

**Francis Brabazon: Poet of the Silent Word – a modern Hafiz**

By

Ross Keating

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# Francis Brabazon

Poet of the Silent Word – a modern Hafiz

ROSS KEATING

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Beacon Hill, Australia

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The tracks we follow lead back to the place from  
where we came.  
We are mighty hunters — but we ourselves are the  
game.

*Francis Brabazon*



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# Abbreviations

## Books by Francis Brabazon

- EP*      *Early Poems* (Sydney: Beacon Hill Publishing, 1953).  
*PT*      *Proletarians – Transition* (Sydney: Beacon Hill Publishing, 1953).  
*7STM*    *7 Stars to Morning* (Sydney: Morgan's Bookshop, 1956).  
*COW*    *Cantos of Wandering* (Sydney: Beacon Hill Publishing, 1957).  
*ST*      *Singing Threshold* (Sydney: Beacon Hill Publishing, 1958).  
*SWG*    *Stay With God* (Sydney: Garuda Books, 1959).  
*LUTPS*   *Let Us the People Sing* (Poona: private pub., 1962).  
*TEWG*   *The East-West Gathering* (Sydney: Meher House, 1963).  
*TWAW*   *The Word at World's End* (Berkeley: John F. Kennedy Press, 1971).  
*IDIS*    *In Dust I Sing* (Berkeley: The Beguine Library, 1974).  
*FATB*    *Four and Twenty Blackbirds* (Myrtle Beach: Sheriar Press, 1975).  
*TWOTW*   *The Wind of the Word* (Sydney: Garuda Publications, 1976).  
*TSW*    *The Silent Word: Being some chapters of the life of Avatar Meher Baba*  
            (Meher Baba Foundation Australia: Sydney, 1978).  
*TGBOP*   *The Golden Book of Praise* (California: The Awakener Press, 1982).  
*TBIAIA*   *The Beloved is All in All* (New Jersey: Beloved Books, 1988).

## Pamphlets by Francis Brabazon

- TBOTN*   *The Birth of the Nation* (Sydney: Beacon Hill Publishing, 1956).  
*TLIOB*   *The Lord is Our Brother* (Bombay Press Conference, Bombay  
            25 Feb. 1959).

## Booklets by Francis Brabazon

- TTFB*    *Three Talks: Francis Brabazon* (Sydney: Meher House, 1969).  
*JWG*    *Journey With God* (Sydney: Beacon Hill Publishing, 1954).



# Introduction

In Australian literature there has been no figure who has been more committed to a quest for the universal meaning of beauty and its relation to truth than Francis Brabazon. Indeed his life is a remarkable story of how a young, shy, farming boy living in a relatively isolated part of the Australian bush ends up staying in India for ten years as the poet-disciple of a person who declares himself to be God in human form, the Avatar of this age.

His story begins in London where he was born in 1907. His father, although related to the Earls of County Meath in Ireland, was a Fabian, an admirer of William Morris, and a supporter of the “common worker”. His mother, who came from a middle-class English family, was a pragmatist by nature and an accomplished pianist. In 1912 they emigrated to Australia and settled on a small farm in Glenrowan, Victoria. As a youth, Brabazon developed a loving connection with the surrounding landscape; he was deeply moved by the beauty of night and the sheer generosity of the earth, and it was here that his first poems were written.

At the age of twenty-one and virtually penniless — after the farm had lost its fight against a severe drought and an ever-increasing population of rabbits — Brabazon arrived in Melbourne. In the city he was at a loss about what to do with his life but after seeing the performance of internationally-acclaimed artists like Anna Pavlova, Alexander Brailowsky, Arthur Schnabel, and viewing the Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art held in 1939, he decided to devote his life to the pursuit of beauty in art.

From this time onwards, the nature of beauty and its relationship to truth became Brabazon’s driving preoccupation in life. For the next twenty years he studied art and explored different artistic mediums, including music, drawing, and poetry, through which he could find answers. In the mid- to late thirties painting became the central focus of his attention and he mixed with the first group of Australian modernist

painters including Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and John Sinclair.

In 1941 and 1942 he exhibited his paintings along with these artists. According to Max Harris, the then editor of the *Angry Penguins*, the first Australian modernist art journal, Brabazon's paintings "initiated the first appreciation of the naive or primitive symbolism in the Australian art world . . . [his work] was the beginning of the notion of innocent vision. It influenced the entire Angry Penguin community". Yet unsatisfied with his painting, Brabazon turned his full attention to writing poetry which he felt offered the greatest possibilities for discovery.

During the period of the early forties Brabazon became interested in the connection between art and spirituality, particularly in Eastern traditions, long before these concerns became popular. He studied Vedanta, Taoism, Confucianism and Sufism, and began a practice of meditation. Of all the spiritual traditions which he investigated, he was most attracted to Sufism and he became a pupil (*mureed*) of a Sufi *Sheikh*, Baron von Frankenberg who lived in Camden outside Sydney.

Von Frankenberg was a past student of Hazarat Inayat Khan who was the founder of the first order of Sufism specifically created for Western culture. This was called the Sufi Movement. In the mid-forties Brabazon moved to Camden and lived with Baron von Frankenberg in a master-disciple relationship. In 1946 he travelled to San Francisco where he studied under *Murshida* Rabia Martin and was initiated as a Sufi *Sheikh* in the order.

In 1951, after returning to Australia, and after the death of von Frankenberg, Brabazon took over the leadership of the Australian branch of the Sufi Movement. In 1952 he again travelled to America and met Meher Baba whom he described as the living embodiment of beauty and knowledge. His years of searching had come to an end. Convinced of Meher Baba's spiritual stature, Brabazon willingly became his follower and began what he described as his period of "true creativity".

After this meeting, he returned to Australia and published, in 1953, his first collection of poems, *Proletarians-Transition*. The unifying theme of this work is the challenge it presents to its

readers to reassess their values and to use their daily work as an opportunity to draw closer to God. Several other volumes of poetry soon followed including a collection of his plays entitled *Singing Threshold*.

Also during the fifties, at the invitation of Meher Baba, Brabazon made several trips to India, and while in Australia he was the key figure in organising Meher Baba's two visits in 1956 and 1958. In 1959 he published his greatest poem, a book-length work entitled *Stay With God* which presents the distillation of his thinking. In this work, Brabazon covers such topics as the divine theme of creation, the spiritual meaning of existence and the vital link between spirituality and art.

When *Stay With God* was first published Brabazon had moved to India and was living with Meher Baba as one of his close disciples. During this period of his life, Meher Baba guided Brabazon in the creation of a new poetry, the English ghazal, based on the form perfected by the Persian Master poet Hafiz of Shiraz in the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The ghazal is a lyric which is meant to be sung, as it still is in Eastern music, in which the lover both complains and praises his or her beloved. It is a type of love-cry in which the heart and mind of the poet, caught in the grip of love-longing, are exposed. According to one authority the word "ghazal" means "the agonised cry of the gazelle when it is cornered after the chase and realises that the game is up".<sup>2</sup>

Brabazon's ghazals are unique, for they are not translations or structural copies of an Eastern counterpart but rather grow out of a similar experience of love between a lover and a beloved from which Hafiz's ghazals arose. There have been many attempts at translating Hafiz's ghazals and in finding a suitably equivalent English form.<sup>3</sup> To directly lift the structural form of a poem, in one language, and attempt to sit another language on top of it, can only produce a work depleted of the spirit of the original.

However, Brabazon's situation as a modern English poet, living in a lover-beloved relationship with his spiritual Master, the relationship out of which Hafiz's wrote his ghazals, makes his attempts much closer to the spirit of the original. Besides

this, both Hafiz and Brabazon had other features in common: both were captivated by beauty, both fell in love with a beautiful woman, both had their thinking shaped by Sufism. All of these common elements which inform the content and flavour of their ghazals have produced areas of similarity in their works.

Besides the cry of love, Brabazon's ghazals contain an eclectic mix of human responses from cutting sarcasm to passages of ecstatic desperation. Part of their appeal is in their hard-nosed wisdom and the glimpse they give of a poet who lived the life of a spiritual seeker, and through his unswerving loyalty to his own inner voice, arrived at his goal, only then to endure the whims and vagaries of a reluctant Beloved.

Brabazon's scant claim to fame in Australian literature is one poem published in the 1956 Oxford edition of *A Book of Australian Verse* and later retained in the updated edition (1986), and one ghazal in the *Oxford Book of Australian Religious Poetry* (1994).<sup>4</sup> There are no poems of his in any other anthology of comparable standard nor is there to be found any critical assessment of his work apart from the occasional book review.<sup>5</sup>

These facts indicate either a poet who has been neglected or one whose work has been found wanting. Certainly, Brabazon's output is not large but he has produced, along with other written works, twelve collections of poetry ranging from satire to children's rhymes and his major work, the book-length poem, *Stay With God*, had a remarkable six hundred pre-publication sales which for an Australian poet writing in the fifties is exceptional.

Part of this neglect may be due to the difficulty critics have found in coming to terms with Brabazon's thought, grounded as it is in Classical Sufi ideas, and his oftentimes obscure references to the lives of saintly figures and their teachings.<sup>6</sup> Partly due also, to the fact that he chose to follow an Eastern spiritual Master, Meher Baba, and openly wrote about this at a time when religious conservatism ruled the day.

With a steady growing interest in spirituality and spiritual poetry, particularly that of the Sufi poets Rumi and Hafiz, there is every reason to think that Brabazon is more relevant today

than ever before. Readers interested in either Sufi poetry, Sufi thought, or the spiritual path, will find much of interest in the life of this much neglected poet.

The research for this book has been based directly on the poet's privately-held archives, which include his personal library, letters, manuscripts, and working notes. Permission to use this material has been granted by the Executors of the Francis Brabazon Archives. I am grateful to the executors, Bernard Bruford, Peter Davies, and Roy Hayes for allowing me free access to this material. Material has also been drawn from interviews and correspondence, conducted over a number of years, with Brabazon's friends and acquaintances in Australia, Europe, America and India.

In this regard, I have many people to thank and still others who offered me information, advice, and encouragement. In particular my thanks extend to: Clarice Adams, The Avatar's Abode Trust, Avatar Meher Baba P. P. C. Trust, Ahmednagar, India, Meryl Baulch, Wendy Borthwick, Lorraine Brown, Joanne Bruford, Betty Burston, Ira Deitrick, Raine Eastman-Gannett, Carl W. Ernst, David Fenster, Liz Gaskin, Beryl Giddins, John Grant, Chris Gray, Michael Griffith, Betty and Oswald Hall, Eugénie M. Halls, Max Harris, Jose Henriques, John Isaacs-Young, Sue Jamieson, Eruch Jessawalla, Bhau Kalchuri, Steve Klein, Bill and Diana Le Page, Michael Le Page, Richard Lockwood, Cecily Malloy, Meher Baba Foundation Australia, Peter and Kathryn Milne, Reg Paffle, Ward Parkes, John Parry, Adrian Rawlins, Robert Rouse, Peter Rowan, Patricia Saunders, Sam Saunders, Felix Schmid, Paul Smith, Diana Snow, Alison Spark, Don Stevens, and James Tulip.

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# Chapter One

## Family Background

### I. Life in England

Bernard Francis Brabazon was born at his parent's home in London, at 12 Gascoyne Road, South Hackney, on 24th January 1907. His father Percy Brabazon claimed some kinship with the Brabazons of Ireland who were the Earls of County Meath. Their history in Ireland extended back to 1543 when Henry VIII appointed Sir William Brabazon as Lord Justice and granted him extensive land which previously belonged to two large monasteries, Donore, outside Dublin and Killruddery, in Wicklow. In 1627, Sir William Brabazon's grandson was created the 1st Earl of Meath.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, their family motto, "My Life is Devoted," was to become the hallmark of Francis's own life.

Percy Brabazon inherited his family's aristocratic tastes and cultured manner but, ironically, was a willing supporter of the rights of the common worker. Politically, he was a radical, a member of the Fabian Society and believed in the new socialism, as expounded by the Social Democratic Federation of 1883, the first English Socialist Party. This stance he shared with many prominent people of the day, like H. M. Hyndman, George Bernard Shaw and William Morris. By profession, Percy was a London theatre critic, a gallery first-nighter, but had to supplement his poorly-paid position by working at his brother's hotel. His brother, like Percy, was also a colourful individualist who did not fit the mould of a typical aristocrat; he had a strong passion for boxing and held, at one time in his career, an amateur English middle-weight boxing title.

As an independent thinker, with a compassionate regard for people's rights, Percy Brabazon was most influenced by William Morris's utopian idealism and shared his deep rooted beliefs in a social system in which useful work would replace useless toil. The industrialisation in England was for Morris intolerable; nothing but a mockery of civilisation. How could workers, forced to live amidst ugliness and squalor, even conceive of beauty, Morris argued, let alone express it. How could anything but misery come from this "eyeless vulgarity which has destroyed art, the one certain solace of labour".<sup>2</sup>

Percy Brabazon met Morris and deeply admired his committed political stance and his frank expression of it which was in such stark contrast to the superficial and contrived respectability of the times. Morris's dream, which was "nearest to his heart — that of building heaven on earth": a quest which filled his creative outpourings from elaborately designed tapestries and wallpapers to his adventurous romances, also appealed to Percy Brabazon, yet it was to find its fuller expression in Francis's life.<sup>3</sup>

Francis's mother, Florence Mary Bayst, shared Percy's interest in politics and art, but was less of an idealistic dreamer; she had more of a pragmatic, down-to-earth nature. This was a quality of mind which Francis was to inherit in full measure. Florence was one of eleven brothers and sisters from a middle class family; she possessed a strong character, a loving nature and was an accomplished pianist.

From her marriage to Percy came a daughter Eileen, who died in early childhood in 1897, and then three healthy boys, Dennis George Anthony, who was the eldest, Cyril Percy, and finally Bernard Francis. Fortunately, after their marriage, Percy was able to acquire a position with a reputable London insurance company and soon became the manager of one of its branches. This entitled him to live with his family in some modestly comfortable rooms above his office.

Although the family lived a relatively happy life, Percy thought the city of London was degenerating, both morally and socially, under the oppressive strain of capitalist progress. Certainly, in his estimation, it was not a fit place to raise his

sons. He agreed with the Scottish poet James Thomson's (1835-1882) estimation that London had become "The City of Dreadful Night":

The city is of Night; perchance of Death,  
But certainly of Night; for never there  
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath  
After the dewy dawning's cold grey air;  
The moon and the stars may shine with scorn or pity;  
The sun has never visited that city,  
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.<sup>4</sup>

In response to this situation, Percy decided to take the family to Australia, not only to escape the ugliness of London's industrialisation, but prompted by a desire to establish his own version of Morris's "earthly paradise" in the Antipodes.

## II. On the Land

In 1912, after Percy had arranged to get a company transfer to Sydney, the family made the nearly three-month boat trip to Australia and arrived in the same year. In another twelve months he was transferred to Melbourne and was appointed claim inspector for the state of Victoria; a post which entitled him to an all-lines gold rail pass. This allowed Percy to travel, free of charge, all over the state. During his long hours on the train he would amuse himself, and entertain his fellow travellers, by composing limericks on the unusual names of towns he passed through.

In 1917, Percy bought a property eleven kilometres from Glenrowan in north-east Victoria in an area known as Kelly Country where the famous bushranger and folk-hero Ned Kelly once lived. It was a small mixed farm with wheat, sheep and an acre of vineyard and various fruit trees.

In view of the amount of time Percy spent travelling all around the state and inspecting the different types of farming land available for sale, the Glenrowan property was a very poor choice. It consisted of a long, narrow strip of cultivation and grass running along the foot of hills. The house itself was about sixteen kilometres in from the road with no less than four paddock gates to open to reach it. All the farm implements were obsolete and the house was in need of essential renovations.

To make matters worse, Percy, who had no facility for using even the simplest of work tools, decided against replacing the much needed farm machinery; he chose instead to hire a mason to build a new house in stone which he named Kelmscott, after Kelmscott Manor, William Morris's summer house on the Thames, to which, other than the title, it had no resemblance in architecture or setting.

These decisions made it difficult for the farm to provide any income for the family, but it seems Percy had no real interest in becoming an Australian farmer. Although the family was now in Australia, Percy insisted they were still English. England, as far as he was concerned, was their real home and the English way of life had to be sustained.

During the nights when Percy was away travelling on business, Florence would either read to the boys or play them music on the piano. She was a gifted musician and would play pieces like Weber's "Invitation to the Dance" (op. 65, 1819) with ease. Francis was keen to learn music, and besides receiving guidance from his mother he took some lessons from a woman who periodically visited the district. Even on cold winter nights, when Francis would have to soak his hands in a tub of hot water before he could play, he would keep up his daily practice. This seems to be the first indication of Francis's unusual affinity for and receptivity to the beauty of art. Usually he played for an hour or more, depending on the mood of the rest of the family. When he had finished he was keen to check the rabbit traps he had set during the day. Rabbit pelts fetched a shilling each.

During the day Francis attended the local Taminick State School.<sup>1</sup> This was a one-teacher public school run by a woman; approximately thirty pupils of all different ages were seated in the school's single classroom. By the time he was twelve years of age, Francis had completed the required Merit Certificate and there was no purpose in his attending the school any further. However, the State Education Policy stated that no student was to leave school under the age of fourteen and so Francis stayed on for two more years and helped the teacher manage the younger children.

The teacher was impressed with Francis's capacity to learn and requested that his parents allow him to sit for a high school scholarship, but his father decided that the cost of paying for his board and lodging away from home, if he did attend high school, was more than the family could afford.

So, in 1921, when he reached the age of fourteen, Francis left school and started working full time on the farm with his

brothers, Dennis and Cyril. Francis was disappointed with this decision, because he wanted to become a teacher and continue with his studies, for he had already developed a love for books, but there was nothing he could do to change his father's decision.

Working on the farm was a lonely life for a young boy whose shyness was exacerbated by the development of a slight stammer in his speech. But despite his shyness and isolation, or possibly even because of it, Francis discovered a new joy in his experience of the natural world around him. In a real way the landscape of Glenrowan taught him to be attentive to nature's subtleties and moods — his eyes to "sap-surge" and his ears "to the music of small voices" — and it sharpened his awareness of slight shifts in his experience.<sup>2</sup>

On a deeper level he records becoming overwhelmed by the sheer generosity of the earth and would often weep at the majestic beauty of the night.<sup>3</sup> But it was in working on the farm, working with nature, that Francis felt his greatest happiness:

There was a song of fullness in driving a straight furrow and the gleaming earth turning over along the long mouldboards for the autumn wheat-sowing and the team with their magnificent chests in line keeping the singletrees level so that there was no jingling as with unmatched horses; in the brown paddock turning green, and then gold, and the hum of the harvester and the wheat pouring into bags; in the delicate green of vineyards under bare hills; Shiraz which bore the small black grapes for port wine and Muscatels and Waltham Cross which when gorged in their last day of ripening made one drowsy and dream-disposed.<sup>4</sup>

Francis's love of the farming life came as a surprise to his genteel and literary father, but not the fact that he chose to express his love for the bush in poetry, which his father encouraged. Over the years, his father provided Francis with a steady supply of books and would spend time with him discussing literature, politics, and the latest edition of the *Bulletin*, a national publication which reflected Australian

culture in all its various facets. Occasionally they even went to Melbourne to see an amateur production of Gilbert and Sullivan or hear a musical recital. Their relationship was brotherly (it was Percy, for instance, who first introduced Francis to smoking tobacco, a habit which he maintained all through his life), yet respectful; Francis always addressed Percy as "Father".

