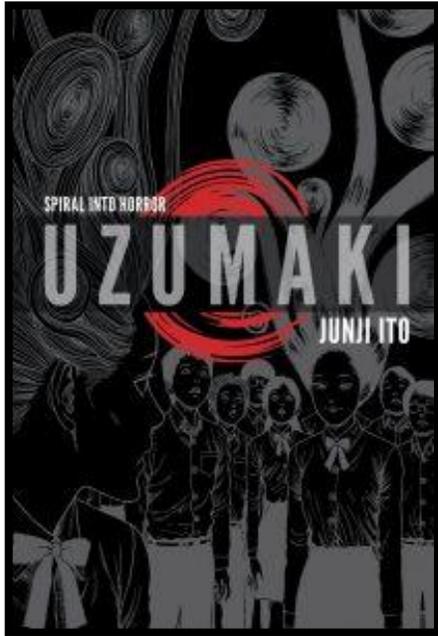


# Gothic Horror

As a representation of modern gothic, we chose a manga, which are essentially Japanese comic books, by Junji Ito, titled, Uzumaki.



Uzumaki centers on a single town, Kurouzu-cho, and its spiral into madness. Each chapter focuses on a different person or event and how it furthers along the descent of the town and its people. We follow Kirie Goshima and her boyfriend, Shuichi Saito, as they experience the spiral curse that is tormenting the town.

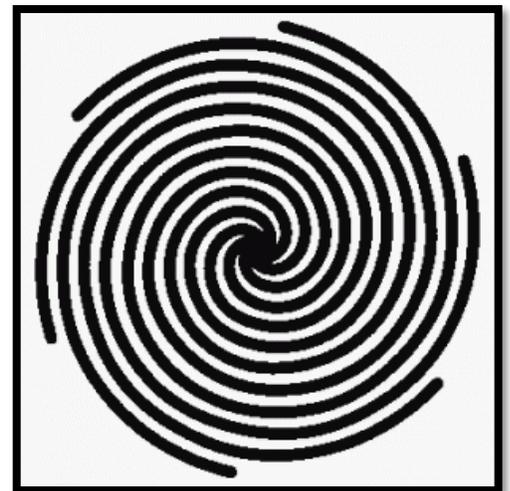
Uzumaki is a horror manga that captures the gothic in a way that is almost a reimaging of the works of H.P Lovecraft only brought to a Japanese audience. The manga falls under Lovecraftian horror, a genre that was named after H.P Lovecraft's works and style of horror that focuses on sanity, hopelessness, and cosmic horror.

