

Wheat Is Cerulean Blue

An Essay By Imogen Mann

Wheat is the most important cereal crop in the UK, and arguably the world. It's the essential ingredient to most of our staple foods.

Flour.

Bread flour. Plain flour. Whole grain flour. Self raising flour. Maida flour. Rye flour. 00 super fine flour. Organic. Regular...

The list goes on, and on, and on, and doesn't even include the livestock feeds that are also essential to our existence.

It's sobering to think that all the staple and delicious foods that this flour is turned into come from the ground seeds of this cultivated grass.

Which invites the question: how do farmers decide which varieties to grow, and when to grow them?

The answer seems complex, as logically it involves the weighing up of multiple data inputs, cost analyses, market trends, plus a healthy dose of individual expertise and experience.

But look deeper and the answer is actually much simpler.

Let me explain...

In the 2006 film *The Devil Wears Prada*, there's a wonderful scene in which Meryl Streep's character, Miranda Priestly, is putting together a cover look. When she's presented with two

seemingly identical blue belts, her new assistant Andy giggles. What follows is brutal.

Here's the relevant extract from the screenplay by Aline Brosh McKenna:

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MIRANDA

Is something funny?

ANDY

No, no, no. It's just...

And MIRANDA says nothing. ANDY twists in the wind.

ANDY (CONT'D)

It's just that both of those belts look the same to me. I'm still learning about this stuff, so-

And the silence is deafening. Everyone looks to see what MIRANDA will do.

MIRANDA

This... stuff? Okay. I understand. You think this has nothing to do with you. You go to your closet and select, say, that lumpy blue sweater because you're trying to tell the world that you take yourself too seriously to care about what's on your body. What you don't know is that your sweater is not blue. It's not even sky blue. It's cerulean. You also don't know that in 2002, De La Renta did a collection of cerulean gowns, Yves St. Laurent showed a cerulean military jacket, Dolce did skirts with cerulean beads, and in our September issue we

did the definitive layout on the colour. Cerulean quickly appeared in eight other major collections, then the secondary and department store lines and then trickled down to some lovely Casual Corner, where you no doubt stumbled on it.

That colour is worth millions of dollars and many jobs. And here you are, thinking you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry. In truth, you are wearing a sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room. From a pile of stuff.

She smiles at ANDY. Who quakes.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

That's all.

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The point is this:

Aside from being a brilliantly written and performed monologue, the character Miranda could just as easily have been talking about wheat.

Food production may not have the glamour of the fashion industry, but at its heart, it is no different.

To the average person, one type of grain looks very much like another. It's only in the detail, the milling of the seeds, the refining of the flour, the labelling, that we discern the differences.

Wheat is more than just a crop. More than just *stuff*.

The foodstuffs derived from it are collectively worth billions of pounds and hundreds of thousands of jobs.

And it's the few big seed companies that really decide what their client farmers grow and therefore ultimately what we eat.

We all think we make choices.

But who chose the flour used to make the bread for that sandwich you ate last week? It wasn't the sandwich maker, the baker or even the farmer who grew the grains.

It was the seed company.

This is the reality.

Wheat is our cerulean blue.

However...

As with everything, there are exceptions, and if you know what a landrace is, you know what I mean. If you don't, well, that's for another day.

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