

FROM HANS Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* through Dickens's account of the Mantalini Mayfair dressmaking establishment in *Nicholas Nickleby* to Robert Altman's movie *Pret-a-Porter*, the fashion business has come in for a fair bit of stick over the years, and David Frankel's film **The Devil Wears Prada**, based on the novel by Lauren Weisberger, gives it both stick and carrot. Indeed, this deliberately ambiguous comedy, set in the Manhattan offices of *Runway* magazine (a lightly disguised *Vogue*), has its Chanel and wears it. Depending on how you react, it could be subtitled 'And Don't You Envy Him' or 'But God Shops at Oxfam'.

The story is told from the point of view of a high-minded, highly naive Andy (the charming Anne Hathaway), recently graduated from a distinguished Midwest university, who, despite her lack of any dress sense or knowledge of fashion, gets a job as second assistant to *Runway*'s editor, Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep), supposedly based on *Vogue*'s infamous Anna Wintour. Miranda is a cross between Lady Bracknell and Joseph Stalin, speaks in a low, threatening monotone and delivers withering, carefully honed put-downs accompanied by a wide range of sneers.

Her assistants are at her beck and call 24 hours a day, and her demands range from fetching coffee to obtaining a manuscript of the new Harry Potter (or two copies as she has twins). The film is amusing in a brittle way, but the smart one-liners are accompanied by serious homilies about the importance of the fashion industry, one delivered by Miranda, the other by her right-hand man (Stanley Tucci), an acerbic old queen who acts as Buttons to Andy's Cinderella and gives her a major makeover, *Pretty Woman*-style.

Streep and Tucci are splendid, as is Emily Blunt as Streep's Sloane first assistant. But it's rather predictable, and the excursion to fashion week in Paris is much less fun than a similar trip in the 1957 musical *Funny Face*, an earlier dig at *Vogue* where Kay Thompson impersonated Wintour's formidable predecessor, Diana Vreeland. Like Scorsese's

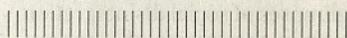
*The Departed*, the plotting of the movie wouldn't have been possible without mobile phones; among its many clichés is the throwing away of a mobile as a declaration of independence.

Written and directed by Iranian-American Ramin Bahrani, the minimalist **Man Push Cart** is a variation on *Bicycle Thieves* set in the same midtown Manhattan area as *The Devil Wears Prada*. But it's about the invisible world of immigrants eking out desperate livings. The hero is a Pakistani widower, a one-disc rock star (known as 'the Bono of Lahore') reduced every day before dawn to dragging his mobile canteen from a warehouse to sell coffee, bagels and doughnuts to office workers. He's briefly helped out by a well-off Pakistani, then dropped, and has a chaste romance with a young Spanish girl. Nothing goes right for him and his dreams of getting enough money to rent a flat so he can take his little son away from his disagreeable parents-in-law turn to dust. It's a sad, honest movie about the day-to-day courage and stoicism of decent people who cling to the lowest rung of the social ladder.

The heroine of *The Devil Wears Prada* comes from Ohio and has received a first-class education at the prestigious Northwestern University north of Chicago. The pathetic late teenagers in the raucous comedy **Accepted** are also from Ohio but have been rejected by every university they've applied to. So they invent their own college, South Harmon Institute of Technology (SHIT) and create a website to impress their parents and convert an abandoned hospital into a fake campus. But several hundred social misfits and fellow rejects read the website and enrol. Without a faculty or a curriculum, 1960s-style anti-elitist anarchy ensues and for a while the movie is fairly funny. Many people will be shocked by the educational ideas the film embraces. The infamous radical educationalist AS Neill of Summerhill fame would have loved it.

The week's other American film, Jonathan Demme's **Neil Young: Heart of Gold**, is an enjoyable concert movie recorded last year in Nashville at the former home of the Grand Ole Opry and built around the 60-year-old Canadian singer-songwriter's folksy *Prairie Wind* album. Written while he was awaiting

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major brain surgery in early 2005, the album features autobiographical songs about farm life, Young's boyhood dog, his dad, his first loves and God. Demme hasn't just turned his camera on any old concert. Demme and Young devised the show, had special backdrops and costumes designed and filmed it with a dozen cameras, none of them pointed at the audience: Young performs on a guitar that once belonged to Hank Williams, and he's accompanied by a great line-up of musicians and an African-American gospel choir. Irresistible.

A very different sort of documentary, Sophie Fiennes's **The Pervert's Guide to Cinema** is a three-part illustrated lecture by Slovenian philosopher and film critic Slavoj Žižek, editor of the celebrated book *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*. Žižek believes that 'cinema is the ultimate pervert art. It doesn't give you what you desire – it tells you how to desire'. Using clips from more than 40 movies, he puts the cinema and its audience on his consulting room couch or

on the cutting-room floor. And the films range in time from the Marx Brothers' first Hollywood film *Monkey Business* (he regards Groucho, Chico and Harpo as respectively the Super Ego, the Ego and the Id) to Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*. Some of his points are on the obvious side and his targets are mostly films of a self-consciously psychoanalytic character.

But he performs with brio and Fiennes gets her picture out of the lecture hall by having Žižek talk about *Vertigo* while visiting San Francisco, *The Birds* from a rowing boat in Bodega Bay, and the murder in *The Conversation* while staying in a room at the same hotel.

The two other British films are not to be lingered over. **Brothers of the Head** is a cod rockumentary by Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe, the pair responsible for the revealing authentic documentary *Lost in La Mancha*. It traces the careers of conjoined twins from a desolate area of East Anglia (they're played by identical twins, Harry and Luke Treadaway) who enjoyed a brief career as punk rock musicians in the 1970s. I didn't get the point or the joke.

**Rabbit on the Moon**, an Anglo-Mexican co-production, is an ambitious but sadly inept political thriller in which an innocent couple – an Englishwoman (the sparky Lorraine Pilkington) who's nursing a baby girl, and her husband, a Mexican artist – become involved in a political assassination in Mexico City and flee for their lives. MI5, MI6 and the MoD are involved, unconvincingly though not improbably.