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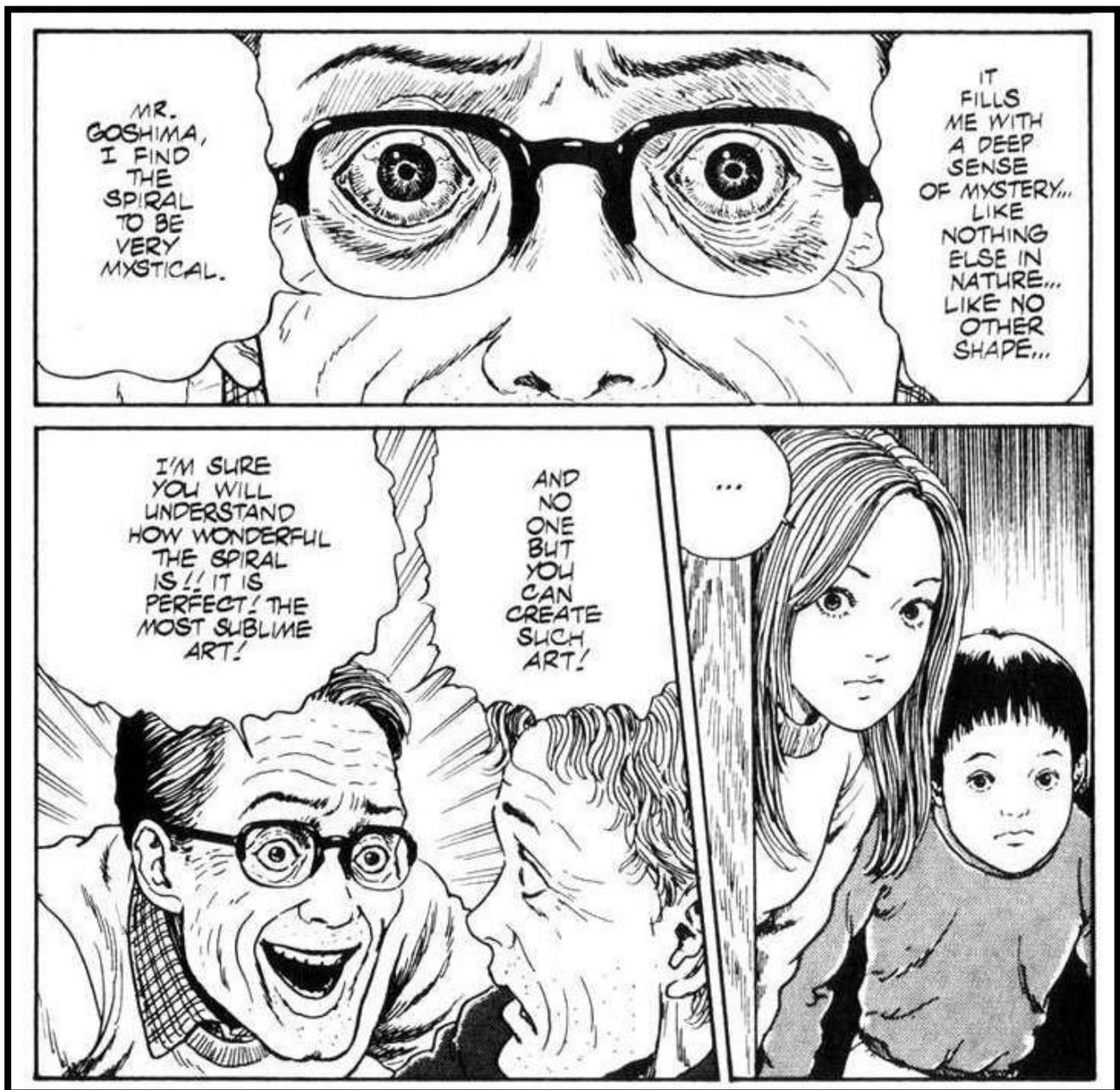
## Theoretical Concepts

### The Sublime

In Uzumaki, what is tormenting the town of Kurouzu-cho is not a monster or a person, rather it is a pattern, the spiral. This symbol is formed both naturally and man-made in the world, it can be found in the sky, in nature, on everyday items, and even within our own bodies. It can be something we can get lost in, hence its usage in hypnosis, something to awe at, something to utilize to create beauty, and even utilized in mathematics as per the Fibonacci sequence.



However, in Uzumaki, this pattern is insidious, it is all consuming, it corrupts everything it touches, it drives those who see it mad, and is what Kurouzu-cho unknowingly falls victim too. Those who are unlucky enough to bear witness to it grow an unnatural obsession with its looks, its shape, its beauty, and its power. It appears in various places in the world, even to the point where it forces itself to manifest where a spiral should not be present. The pattern enraptures anybody who comes across it, either with the spiral itself or with whatever it has sunk its curve into.



Not only do the characters in the manga experience the sublime nature of the spiral, but so does the reader. Ito uses the visual aspect of manga to create artworks that we cannot help but grimace at, be disturbed by, and yet, appreciate and keep us engaged and turning the page. He takes the spiral and contorts it by giving us imagery that mixes the spiral with that which should not be in spiral form. We can sort of understand what the people in the manga go through, why they grow obsessed with the pattern, we can get lost in it, not only in its horror and malice but, in its overly detailed hypnotic beauty.

