

Francis Brabazon Collection:
Significance Assessment Report

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Woombye, 2008

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Collection Background

The collection began as the personal library of Baron Frederick von Frankenberg, which was accumulated in Germany and other parts of Europe c.1900-1920s. It was initially housed at Camden (outside Sydney, NSW). The library formed the core resource for Australia's first Sufi group and other persons interested in the arts and spirituality at that time. From this phase, the collection gained early editions of Inayat Khan's works and the only extant material on the early Sufi Society in Australia.

In 1950, the Modernist poet Francis Brabazon inherited the collection when he succeeded the Baron as head of the Sufi Society. Thereafter, and until 1959, the collection was housed in the centre Francis was constructing at Beacon's Hill (Sydney). It continued to be used by Francis and his associates. Francis also added his own library, which consisted of books and recordings he acquired in Melbourne, New York and elsewhere. Some of these acquisitions reflect Francis' role in early Australian Modernism. This enlarged it into an unusually comprehensive collection on the world's literary and scriptural texts, which Francis then utilized in the creation of his own poetry, prose and music. Also from this period came many notes and drafts of Francis' early works.

Between 1959 and 1969, Francis Brabazon resided in India with his spiritual master, Meher Baba. The collection was moved up to Woombye (Queensland) where Francis and other followers had created what became one of the world's three main Meher Baba centres: Avatar's Abode. The collection has been kept at this location ever since.

From Francis' Indian sojourn, the library inherited many rare editions of works by and about Meher Baba and other Indian spiritual and literary figures, as well as more working notes and early editions of Francis' works. Once Francis returned from India (1969) and until his demise (1984), the collection also accumulated volumes and ephemera associated with the Alternative-inclined youth who were drawn into Francis' orbit at this time.

Since Francis' demise, the collection has become an integral part of the historic buildings, relics and other key elements of Avatar's Abode. In 1996, it was given its own library space and archives. The collection is frequently used by the local community of Meher Baba followers, as well as by local, inter-state and international visitors with specific interest in Meher Baba or in the various literary, artistic and spiritual traditions that the library encompasses.

A. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

1. Historic Significance

Connection with Baron Frederick von Frankenberg/ early Sufism in Australia

The collection is of interest on several levels: firstly, as the personal library of rare translations of Eastern literature, collated by an elite German immigrant: Baron Frederick von Frankenberg. The Baron had been an Officer for the German Crown Prince. He had a pronounced interest in collecting rare works on Eastern/ Islamic literature and Eastern spirituality, apparently due to his family's one-time sojourn in North Africa, and his subsequent close fellowship with Hazrat Inayat Khan (1883-1927) – one of the first Indian musicians and Chisti Sufi teachers to visit and live in the West. On the death of Inayat, the Baron migrated to Australia and married Olivia Ward – a concert pianist from a successful Sydney business family.¹ The Baron became a noted identity in the country town of Camden (NSW), and is remembered there as contributing to the cultural and civic life of the district.² The Baron founded Australia's first Sufi society (1927-1950), and utilized his library to instruct this group. Thus the collection is important as the main source of documents pertaining to the early development of Islamic mysticism in Australia.

The importance of this component of the collection is recognised by the current Sufi movement in Australia, and was the topic of Celia Genn's thesis on early Sufism in Australia.³ The collection has already excited debate on the early Muslim history of Camden, and as documenting some of the restrictions and censorship faced by Germans in Australia during World War II.⁴

Connection with Francis Brabazon and Australian Modernism

This collection thereafter became the property of, and working source material for, the Australian poet Francis Brabazon (1907-1984). Francis Brabazon took over the leadership of the Baron's Sufi group in 1950, and was given the library as part of his new

¹ Ross Keating, *Francis Brabazon – a modern Hafiz* (World Axis: Beacon Hill, 2002), 40.

² Iliana Stillitano, 'Part of Our History,' *Camden Advertiser*, 21 May 2008, pp.1-3.

³ See Celia A Genn, 'A Modern Western Sufism,' in Martin van Bruessen & Julia Day Howell, eds. *Sufism and the 'Modern' in India* (I B Taurus 2007), 267. See also www.smia.com.au

⁴ Iliana Stillitano, 'Part of Our History,' *Camden Advertiser*, 21 May 2008, pp.1-3.

status. Francis added to the collection and also included his own works, to the extent that the Brabazon collection is now the only intact corpus of all Brabazon's works, including much of the poet's working notes and sources.

Brabazon was known as a friend and colleague of Nolan, Tucker, Perceval and Judith Wright. He lived for a while with a number of such early Modernists, exhibiting paintings alongside Arthur Boyd, William Dobell, Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Oswald Hall and others from c.1937 onwards, most notably in the C.A.S. exhibitions in Melbourne (Hotel Australia and Athenaeum Gallery) during 1941 and 1942.⁵ Francis' room, which these men called 'The Dump,' was a meeting place for many of the Melbourne bohemians, with whom he studied at the National Gallery Art School.⁶ Francis's association with the Modernists continued to be common knowledge in literary circles into the 1960s⁷.