Soon Francis was writing poetry about sunsets, imitating the sonnets of Keats, and exhibited in these early writings the bent of a philosophical mind searching for the "meaning of life".<sup>5</sup> This is particularly seen in the title of what is now a lost poem, "The Hill of Life", a work which Francis described at the time as his "magnum opus". Perhaps, judging by its title, it may have been modelled from Shelley's long poem "The Triumph of Life". Thus, at an early age, Francis exhibited the dual quests which would chiefly occupy him for the rest of his days: the search for beauty and for meaning.

But it was in poetry that Francis played out these quests. Years later, he recalled, when ploughing the wheat fields he would be running lines of verse through his head, while on the headlands as the horses rested after completing a row of furrows, he would scribble down his images and ideas. Then later in the evening, he would retire early to the quiet of his room and shape his collected thoughts into verse.

When still only a teenager Francis was reading his poems to his father's friends, but could not be encouraged to submit them to the *Bulletin* for publication. Oddly enough, this reluctance to show his work took time to overcome and it was not until he was thirty-four and living in Melbourne that any of his work was finally published.<sup>6</sup>

For those interested in the development of Francis's craft, it is unfortunate that none of these teenage poems was ever published. However, there are pieces, which, judging by their imagery, may have had their beginnings in the twenties on the Glenrowan property. These are to be found in Brabazon's collection, *Early Poems*. They certainly express the sort of natural reverence and respect for the land which a reader

would expect from a young poet deeply moved by nature's fecundity. For instance, this following scene of simplicity in "The Dream" is probably a picture of the Brabazon's Glenrowan farm and homestead:

The wheat sweeping in a dream up to the  
golden sunset sky;  
the tops of the further hills are tipped with light  
and they slope down to the greenness of springs;  
the intermediate land rests after its deliverance  
from its burden,  
and the little house set on the edge of the dream —  
how cool are its walls, how its doorways sing of peace.<sup>7</sup>

And in another poem from this same collection, "Morning", all the clear stillness and sharp sounds of a bush dawn are captured. The moment just before the working day starts and the breakfast fire is lit:

Over the wheat field  
voluble in the dawn breeze  
the morning comes.

The trees shake out their leaves,  
the small birds cry to each other in quick excited tones,  
and the jackass flings forth his salutation to the morn:

Presently the East,  
her last bright garment flung back across the sky  
stands clear and naked before the rising sun.<sup>8</sup>

Along with his developing poetic talents Francis was also showing a propensity for hard work. There was certainly no shortage of work for a growing young man: the fields had to be ploughed and sown, the wheat harvested, the livestock had to be attended to and jobs like fertilising, irrigation and general maintenance never seemed to cease. Although Francis was short in stature for his age, he was surprisingly strong. In one of his unpublished notes he recorded with some pride:



One night I was coming home with a load of super-phosphate and fell asleep and the horse wandered off the road into a bog. I unloaded the eight bags, got the cart out and reloaded it. A bag of super weighs 186 lbs. dead weight. I could use some of the bags as steps, but the last one was a direct chest high lift.

While Francis and his brothers worked the farm, Percy was earning an income selling insurance around the state of Victoria. When Percy managed to return to Glenrowan on the occasional weekend to be with the family, it was always a happy time. However, during one of these weekend visits, Percy unexpectedly announced that he was going to give up his job with the insurance company and open a second-hand bookshop in Melbourne. He had decided, without consulting any of the family, that Florence and Cyril would join him after a period of time, while Dennis and Francis were to carry on with the farm as best they could.

Florence, being the practical one, expressed concern for the boys' future and her anxiety mounted even more when she realised that her husband had spent all of the family's savings. What was left for the family and the needed working capital for the farm was the uncertain amount from the sale of next year's wheat harvest. Cyril immediately became despondent, and Dennis felt angry and betrayed by his father's abrupt and impractical decision. Francis, however, who was by now devoted to the farming life, was excited by the new changes and his future prospects. He saw it as an opportunity for himself and Dennis to manage the farm as they wished, free from their father's directives. Francis had always dreamed of purchasing the neighbour's adjacent wheat and sheep paddocks and converting them into more vineyards. Now he saw this as a real possibility.

Being financially bound, the family had no choice but to go along with Percy's decision. Fortunately, the monetary return from the following year's wheat harvest was substantial enough to provide for the family and allowed for some

farm improvements as well. But the next year heralded an unexpected severe period of drought accompanied by an onslaught of rabbits which slowly turned the property into what Dennis called a “rock and rabbit farm”.<sup>9</sup>

Soon Dennis, Cyril, and Francis became exhausted from working the unyielding land. What for Francis had started as a hopeful adventure had now become a hopeless task. For his part, Dennis decided to escape temporarily from the situation and take his first ever holiday: a rowing trip down the Murray river. Dennis was only twenty-one when he set off, in February 1924, to row to Albury, a distance of over two thousand kilometres, in a five metre boat he named “The Joke”. His journey gained some public notoriety when an account of it was published as a serialised travelogue in the *Melbourne Herald*.

Francis appreciated Dennis’ desire to travel, for he too was starting to feel the effects of monotony and frustration. Francis at least had his books, piano and writing for distraction, but these did not replace the need which he shared with his brothers for like-minded friends and some adventure. The local town certainly offered nothing for growing young men. In Francis’s eyes it was a place of pathos which in a later publication he managed to capture in all its bleakness:

The township was a sprawl of loneliness:  
eight houses without flowers to cover  
their nakedness; a bakery; a store  
that sent you an account six months after  
you’d paid it, hoping you hadn’t kept the receipt;  
a butcher’s shop . . .  
The post office with more eyes than it needed  
to sort a few letters, and a tongue  
long enough to reach everyone’s ears in the district;  
the pub where thirst and grouches were never  
quenched, and no dreams sprouted. . . .<sup>10</sup>

Elsewhere throughout this same account a sense of Francis’s feeling of isolation on the farm is also conveyed:

Once a year the steam chaff-cutter came around;  
once a year the insurance inspector;  
the harness repairer; the magic-lantern show;  
and there was fresh gossip. And also came  
Indian hawkers from whom we bought cloth,  
needles and thread, soap and sundry trinkets;  
but had no talk with.

There were still swagmen  
on the road at that time: men who carried  
their lives in pieces buried in their souls  
and who tried to catch the bird of the wind  
in their eyelashes. We had no talk with them either.  
We fed them to be rid of them. Cheaper  
than have a lamb go into their pot at night.  
So we said.<sup>11</sup>

When Dennis returned to the farm from his Murray expedition, Cyril and Florence left for Melbourne to help Percy with his bookshop. This meant that Dennis and Francis were left to manage the farm by themselves and had to cope without their mother's simple wholesome cooking. Francis was now eighteen. For the most part Dennis and Francis lived off the ubiquitous rabbit, parboiling six at a time and eating them as needed. However the plainness of their diet was supplemented by the abundance and variety of fruits supplied by their own trees and vines which they would stew, preserve and make into jams. The farm's orchard contained an exceptional variety of fruits, including Valencia oranges and mandarins; Jonathan, five-crown and Rome Beauty apples; nectarines, apricots, plums, figs, Brigs Early May peaches; and Waltham Cross and Muscatel grapes.

To break the sense of isolation, Dennis liked to mix with other people whenever he could and kept up a modest social calendar of dances and parties which Francis would also attend — although somewhat reluctantly. What irked Francis the most was the predicability and the painfully English manner of these occasions:

At the wool-shed dances we danced English waltzes,  
schottisches, polkas and quadrilles to piano and fiddle.  
And at the two or three 'parties' a year  
the same items (after the same coaxings:  
Oh, do sing for us, Mrs. Steers. Do play,  
Gladys — you play beautifully.) . . .  
And outside, the night and the ancient hills —  
their only voices the mopoke and fox.<sup>12</sup>

What both brothers especially enjoyed were the times when they invited a couple of their neighbours over to play cards on a Saturday night. These evenings lasted as long as it took to finish a two gallon demijohn of wine. But more than these nights, Francis enjoyed the occasional evening at a neighbour's farm: he had a very good vineyard and kept a small cask of wine for his guests after selling most of his vintage to the Melbourne merchants. The great appeal of these evenings for Francis was spending time in the company of the farmer's daughter, Rosie, whom he hoped to marry and eventually live with on his own farm.

But the idea of having enough money to buy his own farm was indeed remote considering the fact that both Dennis and Francis were now doing extra work, away from the farm, to help supplement their meagre income. On one of these paying jobs Francis rode a motorbike, which he and Dennis had purchased, over a hundred kilometres to Shepparton to work in the surrounding orchards. Besides earning him some money, this trip was fortuitous in another way: Francis found a small book of poetry left by one of the previous itinerant workers. Although he did not know the work nor its author, for its cover and title page were torn off, he was immediately captivated by the sound of the opening lines of the first poem: "From fairest creatures we desire increase, / That thereby beauty's rose might never die". The work was a collection of Shakespeare's sonnets which Francis kept with him for the rest of his stay and started to memorise.

The fact that Francis, an isolated country boy, showed an obvious appreciation for this type of Elizabethan love verse

indicates the sharp poetic receptivity of his mind. It also indicates that he was ready to pass beyond the works of those Victorian and romantic poets which his father had given him to read.

In contrast to Francis, Dennis cared little for poetry but instead inherited his father's political nature and became an evangelical socialist and would force Francis to consider his own political stance. On one level, Francis agreed with Dennis on the need to have a Socialist State in the interest of justice for all people. But he was not content with a ready made solution; he reasoned that even if everyone's material wants were justly satisfied, happiness would not automatically ensue. Something would still be missing. In seeking an answer to this dilemma, Francis was influenced by Winwood Reade's book *The Martyrdom of Man*, one of the books periodically sent by Percy, with its view that a new "season of mental anguish was at hand".<sup>13</sup>

Reade's work caused an uproar when it was first published in 1872. It was nothing less than a direct and eloquent attack on the English Establishment. Reade argued that in the past, wars and natural disasters were essential for the progressive development of mankind: they had the effect of balancing populations and establishing new cultures. Now, in the late nineteenth century, their effectiveness in advancing the human race had come to an historical end. But still, he insisted, each generation only advances because of the struggles and woes of the previous generation: each generation is "martyred" for the next to rise up. Reade argued that a new form of martyrdom was now required which involved a war against old stifling ideas and false hopes; a war which would cause much "mental anguish". For Reade this was a necessary step if present-day Victorian civilisation was not to fall into cultural stagnation.

Although the book was damned as heretical and labelled as a "Secularists' Bible", it was also praised as the first synoptic history of human existence. Francis was attracted by Reade's vision, his understanding of the nature of civilisation, and his knowledge of ancient and modern cultures and religions. He

was also attracted by Reade's writing style with its prophetic fervour and ability to cut through falsity in a devastating manner. Francis called Read's book his "friend and guide" as he continued his quest to find a personally satisfying philosophy of existence.

However, Dennis and Francis began to realise that another more immediate "anguish" was upon them. The farm had ceased to be financially viable and they had no choice but to sell it to pay off their ever-increasing overdraft. When the bank had completed the final transactions of the sale each of the brothers was left, after their years of hard work, with only five pounds and a one way train ticket to Melbourne. Francis took the outcome philosophically:

I never again thought of my dream of vineyards and the little girl who [I] was to share it with. It was a dream in which the dreamer just stopped dreaming so that a new dream could be dreamed. Before me was a high expectancy — seed-bed of the next dream. I was twenty-one.<sup>14</sup>

# Chapter Two

## Living in Melbourne

### I. Discovering Art

It was early 1928 when Francis Brabazon arrived in Melbourne. He stayed with the rest of the family above his father's bookshop in Swanston Street but was unsure about his future prospects. It seemed to make sense to learn some kind of trade, but the enrolment officer at the local Technical School informed him that he was too old for their classes.

Percy made some inquiries amongst his friends who frequented the bookshop and found the only work available at the time was a temporary position as a roustabout for a shearing company in western New South Wales. The job was at a property called Elsie Station near Menindee, an outback town made famous by its association with the tragic Australian explorers Burke and Wills who perished in its surrounding terrain in the late nineteenth century. Brabazon jumped at the opportunity to be back in the country and, without hesitation, accepted the offer.

On his arrival he was confronted with a vastly different landscape to the cultivated farming land which he was familiar with around Glenrowan. Here Brabazon saw nothing but red flat plains, sand-hills, and distant horizons which circled him as he stood under a huge blue canopy of sky. His experience of the vastness of the surroundings awakened in him a sense of great emptiness which, he later noted, was to remain with him forever.

Brabazon's response to his experience of Menindee was entirely characteristic of him. On the one hand, he was impressed by the austere beauty of the land, while on the other, he continued to search for a meaning to be found in the landscape.

This can be clearly seen in the following few lines from his poem entitled "Manifesto," from his *Early Poems* collection:

The immense fecundity of this land  
where no life has yet flourished!

It is here that we who have been born out of time of the old  
gods and traditions  
must find our new beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

It seems probable that this poem harkens back to the landscape of Menindee. The importance of the Menindee experience in Brabazon's life is confirmed by the fact that, fifty years later, in his long autobiographical poem, *The Wind of the Word*, he starts with a scene from this dry desolate region. The scene is of a relentless outback wind sweeping across the continent seeking a suitable "throat" in which to give full voice to a new Australian "Song":

I first met it out on the plains.  
It rushed in from the further West  
covering the sun and shrouding the trees  
with fall-out from the atomic Interior;  
and the trees marched back over the horizon.  
And it raced on. And I went with it.  
For it was the Wind's time to explore all places,  
sound all things that would sound — seeking a throat  
through which it could utter the Song  
locked in a Continent since the First Dreaming.<sup>2</sup>

This is quite different from the experience which D. H. Lawrence expresses in his novel *Kangaroo* through the figure of the poet Richard Lovat Somers. *Kangaroo*, a novel which Lawrence wrote while in Australia, was published five years before Brabazon's visit to Menindee. In his novel Lawrence describes the spirit of the land to be "hoarily waiting" but his poet "could not penetrate into its secret".<sup>3</sup>

In Brabazon's experience, the spirit is not simply waiting but is active and even frustrated in its search for a poet who could



listen to its “Song” and be its mouthpiece. From what Brabazon was to write fifty years later, it seems in some mysterious way that he felt the spirit — the “Wind” from the “Interior” — to be calling him to listen to its silences and to be a poet in its service. It was a feeling he could not deny but, according to him at the time, he was uncertain as to what it actually meant or what he was to do about it.

Another life-long effect of Brabazon’s stay at Menindee was that he developed a strong affinity with the people of the area. He was impressed by their plain and honest speech which he felt was a response to the stark landscape in which they lived. Over time, this style of speaking was to become part of Brabazon’s own poetic voice and gives his poetry its direct and prosaic Australian character.

After a few months living at Elsie Station, when his work contract with the shearing company had expired, Brabazon returned to his family in Melbourne, but again was unsure about his future prospects. He felt driven to learn more and, with time on his hands, he spent most of the day reading in his father’s bookshop and pondering on the significance of his Menindee experience.

He was also intrigued by many of the elderly customers who came to chat with his father, and he felt a strong desire to meet with them and find out what they knew. One in particular was the journalist Will Craig, who was strongly independent and lived with his wife and six children on a small property on Old Plenty Road just beyond the outer Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg. Craig welcomed Brabazon’s questions and began to take an interest in his welfare. He gave Brabazon a job minding some cows on his property and in payment allowed him to stay, rent-free, in a small hut.

The hut was badly dilapidated, and since it was winter when Brabazon moved in, he found it bitterly cold. One window had been knocked out and the stove, whenever it was lit, filled the place with smoke but very little warmth. But this physical hardship was made up for by Craig’s eagerness to help Brabazon with his writing:

I often walked over [to Craig's house] in the evening and he would read Nietzsche, Heine and Scottish Ballads to me in his rich voice, and he would exhort me to be hard, be strong. He was the first to encourage me in my writing. He said I should start sending poems to magazines of which he would give me a list. I was rather alarmed at this. I replied that I wouldn't want to publish anything which later on I might be ashamed of. But he said, if you don't start sending work around you won't get known.<sup>4</sup>

After learning all he could from listening to Craig, Brabazon decided to return once more to his family's residence. When he arrived he found various changes had taken place: his brother Cyril had taken over his father's position of managing the bookshop; his brother Dennis had left home seeking his own future; and to his glad surprise, his father had become a Melbourne theatre critic for the *Sydney Bulletin*. This latter development, as we shall soon see, turned out to be a great boon for Brabazon.

Like his older brothers, he now felt the need to take charge of his own life and not be a financial burden on his parents, and so he decided to leave home. His first lodgings were in an empty unfurnished room above a welding shop opposite the Argus, a prominent landmark, in Elizabeth Street. For a rent of five shillings a week, which included gas, electricity and the use of a telephone, it provided Brabazon with all he needed. He soon got busy and made himself some rough furniture out of whatever timber he could find and started to take stock of his situation.

He took Craig's advice "to be hard, be strong" literally and began to improve his physical fitness. This took the form of training and exercising in the nearby gymnasium. Brabazon applied himself to these sessions with such diligence that, at one stage, he unofficially broke the Australian weight-lifting record in his weight division; he was even able to wrestle professionally to earn some money. As he became more independent and increasingly absorbed in his own life, Brabazon's contact with his family gradually diminished.

The main problem with living in the city for Brabazon was trying to find work, for most jobs required some basic trade

qualification which he did not possess. But this was duly compensated, in his estimation, by the opportunity he was given to attend cultural events. Thanks to his father's position as a drama critic, an ample supply of free theatre passes came his way and he had the opportunity to see as much theatre as he wished. He especially valued the Little Theatre in Collins Street and went to productions of works by Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Shaw, O'Neill, O'Casey and John Millington Synge.

Even more critical to his life, however, was the opportunity he had to witness the performances of acclaimed overseas artists who came to perform in Melbourne on their international tours. His first enlightening experience came with dance when, after much financial scrimping and saving, he was able to buy a ticket to see the renowned Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova, who had just commenced a season of ballet at His Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne on 25th May 1929.

This was the first time Brabazon had the opportunity to see a truly dedicated artist in action. During her performance he was over-powered with aesthetic shock and could not believe his eyes as he watched her graceful movements. Pavlova, as many critics acclaimed, had such refined artistic skills that she appeared to become one with the part she played.<sup>5</sup> On seeing Pavlova dance Brabazon experienced an epiphany: a revelation of beauty.

Equally powerful was the experience he felt upon hearing the Russian born pianist Alexander Brailowsky play an all-Chopin recital when he visited Melbourne within the same month as Pavlova's visit. Again Brabazon was spellbound:

It was unbelievable that one could fill an auditorium with showers of sound, with landscapes where lovers walked and recited tales of long ago. As an encore the pianist played the little prelude in A major. I knew, or thought I knew, this piece and wondered where all the extra notes came from.<sup>6</sup>

Most significant of all, it was the profound feeling of beauty which Pavlova and Brailowsky were able to reveal in their art which had the most effect on Brabazon. It gave him a momentary awareness of a new depth of consciousness, within his own

being, which he had never imagined existed. As a consequence of this experience, it raised the philosophical question in his mind as to what might be the nature of beauty and how might it be understood.

In Brabazon's own words, "the quest for beauty, what it is, and its relation to truth" became, from this point onwards, his "religion" — the religion of art.<sup>7</sup> To seriously follow such an undertaking, Brabazon knew, required the diligent practice of art itself and not mere rational analysis. But by this time Australia, along with the rest of the world, was sinking into economic depression and the obstacles to a young, unskilled man pursuing art in an attempt to find truth were many.