## The Uncanny

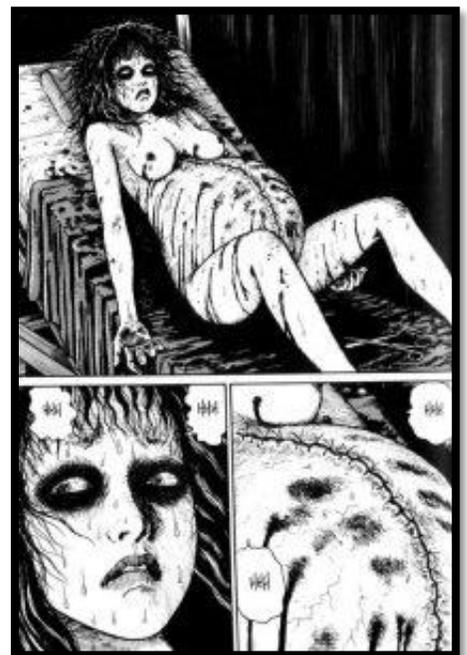


Junji Ito is an expert at capturing the uncanny and bringing it to life through his visuals and writing. Ito has stated himself that likes to take the ordinary and mundane and make us fear it. In *Uzumaki*, Ito took the spiral and turned it into a symbol that causes dread, not only by the pattern itself but with how it injects itself everywhere.

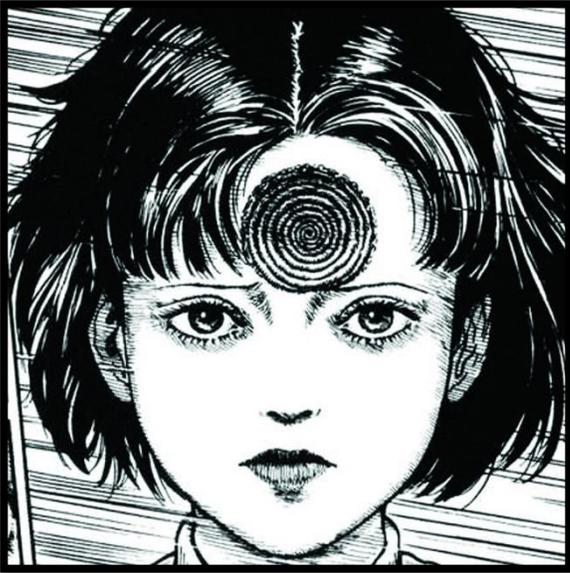
An example of this is in chapter nine, *The Black Lighthouse*, where the lighthouse in Kurouzu-cho begins emitting a bright light that calls everyone to it. Lighthouses serve the purpose of navigational aid to mark danger and highlight safety, however,

Ito changes it to be the danger, to be something to fear and avoid as the light mesmerizes those who see it and are drawn to it despite knowing the danger it houses. One of the protagonists in the manga, Kirie Goshima, enters the lighthouse while following her brother and discovers what has been emitting the light was nothing more than a spiral.

Another more striking example comes in chapter eleven, *The Umbilical Cord*, where childbirth is turned into an event that is presented as monstrous. The babies that are being born in Kurouzu-cho are revealed to have a desire to return to the womb. The babies have an umbilical



cord and placenta that regrows itself after being cut off with the placenta having a mind of its own, attaching itself to the hospital and growing. The head doctor, having been driven insane by the spiral curse, decides to begin the reentry process for the babies, starting with Keiko's son. It is left up to the imagination what happens to the baby once it has reentered the womb and perhaps, that is for the best.

