

Psyche in New York: *The Devil Wears Prada* Updates the Myth

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The Psyche and Cupid story is a central myth of female maturation, usually read as a metaphor for the soul reaching its full growth through the transforming power of love. But there are, if one looks closely, two stories intertwined in this myth. The most obvious, the familiar "Eros plot," concerns Psyche's relationship with her family and her lover, Eros/Cupid. The usually less-emphasized "Psyche plot," on the other hand, is about her relationship with her lover's mother Aphrodite/Venus.[1] At its core, this underlying Psyche plot—perhaps, as some interpretations suggest, a much older remnant of ancient matriarchal rites of initiation—is the story of a younger woman's passage into adulthood through the accomplishment of symbolic tasks assigned by a powerful older woman. This authoritative female figure may even appear to be an enemy, at least at times, but actually mentors and guides her growth into full participation in society. As Valerie Estelle Frankel points out in her study of the mentor element in the heroine's journey, "[a]s a teacher of independence, the evil stepmother [or her equivalent] is essential to the story" (38).

When the Psyche plot is foregrounded in a work, the positive aspects of it can speak to the great hunger of young women for a same-sex mentor. Women "particularly need female mentors who can model the greater diversity in women's lives today" and to help them "develop [their] own definition of success" (Schlegel). A relationship with a female mentor can fulfill important "psychosocial needs" and provide "engaged and authentic emotional support" (Spencer and Liang 109). Fortunately for younger women, "More than half of

[1] I use the terms proposed by Huber for these two story elements in *Transforming Psyche* (108-111), which was the initial impetus for this analysis. There are many variations on the basic Cupid and Psyche story, which may emphasize different aspects of the tale depending on their aims (see Griswold for a study of these variations). "Beauty and the Beast" is one of the most familiar, but it focuses on the Eros plot and leaves out the Psyche/Aphrodite plot almost entirely. As Betsy Hearne points out, "Versions of [Cupid and Psyche] focus on the tasks of the bride, while [Beauty and the Beast] emphasizes the beast and its transformation" (10). While in some retellings the fairy or witch who cursed the Beast may approximate the role played by Aphrodite, her role is usually more to punish and rehabilitate the Beast than to initiate Beauty into adulthood.

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Gen Y women have been mentored by a woman, up from only 34% of Baby Boomers" (Williams). Yet this improvement is not necessarily reflected in popular media; a recent thread on the women's news discussion site *Jezebel* asks the pertinent question: "Where Are All the Female Mentor Characters?" As the columnist points out, "In all of the films, shows, and books I can think of, the woman's mentor is normally a male, either gay or a potential love-interest. If a woman happens to give the heroine some mentoring, it's limited to certain advice-giving incidents, which are often questionable and sometimes destructive." Commenters list numerous examples of both positive and negative female mentors, but far more are from books than from mainstream movies or television. And in these examples, women seem to mentor men positively more often than other women, and for the most part, the same-sex mentoring relationship is indeed limited: a part of the broader story, not the focus of it.

The 2006 movie *The Devil Wears Prada*, adapted for the screen by Aline Brosh McKenna, directed by David Frankel, and starring Meryl Streep, is a very rare example of a popular film where female mentoring is at the center of the story. The book on which the movie is based is a *roman à clef* about author Lauren Weisberger's stint as assistant to Anna Wintour, editor of *Vogue*. It is a self-indulgent and self-centered litany of the humiliating and impossible tasks she was commanded to do, interesting chiefly as an exercise in name-dropping. The central character learns nothing from her experiences and exhibits no character growth throughout the novel; one reviewer accurately calls it "tiresomely self-entitled" (Valby) and Kate Betts, who similarly worked for Wintour early in her career, says "[Weisberger] had a ringside seat at one of the great editorial franchises [but] seems to have understood almost nothing" (Betts). The list of hard-earned "skills" the narrator sarcastically reels off near the end of the novel are actually, if she could look at them with a bit more perspective, useful accomplishments indeed; whose professional life wouldn't be improved by learning "how to complete just about any challenge in under an hour because the phrase […] 'that's not possible' was simply not an option" (326)?[2]

In the far more satisfying movie version, young Andrea "Andy" Sachs (played by Ann Hathaway) is a recent college graduate looking for a job in journalism in New York City. Miranda Priestly (Streep), editor-in-chief of the monthly fashion magazine *Runway*, hires Andy as her assistant. The movie details their fraught mentor-mentee relationship but culminates in Andy's experiences of personal epiphany and professional success.

