

FASHION THROUGH THE FRAMEWORK OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: FROM HELL TO PASSION

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This article explores the emotional and cultural dimensions of the fashion industry through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), focusing on Lauren Weisberger's novel "The Devil Wears Prada". The study examines two central conceptual metaphors: FASHION IS HELL and FASHION IS PASSION. These metaphors reveal the psychological contradictions embedded in the world of high fashion, its capacity to both exhaust and inspire. Drawing on qualitative textual analysis, the research traces metaphorical mappings between source and target domains, showing how conceptual metaphors shape character experience and narrative tone. In the metaphor FASHION IS HELL the fashion workplace is framed as a punishing, hierarchical environment ruled by fear and submission. The dominant figure of Miranda Priestly represents power, control, and emotional oppression, while characters like Andy Sachs embody the vulnerability and struggle of working under extreme conditions. This metaphor also functions as a modern commentary on toxic work culture and stress in corporate settings. In contrast, FASHION IS PASSION illustrates how fashion evokes admiration, desire, and identity. Emotional language, intense visual descriptions, and symbolic fashion elements contribute to constructing fashion as a space of desire, creativity, and personal transformation. Through passion, fashion becomes a form of self-expression and emotional investment, where characters define themselves and others through style. Both metaphors function as cognitive tools that help readers understand the complexity of emotional engagement in professional environments. The article argues that metaphor in fiction not only conveys individual experience but also reflects broader cultural ideologies related to success, ambition, and aesthetic power in the world of fashion.

Key words: conceptual metaphor, source domain, target domain, mapping, fashion.

МОДА КРІЗЬ ПРИЗМУ КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНОЇ МЕТАФОРИ: ВІД ПЕКЛА ДО ПРИСТРАСТІ

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У статті досліджено емоційні та культурні виміри модної індустрії крізь призму теорії концептуальної метафори (Conceptual Metaphor Theory) на прикладі роману Лорен Вайсбергер «Диявол носить Prada». У центрі аналізу дві ключові метафори — FASHION IS HELL та FASHION IS PASSION. Ці метафори відображають психологічні суперечності, притаманні світу високої моди, а саме її здатність одночасно виснажувати й надихати. Спираючись на якісний текстовий аналіз, дослідження простежує метафоричне мапування між доменами джерела та цілі, показуючи, як концептуальна метафора відображає досвід персонажів та емоційний настрій розповіді. Метафора FASHION IS HELL показує модне середовище як жорстку, ієрархічну систему, засновану на страху, покорі та психологічному тиску. Образ Міранди Прістлі уособлює владу та емоційний контроль, а Енді Сакс — вразливість і боротьбу в суворих умовах. Ця метафора також критикує токсичну робочу культуру та стрес у професійній сфері. З іншого боку, FASHION IS PASSION підкреслює красу, бажання та емоційну залученість. Через яскраві описи, символічні деталі та емоційну лексику мода постає як засіб самовираження, натхнення й ідентичності. Персонажі визначають себе через стиль і знаходять у моді джерело особистого зростання. Обидві метафори виконують когнітивну функцію, допомагаючи читачеві осмислити складні емоційні процеси в професійному середовищі. У статті стверджується, що метафора у художньому тексті не лише передає індивідуальне сприйняття, а й відображає ширші культурні ідеології, пов'язані з успіхом, амбіціями та естетичною владою в модному світі.

Ключові слова: концептуальна метафора, домен джерела, домен цілі, мапування, мода.

Introduction. Fashion is more than just clothing or trendsetting; it is a powerful cultural and emotional language that shapes identities, relationships, and values. The way we talk about fashion often reflects the complexity of our experiences with it ranging from admiration and aspiration to pressure and discomfort. Literature, in particular, offers a rich space where these emotional and psychological dimensions of fashion can be explored.

One effective tool for analyzing such representations is Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which suggests that we understand abstract ideas through more concrete

or embodied experiences. In literature, conceptual metaphors help readers grasp complex emotional states or social realities by linking them to familiar source domains such as war, journey, or as, in the case of this paper, hell and passion.

