

Katherine Bucknell interviewed Don Bachardy on May 17, 2016. You can hear excerpts from their conversation in Episode 11 of The Animals Podcast and you can also read them transcribed below.

KB: I spoke to Don the day before his 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday in Santa Monica. I reminded him that he had told me a few years ago that the Palace Theater is huge, a good venue for musicals. “It dwarfed this chamber projection, the fatal mistake was the theatre. That’s something that you said to me.”

DB: “Oh, it was just awful, this *huge* hall for this tiny little what do you call it—chamber piece—which should be done in a small intimate theatre, and here we were in this giant theater and Albert Marre was just *hell*. He was so formal, so square, so humourless, god, it was just *agony* for us.

...

KB: In 1967, when the novel *A Meeting by the River* was published and even in 1979 when the play was staged, this question of bisexuality was a very particular--it was a very particular moment in history when people were living in the closet, very divided about what they owed society or family life as against what they really felt about themselves, so--you and Chris were having none of that. You were trying to live according to your true natures.

DB: And when you think in the fifties when Chris and I started living together, it was considered—I think we were really quite surprised when we found out how well known we were for being trail blazers-- or I guess somebody as well-known as Chris publicly had never really flaunted a boyfriend like Chris had.

...

KB: You used to tell a great story about Stephen Spender coming to visit you and Chris and enjoying--

DB: Yes, coming to the Queer Oasis, “Oh, to get away from Natasha and the children and to be with the two of you where I can talk and be myself.” And then [laughter] we would take him to the airport and leave him off, and then [laughter] on the way home, we would play the family scene with Stephen arriving back to Natasha, “Oh, what a relief to get away from that louche [laughter] house with all the boys and the queers and [laughter] the men and to get back to something wholesome, the children and you, Natasha.” [laughter] I mean we would laugh but we knew it really happened, too. And Natasha, to give her due credit, I think she kind of got on to the routine, and wasn’t all that convinced. She could be a pretty good sport.

...

KB: Let’s transfer from sexuality to spirituality and think about Chris’s life and the Hollywood Vedanta Society and the Temple. That he went through a period in 1944 when he was really genuinely trying to commit or considering that he would try to commit to being a monk. And he decided he couldn’t do that. The group life, the chastity—I mean so many things just were not true to him, and giving up his own name and his own identity particularly

because he was a writer—and this idea that he was a voice and a name that was his essence.

DB: Yes--

KB: And you see him, in his diaries, writing frequently over the next decade or fifteen years about the difficulty of choosing between being *in* the Temple *out* of the Temple--a devotee with a domestic life at home. I've been looking at when he met you and became increasingly committed to you, I can definitely identify anxieties that he had about was this going to come between him and God, and how could he live these two lives. And he certainly came over the long term to a firm conviction that he needed to live both lives and that that was what he was *meant* to do.

DB: Yes, and it was *very* necessary. And a difficult moment, introducing Swami to me. But he knew he had to do it, that he couldn't just be discreet with Swami. He was serious enough about him that when he got involved with me, Swami had to know and had to accept. And that was a test I think he probably dreaded making for fear that Swami wouldn't be up to it. But Swami was so determined to hang on to him, that he made himself do it, and made himself accept me as a Vedantist as well--which he did. And we both, Swami and I, I think we understood perfectly what was going on. [laughter] Which didn't mean that we weren't both serious at the same time.

KB: So, in the play, the way that Patrick is accepted to sit in the place on the other side of Swami on Swami's seat, you were accepted into Swami's love. Not that you were Patrick, but you were included in that.

DB: Oh, yes. That was, ah-- very necessary.

KB: I'm thinking about how Chris had kept his own life in a lot of different compartments for many years, and separated certain friends from one another, family from friends, life abroad, religious life, home life, sex life, devotional life—

DB: It was a great relief for him, yes. To finally kind of settle – and, ah—introducing Swami and me was a very important event. And Prabhavananda knew he had to make the grade as I knew. And the truth was we both weren't kidding. That I was serious about the Vedanta, too, as incredulous as I might have been and was at the start. It wasn't easy for me myself to believe in me as a Vedantist, but finally I had to. Because I wasn't kidding either. It's still very -- as important to me now as -- [tears] I don't know why I can't do it without demonstration, but I'm a perfectly sincere Vedantist. [sigh] It gives me great strength. I don't think I could have done it without him. And it is so much a part of my feeling for Chris. It's now—the two things have become —they're no longer separated. Loving Chris and being a Vedantist are the same thing now.

KB: So that's very beautiful. Because I'm thinking now that this novel *A Meeting by the River* which opens up all these different compartments of Chris's life through this whole variety of characters speaking separately from one another are joined on that stone seat, and of course, the title is *A Meeting by the River*. It's like the river of life. It's this moment at which all the walls between the separate compartments come down. And the life—your life-- is unified, and is now one life in which your religious belief and your personal love is all of a piece.

DB: Yes, it's such a relief—ah—yeah--

KB: Does it upset you—you were saying why you can't do it without an example? Chris would take you along, you would go together. Does it upset you, now that he's gone, that you don't act it out on a daily basis? You *think* about it?

DB: Oh—no. I'm a perfectly true Vedantist. I say my prayers every day. Every night. It is a great source of strength to me, and the two have become one. The Vedanta and the strength I get from Chris are the same thing. Still. And even more so now than ever. Yes, it's how I've survived. That's the triumph of—my triumph, and the triumph of Vedanta. I mean it really does work, and it's all of a piece. I couldn't have done it without it.