[2] According to a sampling of plot summaries and reviews on Amazon.com, Weisberger's three subsequent novels, *Everyone Worth Knowing*, *Chasing Harry Winston*, and *Last Night at Chateau Marmont*, fill much the same niche and are quite similar in premise and style.

The movie is an example of an adaptation which adds depth and resonance to rather unpromising source material. As David Denby's perceptive review points out, in the movie, instead of seeing solely through Andy's eyes as in the book, we look *at* both Andy and Miranda from the outside and gain a completely different perspective (Denby). McKenna points out that she was hired to adapt the book after several male writers had failed (McKenna 9). She focused the movie on Andy, "adding poignancy to the film by gently exposing her naïveté" (Dominus). Miranda also becomes far more sympathetic, because by looking at her through eyes other than Andy's, we can see that she *is* teaching Andy through the tasks she imposes; McKenna says that in adapting the book, Miranda was as much her "point of entry" into the story as Andy (McKenna 12).

McKenna has explained that her screenwriting interests center around movies in which "the women have goals that are not strictly speaking romantic" (qtd. in Dominus). Two of the other movies she scripted, *Morning Glory* and *I Don't Know How She Does It*, share similar plots "turn[ing] on the thrill of work"; the central romance in these romantic comedies is that between "a woman and the perfect career" (Dominus). While her characters want "a great guy *and* a great job, a happy family *and* professional success," they are deeply motivated by "job lust" (Dominus, italics in original). In fact McKenna credits the classic Cary Grant/Rosalind Russell comedy *His Girl Friday* as the movie that changed her life (McKenna 1); few other films could demonstrate this motivation more clearly. In writing this particular adaptation, she found that the turning point was an insight that "allowed [her] to re-crack that whole character [Miranda] to be the mean mentor" (McKenna 2).

The Devil Wears Prada may seem a slender, lightweight piece of froth to subject to any serious analysis,[3] but the movie resonates deeply with many viewers, particularly young women, and I believe there are two reasons for this. The first is the dearth of female mentoring relationship models as the center of the plot in popular culture products.[4] *The Devil Wears Prada* seems nearly unique in foregrounding a mentoring relationship of the sort that is, if not entirely pleasant for the mentee, at least straightforward about the demands, risks, and rewards involved. The second reason is the way the movie echoes, deliberately or not, the essential mythic pattern of the Psyche/Aphrodite story.

[3] I am not the first to consider its mythic depths—Martha P. Nochimson, in her review in *Cineaste*, draws several parallels with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, not the least being that she feels the devilish Miranda is the real hero (48) and gets the best lines.

[4] While there are many films and television shows which include a female mentoring relationship, there are few which foreground it. Perhaps the most similar is the 1988 film *Working Girl*, but its plot centers on the betrayal of the mentee by her mentor, and the parallel romance plot is given nearly equal importance.

The Stories

In most versions of the original myth, Psyche is a mortal of goddess-like beauty. Eros, son of Aphrodite, falls in love with her and takes her away to his secret palace, but visits her only in darkness. Psyche comes into conflict with Aphrodite when their clandestine relationship is discovered—when Eros flees to his mother after Psyche, prodded by her jealous sisters, drips hot oil on him from her lamp when taking a forbidden look at her mysterious lover. Aphrodite separates Psyche from Eros, leaving her alone and pregnant. Psyche realizes she must reach some sort of accommodation with Aphrodite if she is to win him back. She humbles herself to the goddess, who sets her four impossible tasks. Upon succeeding, she is reunited with Eros and granted immortality for herself and their daughter, Pleasure. In this classical version of the tale, the marker of adulthood is socially sanctioned union with an appropriate mate. The blocking older woman is the gatekeeper to adulthood and social acceptance.

