

THE DEVIL RUNS *VOGUE*: MIRANDA PRIESTLY, ANNA WINTOUR, AND THE
DEMONIZED FASHION EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

by

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Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of the female fashion editor-in-chief characters in the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* and the documentary *The September Issue*. It compares Miranda Priestly, fictional editor of *Runway* magazine, and Anna Wintour, real-life editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, and places these two characters in historical context by comparing them to fashion editors-in-chief featured in other movies dating from 1940-1989. It also examines how these portrayals compare with media portraits of female journalists in general, and the possible effects of these images.

Introduction

The Devil Wears Prada (2006) exposes the inner-workings of the fictional *Runway* magazine through the eyes of Andrea Sachs (Anne Hathaway), personal assistant to editor-in-chief Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep). The film was a box-office hit, reaching the No. 2 spot while in theaters during the summer of 2006 and grossed more than \$100 million domestically.ⁱ The movie is based on the book of the same title, written by Lauren Weisberger, who worked as a personal assistant to real-life editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour. *The Devil Wears Prada* depicts Priestly as extremely cold but very good at what she does. She intimidates everyone around her and expects nothing less than perfection from her colleagues at *Runway*. Streep earned critical acclaim for her portrayal of Priestly, appearing masterfully expressionless throughout most of the film. The overall impression the film gives is that in order to be a successful female journalist, one must be cold and calculating, and not give into stereotypical “feminine” behavior.

The September Issue is a documentary that follows *Vogue* editor-in-chief Anna Wintour throughout the summer of 2007 as she works to put together the September issue of the magazine. The movie was released in August of 2009, and grossed \$4 million domestically;ⁱⁱ although it was not as widely seen as *The Devil Wears Prada*, it bears paying attention to because it adds to the perpetuation of a certain image of the female fashion editor-in-chief. It depicts Wintour as very serious and dedicated to her craft. Although we do see her smile more than Priestly’s character, she is often seen pursing her lips, or making curt comments. It is clear that her co-workers fear her (one comments in the beginning that if she presents Wintour with a black item of clothing she will be fired), but at the same time she is highly admired for being the best at what she does.

Although *The Devil Wears Prada* is (supposedly) a work of fiction and *The September Issue* is a documentary, a comparison can be made between the two due to their similar handling of the subject matter and similar characterizations of their respective protagonists. While, as opposed to the fictional Priestly, Wintour is a real person, editing transforms her into a character, a certain persona of herself: we are only shown what the producers, writers and director want us to see of her.

Literature Review

The female fashion editor-in-chief character was recently reintroduced to the public's awareness with the release of *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The September Issue* in the latter half of the 2000s. However, this character is nothing new, existing in films dating back to 1940, and the portrayal of this character is worth examining.

This paper explores the portrayal of the fashion editor-in-chief in the popular comedy *The Devil Wears Prada* and in the documentary chronicling the assembly of one issue of *Vogue* magazine, *The September Issue*. In addition, it examines magazine and newspaper articles about the two films, as well as studying the portrayal of the fashion editor-in-chief character in films throughout history. Next, it compares the images of Miranda Priestly and Anna Wintour to other images of the journalist in popular culture based on others' scholarly writing. Finally, it puts these images in a social sciences context.

The Devil Wears Prada (2006) and *The September Issue* (2009) provide the direct resource materials for my paper, laying out two very specific images of the fashion editor-in-chief character: in one case the fictional Miranda Priestly and in the other, the

very real Anna Wintour. The characters in these films were carefully studied for the way they speak, the way they present themselves, the actions they take and the consequences of these actions –all of which create a complete image.

The magazine and newspaper articles about the film provide insight into the films' creation, the societal context of their release and public and critical reactions to the films. Some focused on what the image of women in the films was. In her article for *The Sunday Tribune*, Anne Marie Hourihane (2006) examines the message *The Devils Wear Prada* is portraying –that women who are successful are also bad and evil –and how the movie portrays this message.

Other articles questioned whether the Miranda Priestly character was indeed based upon real-life *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour. Articles by Ian Burrell (2009) and Byrony Gordon (2009) made direct comparisons of the two films, concluding that the resemblances between the two main characters are hard to ignore. However, in her article for *The Telegraph*, Barbara Amiel (2006), who knows Wintour personally, argues that although Streep's character may be based on Wintour, Priestly is much more exaggerated and villainous than the real thing.

To put the female fashion editor-in-chief character into historical context, I examined films that focused around such a character, looking at movies dating from 1940 on. The films and characters studied in this paper are Margot Merrick in *Third Finger, Left Hand* (1940); Madeleine Damien in *The Dishonored Lady* (1947); Maggie Williams in *The Perfect Marriage* (1947); Louise Henderson in *Maroc 7* (1967); and Grace Guthrie in *Lady in the Corner* (1989).

Next, this paper examines literature specifically about the image of the journalist in popular culture, and particularly focuses on the study of the image of the female journalist. Joe Saltzman (2003) introduces the idea of the “sob sister,” the persona of a female journalist torn between her stereotypically feminine traits (compassion, sympathy, etc.) and the masculine traits she needs to succeed at her job (aggressiveness, toughness, etc.). Howard Good (1998) discusses a similar dichotomy in his book, noting that many portrayals of the girl reporter reinforce the stereotype that women are often compassionate but not successful in their careers.

