Stacey Abbott: “Another one for the Fire, Boys”: The Zombie in the Work of Whedon

During the 2012 Presidential campaign Joss Whedon filmed a satirical commentary on Republican candidate Mitt Romney, declaring that Romney was ‘a different candidate; one with the vision and determination to cut through business as usual politics and finally put this country back on the path to the zombie apocalypse’[1]. In this video, Whedon drew upon the popular iconography of the zombie apocalypse genre for political purposes, adopting the George Romero-approach in which it is used ‘as a character for satire or a political criticism’. Romero has commented that this more allegorical approach is lacking in the recent and popular zombie productions, most notably The Walking Dead[2]. When reflecting upon Whedon’s supernatural television series, Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel, it is interesting to note that the zombie does not appear to be a major player, appearing on occasion as a monster-of-the-week threat to our heroes while the vampire and other demons often take centre stage. As Gerry Canavan has shown with regard to Firefly/Serenity and Dollhouse, the Whedonverse does include elements of the zombie genre although perhaps not presented in the manner to which we have become accustomed [3]. The aim of this paper will be to offer a closer examination of the Whedonverse, revealing that the zombie is not only present on an episodic basis but plays a significant role, repeatedly emerging as a recognisable trope from Buffy and Angel to The Avengers and Marvel’s Agents of Shield. In these texts, the zombie not only evokes horror conventions and the seeming ephemerality of the monster-of-the-week but is often re-inscribed with the allegorical-potential of the genre that Romero argues is lacking in the mainstream, particularly televisual, appeal of the genre. Furthermore, rather than focusing upon a post-apocalyptic landscape in which all is lost and decline is inevitable, the zombie as metaphor in the Whedonverse is often used to reflect upon a world that is teetering upon the brink of apocalypse and where individual/political choice, as in a Presidential campaign, can make the difference between apocalypse and salvation.