Brabazon introduced arts patrons John and Sydney Reed to *The Angry Penguins* editor Max Harris.⁸ Indeed, the friendship of Brabazon, Harris and others helped Harris' journal develop as a mouthpiece for modernist literature in Australia.⁹ This was in no small part due to Brabazon's passion for the key concepts of Modernism. As Max Harris would later express, it was Brabazon's paintings that initiated:

“...the first appreciation of the naïve or primitive symbolism in the Australian art world... It influenced the entire *Angry Penguins* community.”¹⁰

Even so, Francis' interest in art was very short lived. After producing only a few works, he turned his attention towards literature. This became his focus for the rest of his life. Some of his poems were published in leading cultural magazines of Melbourne at this time such as *A Comment*, but here again, his future potential was curtailed when he began dabbling in Chinese, Sufi and Hindu mysticism and added this perspective to his writings. This was little understood at this time, and Francis quickly lost his audience.

Thus, despite publishing about twenty books during his life, Francis' creations were little valued for many decades. His peers accused him of having “gone on the gurus.”¹¹ Nevertheless, Francis won the esteemed *Greenwood Prize* of the Poetry Society of London for “best long poem” in 1966.¹² He also, between c.1959 and 1960, enjoyed some fame for his opus work on the history of religions: *Stay with God*. This received good reviews in the USA, Australia and India. At the same time, part of his *Singing Threshold* (1958) was broadcast by the BBC.¹³

⁵ Ibid, 45, 47.

⁶ Robert Rouse, *The Water Carrier* (Deesh: Woombye, 1998), 12, 17.

⁷ Dr. S. T. Barnard, 'Rum Baba – Review: Francis Brabazon, The East-West Gathering,' *Australian Book Review* Vol.3:2, December 1963, 45.

⁸ Ross Keating, 45.

⁹ Ibid, 46.

¹⁰ Max Harris, correspondence to Ross Keating, 23 May 1990, in above, p.47.

¹¹ S. T. Barnard, 'Rum Baba,' 45.

¹² Keating, 260.

¹³ In 1960, quite a number of favourable reviews of *Stay with God* appeared in the book review sections of journals and newspapers such as *Country Life* (Sydney) and *Saturday Review*, *Citizen News* (Los Angeles), *New York Herald Tribune* (New York), *Centerview*, and *The Times of India*.

Posthumously (since the 1980s), Brabazon has been attracting a more appreciative reading – even internationally - on account of his pioneering work in blending culturally diverse literary traditions, and specifically for devising an English form of the *ghazal* (a Middle Eastern style of poetry).¹⁴ There is now an extensive literature on his works available on the internet. There has also been a biography "The Life and Poetry of **Francis Brabazon**" by Dr Ross Keating (Australian Catholic University) and an interview on the ABC www.abc.net.au concerning his life and work.

Within the broader community on the Sunshine Coast and earlier in Sydney and Melbourne, Francis is remembered as an eccentric identity, sought after / associated with persons interested in esoteric culture and spirituality. His popularity in Melbourne and Sydney was partly due to what is now the Brabazon collection, as the latter contained music and books that his peers found either rare or unobtainable in Australia at that time.¹⁵ Later (1969-1984) at Woombye on the Sunshine Coast, Francis attracted a wide circle of youth, many of whom were inspired by him to themselves become proficient in music, drama, poetry etc. The regional significance of Francis and his collection is recognized by the Shire Librarians (Attachments C and D).

Connection with Meher Baba & Meher Baba movement in Australia

The Brabazon library and archives is one of the main collections in the world on and about Meher Baba (1894-1969) – a notable Indian spiritual figure. *The Directory of Religious Bodies in the USA* rated Meher Baba as arguably "...one of the most influential (new spiritual) figures in the West."¹⁶ There have been several studies in the field of new religious movements supporting this assessment, with recommendations for further research by major experts on new religions such as Robert Ellwood,¹⁷ Gordon Melton,¹⁸ Peter Rowley,¹⁹ Robert McDermott²⁰ and Jacob Needleman.²¹

Meher Baba (aka Meherwan Irani) was an unusually eclectic figure, having been born a Zoroastrian (Iranian) in India, yet receiving Catholic schooling and living as the disciple

¹⁴ See for example, Annemarie Schimmel's assessment of Francis' work in relation to Western appreciation of Rumi in her *The Triumphal Sun* (Albany: SUNY, 1993).

¹⁵ Robert Rouse, *The Water Carrier*, 34.

¹⁶ J Gordon Melton, *Religious Bodies in the United States - A Directory* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 161.

¹⁷ Robert S Ellwood Jr, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973), 285.

¹⁸ J Gordon Melton, *Religious Bodies in the United States - A Directory*, 161.

¹⁹ Peter Rowley, *New Gods in America* (New York: David McKay Co, 1971), 122.

²⁰ Robert A McDermott, "Indian Spirituality in the West: A Bibliographical Mapping", *Philosophy East and West* Vol. XXV : 2 (1975), 227.