Donna Born (1981) examines the consistencies and changes in the image of the female journalist as it evolves over time, noting that while story lines may change, stereotypes of female journalists not being able to handle their emotions while balancing their careers persist through the years.

In her IJPC student research paper, Emily Lerner (2006) looks particularly at women journalists in films of the 1940s, noting that women in these movies may not act like the typical sob sister, but still experience the same dichotomy of having to succeed in work through her masculine traits while trying to maintain her femininity.

Priscilla Hwang (2007) examines the image of the fashion journalist in *The Devil Wears Prada* in her IJPC student research paper. While her paper provides a good perspective on this particular topic, my thesis builds on this research by directly comparing the image in *The Devil Wears Prada* to another film, the documentary *The September Issue*, as well as providing a historical overview of the portrayal of fashion editors-in-chief characters throughout history.

Finally, social science theories are examined to determine what effects these images can have on society. Michele Barrett (1991) discusses ways the dominant patriarchal ideology is reinforced by mass media by portraying women in stereotyped ways. George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1976) and Albert Bandura (1977) discuss how people can learn behaviors from what they observe in mass mediated images. Gaye Tuchman (1979) looks at the gendered representations of men and women in the mass media, and how these images can translate into behavior through modeling theory.

This thesis is the amalgamation of all the various types of literature I examined, looking first at the images themselves and then building on others' research to determine what these images mean, how they fit into a historical and cultural context, and what effects these images are having on society as a whole.

Methodology

This thesis sets out to compare the images of Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada* and Anna Wintour in *The September Issue*, and to consider these images in both a societal and historical context. Data used in this research included primary sources (the films themselves) and secondary sources (articles providing commentary on the films, scholarly articles and social science research).

The primary sources were studied for the way their main characters – female fashion editors-in-chief – were presented. This paper explores the similarities and differences in the images of these characters in the various films. It also compares the themes that are prevalent in these films – women torn between their job and their personal lives – and whether the story arcs changed or not – did the women ultimately

choose one or the other, and has this choice changed over time. Secondary sources were used to provide support for the conclusions drawn from primary sources, and to expand upon their significance.

Chapter one looks directly at the films *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The September Issue* as primary sources, and provides character biographies of Miranda Priestly and Anna Wintour based on the information found in the films themselves.

Chapter two draws on this information to determine whether a comparison can truly be made between these two characters, and looks to secondary sources – specifically newspaper articles – to determine whether one can conclude that the Miranda Priestly character is indeed based on Anna Wintour. The newspaper articles provide insight not available in the films themselves, including interviews with people who know Wintour personally that can provide a first-hand perspective.

Chapter three provides historical context by comparing and contrasting films throughout history that have female fashion editor-in-chief characters, once again drawing on the films themselves as primary sources.

Chapter four looks to scholarly articles to determine where these images fit in with other images of the journalist, specifically the female journalist, that have been proliferated through mass media across time.

Finally, Chapter five addresses social science theories to determine what the impact of these images is. Collectively, the primary and secondary sources summarize the image of the female fashion editor-in-chief in present and historical times, and explain why understanding and studying these images is so important.

Introduction Endnotes

ⁱ “The Devil Wears Prada,” Box Office Mojo, accessed February 18, 2011, <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=devilwearsprada.htm>.

ⁱⁱ “The September Issue,” Box Office Mojo, accessed February 18, 2011, <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=septemberissue.htm>.

Chapter One

Character Biographies: Two Devils in Prada

Miranda Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada*

Miranda Priestly is “a legend,” according to her former assistant Emily Chalton (Emily Blunt).ⁱⁱⁱ She is a perfectionist who takes fashion and her career very seriously. She is always impeccably dressed and emotionally composed. Priestly is married to her second husband (who divorces her during the film) and has twin daughters, whom she tries very hard to please (several of the seemingly impossible demands that she gives to her assistant are to make her daughters happy).

Priestly’s employees fear her. When fashion assistant Nigel (Stanley Tucci) gets word that she is on her way upstairs (in her own elevator, of course) he half-jokingly shouts a warning to the staff at *Runway* magazine to “guard their loins.”^{iv} She rarely cracks a smile, has no sense of humor and seems to always be focused on business. When she arrives at the office, she gives her assistant a laundry list of orders, concluding with her signature: “That is all,” as if the tasks she has rattled off require no effort to accomplish (which is often very far from the case). She, in fact, demands the impossible, requesting that her assistant Andrea Sachs find her a flight from Miami to New York during a monsoon, and asking her to obtain a copy of the unpublished manuscript of the newest *Harry Potter* book.

Priestly feels no need to learn Sachs’s name, referring to her as Emily, her old assistant’s name, for weeks on end. Sachs labels her sadistic, remarking, “She’s not happy unless everyone around her is unhappy, nauseous or suicidal.”^v

Because of her harsh treatment of her colleagues and her sometimes-impossible demands, Priestly's staff knows she is not to be questioned. "You will never ask Miranda anything,"^{vi} Chalton explains to Sachs when she starts the job.

