

My goal for FURSCA this summer was to read and watch a variety of media in the body horror genre, analyze it and take notes, and write a lengthy paper that combined research, analysis, brainstorming, and argument. I planned for the paper to have four parts: recording my observations from my research, drawing analyses and conclusions from those observations, making an argument for the use of poetry in exploring body horror themes, and recording things I found through my research that I wanted to revisit in my creative writing. My long term goal was to use FURSCA as a jumping off point for my honor's thesis, for which I plan to write a manuscript of poems in the body horror genre. During FURSCA, I wanted to build my understanding of the genre, learn its tropes and tools, and find out what themes and messages often come through. I hoped to find lots of inspiration for both individual poem ideas and broader themes for the poetry collection as a whole.

I fully achieved the first goal of my project: consuming a wide range of body horror media. I read six novels, two novellas, two poetry collections, one short story collection, and watched ten movies. My readings (and watchings) spanned three centuries and three continents. I got to everything on my schedule and then some; I learned a lot about the genre and found lots of recurring themes and motifs. I took detailed notes on my readings and on the connections and analyses that popped into my head while reading. Here is a sample of my notes on the novel *Mexican Gothic* (2020):

- Mycelium in and under house, house is full of mold, spores.
- p. 216 - An image that has been sticking with me is when Noemi sees a huge black snake slithering on top of her on the bed and she nudges it with her leg and it breaks open and it's dead and white on the inside and all moldy and mushrooms are growing from it.
- Body horror in the facet of rot, decay – when Noemi sees mushrooms grow out of her wrist and up her arm; agnes with mushrooms growing out of her, her corpse rotting in the basement.

- But also body horror in not being in control of your body, like Neomi is compelled to do certain things, and sometimes in her dreams(?) she can't move
- This novel uses body horror for suspense/foreshadowing and also to add to the general bad creepy vibe of the story
 - The slow build of body horror, transformation

As you can see, I took notes on how body horror was used in the novel to add to the ambience of unease, and on specific images that stuck with me and were good examples of written body horror.

In terms of my paper, I was too ambitious with how many things I could write about in how much time I had. By the end of FURSCA, I wrote 22 pages of the paper, but there were some important sections I didn't get to. I wrote all about my observations and interpretations of what I read and watched, but didn't get as much into the poetry and forward facing aspect of the project. If I had more time, I'm confident that I would've gotten to everything I wanted to get to. That being said, I'm still working on the paper, it just is exceeding the time provided to me by FURSCA. I feel good about what I did get written: thorough explanations of the patterns, themes, and techniques seen throughout the body horror genre, and my interpretation of why they appear and what they're good for. Here is a sample from the paper:

Similarly, lots of body horror media involves pregnancy and/or birth. Like sex, pregnancy and birth are natural bodily processes, so body horror makes sense as a genre to use to ask questions about them. Additionally, pregnancy and birth can be dangerous and scary, and they're often the inspiration of or explanation for horror concepts like parasites and incubation. The *Alien* franchise, for example, is famous for its images of aliens bursting out of people, after something is deposited and grows inside them. This alone can be seen as a metaphor for birth and pregnancy, but in later movies in the franchise, *Prometheus* and *Alien: Prometheus* aliens are more explicitly birthed in a traditional sense from women's bodies. Birthing an inhuman baby is also explored in other body horror movies: *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Fly*, and another Cronenberg film, *The Brood* (1979). All of these movies exist because pregnancy and birth are already such horrifying and surreal concepts. The idea of a human growing an extra set of bones and organs and producing another human out of nothing sounds, in itself, like a horror movie plot. *Alien*, *Rosemary's Baby* and the others work so well because they're taking something horrifying but normalized and making it more grotesque and impossible, re cementing the horror of it into our minds. In *Alien*, we see people's bodies broken apart as an unrecognizable creature bursts out of them. It reminds us that birth is dangerous, and the realities of pregnancy and birth should not be taken lightly.

Reproduction—in a vaguer sense, not just conception and birth—is also seen consistently in body horror. In *The Substance*, a woman’s cells duplicate and transform, and a younger version of herself, also a full grown woman, bursts out of her back. In *Men* (2022), in one of the most distressing sequences in all body horror, a man births another fully grown man, who births another fully grown man, and so on, all their bodies being mutilated in the process. *Frankenstein* is also a case of unnatural reproduction, with Frankenstein giving new life to a body of sewn together parts. Perhaps this theme in body horror comes from a fascination with asexual reproduction, or men desiring to have the power to create life harbored only by women.

Embarking on this project through FURSCA has been an important part of my Albion College experience because it was a chance to engage academically with a topic I’m very interested in that’s not typically the subject of any class. I’ve wanted to read and watch a lot of the things on my list for a long time, but there are always other things that take priority. This summer gave me a chance to really dive into this thing I’m passionate about, and I’m very grateful for that. It has also provided me with lots of background knowledge and ideas to write poems for my honor’s thesis. I will now be able to focus more singularly on writing, as opposed to having to spend extra time researching and brainstorming. At Elkin Isaac, I plan to present some of my research and findings from FURSCA, and read a few poems from my thesis, and talk about how my FURSCA project informed and inspired my thesis. This project has given me an even bigger appreciation for the body horror genre. My pursuit of knowledge and consuming body horror media will continue through this summer and long after. Thank you to the donors who made it possible for me to conduct this research this summer.