

Example of the
importance of
costumes as indicator
of class in the devil
wears pr...

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In 2006's *The Devil Wears Prada*, aspiring journalist Andy Sachs (Anne Hathaway) finds herself as the personal assistant to the editor-in-chief of a large fashion magazine, Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep). Andy, who purports to care little about fashion, is quickly put in her place by the cold, calculating and abrasive Miranda. Over the course of the film, Andy learns more about fashion and clothing, and squares off against the increasingly antagonistic Miranda. Given that the primary subject matter of the film is fashion, the film's costumes and settings indicate many different things about the major characters of the film, particularly Andy, Miranda and Emily, Miranda's first assistant. In essence, the film showcases the glamorous yet ultimately empty and emotionless life of the fashion world, and its costumes indicate the wild contrasts and extremes people have to go to in order to succeed in such a world.

Andy's transformation from the meek, Hollywood-ugly journalist into a fashionista is dramatic and more than a little unrealistic, but eagerly gets across the point of a fashionless woman getting a crash course in what fashion is supposed to be (at least, according to the filmmakers). When Andy first arrives for work at Runway, she wears fairly dressed-down and professional clothes - a white button-down shirt, purple v-neck sweater, modest tan jacket, and slacks that cover most of her body. This is meant to portray her as a no-frills, lower-middle class woman who cares little for fashion. Her use of earth tones directly clashes with the cold, harsh contrasts of the fashions that other characters wear, creating a subtle implication that the world of fashion takes away warmth and leaves only robotic, cold competition.

Miranda, on the other hand, is an alternating assault of garish and professional clothing reminiscent of fashions from the 1950s and 1960s, meant to demonstrate sophistication and high social class. Her first appearance is in all black, providing similar contrast to her shock-white hair. She often wears a black fur coat, subconsciously showing one of the most stereotypical items of clothing indicative of high status. Other accessories indicative of her restrained yet high-class status include the frequent wearing of large hoop earrings, high-heeled shoes and blouses with higher shoulders, emphasizing her power, posture and sense of control. Her frequent wearing of black leather gloves also paints her as unapproachable, as even the sense of touch is closed off to others from her. Throughout the film, she avoids pastels and soft colors, wearing a lot of gold - another indicator of opulence.

Emily, Andy's chief rival in the film, is another calculating and edgy follower of fashion - using copious amounts of black eyeliner and sleek, dark clothes that accentuate her long neck and expose her arms and legs frequently, her outfits give off the impression of 21st century edgy and European eccentricity (certainly the attitude that is portrayed by Emily Blunt in the film). Her use of mostly black outfits which are almost always somewhat impractical creates a contrast with the down-to-earth Andy; she looks like an alien compared to her, and absolutely appears less in touch with her feelings.

Runway as a setting calls to mind the sleek, modern-art and minimalist stylings of the most stereotypical fashion settings (mall makeup stores, etc.)

Glass desks and doors adorn the office, and everything is lit with a high fluorescent to give it a modern, otherworldly feel. The word 'Runway' looms over the receptionist and the other characters, reminding them of what they are there to do. While the offices of Runway look like the stylized bridge of a spaceship, it also removes that personal touch and sense of humanity in favor of trendiness and sleekness. Like the costumes of the high-class fashion gurus, the environment is robbed of its soul as well.

The costumes and settings noted here and present elsewhere in the film play a large part in creating both an alienating and alluring effect to the fashion world that Andy falls into. At one point, Miranda calls Andy out on her frumpy fashion choices, noting that she is "trying to tell the world that [she] takes [herself] too seriously to care what you put on your back," when the high fashion industry in fact created that wardrobe. The costumes and settings of the high fashion world presented in *The Devil Wears Prada* showcases the pros and cons of the fashion world, in a microcosm of just how far you have to sell your soul to make it big and win the American Dream. Showing Andy's contrast of frumpy and shapeless clothes with Miranda's and Emily's varying levels of fashion consciousness depending on their age and social status - Miranda as a high-class sophisticate and Emily as a trendy, out-there it-girl - denotes the various worlds of fashion, and the cold distance that such outlandish clothes can often demonstrate in such people. Andy starts to lose her soul in the same way before she manages to recover by removing herself from that world.

Works Cited

Frankel, David (dir.) *The Devil Wears Prada*. Perf. Meryl Streep, Anne

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