While she is feared, Priestly is also greatly respected. She "chooses every single thing in every single issue,"^{vii} declares Chalton, and while Sachs sees her as vicious, Nigel defends Priestly, saying that she is "just doing her job."^{viii}

During the movie, Priestly finds out her husband wants a divorce, constituting one of the only moments we see a sliver of vulnerability in her icy façade. "Another divorce on Page Six [the *New York Post's* gossip column],"^{ix} she remarks, noting that the press is surely interested in writing about her personal life despite her attempts to be thought of as a serious career woman. She breaks down, worrying about the toll the divorce will take on her daughters. Despite being visibly upset, she refuses to cancel any of her work commitments, reinforcing her dedication to her career.

Anna Wintour in The September Issue

Anna Wintour is the pope of the church of *Vogue*, according to Candy Pratts Price, the magazine's executive fashion director. "It is always going to be Anna's point of view. *Vogue* is Anna's magazine,"^x Price explains. Wintour has the final say on everything that goes into the magazine, and everyone who works with her, even top designers who want their designs featured, will make any adjustment necessary to please her.

"Nuclear Wintour," as she is known by those in the business, grew up in England, and is the daughter of the former editor of London's *Evening Standard*.^{xi} She was

fascinated by the fashion revolution of the 1960s and decided early on that her ultimate career goal was to be the editor of *Vogue*. She has a daughter named Bee Shaffer, and a son and ex-husband who do not appear in the film. Wintour seems a bit out of touch with her daughter's life, telling the cameras that her daughter works in a lawyer's office, while her daughter corrects her, saying she actually works for a judge.

Wintour also has three siblings: a brother who works to find low-income housing for those in need, a sister who is a strong supporter of the farmer's rights movement in Latin America, and a younger brother who is political editor of *The Guardian*.

Wintour has climbed her way to the top of the industry's totem pole. She's the "director and producer of the fashion world," explains Tom Florio, the publisher of *Vogue*, and is involved in all aspects of fashion.

It is clear that she takes her job very seriously, and her determination is visible in her nearly always-pursed lips and curt mannerisms. While it is clear that her employees fear her in some ways, she is also greatly respected by them.

Still, she maintains a sense of humor about herself. During Fashion Week, a woman confronts Wintour, saying, "Many people have said that you are an 'Ice Woman'," to which she responds, "Well this week it was pretty cold."

Chapter One Endnotes

iii *The Devil Wears Prada*, DVD, directed by David Frankel (2006; 20th Century Fox, 2006).

iv Ibid.

v Ibid.

vi Ibid.

vii Ibid.

viii Ibid.

ix Ibid.

x *The September Issue*, DVD, directed by R.J. Cutler (2009; Lionsgate Home Entertainment, 2010).

xi And paragraph that follows: *The September Issue*.

Chapter Two

Is Priestly a Caricature of Wintour?

The striking similarities between the Miranda Priestly character in *The Devil Wears Prada* and the Anna Wintour persona displayed in *The September Issue* are difficult to ignore. “This [Miranda Priestly] character is (very) firmly based on Anna Wintour, the English editor of American *Vogue*, a woman so terrifying that she is also known as Nuclear Wintour,” stated Anne Marie Hourihane in her review of the movie for the *Sunday Tribune*.^{xii} The parallels are not surprising given that *The Devil Wears Prada* is the film adaptation of a novel by Lauren Weisberger, who worked as a personal assistant to Wintour at *Vogue*.^{xiii}

The parallels encompass not only their careers as editors-in-chief of prominent fashion magazines, but also their physical appearance, mannerisms, and personal lives. Physically, both wear dark sunglasses, even when indoors, adding to their holier-than-thou image. Both rarely smile, and more often purse their lips and look generally displeased. As Byrony Gordon puts it in an article for *The Telegraph*, Wintour’s “permanent poker face says more about her than she ever could.”^{xiv} The two women are both also always perfectly put-together, from their flawlessly coiffed hair to their designer outfits (which often include clothes by Prada, of course).

There are parallels in their business personas as well, both working as editors-in-chief of top fashion publications and each controlling every aspect of their respective magazines. Priestly determines every facet of *Runway*, from the items featured to the

photographs used and the articles printed, and Wintour gets the final say on everything that goes into *Vogue*'s glossy pages.

But they are both more than top fashion editors-in-chief: they are queens of the entire world of fashion. Priestly and Wintour alike are catered to by all the top designers. In *The Devil Wears Prada*, Priestly gets to see the latest collections before anyone else, and always gives her input in typical Priestly fashion. "One nod is good, two is very good, and there's only been one smile on record,"^{xv} is how Nigel explains Priestly's rating system to Sachs. In *The September Issue*, Wintour is pandered to by top designers and "is as close to royalty as it is possible for a fashionista to be."^{xvi} In his article for *The Telegraph*, Gordon recounts a scene in the documentary that demonstrates Wintour's true power over the fashion world, including its top designers: "When she meets the head designer at Yves Saint Laurent—a man we must presume to be reasonably powerful—she is disparaging enough of his collection for him to become flustered and rethink it, [and] she has no qualms in asking Prada to 're-interpret' some of their designs."^{xvii}

Priestly and Wintour both also are feared by the other magazine employees. "Her force of personality has even close colleagues trembling in their Manolos,"^{xviii} said journalist Ian Burrell regarding Wintour in a *Sunday Tribune* article. Like Wintour, Priestly rules over the employees of *Runway* with an iron fist, and her colleagues obey her every command, no matter how impossible, for fear of having to deal with her wrath.