²¹ Jacob Needleman, *The New Religions* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co, 1970), 76f.

of spiritual figures from apparently opposite Maharashtrian lineages - Chisti Sufi (Muslim) and Datta (Hindu). In 1925, he began his trademark (lifelong) silence and established a thriving spiritual centre near Ahmednagar that housed thousands of destitute and sick people from all over the region. His schools and activities attracted the attention of national newspapers, and thus a following grew in various parts of India and Iran. By 1928, when Meher left for his first trip to Iran, *The Times of India* was comparing his popularity to that of his contemporaries: Yogananda and Krishnamurti.²²

In 1931, two British mystics: Meredith Starr (who was later to introduce Subud to the West) and Paul Brunton (who eventually became the main promoter of Maharishi Ramana) 'discovered' Meher and made possible his trips to the West. During the 1930s, Indian gurus were a novelty in the West. Thus prominent actors, educators, intelligentsia, ministers and religious heads in various Western countries arranged grand receptions in Meher Baba's honour.²³ On 1st June 1932, Meher was hosted by Hollywood's leading couple: Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks.²⁴ No less than a thousand film celebrities came to see him at the couple's residence on that occasion.²⁵ Meher's Western visits and messages at this time made front page news or feature articles in *New York Times*, *Time* magazine²⁶ and the *Daily Mirror*.²⁷ The Western press was especially intrigued with Mahatma Gandhi's sustained interest in, and correspondence with, Meher Baba.²⁸

The result of this acclaim was that Meher Baba emerged as "one of the enthusiasms of the '30's."²⁹ His followers during the 1930s included Nadine Tolstoy (the Russian writer's daughter), *Everyman* Editor Charles Purdom, Princess Matchabelli of the famous perfumes, Helen Dahm (the "Grand Old Lady of Swiss Art"),³⁰ inventor Thomas Watson and screenwriter Mercedes de Acosta.³¹ One of the world's first Alternative communities - *Moy Mell* in California - was visited by Meher and guided by his writings, which they adopted for daily study.³²

²² *The Times of India*, 13 August 1929.

²³ Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher* (Myrtle Beach: Manifestation, 1971-2001): Vol. V 1932-1934, 1646 f.

²⁴ Naosherwan Anzar, *The Beloved - The Life and Work of Meher Baba* (Ahmednagar: Sheriar, 1974), 32.

²⁵ These included Tallulah Bankhead, Gary Cooper, Cary Grant, Boris Karloff, director Joseph von Sternberg, and cowboy Tom Mix. See Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher* Vol. V 1932 - 1934, 1646-1649, 1654.

²⁶ 'Indian Mystic Comes with Message for Us,' *New York Times* 20 May 1932; 'God on the Hudson,' *Time* 2 May 1932, 22.

²⁷ See Kitty Davey, *Love Alone Prevails: A Story of Life with Meher Baba* (Ahmednagar: Sheriar, 1990), 43.

²⁸ Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher* Vol. IV 1929 - 1932, 1380-1388; Vol. V 1932 - 1934, 1726-1739.

²⁹ Robert S Ellwood Jnr, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*, 281.

³⁰ Veronica Fabre & Rick Flinn, 'Meher Baba's Tomb- The Story of Helen Dahm', *Glow International* August 1990, 16-19.

³¹ Mercedes de Acosta, *Here Lies the Heart* (New York: Reynal, 1960).

³² This was 'the Dunes' - 12 miles of sand dunes halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Here an extraordinary collection of youth - poets, artists and others - had been inspired to live a community life of meditation and work. The most definitive work on this community, that also examines Meher Baba's role is Norm Hammond, *The Dunites* (South County Historical Society, 1992). See also Sam Cohan, "His Hand-Clasp," *The Glow* Vol. VII: 4 (November 1972), 9; and Kathleen O'Quinn, "Baba in the Dunes," *The Awakener* Vol. XXI: 1 (1984), 53.

Meher's years in the limelight were followed by fifteen years of relative obscurity (1937 - 1952), due to his turning his interest to travelling extensively around the Indian countryside and cities, in order to locate and personally assist destitute individuals and 'spiritual seekers'. In this period, he established a number of innovative institutes for the care of lepers and the mentally afflicted. In particular, his categories and analyses of the *mast* phenomenon ('God-mad' – a type of spiritual derelict) were considered revolutionary. With his British physician William Donkin, Meher compiled *The Wayfarers* (1949) – a detailed account of *masts*. *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (1997) rated this work as "unparalleled in the history of religion."³³

Soon after - by the 1950s - Meher Baba was authoring or overseeing a number of writings that now enjoy global distribution - *God Speaks* (1955), *Life at Its Best* (1957), *Beams* (1958) etc. These works offered Meher's ideas on Divine love, spirituality and the nature of the cosmos. They became popular reading by the 1960s, especially for their catchy maxims and succinct blending of Vedantic, Sufi, Zoroastrian and Christian thought. As a result of these works and Meher's renewed travels overseas, a fresh wave of followers emerged, including (in the West) early Buddhologists such as Christmas Humphreys and Dr. Evans-Wentz,³⁴ *Picture* editor Thomas Hopkinson,³⁵ master dancer/ choreographer Brynar Mehl³⁶ and Princess von Brancovan.³⁷

A more dramatic expansion of the Meher Baba's influence occurred in the years approaching and following his death in 1969. This expansion began in 1965, when three American Hippies hitch-hiked to his centre, and Meher Baba issued them with statements warning against the use of drugs.³⁸ From this basis, the three travellers initiated a massive anti-drug campaign in the USA, Europe and Australia.³⁹ Although the crusade was largely unsuccessful,⁴⁰ some of Baba's views found their way into academic debate on the merits and dangers of hallucinogens.⁴¹

³³ Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1997), 115.