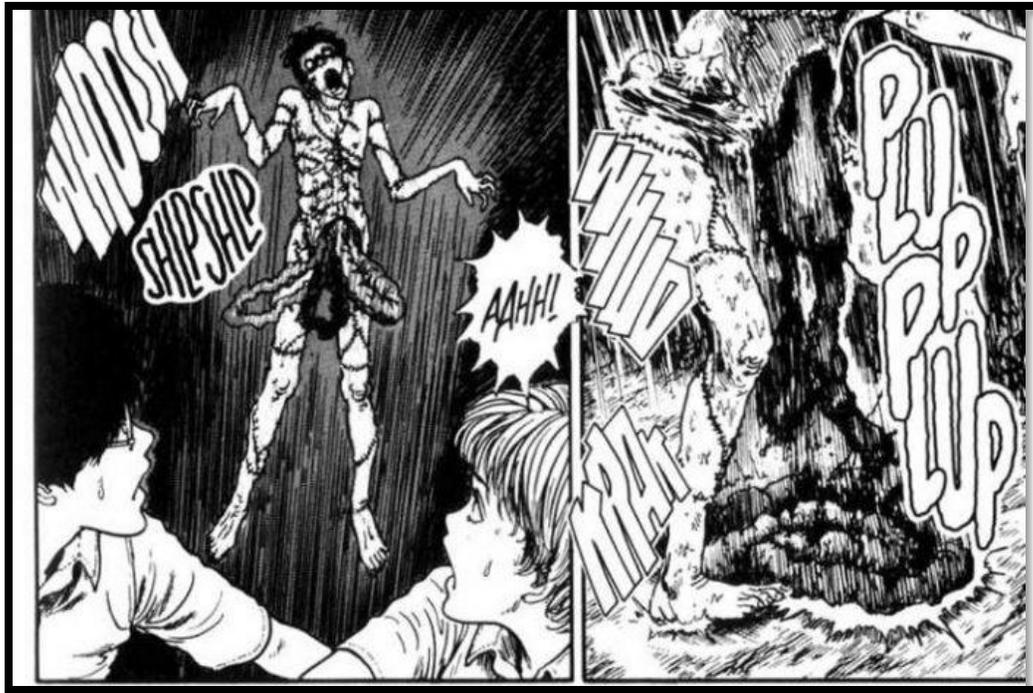


In chapter three, *The Scar*, we meet Azami Kurotani, a girl that can get any boy to fall in love with her because of the scar on her forehead. Scars have a unique quality in which they are both an imperfection and a sign of beauty. With Azami, Ito takes the scar and perverts it, causing the scar to become a spiral that enamors those who lay their eyes on it. Azami pays no mind to all the boys that love her, until, she comes across Shuichi, the one boy who can see the scar for what it is and rejects her. This causes her to become obsessed with him and allows the spiral curse to engulf her as well.

These chapters both exemplify how Ito can take what we know and turn it into something deeply disturbing.

## **The Abject**

In chapter seven, *The Jack in the Box*, we are treated to viewing a corpse that springs back to life and chases Shuichi and Kirie through the town. With every jump it takes, the corpse of the young man is further dismembered, due to its state of deterioration. The corpse is a major example of the abject due to how it can remind us of our own mortality. With this scene, we not only treated to a corpse but one that is actively losing its organs and its body parts as it comes after the protagonists. A representation of how fragile we are, of what we may become, of what we can be reduced to upon death, nothing more than a deteriorating mess. A thought that can corrupt us and can be why we have aspirations to leave a mark on the world, to be remembered as something great and leave a legacy that can continue what we strived for.



## Atmosphere

### Monstrous

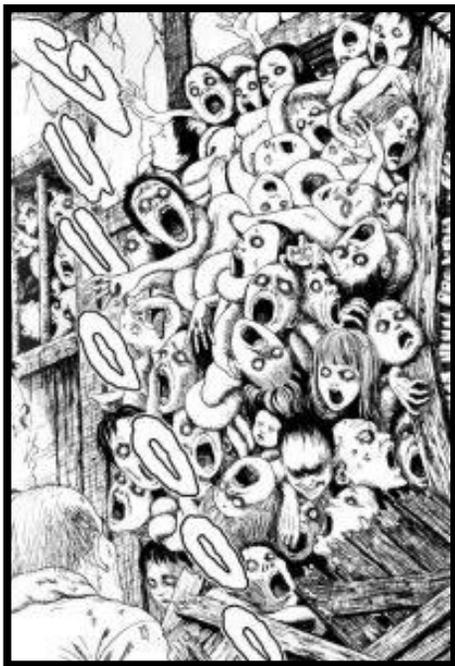


Uzumaki is full of monstrosities and they each revolve around the human body. Ito decides to focus on body horror in his work as he believes this the best type of horror. When it comes to a monster or a person, you can run away or kill it, but you cannot escape your own body no matter how hard you may try unless you are willing to die, the fate which we are actively trying to avoid. This does not mean he does not utilize humans as monsters, however, and we can see examples of all of these in chapters eight, ten, and sixteen.