Work, which had always been a problem for Brabazon, became even more so. During the early thirties, on various occasions, he could only afford to live on turnips or whatever was cheapest at the nearby Victoria market.<sup>8</sup> When he ran out of money he had to depend upon the government supplied sustenance relief or "susso" which recipients had to work for. One of Brabazon's jobs was picking up stones in paddocks. During these difficult times Brabazon felt a sense of hopelessness haunting Melbourne:

The city in which I found myself  
was not lit with the companionship of hope and  
adventure  
but with candles that had got lost  
and were weeping great white tears  
which ran down the cheeks of night; a city  
where the streets walked always to the same place  
where one was.<sup>9</sup>

At one stage, when things were desperate, Brabazon left Melbourne and took to the road carrying his swag. He ate and slept wherever he could and jumped the trains to reach the next town and hopefully another meal. Returning to the bush refreshed Brabazon's spirit, but eventually he was drawn back to the city:

... And city men  
jumping the trains at night or camping out  
again saw the stars. The cry of distance.

Every railway bridge was a net of yarns,  
and every train a loaded defiance.  
'We've had it good in the past — she'll come good again.'  
And back to the city.<sup>10</sup>

At least in the city, Brabazon was able to continue his study of art which even his lack of money did not inhibit. For instance, he would often attend the Town Hall concerts and Symphony recitals for free, either by walking in with the musicians, via the side door, or entering at intermission without a coat, so giving the impression to the door-keeper that he was returning to his place for the second half of the program. He also made full use of the Melbourne Public Library and the libraries attached to the various Workers' Institutes.

Sometimes, when he had no other way of obtaining a book, he would surreptitiously help himself to a copy from the shelves of bookshops. When he had finished reading it, or if it proved to be of no personal value, he would wrap the copy in brown paper and string and leave it inside the door and quietly walk away as if he was delivering a parcel.

The Depression caused Brabazon to become disillusioned with capitalism and the free market economy and he entertained the idea, like many free-thinking artists of his generation, of joining the Communist Party. But this was short lived, for he soon found that he was too much of an individualist to be able to commit himself to any organisation requiring uniformity of any kind. Instead he chose to continue with his own self-education, pursuing interests and ideas as they presented themselves to him. His reading was eclectic and included those authors who were causing the most social "mental anguish", namely Marx, Freud, and particularly Nietzsche. When Brabazon came across Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* he didn't sleep until he had finished reading the complete text. He was struck with its bolts of "untamed wisdom!" and found a kindred voice in the poetic passages of longing:<sup>11</sup>

It is night: now do all the leaping fountains speak louder.  
And my soul too is a leaping fountain.

It is night: only now do all songs of lovers awaken. And my soul too is the song of the lover.

Something unquenched, unquenchable, is in me, that wants to speak out. A craving for love is in me, that itself speaks the language of love.<sup>12</sup>

Brabazon was also strongly attracted to traditional works and particularly to epic tales and heroic sagas which he felt “were as men were — noble and violent, / full of wisdom and peace — and had songs to sing / and stood up and sang them”.<sup>13</sup> These works formed and shaped his thinking and kept him standing for hours in bookshops from which he would stagger on to the street “drunk and unseeing”. The Melbourne bookshops in the thirties were a haven for Brabazon and were full of imported books on philosophy, anthropology, art, poetry translations and cultural and spiritual literature.<sup>14</sup>

To help relieve his constant problem of lack of money Brabazon decided to start his own business. Although he had no trade qualifications or experience, he felt he had acquired enough skills in the area of physical training to become a therapeutic masseur. Surprisingly, he found an ample number of clients amongst wealthy business and sporting men. His work hours were in the early morning from six to mid-morning and then again in the evening after five; this left Brabazon with the whole day to pursue his own study and artistic interests.

With his first payments from his clients, Brabazon hired a piano and for the next three years studied part-time under an accomplished woman teacher. She introduced him to an extensive range of piano music, and under her guidance he improved his piano technique. He also bought a second-hand gramophone, constantly bought and sold second-hand records, and kept attending concerts whenever possible, in the desire to hear more and different forms of music.

While he was absorbed in music Brabazon also became interested in drawing. This occurred when he dropped his evening clients in his masseur business and found a position at the Melbourne National Gallery School posing as a model in the art classes under the pseudonym of Bernard Francis.

He dropped the name Brabazon out of regard for his father whom he thought may be displeased with his aristocratic name becoming associated with such an occupation. Having a well-defined body, from all his physical training, Brabazon made an ideal model. Of all the artists at the school, Cliff Bayliss stood out in Brabazon's mind as the most dedicated and skilful and so he invited Bayliss to his small one room residence to listen to Beethoven and discuss art. During this meeting Bayliss never stopped sketching and his understanding of the "principles in art" so inspired Brabazon that he decided to enrol in classes at the Gallery Art School and become his student.

By the end of 1936, Brabazon made an important personal assessment which set the course for the rest of his life:

When he [Brabazon] was about thirty he sat down one night and faced himself, asking himself what he wanted from life. He was, at the time, making good money and was at the same time, writing [poetry], drawing and seriously trying to acquire a foundation of piano technique. For months he restricted himself to five hours sleep a day . . . On this night he said to himself, 'What do you really want? You can go and increase your business and so be able to buy what are called all the comforts of life, but then you won't have time for art . . . You already do not have enough time for this and the only way you'll get enough time is by neglecting your business, and you know that when a man does that, his business leaves him. You have always rather despised starving artists, but now you can see that if you want art you may have to do some starving also.' So he put to himself the test question, 'What when you are at the end of your life will give you most satisfaction? To have enjoyed life or perhaps have written one real poem or painted one real canvas?' The answer was, 'One poem or canvas please.'<sup>15</sup>

As a result of this decision Brabazon closed his masseur business but kept working as a model in the evening classes at the National Gallery, and then later dropped this also and became a part-time attendant at the Gallery. The change involved a

considerable drop in income and meant he could not buy any more books or records, but could just manage his rent payments and food expenses.

In 1938, Brabazon started mixing with a small group of dedicated art students, mostly painters, who offered encouragement to each other and shared their resources in a communal manner. These included Sidney Nolan, John Sinclair, Albert Tucker, and others.<sup>16</sup> As Richard Haese points out, "Friendship between Gallery School students in Melbourne formed the basis of supportive enclaves and groups which coalesced in the late 1930s and early 1940s".<sup>17</sup>

Brabazon found no contemporary local writers or poets of interest, only painters. By this time, he had moved his residence to a single room above a bicycle repair shop in Little Lonsdale Street which became known to his friends and fellow artists as "The Dump". It was furnished with wooden boxes for shelves and some fruit crates for chairs; and amongst these makeshift items stood a piano:

... The 12x12 room  
on a back lane facing a blank wall.  
Beautiful wall! painted by Sassetta  
Beautiful room! filled with fog of voices.  
Beautiful piano! sometimes a musician played you.<sup>18</sup>

It was here that Brabazon began his life solely dedicated to art. One of his strongest influences at the time was Beethoven whom he saw as representing the model artist: a man, who, as J. W. N. Sullivan points out, was "completely loyal to his own experience".<sup>19</sup> Brabazon's admiration for Beethoven is interesting for it may have been because of Beethoven's strong belief in God as the ultimate source of beauty in nature and art that Brabazon began to adopt similar views himself.

Beethoven wrote in his diary: "... if order and beauty are reflected in the world, then there is God ... He who is above, — O, He is, and without Him there is nothing".<sup>20</sup> And in this entry recorded with the remark, "From Indian Literature": "God is immaterial, and for this reason transcends every conception. Since He is invisible He can have no form. But from what



we observe in His work we may conclude that He is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent".<sup>21</sup>

Of all the numerous concerts which Brabazon attended in the thirties in Melbourne, the two which moved him the most were the Budapest String Quartet playing Beethoven's seventeen string quartets and Arthur Schnabel's rendition of his thirty-two piano sonatas. In 1939, Schnabel came to Australia on a concert tour and played in Melbourne in July of that year. His masterful concerts were neither flamboyant nor austere. Rather, Schnabel worked on the principle of playing music in the manner which was entirely adequate to the inherent demands of the composition, nothing more and nothing less.

Schnabel's approach to playing was one which Brabazon admired and tried to emulate himself. Yet it became obvious to Brabazon after hearing Schnabel play that he himself had no future as a pianist. Firstly, he had started too late in life, and secondly, his fingers, partly from hard work and partly due to their structure, were not suited to playing the piano with any degree of virtuosity. At one stage, in frustration, he even considered having an operation on his hands to improve his playing capability. But reluctantly he accepted his limitations at the piano, although the need to express himself in some form of artistic medium persisted.

As a potential poet, Brabazon was also unsure about his skill and felt his poems were becoming more like static picture-pieces. Many of the pieces published in *Early Poems*, which were originally written in the thirties, exhibit this dominant pictorial element. For instance, "Seaside":

Over the sands, which the sea has loved  
for so long, the setting sun  
is throwing the groups of the holiday crowd  
into the stained-glass windows of old churches:

Grandmothers sit in indecorous postures,  
and their eyes hold a distance  
where no memory stirs. Old men  
having trotted up from the water,

stand with their legs apart vigorously  
rubbing themselves; and there is the mother and child  
the centre of an admiring group.

Young people are leaping into the molten sea,  
and as they emerge again  
they stand for a moment on the top of the waves  
aurioled in the western flame. At this moment  
they know death and are unafraid.<sup>22</sup>

With the sense that his poems were becoming like pictures and with his ambition of becoming a concert pianist eliminated, Brabazon now concentrated his attention on his drawing. During 1938, in Melbourne, the Contemporary Art Society was formed and became the vanguard of modernism in Australia, and although "there was little unanimity over the nature of modern art" the society was united against the conservatism of the Gallery school.<sup>23</sup>

Brabazon found a greater affinity with the Society than the Gallery. He appreciated the support it gave to artists like himself who were becoming increasingly interested in new forms of artistic expression.<sup>24</sup> A major event which helped nourish the budding interest in modernism in the Melbourne art scene was the Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art held in 1939.<sup>25</sup> It included works by Picasso, Braque, Cezanne, Chagall, Juan Gris, Dali and others.

Brabazon described the exhibition as revolutionary and was astonished that he had progressed — "in one leap" — from "never having seen a [modernist European] painting" to some "understanding of the Paris painters". Excited by his new and surprising insight, Brabazon felt he had at last found his true artistic medium — painting:

So I got one of my friends, Howard Matthews, an excellent painter and a thorough artist, to buy paints (Winsor and Newtons artists' colours), brushes, canvas, for me. I forgot Cliff's [Bayliss] insistence that good painting rests on good drawing, and plunged straightway into colour.<sup>26</sup>

## II. The Spiritual Search

As the euphoria produced by his reaction to the Herald Exhibition subsided, Brabazon's mad rush into colour and painting lost its momentum and he was left wondering where to turn for inspiration. His paintings, he felt, were leading nowhere; nor could he see any purpose in continuing with his art. While his frustration grew, he began to fall into a state of chronic mental depression. Soon he felt deeply alone:

. . . it reached a stage where for a period of months — nearly a year — there was no light at all. The twenty-four hours were all the same. It was the same awake or asleep. Every day I rehearsed death and saw humanity as vast processions winding across the plains.<sup>1</sup>

In an attempt to forget his condition, Brabazon indulged in what he described as his “inherent disposition to artistic decadence” and gave free expression to those desires which he had suppressed from his youth. But, surprisingly, he found that it was in these moments of self abandonment that he experienced a keen anguish for God.

In what was possibly one of the most significant turning points in his life, it suddenly occurred to Brabazon that what he had always been unconsciously pursuing in his quest for beauty in art was actually an experience of the presence of God. To help confirm the validity of this intuition, Brabazon felt the need to contact a person or teacher of a genuine spiritual stature.

His reading by this time had turned to books of a spiritual nature, and he found in the writings and life story of the Indian Bhakti Guru, Paramahansa Shri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) of

Calcutta, someone who best exemplified the type of spiritual Master he was looking for.<sup>2</sup> This was the same teacher who had attracted Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood in their spiritual searchings. Ramakrishna's teachings were founded on the ancient Indian Scriptures known as the Upanishads as interpreted by the *Advaita Vedanta* philosophy of Shankara (c. 800). Later, Brabazon was to write of Ramakrishna:

... here was a heart that contained all hearts, a mind that cut through all pretence. One at a time he had explained all the possible paths to God and identified himself with each source and had merged all sources in the One Source.

He preached the doctrine of love, not in dry separative sermons, but by joining in the spiritual songs and dances with the people who came to see him.<sup>3</sup>

According to his biographers, although Ramakrishna was illiterate he had such an inherent knowledge of God that he astounded even the most learned pandits with his divine insights. Brabazon was equally impressed, at this time, by the English writings of his disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who had been sent to America by Ramakrishna to explain *Vedanta* to a predominantly Christian audience.<sup>4</sup>

Convinced that a teacher of Ramakrishna's or Vivekananda's stature could not be found in the West, let alone Australia, Brabazon decided he needed to travel to India. However, at this time, a dramatic change occurred in his life which made him feel that God, in a sense, had made an inward journey to him. He felt a new awareness develop within him which he described as an inner "faculty of guidance".<sup>5</sup> Particularly when he was in the act of buying books he sensed "something" making his selection for him, and often for no immediately apparent reason. Brabazon recalled:

The most remarkable example of this was: I went into Hall's bookshop, went straight to the far end corner, got the ladder and climbed up to the top shelf and took down the six volume translated edition of *The Poet Saints of*

*Maharashtra*. I knew nothing about these books and just put them away without opening them. Several years later I opened the parcel; it was just what I wanted at the time.<sup>6</sup>

At other times, he felt drawn to a certain book which had an immediate effect upon him. This was markedly the case when he found a copy of the newly published translation of the poem the “Dark Night of the Soul” by the Spanish poet St. John of the Cross:

... I also climbed a ladder and opened a book and read:  
On a dark night, Kindled in love and yearnings —  
oh, happy chance! —  
I went forth without being observed, My house  
being now at rest.  
Something within me fled, something remained.<sup>7</sup>

After reading St. John’s “Dark Night of the Soul” Brabazon felt he had found a near-perfect poem or work of art, in which form and content, beauty and meaning were perfectly balanced. But more significantly, the poem imparted to him something of the flavour of divine love-longing between a lover-poet and his divine Beloved which was to fill much of his own later poetry. It made him feel as if he had climbed the very “secret ladder” alluded to in the poem and momentarily feel the same kind of experience expressed by St. John in his last two verses:

The breeze blew from the turret As I parted his  
locks;  
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck And  
caused all my senses to be suspended.  
I remained, lost in oblivion; My face I reclined on  
the Beloved.  
All ceased and I abandoned myself, Leaving my  
cares forgotten among the lilies.<sup>8</sup>

In Brabazon’s terms — “Something within me fled, something remained”.

Brabazon’s discovery of St. John’s poem provided him with a new artistic experience. It was the same kind of artistic

experience which he had felt in seeing Pavlova dance, or standing in front of a French Modernist painting. The only difference was that it penetrated more deeply and powerfully into the depths of his being. Ironically, its power was such that it made Brabazon feel disempowered and overcome.

The art historian, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy — whose writing on art was to later shape much of Brabazon's thinking — described in comparable terms this same type of experience happening to him: "I have myself been completely dissolved and broken up by reading aloud Plato's *Phaedo*. . . . [This experience] represents the shock of conviction . . . the body-blow that is delivered by any perfect and therefore convincing statement of truth."<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, Coomaraswamy described this as "an immediate experience, and congeneric with the tasting of God".<sup>10</sup>

Brabazon now felt, and more fervently than ever before, the need for some guidance from a spiritual teacher. In hindsight he surmised that perhaps his previous period of inner darkness and depression was a type of purging which allowed him to be so responsive to St John's poem. But the persistent thought lingered in his mind that he could be simply deluding himself and heading off on some false spiritual path of his own making.

Then in mid-1940 an event occurred which led him to find his first spiritual teacher. One of his friends invited him to a Buddhist meeting in the Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn at the home of Norman Ratcliff. Brabazon had acquired some knowledge and interest in Buddhism mostly through his study of Chinese and Japanese art, but saw no point in discussing matters at meetings where there was no real authority present.<sup>11</sup> Yet out of courtesy to his friend he attended. At the end of the meeting Brabazon informed his friend that he would not be returning for the above mentioned reason. In response he was told that a real authority and spiritual teacher of Sufism, Baron von Frankenberg who lived outside Sydney at Camden, sometimes visited Melbourne to attend Sufi meetings held at the same house. Brabazon was keen to hear this information and made initial arrangements to meet the Baron when he next visited.

### III. The Sufi Movement

The Sufi Movement, to which Baron von Frankenberg belonged, had been established by Hazarat Inayat Khan in 1910 to introduce Sufism to the West as a practical philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Its aim was to provide a way whereby spiritual ideals could be incorporated into everyday life. Branches were initially established in America, then France and Russia and, by the forties, when Brabazon first heard of the Sufi Movement, there were centres in Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, and Scandinavia, with the small Australian group being affiliated with the American branch.

The teachings of the Movement were taken from the extensive writings of Inayat Khan. His training was mainly in the Chishti School of Sufism, which was founded by Hazarat Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (c. 1142-1236) who was believed to be a direct descendent of Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Muinuddin Chishti is still highly venerated today and known throughout India as the great saint of Ajmer. The Chishti school is noted for its use of music to facilitate inner spiritual development.<sup>3</sup>

Inayat Khan's writings are extensive and wide ranging. His writings on art alone extend across such topics as the essence of art, art and religion, painting, sculpture, architecture, music and Persian Sufi poetry. Besides being a highly competent singer and vina player, who was in demand at the courts of many Indian princes, he was also a poet and playwright. As a music teacher Inayat Khan held the position of Professor of Music at the Gayan Shala Music Academy of Baroda, and during his career he toured America and lectured on Indian music at such universities as Berkeley, California and Columbia in New York.

He also visited Russia where his concert at the Moscow Conservatoire was warmly received, and he became friends with the composer Scriabin and with Tolstoy's son, Serge. In Paris, he met with the composer Debussy and with other luminaries, such as the actress Sarah Bernhardt, the Italian poet and playwright Gabriele D'Annunzio, and the dancer Isadora Duncan.<sup>4</sup> While in England he met the Australian composer Percy Grainger. Yet despite the fullness of his life and career he was at heart a renunciate. He told an American woman, Miss Ora Ray Baker, who later became his wife, "I am a dervish. Today I eat dry bread tomorrow perhaps none. If you come with me, this will be your life also".<sup>5</sup>

Historically Inayat Khan was not the first person to present Sufism in the English language. Before him the famous English explorer Sir Richard Burton, the first European to visit the holy Muslim cities of Al-Madinah and Mecca in 1853, and a qualified Sufi adept in the Qadiri order, also wrote in English on Sufism. Burton's poetic work *The Kasidah of Haji Abdu El Yezdi: A Lay of Higher Law*, written after his return from Mecca, provides the first attempt in English to explain Sufism from the position of a believer and not simply as an observer.<sup>6</sup> It is filled with Sufi ideas and style, and its concluding "Notes" display an imposing understanding of the unity of religious truth which is the essence of Sufi beliefs. Burton, however, did not pursue the establishment of any Western Sufi Order. This was to be Inayat Khan's contribution to Sufism, which he began in New York in 1911 at the age of twenty-eight.

Under Hazarat Inayat Khan's leadership, Sufism was defined as a perennial teaching, and the Sufi Movement was his vehicle to reinstate these timeless truths in Western culture. According to Hazarat Inayat Khan, the word Sufism is derived from the Arabic *safa*, meaning "a purifying process", although other teachers and scholars have linked the word to the Greek and Persian *sophia*, "wisdom", or to the Arabic *soof* meaning "wool", referring to the woollen garments the Sufis traditionally wore.

