

# **THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS: HOW THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA BRANDS THE IMAGE OF THE FASHION JOURNALIST**

BY PRISCILLA HWANG

## **Introduction**

It's the job "a million girls would die for,"<sup>1</sup> if you're into fashion, that is. And you have to be willing to do anything to keep your job working for Miranda Priestly, the terrorizing editor-in-chief of the fictitious *Runway* magazine. Author Lauren Weisberger illustrates the cruel and superficial world of fashion journalism in her 2003 best-selling novel *The Devil Wears Prada* – the adapted screenplay of the book was a box-office hit in 2006. Weisberger proves that working as a fashion journalist is not just a job, it's a lifestyle.

Andrea "Andy" Sachs figures it out the hard way when she unintentionally finds herself working for Miranda Priestly as her second assistant.<sup>2</sup> Inadequate at first, Andrea's lack of fashion sense and sophistication is ridiculed among the thin, gorgeous employees of *Runway*. After all, this is the glossy world of fashion magazines where even a bad hair day can get you fired.<sup>3</sup> It's an exclusive universe of socialites, celebrities, high-end designers, sought-after photographers, and front-row seats during Fashion Week in Paris, Milan and Italy.<sup>4</sup> It's a members-only club for those in-the-know, and as Andrea painfully learns within a year, all you have to do to get there is scrape every inch of skin off your back to please the Miranda Priestlys of the fashion world.

Weisberger's novel indirectly mirrors her own past experiences working as an assistant to an editor at *Vogue*, one of the world's most prominent fashion magazines.<sup>5</sup> Those in the fashion industry will confess – the merciless Miranda Priestly seems to be a carbon-copy of *Vogue's* Editor-in-Chief Anna Wintour. So much in fact, it's almost a crime to call the story fiction.

### **Andrea Sachs the Editorial Assistant**

Andrea was just a regular girl before she arrived at *Runway*.<sup>6</sup> Her closest friends call her “Andy,” a name well-suited for her tomboyish qualities.<sup>7</sup> She had just graduated from Brown University, where she majored in English with an emphasis in journalism. So when she packed her bags and moved to New York with her boyfriend Alex, she was hopeful that she would one day work as a reporter for *The New Yorker* – a publication she regarded as being a members-only club for readers.<sup>8</sup> She had read every issue for seven years and “knew every section, every editor, and every writer by heart.”<sup>9</sup>

Writing for *The New Yorker* was the only thing Andrea had ever wanted.<sup>10</sup> She was a serious journalist, and the last thing she could ever care about was fashion. But she had sent out a number of resumes and cover letters to big magazine publications hoping to gain some magazine-writing experience, not thinking much of it.<sup>11</sup> So a call-back from the prestigious Elias-Clark publishing company was a huge surprise.<sup>12</sup> There was a job opening at *Runway* magazine for an assistant. The only problem was that Andrea had never heard of *Runway* and didn't know the first thing about fashion.<sup>13</sup> But she grudgingly decides to go in for the interview, evident in the way she carelessly throws on mismatched clothes that “bordered on supremely ugly.”<sup>14</sup> She figured that outer appearances were not of any importance in getting

hired for a job. “*They’re not going to hire me or reject me on the outfit alone*, I remember thinking. Clearly, I was barely lucid.”<sup>15</sup>

Andrea finds out that she was wrong the minute she steps inside the Elias-Clark building and finds herself surrounded by women resembling models.<sup>16</sup> “The women, or rather the girls, were individually beautiful. Collectively, they were mind-blowing. Most appeared to be about twenty-five, and few looked a day older than thirty... All weighed less than 110 pounds.”<sup>17</sup>

Once inside the *Runway* offices, Andrea is even more taken aback by the hip, trendy décor. She can’t believe how different *Runway* is compared with a regular workplace. “Where dowdy secretaries should have been ensconced, polished young girls with prominent cheek bones and power suits presided.”<sup>18</sup> Even Sharon, the receptionist is a beautiful, stylish woman.<sup>19</sup> Andrea realizes at this point that she does not fit in with the *Runway* employees. “I had known the minute I stepped on the *Runway* floor that I didn’t belong.”<sup>20</sup> Her nonexistent knowledge about fashion magazines is tested even before she goes in for the interview when Sharon asks Andrea if she knows the name of the editor-in-chief. Andrea has no idea, and doesn’t understand why that was something worth knowing. After all, Andrea believed that no one even reads fashion magazines – “It was a *fashion* magazine, for chrissake, one I wasn’t even sure contained any writing, just lots of hungry-looking models and glossy ads.”<sup>21</sup> Andrea believed that writing was for serious publications, and she did not regard *Runway* to be anywhere close to it. “It’s a fashion magazine. It’s all about cleavage and lip gloss, right?”<sup>22</sup>