The Eros plot, with its emphasis on the social control of sexuality and reproduction, is the most familiar element of the tale; still, though it "nearly obfuscates the importance of […] Psyche's journey," it is only part of the whole (Huber 109). The complete source story emphasizes "the importance of both meaningful work *and* affective relationships to well-being" (Huber 139). The series of symbolic tasks have been interpreted in numerous ways, but in the end Psyche—the Soul—comes to maturity through achieving these tasks and complying with the social norms Aphrodite imposes. The female hero develops "courage, skill, and independence" (Pearson and Pope 8) in both areas. Aphrodite is, in Jean Shinoda Bolen's phrase, the archetypal "alchemical goddess" who transforms those which whom she has a relationship and facilitates creativity and new life (*Everywoman* 225); in this myth, Aphrodite provides "the tasks through which Psyche [grows]" (238).

In *Prada*, the marker of adulthood for Andy is not having a relationship with a man—though Andy does have one and their relationship is affected by her quest—but a grown-up job that will pay the rent, use her talents, and that she can hold with integrity. McKenna quotes Amelia Earhart as one of her inspirations; she once said "I want to do something useful in the world" (qtd. in McKannea 3), and this is a prime motivation for Andy. In keeping with McKenna's interest in the place of work in the lives of women, the movie "concludes with a reconciliation between the heroine and her boyfriend, but it is almost beside the point: the happy ending is delivered by a better job" (Dominus). Miranda, like Aphrodite, sets her protégée tasks that force her to push her abilities to their limits. There is also an important moment of rebellion essential to Andy's development, as we shall see, which parallels a similar moment in Psyche's story.

In the movie, young Andrea Sachs lives in New York with her boyfriend. Andy's goal is a job as a writer for a serious cultural magazine. In spite of a disastrous interview and an obvious mis-fit with her high fashion magazine, Miranda Priestly sees something in her and takes her on as her second assistant, to handle the minutiae of her personal life. The bargain Miranda offers is, as one reviewer describes it, "one year of professional wifework in exchange for entrée into the world of magazine journalism" (Miller 224). While over and over we hear the phrase "A million girls would kill for that job" (e.g. scenes 2, 4, 8), all Andy wants is the line on her resume that will open doors to her *real* dream position. With the help of Miranda's second-in-command, Nigel (Stanley Tucci), Andy learns to keep up with Miranda's nearly impossible demands; in fact, she begins to outshine Miranda's first assistant, Emily (Emily Blunt). A crisis occurs when Miranda gives Andy the chance to accompany her to the much-anticipated Paris fashion week shows in Emily's place. In Paris, Andy faces a number of temptations and finally must confront herself and her treatment of Emily and decide if she belongs in the *Runway* world or not.

Thus, in keeping with the Psyche/Aphrodite paradigm, a young girl is initiated into adult life by submitting to and learning from an older and wiser female figure, who at first appears to be a dragon blocking her way (as Andy says during her first week on the job, "she is not happy unless everyone around her is panicked, nauseous, or suicidal" [scene 10]) but is at a deeper level forcing her to explore the limits of her strengths and weaknesses. But she must eventually learn when to rebel against her teacher and begin to trust her own judgment. The setting in the fashion industry reinforces Miranda's identification with Aphrodite as a goddess of beauty. In contrast, the unkempt Andy, who snickers at a debate between which of two similar belts is better for a fashion shoot, is an awkward caterpillar—a Psyche, who is often symbolized as a butterfly, before her transformation. This setting also serves to reinforce the value of the physical and feminine world, and early on subverts the idea that fashion, the ultimate in feminine work, is trivial. As Frankel points out, "stepmother-witches often represent the heroine's internal denigration of the feminine" (41); in this case, Andy has to face her own internal belittling of the feminine. Miranda's monologue on the color of Andy's "lumpy" blue sweater and its place in a vast economic web (which she is quite frank about personally controlling) celebrates feminine power:

