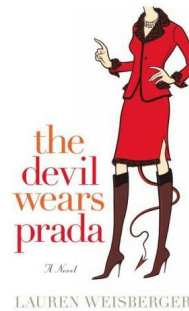
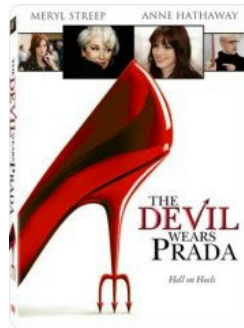


The Devil Wears Prada: One of the Best Films of 2006? Yes!

Special for Digital Filmmaker
by Jan Lisa Huttner



"I was thrilled that the book had 2 strong female leads, and that it was about a woman coming-of-age in the workplace. Older women are drawn in by Meryl [Streep], and seeing somebody who's in her mid 50s playing that part, but they also see themselves having been Andy once, because most of the women in the audience now have had some experience in the workplace. People ask me: How do you feel about 'Prada' being called a 'chick-flick'? If you find a good story, it's a good story. Does it have a feminist, female protagonist? So much the better!"

-- Screenwriter [Aline Brosh McKenna](#)

"[The Devil Wears Prada](#)" was released on DVD on December 12, 2006.

According to Karen Valby (writing about Meryl Streep [on page 56](#) of the "Special Year-End Double Issue" of Entertainment Weekly), "The Devil Wears Prada" was last summer's "Cinderella story," (with world-wide box office grosses already over \$300 million on a budget of \$35M). But as the awards season heats up, all eyes remain on Streep, as if she's not just one of the greatest actors of her generation, but someone who also transcends her material – writing her own speeches, blocking her own scenes, and making everyone else on Prada's creative team simply superfluous.

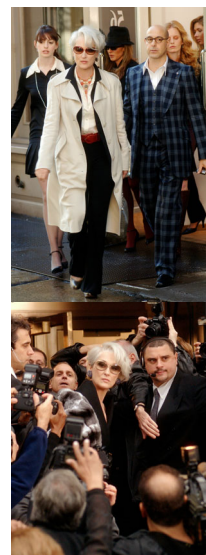
This is, of course, ridiculous. [Streep's brilliance](#) (about which there is no question) didn't save "Prime," "She-Devil," or a great many other films in which she's starred, from critical and/or commercial oblivion. But ignoring Prada's creative team and focusing just on Streep's performance is nothing new; rather it's part of a well-documented pattern. Hilary Swank came out of nowhere to win the Best Actress Oscar for "Boys Don't Cry" in 1999, but when was the last time you heard any buzz about writer/director [Kimberly Peirce](#)? Charlize Theron received the Best Actress Oscar for "Monster" in 2003 after years of arm-candy roles, but when was the last time you heard any buzz about writer/director [Patty Jenkins](#)?

Rewarding the actress, as wonderful as she may be, typically goes hand-in-hand with trivializing the film in which she shines, especially when the film was written and/or directed by another woman. In 2003, "Frida" received six Oscar nominations (including one for Salma Hayek in the title role), but director [Julie Taymor](#) was slighted, even though Taymor was the first woman ever to win a Tony award for directing a Broadway musical ("The Lion King"). And this year Hollywood princess Sofia Coppola learned the lesson too: make a film that stars a man ("Lost in Translation") and everyone applauds;

make a film that stars a woman (“[Marie Antoinette](#)”) and you’re yesterday’s news. Like poor Rodney Dangerfield, films about women, especially when they’re also films by women, just don’t get no respect.

Does it take anything away from Streep if we sing her praises within the context of this film? Quite the contrary: as Prada makes clear to us, “Miranda Priestly” depends on her Runway magazine support staff every waking minute of every day. With Prada DVDs already on the shelf for all to see and the closing date for Academy Award nominations (1/13/07) imminent, there’s just enough time for one more look before the envelopes are irrevocably sealed.

In “The Devil Wears Prada” Meryl Streep plays “Miranda Priestly,” one of the most genuinely powerful female characters ever depicted on film.



“Miranda: we wanted to take Miranda and her work very seriously, and make sure the audience got a sense of what she does and why she’s so accomplished. She’s not just inspiring that behavior in the other people around her because she’s ‘scary,’ but because she’s so accomplished and she’s achieved such a high level at work. I wanted to make sure the audience understood why she had so much power in her world; and then understand that there was a cost for her... Miranda’s held to a different standard than male executives might be held to, and she lives under a microscope.”

-- Screenwriter [Aline Brosh McKenna](#)

Photos courtesy of TM & Twentieth Century Fox Pictures. All rights reserved.

