

avoid or kill them. Critics such as Jeffery Cohen have noted that the monster is "difference made flesh,"¹ and thus eligible for destruction. But when Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*: "They are us. We are them." *Shaun of the Dead* likewise plays up the similarity between *us* living workers and *them* zombies, and it takes this notion a step further in the conclusion of the film, when the zombies are incorporated into the "living" society rather than overrunning the living or being dispatched with a blow to the head. This unsettling similarity between worker and zombie is evident even in the original British trailer for the film, which juxtaposes a series of quick clips from the film with a wry voice-over narration:

Do you ever feel that modern life is not for you?
Do you do the same dead-end job every day?
Is your romance *dying* on its feet?
Have you ever felt that you are turning into . . . a *zombie*?
Maybe . . . you're not alone.
[words flash on the screen] IN A TIME OF CRISIS
A HERO MUST RISE
FROM HIS SOFA
THIS YEAR
FEAR
HAS A NEW ENEMY
AND COURAGE
HAS A NEW NAME
[Liz's nervous voice:] "Shaun!"²

The trailer clearly portrays the film's protagonist as a disaffected slacker/couch potato, playing up the humor of his lack of heroic attributes. The last four screens are meant to be ironic, as the images show Shaun running frantically or crying in fear while the words on the screen proclaim his the new name of courage. The trailer prepares us for a film that will not feature the stereotypical tough-guy Hollywood hero, the next Terminator or Rambo.

Shaun is, in fact, the anti-Rambo. He is not particularly strong or skilled in self-defense. He tries to arm himself with kitchen implements, record albums, a cricket bat, a pool cue, and, finally, a rifle that he has no skill in firing. His attempt to give the zombies "the slip" only leads them back to his hideout, and he is unable to defend his mum or his friends. He tries his best with the resources he has at hand, but is unable, in his own words, to get a "fucking break" the way typical film heroes do.

The first part of the trailer, in fact, articulates Shaun's position as an Everyman character. The repeated use of second-person pronouns implicates the audience, indicating that *we* may be turning into zombies due to our dead-end jobs and the effect of "modern life." The last statement, that we are not alone, indicates that this "zombie" condition may affect many members of our society. In addition, this part of the trailer accentuates the living/dead dichotomy: modern life, dead-end job, romance *dying*. When you put them all together, the lines begin to blur: modern life becomes a living death in the realm of the zombie. This rhetoric is consistent with Cohen's theory, which, in part, emphasizes that monsters live at the crux of dichotomies.

In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Cohen explains that "the monstrous body is [. . . a] construct and a projection [that] exists only to be read: the monstrosity is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,'" and it appears that *Shaun of the Dead*'s zombies reveal and warn against the deadening effects of modern life. Even in the first minutes of the film's opening sequence, we can see that working "life" kills all but the outer shell of the grocery cart jockeys, the cashiers, and every commuter in London. As *Shaun*'s opening music plays, teens slowly push carts through a parking lot; the check-out girl, Mary, monotonously scans item after item while gazing, unfocused, at nothing in particular; commuters ride the bus without talking to or making eye contact with one another; and pedestrians plod down the sidewalk in an automaton shuffle that resembles the slow, stumbling steps of early Romero zombies.³ The zombie-like London citizens in *Shaun*'s opening resemble *Dawn of the Dead*'s mall zombies, who ride the escalators and stumble through the mall because of some preternatural memory of that place.⁴ Our entire society appears to be affected. We are not alone in the zombie condition.

Even before the film's zombie crisis explodes, our protagonist appears embodied. The audience's first "zombie false alarm" occurs as a hung-over Shaun stumbles out of his bedroom and the camera slowly pans up from his stiffly stumbling feet. Is that a zombie moan we hear? No, it's just our hero yawning. And this apathetic hero fits the Generation X slacker stereotype. In the opening sequence, Shaun can barely pay attention to the "shape up or else" lecture he's getting from his girlfriend, Liz. Despite the fact that Shaun has been to college, is now twenty-nine years old, and has been dating Liz for the last three years, he has not accepted the responsibilities of a productive adult life. He still lives in a flat with his college mate, Pete, and his childhood best friend, Ed. He continues to work as a clerk in an electronics store—Force Electronics, a nod to the