

KJ Swanson: 'Avenging Is Your world. Your World Is Crazy.' Joss Whedon's *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* as Action Films that Problematize Redemptive Violence

Within weeks of one another, two films opened to both critical and box office success: *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Joss Whedon's second film for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the long-anticipated fourth installment of George Miller's dystopian film saga. And whilst, for differing reasons, both films found themselves at the center of feminist debate, less critical attention has been paid to the surprising ways these two action films problematize the violence used to communicate their stories. In *Age of Ultron*, Whedon complicates accepted tropes of super-heroism and implicates his protagonists with the question of at what point, if ever, safety and survival may be worth the price of autonomy. *Fury Road*, Miller's portrayal of a world wherein safety and survival no longer co-exist, features protagonists who would answer the above question with a visceral "Never." But whereas Whedon's vision (pun allowed) veers ambivalently between the hope of human cooperation and the inevitability of isolated, exceptional leaders, Miller's story exchanges a valorized "last man standing" archetype for an empathetic and interdependent, rather than independent, response to injustice. By comparing how *Fury Road* and *Age of Ultron* explore and illustrate issues of destructive hyper-masculinity, gendered response to conflict, and what activist and theologian Walter Wink notably termed "the myth of redemptive violence," this paper will demonstrate how both films manage to self-reflexively challenge not just their own filmic genres of action violence, but the very idea that peace is best achieved through violent force. According to these two films, does a world bent on self-destruction need avengers, or is it the violent, rather than the violence, that need redemption?