This study explores how conceptual metaphors shape our understanding of the fashion industry in “The Devil Wears Prada” by Lauren Weisberger. Specifically, it examines two key metaphors that emerge in the novel: FASHION IS HELL and FASHION IS PASSION. These metaphors offer contrasting yet complementary views of the fashion world, both emotionally draining and deeply inspiring. By analyzing how these metaphors are constructed and expressed through language and narrative, this paper reveals the psychological and cultural tensions embedded in the world of high fashion.

The aim of this article is to examine how metaphorical mappings, as proposed in CMT, structure the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of the fashion industry as represented in fiction. By identifying consistent source-target correspondences, the study explores how metaphors contribute to the portrayal of professional identity, status dynamics, and individual transformation in “The Devil Wears Prada”. The discussion is based on close reading of selected passages from the novel, interpreted through the lens of CMT.

Overview of theoretical sources. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), proposes that people understand abstract concepts through more concrete experiences. This understanding occurs via systematic cross-domain mappings, where a source domain (e.g., war, fire, hell) structures a target domain (e.g., politics, love, fashion). Metaphors are thus not only linguistic expressions but also cognitive structures shaping perception, reasoning, and discourse (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010; Gibbs, 1994).

CMT has been applied across many fields — from political rhetoric (Charteris-Black, 2005) to media discourse (Musolff, 2006) and education (Cameron, 2003). In literary studies, metaphors function as deeper narrative frameworks that organize characters’ emotional worlds and cultural positions (Semino, 2008; Stockwell, 2002). Studies have shown how metaphor shapes public understanding of abstract phenomena such as political crises (Bilyk & Pyliachyk, 2018), future in electoral discourse (Bilyk, Ivanotchak, & Pyliachyk, 2021), and pandemic experiences (Bilyk et al., 2022). In fiction, metaphors enrich character development and narrative structure. For example, Bystrov (2014) explores the fractal metaphor LIFE IS A STORY

in biographical fiction, demonstrating how metaphorical patterns reflect identity and meaning-making.

Fictional texts often embody conceptual metaphors that reflect and critique social norms, including power, identity, gender, and professional life.

This study follows this line of metaphor analysis within fiction, aiming to show how metaphor reveals underlying tensions and values in “The Devil Wears Prada”. The focus is on metaphorical mappings that structure characters’ emotional responses and social roles in the fashion domain, through the metaphors FASHION IS HELL and FASHION IS PASSION. Such metaphors construct fashion not just as a style industry, but as an emotionally charged experience. This approach contributes to the growing body of metaphor research in fiction and highlights how conceptual metaphors structure narrative and cultural meaning.

Research Methods and Materials. This study employs a qualitative textual analysis based on the principles of CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to examine how metaphor shapes representations of the fashion industry in Lauren Weisberger’s “The Devil Wears Prada”. The focus lies on two dominant conceptual metaphors FASHION IS HELL and FASHION IS PASSION which serve as interpretive lenses for understanding the emotional and social dynamics of the novel’s fashion world.

The material analyzed includes the full text of the 2003 novel, which offers numerous examples of metaphorical language embedded in character reflections and narrative descriptions. Key scenes were selected for their strong figurative content and relevance to the themes under investigation.

The analysis emphasizes conceptual mappings, which refer to structured relationships between source and target domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010, 2015). Following the standard approach in conceptual metaphor analysis, the study identifies metaphorical expressions and then traces the systematic mappings from source domains (HELL, PASSION) to the target domain (FASHION).

The metaphorical mappings are not limited to isolated phrases but extend to whole scenes, attitudes, and character developments. The study explores how these mappings shape not only the emotional tone of the story but also broader cultural assumptions about fashion and power.

The method relies on close reading, manual coding, and interpretive analysis. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how metaphor functions as a cognitive and narrative device, shaping both the story world and the reader’s perception of fashion as a complex, often contradictory domain.