Sharon stares in disbelief when Andrea tells her that she does not know the name of the editor-in-chief. She can’t believe that someone has never heard of Miranda Priestly –

everyone who's anyone in the fashion industry knows Miranda Priestly. "'Miranda Priestly,' she near-whispered, with a mixture of reverence and fear. 'Her name is Miranda Priestly.'"<sup>23</sup> Andrea suddenly realizes that she is applying to work for "the single most influential woman in the fashion industry, and clearly one of the most prominent magazine editors in the world. The world!"<sup>24</sup>

Unaware of the job description at first, Andrea decides that *Runway* is her chance at *The New Yorker* when she gets a tip from a former assistant. "Work a year for Miranda and don't get fired, and she'll make a call and get you a job anywhere you want."<sup>25</sup> Just moments after meeting Miranda Priestly, Andrea decides that she really wants the job. Of course it wasn't "akin to getting into law school or having an essay published in a campus journal, but it was, in my starved-for-success mind, a real challenge – a challenge because I was an imposter, and not a very good one at that."<sup>26</sup> Andrea has no idea what's to come next, or what's to come every minute of every day thereafter for an entire year. The backbreaking tasks that she has to endure suck her private life completely dry. She came close to quitting once when Miranda threatened to fire her if she could not obtain a copy of the unpublished *Harry Potter* manuscript for her twin daughters. Miranda's daughters had finished reading the most recent book and they wanted to know what happened next.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the course of working for Miranda, Andrea is mentally battered. The sound of the phone ringing "triggers fear, intense anxiety, and heart-stopping panic."<sup>28</sup> Miranda calls Andrea all day long, nonstop, demanding Andrea complete absurdly impossible tasks. Andrea believes that her cell phone (given to her by Miranda) keeps her "tied to Miranda like an umbilical cord, refusing to let me grow up or out or away from my source of suffocation."<sup>29</sup>

The decision to wait on Miranda Priestly hand and foot costs Andrea her relationship with her boyfriend, her best friends and her family. Her boyfriend Alex works as an elementary teacher in the Bronx. At first, he supports Andrea's decision to work at *Runway*. But as time goes on, they grow apart and away from each other. Andrea's best friend and former roommate Lily Goodwin also moves to the backburner once Andrea starts working for Miranda.

Andrea makes the choice for herself – a chance of becoming a journalist for *The New Yorker* outweighs everything else important in her life. Andrea also finds a new love interest in Christian Collingsworth, a good-looking, literary fiction writer. In the process, Andrea suddenly becomes one of them, a *Runway* girl – stylish, sophisticated, superficial and ready to step over anyone in her way of getting to the top.<sup>30</sup> Andrea evolves from an ordinary girl to someone whose taste in fashion, lifestyle and men heightens while working in the fashion magazine industry.

### **Miranda Priestly the Editor**

“Man your battle stations!”<sup>31</sup> All hell breaks loose once Miranda Priestly is in the building.<sup>32</sup> The army of *Runway* employees split in all directions. They change into stilettos, run lint-rollers down their skirts, curl their eyelashes, brush their hair and gloss their lips.<sup>33</sup> It would be an insult to appear less than perfect in her presence. The stage direction in the movie version of the novel calls for it – *guards, assistants and secretaries cower, distinguished executives bow their heads in respectful greeting.*<sup>34</sup> Andrea is surprised at first by Miranda's appearance.<sup>35</sup> “The hand she held out was small-boned, feminine, soft.” She speaks with an “upper-crust” British accent and never averts her cold eyes.<sup>36</sup>

Miranda is the Cruella de Ville of bosses<sup>37</sup> and her demeanor is nowhere near soft. Want to get close to her? Forget it. As the editor-in-chief of *Runway*, she controls everything and everyone but will not acknowledge your existence.<sup>38</sup> She refuses to answer questions and will not repeat herself.<sup>39</sup>

Being the boss of *Runway* means she controls every aspect of the magazine: the designer clothes, handbags, shoes and accessories featured in next month's issue, the models chosen and the articles published. And of course, *The Book*, a mock issue of the magazine that Miranda edits and approves before it goes to print. Her employees regard *The Book* as the Bible. "The Book is the most important thing you will ever touch in your whole life, including your newborn children and eventually the face of God."<sup>40</sup>

Miranda exists as a prominent figure in the fashion magazine world, if not the most prominent in the fashion industry. She's adored by all who rule it – including such high-end designers as Dolce & Gabbana, Donatella Versace, Michael Kors and James Holt (the featured designer in the film). She wears only the finest apparel punctuated by her signature fashion staple – a white-Hermes silk scarf that she dons in different places each day. She orders dozens of the pricey adornments at a time.<sup>41</sup>

Her employees fear her like the plague.<sup>42</sup> She is worshiped like a god and yet described as a full-fledged bitch.<sup>43</sup> Her opinions are gold and they are the only ones that matter at *Runway*.<sup>44</sup> While her employees bend over backward, forward and sideways to make her happy, Miranda never acknowledges their hard work. Instead, she opts to spit out insult after insult, often calling her employees dumb and a disappointment.<sup>45</sup> She stares up and down and lingers "just long enough to make each feel fat, ugly and inappropriately clad."<sup>46</sup> She makes sure that her employees know that they are easily replaceable.<sup>47</sup> She

drinks sparkling water from a crystal glass and expects her lunch to be piping-hot and ready when she gets there. “That’s all,” she says coldly after every demand.