Similarities also can be drawn between both of their personal lives, with both having undergone divorce. In fact, husbands and other romantic partners are completely absent from both films. They both also have daughters (though Priestly has twins while Wintour has one daughter and a son).

There are also similarities between the two films themselves, making it easier to draw parallels between the characters. Both open with scenes of their respective protagonists on their way to the office donning sunglasses in a private car, and both head up to nearly identical offices: spacious and perfectly manicured, with large windows that gaze out onto the surrounding city.

Priestly and Wintour also both have the same habit of asking their colleagues to perform a list of tasks, and before giving them time to ask for clarification, ending the conversation, with, in the case of Priestly, her signature, “That is all,”^{xxix} or in the case of Wintour, a simple, “Thanks.”^{xxx}

There is also a plotline in *The Devil Wears Prada* that, while not included in *The September Issue*, mirrors a situation straight from Wintour’s life. In the supposedly fictitious *The Devil Wears Prada*, the publisher of *Runway* wants to replace the older Priestly with the younger editor of French *Runway*. This incident is echoed in Wintour’s real life: according to Burrell, “it was alleged that Condé Nast chief Si Newhouse wanted to replace [Wintour] with the edgier editor of French *Vogue*, Carine Roitfeld.”^{xxxi}

Insiders in the fashion world have not hesitated to draw parallels between Priestly and Wintour. In an article for *Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, reporter Graham Fuller explores the idea that the Miranda Priestly character is simply a fictionalized portrayal of the real-life Anna Wintour, and speaks to *Vogue* employees to prove his point.^{xxii} Like Priestly, “[Wintour] 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.^{xxiii}

In Burrell's piece, he notes that upon the release of *The Devil Wears Prada*, "Commentators did not hesitate to make the comparison between Miranda Priestly, the domineering fashion magazine editor character played by Meryl Streep, and Wintour."^{xxiv} Wintour herself was not above recognizing the comparison and, in fact, attended a Manhattan screening of the film dressed in Prada.^{xxv}

It becomes apparent through analysis of the two films that the similarities cannot be sheer coincidence. Together the two characters cement a particular image of the female fashion editor-in-chief character: extremely powerful but also extremely cold; a success in career and a failure in personal life.

Chapter Two Endnotes

- ^{xii} Ann Marie Hourihane, "Wear All the Prada You Want But Try Not to Be a Success," *The Sunday Tribune*, Ireland, October 8, 2006, accessed February 18, 2011, <http://www.tribune.ie/archive/article/2006/oct/08/wear-all-the-prada-you-want-but-try-not-to-be-a-su/>.
- ^{xiii} Kate Betts, "'The Devil Wears Prada': Anna Dearest," review of *The Devil Wears Prada*, by Lauren Weisberger, *New York Times*, April 13, 2003, Arts, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/13/books/anna-dearest.html>.
- ^{xiv} Byrony Gordon, "The September Issue: Anna Wintour Unmasked in the 'Real' Devil Wears Prada," *The Telegraph*, London, June 23, 2009, accessed February 18, 2011, <http://fashion.telegraph.co.uk/news-features/TMG5603995/The-September-Issue-Anna-Wintour-unmasked-in-The-real-Devil-Wears-Prada.html>.
- ^{xv} *The Devil Wears Prada*.
- ^{xvi} Ian Burrell, "Out of Fashion," *The Sunday Tribune*, Ireland, February 8, 2009, accessed February 18, 2011, <http://www.tribune.ie/article/2009/feb/08/out-of-fashion/>.
- ^{xvii} Gordon, "The September Issue: Anna Wintour Unmasked in the 'Real' Devil Wears Prada."
- ^{xviii} Burrell, "Out of Fashion."
- ^{xix} *The Devil Wears Prada*.
- ^{xx} *The September Issue*.
- ^{xxi} Burrell, "Out of Fashion."
- ^{xxii} Priscilla Hwang, "The Devil Is in the Details: How the Devil Wears Prada Brands the Image of the Fashion Journalist" (IJPC Student Research Paper, University of Southern California, 2007).
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid*.
- ^{xxiv} Burrell, "Out of Fashion."
- ^{xxv} Barbara Amiel, "The 'Devil' I Know," *The Telegraph*, London, July 2, 2006, accessed February 18, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3653567/The-Devil-I-know.html>.

Chapter Three

The Female Fashion Editor-in-Chief Throughout Movie History

Priestly and Wintour, two emblems for the female fashion editor-in-chief character, are not the first of their kind to appear onscreen. In fact, this character has appeared in movies dating back to the 1940s.