> You think this has nothing to do with you. […] You're trying to tell the world that you take yourself too seriously to care about what you put on your back. […] That blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs. And it's sort of comical how you think you've 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 people in this room. (Scene 9)

Andy's particular out-of-date crew-neck cerulean blue cable-knit sweater did not just randomly appear out of nowhere; it was the end result of conscious decisions by a network of people around the globe, and Miranda is entirely aware that the judgments and pronouncements she makes on a daily basis affect the lives and livelihoods of millions, femininely trivial as they may seem to Andy.

Andy initially resists the cult-like lure of the fashion world—"They all act like they're curing cancer or something" (scene 10), she says disparagingly. But as she becomes part of the world at *Runway*, we can see her finding it more and more alluring. Andy's friends and her boyfriend begin to play the role of Psyche's jealous sisters, their disapproving remarks thinly disguising their envy of her life in the palace at *Runway*, while Miranda herself almost takes on some of the characteristics of Eros, the lover who takes her away from her family and friends and tempts her with a materially richer life.[5] They try to convince Andy that working for Miranda is bad for her: "Looks like someone's been drinking the Kool-Aid" (scene 14), her boyfriend says, and is delighted at any sign she might quit. Later on he tells her, "You've become one of them" and, when Andy's cell phone rings in the middle of an argument, "The person whose calls you always take, that's the relationship you're in" (scene 24).

This relationship, which frankly *is* more important to Andy at this point, is by no means a happy and harmonious one. According to Huber's study of the Psyche myth, officially recorded versions of myths may be biased towards showing goddesses as hostile towards mortal women, though secret cultic and initiatory practices may preserve "ceremonies and rituals" that shift the focus towards the fulfillment of women's needs (22), including, one may presume, the need for a powerful teacher and mentor of the same sex. On the other hand, "[m]aternal antagonism," real or feigned, to daughters at a certain stage does encourage independence and self-reliance—it helps daughters become their own persons, separate from the mother (Huber 23; see also Gordon and Shaffer, esp. chapter 3). More bluntly, as Frankel puts it, "[t]he Terrible Mother is the heroine's catalyst"; only by facing her antagonism and claiming her power as her own can the younger woman develop strength to face the world (42). By working through the conflict, the daughter/mentee also reaches a healthy balance of independence from and respect or love for the mother/mentor. This is handled quite delicately in *The Devil Wears Prada*; in spite of their differences, as Andy grows into a pride in her accomplishments and an appreciation of what she is learning from

[5] This may help to explain the astonishing amount of Miranda/Andy ("Mirandy") slash fan-fiction to be found on the internet.

Miranda, we see her concern for Miranda's moment of vulnerability after her husband files for divorce (scene 26), her impassioned defense of Miranda's methods (scene 28), her mad rush through Paris to find Miranda and warn her about a rival editor's takeover attempt (scene 29-30), and the final scene where Andy hesitantly waves to her and we witness Miranda's private smile (scene 35).

The Tasks

Let us look a little more deeply at what Miranda teaches Andy, first by examining the four challenges imposed by the goddess in the ancient myth. Through the tasks Aphrodite sets her, "Psyche begins to understand her own power, the possibilities of relationship, and most of all, she learns to accept the consequences of her actions" (Huber 60). "Through the four tasks," and I would add, through her disobedience at the end of the fourth task, "Psyche evolves. She develops capabilities and strengths as her courage and determination are tested" (Bolen, *Everywoman* 262). "Each time Psyche completes a task, she gains a new intellectual capacity" (Frankel 42). A hidden aspect of all these tasks is that the helpful creatures and beings who come forward to aid Psyche are associates of Aphrodite: "Aphrodite both sets the tasks and aids Psyche in the guise of her familiars […] She is the […] mother-figure […] who directs Psyche to an understanding of the strength of female being and feminine values" (Huber 76).