At one point in the novel, Miranda directs Andrea to pick up the car from “the place” and drop it off at the garage. No further information is given. Miranda never repeats herself and doesn’t spare extra words for other people’s sake. This mysterious “place” where Andrea needs to pick up the car remains unknown. But no one dares ask Miranda questions, so Andrea is forced to investigate on her own, calling all around town looking for leads.<sup>48</sup>

As one of the most prominent figures in the fashion world, Miranda has access to everything that she wants. She arrogantly assumes that everyone knows her name and thus expects her assistants to obtain whatever she needs, whenever she wants it. She demands that Andrea get her two copies of the *Harry Potter* manuscript. In response, Andrea calls Scholastic Books and reaches the company’s publicity assistant who apparently has not heard of Miranda Priestly or *Runway* magazine. “I wondered how [Miranda] would react if she knew I actually had someone on the line who’d never heard of her. Probably not well,” Andrea thinks to herself.<sup>49</sup>

### **Emily the First Assistant**

Emily Charlton is the overworked, first assistant to Miranda, promoted to the position when Miranda’s previous senior assistant Allison was moved to a higher position. As Andrea observes, Emily is a beautiful girl who takes her job at *Runway* very seriously.<sup>50</sup> The epitome of a *Runway* girl – stylish and sophisticated – she takes it upon herself to fulfill every task and go beyond what is asked of her to please Miranda. Like all of the *Runway* employees, Emily is also deathly afraid of displeasing Miranda.

Unlike Andrea, Emily lives for fashion. Emily's main objective is to go to Paris alongside Miranda for Fashion Week, a task reserved only for the senior assistant. Going to Paris means that she would be able to come home with suitcases full of designer clothing. Emily's plan is to spend two years working as Miranda's senior assistant and then to be promoted "to an amazing fashion position at *Runway*."<sup>51</sup> She worships Miranda and feels lucky to be working for the most prominent figure in the fashion industry.

Emily believes that Andrea is inadequate for the job when she first meets her. Andrea also observes the way Emily looks at her. "Never one to mince emotions, she could raise her eyebrows and drop her chin in a way that clearly conveyed equal parts disgust and pity."<sup>52</sup> But as Andrea's senior, it is Emily's duty to make sure that Andrea is doing her job correctly. A mistake made by Andrea could cost Emily her job as well, so she doesn't waste any time explaining to Andrea what is required from both of them. She explains everything with pride, finding ways to boast about her own accomplishments. Emily is a stickler for details, making sure that every task is accomplished perfectly. Yet when Andrea does something right, Emily chooses not to acknowledge it.

Emily also finds cunning ways to make Andrea feel dumb. "Yes, well, you do know who she is, don't you?"<sup>53</sup> Emily contemptuously asks when Andrea tells her about a woman she ran into at *Runway*. Emily belittles Andrea when she can't answer, just to make Andrea "look like a complete and total loser."<sup>54</sup>

### **The Man of *Runway***

Nigel is an openly gay man and the only prominent male staff member at *Runway*. As the fashion authority of the magazine, Nigel's character is loosely based upon the real-life editor-at-large of *Vogue*, Andre Leon Talley.<sup>55</sup> The larger-than-life Talley is always seen at



major fashion shows alongside Anna Wintour. Similarly, Nigel is a fashion guru and is constantly by Miranda's side. Nigel is also somewhat of a celebrity who appears as a fashion consultant on television. He is portrayed in the novel as a loud and flashy fashion journalist who cares a great deal about fashion.<sup>56</sup>

Unlike Emily and the other female employees of *Runway*, Nigel is kind, likable and accessible. He is the only person at *Runway* whom Andrea learns to trust. "I liked his kind green eyes that seemed to laugh instead of taunt, but more than that, I liked that I had passed...I *liked* this guy."<sup>57</sup>

Like the rest of the *Runway* employees, Nigel picks on Andrea for the way she dresses but his intentions are not cruel. His bellowing voice is expressed in all capital letters throughout the novel – "KNEE-HIGH BOOT? WITH A KNEE-LENGTH SKIRT? ARE YOU KIDDING ME? BABY GIRL, IN CASE YOU'RE UNAWARE – IN CASE YOU MISSED THE BIG, BLACK SIGN BY THE DOOR – THIS IS *RUNWAY* MAGAZINE, THE FUCKING HIPPEST MAGAZINE ON EARTH. ON EARTH! BUT NO WORRIES, HONEY, NIGEL WILL GET RID OF THAT JERSEY MALL-RAT LOOK YOU'VE GOT GOING SOON ENOUGH."<sup>58</sup> Nigel is boisterous and animated. He also becomes the only person whom Andrea goes to for help when she decides that she wants a complete head-to-toe makeover to please Miranda.

