

Title: A Comparison of the Sublime in Gogol's *The Portrait*, Poe's *The Oval Portrait*, and Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece*

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In Gogol's *The Portrait*, Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece*, and Poe's *The Oval Portrait* the struggle between the destructive power of natural beauty and the human desire to reproduce it on canvas places the respective main characters in a precarious position. Their artistic attempts lead to the destruction of the human psyche through the sublime nature of their creations. Balzac's protagonist creates the woman of his wildest dreams by painting a female portrait for more than ten years. Poe's painter recreates female beauty on canvas while slowly taking away his sitter's life. Gogol's character, on the other hand, paints a pawnbroker's portrait in order to preserve his life. This paper argues that as the artist assumes the role of the Creator, his desire to achieve the sublime in a work of art disturbs the natural balance of human existence, resulting in the unwitting destruction of the human psyche and even death. In examining the relation between the artist and the work of art in the selected stories, this paper also compares how the three authors conceptualize the nature of art both as a process of transmitting and preserving life on canvas and as a product of creative genius.

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