

Mary Ellen Iatropoulos and Lorna Jowett: Good Cop, Bad Cop: Interrogating Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. (Iatropoulos Part One, Jowett Part Two)

A certain trepidation pervades critical discussion of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* amongst Whedon scholars. For all the trumpeting of Joss Whedon's name to promote the show, Whedon's nominal involvement in production prompts the question of whether *AoS* is "really" a Whedon show. At times, *AoS* seems too mainstream for a cult audience; at others, it courts this audience with narrative "special effects," references to comic book sources, and Marvel Cinematic Universe tie-ins. The show resists linear interpretation by constantly upheaving itself, from dramatic reversals in basic narrative expectations (e.g. the Hydra revelation following *The Winter Soldier*) to sudden twists requiring us to completely reassess characters (e.g. Ward having been Hydra all along). How can we make sense of such a swiftly-shifting and seemingly contradictory show? Are they S.H.I.E.L.D, or are they Hydra? Are they good guys, or are they bad guys? Is this really a Whedon show, or isn't it? Is it any good, or not? This paper deliberately adopts binary positions to engage this dialectic and flesh out debate regarding *AoS* as part of the Whedonverse.

This paper extends Abbott, Calvert and Jowett's discussion of *AoS* as part of the Whedon brand (2015) and Kociemba and Iatropoulos's examination of Whedon's auteurism (2015). Some "Whedonesque" elements (as defined by Lavery, Wilcox, and others) do surface in *AoS*. As Jowett will contest, when understood as Whedonesque, *AoS* is televisual art deserving of acceptance into Whedon canon. Yet, as Iatropoulos will argue, *AoS*'s strategy of undermining expectations can result in the show's "Whedonesque" elements also being undermined. Jowett and Iatropoulos will present an embodied performance of critical contention involving the show's treatment of race, gender, and age, inhabiting--and thus making visible--*AoS*'s oscillation between subverting ideological and genre paradigms and reinforcing them.

Works Cited

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