

## 8.20.16 Magdalene College Vita & Richard

About six years ago, when Richard was teaching at Harvard, he asked me over to meet his girlfriend Vita for the first time. I was a little nervous, but after an hour hanging out with this brilliant, funny, vital woman, I had to pull Richard into the kitchen and tell him “Comrade, God is being very good to you.”

But now I fear I have committed a serious offence. Richard tells me that the Cambridge City Council prohibits any religious expression in its civil marriages, that using the G word can get the wedding party prosecuted and forfeit their security deposit. But since this is an anarchist wedding party I feel we should resist this oppressive demand. Why does the bourgeois State get to tell us how we can toast love?

Because I simply can't give Vita and Richard a purely secular toast. They are the most Enchanted people I know. For all of their postmodern, left wing, anti-colonialism, everything they do has a kind of devotional ecstasy. I knew this early on about Richard. We met when we were about 20, appropriately enough in 1984. If you can imagine Richard as a 20-year-old boy, well, it's not very hard, he was exactly the same as he is now. And we talked about liberation theology and Third World revolution, as only Harvard undergraduates can, and Richard would exhale and say: “The very idea of progress in history, all this Hegel and Marx, it is only a way of saying that God is Love.” He didn't mean this in a Church-of-England kind of way. He meant it more in a Rastafarian kind of way: “In the Kingdom of Jah, Man shall reign.” But because we were lonely 20-year-old boys, who had nothing better to do on a Saturday night “God is Love” here meant something more specific: “O Lord, you who control the dialectics of history and overthrow great empires, while you're at it, could you please also send us a couple of girlfriends?” And this kind of prayer does get answered, just never the way you think it will.

The slogan “God is Love” means radically different things in different eras. In the Middle Ages, no one had any doubt about the God part. It was obvious we were subjects of a supernatural administrator, who doled out tiny crumbs of joy during famines and plagues and 30-year life expectancies. But here “God is Love” was really proprietary- God Owns Love and only the orthodox were eligible to taste it. And that’s not Vita and Richard. In the modern era, the slogan is reversed, we are so proud of our dating apps and reality shows that we hardly need God at all, we have achieved an Efficient Market for forming compatible relationships, and love isn’t divine- it’s just an algorithm.

But none of this captures what is so blindingly obvious about Vita and Richard- that Love is *miraculous*. I don’t just mean “love is good, love is lovely, Yay Love!” No, Love is unexpected, bizarre, preposterous, inconvenient, disruptive, beyond the power of rational minds to contrive, insistent, implausible, through the looking glass, a Black Swan, a Blake Angel, it’s the Leicester City Football Club. It’s an enchantment that doesn’t wear off, the Fairy Queen in love with an ass – (no offense, Richard.) It’s divine because it’s irrational, and the older we get, the more it’s like oxygen or food, it’s a sustaining madness that we would die without.

Chris talked about dancing. Throughout the ceremony I thought about what Emma Goldman said to Lenin: “If I can’t dance I don’t want to be part of your revolution” And she didn’t just mean that she wanted to do the Hokey-Pokey in Red Square, though this is something I can see Vita and Richard doing- she meant something almost religious: “If I can’t give myself up to the irrational grace of the Universe, this revolution will not be worth fighting for.” So I am so proud that my comrade has stayed true to his inner light, that he has found and offered himself to Vita, someone as luminous as he is, so please give me your glasses, to Vita and Richard: God is Love.