

trials and eventually transform himself into hero material.¹² But unlike previous film heroes such as Luke Skywalker or Daniel from *The Karate Kid*, Shaun attempts to progress from lazy slacker to slacker hero without changing himself. There is a brief moment toward the end of the film where it appears that Shaun has elevated himself into a true leader, as he rallies his mates with inspiring words from Bertrand Russell: "The only thing that will redeem mankind is cooperation." But Liz recognizes that he has recently read that quotation on a beer mat—Guinness Extra Cold, to be exact—so Shaun's slacker reputation remains untainted.

In this film, a slacker hero appears to be just what society needs. Critics have long noted that horror film monsters should be examined within the cultural/sociological matrix of relations that generate them, from Stephen King's argument that successful horror films "always seem to play upon and express fears which exist across a wide spectrum of people,"¹³ to Tony Magistrale's more concise assertion that the monster "is nothing less than a barometer for measuring an era's cultural anxieties."¹⁴ Thus *Shaun* should be examined in terms of the postindustrial, service-oriented work force the film portrays. As Mapes notes, "Shaun also makes the point that many of the lower-paid workers in Western cities are practically zombies anyway. Demanding, unimportant jobs leave them numb, and all some employers want is a body without a soul or a brain to get in the way of work, work, work."¹⁵ This image of the enslaved zombie worker, while new to the Romero zombie audience,¹⁶ is actually a return to the image that captured the public's imagination in the early twentieth century.

Zora Neale Hurston described zombies to the American public in her 1938 work of folklore *Tell My Horse*. For Hurston, a zombie is an individual corpse commonly believed to be raised from the dead by voodoo. Hurston also suggests that a victim could be drugged and buried alive to be retrieved later.¹⁷ The zombie is then forced to work in the fields or do the voodoo practitioner's evil deeds. Anyone could be targeted and enslaved by a *bacor*, or voodoo priest, and the victim's family would never look for their loved one because they would assume the victim is dead and buried.¹⁸ In fact, during her travels in Haiti, Hurston was shown the supposed zombie Felicia Felix-Mentor, who had been buried in 1907 yet was found walking about muttering incoherently in 1936. Although at first glance Felicia Felix-Mentor looked like an emaciated old woman, a closer look revealed the dreadful sight of the "blank face" and "dead eyes"; Hurston writes, "The sight of this wreckage was too much to endure for long."¹⁹ The horror of the story is that it features a woman who was once a wife and mother, part

of our familiar world, but somehow has become a "broken remnant, relic, or refuse."²⁰—in other words, a monster.

The voodoo zombie has been portrayed in more recent works, such as Daniel Gruener's 1996 film *All of Them Witches*, which depicts a young woman who finds herself pursued by a Hurston-style voodoo zombie and must learn to use voodoo herself to escape not only the zombie but her own controlling husband. But the Romero trilogy effectively supplants the folklore voodoo zombie in our popular imagination with his own vision of mass zombie attacks. Romero's zombies are not, and cannot be, controlled by anyone. They do no work and exist only to terrorize and devour the living.

Critics such as Roger Ebert note that Romero's zombie trilogy has changed our notion of the zombie: "George Romero, who invented the modern genre with *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*, was essentially devising video game targets before there were video games: They pop up, one after another, and you shoot them."²¹ Pegg and Wright emphasize the notion of zombie as easy target through Ed's leisure activities. Ed, who has spent most of his life playing violent video games, now amuses himself by hitting pedestrian zombies as he drives, pretending to score points with each hit. By the end of the film, however, there are a number of zombies "saved" rather than destroyed by the living. Ultimately, Pegg and Wright are not interested in merely eradicating zombies; they seek to examine how productive members of society already resemble zombies, and how we might compartmentalize those aspects of modern life that deaden us and nourish the more playful aspects that will allow us to, in Liz's words, "live a little."

On the surface, this zombie film parody—a self-proclaimed "Romantic comedy. With zombies"—seemingly adheres to a zombie-wise audience's expectations. There are many zombies, and instead of following the most recent zombie film trend of being vicious, fast hunters, they follow in the Romero tradition of being dim, slow-moving predators one can stop with a blow to the head. And true to popular horror film tradition, they seem to provide the story with a clearly defined enemy, a monstrous Other, for our hero and his sidekick to destroy as we cheer them on, without us having to feel guilty about taking pleasure in such carnage. For instance, when Ed hits a pedestrian with Pete's car, Shaun is racked with guilt, cautiously calling out to the body in the street. When the corpse reveals its startling zombie visage, Shaun says, "Oh, thank heavens for that," and we can all breathe a sigh of relief. We thought for a moment that our protagonists had killed someone. Thankfully, the victim was just a zombie.