Margot Merrick in *Third Finger, Left Hand*

Margot Merrick (Myrna Loy) is the protagonist of the film *Third Finger, Left Hand* (1940). Merrick's character is very serious about business, and the people who work for her seem frightened of her, much like is the case with Priestly and Wintour. Merrick is so dedicated to moving up in her career that she feigns a marriage to avoid passes from men in the industry and to be able to do her job without being bothered. People "can't believe that a woman would want to be in the office for any other reason except to meet men,"^{xxvi} she explains.

Merrick worries that if she did not pretend to be married, the publisher's jealous wife would have her fired, which happened to single female editors in the past. "How long has any unmarried woman survived as editor of this magazine? That 'Mrs.' in front of my name is job insurance,"^{xxvii} she says.

Her belief that every woman should have a career clashes with that of Jeff Thompson (Melvyn Douglas), a man she meets at a bar who says he prefers "simple" women. She tells Thompson the same story she has been telling for years: that she met her husband in Rio and he still lives there, so she never gets to see him. In reality, she

lives in an upscale home with her father (Raymond Walburn) and her sister Vicky (Bonita Granville).

Thompson, annoyed by her antics, discovers that her husband is made up and decides to get back at Merrick by pretending to be her husband and staging a “reunion” for the press. The staged affair makes front-page news, with headlines reading “Career Woman Reunites with Husband” –a situation akin to Priestly’s belief that the news of her divorce will make Page Six.

Merrick insists that she and Thompson get a public “divorce,” but afterwards becomes depressed and loses interest in her career, realizing that it is love and marriage that she wants after all. She ends up marrying Thompson in the end, abandoning her career in the process.

Madeleine Damien in *The Dishonored Lady*

Madeleine Damien (Hedy Lamarr) is the editor-in-chief of *Boulevard* magazine in the 1947 film *The Dishonored Lady*. Damien is an emotionally disturbed woman who ends up giving up her career for love.

She first appears on screen smoking a cigarette and looking withdrawn while driving in her car, and it is soon revealed that she is about to attempt suicide. From the get-go we see a character who is emotionally unstable, who feels a need to fill a void left by her father, who killed himself when she was just a young girl.

Damien is always seeking excitement, which often takes the form of new boyfriends. She is cold toward her employees—just like Priestly and Wintour—and even fires her secretary on the spot when she overhears the secretary gossiping about her.

Damien decides to seek psychiatric help, and she reveals to her doctor (Morris Carnovsky) that being independent and being successful in her career has not made her happy. Upon her psychiatrist's suggestion, she quits her job, moves, changes her name and adapts a new, simpler lifestyle. She becomes an artist and finds employment as an illustrator for a researcher, Dr. David Cousins (Dennis O'Keefe) whom she ends up falling in love with. She calls her new love "the only happiness she ever had."^{xxviii}

Things get complicated when her old suitor, Felix Courtland (John Loder), arrives on the scene, as she has not yet revealed to Cousins her true identity. She ends up cheating on Cousins with Courtland, and things get even more complicated when Courtland is murdered and she is implicated in the crime. She is innocent, but she must come clean to Cousins, now her fiancé, about her true identity and risk losing him to clear her name. In the end, she is declared innocent of the murder, Cousins forgives her, and she ends up happy and in love, never returning to her old career as an editor-in-chief.

Maggie Williams in *The Perfect Marriage*

A more independent female protagonist emerges the same year (1947) in the film *The Perfect Marriage*, in which Loretta Young portrays editor Maggie Williams, whose drive for independence and success in her career ultimately leads to a divorce. Williams always appears well dressed and put together. She has been married for 10 years to her husband Dale (David Niven), and together they have a daughter named Helen (Nina Griffith) whom they affectionately call "Cookie."

Williams is a very independent upper class Manhattanite. Her own husband describes her as “strong as an ox.”^{xxix} She only seems weak when she experiences her chronic back pain: here she becomes dependent on her husband for comfort and relief.

Her seemingly perfect marriage begins to unravel, as her constant focus on her career strains her relationship with her husband. Williams decides to get a divorce after she is led to believe that her husband is cheating on her. She immediately takes on the role of a strong, independent woman, going out on dates with other men and stating that she does not think that she ever wants to remarry. She does not wish to be dependent on her husband, even financially, and seeks no money from the divorce, stating to her lawyer, “I have a job and I happen to make a very good salary.”^{xxx}

Louise Henderson in *Maroc 7*

Louise Henderson, played by Cyd Charisse, is a fashion editor-in-chief in the movie *Maroc 7* (1967), who doubles as a villainous jewel thief. She, like the other fashion editor-in-chief characters, takes fashion very seriously and is always impeccably dressed. Although her role as a career woman is not the focus of the film, one gets insights into her personality through her actions as a thief. She is confident and conniving, using her wits to control others in order to get what she wants, in this case rare jewels, not caring who gets hurt—or even killed—in the process.