### **Anne Hathaway as Andy**

Actress Anne Hathaway brings Andrea to life on the silver screen for the film version of *The Devil Wears Prada*. The film, released in theaters in June 2006, grossed nearly 30 million dollars in its first opening weekend and made more than 100 million dollars in the

four weeks it was in theaters.<sup>59</sup> Critics hailed the film “as the best film ever made about the fashion world, although it is equally about journalism and careerism.”<sup>60</sup>

There are several differences between the novel and the film, but they are subtle and do not stray away from the essence of Weisberger’s story. For instance, Andrea’s love interest in the film is changed from Christian Collingsworth, a literary writer, to Christian Thompson, an up-and-coming magazine writer who charms Andrea out of her relationship with her boyfriend.

Hathaway seamlessly plays the part of the fashion virgin.<sup>61</sup> As the film opens up, the audience sees Hathaway rummaging through her closet and getting dressed for the interview with Miranda. The major differences between a regular girl like Andrea and the women of *Runway* are made clear from the very beginning.<sup>62</sup>

The opening shot of Hathaway changes to a mini-montage of the *Runway* girls getting ready to go to work. While Hathaway pulls out bleak, boring sweaters out of her closet, the *Runway* girls are shown gracefully pulling out and slipping on lace underwear and bras and effortlessly putting on their makeup. On the other hand, Andrea is seen quickly pulling a comb through her hair, smudging her lips with some gloss, and throwing on her clothes.<sup>63</sup> Andrea is “presented in a shapeless sweater and a tweed skirt, which makes her a pariah in the halls of *Runway*.”<sup>64</sup> The *Runway* girls elegantly call out for a taxi in fur coats while Andrea is seen running down a subway station stuffing food into her mouth.<sup>65</sup>

The audience sees that Andrea is different from the other girls once she arrives at the Elias-Clark building. She walks in carrying a rather large, masculine-looking briefcase while the sea of women in the building tote the latest satchels, hobos, clutches and handbags. As Andrea looks back on her first day at *Runway*, she is humiliated by the thought of what she

wore.<sup>66</sup> “A quick shot of Andy's chunky shoes further establishes Andy's unsuitability for her new job at the barbarous *Runway* magazine; she is a square-toed girl in a pointy-toed world where the personalities are as spiky as the footwear.”<sup>67</sup>

In the film, Andrea's life is taken over by Miranda's constant demands and expectations. Andrea is seen incessantly picking up phone calls from Miranda during the times she is with her friends and family. When her father comes to New York to visit, Andrea appears extremely happy to spend quality time with him, but their dinner date is cut short when she receives a call from a panicked Miranda who demands that Andrea get her a flight out of Miami. Miranda disregards the fact that no planes are flying out of airports due to hazardous weather conditions. Andrea spends the entire night desperately looking for someone to help her. Ultimately in the end, Andrea is unsuccessful in fulfilling the task and later gets harassed by Miranda for it.<sup>68</sup>

Andrea's relationship with her boyfriend also ends because of her work. Before *Runway*, Andrea and her boyfriend Nate (whose name was changed in the film) appear as a happy couple living a normal, modest life. Once Miranda enters the picture, Andrea hardly has time for Nate and even stands him up on his birthday. Nate can no longer accept Andrea's decision to stay at *Runway*. He even points out the changes he sees in her, the most obvious being the way she dresses. According to Nate, Andrea was once the girl who hated everything about *Runway*, especially the girls, but as he points out in the film, she suddenly becomes one of them.<sup>69</sup>

It is hard to sympathize with Andrea's revamped image as a fashion journalist because of the selfish choices she makes during her stint at *Runway*. Andrea evolves from a humble college graduate to a snobbish editorial assistant. Her qualities gradually mirror her

new, fashionable outer image. Slowly, the audience begins to see that Andrea makes choices to better her image, including falling for her new love interest, Christian Thompson.<sup>70</sup>

Thompson and Andrea's boyfriend Nate are polar opposites. Nate works a modest job as a chef in a small Manhattan restaurant while Christian is a successful magazine writer who hangs out with a high-profile crowd of designers, writers, and actors.<sup>71</sup> He is egotistical and confident and pursues Andrea aggressively. "If you didn't have that stupid boyfriend, I'd have to whisk you away right here and now,"<sup>72</sup> he tells her one night at a party. Andrea is enamored by the fact that a guy like Christian is interested in her, and the more she changes her outer appearance, the more she gives in. Andrea doesn't seem to acknowledge the transformation. "You sold your soul to the devil when you put on your first pair of Jimmy Choos," Emily tells Andrea.<sup>73</sup>

Andrea's best friend Lily expresses her disgust when she catches Andrea receiving a kiss on the cheek from Christian. "The Andy I know is madly in love with Nate, is always five minutes early and thinks Old Navy is couture... This glamazon who skulks around in corners with some random hot fashion guy? I don't get her,"<sup>74</sup> Lily says to Andrea. But Lily's remarks don't stop Andrea from leaving Nate and engaging in a fling with Christian in Paris.