³⁴ W. Y. Evans Wentz even wrote a commentary on *God Speaks* (see Naosherwan Anzar, *The Beloved*, 85) and the Foreword for *Life at Its Best* (New York: Perennial Library 1957), xiii-xvii.

³⁵ Thomas Hopkinson was founder and editor of the innovative *Picture* (England) and *Drum* (South Africa).

³⁶ Ann Dunn in 'Ballet Talk' (www.ballettalk.invisionzone.com) 11 March 2009-04-08

³⁷ Ira Shader, 'Meeting the Master', *Glow International* Feb. 1986, 22-23.

³⁸ *God in a Pill? Meher Baba on LSD and the High Roads* (San Francisco: Sufism Reoriented: 1966).

³⁹ See Allan Y Cohen, 'Youth, Mysticism and the Search for God', *Crucible: The Journal of the Church Assembly Board for Social Responsibility* Vol. 1: 6 (May 1970), 72f.

⁴⁰ Bruce Hoffman, 'Something on an Inner Level', *Glow International* Feb. 1990, 17.

⁴¹ For example, Allen Y Cohen, 'Inside What's Happening: Sociological, Psychological and Spiritual Perspectives on the Contemporary Drug Scene,' *American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health* Vol. 5 : 11 (November 1969), 2094; Albert Moraczewski, "Psychedelic Agents and Mysticism", *Psychosomatics* Vol. 12 : 2 (1971), 95-6, and Ronald K Siegel, 'Religious Behavior in Animals and Man: Drug-induced Effects', *Journal of Diagnostic Issues* Vol. 7 : 3 (1977), 233.

Partly through the anti-drug campaign, Meher Baba became part of the ‘counterculture scene’ - one of the most recognizable guru-figures of the 1960s/ 1970s⁴² and apparently the first to attract a significant youth following.⁴³ Meher Baba’s face featured as the cover of the November 1970 *Rolling Stone* magazine.⁴⁴ Several Rock identities of the time – Pete Townsend of *the Who*, ‘Melanie’ Safka, Ronnie Lane of *the Faces*, and songwriter Billy Nichols declared themselves ‘Baba lovers.’ They subsequently produced several major works inspired by Meher Baba (most famously the world’s first rock opera – the *Who’s Tommy*).⁴⁵

For many Western youth at this time, Meher’s maxims and books were their earliest exposure to Indian (and more specifically Maharashtra *bhakti*) thought. This in turn helped shape the philosophies of the 60s/70s Alternative movement. Specifically, Maharashtra *bhakti* concepts such as universal love, the importance of the Guru, and the irrelevancy of rites and institutional religion – all recognizable emphases of 60s youth culture – may be traced back to ideas floated in the writings of Meher Baba and several other Maharashtra figures popular in the West at this time.⁴⁶

Today, the Meher Baba movement is a quiet and inconspicuous phenomenon, but more influential and widespread than may appear - the British *Independent* dubbing it “probably the biggest underground network in humanity.”⁴⁷ Conservative estimates of followers of Meher Baba range from 210,000⁴⁸ to 1,000,000.⁴⁹ *People* magazine (India) claimed there are groups “all over the globe...so vast ... that the Net has nearly 600 web pages of information on (him)...including his favourite song, movies and so on.”⁵⁰

Although the ‘Baba lovers movement’ in Australia remains quite small (c.500 followers), it is of wider interest as one of the earliest (Australian following began in the 1930s) and more prominent⁵¹ examples of the alternative/ ‘new’ Eastern religions that swept into popularity in Australia and other parts of the West.⁵² Especially during the 60s/70s, the

⁴² Robert Greenfield, *Timothy Leary – A Biography* (Houghton Milton Harcourt, 2007), 313.

⁴³ There was already a substantial Alternate/ youth following for Meher Baba in the late 1950s / early 1960s.

⁴⁴ *Rolling Stone* No.71 (26 November 1970).

⁴⁵ Paul Birchard, 'Obituary - Delia de Leon: Head of the Q', *The Guardian* 10 February 1993.

⁴⁶ Neem Karooli Baba and the Beatles’ guru – Maharishi – were other Maharashtra figures. See Robert S Ellwood Jnr, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*, 281. Meher’s followers produced many posters and cards with pithy sayings on love and spirituality that enjoyed a wide circulation in youth culture at this time. The best example is ‘don’t worry, be happy!’ - see James Lusk, 'Meher Baba Manifesting in Popular Song', *Glow International* Feb. 1989, 22.