When “The Devil Wears Prada” arrived in bookstores in the spring of 2003, the cheeky little novel became an immediate chick-lit classic. Everyone in the biz knew that author Lauren Weisberger had once worked for Vogue editor [Anna Wintour](#), so the book was read as a roman-a-clef, even though Weisberger herself was always careful to explain that “[Miranda](#)” had many different sources. The novel’s protagonist is definitely “Andy Sachs” (a character loosely based on Weisberger although she’s given herself a decidedly more upscale background).

Andy’s life is filled with problems: she has problems with Jill (her sister), problems with Nate (her boyfriend), problems with Lily (her roommate/best friend), and oh yes, she also has problems with Miranda Priestly (her terrifying boss). Miranda takes Andy to Paris for Fashion Week only after Emily (Miranda’s “first assistant”) is ordered into bed by her physician, and Andy abandons Miranda in Paris because Lily’s in the hospital. By

novel's end, Andy is exploring her options as a freelance writer, selling-off her Runway magazine chum to consignment shops whenever she needs some extra pocket cash.

In the screen version of Prada, by contrast, Miranda Priestly is the sun in Andy's universe; Andy, Emily, Nigel (a composite of characters on the edges of the novel's action) and a Manhattan skyscraper filled with "clackers" (stringbeans in stiletto heels) orbit around Miranda and reflect her radiance. Keeping tight focus on the Runway world, the screenplay reduces Andy's family to one visit from Dad, turns Lily to a bit player, and houses Andy in a tiny tenement flat with Nate.

"Andy Sachs" (Anne Hathaway) is subject to often brutal OJT from her Runway magazine colleagues "Emily" (Emily Blunt) & "Nigel" (Stanley Tucci).



"...it's an important thing in your 20s to recognize when you're failing. Andy's making this mistake of blaming everything on Miranda instead of just understanding that a boss is boss, and part of what you need to do is figure out how to work around the boss. It's not just the fashion world, it's every workplace. Everybody's been that young person in the workplace for the first time. Everybody's had to realize that you have to fit in if you want to succeed."

-- Screenwriter [Aline Brosh McKenna](#)

Photos courtesy of TM & Twentieth Century Fox Pictures. All rights reserved.

Prada the film then expands to explore the intricacies of Miranda's private life (details which the novel's narrator has no interest in). And here's the bottom line: Miranda Priestly is an ambitious working mother doing her best to raise twin daughters with an endless series of "father figures" who leave in a huff once they've been called "Mr. Priestly" one too many times in public. Barely adolescents, the daughters are already little witches, and Miranda, for all her worldly power, has absolutely none at home.

So beneath the glitter of the clothes and the jewels and all the perks of limoed life, Prada is, in fact, a highly realistic depiction of a female executive, probably the most realistic depiction ever filmed. Yes, Streep embodies Miranda to perfection, but primary credit here goes to director [David Frankel](#) and screenwriter Alice Brosh McKenna. They've made Prada so much fun to watch that many people don't even realize what they're really seeing. Frankel (the Emmy-winning son of Max Frankel, a former executive editor at the New York Times) and McKenna (who graduated magna cum lauda from Harvard) clearly know everything there is to know about east coast Jewish workaholics, and it's that insider knowledge that enables them to pull the whole thing off with such elan.

Life at Runway magazine is like life in office towers all around the world, filled with competitive, aggressive young people from top schools who work horrendous hours under oppressive conditions, scratching and scheming to get ahead. Like Andy, most of these newbees will come to have second thoughts about the price of success, and very

few of the people who will eventually inhabit corner offices will be women. Anyone who really wants to understand the world in which we live today would do well to take Prada very seriously. It addresses questions few of us have yet had the courage to ask.

Creative Teamwork:



The incomparable Meryl Streep on set with director David Frankel.

© Jan Lisa Huttner (December 31, 2006)

WITH 11 LINKS (indicated in blue print above) AS FOLLOWS:

1.) Header:
The Devil Wears Prada

<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0458352>

2.) Top caption
Screenwriter Aline Brosh McKenna

<http://www.films42.com/chats/aline-mckenna.asp>

3.) Paragraph 1:
on page 56

http://www.ew.com/ew/report/0,6115,1571627-5-12_7|7432|1571322|1_0_00.html

4.) Paragraph 2:
Streep's brilliance

<http://us.imdb.com/name/nm0000658>

5.) Paragraph 2:
Kimberly Peirce

<http://us.imdb.com/name/nm0005303>

6.) Paragraph 2:
Patty Jenkins

<http://us.imdb.com/name/nm0420941>

7.) Paragraph 3:
Julie Taymor

<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0445922>

8.) Paragraph 3:
Marie Antoinette

<http://digitalfilmmaker.net/dv/features/MarieAntoinette/index.html>

9.) Paragraph 5:
Anna Wintour

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Wintour

10.) Paragraph 5:
"Miranda" had different many sources

http://www.somethingjewish.co.uk/articles/680_devil_woman_intervie.htm

11.) Paragraph 9:
David Frankel

<http://us.imdb.com/name/nm0291205>