### **Meryl Streep as Miranda Priestly**

Actress Meryl Streep makes her grand entrance as Miranda Priestly soon after Andrea arrives at *Runway* for an interview. The elevator doors slide open and the audience sees Streep in all of Miranda's glory – sporting a short, side-swept white and silver hairdo and sleek, black sunglasses. According to rave reviews, Streep is a natural portraying the monster-boss of *Runway*.<sup>75</sup> She speaks only in short, stark sentences and doesn't hiccup for

the slightest occurrence. She responds to Andrea only with a cold, disdainful glare and every insult she slaps Andrea with is concluded with her signature remark, “That’s all.”<sup>76</sup>

As the editor-in-chief of *Runway*, Miranda regards fashion journalism to be serious business. At one point in the film, Miranda is seen trying to decide between two belts for a photo shoot. Andrea is seen giggling to herself and gets caught by Miranda. When Miranda asks Andrea why she is laughing, Andrea half-heartedly apologizes and states that she is still learning about “this stuff.” Miranda is extremely insulted by Andrea’s remarks. As Miranda, Streep crossly responds in a calm, near-whisper that leaves Andrea stiff with shame – “This stuff? Oh, you think this has nothing to do with you. You, for instance, go to your closet, and pull out that lumpy blue sweater because you’re trying to tell the world you take yourself too seriously to care what you put on your back... But that sweater is not just blue, it’s not turquoise, it’s actually cerulean.”<sup>77</sup>

Miranda explains to Andrea that it is the fashion journalists who are responsible for deciding what colors and styles of clothing regular people like Andrea are going to purchase. She also stresses that one fashion designer’s choice affects the entire fashion industry for the season. Streep continues to express her resentment towards Andrea’s remark about fashion in her unquavering voice – “It’s sort of comical how you think you made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you’re wearing a sweater that was selected for you by the same people in this room...from a pile of *stuff*.”

Streep portrays Miranda as a hostile, unreceptive, cold and nasty boss who is almost always expressionless.<sup>78</sup> But there is a single moment in the film where Miranda stuns the audience by expressing a side of her that everyone presumes doesn’t exist – a vulnerable side. While in Paris, Andrea walks into Miranda’s hotel room after a long day only to find

Miranda sitting on a couch, distraught and in tears. Andrea is completely shocked – Miranda isn't wearing any makeup and she is out of her usual glamorous attire. When Andrea approaches, Miranda confesses to Andrea that her husband has decided to leave her. It is at this moment that we see Miranda as a real person. She is no longer an image of power. Instead, she portrays the vulnerability of a successful woman who chooses career over family. "At first they're always proud to be with me, proud to be with a powerful, accomplished woman..."<sup>79</sup>

By revealing a weakness, the audience can see that even a powerful woman like Miranda is still a woman underneath who deals with personal pain and sorrow. A big part of Miranda's grief is that the tabloids would find out about her divorce and splash the news in headlines all over the world. Miranda dreads the thought of people seeing her as someone who can't keep a family together.<sup>80</sup> Andrea knows that it is her job to keep the news out of the press.<sup>81</sup>

### **Emily Blunt as Emily Charlton**

In the film, Emily Charlton patronizes Andrea as Miranda's overachieving senior assistant. "Human resources certainly has an odd sense of humor," Emily says out loud when she first meets Andrea.<sup>82</sup> Emily holds nothing back and does nothing to make Andrea feel more at ease. Emily is self-absorbed and cares about nothing except going to Paris with Miranda in the upcoming months. She even brags about a new diet that she has been on to lose weight before Paris, the new diet "where I don't eat for a week and when I think I'm going to faint, I eat a cube of cheese. I figure I'm one stomach-flu away from my goal weight."<sup>83</sup> But her dreams of coming home with a closet full of designer clothes are crushed

when Miranda asks Andrea to go with her instead. Miranda also makes things worse when she tells Andrea that she would have to break the news to Emily.

In one scene, Emily is seen running down New York City streets carrying a number of shopping bags filled with Miranda's things while on the phone with Andrea. Andrea is just about to break the news to Emily when she is suddenly hit by a taxi while crossing the street. All the items in the bags fly everywhere, including dozens of white Hermes scarves. Andrea is forced to break the news to Emily in the hospital room, where Emily looks *like what she is...a skinny, tired young girl*.<sup>84</sup>

Emily feels betrayed when she finds out that Andrea took Miranda's offer to go to Paris. Andrea tells Emily that she didn't have a choice. "I don't care if she was going to fire you or beat you with a hot poker, you should have said no," Emily responds.<sup>85</sup> Emily has a hard time swallowing the situation. "What gets me about this whole thing is, you're the one who pretends you don't care about this stuff," Emily tells Andrea angrily. "You don't care about fashion, you just want to be a journalist, blah, blah, blah. What a pile of bullshit."<sup>86</sup>