⁴⁷ ‘Baba Don’t Preach,’ *The Independent* 24 February 1994, II.

⁴⁸ Robert Humphreys & Roland Ward, *Religious Bodies in Australia: A Comprehensive Guide* (Melbourne: Humphrey & Ward, 2002), 292.

⁴⁹ Tim Thelen (prod.) & Dina Snow (narrator), *Meher Baba, the Awakener* Video recording, Divine Sport Productions (USA) 1994.

⁵⁰ Meher Castelino, ‘As Luck Would Have It,’ *People (India)* Sunday Mid-day Section, 23 August 1998, 25.

⁵¹ Steven Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age* (Routledge 2003), pp.36-237.

⁵² Lorne L Dawson, *Cults in Context: Readings in the Study of New Religious Movements* (Transaction 1998), p. 95.

words and ideas of Meher Baba played an important role in the emerging alternative counterculture in Australia.⁵³ As overseas, rock bands were sometimes pivotal in this development. *Tully* – an Australia group, many of whom were Baba devotees, played a significant role, also being responsible for bringing the rock musical *Hair* to Australia as a stage performance. Drawing inspiration from Baba and the eclectic and folk-centred arts of Brabazon, Tully's music contributed to the revival of Australian folk music.⁵⁴ The Brabazon collection contains some of the early music and ephemera associated with this band.

The Brabazon collection contains original and/ or rare source materials on and about this figure, including film footage. Much of this material was collected by Francis whilst living with Meher Baba in India.

The collection is also significant in its documentation of the development and growth of the Meher Baba movement in Australia from the 1940s till today, and of its main centre here - Avatar's Abode – and of its principal festival, 'the Anniversary.' It contains many photographs, news clippings, letters, notes and ephemera related to this history.

⁵³ Margery Davis' 'Life with Baba', [The Bulletin](#) 15 March 1969, 40-42. Meher Baba was known as "the love man" to Australian Hippies - see [Slaggers](#) Melbourne: Central Publicity 1971, 17f, and his words and ideas featured in various Alternative magazines of that time including *Maggie's Farm*, *Lucifer*, *Tharunka* and the first Aquarius Festival in Nimbin, 1973 (A Lup (prod.), [Nimbin Aquarius Festival](#) Videos I & II Nimbin: Amateur Production 1973).

⁵⁴ Malcolm J. Turnbull, 'The Early Years of the Folk Revival in Melbourne – Part II,' in Warren Fahey, [Australian Folklore Unit](#) (www.warrenfahey.com/revival_melbourne) & 'Come Back Again... with Chris Spencer,' Extradition – Hush, in [Howlspace – the living history of our music](#) (www.howlspace.com.au)

Connection with Avatar's Abode Centre/ Community (Woombye, Qld)

“Avatar’s Abode” was the first of a range of Eastern (Buddhist, Hindu and Sufi) centres to be established around Queensland during the ‘60s/ ‘70s wave of interest in Alternate/ Eastern spirituality.⁵⁵ Ajaya Sahoo identified such “Indian guru” communities as important conduits for the transnational networks of what he terms the recent “Indian Diaspora” in Australia.⁵⁶ The importance of Avatar’s Abode and its attendant community for the Sunshine Coast region was recently recognised by the then-Shire Mayor (Attachment E).

The families who established Avatar’s Abode were urbane citizens from southern cities (Sydney and Melbourne). They had little experience in farming and no friends or relatives in Queensland. Thus turning a rundown pineapple farm on the Sunshine Coast into a site/ community focused on an Eastern spiritual figure was a challenge, especially during the conservative 1950s. Nevertheless, Avatar’s Abode flourished as a transit/ meeting point for Australian youth investigating Alternative/ Eastern lifestyles and spiritualities, especially as this region was one of several areas in Australia to which young ‘seekers’ habitually moved during the 1960s/ 1970s.⁵⁷

Connection with ‘the Anniversary’ Festival

The ‘Anniversary’ is an annual showcase of music, skits, talks, film, art etc. on and about Meher Baba and related spiritual themes. It serves as the principal Meher Baba gathering/ event in Australia. The Anniversary is apparently the oldest and longest-running festival of an Alternative religion in Queensland, predating comparable events (such as Chenrezig’s Open Days) by two or three decades. Each year, it attracts several hundred people to the Sunshine Coast region.

2. Aesthetic Significance

The Brabazon collection contains half a dozen of Francis Brabazon’s paintings, and many of the drafts, hand-written notes, sketches etc. of this poet. It also holds much of the literature and music that informed and inspired his work. Some of this is scribbled with detailed, hand-written notes from Brabazon. The paintings and notes are of cultural interest with regards to Brabazon’s status as an Australian Modernist figure of the 1930s-1940s. They also reflect the interests of the Melbourne Modernists.

⁵⁵ Ray Kerkhove, *Soul Havens – The Story of Spiritual Sanctuaries on the Sunshine Coast* (Woombye 2003), 64.