Grace Guthrie in *Lady in a Corner*

In *Lady in a Corner* (1989), Loretta Young plays the part of the widowed editor-in-chief of *Grace* magazine. Grace Guthrie is a workaholic, determined to save her

magazine from a financial takeover no matter what it takes. Guthrie is a World War II widow, whose closest family consists of her nephew (Christopher Neame) and his wife and two daughters. She has no children of her own. An old romance with her publisher, David Henderson (Brian Keith), which scandalously began while he was still married, is briefly rekindled during the film. Like many other female editor-in-chief characters in film, she sacrifices love for her career. Her nephew remarks, “She had other escorts, but everyone came second to her beloved magazine.”^{xxxix}

Guthrie lives by the motto, “The early bird catches the worm.” She likes being the first one to arrive at her office, and is caught off guard when she realizes she has been beat to work by Susan Dawson (Lindsay Frost), the new controversial contributing editor. The movie centers around her power struggle with Dawson, with Guthrie constantly putting Dawson in her place in an attempt to maintain her powerful role.

This power play provokes Dawson to describe Guthrie as “high-handed and maternalistic.”^{xxxix} While Guthrie is a woman of power, she also is portrayed as having a strong sense of integrity and old-fashioned values. She believes that selling the magazine would compromise its moral content, so fights hard to keep it under her ownership, even though this means trying to raise the funds to save it by herself.

Guthrie acts as the moral voice of the magazine, fighting against any content that she deems unfit, even if this entails making biting comments and criticizing others who don’t meet her standards, especially Dawson. This type of berating of colleagues mirrors that of Priestly and Wintour.

In the end, Guthrie saves her magazine, and gives into Dawson’s cutting-edge views to keep the magazine current. She is portrayed as almost a selfless hero, willing to

admit when she is wrong, and doing what is best for her magazine even when it is not best for her.

Chapter Three Endnotes

^{xxvi} *Third Finger, Left Hand*, DVD, directed by Robert Z. Leonard (1940; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)).

^{xxvii} Ibid.

^{xxviii} *Dishonored Lady*, DVD, directed by Robert Stevenson (1947; Vci Video, 2004).

^{xxix} *The Perfect Marriage*, VHS, directed by Lewis Allen (1947; Universal Studios, 1994).

^{xxx} Ibid.

^{xxxi} *Lady in a Corner*, DVD, directed by Peter Levin (1989; Moon Stone).

^{xxxii} Ibid.

Chapter Four

Do Devils Cry?: The “Sob Sister” Stereotype

One of the prominent stereotypes consistent in the image of the female journalist in popular culture is that of the “sob sister.” As Director of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Joe Saltzman explains, “The female journalist faces an ongoing dilemma: How to incorporate the masculine traits of journalism essential for success – being aggressive, self-reliant, curious, tough, ambitious, cynical, cocky, unsympathetic – while still being the woman society would like her to be – compassionate, caring, loving, maternal, sympathetic.”^{xxxiii}

Donna Born, of the Department of Journalism at Central Michigan University, elaborates on this conflict, which is persistent in images of female journalists throughout history: “In all the time periods, compassion caused conflicts in professional responsibilities and at times the loss of professional respect.”^{xxxiv} Howard Good, an author and journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, sees journalism specifically as the perfect career outlet to explore the dichotomy: “In...films, journalism functions as a vehicle for exploring certain gender-based conflicts –career versus marriage, workplace versus home, co-worker versus family.”^{xxxv}

One can see evidence of this struggle in images of the female fashion editor-in-chief characters portrayed in films since the 1940s. In virtually all the films, the woman must choose which side to give into: the masculine side, dominated by a need to be successful in her career, and the feminine side, dominated by a desire to find fulfillment through love.

In the earlier films, such as *Third Finger, Left Hand* (1940) and *The Dishonored Lady* (1947), the protagonists try to put on a front of toughness in their career, but both break down and end up favoring a life as a married woman instead. They don't give up without a fight though and, as Saltzman explains, the sob sister "has to persuade the males around her that she is worthy of their respect."^{xxxvi} This is evident in *Third Finger, Left Hand* when Margot Merrick goes so far as to pretend she is married in order to ensure that her male counterparts view her as a respected co-worker and not as an object of their desires. In *The Dishonored Lady*, Madeleine Damien puts on a tough front to intimidate the men with whom she works, but falls apart behind closed doors. She, like Merrick, decides she can't find happiness from her career, and gives into her "feminine" side and decides to settle down and get married.

In *The Perfect Marriage* (1947) and *Lady in a Corner* (1989), it is clear that the women feel torn between the "masculine" business person they must be to fulfill their career goals and the "feminine" compassionate, vulnerable person they need to exhibit to maintain happiness in their personal life. Both end up sacrificing their feminine tendencies to focus on having success in the business world. In *The Perfect Marriage*, Maggie Williams starts off as the perfect wife and mother, and one does see a vulnerability in her in the moments she relies on her husband to ease the physical pain caused by her back condition. But it becomes apparent that she puts this role second to her more masculine, career-oriented side. For example, she answers the apartment door, an intrusion on her celebration of her 10th wedding anniversary, because she thinks it might be an important update about a Paris fashion show.