In his explanation of the term, Hazarat Inayat Khan emphasised that Sufi ideas have "never been owned by any race or religion, for



differences and distinctions are the very delusions from which the Sufi purifies himself. . . .”<sup>7</sup> This emphasis was established during the period of Classical Sufi thought and is exemplified in the oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism, the *Kashf Al-Mahjub* of Al Hujwiri, in which the author stresses the term’s universal applicability:

“Sufi” is a name which is given, and has formerly been given to the perfect saints and spiritual adepts. One of the Shaykhs says: “He that is purified by love is pure, and he that is absorbed in the Beloved and has abandoned all else is a ‘Sufi’.” The name has no derivation answering to etymological requirements, inasmuch as Sufism is too exalted to have any genus from which it might be derived; for one thing from another demands homogeneity. All that exists is the opposite to purity and things are not derived from their opposites. To Sufis the meaning of Sufism is clearer than the sun and does not need explanation or indication. Since “Sufi” admits of no explanation, all the world are interpreters thereof, whether they recognise the dignity of the name or not at the time when they learn its meaning. The perfect, then, among them are called *Sufi*, and the inferior aspirant among them are called *Mutasawwif*. . . which implies “taking trouble” . . .<sup>8</sup>

It could be interpreted, in the light of Al Hujwiri’s idealistic comments, that St. John of the Cross could be called a “Sufi”, as also could Paramahansa Ramakrishna, for Sufism defined in this manner transcends all religious differences.<sup>9</sup> This type of religious thinking was openly acknowledged and presented in the writings of Hazarat Inayat Khan as the natural outcome of spiritual understanding. Indeed, even on an exoteric level, he wrote that “each person should belong to that [religion] which is most suitable. If he is content with his own, that is the reason for adhering to it; if not, he may seek one with which he can be content”.<sup>10</sup>

This openness of the Sufi Movement stemmed from the monotheistic belief that “There is One God, the Eternal, the

Only Being; none exists save He", and a belief that the "God-man" of the world religions, the founding figure, was this same One Being incarnated:

Although the tongue of God is busy speaking through all things, yet in order to speak to the deaf ears of many among us, it is necessary for Him to speak through the lips of man. He has done this all through history. . . every great teacher of the past having been the Guiding Spirit living the life of God in human guise. In other words, their human guises are the various coats worn by the same person, who appeared to be different in each. Shiva, Buddha, Rama, Krishna on the one side, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mahommed on the other; and many more known or unknown to history — always one and the same person.<sup>11</sup>

Inayat Khan's twentieth century Sufi Movement did not create a new set of religious dogmas or outward rituals as channels for God's grace. Rather, its documents emphasise practicality and state that if an aspirant is serious and wishes to realise the spiritual truths of Sufism, and not simply to understand them philosophically, he or she must learn the art of living in the "manner of God — *Akhlak Allah*". This practice, it is believed by the Sufis, leads to a natural state of human happiness, harmony, beauty, and purity: a person's rightful heritage — the perfection of life.<sup>12</sup> The accomplishment of this practice depends in part upon the sustained spiritual desire of the aspirant, but even more so upon the guidance and inner help of a spiritual Master, whom the Sufis call a *Murshid* or, in the case of a woman Master, *Murshida*. To the members of the Sufi Movement Inayat Khan was such a *Murshid*.

In July 1912, before he left on a trip from the United States to England, Inayat Khan initiated the first of his American followers — a Jewish woman named Ada Martin — and gave her the status and name of *Murshida* Rabia Martin. The name Rabia comes from the woman Sufi saint Rabia of Basra (c. 717-801). After Inayat Khan's death in Delhi in 1927 at the age of forty-

four, *Murshida* Rabia Martin continued to honour her appointed leadership position and did so until her own death in 1947.

In 1938 she visited Melbourne and spoke to the Australian branch of the Sufi Movement which was under her leadership. This group originally formed in Sydney in the early thirties under the guidance of Frederick Elliott Baron von Frankenberg, whose Sufi name was Momin. Von Frankenberg, like *Murshida* Martin, had studied under Inayat Khan; in his case it was for eighteen months in the early twenties in Suresnes, France. In the early thirties, when von Frankenberg was visiting New York on a world tour, *Murshida* Rabia Martin elevated him to the position of *Sheikh* or qualified teacher. In 1937, when he arrived back in Australia he became the official leader of the Australian branch of the Sufi Movement.

Baron von Frankenberg possessed all the distinctiveness of a German aristocrat, strong Teutonic facial features, a clipped beard and an authoritative presence. In his early career he had held the rank of an officer in the German Crown Prince's regiment, serving part of his time as a motorcycle dispatch rider. It was a position he detested but could not escape. As a last resort he made a covenant with God: that if God extracted him from the mindless war machine he would devote his life to God's cause. To von Frankenberg's glad surprise he was soon discharged from the army and subsequently joined the Sufi Movement. After Hazarat Inayat Khan's death in 1927 he emigrated to Australia.

In 1940, when Brabazon first heard of Baron von Frankenberg, or *Sheikh* Momin, he immediately wrote to him outlining his spiritual problems and asked if he would teach him some form of meditation by which he could arrive at an experience of truth. *Sheikh* Momin replied, in a kind and sympathetic manner, notifying Brabazon that he would not immediately teach him meditation, but assured him that if he placed his trust in his guidance there would be nothing withheld. Brabazon accepted this commitment and started to regularly attend the Sufi meetings at Hawthorn. After a few weeks *Sheikh* Momin paid a visit to the Melbourne Sufi group and met Brabazon for the first time.

Brabazon's initial reaction on seeing *Sheikh* Momin was one of immediate acceptance. Possibly he was simply projecting his own deeply felt need for a spiritual guide, but Brabazon was convinced that *Sheikh* Momin possessed a genuine spiritual quality and felt their meeting confirmed the old saying, "When the pupil is ready, the teacher comes to the pupil".

As a measure of his sincerity Brabazon asked if he could return with *Sheikh* Momin to Camden and be his pupil. *Sheikh* Momin refused the offer and suggested instead that Brabazon should keep attending the Sufi meetings and continue to study under his directions.

This was the beginning of a period of inner turbulence for Brabazon, for now he had to submit to the directions of another person — something which ran against the grain of his independent nature. During this time *Sheikh* Momin and Brabazon frequently exchanged letters, many of which were concerned with both spiritual and personal matters. In these letters Brabazon urged *Sheikh* Momin to act as a type of therapist, "a doctor of the soul", and "probe out any secrets which . . . [he] may unconsciously withhold".

*Sheikh* Momin, however, did not enter into this type of relationship, nor did he seem to give it much importance. If anything *Sheikh* Momin wanted Brabazon to work through his own difficulties by himself. Yet Brabazon did find in *Sheikh* Momin's letters, messages that were inspiring and of real personal value. In response to one of *Sheikh* Momin's letters Brabazon wrote:

Your group letter tonight [read at the Sufi meeting Brabazon attended] was a tonic, where you said that one cannot aspire to that Self, [for] one is it.

As long as I remember that fact and can feel it I am all right and am in control . . . Then I can see what right actions would be. But I forget, and then I think the outward beauty of things . . . is the real thing or at least if not quite the real thing that one can reach the Real by absorbing or exploring them. . . .

Then the round starts again: coming home . . . feeling full of beauty and projects of work; starting painting; two or three hours sleep; off to work; washed out the next day; longing for the beautiful and that Something which I sensed and could not find.<sup>13</sup>

These few comments indicate the beginning of another turning point in Brabazon's spiritual quest for beauty. Gradually he began to focus his attention away from the world and direct it inwardly. Instead of focusing on the beauty of external objects, or even on some idealised notion of beauty behind the appearance of things, Brabazon began to see beauty as an inner state of being. This new focus gave Brabazon a new approach to his art: to experience beauty inwardly and then to express the beauty of that experience in art.

## IV. Art from Meditation

One result of Brabazon's focus on inwardness was that he became increasingly noncommunicative. Even in public he would sit alone with his head bent and his eyes closed, seemingly absorbed in himself. Some of his artist friends who met him during this time commented that he had become overly serious. However, this did not bother Brabazon for he felt he had discovered a new sense of the "Real".

What Brabazon had inadvertently discovered was a form of meditation which best suited his own artistic temperament. As a result of this discovery, which occurred after nearly a year under *Sheikh* Momim's guidance, Brabazon had his first poem published in September 1941. The poem brought to a close a period of much despairing on Brabazon's part about his future as an artist, and heralded his new artistic direction.

The poem, entitled "Benevolent Shapes", appeared in *A Comment*, a Melbourne based literary magazine:

As we ascend from the river bed, as we emerge from  
the waters, your feet tread gracefully the tree lengths  
like some delicate creature descending from heaven.  
In your right hand, your right hand — all our gifts  
(before our asking), all our dreams & fairylands, all  
our experiences & efforts, & all our voyages returning  
upon us before our setting out.  
Thus it should be — & the ever opening doors closed by  
our own knowledge against successive effort.<sup>1</sup>

The poem represents a movement away from the descriptive picture-pieces of his early works. The initial description of landscape, for instance, is given only a vague outline,

without focus. What the poem suggests is an inner process of meditation: a baptismal emerging into a benevolent presence of diffused light and tranquillity. At the end of the poem, as in meditation, an elevated psychological state of certainty is described in which the “ever opening doors” of the restless mind and the senses are shut.

In many ways the poem is not unlike descriptions found in the writings of Chinese Quietism which Brabazon had studied using Arthur Waley’s translation.<sup>2</sup>

In Waley’s introduction to his translation of the classic Taoist text on Quietism, the *Tao Te Ching*, can be found an analysis of meditation which suggests Brabazon’s poetic description in “Benevolent Shapes”.

Waley’s commentary is also interesting in that it deals with meditation, “the process of Quietism”, as the same practice the world over; and in this sense its approach is in accord with Sufi ideals. For Brabazon meditation was a process by which he endeavoured to experience that inner state of being in which, paradoxically, as *Sheikh* Momin had previously pointed out to him “one cannot aspire to”, for essentially, “one is it”. In Waley’s words:

The process of Quietism, then, consisted in a travelling back through the successive layers of consciousness to the point when one arrived at Pure Consciousness, where one no longer saw ‘things perceived’, but ‘that whereby we perceive’. For never to have known ‘that whereby we know’ is to cast away a treasure that is ours.

. . . The Quietist, whether Chinese, Indian, German or Spanish, has always made the same reply: by such practices three things are attained, truth, happiness and power.

. . . But in actual practice the visions of the Quietist do not present themselves to him merely as more or less agreeable alternatives to everyday existence. They are accompanied by a sense of finality, by a feeling that ‘all the problems which all the schools of philosophers under Heaven cannot settle this way or that have been settled this way or that’. [Chuang Tzu XVIII] Moreover,

the state to which the Quietists attains is not merely pleasurable rather than painful. It is 'absolute joy', utterly transcending any form of earthly enjoyment.<sup>3</sup>

A month after the publication of "Benevolent Shapes", as if to confirm his new artistic discovery, Brabazon had the first ever public exhibition of his paintings. The art exhibition took place in the C.A.S. (1941) Annual Exhibition held in Hotel Australia in Collins Street, Melbourne, where four of his works were shown: "Annunciation", "Worker '41", "Oranges" and "Portrait". These were hung alongside paintings by William Dobell, Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and others. Unfortunately no record exists of any critical response to Brabazon's 1941 paintings. This is a pity, for it would be interesting to see if they expressed something of the meditative stillness that the poem "Benevolent Shapes" suggests.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, the 1941 C.A.S. exhibition was a huge success and of even greater importance than the Herald exhibition of 1939. In all, 310 works were shown, and the exhibition signalled to the viewing public that modernism was the progressive new force in Australian art.

That same year, Brabazon introduced the influential art patrons John and Sunday Reed to Max Harris, the editor of the radical Adelaide University Arts Association journal, *The Angry Penguins*.<sup>5</sup> From this important meeting John Reed became joint editor, and the journal soon became the mouthpiece of modernism in Australian art. Brabazon felt that his future was now starting to show some prospect, but then, unfortunately, like many of his fellow artists including his friends Nolan, Tucker, and Perceval, he was conscripted into the army and made to undergo military training.

Brabazon was sent to Bonegilla Military Camp outside Albury. There, he found his combat training farcical and highly inadequate, especially having to practice rifle shooting without using ammunition. When he was granted his first recreational leave in Melbourne, Brabazon reported back to duty three days late and gave the excuse to the presiding officer that he had been busy painting. He went on to argue that he could be more



useful to his country as an artist than a soldier, for even if the war was lost, he added, if the spiritual and cultural side of a country is neglected, then it will surely be conquered. And in completing his case, Brabazon declared that his work would be instrumental in helping to lay a solid foundation for a future Australian culture, and to these ends he had dedicated his life. Needless to say, Brabazon's argument went over the head of the presiding officer who simply gave him a stern warning for his negligence.

Soon after being disciplined for his negligence by the officer, Brabazon wrote the poem "Discipline is a Cover for the Weakness of the Flesh (Bonegilla Military Camp)" which outlined the gist of his arguments. The work was subsequently published in the January issue of *A Comment* (1942).

The form of the poem with its long flowing lines and its tender imagery and tone expresses due reverence for its subject matter. The opening three lines are a fine distillation of Brabazon's approach to art and life at this time of his life and a good indication of exactly where he stood in his on-going quest to understand the relationship between beauty and Truth:

Perfection of action is a glory,  
it is a keen glance, and the tenderness of love  
    is within its boundaries:  
the air moved by the lover's arm is in gladness;  
the ground trodden by his feet, adores —  
but nature is violated by the demanded movement  
because it is a created front against her most  
    intimate desires.  
The rhythm of grass is gentle, and seeks death  
    through the elements  
or the living breath of teeth;  
earth is the bride of sun and the discreet ploughshare;  
even the stones of the road cry out against the  
    tread of companies.  
It is only to love that nature yields herself —  
the loving hands of the workman, and the  
    glance of the saint  
are her masters, and her womb is in joy with their seed.<sup>6</sup>

In January 1942, the same month as this poem was published, Brabazon was moved to Caulfield Racecourse with a group of other soldiers and informed that he was to leave for New Guinea for active combat. He was more affected by the thought of his lack of adequate training than by the fact of actually having to go to war. However, due to partial paralysis in his left arm which he had suffered three years earlier, he was sent by the Medical Officer to Heidelberg Military Hospital for six weeks of neurological tests and observation, and consequently missed leaving for New Guinea.

In the hospital, Brabazon still continued painting, as he had done in his spare time at Bonegilla, and arranged for a selection of his paintings to be included in the Victorian section of the 1942 C.A.S. exhibition held at the Athenaeum Gallery in Melbourne in August of that year. Three of Brabazon's paintings — "Cook-house", "Bonegilla Military Hospital Heidelberg", and "Mess Hut, Bonegilla" — were included in the Victorian section alongside works by Boyd, Bergner, Counihan and others. During the exhibition Brabazon was granted military leave to see his paintings on display. Max Harris, the editor of the *Angry Penguins*, viewed the exhibition and thought Brabazon's paintings introduced a new style into Australian art:

His early painting (1942) initiated the first appreciation of the naive or primitive symbolism in the Australian Art world. . . . Francis [Brabazon] was the beginning of the notion of innocent vision. It influenced the entire Angry Penguins community.<sup>7</sup>

However, Brabazon later remarked:

I have no idea how much, or in what way, I may have influenced him [Sidney Nolan] and others. (I have no idea of influencing anybody — I was too busy learning from them) but my view that physical discipline was necessary for the artist and that he should work from direct experience may have contributed towards Nolan's [approach to painting].<sup>8</sup>

We can gain some understanding of what Brabazon meant by his notion of “physical discipline” and working from “direct experience” by briefly looking at some of the texts in Eastern philosophy which he was studying at the time. These included works by the early Chinese philosophers Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, and the second-century Indian sage Patanjali, who founded a disciplined way to gain liberation known as yoga.

According to Patanjali, yoga is essentially a practice of concentration, requiring “physical discipline” to aid the stilling of the movements of the mind. Brabazon’s comment on the need for the artist to have “physical discipline”, could be equated with the practice of this type of yoga. Brabazon was familiar with two translations of Patanjali’s writings, one by Shree Purohit Swami and the other by Vivekananda, which both give details concerning the actual practice of meditation and a comprehensive explanation of the working of the mind from a spiritual perspective.<sup>9</sup> Briefly, according to Patanjali, “When the mind is controlled”, through yoga, “Self [the depth of the mind] stays in His native condition. Otherwise Self conforms to the nature of mind’s activities [i.e., to the shifting movements on the surface of the mind].”<sup>10</sup> By way of a commentary Purohit Swami adds:

When mind is immovable, Self is like the sun when the clouds are gone, like the bottom of the lake when there are no ripples. It shows its true form.

But there is constant movement among the three qualities, sometimes purity prevails, at others passion or ignorance. Mind is controlled when it is withdrawn from movement; then the Self, which until then had identified itself with these, cannot identify itself with anything but itself.<sup>11</sup>

For Brabazon this was a doubly appealing prospect. Spiritually, he was keen to experience his true “Self”. Artistically, he interpreted this “Self” as being the source of all creativity. He felt that once the mind was made “immovable”, it became the surface and frame of all true art. Therefore, Brabazon endeavoured to meditate to reach this state and then, once in it, to create art directly from that

experience. Working in this “direct” manner Brabazon produced pieces which Harris perceptively called, of “innocent vision”.

Harris’s comment that Brabazon’s (1942) work “influenced the entire Angry Penguin community” is also worth exploring, especially his possible influence on Nolan’s approach to painting. The following extract, from Adam’s biography on Nolan, shows that Nolan’s approach to painting is not dissimilar to Brabazon’s meditative approach:

Nolan found it could take up to an hour to reach the right state of mind . . . waiting for the moment when his brain would trigger a signal for the action to start . . . ‘If the moment is right’, Nolan explained, ‘you start to work away quite consciously and the paint itself, which is just an intractable material, actually begins to spread itself into forms; you think of a tree and a tree evolves; you think of a horse’s head and that appears.’ But these were only fragments of a mosaic that needed resolution to give them credence. Nolan often seemed to lose himself at this point, drifting into a sort of weightless trance while the images continued to build to their conclusion. He said, ‘If you are lucky enough to achieve this state, which might last for twenty minutes, something inexplicable happens and when you come out of it, the picture more or less is completed, or at least it can be finished quite consciously.’<sup>12</sup>

It can be seen that Nolan’s painting style distinctly changed in 1942: from the abstract painting of “Boy and the Moon” (1940) and “Luna Park” (1941), to his 1942 Dimboola paintings which appear on the surface to be like naive children’s art or of “innocent vision”. But if Brabazon’s and Nolan’s style and method of painting were similar, their artistic quests were different. For instance, by the mid-forties, Nolan was attracted to the story of Ned Kelly and found it appealing as an unique Australian myth which, as he described it, arose out of the bush and ended in it.<sup>13</sup> Brabazon, on the other hand, was attracted to the stories of eastern spiritual figures who had obtained some

degree of Self-realization, and saw them as models for his own life. In his artistic quest, Nolan wanted to create, through his depictions of figures like Ned Kelly, a distinctive Australian art. Brabazon, in his quest was seeking to create a distinctive spiritual art in Australia: an art arising out of the depth of his being — his own yet universal spiritual essence.