⁵⁶ See Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, ‘Transnational Networks of Indian Diaspora in Australia,’ *Journal of Contemporary Asia & Europe* Vol.1 (2), 2004, 120-134.

⁵⁷ John Lindblad, ‘Where the Drop-outs Are,’ *Bulletin*, 27 March 1976; see also Peter Cock, *Alternative Australia – Communities of the Future?* (Melbourne: Quartet, 1979), 26-7, 132-4.

3. Social/ Spiritual Significance

The Brabazon collection's social/ spiritual significance is fivefold:

1. In association with an Indian spiritual figure, Meher Baba (1894-1969);
2. In association with Francis Brabazon (1907-1984);
3. In association with the development of Avatar's Abode (1958 – today);
4. In association with the development of 'the Anniversary' (1959 – today); and
5. In association with the history/ development of Sufism in Australia.

1. In association with Meher Baba

The Brabazon collection is a feature of an Australian spiritual centre: *Avatar's Abode*, in Woombye (Sunshine Coast, Queensland). This is due to Francis having been a close disciple of Meher Baba – particularly towards the final decade of this figure's life.

Avatar's Abode is considered one of the world's main centres or "places of pilgrimage" for devotees of Meher Baba, and the focal point for the movement in Australia. The Avatar's Abode centre is kept in perpetuity by a Trust, which was formed in 1984 specifically to maintain the various buildings and items associated with Meher Baba's life and his stay on the property in 1958. The items and documents associated with Meher Baba that are maintained by the Trust date are fairly rare even globally, and date from as early as c.1900 through to the 1960s. They include clothing and personal belongings that followers consider symbolic/ iconic of their founder such as alphabet boards (Meher Baba maintained silence most of his life and used these to communicate) and a pink coat, *sadras* and sandals (common garments of this teacher).

As part of its duties, the Avatar's Abode Trust is also committed to maintaining documents on and about Meher Baba. Francis Brabazon lived with Meher Baba in India and was one of the disciples most interested in gathering written material on and about Meher Baba. Consequently, Avatar's Abode has inherited a considerable amount of early and rare sources on this figure, such as original and out-of-print journals, circulars, signed copies of early works, news clippings, newsletters, photographs, and film footage. Some of the material has not been located anywhere else in the world and has subsequently been published on-line (for example, *The Combined Diary* – a 1920s document by various early disciples).

The use of the Brabazon collection is very current and quite public, as Avatar's Abode is open to the public from 9 am to 6pm most days, and sees considerable use by the local Meher Baba community at all times. It also attracts a range of interstate and international visitors, who sporadically stay in accommodation here. As the library has been part of Avatar's Abode's Reception Centre for over a decade, it is integral to the centre's function of providing a wide range of easily-accessible information and source materials on Meher Baba, as outlined in the Avatar's Abode *Trust Deed*. Residents of Avatar's

Abode and other persons involved in caring for the property regularly provide visitors access to the collection. Visitors staying on the property can also directly access the library/ collection themselves.

The Meher Baba community views the library as an important resource for persons undertaking research, writing, film, music, art or events inspired by Meher Baba and his works. Despite the small size and scattered residence of this community,⁵⁸ its members have been very active in the arts and services, both locally and nationally, and the Brabazon collection has provided an important resource for devotees' endeavours in the broader community.

2. In association with Francis Brabazon

The local and international Meher Baba community places considerable social and spiritual significance on this collection on account of their respect for Francis Brabazon's role as a *mandali* (close disciple) of Meher Baba and mentor for many of the early Australian followers. Brabazon was considered important for being a personal attendant to Meher Baba in this figure's final years (1959-1969), and for either writing or supervising prose, poetry, dramas and music that continues to see much use in the movement both locally and internationally. Moreover, it was Francis Brabazon who initially began Avatar's Abode.

The collection is situated in one of only two sites in Australia that preserve aspects of the life and times of this disciple of Meher Baba (the other spot being Meher House in Sydney). It is thus of some social/ spiritual significance to the Australian followers. Brabazon's cottage and grave are both located nearby on Avatar's Abode.

3. In association with the development of Avatar's Abode

The Francis Brabazon collection includes an unusually intact range of ephemera on the early history and use of 'Avatar's Abode,' including notices on accommodation, photographs, examples of the literature in vogue at this time, and a full set of posters produced by Meher Baba devotees during the 1970s. Such items capture important aspects of Australian Alternative lifestyles during the 1960s/1970s.

4. In association with the history and development of 'the Anniversary'

The Francis Brabazon collection includes the only complete compilation of programs, notices and directives relating to this event, along with photographs and drafts on some of its key performances and dramas. The Meher Baba community consider this an important

⁵⁸ About a quarter of all followers live around the Sunshine Coast region. The rest have formed small, loose-knit groups in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Canberra, North Coast NSW and the Gold Coast.

asset and have utilized segments of this collection for displays or as a reference point in planning activities.

