

The comedy writer Max Brooks understands that dimension of monster stories very well. In books like *The Zombie Survival Guide* and *World War Z*, Brooks gives us painstaking, haunting, and hilarious advice about how best to meet our undead foes. For its April Fools' edition, the otherwise serious journal *Archaeology* interviewed Brooks, asking him (tongue firmly in cheek): "Does the archaeological record hold any zombie-related lessons for us today? What can our ancestors teach us about meeting and, ultimately, defeating the undead menace?" Brooks replied: "The greatest lesson our ancestors have to teach us is to remain both vigilant and unafraid. We must endeavor to emulate the ancient Romans; calm, efficient, treating zombies as just one more item on a rather mundane checklist. Panic is the undead's greatest ally, doing far more damage, in some cases, than the creatures themselves. The goal is to be prepared, not scared, to use our heads, and cut off theirs."

Brooks is unparalleled in parodying a well-worn monster tradition, but he wouldn't be so funny if we weren't already using monster stories to imagine strategies for facing enemies. The monster is a virtual sparring partner for our imagination. How will I avoid, assuage, or defeat my enemy? Will I have grace under pressure? Will I help others who are injured? Or will I be that guy who selfishly goes it alone and usually meets an especially painful demise?

In a significant sense, monsters are a part of our attempt to envision the good life or at least the secure life. Our ethical convictions do not spring fully grown from our heads but must be developed in the context of real and imagined challenges. In order to discover our values, we have to face trials and tribulation, and monsters help us imaginatively rehearse. Imagining how we will face an unstoppable, powerful, and inhuman threat is an illuminating exercise in hypothetical reasoning and hypothetical feeling.

You can't know for sure how you will face a headless zombie, an alien face-hugger, an approaching sea monster, or a chainsaw-wielding psycho. Fortunately, you're unlikely to be put to the test. But you might face similarly terrifying trials. You might be assaulted, be put on the front lines of some war, or be robbed, raped, or otherwise harassed and assailed. We may be lucky enough to have had no real acquaintance with such horrors, but we have all nonetheless played them out in our mind's eye. And though we can't know for sure how we'll face an enemy soldier or a rapist, it doesn't stop us from imaginatively formulating responses. We use the imagination in order to establish our own agency in chaotic and uncontrollable situations.

People frequently underestimate the role of art and imagery in their own moral convictions. Through art (e.g., Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Hitchcock's *Psycho*, King's and Kubrick's *The Shining*), artists convey moral