In late 1942 Brabazon was discharged from military service on medical grounds and obtained a position with the Melbourne Public Library putting away books in the lending section. This was a humble position which paid a low wage, but it was nonetheless a permanent job which covered his financial needs. During this period he lived by himself in the inner city of Melbourne and tended to change his accommodation quite frequently; his residences were invariably large, either lofts or disused factories. He also began, once more, to regularly attend the Sufi meetings and remained in close contact with *Sheikh Momin*. In one of his letters from this period he writes:

Your answer to my last [letter] is one of the most beautiful that you have sent me. I like particularly, ‘the cause of prayer is gratefulness and trust and devotion.’

I think it was in my last letter that I said I had been singing *Dikar* regularly. You said that it is singing to God. Well, I could only sing to Him when I felt gratitude and trust and devotion. I was not able to sing to Him when I was feeling all messed up (mostly through other people).<sup>14</sup>

Besides “singing *Dikar*” Brabazon was also concentrating on his painting as a form of spiritual practice. He would often write to *Sheikh Momin* informing him about his progress:

I have completed a painting from meditation and have shown it to the ones [in the Sufi group] who are interested in Art. I was very pleased because Os [Oswald Hall] was impressed. You see all along I have been saying to them about only painting from meditation and dedicating all work to the One [God]. So it was good to be able to show a definite proof that it works, Os (who has studied exactness of drawing at school) was impressed by the fact

that although I have not studied from models at all, the main anatomical features were true. John [Bruford] and Gordon [Thompson] were also impressed.<sup>15</sup>

Brabazon also used meditation to write poetry. The poem, "7 Stars to Morning", written in 1942, is a poem created in this manner. This is a lengthy work, over two hundred lines, and takes the reader through significant scenes in Brabazon's own spiritual journey as a young man adrift in the city of Melbourne and through the world of his questioning and penetrating mind. The poem reaches its climax when the protagonist, the spiritual seeker, experiences a form of apotheosis in a mythical cave on the slopes of Mt Kosciusko. In this section of the poem the seeker is given a vision from "He-the-Teacher, / Who is the Lord of all hearts, and Whom I found within my own heart".<sup>16</sup>

In the first verse Brabazon describes the alert meditative state of the seeker poised on the threshold of inspiration:

Having listened to the Bird,  
That excellent Councillor who lives in the heart,  
I looked out in a night  
Wondering towards the land  
Or the Promised Land,  
Or the Buddha Lands intaken ingazing in kneeling  
by Bhikshu Dharmakara,  
Or the heroes-returning land of Valhalla or Hawaiki;  
Or Abraham's Bosom,  
Or the No-place transcending Triloka  
Which the Messenger so calmly announced.<sup>17</sup>

The different "places" mentioned above, or more accurately the "No-places", refer to transcendental states of consciousness as named in various religious texts; in Brabazon's understanding they refer to that "place" where the "Self" rests in its "native condition". In the second verse the seeker starts his journey. Here, Brabazon makes an obvious reference to the opening lines of the St. John of the Cross's poem the "Dark Night of the Soul". But in this case he adapts St John's lines and uses the Southern Cross and the Pointers, "the seven stars which adorn our southern sky", as the seeker's guide, thereby situating the poem in a distinctly Australian setting.<sup>51</sup>

It was night. And seven stars,  
Seven jewels of a sky lit the night.  
And I left my house quietly, quietly and secretly,  
And followed them through to a dawn.  
And the sun rising in the East-sky  
Blotted them out, and me.<sup>18</sup>

What follows is a selection of recollections drawn from Brabazon's life of wandering, scenes of harlotry, of public boxing fights, and of empty streets which lead nowhere. The recollections revolve around one central issue — "concerning the Word and the song divine, / Which is the beginning and essence of the soul/ And for which the soul longs for return".<sup>19</sup> This section of the poem ends with the seeker arriving at a new place, and hearing a new beckoning:

And I came out under trees.  
And the kookaburras were laughing their last laugh  
Into the sunset: and the magpies were warbling their last  
sweet guttural notes  
Before night came on again. And I lay down to rest.  
And as forest-murmurs to Siegfried was directions to the  
Beloved:  
And as no doubt the cuckoo forwarded Beethoven's  
march;  
So the songsters give me the hint.  
And I looked out in the night,  
Wondering towards the land.<sup>20</sup>

In the next sequence, Brabazon moves into an allegorical form reminiscent of Farid ud-Din Attar's Sufi tale of pilgrimage, *The Conference of the Birds*.<sup>21</sup> However, instead of the Persian Hoopoe bird Brabazon employs the Australian lyre-bird, "that bird / Without limitation, who knows all notes and songs" to act as his guide. The lyre-bird suggests that the seeker "climb the highest mountain and greet the morning sun", whereupon he sets out to climb Mt Kosciusko just as the birds in Attar's tale set flight to the distant place where Simorgh the "Great King" of the birds resides:<sup>22</sup>

So I hurried on still, following the stars,  
Up Kosciusko' slopes, and found the cave  
That faces to the east. And I sat down  
In the prescribed sitting-way, and He-the-Teacher,  
Who is the Lord of all hearts, and Whom I found within  
    my own heart,  
Began to teach me.<sup>23</sup>

And what we find presented in the following teaching is a similar type of "innocent vision" as found in Brabazon's paintings; and the same idea of direct seeing using meditation — "through-look-clearly" — as opposed to seeing as merely looking outward and "seeing-in-self" only:

He said: "In the cattle He is cattle, and in the sheep,  
    sheep;  
In the shining of the flower is His knowledge of  
    flower-shining;  
In the rock's dream He dreams;  
But in the trees He is half way out of the earth.  
In man and woman, in the perfected vehicle,  
He is able to through-look-clearly, and is Hu-man —  
But they turn themselves outward to seeing-in-self,  
And He is separated in Him."<sup>24</sup>

What follows in the narrative is the seeker's union with "Him" in which the seeker becomes effaced in an experience of effusive love:

So He spoke,  
Teaching.  
    So I clasped my hands before Him,  
And crept into His hand:  
And through the rest of the night  
He swung me on the swing of His love and regarding;  
And sang His song in my heart,  
And His song sounded against the very fibre of my soul.  
And the sun rose,  
And the stars lost their significance, as I did also;  
In fact, I and the stars were completely blotted out.<sup>25</sup>



Finally the seeker returns, transformed, to the world of mundane reality from his state of meditative absorption:

And I came down from the mountain,  
Which the people in different ages have named different  
names;  
Came down from the presence of my Master,  
With the sun in my eyes  
And my heart polished like a mirror,  
Clear as the waters of the lake.  
And everyone that I met was burnt with that sun;  
Each heart was mirroring His countenance and Image.

So I do not ask any more questions.  
Because I myself was the question  
And He-the-Light was the answer;  
And when the answer fills the question,  
There is no more question,  
but only reality.<sup>26</sup>

Along with the seeker's transformation is a greater empathy for the condition of humanity and a desire to impart to others something of the knowledge of his experience for their spiritual upliftment:

So I sing this song, while I may, of the empty heart,  
For hearts can only be united in emptiness:  
As only an empty house may be inhabited;  
Or the clean page receive the written word.  
I sing that it may not be too late,  
That the Light of the day  
May not pass and leave the "seers" peering at shadows  
across gloom;  
That the "singers" may not be caught on a half-close  
wondering for the next bar;  
And the drinkers may not have to travel the long road of  
satiation and return.<sup>27</sup>

On one level, the narrative form of the poem suggests the stages in Brabazon's own process of inner meditation while on

another, a type of heroic, spiritual journey in which a seeker receives an inner realisation and returns to share his boon with other people.

A text which Brabazon was familiar with and one which describes such a heroic, spiritual journey, but as an actual historical event, is the autobiography of a little-known Indian Hindu yogi, Shri Natekar Swami (later named Bhagwan Shri Hamsa). Entitled, *The Holy Mountain: Mansarovar and the Mount Kailas*, it covers Natekar Swami's pilgrimage, in 1908, to Lake Manas and to one of Asia's most sacred sites, Mount Kailas, in western Tibet where he receives a form of spiritual enlightenment.<sup>28</sup>

This work provides an extraordinary and detailed account of a Hindu pilgrim enduring great physical hardship on the icy slopes of the Himalayas, and finally receiving the blessing of his Master who appears before him in human form. His Master is Dattatreya, a legendary holy figure, believed to have lived some time after Patanjali and is revered by many Hindus as the first great Yogi.<sup>29</sup> The climax of the book is when Dattatreya appears, much as "He-the-Teacher" appears in Brabazon's poem, and awakens Natekar Swami from his deep meditation and gives him a mantra or sacred words and initiates him "into the realisation of the Self."<sup>30</sup> Naketar Swami writes of his experience of the "Self" in terms reminiscent of Patanjali, when the mind is made totally and utterly "immovable":

I found myself reflected everywhere in the whole Universe!  
It was all one harmony — full of Wisdom, Infinite Love  
Perennial and Bliss Eternal! Where was the body, its  
tenements and the "I"! It was all *Satchidananda* (Truth,  
Wisdom and Bliss).<sup>31</sup>

When Brabazon first came upon Bhagwan Shri Hamsa's autobiography, he was struck by the spiritual stature of the author and by the fact that the account of his profound spiritual experience took place in the twentieth century (1908). As such, it convinced Brabazon that such an experience was not something fanciful from the past but was obtainable

now, and he saw it as a real possibility in his own life. In a way, the final section of "7 Stars to Morning", is Brabazon's poetic attempt, through his meditative absorption of Bhagwan Shri Hamsa's real-life story, to imaginatively sense his own possible experience of "*Satchidananda*".

The credibility of this viewpoint is reinforced not only because the narrative line is similar but also because Brabazon alludes to the same places as found in Bhagwan Shri Hamsa's text. For instance, Meru, the mountain in Hindu cosmology (believed by many Hindus to be Mount Kailas) situated at the centre of the world where Shiva resides; of Himavat, the mythological name for the Himalayas, thought of as a single many-peaked mountain, the "Abode of Snow"; and of Gaurisankar, the perpetually frozen lake near Mount Kailas where Natekar Swami sat in snow up to his chest and received his Guru's blessing. It is also suggested in Brabazon's use of a similar image of reflected light to describe the state of consciousness of the seeker after receiving his "teaching" in the cave on Mt Kosciusko:

Thereafter, returning in the ways; returning from one  
small place to another.

Coming down the mountain, coming down

From Meru, Himavat, or Gaurisanka;

Coming out on to the plains,

All men appeared to me to be lit with that sun,

Burning; burning; their pure flesh

Feeding the flame of self-sacrifice; each soul

Was the Bird reflecting upon the waters of the lake.<sup>32</sup>

In 1943, after "7 Stars to Morning" was completed, *Sheikh Momin* offered Brabazon a position as a fully paid, live-in worker on his Camden property. Brabazon saw this as the beginning of his own real-life spiritual journey: a chance to make real what he had only imagined in "7 Stars to Morning". Surprisingly, the usually slow processing of government wartime regulations granting change of employment went quickly and soon Brabazon set off to Camden alone.

# Chapter Three

## Spiritual Training

### I. Camden, N.S.W.

When Baron von Frankenberg arrived in Australia from Europe in the late twenties he married for a second time. His Australian wife, Olive Pauline Ward, came from a successful Sydney business family. She converted to Sufism and was known by her Sufi name Lila. Before her marriage she was a concert pianist, but abandoned any thought of a musical career when she chose to live with her husband in the country near Camden outside Sydney. The von Frankenbergs moved to this area in the late thirties and bought a local dairy farm. It was a quiet, fertile piece of grazing land located near a small town, The Oaks, which lies south of Camden. The farm was called “Spring Hills”, and it soon attracted much attention from the nearby community after *Sheikh* Momin had built, from his own design, a modern-looking residence on the property.

By the time Brabazon arrived at “Spring Hills” in 1943 *Sheikh* Momin was regarded as a distinctive and generally likeable figure in the district and known simply as “the Baron”. Although he was from a cultivated aristocratic background steeped in European culture and sensibilities, *Sheikh* Momin did not keep himself aloof from the Camden community. Rather, he played an active part in the local Show Society, and would give non-denominational, multi-religious services of “Universal Worship” in his house on Sunday mornings. At these services passages were read from various sacred texts including the Bible, the Koran and the Upanishads. The Buddhist and Hindu sculpture, Persian kilims and large Middle European tapestries which furnished the house

added to the religious atmosphere of these occasions. As a leader he was charismatic, but at times curt with people.

Initially Brabazon thought that living with *Sheikh* Momin would be an opportunity to concentrate more fully upon his meditative practices. But this proved to be far from the case. Instead, he worked about twelve hours a day and meditated only in the evenings. His work centred on domestic duties, taking charge of all the daily kitchen requirements and cleaning around the house; the dairy was run by a sharefarmer. Brabazon's responsibility also involved cooking, for which he had little knowledge, especially when it came to satisfying the discerning tastes of the von Frankenbergs. In the first year *Sheikh* Momin constantly directed and instructed Brabazon in his duties to the point of exasperation. Brabazon felt he was being hounded, and on one occasion when it became too unbearable, he actually left for a short time.

But unlike other spiritual teachers in a position of power over their pupils or *mureeds* *Sheikh* Momin never abused his authority. He always paid Brabazon the standard wage for his services and insisted that he take a day's leave each week away from the property, and that he was under no obligation to stay. Yet, while the days were full and demanding, Brabazon's evenings spent with *Sheikh* Momin were a time of relaxation and spiritual upliftment. These were Brabazon's happiest times:

*Sheikh* Momin was widely read in mystical and occult matters and had a fine library, and we read and meditated together every night. He allowed me free discussion — something unheard of in esoteric schools — and some of our liveliest sessions were with him sitting on the wood-box drying the dinner things as I washed them up.<sup>1</sup>

The form of meditation they used was one of stilling the mind of all mental distractions and thus allowing the image of the deeper "Self" to be reflected on its surface. In the Sufism as presented by *Sheikh* Momin, this type of meditation was based on two teachings: firstly, that the heart (*qalb*), or the depth of the

mind, has the capacity to mirror or reflect divinity; and secondly, that it is necessary to still or clean the “surface” of the *qalb*:

[T]he *qalb* is capable of knowing the essence of all things, and when illumined by faith and knowledge reflects the whole content of the divine mind; hence the Prophet said, “My earth and My heaven contain Me not, but the heart [*qalb*] of My faithful servant containeth Me.”<sup>2</sup>

“Look in your own heart,” says the Sufi, “for the kingdom of God is within you.” He who truly knows himself knows God, for the heart is a mirror in which every divine quality is reflected. But just as a steel mirror when coated with rust loses its power of reflexion, so the inward spiritual sense, which Sufis call the eye of the heart, is blind to the celestial glory until the dark obstruction of the phenomenal self, with all its sensual contamination, has been wholly cleared away. The clearance, if it is to be done effectively, must be the work of God, though it demands a certain inward co-operation on the part of man. “Whosoever shall strive for Our sake, We will guide him into Our ways” (Kor. 29.69)<sup>3</sup>

As a focus for Brabazon’s meditation, *Sheikh* Momin had instructed him to concentrate upon an esoteric Sufi formula or *darood*: “Towards the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty”, which was originally given by Hazarat Inayat Khan to his *mureeds*. In other words, Brabazon’s meditation was not on a separate object in creation, but on the Sufi idea that the source of all creation is One; that all of creation is in reality “One speaking”.

In addition to meditation, *Sheikh* Momin discussed with Brabazon the teachings of Hazarat Inayat Khan and other spiritual Masters from different religious traditions. Perhaps more importantly, he also instructed and encouraged him in his poetry. For instance, he passed onto Brabazon his love for Homer and his understanding of the spiritual significance of Homer’s epics.<sup>4</sup> He also gave Brabazon his first real appreciation of Sufi poetry, particularly that of Farid-ud-din Attar, Jelal-ud-din Rumi, Muslih-ud-din Sa’di and Shams-ud-din Muhammed Hafiz.

For his teaching text, *Sheikh Momin* had privately published a collection of thirty eight papers entitled, *Social Gathekas: Verbatim Lectures of Pir O Murshid Inayat Khan*. In these papers Inayat Khan stressed that the essence of poetry was not the mere rhythm or sound of words strung together, for that would simply be a form of music, but the clear expression of significant "thought and ideas". In his conception, poetry could be defined as the seamless fusion between words of truth and the deep personal rhythm of the poet's soul. Much of what Inayat Khan wrote about poetry was a confirmation of what Brabazon had already intuitively discovered himself. But perhaps Brabazon's increasing concentration on poetry from this point onwards in his artistic career, as opposed to painting or music, was influenced by Inayat Khan's elevation of the importance of poetry:

Among all things in this world that are valuable the word is most precious, for in the word you can find light that gems and jewels do not possess; in a word you can find an intoxication which no wine can give, in a word you can find a life that could heal the wounds of the heart. Therefore, poetry in which the soul is expressed is as living as a human being. If I were to say that the greatest beauty that God bestows on man is eloquence, poetry, it would not be an exaggeration.<sup>5</sup>

According to Inayat Khan, poetry constitutes the very essence of life itself for it "comes from the deepest impulse of the soul."<sup>6</sup> Under the influence of this type of thinking and *Sheikh Momin's* tutelage Brabazon wrote a selection of finely crafted poems at "Spring Hills" which he gathered under the Sufi title of *One Speaking* and later published.<sup>7</sup> This work, consisting of twenty-nine poems in an unusual fourteen-line form, opens with a dedication: "To the friend, M.v F. [Momin von Frankenberg] who was the inspirer of these pieces".

What characterises all of the poems in *One Speaking* is that they read like refined studies on the Sufi idea of oneness itself.

Perhaps they may even have been written by Brabazon as part of his training with *Sheikh Momin*, to indicate his degree of meditative achievement. Their disciplined form and style is so different from what Brabazon had ever written before, that it raises the possibility that these works are as much a product of *Sheikh Momin's* influence as Brabazon's inspiration. In the poem, "Present Cancelling Line" something of this can be seen:

When in one's heart  
the Image of adoration  
is established, and its pure contours  
bejewel the lake of the mind,

and from the sense-shores  
a wind of refusal  
and doubting springs up  
to ruffle the waters,

utter it not to the loved-one;  
kill that self-seeming falsehood;  
keep the mirror steadily reflecting

the Image, that the Image  
may not for a moment  
have lost to its sight the imaging.<sup>8</sup>

In another poem from *One Speaking*, "Modesty", the same tone and central idea of oneness persists, as it does throughout the entire collection:

Those tales of innocent  
grandeur by which we reckoned  
the Beloved, ineffably;  
heart singing is not confined

to any place, nor does it obey  
any rules of aesthetic  
dictation: that  
Negro singer's delicate



assumptions, the Chinese  
spatial allocation,  
or Noh's agreed-on

retirement, are one with;  
and Mozart's  
exactly placed hinting.<sup>9</sup>

At best, the poems in this collection give a clear impression of Brabazon's state of consciousness as a trainee *mureed* during this period of his life. They are thoughtfully crafted pieces but their concentration on a single abstract idea tends to make them dry, impersonal and even didactic. Ironically, the quality of lyrical beauty, which was one of the driving forces behind Brabazon's initial spiritual search, tends to be sacrificed in these works. At times, however, Brabazon does manage to create a feeling of reverential stillness that leads the reader to vicariously experience a sense of felt oneness. This is nowhere better illustrated than in "One Speaking Two", possibly the best poem from the collection:

In the most intimate  
dialogues one is speaking  
and one is responding, re-  
sounding, according.

Heart is in fullness  
as a forest morning  
to Sun, and Will  
is that sun remounting.