5. In association with the early development/ history of Sufism in Australia

As discussed earlier, most of the original Brabazon collection was the personal library of the German aristocrat, Baron von Frankenberg, which Francis Brabazon inherited when he took over leadership of the Baron's group in 1950. The importance of this component of the collection is recognised by the current Sufi movement in Australia, and was the topic of Celia Genn's thesis on early Sufism in Australia.⁵⁹ It has already excited debate on the early Muslim history of Camden, where the collection was first housed.⁶⁰

The Baron began Australia's first Sufi society when he arrived in Sydney. His library includes many rare translations of Muslim, Eastern and other texts he collected in Europe between the 1890s and 1920s. Some of these are unobtainable in any other library in Australia. As a collection, these works are important as the core reading material of Australia's first Sufi (Muslim mystical) group.

What is more significant to the Australian Sufi Society, is that the collection contains many of the early Australian editions of works of their founder – Hazrat Inayat Khan - as well as pamphlets, letters and other ephemera that have shed much light on the earliest history of Sufism in Australia.

⁵⁹ See Celia A Genn, 'A Modern Western Sufism,' in Martin van Bruessen & Julia Day Howell, eds. Sufism and the 'Modern' in India (I B Taurus 2007), 267. See also www.smia.com.au

⁶⁰ Iliana Stillitano, 'Part of Our History,' Camden Advertiser, 21 May 2008, pp.1-3.

B. SIGNIFICANCE BY COMPARATIVE CRITERIA

1. Provenance

To a large degree, the importance of this collection lies in its continuous and direct association with Baron von Frankenberg and subsequently Francis Brabazon, and its location in one of the major centres of the Meher Baba movement: Avatar's Abode.

Much of the original contents were accumulated in Europe 1890s – 1930s, residing in Camden from 1927 until they were transferred to Meher House (1950), where they stayed another decade. Thereafter, they have always (for nearly 50 years) been housed at Avatar's Abode. As this suggests, the collection was central to the activities of the early Sufi Society and then the early Meher Baba movement (and thereby Francis Brabazon).

The collection has mostly been catalogued, but this is yet to be transferred to a database. Notes and references Francis made within the volumes of this library have been laboriously collated and recorded.

2. Representativeness

The collection is representative of some of the literary/ cultural interests of the Melbourne Modernists 1930s-1940s, and of the type of materials produced, and books read, within Australian counterculture 1960s-1970s in Queensland. It is also representative of the ephemera associated with the development of new Eastern centres in Australia between the 1940s and 1970s.

3. Rarity

This is the only complete corpus of writings, notes etc. of Francis Brabazon, and the only fully comprehensive collection of works by and about Meher Baba in Australia. It includes a number of previously-unpublished source materials on Meher Baba, and various out-of-print works. Additionally, this library contains the only extant material on Australia's first Sufi group. The collections of Sufi societies in Australia do not have any material of similar age pertaining to Sufism in Australia.

The Brabazon collection also contains many early translations of Islamic and Hindi works, comprising volumes collected c.1890-1920s. The rarity and literary value of these books – both regionally and nationally - was recently recognised by Dr Geoff Gunther, an English/ Literature Professor (Attachment F).

4. Condition/ Intactness

- The complete corpus of Francis Brabazon's works.
- The most intact and comprehensive collections of writings on and about Meher Baba in Australia.
- Full or nearly complete sets of a variety of Indian journals from the 1920s/ 1930s onwards.
- The complete corpus of early Inayat Khan (Sufi) publications in Australia 1920s-1940s.

Part of the collection is a borrowing library. Another part is a humidity and climate controlled archives wherein more fragile or valued items are stored. There are boxes of notes interleaved with acid-free paper, and some volumes have been professionally repaired.

5. Interpretive Potential

The collection has significant and multifarious interpretive potential, covering a variety of fields:

- the cultural and spiritual context of Australian Modernism 1930s – 1940s
- the life and works of Australian Modernist poet Francis Brabazon
- the life and works of a major Indian spiritual figure, Meher Baba
- the life and works of a Camden identity & early Australian Sufi leader, Baron von Frankenberg
- the history and development of Eastern/ New Religious Movements (esp. Meher Baba followers, Sufi groups) within Australia 1920s – 1980s
- the Alternative movement in Australia 1950s – 1980s
- the history and development of a spiritual centre and a spiritual community (Avatar's Abode) in Queensland 1950s – today, and
- the history and development of a regional religious event (Avatar's Abode Anniversary) 1950s – today.

To date, three academics in mainstream universities – Ross Keating, Ray Kerkhove and Celia Genn – have written doctoral theses and published books from material in this collection. At least half a dozen individuals from the local community and interstate have regularly utilized materials in the collection to create books, music, films or the conceptual framework for state-wide festivals. This is due to the collection containing so many, and such rare, translations of key scriptures and source materials on the world's faiths and on the principal works of literature, art and music of the world's cultures.

The collection's research potential on the realm of Meher Baba is recognised by the University of Queensland (see Attachment A). The collection contains many early circulars, letters, posters and ephemera that will prove useful in reconstructing the movement's history.