In chapter eight, The Snail, details the events that transpire once it begins to rain in Kurouzu-cho. A student by the name of Katayama showcases some unusual traits, he's very slow, only shows up to class

when it rains and has a lump on his back. Everybody notices these things about him, but it isn't until he shows up to class on a certain day that it is revealed what is afflicting him. Katayama is slowly morphing into a snail, which is why he had those attributes in the first place. Katayama was the first one to become a human/snail hybrid, but he wouldn't be the last. Throughout the chapter we watch as Katayama slowly morphs into this creature, his condition worsening by the day, mirroring how one can easily contract a disease and fade away because of it.

In chapter ten, Mosquitos, we see what happens when the attributes of mosquitos are applied to human women. The reason female mosquitos suck on our blood is to feed their eggs, something that human women have no need to do, thankfully. However, this chapter delves into that very idea, as the pregnant women in Kurouzu-cho begin to suck the blood out of the town's residents in order to keep their embryo's fed. Here, we get to see how horrifying the characteristics of other creatures that share our Earth can truly be, especially once the human element is thrown into the mix.

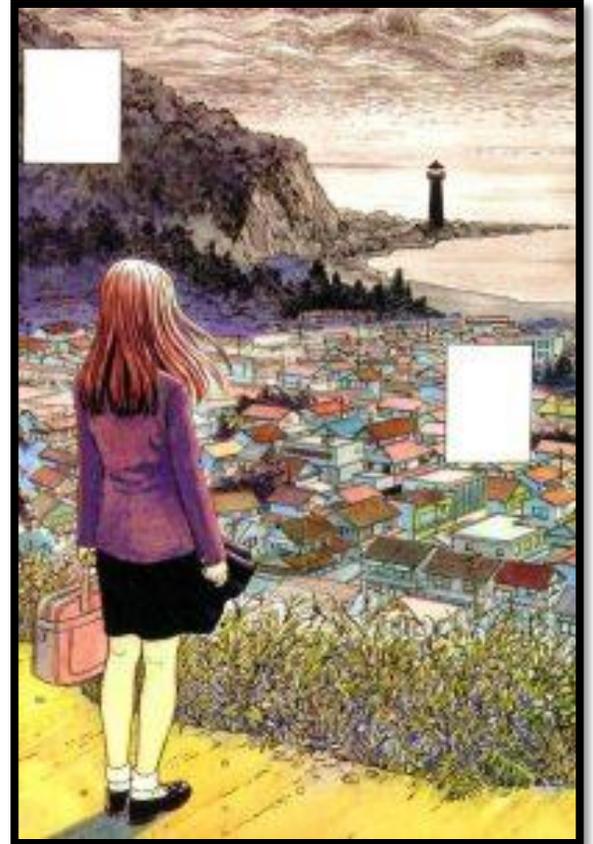


Later in the manga, in chapter sixteen, Erosion, when Kirie and her group are looking for shelter as the town of Kurouzu-cho has been decimated by typhoons, whirlwinds, and other spiral related disasters, they come across one of the last remaining shelters in the whole town. The surviving residents have all holed up inside for an extended period and will not allow anyone else to enter. Desperation leads those who are left outside to ram the shelter and they discover the horror that the people inside have become. Nothing more than an amalgamation of human bodies.

## Imprisonment and Decay

Uzumaki showcases the slow descent of the town and residents of Kurouzu-cho go through. What begins affecting one person, slowly grows as the manga progresses. It takes shape in multiple different ways, eating at different parts of the town and different people in unique ways. We watch as the town and townspeople deteriorate in nothing more than a spiral and savages. In the end, most people only care about are themselves and will do anything to survive, while the others take this time to relish in the madness and wreak havoc but, it ultimately does not matter, as by this point, the curse has won and nobody can be saved anymore, they can only await the process to begin anew.

When the spiral curse began, people were still able to escape Kurouzu-cho, however, the curse begins to manifest itself as natural disasters that destroy the town and by this point, escape is impossible. The town itself will not allow anyone to escape as it has slowly become a spiral as well. Those who try to leave the town simply circle back to the same place they started, it does not matter from where they attempt to leave. All roads lead back to Kurouzu-cho. Time itself keeps them imprisoned in the town as one's sense of time is lost and time begins to pass at an accelerated rate, forcing the residents to succumb to the passage of time, being nothing more than another casualty to the spiral curse.