In *Lady in a Corner*, Grace Guthrie also faces the challenge of balancing the feminine and masculine sides of herself. She shows compassion when she is with her nephew and his family, and seems to be adored by her grandnieces. But she, too, feels the need to act extra tough in front of her male colleagues, especially her publisher David Henderson. “You never let me get a word in,” he exclaims during a business meeting.^{xxxvii} While she is successful in her career, ultimately saving her magazine from a financial takeover, she does so by acting aggressive and tough—typical male traits—and she does not end up married and in love like the protagonists in the earlier films.

According to Saltzman, 21st-century images of female journalists, like those of Priestly in *The Devil Wears Prada* and Wintour in *The September Issue*, are similar to past images of the sob sister.^{xxxviii} “If a woman is successful, it means she has assumed many of the characteristics of the newsman, losing her femininity in the process,” he states.^{xxxix}

This certainly seems to be the case with Priestly’s character, who takes on the masculine traits Saltzman outlines in his definition of the sob sister. She is self-reliant, having gone through multiple divorces; she is tough, holding herself and those around her to high expectations and rarely cracking a smile; ambitious, rising to the top of the fashion world; cocky, considering her opinions to be the first and foremost in the fashion industry; and unsympathetic, expecting her colleagues to get whatever she wants them to do done, no matter how seemingly impossible the tasks are. She does seem to have lost almost all traces of femininity: one does not see her as compassionate, caring, or sympathetic. We do see a hint of her maternal leanings, however, in her insistence that

she make it back to New York from Miami, despite monsoons, in order to see her daughters' ballet recital, and demands that Sachs acquire anything her daughters want.

The same masculine characteristics are also exhibited by Wintour in *The September Issue*. She too is tough, ambitious, cocky and unsympathetic. One only sees her “feminine frailty”^{xl} in a moment when she discusses her siblings' jobs and their failure to truly grasp what she does and take it seriously.

In the earlier films, the theme seems to be the dichotomy between being a businesswoman and being a wife, with the women having to choose one role over the other, while in the later movies, and the two highlighted in this paper, men have no romantic role. In both cases, the message seems to be that the women ultimately cannot have both love and a successful career.

As Hourihane puts it, “Successful women are bad, evil monsters who cannot hold on to their men. That is the message of... *The Devil Wears Prada*,”^{xli} and the same could be said about *The September Issue*, given the consistencies in the two films. Born explains that this sacrificing of personal happiness for career success is a standard theme found in portrayals of female journalists: “A consistent stereotype throughout the fiction portrayed the woman journalist as better than female—or more like the male—thus explaining her professional ability as well as her loss of personal happiness (which depended on feminine qualities) when her male traits became too strong.”^{xlii}

Chapter Four Endnotes

xxxiii Joe Saltzman, "Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture," *Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture* (2003): 1, accessed February 18, 2011.

xxxiv Donna Born, "The Image of the Woman Journalist in American Popular Fiction 1890 to Present" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, East Lansing, Michigan, August 8-11, 1981).

xxxv Howard Good, *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism, and the Movies* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1998), 30.

xxxvi Saltzman, "Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture," 3.

xxxvii *Lady in a Corner*.

xxxviii Saltzman, "Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture," 5.

xxxix Ibid.

xl Op. Cit. 3.

xli Hourihane, "Wear All the Prada You Want But Try Not to Be a Success."

xlii Born, "The Image of the Woman Journalist."

Chapter Five

Impact of Stereotypes

So why do these images and stereotypes matter? These are the images that provide a glimpse into the world of the female journalist for people outside the profession.

Cultivation theory suggests that mass media results in “the socialization of most people into standardized roles and behaviors. Its function is in a word: enculturation.”^{xliii} According to this theory, media images have the potential to shape audience opinions, and considering that *The Devil Wears Prada* grossed more than \$300 million worldwide,^{xliv} that means many opinions are at stake. If audiences look to these films for their ideas about society, they will leave with the message that a woman, specifically one in the field of journalism, cannot be successful in both love and career and must sacrifice one to achieve fulfillment in the other, which is a possibly dangerous message for people, especially young girls who may be undecided about their career aspirations, to receive.

Social learning theory suggests that “children and adults acquire attitudes, emotional responses and new styles of conduct through filmed and televised modeling,”^{xlv} meaning audiences model their behavior based on what they see in films like *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The September Issue*. “Modeling theory, an extension of the concept of the role model...has...recently been applied to the impact of the media’s vision of women—laboratory experiment surveys show that this is the case in some scenarios,” explains Gaye Tuchman, a professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut. Her studies showed that character portrayals in film have empirically proven affects.^{xlvi}

Thomas Schatz, an author and professor of communication at the University of Texas at Austin, points out the capacity of journalism genre films to both criticize and reinforce the values, beliefs, and ideals of our culture within the same narrative context.^{xlvii} This is certainly true concerning the portrayal of women in *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The September Issue*: the films break certain gender stereotypes, showing that women can be powerful, aggressive and “masculine,” and can have successful careers, a message that challenges traditional gender stereotypes. However, at the same time, it depicts these women as failures in their personal lives, both having undergone divorce, and both seeming to lack personal happiness, based on the fact that they are rarely seen smiling or expressing joy. So while the films seemingly challenge gender stereotypes, they in a way reinforce them by demonstrating that women who fall out of the gender mold may be successful, but are also unhappy.

