bargain to fulfill her most ardent desire, to have a child, which is never realized.

A noteworthy subtext is Goya's work in the Spanish court, where he painted portraits of nobles and enjoyed wealth, privilege and prestige but where he was restrained and limited. In a memorable quote Asensio tells him "you paint the rich, nobles and their saints…idols that kill individual freedom. Of course you are well compensated but with every saint that you paint you kill your art, with every noble you destroy your own greatness". In this graphic novel as in his life, Goya eventually leaves the court to give free reign to his artistic freedom. Towards the end of the graphic novel, Goya is exposed to the horrors of war. Goya was a witness to the War of Independence against France, which raged from 1808 to 1814. In one scene Goya and a companion, while walking through

the city one night, pass a horrific scene of executed Spanish patriots, which was immortalized in Goya's famous anti-war statement, El 3 de mayo.

This graphic novel follows the chronological trajectory of Goya's adult life. The major plotlines have a basis in real events. A reader with a knowledge Goya's life and works would be able to anticipate a basic outline of the scenes. The plotlines are quite linear and mainly separate but there is usually a smooth transition between each. Occasionally transitions are not clear and somewhat confusing.

The dialogue is uncomplicated and very suitable for translation to English. It is also quite natural and believable. Although the subject matter in this graphic novel presents a very unique perspective and the images are beautiful and compelling, I do not believe that it would be successful in the United States. The average American reader of graphic novels would not have enough background knowledge or curiosity about the life and work of Francisco Goya to understand it.

Other graphic novels by El Torres within the horror genre are "Zomnibus", "Eclipse of the Undead", "The Veil", "Tambores" and "Nancy in Hell". The main character of "The Ghost of Gaudí" is also an illustrious Spanish master, Antoni Gaudí.

I am not a reader of graphic novels nor do I have a solid frame of reference but I would classify this one with other serious graphic novels such as "Persepolis", "Maus" or "Onward towards Our Noble Deaths". It seems like the graphic novel is an excellent way to explore the life and works of an artist. Illustration provides a vehicle for weaving actual works of the artist into the story, as did El Torres.