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## Themes

### Obsession and Madness

Throughout the manga, we see how different people succumb to their obsession with the spirals. We can see how ordinary people deteriorate and let themselves be overwhelmed with a simple pattern. We watch as their obsession leads them to be

driven insane. Both themes are at the core of the manga and are intertwined with each other. Obsession breeds madness and once someone has been enticed by the spiral, there is no escape, only by becoming one with the spiral can anyone be truly free.

The best example of obsession comes from Mr. Saito, an ordinary man who upon noticing the spirals on a snail has his fate sealed. He throws away everything in his life in order to inspect all the spirals he can find or create. Eventually, his wife rids the house of everything spiral related, but it's too late, as Mr. Saito has come to the realization that he can make spirals with his body. He proceeds to rotate his pupils in a spiral formation, individually from each other and even extending his tongue while having it spiral out in front of him. His spiral obsession reaches its climax when he reduces his body into a spiral, killing himself in the process, all so he could join the spirals.



We can see that an obsession can arise from seemingly nothing, from something that is inconsequential to the more traumatic. It seems to show that we may be closer to madness than we may afraid to admit, it could be a simple event, a simple sight, or a simple thought that can cause to lose ourselves and our grip on reality. This is what is at the heart of Uzumaki, this notion that sanity is something so fragile, something we are so desperate to hold on to that it may very well be the reason why we lose it in the first place. Of course, the manga has implications that the madness derives from some other beings that we cannot comprehend, but is that not true of ourselves as well?

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# Comparisons

## The Tell-Tale Heart and The Black Cat by Edgar Allen Poe



Edgar Allen Poe has writings which are slathered in the macabre and denote the themes of madness and obsession. In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, we see a man who is obviously not one with reality and how his own mind brings about his downfall. Madness is what drives him to kill and in *Uzumaki*, the spiral, once it has gripped the mind, it can make

one do anything, whether it be murder, suicide, obsess or simply become a monster.

In *Uzumaki*, they are influenced by an external factor, yes, but their minds are not their own, they fixate on the spiral and will do anything for it. While the narrator in *The Tell Tale Heart* is fixated on the evil eye and is driven to murder over something that is non-existent. We are shown the lengths one can go if one is no longer in control of their headspace.

Meanwhile, *The Black Cat* focuses more on obsession as the narrator here is solely focused on the cat which he harmed and the cat which he believes is out to get him. Of course, his issue stems from his alcoholism, this is the catalyst which drives to him to murder his wife at the end of the story, taking the place of the spiral found in *Uzumaki*. His addiction causes him to lose grip on reality, just like the narrator in the *Tell-Tale Heart* or those who fell to the spiral curse in *Uzumaki*. We are given a front row seat into how this man decays into something he was not, as in the beginning, we are shown a loving and caring man, not an obsessed maniac. Not always is the reason for which one goes mad something unnatural, it shows us that we can fall victim to our own vices. We are the ones in control of what we do and if we allow ourselves to be controlled by our vices, then we will end up in the same place.

## The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman



The Yellow Wallpaper follows a woman who is slowly going mad while being restricted to one room in her house. Her mind begins to fixate on the yellow wallpaper that covers the room and she begins to see it as something more.

Between this and Uzumaki, we can see various similarities. The prevalent theme of obsession is seen in her fixation with the wallpaper and how she is slowly losing her sanity because of it and the underlying circumstances of her situation. We watch as she further deteriorates and detaches herself from others, completely being engulfed by the notion that there is something up with the wallpaper in the room, it overtakes her senses and brings about hallucinations which only make her less and less human.

We can see the elements of the uncanny rear their head in the writing of Gilman, as she takes something we might see every day, a wallpaper and uses it as a horrifying fixture that breaks the narrators grasp on reality. Both utilize something common, a wallpaper and a spiral, to evoke terror and dread. Again, going back to this idea that our sanity is fragile and the simplest of things can cause an irreparable fracture.