Chapter Five Endnotes

^{xliii} George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "Living with Television: The Violence Profile," *Journal of Communication* 26 (1976): 175.

^{xliv} "The Devil Wears Prada."

^{xlv} Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 39.

^{xlvi} Gaye Tuchman, "Women's Depiction by the Mass Media," *Signs* 4 (1979): 533.

^{xlvii} Good, *Girl Reporter*, 33.

Conclusion

Cold, calculating, cruel, and downright *devilish* are words that can be used to describe the way female fashion editors-in-chief are portrayed in *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The September Issue*.

The Devil Wears Prada's Miranda Priestly rules over *Runway* magazine and the fashion world, with an often-expressionless face and a perfectly styled appearance. Her unsympathetic nature can be inferred to be the cause of her second failed marriage, but at the same time, has led her to be able to be a great success career-wise.

Anna Wintour, as depicted in *The September Issue*, is arguably Priestly's real-life counterpart, with parallels between the two characters ranging from their ever-present dark sunglasses to their ability to intimidate their co-workers. Like Priestly, Wintour has achieved career success while displaying "masculine" traits, and seems to have lost her typically feminine attributes.

The dichotomy between a need to be masculine in the workplace and feminine in the personal sphere seen in these characters has been found in female fashion editor-in-chief characters throughout history, as they fall prey to the "sob sister" stereotype. What has changed is the ultimate choice the character makes. In 1940s films, such as *Third Finger, Left Hand* (1940) and *Dishonored Lady* (1947), the women choose to forgo their careers for a life as married women, whereas in the other films, such as *The Perfect Marriage* (1947), *Lady in a Corner* (1989), *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), and *The September Issue* (2009), romance is either sacrificed for career, or is completely absent from the films.

Social scientists believe images like these have real effects on viewers through cultivation theory and social learning theory, which speculate that audiences may model behaviors and expectations based on what appears in the mass media, including film portrayals, like Priestly's and Wintour's. If this is the case, the devil may not be the evil female career woman, but may instead be the film industry, for perpetuating stereotypes about the female journalist, specifically the female fashion editor-in-chief.

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Appendix: Movie Summaries

The Devil Wears Prada (2006)

Andrea "Andy" Sachs, an aspiring journalist with no interest in fashion, gets a job working as personal assistant to "boss from hell" Miranda Priestly, the editor-in-chief of *Runway* magazine, a top fashion publication. Andy must work hard to fulfill

Miranda's every diva-like desire, no matter how outlandish, as they work to put together upcoming issues, host social events and attend Paris fashion week.

The September Issue (2009)

Filmmaker R.J. Cutler gives viewers an inside look into the making of *Vogue's* September issue, the largest issue of the year. The documentary follows editor-in-chief Anna Wintour and her staff throughout the summer of 2007 as they prepare the fashion magazine for print.

Third Finger, Left Hand (1940)

Margot Merrick is the editor of a glamorous women's magazine, who wears a wedding ring even though she is unmarried. She wants to protect her career from harm by male co-workers, who could see her as an object of desire, and jealous wives, who could petition to get her fired, by feigning a marriage. A man she meets at a bar, Jeff Thompson, is unrelenting in his pursuit of Margot, who finally gives in, and the two become involved. Jeff decides to pretend to be her long-lost husband, but this only causes things to become more complicated.

The Dishonored Lady (1947)

The movie opens with Madeleine Damien, a successful magazine editor, on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Her psychiatrist, Dr. Caleb, suggests she take on a less stressful line of work, so Madeleine decides to become an artist. She falls in love with the researcher she works for, Dr. David Cousins, and the two plan to get married. However, while David is out of town, Madeleine meets up with an old lover, Felix Courtland. While she is over at his place, a fight breaks out between Felix and another man, who ends up murdering him. Madeleine is accused of the crime, and David, who knows nothing of her past life, leaves her. In the end, she is cleared of the crime and ends up with David.

The Perfect Marriage (1947)

Maggie Williams, editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine, and her husband Dale have a seemingly perfect marriage of 10 years, but behind closed doors they engage in major battles. Their daughter Cookie is caught between her two parents, and hopes not to have to choose between them, though this seems like it will be inevitable when the two speak of divorce.

Maroc 7 (1967)

Louise Henderson is the editor of a chic fashion magazine, who uses her jet-setting lifestyle as a front for an international jewel-smuggling operation. Along with the magazine's top photographer and cover model, Henderson thinks the operation is in the bag, until a secret agent is sent in to infiltrate the scheme as they embark on their next mission: stealing a priceless gem from Morocco.

Lady in a Corner (1989)

Grace Guthrie is the strong-willed editor-in-chief of *Grace* magazine, a top fashion publication. A British "sleaze lord" threatens to buy out the magazine, which

Grace fears will diminish the content of her publication. She struggles to maintain her power against a new editor, whom she fears is really working for the British mogul. She puts off romantic advances from her publisher and focuses on raising enough money to prevent a takeover of the magazine.