The first of Psyche's tasks is to sort out an enormous pile of grain and seeds mixed up deliberately by Aphrodite. The goddess's words almost sound like something Miranda might say: "You are such a hideous slave […]. I shall now test your worth […]. Finish the job before this evening and show it to me for my approval" (Hanson translation, qtd. in Huber 205). The translation paraphrased by Frankel is even more devastating: "Can't you do anything? Know anything? Be anything?" (42). She is helped by ants, who sort the piles for her. Bolen sees this task as representative of an inner sorting-out: "when a woman must make a crucial decision, she must often first sort out a jumble of confused feelings and competing loyalties. [She must] separate out what is truly important from what is insignificant. [She] learns to stay with a confused situation and not act until clarity emerges" (*Everywoman* 259). She has to learn to sort, categorize, discriminate, and classify (Huber 91), to prioritize and to work methodically to reach her goal.

Psyche's second task is gathering golden fleece from the aggressive rams of the sun, who will trample her to death if she enters their enclosure. She is advised to wait till the rams are sleeping and gather it then, so this task is about patience and learning to wait for the right moment. The rams and their fleece also represent "her ability to gather worldly power […] and yet remain uninjured and uncowed" (Frankel 43).

The third task is collecting a bottle of water from the River Styx. Aphrodite says this test is designed to see if Psyche is "endowed with courageous spirit and singular intelligence" (Hanson translation, qtd. in Huber 207). To accomplish this task, she asks for help from an eagle. At one level, this means she must have the intelligence to realize when a task is beyond her and she must call on others for help or fail. But perhaps more importantly, "[t]he eagle symbolizes the ability to see the landscape from a distant perspective and swoop down to grasp what is needed"—in other words, this task requires and teaches perspective and "emotional distance" (Bolen, *Everywoman* 261).

The final task Aphrodite gives Psyche is to go to the goddess Persephone in the underworld and bring back a casket filled with one day's worth of her beauty, claiming she has exhausted her own beauty in caring for the son Psyche herself has injured. The danger in this ultimate task is that Psyche may not be able to reach Hades without losing her life in the process, and even if she does, she might not be allowed to return to the land of the living. Psyche despairs and considers suicide, but is advised by a voice from a tower, which warns her not to be distracted by spurious calls for help along the way. Here Psyche must learn "the inclusion of self into an ethic of care for others. She must grant the same importance to her own journey as she would give to [those of] others" (Huber 79). Psyche must learn to act counter to the expectation, familiar from many other fairy tales,[6] that women must set aside their own needs for anyone who asks, and not let herself be constantly distracted from her goal; "until a woman can say no to her particular susceptibility, she cannot determine her own life course" (Bolen, *Everywoman* 261).

There is a twist to this challenge that might almost be called a fifth task. When Psyche returns to the land of the living, she gives in to the temptation to take a drop of beauty for herself from the casket, and falls into profound death-like sleep from which Eros must awaken her. Huber posits that the disobedience of taking a drop of beauty from the casket is *not* a failure—that it is instead a necessary ritual completion of her education (112)—and suggests a kinship to the Eleusinian mysteries, "rituals designed to bring mystical insight into the meaning of death" (112). This is a parallel to many male versions of the mentor/mentee story, where at some point the wise teacher must die to this world so that the student can move on and grow—consider Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi, Harry Potter and Dumbledore, even Frodo and Gandalf. But in this female version and its variants, the essential separation from the mentor takes the form of rebellion, as we see in Psyche's story, and there is often (though

[6] For example, in various Baba Yaga tales the young girl turns aside to help many creatures and even inanimate objects along the way to the witch's hut, which in turn help her when she flees the witch ("The Black Geese" in Lurie).

not always) a following reconciliation with the mentor—in keeping with the often circular or spiral structure of women's myths, separation is rarely as permanent as is the death of the mentor in male myths. Learning when, how, and why to disobey, and when it is worth trying to repair and maintain a relationship afterwards, is an important lesson.[7]

I would not want to claim that McKenna mapped Andy's tasks intentionally and precisely onto Psyche's; she gives no indication that this was a deliberate screenwriting choice in her interviews and her BAFTA lecture, though she has claimed that she is a "story buff" (McKenna 3) and demonstrates familiarity with a wide range of literature. However, I feel there are certain essential things that Psyche learns from the tasks assigned by Aphrodite that Andy similarly learns from Miranda, and in each case there are useful parallels to be drawn.