Discussion and Results. The conceptual metaphor FASHION IS HELL plays a central role in Lauren Weisberger's "The Devil Wears Prada", and it starts right from the title. The word *devil* immediately creates a certain expectation in the reader's mind suggesting that something dark or punishing is connected to the world of fashion. In the story, this idea is closely tied to Miranda Priestly, the powerful and intimidating editor-in-chief of *Runway* magazine. She is not just a strict boss, she is portrayed as someone who makes life very hard for her employees. This sets the tone for how the fashion industry is presented in the novel: not just exciting or glamorous, but stressful, and at times even cruel.

The title works like a metaphor in itself. It invites the reader to see Miranda as a kind of "devil" figure and the Runway office as a version of "hell" — a place where people feel trapped, judged, and overwhelmed.

So, the title "The Devil Wears Prada" isn't just catchy or ironic. It introduces one of the main metaphors that helps us understand the emotional pressure and intensity of life in the high fashion world. It shows that behind the beautiful clothes and polished image, there is a world of fear, power struggles, and emotional tolls.

The above-mentioned metaphor is grounded in a series of consistent mappings between the source domain (HELL) and the target domain (FASHION), including:

Source Domain (HELL)

the devil
living in hell
hell on earth
torture and submission

Target Domain (FASHION)

Miranda Priestly (editor-in-chief)
working for *Runway*
the *Runway* office
office hierarchy and work culture

Miranda's dominance over her employees is not merely strict management, it is portrayed as psychological torment. Andy Sachs, the main character, often describes her work experience using words and phrases associated with fear and suffering. In one scene, a visitor refuses to enter the office after seeing Miranda:

"A woman of around thirty-five stepped forward to board, but stopped two feet from the door when she saw Miranda standing inside. 'Oh, I, uh...' she stammered loudly, looking frantically around her for an excuse not to enter our *private hell*" (Weisberger, 2003).

This lexical choice, *private hell*, shows how Andy and her coworkers feel trapped and overwhelmed. Miranda's presence turns the workplace into a space of constant tension. Hell is not abstract, it is the physical and emo-

tional landscape of the *Runway* office ruled by Miranda's whims. The metaphor intensifies in a scene where Andy is berated for failing to locate a non-existent article:

"I know Ms. Priestly is a crazy woman and I don't doubt that she's *making your life a living hell*, but I just can't produce an article that doesn't exist. Do you understand?" (Weisberger, 2003).

The phrase *living hell* is repeated in the novel, showing that working at *Runway* is not just difficult — it is emotionally exhausting. The infernal metaphor is not limited to Andy's perspective. Former employees, too, characterize Miranda as a tyrant:

"That woman *made my life a living hell* for the year I worked there, and I never even had to exchange a single word with her" (Weisberger, 2003).

This confirms that the feeling of being in "hell" is not limited to Andy. Many others describe their time at *Runway* in the same way.

In one humorous yet painful scene, Andy describes climbing a hill in an evening gown and heels as a *hill of hell*:

"What cruel, cruel sadist would make a woman in a skintight, floor-length gown and spiked heels climb such a *hill of hell*?" (Weisberger, 2003).

Here, fashion itself becomes a form of punishment. The clothing, which is supposed to represent beauty and style, turns into a source of pain. The scene symbolizes how difficult it is to succeed in the fashion world: the climb is steep, and the cost is high.

The metaphor also reflects Andy's emotional journey. Like a character in a classic story, she enters a "hellish" place, faces many trials, and slowly begins to understand more about herself and the industry. Miranda, though portrayed as cruel, also has power and control. She is both feared and admired, which is another sign that fashion is not only hellish, but also seductive and influential.

So, the metaphor FASHION IS HELL helps readers understand the emotional and mental challenges of working in the high fashion world. It shows how the industry can be glamorous on the outside but deeply demanding and punishing on the inside.

