

The Devil Wears Prada

A 20th Century / Fox 2000 Picture Presentation

A Wendy Finerman Production

Screenplay by Aline Brosh McKenna

Directed by David Frankel

Based on the novel by Lauren Weisberger

Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser

The film deals with the story of an uncomplicated, unsophisticated and naïve young woman, Andrea Sachs (as played by Anne Hathaway) and her move to New York and into the fashion world when she lands a job, surprisingly so, at Runway magazine, a world leading glossy fashion publication with a world-wide following. The film is based on the book *The Devil Wears Prada* written by Lauren Weisberger, which in actual fact contains most of Ms Wienberger's own experiences as an assistant to Anna Wintour, the infamous Editor-in-Chief of Vogue Magazine. The film follows Andrea's 'transformation' and adaptation into the fast-paced, money, image and power driven industry that is haute couture and fashion today. Although Andrea's experience is the main focus of the film, it is not however the most interesting of the various processes that one can see developing as the film progresses.

Meryl Streep's brilliant performance as Miranda Priestly, Andrea's new boss from hell and Editor-in-Chief of Runway magazine, brings to the viewer an exceptionally complicated individual, albeit one who is portrayed as extremely controlling, cold and narcissistic. Miranda's presence is dreaded and her character feared by all whom either works for her, or has anything to do with her. Even the top fashion houses seem to support her position of power. One nod of approval, or a side-ways glance of disgust by her make or brake fashion collections bound for the catwalks of the world even before they are shown to the eager aficionados, fashion junkies and followers each season.

Although the film does not give any insight into Miranda's past, it does highlight her present functioning as a controlling, anal-retentive and creative genius. From the outward glance it appears that she does not care anything for anyone, except for her own needs and the success and standard of the magazine that she is in charge of. Cunning, harsh criticism and demanding takes on new meaning when confronted with her character in the film. Miranda sets impossible tasks and expectations for those working for, or rather 'under' her and she knows no boundaries, nor does she have any consideration in terms of working hours or people's private lives. What Miranda demands, Miranda gets, even if it is a yet-to-be-printed copy of J.K. Rowling's latest Harry Potter edition for her two daughters.

The task then to analyse her character and hypothesise about her various inadequacies, maladaptive processes and 'psychopathology' from a psychological perspective is a rather easy one. One gets a sense that here is a woman so hurt or scorned in some way, somewhere during her life, that she employs severe defence mechanisms to keep her 'untouchable' and out of harms way. Miranda lets no one near her, not physically nor emotionally. She lives and breathes Runway magazine. This is in stark contrast to Andrea's character that has many friends and a loving boyfriend. Everything around, and everything about Miranda seems perfect, too perfect in fact, except for her acidic personality naturally. But it is when the viewer learns that she is actually divorcing her husband and that she is experiencing a tough time emotionally that this image of perfections appears flawed and her reverting to control and demand seem to fit as an attempt to cope and 'keep everything together'.

Another fascinating process or theme highlighted by the film is the one surrounding the phenomenon of how we know the fashion industry of today. After viewing the film, the writer acquired a copy of Vogue magazine and set out to see for himself what all the fuss is about. A very thick (pun intended), glossy publication with page upon page of starved models in very expensive clothes - some outfits more like weird creations not fit even for Halloween, designer and brand name jewellery and other fashion accessories. Anything from, and bigger than a size four you will not find in its pages. But the bottom line is that it sells, and the ideas, image and merchandise that it advertises are in fact the cornerstones of a multi billion dollar industry. Very interesting debates can be held about the reason for this, but it is the writer's opinion that insecurity and low self-esteem in the masses are the basis for the fashion industry's success.

The Devil Wears Prada is a feel-good movie, both for those with a narcissistic inclination dreaming of a high-powered career and for those feeling like the under-dog. Andrea learns very valuable lessons in the end, especially regarding life's priorities and 'different' norms and values that are light-years apart from those seemingly adhered to and practised within the world of fashion. Meryl Streep's performance in this film deserves all accolades and prizes coming her way this award season.