

Rhonda V. Wilcox: “Every Man Ever Got a Statue”: Public Statuary in Whedon’s *Age of Ultron*

Whedon is a master of words; however, he also communicates consciously through visual language. Scholars such as Stacey Abbott and Matthew Pateman have elucidated his direction, while others such as Marni Stanley and Jessica Hautsch have analyzed the drawings of the comics. Visual symbolism has long been part of Whedon’s method (see, e.g., *Why Buffy Matters* on thresholds, 40-45). Authors including Sanford Levinson and Barbara Groseclose have explored the semiotics of public statuary. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Whedon makes repeated use of public statues—imagery that deepens and complicates themes of this complex production.

Many viewers will remember the image behind the closing credits: a statue of the movie’s larger-than-life characters. But there are half a dozen earlier images of statues, often in fraught contexts. Whedon himself points out one of the preceding instances (of “the heroes of New York”) during his commentary, comparing it to the closing statue of the Avengers which “elevates them but . . . also grounds them.” The division he touches on is even clearer in an earlier work, the “Jaynestown” episode of *Firefly*, in which Mal declares that he believes “Every man ever got a statue made of him was one kind of sumbitch or another.” The tension between public heroism and human failing is represented by the idea Mal expresses, and directly related to the very significant issue of the U.S. role in global politics, as raised in *Age of Ultron* by the question of “collateral damage,” unilateral action, and the possible monstrosity of the heroes. The heroes immortalized in statue also have a queer reflection in the robots of *Ultron*; indeed, one of those heroes is, in part, such a robot. Whether the Lenin-like statues of Sokovia or the real artworks of Seoul, the statues of *Ultron* have much to say.