And the advancing music  
*saying* heart, becomes  
winged, and bears heart

indifferently all  
and with love to the  
most exact places.<sup>10</sup>

## II. Fairfax, California

As the Australian leader of the Sufi Movement, *Sheikh* Momin kept in close correspondence with *Murshida* Martin in America. One topic of discussion which they shared was the question of who would replace Inayat Khan as the next spiritual head of the Movement. In this regard, *Murshida* Martin always saw her role as a type of interim leader; she had not the spiritual status of Inayat Khan and was always searching for someone who did. In one of her letters *Murshida* Martin informed *Sheikh* Momin of her interest in an Indian Master, Shri Sadguru Meher Baba, whom she had first heard of in New York in 1942.

This was during a lecture given by Princess Norina Matchabelli, who had recently returned from India where she had lived for several years in Meher Baba's ashram. *Murshida* Martin was very impressed by the lecture and felt the need to examine closely Meher Baba's teachings. For the next two years, while living in New York, she studied all the published literature by and about Meher Baba with the help of Princess Norina Matchabelli and Elizabeth Patterson. Her own conviction regarding Meher Baba's spiritual authority was not spontaneous, but slowly developed over these two years. By the end of this time her acceptance of Meher Baba as a *Qutub*, a Perfect Master at the head of the spiritual hierarchy, was complete. Naturally, once she arrived at this certainty, her desire was to hand the Sufi Movement over to him.

From New York, *Murshida* Martin moved to California and, towards the end of 1945, she formally announced to the San Francisco Sufi group that Meher Baba was the new spiritual teacher she had been searching for. She also told the group that

she had informed Meher Baba of her conviction in him and that, in response, he had accepted her as his student and the full responsibility for the Sufi Movement. After this announcement, *Murshida* Martin allowed two weeks for the group members to consider her decision and to decide whether they wished to continue to follow her under Meher Baba's spiritual guidance.

According to Don Stevens, one of the Sufis present at the meeting, no one rejected *Murshida* Martin's offer, although various people left within the next few years after further consideration. In due course, *Sheikh* Momin was notified by *Murshida* Martin of her decision, but he personally found it difficult to accept; true to his Sufi name Momin, meaning "faithful", his loyalty remained with Inayat Khan. She also sent him a copy of Meher Baba's five volume set of *Discourses* which he began to study along with Brabazon.<sup>1</sup>

*Sheikh* Momin was impressed by what he read, but was not fully convinced of their author's authority. He decided to write directly to Meher Baba in India where his letters were passed onto Abdul Ghani Munsiff, a resident disciple of Meher Baba's whose background was in Sufism. Under Meher Baba's instruction a substantial amount of correspondence took place between *Sheikh* Momin and Munsiff which dealt with many of *Sheikh* Momin's doubts. As for Brabazon, his response was much more immediate; for him, the *Discourses* "seemed to be the work of no ordinary man, no matter how keen his intellect, how broad his commitment to humanity".

Knowing of *Sheikh* Momin's uncertainty concerning Meher Baba's spiritual authority, *Murshida* Martin suggested, in one of her letters, that they both travel to India to meet him. *Sheikh* Momin did not particularly warm to the idea of travelling with a frail elderly lady and being responsible for all the necessary arrangements, considering the fact that he himself was not young. Instead, he proposed that Brabazon go in his place and that he would pay all the costs, which he knew, in his appreciation of Brabazon's frugal way of living, would be kept to a minimum.

Finally word came from *Murshida* Martin that Meher Baba was expected to visit the American Sufi centre in Fairfax, twenty

miles out of San Francisco. In the change of plans which ensued, it was decided that Brabazon was to travel to America for three reasons: to help prepare the centre for Meher Baba's visit; to commence advanced Sufi study under *Murshida* Martin; and as *Sheikh* Momin's representative, to meet Meher Baba when he arrived in America.

Brabazon was thrilled with the arrangement and, after only five weeks, was on board the troopship *Marine Falcon* leaving Sydney for San Francisco. The usual waiting time to obtain a similar booking, because of the high demand for travel in the aftermath of World War Two, was anything up to two years. On board the *Marine Falcon* conditions were very basic, but Brabazon was happy to have saved thirty pounds of *Sheikh* Momin's money by travelling on a troop ship and not on a standard ocean liner.

He enjoyed his first experience of travel out of Australia and took a keen interest in all aspects of the voyage. He had a short stopover in Suva in the Fiji Isles and Papeete, the capital of Tahiti, which reminded him of Gauguin's paintings. Finally he reached San Francisco in September 1946.

On his arrival at the wharf he was personally greeted by *Murshida* Martin. She was a short, impressive woman of about seventy years who, according to Brabazon, radiated peace and strength. Yet he also found her to be very down to earth. She took Brabazon to her residence where Hazarat Inayat Khan had stayed during his American visits. After a brief visit he was then taken to Fairfax.

Fairfax is situated in Marin County, and Brabazon's place of residence, called *Kaaba Allah* (House of God), stood on three acres of hilly terrain. The house was long and narrow, running along the side of a hill. It had been converted from a weekender of the Martin's to a place of residence for *mureeds*, a *khankath* or community house. The following morning Brabazon was interviewed by *Murshida* Martin and given specific instructions, including what she called his "spiritual assignment".

This entailed building a road, approximately twenty metres long, from the meditation chapel at *Kaaba Allah*, across a steep hillside, to a large outcropping of rock which Hazarat Inayat

Khan had ordained to be the site for a future temple. The site was named *Pir Dahan* (The Voice of the Prophet). Brabazon chose to build the road out of stone, two metres wide with a retaining wall one metre high, and to do all the backbreaking work of carrying huge stones up the hill by himself. It took him nearly a year to complete the work.

Every couple of weeks *Murshida* Martin visited *Kaaba Allah* to see how her new *mureed* was progressing. Brabazon felt honoured by these visits and cherished his time in her company. He soon came to realise that she spoke very little and when she did, it was always only a few carefully chosen words. Over time Brabazon became more attuned to her silent manner and found that he was able to respond inwardly to it. It was, he discovered, the way she taught:

Simply, she maintained her inner silence and taught by the *mureed's* focussing on that. This is one of the best methods of teaching. It has been practised right through the ages. It was particularly effective in the case of the first Chinese patriarch, Bodhidharma, who spoke only about two sentences and started Zen-Buddhism in China. It depends upon the pupil's ability of attunement. . . .

Language is necessary, especially in the early stages. As one goes further on, language becomes more and more unnecessary. That is even reflected in the papers we have of *Murshida's*. The higher papers are often quite short, just a few sentences in the lesson, but there is the whole lesson. Whereas the Candidate *gathekas* [lessons] are several papers. Language is useful as a vehicle of expression, but it is hopeless if the pupil just picks up the language. He has to find the attitude behind the words, the heart behind the expression.<sup>2</sup>

*Murshida* Martin's way of teaching in silence may not entirely have been her own choice, for she was also at the time suffering from throat cancer which reached a critical state during Brabazon's stay. More than anything else it was the silent strength with which she dealt with her illness which taught Brabazon the

most. He recalled visiting her while she was in considerable pain, and his lasting impression was that “she was lying in bed like a lion — just like a lion”.

Her health continued to deteriorate and at the end of August 1947, approximately six months after Brabazon’s arrival in America, she died. Added to this sad event, came the further disappointing news for Brabazon that Meher Baba had postponed his American visit. This meant that Brabazon had no real need to remain in America, and yet, with *Sheikh Momin*’s consent, he continued to stay at *Kaaba Allah* until March 1948 and helped pay for his own expenses by working as a part-time gardener in the area.

In mid-1947 just before *Murshida* Martin died, she appointed Ivy Duce, who was living in Washington D. C. at the time, as her successor under Meher Baba. One of *Murshida* Duce’s first directives was the appointment of *Khalif* Samuel Lewis, a former student of Inayat Khan’s, as her representative in California.<sup>3</sup> *Khalif* Lewis had arrived from South Carolina during *Murshida* Martin’s sickness. And although Brabazon initially described him as a type of bagman in appearance, he later found him to be a genius of sorts who could converse on topics ranging from science, art, comparative religion and mysticism, as well as being a poet.<sup>4</sup>

Both he and Brabazon were opinionated, and at times their ideas clashed. However, it was on *Khalif* Samuel’s advice that Brabazon took up folk dancing in the local township as a form of active meditation to balance the formal and quietist meditation he practiced under *Sheikh Momin*. Soon Brabazon was promoting the benefits of folk dancing and became an active member of the Board that ran the various local gatherings and festivals besides becoming a proficient dancer:

. . . I think it is a very good idea [folk dancing], and I think that in America it is more than just a fad or folk-festival idea, because they have so many different nationalities, and they have brought their dances with them from their own countries, and it is fairly natural for them to do these,

and learn others too. Some are quite difficult and require a certain athletic proficiency to accomplish.

It took me six months to learn the Russian Hopak, for instance, which is extremely vigorous.<sup>5</sup>

San Francisco was indeed filled with people from different nationalities and Brabazon was keen to learn from the cultural diversity which made up the city. He was particularly drawn to folk art, both traditional and contemporary, and was captivated by its innocent and naive style which spoke directly from and to the heart. He was impressed, for instance, with the disarming purity of the childlike saint portraits, both in carvings and paintings, of New Mexico known as *santos* and by the clear impassioned cry in Spanish flamenco music.<sup>6</sup>

He was equally moved by the joyfully spirited calypso songs of the Caribbean Islands, the melodies of Mexican folk tunes, and by the forthrightness of Leadbelly's blues. In poetry, he was attracted to the prayer-like simplicity of the Chilean poet Gabriel Mistral and the dark longing and surrealism in the Spanish poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca.

Towards the end of 1947, *Murshida* Duce visited San Francisco to make contact with the *mureeds* under her guidance and subsequently met Brabazon for the first time. Although his bohemian dress and manner were in sharp contrast to her refined New York sense of style — she later referred to him as her “first hippie” —she was suitably impressed with his character and leadership potential.

As a result of this meeting, she wanted Brabazon to become a *Sheikh* and directed *Khalif* Samuel to be his spiritual director. Part of Brabazon's induction process included study and meditation sessions commencing at six in the morning and finishing after midnight; luckily Brabazon was able to extend his visa for an extra six months to complete his training. The final initiation ceremony was carried out in silence in a small chapel with *Khalif* Samuel officiating.

In his new position as a *Sheikh*, Brabazon was given the role of preparing the Candidate Class before their initiation into the Sufi

Movement. During this same period *Murshida* Duce travelled to India where she met with Meher Baba and stayed at his ashram. She felt convinced, as *Murshida* Martin was before her, that Meher Baba was the highest spiritual authority of the age. From her perspective this was not simply some idle evaluation, for in her previous travels in the East she had met with most of the leading Sufi authorities in the world.

At the end of five days Meher Baba told her to return to America as both his disciple and as a teacher. On her return, however, she met with differing responses from the Sufi members as to her unequivocal acceptance of Meher Baba's overarching spiritual authority. Many members could not accept *Murshida* Duce's opinion and left the Movement, while others took a more critical stance, questioning the validity of her succession to *Murshida* Martin and openly attacking her. Brabazon supported *Murshida* Duce.

In a telephone conversation with Brabazon soon after her return, *Murshida* Duce told him that he was mentioned in her talks with Meher Baba. She also relayed Meher Baba's message to him that they would meet sometime in the future. This assurance of a meeting, even with its uncertainty of when, filled Brabazon with joyful expectation. Soon after receiving this news Brabazon felt his connection with Meher Baba was inwardly confirmed by a significant dream in which he pictured Meher Baba rescuing him from drowning:

But when I drowned,  
Caught by a wave of that monstrous sea,  
Sadguru [Meher Baba] caught me up and took me to the  
shore.  
And naked I wept, a little child again.  
So I say with the Sufi, "Guru is greater than God,  
Because He threw me into the ocean,  
And Guru fished me out."<sup>7</sup>

In California Brabazon wrote a collection of new poems, several of which he read on a live poetry broadcast at the local radio station along with *Khalif* Samuel who also read from his



own works. While the title, under which he later published these poems, *Music in the Earth*, promises a new celebratory orientation away from the idealistic poems in *One Speaking*, the poems are generally disappointing.<sup>8</sup> At worst they tend to be dressed up Sufi teachings which do not come alive as poetry as the following extract from “Love Poem” shows:

Consider the lilies. Consider any other strong word.  
Consider those star clusters such as the lily-of-the-valley  
and small mosses, which seem to be your especial care.  
The true lover seeks the beloved’s foot  
equally as her lips — one of her smiles  
is more recompense for life’s thorns  
than the accumulated bed of the world’s most honoured  
beauty.  
This is the hierarchial way, in which is embodied  
that whole religion which is the Love-wisdom,  
which was the root of Solomon’s glory  
and the axe of Majnun’s downfall;  
which makes wise men fools, and fools wise men.<sup>9</sup>

Just as *Sheikh* Momin influenced the poems in *One Speaking*, *Khalif* Samuel, Brabazon’s American Sufi teacher, may have equally influenced the poems in this collection. In the following extract from one of *Khalif* Samuel’s poems “Siva! Siva!” which he wrote in 1942, the same grand-scaled pronouncements are made in much the same sweeping style as in Brabazon’s preceding verse:

The universal beating heart which love betokens  
Fills all space and the interstices between,  
Turns all maelstromic chaos into vibrant, harmonious  
cosmos.  
Causes all causes and their secondary movements,  
Each with its purposes, its functions, its peculiarities  
So that the Grand Being, is One Complete and Perfect  
Whole;  
Complete in all its parts, perfect in Its intentions,  
Leaving freedom even for that which it seems

Most antagonistic and despicable  
And apparently destined to war against Its essence — <sup>10</sup>

Elsewhere in *Music in the Earth* there are some moments of dramatic tension — in “Fiesta”, “The Dancer” and “The Dance” for instance — but generally the works are static and prosaic. The impression is given in poems like “Song for the Women”, “Love Poem”, and particularly in the aphoristic sayings in “Fish for Breakfast” that Brabazon’s new position as a *Sheikh* had tended to dominate his writing. Yet biographically this is a revealing work for this very reason. It shows his thinking as a result of his *Sheikh* training. In brief, what we find throughout the collection are certain recurring themes, namely, the spiritual unity of existence, God defined as the source and pulse of existence, and the need to live in harmony with God. In the following statements taken from “Fish for Breakfast” the voice of a Sufi *Sheikh* talking to his *mureeds* is not difficult to imagine:

- 1 The life is according to the objects cherished in the heart.
- 2 Work within your life-capacity, worshipping God as its source. No action done without thought of God is of any use. In fact, the only evil is that action which is done without thought of God. This is the meaning of “sowing and reaping.”
- 3 In the understanding of this is the solution of the “problem of labor.” And marriage. And art.
- 4 When this is put in practice, the divine meaning of life as “Dance” will be realized. Everything then will be “Art.”
- 5 Every action done in the thought of the Beloved is the only gain; and every action not done in the thought of the Beloved is the only loss.
- 6 The service of the friend  
The love of the mother  
The help of the teacher,  
are examples of “Dance.”<sup>11</sup>

As already mentioned, although the subject matter of the poems in this new collection is no longer the single abstract idea of oneness as in *One Speaking*, the poems still appear to be mere vehicles used to convey Sufi ideas and principles. And here again, a strong didactic impulse dominates, and if there is any sense of beauty conveyed it is a very austere one. Overall the impression is given of a poet who has been drawn to the power of universal ideas; whose mind is able to penetrate these ideas and articulate them but whose heart has not yet been touched by love.

The most interesting poems in the collection, however, are those in which Brabazon forgets his didactic impulse. In "Night Song" written for *Khalif* Samuel, we can see Brabazon experimenting with naive folk imagery to convey a feeling of love and innocence, much in the style of Gabriel Mistral's poems. The second verse of this poem reads:

Samuel, who befriended the Andes,  
    on his little five-note flute  
    sings:  
O beloved, the flowers have closed their petals,  
the moon has sunk to rest, —  
but open to me your window  
and the flowers will open their petals  
and the moon will rise again.<sup>12</sup>

The most promising poem is "Shireen: Lament for the Death of a Young Air-woman". Shireen Phelps was a vivacious young woman who joined the Sufi Movement when Brabazon was undergoing his *Sheikh* training. Although he only saw her two or three times he was captivated by her beauty and intelligence. Tragically she died in an aeroplane accident before they could develop any lasting relationship. In Brabazon's poem, something of his sense of loss is dramatically created:

Nothing had really occurred. The atmosphere was serene.  
A bird had soared into the blue  
and a feather had dropped from its wing,  
and a dog sniffing along the highway

stopped in its tracks and chased it for a moment as it  
passed him.

A ray of sun filtered into the prison-yard,  
and the prisoners had looked up for a moment  
and remembered beaches where an ocean raced over  
white sand.

A rain-cloud had passed over the plains,  
a few drops fell,  
and the earth had opened its parched mouth for the  
deluge;  
and the cattle who had left off pawing the ground  
stood gazing vacantly at the horizon.

Nothing had really happened.  
But to the children marching up out of the earth,  
to the lovers seeking to focus their ardour,  
a light is denied them. To the women in labour,  
to the men fretfully at evening, a comfort is withheld.  
To the bird-flocks and the grasses,  
and the companionate lands, an impulse is lost.<sup>13</sup>

### III. Beacon Hill to New York

On his return to Australia in May 1948, Brabazon (*Sheikh Francis*) was forty-one. To a new *mureed* who met him for the first time, he appeared as a “very active, muscular man, positive and animated . . . [who] had considerable Irish charm and whimsy, and a sense of fun and humour that could be a delight to the intellect as well as provide a good belly laugh.”<sup>1</sup>

In his first address as a *Sheikh* to the Sufi followers in Melbourne, Brabazon spoke with confidence and authority and warned his audience against the needless confusion which can arise when the distinction between the “Message” (the perennial Sufi message of love and divine truth) and the different “message-bearers” is not upheld. Brabazon obviously had in mind those members in the audience who, following the American pattern, were continuing to question Meher Baba’s spiritual authority and that of *Murshida Duce*. Brabazon’s speech also gave a clear understanding to all present of his high regard for Sufism as a universal tradition.

During his talk Brabazon stressed the essential importance of following a living spiritual Master as well as the importance of the personal transference of “Light” from the Master to the pupil, an idea which he was to employ often in his poetry and writing. The following lengthy extract covers these aspects in his speech:

In the Gathas [teachings] of Holy Murshid [Inayat Khan], and in the Sufi traditions, you have the Divine Light pictured as the Sun. My going to America was a journey to that Sun. In America that Sun was called *Pir-O-Murshida Rabia* and is now *Pir-O-Murshida Ivy*, and in Australia it is called *Khalif Momin*.<sup>2</sup> In this I obtained my proof of

the Sufi message. The light is one but its expression is different. The Message is one, the message-bearers are of various personalities. This is one of the traps that Murshid [Inayat Khan] himself pointed out to his *mureeds*, and I am mentioning it now to you so that you will be sure to avoid that trap, and that is — attachment to the personality of the teacher as distinct from the Message. It is very easy for a *mureed* to imagine what Murshid Inayat Khan was like and to interpret the books and the lessons by the light of that imagination. It is much, much harder to accept the direct admonition of the teacher who is living. It is much more uncomfortable. I had this well impressed upon me in America with *mureeds* who had been disciples of Inayat Khan himself, and subsequently found it difficult to accept the living teacher as the same light. The personality being different, they thought the Message was not the same. But the Message is the same. These same people would have exactly the same difficulty if they met a man who had complete Christ-consciousness. They would not be able to see he was the same as the Christ, because the personality would be different.