### **Stanley Tucci as Nigel**

"Are we doing a before and after piece someone didn't tell me about?" Nigel asks Miranda moments after he sees Andrea. Stanley Tucci plays the flamboyant Nigel, Miranda's first-hand man and the art director of *Runway*. Tucci's character is bald and wears thick, black-rimmed glasses, perhaps better to observe Andrea's poor fashion sense.<sup>87</sup> Nigel constantly pokes fun at Andrea with such sly remarks as, "You're in dire need of *Chanel*."<sup>88</sup>

Tucci exudes an air of likability as Nigel. His outlandish demeanor is also toned down a notch in the film. He does not bellow out and holler as his character does in the novel. Rather, he possesses a composed disposition that is quite endearing.<sup>89</sup> Nigel is

intelligent and appreciates artists. While unblemished as a comical, gay fashion guru, we also see Nigel's serious side when he explains to Andrea the value of fashion magazines like *Runway* for guys like him. "You think this is just a magazine? It's a shining beacon of hope for, let's say, a young boy living in Rhode Island with six brothers, pretending to go to soccer practice when he's actually going to sewing class and reading *Runway* under the covers..."<sup>90</sup>

Nigel also doesn't cut Andrea any slack when she runs to him in tears after Miranda scolds her for her poor performance. Andrea can't understand why Miranda is never appreciative of the tasks she does right. Nigel puts things in perspective for Andrea. "Where people would die to work, you only deign to work. And you want to know why she doesn't kiss you on the forehead and give you a gold star at the end of the day? Wake up, sweetheart."<sup>91</sup>

### **The Real-life Fashion Maven**

"Successful women are bad, evil monsters who cannot hold on to their men,"<sup>92</sup> reporter Ann Marie Hourihane writes in a 2006 article for the *Sunday Tribune* (Ireland), regarding the film's implications. Numerous reviews of *The Devil Wears Prada* focus on the film's accurate account of the fashion magazine industry, with minor exaggerations, including the over-the-top characters. However, Hourihane acknowledges that Meryl Streep's portrayal of the "boss from hell" is "wonderful" in that the character "is [very] firmly based on Anna Wintour...a woman so terrifying that she is also known as Nuclear Wintour."<sup>93</sup>

Hourihane writes that the film's message "seems to be that it is a bad idea to become a very successful female because, although you will be a vital influence in a multi-million dollar industry, everyone's going to be scared of you..."<sup>94</sup> This message is not far from the



truth about the image of successful female journalists. In his essay *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture*, Joe Saltzman writes that a woman journalist always has to “prove herself” and “persuade men that she is worthy of their respect.”<sup>95</sup> Miranda Priestly is indeed a women journalist who reflects this image. She is a powerful journalist who has earned the respect of both men and women in the fashion industry. Yet Saltzman explains that the powerful female journalist is also prone to revealing a softer side.<sup>96</sup> “By the end of the film, most sob sisters, no matter how tough or independent during the film, would give up anything for marriage, children, and a life at home.”<sup>97</sup> While neither the novel nor the film explains whether Miranda Priestly regrets having sacrificed her life for her career, it is most likely assumed that Miranda Priestly has accepted her life as a woman on top of the fashion magazine industry.

In comparison, men and women in the fashion industry regard Anna Wintour as a bitch, but Wintour’s unpleasant mannerisms are common among fashion editors of major magazines. “It took only a few weeks in the job for me to mutate into that strangely exotic and spoilt creature: the magazine maven, whose every whim, like those of Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada*, must be pandered to,”<sup>98</sup> Liz Jones, reporter for the *Daily Mail* (London) writes. Jones, a former editor for *Marie Claire*, a monthly women’s fashion magazine, writes from experience. She notes the similarities between Miranda Priestly and herself during her time working as editor. She regards her time as editor as one of “the most surreal three years of my life.”<sup>99</sup> Jones concludes that she “entered a parallel universe of go-sees, call-ins, freebies, front rows and fabulous clothes.”<sup>100</sup> Jones acknowledges that she was “incapable of fetching my own latte, so my assistant would fetch it for me.” After 11 years of receiving free designer clothes, gifts and flowers, she became extremely spoiled, out of touch

with reality and would “throw a tantrum if ever I was asked to pay full price in a designer store, or not allowed to borrow a particular Versace gown because it was in New York, being worn by Nicole Kidman.”<sup>101</sup> The endless amounts of free clothes, handbags and other amazingly expensive designer duds are accepted by fashion editors, because the fashion magazine world is a business of advertising, where journalistic integrity virtually doesn’t exist. “These freebies were nothing less than bribes, if beautifully cut and packaged ones. How could a magazine possibly not give space to Louis Vuitton when I had just been given such a lovely suitcase?”<sup>102</sup>