"I need ten or fifteen skirts from Calvin Klein" is the start of a confusing shorthand list of tasks that Miranda rattles off to Andy on her first day at work (scene 6), culminating in the unspoken command to put on a less heinously unattractive pair of shoes. Emily gleefully passes on more tasks: pick up the Hermés scarves, the dry cleaning, the Starbucks, etc. This becomes the first salvo in a montage of Miranda's daily arrivals at the office, tossing her purse, coat, and cryptic demands to Andy as she breezes through the outer office like a force of nature (scene 10). But, like Psyche's grain-sorting task, it teaches Andy to interpret, organize, prioritize, and flawlessly execute the tasks with which Miranda entrusts her, though it takes her a while to understand *why*. Here Miranda is teaching her one of the things it takes to *be* Miranda—jealously guarding one's personal time from trivia, and the absolute necessity of surrounding oneself with people who can be trusted to accomplish the tasks they are given. Meryl Streep, who was involved in the adaptation of the novel by McKenna at an early stage, grasped this aspect of Miranda's character right away: "Miranda is always factoring in how much something is going to slow her down. […] [S]he's just doing what she needs to do to get from Point A to Point B" (paraphrased in Matthews); Streep told McKenna to make Miranda "meaner, dryer, more efficient, scarier" (Rosen 19).

Andy's first major failure at a truly important task occurs when Miranda is grounded in Miami due to a hurricane and insists that Andy find her

[7] Rebellion is central to the Scottish ballad of Tam Lin, in which headstrong young Janet of Carterhaugh rescues her lover from the queen of the fairies. The teaching function of the fairy queen/Aphrodite figure is deeply obscured here, but through their conflict Janet is taught courage and persistence. Additionally, like Psyche, her mating and pregnancy occur before they are sanctioned by authority and she must redeem her "transgression of the dominant social conventions" (Hixon 69) through this ritual conflict with an older woman who has a prior claim on her lover.

a flight out. "This is your responsibility. This is your job," she hisses (scene 11), but to no avail—the task is simply impossible, and Andy can't help feeling that Miranda's tongue-lashing—"You ended up disappointing me […] more than any of the other silly girls" (scene 12)—is totally unfair. In a parallel with Psyche's fleece-gathering task, Andy here suffers the consequences of awakening the anger of a powerful antagonist through a lack of understanding of how to safely approach her. In tears, she runs to Nigel's office, complaining the no matter how hard she tries she can't satisfy Miranda. Wisely, Nigel knows what she needs: "You are *not* trying," he says. "You are whining." He chastises Andy for only deigning to work there rather than being committed to her job (scene 12). Andy admits to not doing her best, and as part of her new dedication persuades him to transform her into a *Runway* girl. In this sequence what Andy learns is to devote her full attention to the present moment; to become what the job demands, rather than only begrudgingly doing it until something better comes along. Her new self-confidence allows her to approach Miranda's power with less trepidation; she is changing from caterpillar to butterfly.

This transformation, and her growing ability to not just meet but anticipate Miranda's needs (scene 15), earns her the reward of bringing The Book (the daily mock-up of the current issue) to Miranda's townhouse. She is "given instructions that smack of a magical initiation: speak to no one, deposit the dry cleaning in the closet and the layout book on the table with the flowers; leave quickly" (Nochimson 49). But as in a fairy tale, she allows herself to be tempted aside from the path, and witnesses an argument between Miranda and her husband—in effect, she sees the goddess in a state of vulnerability (scene 17). As with Aphrodite's revelation that her beauty has suffered in caring for her wounded son, what Andy witnesses in Miranda's moment of weakness and imperfection is the result of the stress of *being* Miranda. It is a lesson by example that will come back later to remind Andy of the dangers of slavishly following her mentor's lead in all things.