You might say the message has never clothed itself in the same body twice — that would be a physical impossibility. The message, in order to be delivered, has to assume the vehicle suitable for it in the time and place where it is delivered, and it expresses itself in the terms which can be understood by the people of that period. So we look upon Moses as a Law-Giver, then we think of Jesus as being a Peace-Maker and Forgiver, and we think of Buddha as being the Compassionate One, and Krishna is pictured as a Dancer and Shiva is pictured as an Ascetic, and we regard Mohammed as a Uniter. But these are merely expressions of the One Message in terms suitable for the people to whom they were given and for humanity at its particular stage of evolution.

This Message, this Light, has only ever had one method of transference — that is, the personal transference from

master to pupil. This is the only way that the Light has been transferred in the dark periods of humanity. *Khalif Momin* has given you a picture of lighting one lamp from another. He hasn't given you the picture of learning one from another. The message cannot be learnt, it can only be acquired directly from your teacher. If it could be learnt, all we would have to do would be to read books and we would have it, but we can read all the books in the world, papers of every scripture, and we would still not be one iota nearer Christ-consciousness.

Generally speaking, through history there have been two types of men — those who have the books and those who have the Light. This transference of Light comes about by the peculiar relationship which in Sufic terms is called "*piri-mureed*," which means "teacher and pupil." This relationship is peculiar because there is no other relationship, whether it be wife or husband or brother or sister or child or friend, which can compare with it in sweetness, in its knowledge, in its satisfaction to the soul. People sometimes think they can get spirituality by being good, by obeying the law, by being a fair business dealer, by faithfully following some art or science, and *Murshid [Inayat Khan]* distinctly says that spirituality is a spring that rises in the human heart. I have met many people who lead good lives and do these various things, and I have met many people who have sincerely followed some art and think they, in popular terms, "have it." Think they are getting somewhere. That is their delusion and dream — which they will have to wake up from. Whether it takes them a whole lifetime to wake up from it or many lifetimes, it does not matter much. We must remember that the possible scope in this dream world is almost infinite. It is "almost" infinite because only God Himself is infinite, but it is so wide — the scope in the mind world in the dream conditions — that one can spend lifetimes expressing it, and some of the time being quite happy with one's discoveries, but unfortunately it has nothing to do with

spirituality. Spirituality, as Murshid says, is a spring in the human heart. It is a Light, a lamp being lit from another lamp. It is that ineffable condition of Love's sweetness which is called "*piri-mureed*," and I hope God will bless you all to realise this condition.<sup>3</sup>

Amongst the Sufis present, it was felt that Brabazon was destined to lead the Australian Sufi Movement after *Khalif* Momin. At the end of his speech Brabazon announced that he would eventually establish himself in Sydney, being the largest and most central of Australian cities, and only periodically visit Melbourne. However, his most immediate plans were to return to Camden and be with *Khalif* Momin, who was presently in poor health.

For some of the Melbourne Sufis accustomed to the cultured, European manner of *Khalif* Momin, Brabazon's directness of style posed yet another disturbing change which they had to adjust to. This was especially difficult for those in the group who had not fully accepted the replacement of Inayat Khan with Meher Baba as their ultimate spiritual authority. Although *Khalif* Momin saw Brabazon as his successor, he belonged to this group of doubters and this caused a divisive tension in the group.

Yet, during this critical period no *mureed* was ever forced to conform to any belief or behaviour beyond his or her wish, and at all times each person was allowed the individual freedom required for responsible action. Indeed, while *Khalif* Momin was questioning his own stance towards Meher Baba he did not obstruct any Australian Sufis from personally contacting Meher Baba if they so wished. This is evident in the following extract from a letter, September 1948, to *Khalif* Momin from Abdulla Ghani Munsiff:

[Meher] Baba is pleased to note that in spite of obscure and unclear problems confronting you concerning Baba and His working, you have been directing Sufis in Australia to contact Baba directly. Baba will see to sending me or any of His disciples to Australia and U.S.A. at the proper time. In the meantime, I would welcome any and all queries from you concerning the path and do my best to answer them.



With Love and blessings from Baba, to you and to the Sufis around you.<sup>4</sup>

Soon the whole issue of each person's acceptance or rejection of Meher Baba was brought to a head when Meher Baba sent his first general circular to the Australian group in late 1948. In it he requested that those people who believe in him were to follow certain instructions. Brabazon, for his part, was not just willing to follow Meher Baba's orders, he was delighted to have the opportunity to obey someone whom he believed to be spiritually advanced. The circular read in part:

All men and women who believe in me should observe silence for one full month in July 1949 (communicating only by signs when necessary for work).

From 1st January 1949 until the end of 1949, no one is to have any correspondence of any kind, with anyone, anywhere except by telegram or telephone where necessary. Correspondence by letter may be made only for unavoidable business reasons and for urgent serious impersonal reasons. Correspondence with me may be made only telegraphically and only when necessary.

Although I am in everyone and in everything and my work is for the spiritual awakening of all mankind, I am always aloof from politics of any kind. My disciples and devotees should continue as before to abstain from taking part in political activities or discussion.<sup>5</sup>

These directives proved for many to be the deciding factor, and only those who were prepared to follow Meher Baba's instructions remained; this amounted to approximately twenty-five out of a group of fifty. But for some of these members, and even more so for Brabazon as a Sufi *Sheikh*, there was an uncertainty about the direction of the Movement under Meher Baba's leadership. Despite this fact, Brabazon accepted the aspirations of *Murshida Duce* who was adamant that the Movement, now with its reduced numbers and with Meher Baba

at its head, should rejuvenate itself and reach new heights. With this intention in mind Brabazon went ahead and purchased on 7th February 1949, with finance supplied by *Khalif* Momin, an acre of bushland at Beacon Hill twenty kilometres north of Sydney to establish the first Australian Sufi centre. The actual site had sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean and surrounding countryside, and a large sandstone deposit which Brabazon planned to utilise as his main building material.

Just over a year after the purchase of the land, on 30th March 1950, *Khalif* Momin died from cancer of the lower jaw and *Murshida* Duce officially appointed Brabazon to lead the Movement in Australia. Although his appointment was expected, it still came as a jolt to Brabazon, for he felt unprepared for the extra responsibility. His own feeling was that a more spiritually advanced person was needed for the task.

There was also disquiet amongst some of the Melbourne *mureeds* over the decision. One in particular insisted that *Khalif* Momin had already appointed him and given him the name Khwaja. However, *Murshida* Duce held to her decision and expected that each Australian Sufi should give his or her wholehearted allegiance to Brabazon. But, with Brabazon living at Beacon Hill and the majority of his *mureeds* living in Melbourne, many of whom were unhappy with his appointment, his task as an effective leader was to prove challenging.

When Brabazon first moved to Beacon Hill, he lived in a tent on the site and started the initial quarry work of breaking free large sandstone slabs from the surrounding rock shelf and cutting them into suitable building blocks. Being a highly self-disciplined person, Brabazon's day followed an ordered pattern: he rose each morning at six, poured a cold bucket of water over his head to wake himself up, stretched his muscles for the strenuous work ahead, ate a breakfast of porridge, toast and tea prepared on an open fire, and then set to work. At midday he would break for a simple lunch and then in the afternoon he would commence his writing and attend to any correspondence;

this pattern continued from Monday to Saturday and by Sunday all he could do was rest.

Brabazon's first construction at Beacon Hill was a single-room, stone cabin for his own accommodation. Luckily he had just completed it before the summer storms arrived, which tore apart the thin tent where he had been sleeping. The cabin itself was no more than a type of monastic cell approximately two metres by two and a half metres with a low lying roof. For Brabazon, who was a sannyyasin at heart and cared little for worldly comforts and possessions, it was "a place inviolate / In which to practise calling; a sanctuary / In which to husband song; a retreat / In which to nourish poverty".<sup>6</sup>

As the new leader of the Sufi Movement in Australia, Brabazon was keen to establish his presence amongst his *mureeds*. In an autocratic manner he laid down the format for the running of the Melbourne meetings and stipulated that there was to be no discussion and no questioning of the material read; all questions were to be recorded and sent to him at the end of the month for him to answer. Yet despite his controlling style as a leader, Brabazon was respected by the Melbourne *mureeds* for his breadth of knowledge and spiritual understanding.

During the period of the late forties and into the early fifties Brabazon was secretly hoping to receive a cable from *Murshida* Duce asking him to return to America. He knew that if Meher Baba was to ever visited the States, *Murshida* would cable him to come immediately so he could meet him. Finally, the desired telegram came, and Brabazon wasted no time in buying a ticket on the S. S. Aorangi, Canadian Australian Line to Vancouver.

On 10th January 1952, he left Sydney and later disembarked in New York. On his arrival he was greeted by *Murshida* Duce and soon came to meet all the *mureeds* of the New York Sufi group. He spoke at their meetings about the Australian situation and they enjoyed his skill as a story-teller. Fortunately for Brabazon, with his rather limited supply of finance, he was able to obtain a job in an apartment building as a maintenance worker on the late evening shift. This required him to be on call when and where needed and to stoke and clean out the building's boiler. As far

as Brabazon was concerned it was an ideal position, for besides providing him with needed money, it meant he was free to attend early evening concerts and plays, and explore the multitude of New York galleries and bookshops during the day. In the late evening, when he was not on call, he would read and write in a small room on the ground floor of the apartment building.

To have come from the isolation of a scrubby patch of bushland on the outskirts of north Sydney, from living in a single-room stone cabin, to the thriving cultural and artistic hub of the world, New York, was to have leapt across a gaping chasm. The few weeks Brabazon spent in the city were intense and enriching both personally and artistically. Most of the time he was getting by on only four hours sleep a day and sometimes no sleep at all. He kept himself going with a copious supply of coffee, his ubiquitous cigarettes, and occasionally exercising in the local gym.

The artistic opportunities in New York provided Brabazon with a crucial boost to his own creative development and enlarged his horizons beyond anything he could ever have hoped for in Australia. He went to Professor Kimon Frier's lectures on poetry at the New York Poetry Centre and became interested in the works of a variety of poets including William Carlos Williams, Pablo Neruda and the English poet George Barker. He heard Palestrina, Monteverdi, Dufay and DuPrey sung in the New York Gothic cathedral; heard for the first time, played live, the string quartet music of Bartok, and the music of Villa Lobos, both of which moved him deeply. He also heard the masterful singing of Josh White, "The Singing Christian", in Greenwich Village and the Negro spirituals sung by the powerful operatic voice of Marian Anderson, besides being totally captivated with Virgil Thompson's production of Gertrude Stein's play "Four Saints in Three Acts".

He frequented the New York galleries of modern art and viewed an extensive range of the works of modern European painters, a few of which he had seen for the first time in Melbourne in 1939. Included in these works were Brabazon's favourites, Cezanne, Picasso, Braque, Chagall and Juan Gris. In particular, he was able to see Picasso's "Guernica" which was

then displayed in New York. He also saw many of the works of the European masters and was most impressed by the works of Giotto, Fra Angelico, Memling, Piero della Francesca and El Greco. As he had done on his first trip to America, Brabazon spent most of his money on books and records. Yet ironically, while the city itself was a storehouse and an inexhaustible museum of international culture, Brabazon found it had no life-giving cultural centre of its own. In 1959, recalling his visit, he wrote:

You should go to New York. You should see culture  
stockpiled. You should see the herd of faces  
    which don't smile,  
the crowd of eyes which don't laugh; the poor children  
    of the rich  
being wheeled in Central Park, buttoned to the eyes  
    from the weak sun.  
The skyscrapers of New York are beautiful in their  
    reach to death —  
lovely with red tears of undedicated labour.<sup>7</sup>

Yet in the midst of all this stockpiling of culture, New York was the place where Brabazon experienced his first real awakening of love. Since his arrival he enjoyed the acquaintance of a young and beautiful woman who was a friend of *Murshida Duce's* family, Sparkie Lukas. After talking to her on one occasion Brabazon felt — just moments later when alone — a transformation take place in his being. Brabazon's recollections of this inner experience has parallels to that of the poet Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) description in his *La Vita Nuova* after seeing Beatrice for the first time. Dante writes: "The moment I saw her I say in all truth that the vital spirit, which dwells in the inmost depths of the heart, began to tremble so violently that I felt the vibration alarmingly in all my pulses, even the weakest of them."<sup>8</sup> Brabazon recalled:

Something melted in my breast and a light became in it and spread right through me. This was something quite different from anything I had up to this time experienced — it was not a "warmth" an "attraction" or a "desire" for

a girl, it was another person actually within me, a person called Sparkie.<sup>9</sup>

This inner change left Brabazon speechless; he did not know where to turn. No natural landscape nor work of art had ever before affected him in this manner. It was a deep inner awakening, as if a veil had been removed from his consciousness. It broke through all his defences, his intellectual pride, and awakened his dormant heart:

Suns are hammered light,  
And dawns are torn curtains. —  
And since my eyes got entangled in a girl's hair,  
And her voice made a rent in my consciousness  
I will not mind if my bones are pounded into malleability,  
And drops of pure milk are strained out of my blood.<sup>10</sup>

This radical change in his attitude happened so rapidly and was so all-consuming that Brabazon did not have the time nor the inclination to reflect on its significance. All he knew was that he had crossed a new threshold in his quest for beauty and his understanding of beauty's relationship to truth.

Initially Brabazon did not disclose his love to anyone except Sparkie. Usually they would seek privacy by walking and spending time in Central Park, where Brabazon would read to her his latest poems, for instance "Death by Drowning" which was written in New York. In one of his poems, "Dawn through to Sunrise", which he dedicated to Sparkie, we can sense something of the dramatic effect she had upon his life:

Since the arrow of Fortune's wheel turned my way,  
And dawn entered my heart  
Making an accommodation for the sun,  
I have become a gambler in the markets of this world;  
Reckless in the festival of music,  
And shameless in regards affairs of love.  
There is fire in my skull,  
And music in the blood of my temples;  
My heart is a meeting place of pain,  
And my eyes, wet mirrors of gratitude.<sup>11</sup>

A few weeks later, while Brabazon was still reeling from this momentous event in his life, he was to meet Meher Baba; a meeting which was to have an even greater and more lasting effect upon him.

## IV. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Meher Baba arrived in America in April 1952 and almost immediately travelled to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina where a centre had been established for him by some of his followers. Meanwhile, on 24th April 1952 while in New York, *Murshida* Duce initiated Brabazon into the higher teaching position of *Khalif*, just one step removed from her office of *Murshida*. Possibly this was a move on her part to reaffirm his leadership position within Australia, or perhaps to give him some extra standing in the Sufi Movement generally, particularly before meeting Meher Baba.

On 7th May a small party of Sufis, including *Murshida* Duce, Brabazon and Sparkie Lukas, drove down from New York to meet him at his Myrtle Beach residence. The party reached their destination the next day and stayed the night in a local motel. Early the next morning Brabazon dressed himself in Australian colours, a newly purchased green sports jacket and a yellow shirt, and left with the others on the final part of their journey.

On their arrival at the centre, a five hundred acre property of virgin forest, they were directed to a small wooden cabin. Here they were asked to read a short message entitled “Meher Baba Explains”. Then *Murshida* Duce was invited inside the cabin to see Meher Baba. Soon Brabazon got his long awaited opportunity. It was now eight o’clock. *Murshida* Duce who remained present during Brabazon’s first meeting recorded something of what happened:

When he [Meher Baba] called in Brabazon, Baba said, of course via the board, “I’ve seen you before but you



don't remember it, do you?" Francis admitted he did not remember.<sup>1</sup> He perched on the edge of his chair until Baba put him at ease by saying, "Sit back, be comfortable, you must know that I am within you, so if you feel like coughing, cough, for it means that *I* want to cough!"<sup>2</sup>

Brabazon presumed that Meher Baba's comment on past remembrance was referring to past lives, but he did not wish to ask any questions and so distract his focused attention. According to Brabazon, at this first meeting, he was instantly convinced of Meher Baba's spiritual stature:

... He looked as I had imagined a Sadguru would look — a man who is nothing and everything, a man who is dead and alive, a man who has gone through everything. He is quite small, short and slight. His eyes are the most remarkable thing about Him; very large eyes, and they are constantly moving. In an ordinary person we would call it restlessness, but not Him. He did not convey that at all, but conveyed activity. He was kind enough to sign to His three disciples around Him His pleasure in me and that I had come. Then I went out. Soon afterwards *Murshida* and I went in again.<sup>3</sup>

This time Meher Baba talked with *Murshida* Duce and Brabazon for three and a half hours on Sufism and its future direction; during this session Brabazon felt his mind was drawn to a razor-keenness; but firstly he obtained from them a measure of their personal commitment:

He asked us what we were prepared to do. AND THAT WAS THE REAL MOMENT. When He asked us a question the atmosphere of the room seemed to become highly charged, and even His men seemed to — what you might say — become more alerted. And I told Him I would do anything He ordered me to do. He said, "will you do anything I ask you?" And I said, "yes." He said, "even if it costs you your life?" And I said, "yes."<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to imagine the depth of longing and gladness which was released with each “yes” that Brabazon spoke. It was a response which his heart had yearned to give, across all the years of his searching and now it came from his lips without force or reserve: “yes”, “yes”. Although they were spontaneously spoken, they were no less full of conviction. Brabazon was not a person to take words lightly nor to submit to any authority unless deserving. His gladness was magnified by the realisation that in his affirmative answers was also the guarantee that Meher Baba would be his spiritual guide; a realisation which, more than anything else, gave him great peace.

After this commitment was made, Meher Baba declared that he wanted *Murshida* Duce to give the Australian Sufi work totally to Brabazon, that Brabazon would be directly under Meher Baba’s supervision, and that both he and *Murshida* Duce would need to become spiritually illumined Murshids if they were to head a Sufi Order.

The idea of becoming an illumined Murshid left Brabazon totally perplexed, for he knew fully well that to be an illumined Murshid was nothing less than having the spiritual consciousness of a saint, something which he knew was beyond even his wildest imaginings. Following these pronouncements, Meher Baba then went on to stress the importance of honesty and stated:

[U]nless we experience what we preach and teach, we are not honest, not only to Sufism but to life itself. To be an atheist, not to believe in God, to be bad even, is better than to be a hypocrite. So we must work on that basis. . . . Truth is hidden; unless one has attained *fana* and acquired *baqa*, one cannot lead others to perfection, so when we ourselves do not experience that state, and when we ask others to follow us, it means we are insulting Sufism, and all over the East and West it is being done, and by God’s will, I intend to change the whole affair, overhaul the whole thing, because I love Sufism with all my heart.<sup>5</sup>

Listen very carefully, because for the first time, I am taking a personal interest in Sufism. I am very serious about the reoriented Sufism, and we must be so honest as to have its

results appearing all over the world. There are three things that always hinder Truth. First is temptation — very, very few persons can overcome temptations; temptations of money, fame, power, lust, leadership are disastrous, very binding and very few escape it. Second, vagueness about things, and third, dishonesty.<sup>6</sup>

Towards the end of this session Meher Baba gave both *Murshida* Duce and Brabazon a certain spiritual practice to be performed from 11:30pm to 12:30am for nine months and told Brabazon he was to return almost immediately to Australia. This latter directive shocked Brabazon. It was all too much for him to contemplate. How could he now, having found the love of his life and the spiritual Master of his life simply leave them both? To make matters worse, the reason Meher Baba gave for his decision appeared to be rather abstruse: he wanted Brabazon in Australia when his “Full Free Life” began on 10th July.<sup>7</sup> And in his response to Brabazon’s query about his relationship with Sparkie Lukas, Meher Baba only gave the rather indefinite reply, “we will see later”.