Equally, the collection's potential for interpreting the works and life of Francis Brabazon is recognised by Dr Ross Keating (see Attachment B). As the collection contains some of the poet's personal effects as well as the original sources from which Francis created his literature and music, plus many of his working notes, it will be invaluable for later research on this figure.

Shakira Hussein, a Muslim researcher, is currently investigating material on Baron von Frankenberg and his wider significance to the history of Islam in Australia and Europe.

As the Brabazon collection was originally Baron von Frankenberg's personal library, it contains much of his personal notes and correspondence. The Baron was a German aristocrat who moved to Camden (near Sydney) in the 1920s. During the 1930s/ 1940s, the Baron, like many Germans, came under suspicion for Nazi sympathies. The Brabazon collection includes personal letters of the Baron that reflect the restrictions and censorship placed on German migrants at this time.

C. AUSTRALIAN & QUEENSLAND

HERITAGE THEMES

The following section places the Francis Brabazon Collection's significance within the *Australian Historic Themes Framework* of the Australian Heritage Commission, and Thom Blake's *Historic Themes in Queensland* (the latter being the basis of QHTN's assessment of all cultural heritage collections in Queensland).

1. *Examples and early editions of early Australian Modernist art, literature and Modernist cultural context.*

Australian Heritage Themes No. 8. Developing Australia's Cultural Life:

8.10.3 Creating literature

Queensland Heritage Themes No.7: Developing Civic, Social and Cultural Institutes or Activities

h) Cultural Activities – music & performing arts, visual arts, cinema

2. *The only complete collection in the world of source materials, notes, drafts, etc. of Francis Brabazon's poetry, prose, songs and drama.*

Australian Heritage Themes No. 8. Developing Australia's Cultural Life:

8.10.3 Creating literature

Queensland Heritage Themes No. 6: Developing Civic, Social and Cultural Institutes or Activities

h) Cultural Activities – music & performing arts, visual arts, cinema

Queensland Heritage Themes No.1: Peopling Places.

c) Queensland characters

3. *The only collection of ephemera and documents on the 50-year development of the Avatar's Abode community/ centre.*

Australian Heritage Themes No. 2. Peopling Australia:

2.2 Adapting to Diverse Environments

Australian Heritage Themes No. 8. Developing Australia's Cultural Life:

8.6.4 Making places of worship

Queensland Heritage Themes No. 5. Creating Settlements and Dwellings/ Living in Communities

g) Alternative lifestyles

4. *The only collection of ephemera and documents covering the 50-year development of 'Avatar's Abode Anniversary'.*

Queensland Heritage Themes No. 6. Developing Civic, Social and Cultural Institutes & Activities

- g) Religious organisations, beliefs and customs**
- k) Festivals and events**

5. *The most comprehensive compilation on and about Meher Baba and his movement in Australia.*
6. *One of the four largest/ most comprehensive collections on and about Meher Baba in the world, including many rare early sources.*

Queensland Heritage Themes No. 6. Developing Civic, Social and Cultural Institutes & Activities

- g) Religious organisations, beliefs and customs**

7. *The only extant collection of documents relating to the earliest development of Sufi (Muslim mystical groups) in Australia.*

Queensland Heritage Themes No. 6. Developing Civic, Social and Cultural Institutes & Activities

- g) Religious organisations, beliefs and customs**

8. *Some documents pertaining to the life and treatment of German migrants in Australia 1920s-1940s.*

Australian Heritage Themes No. 2. Peopling Australia:

2.4 Migrating

Queensland Heritage Themes No.1: Peopling Places

- b. Migration and cross cultural stories.**

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

(IMPLEMENTATION)

DISPLAY/ SHELVING

- More book shelves & cabinets to counter the current problem of over-stacked shelves (which is damaging books and making it difficult to keep track of the contents).
- Cabinets specifically to house the original Brabazon collection (as distinct from the lending library).
- Physical re-organization of library to allow both/ better access and security – e.g. the lending library component could be moved entirely into the current reception & office areas.

STORAGE

- Archival boxes to store ephemera/ letters etc. At least a dozen need to be ordered, in varying sizes.
- Storage of film footage away from paper/ combustible material.

SORTING

- Location and removal of at-risk items (especially rare, fragile or valuable books).
- Complete identification and segregation of Baron's library away from the rest of the collection, for preservation and security. This will require more interviews with persons who were intimate with the Baron's group/ the original collection
- Identification and segregation of Francis' additions to the Baron's library. This will require more interviews with persons familiar with Francis and the history of his books.

POLICIES

- Re-visiting/ updating acquisition policy to ensure thematic integrity
- Updating of access/ loan/ conditions of research to better control loss and deterioration of contents.

CATALOGUING

- Transferral of catalogue to a computerized database
- Complete cataloguing of archival items
- Catalogue overview for quick reference

FURTHER RESEARCH

- Identification of relationship between collection and other elements of Avatar's Abode
- History of ownership/ use of individual books
- Comparative significance of the Baron and his books
- Francis Brabazon's connections with Australian Modernism
- Assessment of rarity of specific documents/ publication pertaining to Meher Baba's life and works

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX E

