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### Spirit of Perverseness

There is no question that the stories “The Black Cat” by Edgar Allan Poe and “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman are gothic texts. The characters in both stories teach us about the spirit of perverseness which can be defined as the force that drives people to do things that are bad for themselves and others. Both characters share the same quality and the only difference is what actions they take in order to destroy the lives of their loved ones, one uses abuse which leads to death while the other character uses control which leads to driving his wife insane.

In the story “The Black Cat” by Edgar Allan Poe, the narrator confesses his love for animals such as cats and dogs. The narrator describes that he has his wife who helps him raise their pets. He has a favorite animal which is a black cat named Pluto. Shortly after, he starts suffering from violent mood swings which is the result of his alcoholism. He starts to mistreat his wife and animals, eventually he lashes out on Pluto after getting home drunk one night. He hangs the cat from a tree and on the night of Pluto’s death, his house sets on fire. One night after being out drinking he stumbles into a black cat who resembles Pluto and the cat becomes a part of his household. The spirit of perverseness takes over once again leading to his murderous thoughts. One day he trips on the cat and he decides to grab an axe but unexpectedly, the wife defends the animal. The narrator disapproves of this and decides to bury the axe of his wife’s head. The police arrive on the fourth day and discover what he has done.

In the story “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the narrator begins by informing the reader that her husband has taken her to a summer vacation. She discusses that she suffers from depression and her husband John who also happens to be her doctor constantly disregards her illness and her thoughts. The solution that is given by her husband John is to not do anything that will make her use her imagination such as writing. She starts to focus more on the house using it as an outlet to take her mind of her mental problems. She becomes more and more fixated on the wallpaper and wallpaper starts to take over her imagination because it seems to be the only source of entertainment. Now the wallpaper starts taking the shape of a woman who is struggling inside the room's yellow wallpaper. In an effort to help out the woman, she tears it down. By the end of the story she has gone completely insane thinking that she is the trapped woman.

As stated before, both characters share the same characteristic which is the spirit of perverseness, we will look closely at this gothic element and analyze it. The narrator in “The Black Cat”, experiences his first taste of this force when he mentions that “The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its

flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, ginnurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame” (Poe,1843). This describes exactly what he is feeling as this force takes over, he feels like he is no longer his original self but someone else. He mentions that he feels horror and remorse for the crimes he commits against his cat Pluto which means that he is fully aware that he is inflicting pain on others, and to make matters worse after this is all over with, he drowns himself in wine again. Pluto felt extreme terror when he came across him, which was the last straw. He asks the question of “ Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not? “(Poe,1843). This phrase is his excuse for his cruel actions, not only against his wife but the animals. If you think about it long enough you will realize that his perversion does not come from his primitive instinct but instead it comes from his alcohol abuse. John in “The Yellow Wallpaper”, is the husband of the narrator. He is a physician who does not believe that she is sick but although he says he does not believe in her depression he advises her to not think about it. He gives her a prescription for a condition he believes she does not have. She suffers a lot but he insists that there is no reason on why she should be suffering. She is not permitted to use her imagination because it will take her to places she should not go to. This is a clear example of the spirit of perverseness because he believes she is not sick but does everything in his power to treat her as if she is which drives her insane. He proceeds to take everything away from her such as family visitation and using her imagination which left her with nothing but the yellow wallpaper. And who in their right mind isolates someone who is not “sick” as mentioned over and over again by John, he obviously knew this would make matters worse.

Now, I will dig in deeper into their actions which is what differentiates one character from the other. The narrator used actual physical violence on his animals and his wife. He mentions that he fancied that his cat Pluto avoided him and took matter into his own hands when the cat inflicted a small injury on his hand. The narrator took a penknife, opened it and cut one of his eyes from his socket. But this is not where he stops, he then decides to slip a noose around his neck because he could not stand the guilt he felt for what he had done to his cat. After he killed Pluto, he stumbles on a cat after a night out and brings him home. One day, while he is going downstairs, the cat follows him which almost caused an accident. He exclaims that “Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal, which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished” (Poe,1843). He was aiming to kill the cat but the wife intervened and he buried the axe in her brain. John on the other hand does not physically hurt his wife, instead he emotionally abuses her. Both of their techniques are different but they are still perverse nonetheless. He tells his wife that if she can not control herself then she has to take pills that do it for her .John does not take any of her requests in consideration, she mentioned that she wanted the room from downstairs but he refused. John meant to repaper the room but claimed that it was getting the best out of her and he did not want to give in so he refused to do it. He treats her like a little girl and even calls her little girl. He tells her that if she behaves then she can have family over. All of these actions lead her to obsess over the only thing she has, which is the wallpaper.

In conclusion, the spirit of perverseness shows up in both of these stories for one reason and only reason only, which is to cause destruction in the lives of those close to the characters. This force drives them to commit gruesome crimes and it shows what they are capable of doing even though there is nothing that excuses their actions.