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Art History: 20th Century Dress and Culture

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The Devil Wears Prada

Newly entering the fashion industry is a process of how you can get to where you want to be in life. In this film, Andy who is portrayed by Anne Hathaway is a personal assistant to Miranda Priestly who is portrayed by Meryl Steep that is demanding because she holds a high powerful position in the company and is driven to perfection. The film is based on a true story written by Anna Wintour’s assistant at her time in Vogue company. Supermodel, Gisele Bündchen made a special appearance in the movie to portray as an “obnoxious” character and one of the antagonists. Another character is Emily Charlton who is portrayed by Emily Blunt shows an “arrogant” behavior towards Andy because she is new to the job and tends to do the tasks slower than how she would do it. The name of the filmmaker is David Frankel, and the film was released on June 30, 2006. The movie genre is Romance/Comedy, and the time period is in late 2000s which were shot in New York City and Paris.

The role that fashion is playing in the overall film narrative is by the character’s position in the film. For example, Andy’s fashion wardrobe consists of anything she throws on because she does not know much about it. However, Miranda Priestly who is the head of the company dresses professionally that fits her role and empowering clothing pieces that shows she is the boss. An idea that fashion is communicating within the context of the movie is the way the characters are dressed in a certain level of how much they achieved in life. The way Andy dress compared to Emily shows that she does not know a lot about fashion and what is currently on trend of the season. A well-known custom designer behind the costumes is Vivienne Westwood, which was worn by Emily throughout the film, but it is mostly by Patricia Field. There is a relationship between the various costumes and roles played in the film because they showed Andy’s style evolution and how her style improved and got better after she learned more about fashion. In addition, Emily’s character is “arrogant” which explains her wardrobe as “dark” and “gothic”. I think the costume designer chose certain costumes to describe the character’s personality like Miranda as “precise” and “direct” whereas Andy is “awkward” and “ambitious”. Costume’s detail social status of a character since Andy did not come from a rich family, she dresses ordinary and basic in the beginning because it was not her strength to be in the fashion industry until later. It is used to show and add information on the mental/psychological status of a character because it helps depict the character’s realness of the story and where they came from. The film influenced the fashion style at the time because Emily’s character wore Vivienne Westwood pieces which is punk, and Andy also wore Chanel “edgy” blazer. From my own perspective, the film is considered a ‘fashion film’ because of the setting and how it is Vogue related especially based on the writer’s experiences who worked for Anna Wintour and the movie also exposed the fashion industry. The first scene that fashion plays a key role is the “Andy Vogue Scene” which Andy’s wardrobe change in every scene and she wore designer brands like Chanel, Marc Jacobs, and John Galliano. Another scene is Andy’s business trip to Paris which she wore a vintage ‘dark green’ dress which resembles the dresses which were worn around 1940s.

Fashion shapes the film in many ways and personalities. Miranda’s personality is different from both Andy and Emily because she holds a higher position among all. It is taught that being new is when you need to prepare yourself to overcome any challenges and prepare for the worse. The essential of working in the fashion industry requires full commitment and adjusting to the environment. Fashion shapes the film by symbolizing the character’s way of dressing like how Miranda Priestly dressed like a role model for having the most power and Andy as a “working woman”. The film created a big impact in fashion from adapting and learning new skills for personal improvements.