While fashion editors are journalists in their own right, they are also the subjects of news stories. Their powerful status attracts coverage of their personal lives, scandals and the way they treat their staffs, as in the case of Liz Jones, Anna Wintour and the fictitious Miranda Priestly. Jones was constantly making headlines due to allegations that she was a difficult woman to work for and other “frivolous nonsense.”<sup>103</sup>

Reporter Graham Fuller delves into the idea that Miranda Priestly’s portrayal mirrors the real-life Anna Wintour. In a piece for *Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, Fuller describes Wintour as “the dominant (and most feared) arbiter in U.S. fashion... With her severe bob and trademark sunglasses, the rail-thin Wintour exudes an aura of unapproachability...”<sup>104</sup> Fuller relates the stories of real-life *Vogue* employees who’ve encountered Wintour’s unpleasant nature. Like Miranda, “She doesn’t do small talk. She’s never going to be friends with her assistant... One U.S. *Vogue* intern was famously told never to make eye contact with Wintour or to initiate a conversation. One day, the terrified girl witnessed the editor tripping in the corridor but was too scared to offer help. She stepped over Wintour’s prone form and carried on walking.”<sup>105</sup>

Fuller also reports that a number of fashion employees believe that the film is “a fair portrait of the conditions they work in.”<sup>106</sup> However, Fuller suggests that Andrea’s character should not be looked at as someone who is falling into a trap. Joanna Coles, an interviewee for Fuller’s article and the current editor-in-chief of *Marie Claire* (U.S.), believes that “Andy isn’t being opportunistic but embracing her own ambition.”<sup>107</sup> Coles says that too much attention is being placed on Andrea’s gradual changes in character only because she is a woman. “If you look at the way the major Wall Street banks are run, no one says, ‘God, those guys are really ruthless,’”<sup>108</sup> Fuller reports.

Even Andrea grows to respect Miranda for her role as a successful, female journalist. Andrea soon sees Miranda as a real person, which makes her realize Miranda’s true strengths. Andrea even sticks up for Miranda when others insult her. “You wouldn’t be saying that if she were a man. You’d be admiring her strengths, her grit, her tenacity... but because she’s a woman, those things make her a ball buster.”<sup>109</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Andrea walked into *Runway* with the dream of working as a serious journalist for *The New Yorker*, and walked out 12 months later pursuing the same dream only with better clothes, makeup and hair. Rising to the challenge as Miranda’s assistant and surviving her outrageous antics were accomplishments on their own. However, Andrea also takes away a newfound knowledge and respect for fashion journalists. While *The New Yorker* may seem worlds apart from Miranda Priestly’s fashion world, *The Devil Wears Prada* exposes the personal passion that brings together an unlikely pair.

The last scene of the film reveals this unspoken understanding between a hard-hitting fashion editor and the go-getting college graduate. When Andrea chooses to leave *Runway*, she gets a job as a reporter for the *New York Observer*, thanks to Miranda Priestly who put in a recommendation. Andrea is shocked when she learns this, initially because Miranda had something kind to say. But as the audience can see, Miranda had acknowledged Andrea's hard work. As Andrea walks down the street, she sees Miranda across the street, getting into her limousine. Their eyes meet.

*A beat.*

*And then Andy nods her head – in thanks, in salutations, in farewell...*

*But Miranda does not react. She gets into the car.*

*Andy shakes her head. That's Miranda. She smiles, then turns, and starts to walk down the street.*

*Miranda gets in, sits back in her seat...And through her window she can see...*

*Andy, a bounce in her step, walking away...*

*And Miranda alone, where no one can see her, finally breaks into a real smile.<sup>110</sup>*

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Directed by David Frankel. Written by Aline Brosch McKenna.

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<sup>1</sup> Weisberger, Lauren. *The Devil Wears Prada*. (Broadway Books, New York, 2003), p. 16. “The chance to work for her, to watch her edit and meet with famous writers and models, to help her achieve all she does *each and every day*, well, I shouldn’t need to tell you that it’s a job a million girls would die for.” Sharon, the receptionist at human resources at *Runway*, describes the position to Andrea, who later hears this phrase from nearly everyone who works at *Runway*.

<sup>2</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 16. Andrea wonders why Miranda needs two assistants. “Of course Miranda needs two assistants,” the receptionist tells Andrea in disbelief. Like everyone else who meets Andrea later, Sharon can’t believe that Andrea hasn’t heard of Miranda Priestly.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 73. “I talked and talked, but I didn’t know how to explain this world that may have been only two hours away geographically but was really in a different solar system.” Andrea has a hard time figuring out how to describe her job in the fashion industry to her mother.