Here Miranda seems to give in to the temptation to make it personal—a rare flaw, but like Aphrodite she cannot afford to appear weak and less than perfect, even to an employee. (Part of Aphrodite's anger at Psyche is that not only does the girl rival her beauty, she is about to turn Aphrodite into a grandmother, making her feel old and unattractive.) The next morning, Miranda demands a truly impossible task: get the manuscript of the unpublished final Harry Potter book for her twins by the end of the day. Andy asks for help from Christian Thompson, a famous writer who had recently flirted with her at a party. As with Psyche's third task, where she is helped by an eagle, here Andy learns to step back, get some perspective, and assess the resources she has available to solve the problem, then hone in on the one best solution. She succeeds, and even proves herself three steps ahead of the game by having two copies printed, bound, and

in the hands of the twins before she even reports back to Miranda—with a third copy for her (scene 18).

Following on this redemption, Miranda begins relying more and more on Andy, to the point where she decides to take her to Paris for fashion week instead of Emily (scene 22). She puts Andy in very difficult position by threatening to withhold her reference if Andy refuses, and insisting that Andy tell Emily herself (scene 23). The Paris trip is like Psyche's temptation to take a drop of beauty—a chance to enter fully into the life of Aphrodite herself. Andy has the opportunity to revel in the City of Lights, designer clothes, shows, celebrities, fine cuisine, luxury—the rewards of feminine power at its richest and most intoxicating. By succumbing to this temptation, allowing Miranda to persuade her to betray Emily, Andy dies to her inner voices—letting the inducements of Paris drown out her moral sense and "[losing] her moral compass" (Miller 221). As Emily cuttingly says, "You sold your soul the day you put on that first pair of Jimmy Choos" (scene 23). Thus she is easy prey when Christian reappears and seduces her with both personal and professional temptations (scene 28).

In this final trial, Andy enters what Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, in their book *The Female Hero*, call "The Emperor's New Clothes" phase of the hero-journey. In this phase the hero encounters a seducer who awakens her to a new world of experience, but the seducer turns out to be a captor, and the hero must demythologize and slay the seducer to pass the test and move on to become whole and autonomous (Pearson and Pope 68). But it is *not* the obvious male figure playing the real seducer here. What Christian Thompson can give her is a cheat and nothing at all compared to what Miranda can offer—if Andy will just put aside her scruples, admit she wants the kind of life Miranda leads, and enter wholly into her world. Miranda says "I see a great deal of myself in you" and emphasizes that the choices Andy has already made show her well on the way to following in her footsteps. "Everybody wants this," she insists as they glide through Paris in her limousine; "Everybody wants to be us" (scene 31).

Miranda is thus the real seducer-dragon who must be rejected as a final test. Andy must avoid joining that world, merging with the mother/goddess/seducer, in order to remain herself and stay true to her original goals. She needs to break free from her "waltz […] with the Bitch Goddess" (Kauffmann) and recognize and reject the "shadow side of Aphrodite"—the self-centeredness and lack of concern for the effects of her actions on others (Bolen, *Older* 174) that are especially revealed in the fourth task when Aphrodite sends Psyche to the Queen of the Underworld. The memory of Miranda's vulnerability, the cost she must pay to rise above it, and the steps she must take to hide it—reinforced shortly prior to the climactic temptation in a scene where a haggard and unkempt Miranda directs Andy to change the banquet seating chart because

her husband has filed for divorce (scene 26)—emphasize to Andy the potential personal costs of emulating Miranda's commitment to *being* Miranda.