Another important conceptual metaphor found in "The Devil Wears Prada" is FASHION IS PASSION. In the novel fashion is not just a job or a form of entertainment, it is something that demands intense emotional commitment, admiration, and even obsession. The metaphor is based on the mapping between the source domain PASSION and the target domain FASHION, as shown below:

Source Domain (PASSION)

physical attraction

emotional intensity

admiration of a person

signature element

Target Domain (FASHION)

attraction to fashion and style

dedication to fashion

admiration of fashion icons and designers

symbol of personal style and identity

Characters in the novel express deep feelings about fashion, describing it with admiration and desire. One example is when Andy observes a colleague's stylish appearance: "The belted jacket cinched her already tiny waist and complemented the perfectly fitted pencil skirt she wore beneath it. She looked dynamite" (Weisberger, 2003).

Here, fashion is not only about looking good, it's about feeling powerful and admired. The use of the word *dynamite* suggests that appearance has explosive emotional impact.

Another character, a male model, is described in a way that highlights his passionate presence: "He had 250 pounds stretched over his incredibly tall frame and was so muscular, so positively ripped, that it looked as though he might explode out of his denim catsuit" (Weisberger, 2003).

Such vivid descriptions create an emotional atmosphere around fashion. It is more than simple attractive beauty, it becomes a way of expressing strong feelings, even desire.

Miranda Priestly is also surrounded by passion. One admirer declares: "Miranda Priestly, you're not only the darling of the fashion world, you're the Queen of my world!" This emotional language positions Miranda as an object of deep admiration. She represents more than just fashion leadership, she becomes a symbol of desire, power, and aspiration.

Passion is also shown through Miranda's personal style. She is known for always wearing a white Hermès scarf:

"She *always, always, always* wears a single white *Hermus scarf*... They're like, her signature. Everyone knows that Miranda Priestly wears a white *Hermus scarf*, no matter what. How cool is that?" (Weisberger, 2003).

The Hermès scarf becomes Miranda's iconic symbol, illustrating how passion for fashion translates into consistent aesthetic branding. For Miranda, fashion is both personal and professional identity; for others, it is a source of fascination, imitation, and aspiration. Passion is directed not only toward luxury items but toward the people who embody fashion excellence. The repetition of *always* and the excitement in the speaker's tone show that this small fashion detail has become a passionate symbol of Miranda's identity. It is something admired and remembered by everyone around her.

Through these examples we see that fashion in the novel is full of passion — from how people dress to how they talk about fashion leaders and icons. The metaphor FASHION IS PASSION highlights how emotionally invested the characters are. To succeed in fashion, it is not enough to look good or follow trends. One must truly care, sometimes to an extreme degree.

This metaphor contrasts with FASHION IS HELL. While fashion can be painful and demanding, it is also something people deeply love. The two metaphors together show the complexity of the fashion world: it is both cruel and beautiful, harsh and inspiring.

Conclusion. The analysis of *The Devil Wears Prada* through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory reveals the dual nature of fashion as both oppressive and inspiring. By looking at two main metaphors FASHION IS HELL and FASHION IS PASSION we can see how fashion is not just about clothes. It's also about power, pressure, admiration, and desire.

The metaphor FASHION IS HELL helps show how stressful and painful the fashion industry can be. Characters feel trapped, overworked, and constantly judged. Their experiences are described in ways that remind us of suffering and punishment.

At the same time, the metaphor FASHION IS PASSION highlights admiration, intensity, and personal identification, framing fashion as an object of desire, creativity, and devotion. These contrasting metaphors do not cancel each other out, rather, they co-exist to reflect the ambivalent emotional landscape of fashion work. They show that the industry can be both inspiring and exhausting. This mix of emotions makes the story powerful and helps readers better understand the world the characters live in. By using CMT and uncovering the metaphorical mappings in literary narrative, we gain access to the cultural and emotional underpinnings of professional life, identity formation, and aesthetic value systems. The findings also demonstrate that fiction is a useful place to study metaphors, as characters' experiences help reveal how people think and feel in society. Future research could explore other metaphors in different novels to better understand how fashion is shaped by language.

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