<sup>5</sup> [www.condenast.com](http://www.condenast.com), 2007. “For over a century, *Vogue* has been the leading American magazine devoted to the best in fashion, beauty, and lifestyle.” Accessed April 4, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> “I had, until this point, spent the past twenty-three years embodying small-town America. My entire existence was a perfect cliché.” Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “I’d loved it. Loved the snappy reviews and the witty cartoons and the feeling of being admitted to a special, members-only club for readers.” Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> “I’d read every issue for the past seven years and knew every section, every editor, and every writer by heart.” Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> “It was all I’d ever wanted to do, the only place I’d ever really wanted to work.” *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> “I left them with security guards at all the big magazine publishers, with a halfhearted cover letter explaining that I wanted to be an editorial assistant and gain some magazine writing experience.” Andrea looks back on how her career at *Runway* began when she first arrived to New York. Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 12.

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<sup>12</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> “A blue button-down, a not-too-perky ponytail, and a pair of slightly scuffed flats completed my look.” Andrea describes the morning she got dressed for her interview at *Runway*. Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> “I showed up on time for my eleven a.m. interview and didn’t panic until I encountered the line of leggy, Twiggy types waiting to be permitted to board the elevators.” *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> “The gorgeous jewelry and impeccable makeup of the human resources receptionist did nothing to allay my overwhelming feelings of inadequacy.” Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> *The Devil Wears Prada* – Screenplay (By Peter Hedges, Revisions by Howard Michael Gould, Paul Rudnick, and Don Roose. Current Revisions by Aline Brosh McKenna), March 10, 2005, p. 13.

Andrea discusses her new job with her boyfriend and close friends at a bar.

<sup>23</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* Sharon tells Andrea who Miranda Priestly is after learning that Andrea is unaware of Miranda Priestly’s position in the fashion world.

<sup>25</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 78.

<sup>28</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> In both the novel and the film, Andrea chooses to go to Paris with Miranda, even though Andrea knew that going to Paris was Emily’s dream since her arrival at *Runway*. “You could have said no,” Emily says to Andrea in the film, while confronting Andrea about her intentions. McKenna, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Screenplay), p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> McKenna, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Screenplay), p. 6. Nigel yells out to warn the *Runway* employees that Miranda Priestly has arrived.

<sup>32</sup> McKenna, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Screenplay), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006).

<sup>34</sup> McKenna, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Screenplay), p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Dolan, Jenny, *LaCrosse Tribune – Lifestyle Magazine* (McClatchy-Tribune Business News, Wisconsin, August 24, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> McKenna, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Screenplay), p. 6. When a lowly editorial assistant finds himself in the elevator with Miranda, he leaps out and apologizes for being in her way.

<sup>39</sup> Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep) in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006).

<sup>40</sup> McKenna, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Screenplay), p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep) in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006).

<sup>42</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> “She. Is. Such. A. Bitch! I cannot deal with her anymore. Who does that? I mean, really – WHO DOES THAT?” A twenty-something girl complains about Miranda Priestly’s antics. Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>45</sup> Dolan, Jenny. *LifeStyle Magazine*. August 24, 2006.
- <sup>46</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 249.
- <sup>47</sup> “You think there aren’t a million girls who want your job and who understand couture just as well as you?” Miranda coldly asks Jocelyn, the highest-ranking fashion assistant. Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 249.
- <sup>48</sup> “Ahn-dre-ah, my car needs to be picked up from the place and dropped off at the garage.” Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 3.
- <sup>49</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 78.
- <sup>50</sup> “Her skin was flawless and pale, not so much as a single freckle or blemish, and it stretched perfectly over the highest cheekbones I’d ever seen.” Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 17.
- <sup>51</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 40.
- <sup>52</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 43.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Fortini, Amanda. “The Devil’s in the Details: What the Film Gets Right about Fashion Magazines.” (June 30, 2006), [www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com). Accessed February 2007.
- <sup>56</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>57</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 55. Nigel tells Andrea that she has nice legs, great hair and a pretty face. Andrea is flattered and decides to overlook his other comments.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>61</sup> Andrea Sachs (Anne Hathaway) in *The Devil Wears Prada*, (2006).
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>64</sup> Fuller, Graham. “*Dealing With the Devil*,” (Sunday Telegraph Magazine, Australia, September 10, 2006), p. 22.
- <sup>65</sup> Andrea Sachs (Anne Hathaway) in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006).
- <sup>66</sup> “To this day, the thought of what I wore – and that I carried something resembling a briefcase – continues to haunt me.” Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p. 19.
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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> McKenna, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Screenplay), p. 85.

<sup>85</sup> Emily Charlton (Emily Blunt) in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Nigel (Stanley Tucci) in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Hourihane, Ann Marie. "Wear All the Prada You Want But Try Not to Be a Success," (Sunday Tribune, Ireland, October 8, 2006). p. N18.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Saltzman, Joe. *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture*, www.ijpc.org. Accessed April 2007.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>98</sup> Jones, Liz. "Diary of a Devil," (Daily Mail, London, September 4, 2006). ED p. 41.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Fuller, Graham. "Dealing With the Devil," (Sunday Telegraph Magazine, Australia, September 10, 2006),p. 22.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Andrea Sachs (Anne Hathaway) in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006).

<sup>110</sup> McKenna, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Screenplay), p. 117.