One of the satisfactions of the movie is that Andy returns with a boon to the community, in keeping with the Campbellian monomyth pattern—unlike Psyche who is translated directly to heaven and becomes assimilated into the "patriarchal pantheon" (Huber 122). Abandoning Miranda to the paparazzi, quitting her job at *Runway* and returning to New York, Andy brings some healing to her damaged personal relationships and gains an opportunity to do meaningful work for a magazine that makes a difference; her story "spirals onward, […] opening out onto another stage" (Huber 142). Unlike Psyche, Andy is not pregnant during her trials. However, she has been blocked from writing during this time—she serves only as Miranda's personal assistant and is not allowed to write for *Runway*.[8] But her new job, for which Miranda gives her a typically backhanded reference, will allow her to create (give birth to) words again.

Interestingly, she does *not* give up her newfound sense of direction for her boyfriend, who is moving to Boston, nor does she ask him to stay in New York with her. As Pearson and Pope point out, "[i]n feminist literature, the young girl's rejection of the Wicked Witch is usually followed by a similar rejection of her role as suffering redeemer of her male sexual partner" (107). He must find his own way. Andy emerges from the artificial otherworld of the fashion magazine back into the everyday world, but, as the final shot of her stylish leather jacket and stiletto boots shows (scene 37), with a new and more balanced sense of appreciation for the feminine and physical worlds.

As Frankel states, "[d]espite their cruelty, […] evil stepmothers teach valuable lessons. [They] teach and threaten as one" (43). What has Miranda taught Andy, in the end? Andy has perhaps absorbed some of the essentials of practicing journalism at the highest levels—the fast pace, the priorities, the relentless competition. She may have learned the value of reliable assistants, and hopefully how *not* to treat her own future employees. She may also have learned more intangible lessons about consolidating and using feminine power in a male world, and valuing the physical world more than she did when she first took the job. It is also significant that *Runway* is a monthly magazine—work at *Runway* is never done and starts over again as soon as each issue is put to bed. A woman's heroic quest is likewise frequently "circuitous" and "labyrinthine" rather than straightforward (Pearson and Pope 77); "the spiral pattern lends itself to […]

[8] This aspect of her servitude is actually given somewhat more importance in the book; the book's temptation scene in Paris centers around Miranda's rather grudging offer to allow Andy to write some short pieces for *Runway* (326-8).

cooperation and accommodation [and] maintaining connections […]. The process is continuous" (Huber 119).

The Devil Wears Prada builds on the Psyche plot (consciously or not) to demonstrate that the marker of maturity for modern women can be finding meaningful and suitable work rather than an appropriate marriage partner. But in order to reach true maturity, she is also expected to find a way to maintain a delicate, elusive, hard-to-define work-life balance. As McKenna says in relation to one of her other films, "We weren't trying to make, 'I Don't Know How She Doesn't Do It.' […] She does it" (Dominus). She must figure out what is important to her in life and what she is willing to do or sacrifice to get it, and take responsibility for choosing her own future. A same-sex mentor can be crucial in this process. She may find the mentor she needs outside herself, or she may internalize an idealized image of the wise older teacher, but she must rebel at some point to avoid becoming her teacher and repeating her mistakes. Frankel reminds us that "[w]omen's mythology is all about cycling" (173) and "circular logic" (10). In *The Devil Wears Prada*, Miranda is the fixed center from which Andy journeys away and back in this phase of her life, each time coming back better, more skilled, having learned something, and perhaps storing up wisdom for her own eventual turn as a mentor.[9]

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[9] There is another recent movie in which Meryl Streep plays a mentor figure and where the marker of female maturity is finding one's proper work rather than a relationship. In *Julie and Julia* the two protagonists never meet, but young Julie Powell considers Julia Child her mentor nonetheless. In a key scene near the end of the movie, Julie despairs when she finds out that Julia does not approve of her blog project of working her way through *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Julie fears that her chosen mentor has proved to be flawed and perhaps even petty, but her husband points out that "The [Julia Child] in your head is the one that matters" (scene 27). Julie has in effect internalized the mentoring goddess figure but not submerged herself in her, and can pursue her path best by staying true to this image and not obsessing over the possibly imperfect, totally human Julia.

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