

Theatrical Tantrums, Transubstantiation and the Referential Necessities of Vogue

My First Holy Communion photograph displays freshly coiffured, laundered albeit pensive miniature brides and grooms, 'lovingly' flanked by cane - wielding, black robed Catholic nuns – “old witches who’ve escaped from the world!”- a vitriolic description my mother would often attribute to Women Of The Order. The morning had started badly. My mum wore polka dots, a white corsage, vertiginous hair, and an expression devoid of the milk-of-human-kindness in response to my protestations of “please don’t make me do it!”

My attire, seven deadly sins consisting of:

1. Bell sleeved, knee length, white lace wedding dress, fitted, with a gentle flair from the waist (despised),
2. Daisy encrusted halo attached to a bulbous silk net veil (abhorred),
3. Pearl- buttoned white cotton gloves (tolerated-due to imaginary macabre surgical implications),
4. White purse (containing a small amount -of what I presumed to be - silence money),
5. Lilac shoes (impractical for riding my beloved bike),
6. Marqcasite silver crucifix and bible (beautiful),
7. Short white socks (no strong opinion).

Incredulity surmised the situation. I was under the impression that I was to marry Christ and aware that the nuns in my primary school had willingly surrendered to this, I had never seen them happy with their marital lot or happy with anything whatsoever. I had not chosen my betrothal dress or indeed the groom; I was without a voice in this whole pitiful debacle. The Communion church hall was festooned with ribbons, garlands of flowers and a barrage of diminutive brides indulging in competitive dress wars spurned on by covetous mothers - and grooms! A plethora of grooms, were they to marry Our Lady? So many questions all dismissed as being inopportune or inappropriate, as the sacred event, neared its crescendo. At the helm, the formidable Sister Mary - the female incarnation of the child- catcher from *Chitty-Chitty Bang Bang* - informed trusting faces that we would receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and not what the uninitiated eye perceived as bread and wine. I was fraught with suppositions of what this actually meant, and glancing at the faces of other children, could see their desperate need for a return to the comfort of oblivion. Transubstantiation was not a buzzword in my class at the time.

During a recent telephone conversation with my mother, I asked if she thought the Holy Communion ritual of veiled brides slightly archaic and odd. After what seemed to be lengthy and protracted thought she said, ‘yes it was really very odd’ I waited ‘...I dressed you in short white socks, when the vogue for the day was clearly knee – highs.’