This was a hard testing of Brabazon’s conviction in his Master and something which forced him to dig even more deeply within himself before he could answer, as before, with “yes”. And yet, Brabazon’s final and unequivocal acceptance of Meher Baba’s directive to immediately return to Australia is not surprising, even though it was the last thing he would consider doing on his own. For in Meher Baba he felt he saw the living Christ and he half expected that he would be required to do no less than to “sell all and follow me”; he just wished it was not so sudden.

To be in Australia by 10th July as Meher Baba requested, Brabazon had to move swiftly. On 13th May, he caught the all-night bus to New York; then, with little time to spare, he caught the train to New Orleans which arrived just in time for him to catch the last ship to reach Australia before the July date. Soon after he left Myrtle Beach, Brabazon started to record his feelings and thoughts in verse and discovered that his writing flowed more easily in a new, more lyrical style.

Significantly, he later described this moment as the beginning of his “true creativity”, and the first poem to come out of this new creativity was “Dawn through to Sunrise”.<sup>8</sup> This poem started out as a single couplet of seventeen syllables which Brabazon wrote between dawn and sunrise after travelling through the night from Myrtle Beach to New York. On the train to New Orleans he started to explore the poetic possibilities offered by the couplet. And then, on 29th May, while travelling on ship through the Caribbean Sea, Brabazon completed the work in its present form, over four hundred lines, the longest poem he had ever written.

“Dawn through to Sunrise” reads like a spontaneous outpouring of deeply felt thought which spills out into an assemblage of images, events, perceptions and interpretative commentary. There is no seemingly logical pattern nor structural form imposed on the work, only line breaks separating contained pieces of expression. What, however, gives the work a sense of unity is its feeling tone and sustained rhapsodic quality. As Brabazon was working on this poem, on the last leg of his journey at sea, he experienced “an almost continuous sort of vision of beauty” of which Sparkie Lukas “was an integral part”. The intensity of this vision was such that Brabazon could not stop himself from weeping and had to avoid being seen by the other passengers:

And we came out into the Pacific, with my Sweetheart  
Trailing the hem of her petticoat along the edges of the  
sky: 4 a.m.  
And the sun was slow to rise . . .<sup>9</sup>

Brabazon described this gratuitous experience as mystical and far greater than anything which he had ever gained from meditation. Its most distinctive quality was Sparkie’s spiritual presence intimately pervading his own being to such an extent that he felt no longing for her physical proximity.

In the context of his on-going quest for understanding beauty, in the light of this mystical experience, Brabazon concluded that “Sparkie is just beauty. And as such, is to me the most cherished

form of BABA who is the All-pervading God in every form . . . She is non-existent except in Him; but in Him she is existent in my eyes as beauty". Much of "Dawn through to Sunrise" can be seen as Brabazon's attempt to express the dynamic nature of this discovery in which "the dawn" represents Sparkie and "the Sun", Meher Baba:

If the sun had not kissed me,  
The dawn would have become my pilgrimage.  
But since that morning and the bestowal of blessing,  
She has become my companion and accommodation.  
Therefore is her activity with mine: we walk hand in  
hand.  
And the sun and the rain make our path green,  
And our bed is fresh with sea breezes.<sup>10</sup>

In another passage, Brabazon expresses his desire to become totally extinguished in Sparkie's beauty as the "most cherished form of BABA":

I have blackened my face in the sun  
So that the whiteness of the dawn might surround me,  
So that my soul might be reflected in her smile. —  
Forgive me. The vision of a flower with dove's eyes  
Has robbed me of my senses.  
Rather have I been made black  
So that her fairness may dominate my vision:  
A speck of dust within her sky  
In which He breathes His name, and because He breathes,  
I imagine that I sing! <sup>11</sup>

What is different about these lines, in comparison to those found in much of *Music in the Earth*, is that they carry the weight of personal feeling and not simply dry intellectual understanding. Even when the poem moves into passages of interpretative commentary we find they are grounded in lived experience:

One must make a relationship of God,  
And Sadguru is the best relationship.  
One's father, mother, sweetheart, wife, or friend  
Is nothing but Sadguru.

Just as the Dawn is nothing but the Sun:  
Her curls, His glance, reaching down from  
abodes of silence

Upon courageous shoulders of my fair one;  
Putting hope and colour into my cheeks,  
Sharpening my eyes to reflecting points of light;  
Levelling my mind of its edges,  
Thickening my speech to incoherency.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, as Brabazon expressed it, this was the beginning of his "true creativity" — the beginning of his own unique style of poetry.

# Chapter Four

## The Pamphleteer of God

### I. The Accommodated Poet

When Brabazon returned to Australia he carried with him a message from Meher Baba to all his Australian followers:

I received your letters sent to me through dear Francis, and the love and devotion of your hearts have made me very happy. I send each and all of you my love, and maybe some day I will come to Australia and you will contact me physically. I have given full instructions to Francis and he will guide you to me accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

This new position of Brabazon's as a "guide", marked the end of his life as a spiritual seeker. In an account written two years after his meeting with Meher Baba, Brabazon declares this end himself:

This meeting [with Meher Baba] was the culmination of ten years of spiritual study and search for that ideal Guide in whom I could unreservedly place my confidence; that man who, I felt, had mastered every difficulty and obstacle which still confronted me. During the previous ten years, I had studied the methods and practices of the great Sufi schools and had read fairly widely in Vedanta, Buddhism and other systems, including Taoism and Confucianism. In Meher Baba I found that person who not merely *knew* these things, but was the living embodiment of all these systems and knowledges. In other words, he was a man who had reached the summit of Truth; in religious terms, was God-Realized.<sup>2</sup>

To inform his fellow Sufi followers of his meeting with Meher Baba, Brabazon called a meeting to take place outside his stone cabin at Beacon Hill at 8:00am on 11th July 1952 — the same time of day when Brabazon first met Meher Baba approximately two months earlier. At this meeting, Brabazon conveyed Meher Baba's instruction that his followers need to gain "a proper intellectual conviction" and to make that their "principal work", and then went on to add that:

He [Meher Baba] said He would take over Sufism [the Sufi Movement] personally, and we — *Murshida* in America and myself here — would be directly under Him . . .

It is not different, inasmuch as there is no radical change — and yet there is every difference. Some of you may be aware that the Sufism that Inayat Khan brought to [the West] was in itself quite correct as far as it went.

You might say [however] it was rather a diminished form of Sufism. No doubt Inayat Khan thought [that] that was all we were capable of at the time, and if he had given us pure Sufism we could not have done it, but at the [same] time his — what we would call his higher papers and exercises — are pure Sufism.

Yet they are not of any value unless one is directly under a Murshid. This is a thing that people generally have no conception of at all — that the spirit of Sufism is dependent upon the grace of a Murshid. But he [Murshid] does not do the thing for one, but makes it possible for that one to do it. It is like a person making a track through the jungle and the others following him. . . .

And He [Meher Baba] expects us to become Sufis, strange as it may seem — he expects us to become Sufis.<sup>3</sup>

It was not only "strange", but as far as Brabazon was concerned, impossible: for without an illumined Murshid in Australia how could anyone in Australia expect to become a genuine Sufi? In Myrtle Beach, Meher Baba had said that Brabazon would need to become an illumined Murshid to fill the role; but Brabazon knew he was not illumined and so could



not fulfil the needed role. In actual fact, this unresolved dilemma brought about the beginning of the end of the Sufi Movement in Australia, leaving people to follow Meher Baba without any supporting structure.

By way of contrast, in America, Ivy Duce took a different tack. She established a new Sufi organization under the name of Sufism Reoriented, maintained her role as *Murshida*, and acknowledged Meher Baba as its ultimate spiritual authority. It seems where Brabazon had focused on the need for Sufism to be headed by an illumined Murshid, Ivy Duce focused on Meher Baba accepting ultimate responsibility for the group. In his talk, Brabazon was quite clear about the particular direction he was taking:

That is why I say there cannot be any Sufism until there is a Murshid, and if Baba does not find any one of us bright enough, He will have to send someone here [to Australia]; but in the meantime we will be establishing our intellectual basis. When there is a Murshid or *Murshida*, the rest will have to follow that one. You cannot follow me, or any one of yourselves, but I can perhaps still help you somewhat, as perhaps my intellectual basis is a bit more secure than some of yours. Baba did say this in his answer to some of your letters sent to him: "Francis will guide you to Me." You can accept that much.<sup>4</sup>

After this point of clarification was made, Brabazon began to give some of his views on how to establish a sound "intellectual basis". He started by insisting that each person should no longer "imbibe any more [Sufi] lessons on a basis of duty or trust", but to "strain everything through their mind". Yet, in the same breath, he warned those present not to become bound by the use of the intellect, that it was not an end in itself.

As their main focus for intellectual investigation Brabazon suggested that each person should study the topic which is central to Meher Baba's teachings, that of love. Brabazon insisted: "One who will study love, and gain knowledge . . . will attain — whether on the physical plane or the Path of God". Brabazon's own experience of love seems to have been confined

to his relationship with Sparkie, and yet he clearly felt that this relationship was integral to his relationship with Meher Baba.

After this meeting, and for the next several months, Brabazon began his own intensive study of love; a study which was to continue for the rest of his life. During his periods of working alone, in what was nothing but a stone quarry, he continued to feel Sparkie's presence intimately within his being. In the evenings he would shape his thoughts and feelings for her into words, trying to find some meaning in the tumultuous experience of love she had awakened in him:

How can I tell you of all your loveliness  
and still leave you utterly free?  
You are the spring of manifest objects  
and they resolve again into you.  
Sadguru is the all-pervading being;  
You are his loveliness in form.  
In music it is you who take form in its melodies  
and rhythm;  
When I look at the ocean, the oh-so-blue ocean  
I see your form vastly pervading,  
stretching my soul painfully towards infinity;  
When I look at the sky, it is your Azure  
in compassionate accommodation of my spirit.  
Oh, Sparkie ever since that day  
when His light manifested out of your being  
and opened the spring of my heart,  
do you pervade my life, bringing into it  
sweetness and contentment and pain.<sup>5</sup>

When examining these lines the Western reader, again, has to turn to Dante to draw a comparison, and in particular to his *La Vita Nuova*, which is Dante's study of love. Charles Williams, a Dante scholar, in describing the relationship between Dante, God and Beatrice made the comment: "the entire work of Dante . . . is a description of the great act of knowledge, in which Dante himself is the Knower, and God is the Known, and Beatrice is the Knowing".<sup>6</sup> Using these terms "of knowledge" it could be suggested that Brabazon's relationship with Sparkie follows

a similar pattern. In Brabazon's case, the specific knowledge gained by Brabazon, through the intercession of Sparkie, was the experiential knowledge of the "light" of his own being:

You are my heart; or rather  
that light which is within my heart;  
which is the same thing, or illumined desire.  
That is why  
I leave you free. Because that  
which I call you, is the essential freedom  
of my own being.<sup>7</sup>

This type of learning is not new to European literature but one has to go back to the period of the troubadours (1095-1295) to find it. For instance, in the poetry of Arnaut Daniel (c. 1180-1210) — which directly influenced Dante — we read: "For Love himself pares down and gilds my song / which moves from her whose glances are / the firm light rail that guide all excellence."<sup>8</sup> Or later, after Dante, it can be found in the sonnets of Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) who said of his beloved Vittoria Colonna, that she "hewed his soul from the rock and freed it as the sculptor the figure from its shrouding". Michelangelo's poem reads:

A man within a woman, nay a God  
Speaks through her spoken word;  
I therefore who have heard  
Must suffer change, and shall be mine no more.  
She lured me from the paths I whilhom trod,  
Borne from my former state by her away,  
I stand aloof, and mine own self deplore.  
Above all vain desire.  
The beauty of her face doth lift my clay,  
All lesser loveliness seems charnal mire.  
O lady, who through fire  
And water leadest souls to joy serene,  
Let me no more unto myself return.<sup>9</sup>

What is particularly significant to note about this type of Western poetry, which predominantly disappeared with the

coming of the Renaissance, is its origin in European literature. William Anderson, a translator of Dante's work, suggests that the idea of knowing God through the experience of human love, which was first introduced into European literature by the troubadours, originally came from Sufism:

[This] extraordinary new conception of Love seems to derive from the intense romanticism of some of the Sufi poets, especially Ibn Arabi [1165-1240]. There is no other known source in European literature for this revolutionizing idea of sexual love sublimated into the means of salvation itself, and when we know that Ibn Arabi asserted that it is God who appears to every lover in the image of his beloved, we may be nearer to understanding how Dante was able to stress the Christ-like nature of Beatrice.<sup>10</sup>

The French Sufi scholar Henry Corbin in his work *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* gives an insightful account of Ibn Arabi's love relationship with his beloved Nizam.<sup>11</sup> One of the most famous stories in this Sufi tradition of human love leading to divine love is that of Majnun and Laila. In helping to gain some insight into the Sufi understanding of the spiritual relationship between God, women and men that gave birth to this tradition, the words of the Sufi poet and mystic Jalal-ud-Din Rumi (1207-1273) are revealing:

The Prophet [Mohammed] said that woman prevails  
exceedingly over the wise and intelligent,  
(While), on the other hand, ignorant men prevail over  
woman, for in them the fierceness of the animal is  
imprisoned.  
They lack tenderness, kindness, and affection, because  
animality predominates over their (human) nature.  
Love and tenderness are human qualities, anger and lust are  
animal qualities.  
She (woman) is a ray of God, she is not that (earthly)  
beloved: she is creative, you might say she is not  
created.<sup>12</sup>

The following lines in which Brabazon addresses Sparkie can easily be seen as coming directly out of this Sufi tradition:

With complete trust I bow before the light  
which is you. I have but one prayer,  
that I should become lost in this light  
that this light might utterly sweep away  
the wall of me which is between my soul  
and your purity.  
What is your purity? A door  
leading out of myself into me;  
a threshold of flowers; an opening  
into immortality.<sup>13</sup>

At this point it needs to be mentioned that Brabazon also saw men as playing a similar role in the spiritual fulfilment of women; something which is not commonly found in Sufi writings. In the following passage by Brabazon, this view is brought out:

Woman is the most beautiful portion of creation,  
And stands midway between the lover and his Goal.  
To turn his feet aside,  
or take his hand  
And lead him on, passing the oafs, Lust and Despair,  
And plant his feet upon the shining stair.  
And man to woman? He also to her stands,  
An upright symbol midway across the plains  
Of her desire, to betray her ear  
And drown her trustfulness in the bitter waters  
Of unfulfilment, or with deft hand  
Swing her frail barque on the course  
Set by the compass of her unerring heart.<sup>14</sup>

Of all the Sufi poets against which Brabazon could be compared, the life of Hafiz of Shiraz is similar in many respects. Born in Shiraz, Persia in 1320, the year before Dante died, Hafiz was only a young man when he fell in love with a beautiful woman, Shakhi-i-Nabat. This occurred — as in Brabazon's case — after he came under the guidance of his spiritual Master,

Mohammed Attar. So too with Brabazon, Hafiz's path to Self-Realization followed the path of beauty which he documented in his poetry. The strongest link between both poets is that they wrote of their experiences of beauty and love using the poetic form called the ghazal. Hafiz perfected the ghazal in Persian while Brabazon introduced it into the English language in the 1960s, approximately 700 years after Hafiz.

Meanwhile, the works completed by Brabazon in 1953 at Beacon Hill were the fruits of his study of love: his attempts to understand his unique relationship with Sparkie from a predominately Sufi perspective. These works include the two long poems, "The Stone Masons" and "The Householders", and one act of a verse play which was later completed and published as an extended narrative poem entitled *Cantos of Wandering*. It is, however, in his long poems that Brabazon's understanding is most cogently presented, especially when the two long poems are combined with the earlier poem, "Dawn through to Sunrise" and read as a trilogy.

Indeed, it seems Brabazon had the idea of a trilogy in mind when in 1957 he published all three poems in chronological sequence as the closing poems in the collection *7 Stars to Morning*. Not only are these three poems linked by their lack of formal structure, apart from the recurring reference — somewhat like a shifting refrain, to the "Dawn" of beauty and the rising of the "Sun" of truth — they also share a common style: a kind of impassioned expository style in which Brabazon can be seen making sense of his inflicted experience of love:

"My body complains,  
But because of a stray curl, my forehead smiles;  
My brow is a dreaming stone,  
But because of a girl's laughter  
My eyes have become the birth-bed of flowers;  
My eyes are dimmed with weeping,  
But because of two red lips  
My own mouth has become most sweet."

The light streams across the pure contours  
of her face,  
Brightening the day and illumining the  
path of our union.

This song is nothing else but God speaking  
To my sweetheart in the most intimate terms  
He can accumulate from the stone-dust of this quarry.  
This alone is my proof of His existence;  
And that, in her amazing ear,  
He encourages the gradual articulation of a tongue.  
God has made me black, but He can whiten me  
if He will,  
And white on white, to lose myself in my Dawn.<sup>15</sup>

In the opening section of this quote we see an example of Brabazon's use of surreal-type imagery, "My eyes have become the birth-bed of flowers". This is the type of imagery which he employs to express something of his new experience of love, and like all of his most frequently occurring images of this period — sun, dawn, light and accommodating sky — it conveys a sense of expansiveness and light, an elevated state of mind.

Another feature of his work, which is particularly seen in the last two poems of the trilogy, is a type of literary "collage" technique where he simply "pastes" into his poem whatever appears in his consciousness at the time of writing. This technique gives his work the look and sound of a first draft. Some of these disparate "pastings" include: stories taken from the lives of religious personages (e.g., Job, Bayazid, Jetsun Milarepa); fables (e.g., Aesop's *The Queen Bee*); legends (e.g., Leander swimming across Hellespont); personal recollections (e.g., working as a roustabout at Elsie station); and humorous events from his own life (e.g., being bequeathed — most likely from Baron von Frankenberg — "an enormous frigidaire / And a Steinway piano . . . [with] nothing to put in one. / Or get out of the other. . .").<sup>16</sup>

Some of the most striking lines are finely crafted and balance depth of thought with feeling. Take the case of this following passage from "The Stone Masons" in which the "anguish and

ecstasy of the saints" — in their love for their beloved God — is seen as "the same as [the] mortal lover, whose beloved, / According to the laws of her nature / Discloses a part of her charms . . .":

The trees put on leaves all the way up their trunks.  
The trees are so modest. What is modesty?  
Naked truth covering itself with beauty.  
God is most modest. He covers Himself from all  
But those intimate with Him. The rest  
Can serve; or wait the path of service.

What is anguish and ecstasy of the saints?  
The same as mortal lover, whose beloved,  
According to the laws of her own nature  
Discloses a part of her charms, or wholly  
Reveals the line and volume of her form  
Against the back-drop of a white sheet, or whiter beach  
Arched by a towering blue Pacific wave:  
Then covers herself again.

Do not wonder  
That the lovers of God are drunken men.  
One glimpse of their vision would deprive us of our  
reason, —  
Reason, you beautiful goddess since the Greeks;  
Reason, you dear ox plowing soil  
Which will not grow wheat or flowers.

For what use is reason unless it is inspired  
By a curl? What is law  
If it is not cast in the rhythm of a brown body on golden  
sands?  
If our thought cannot match her vision  
Curving with flight of sea-gulls,  
The only remedy is salt-water, which has healing  
properties  
Not mentioned in books of medicine.<sup>17</sup>

Here again, a Sufi understanding can help elucidate these lines. According to Corbin, in the teachings of the Sufis belonging to the school of Ibn 'Arabi or Jalaluddin Rumi:



A veritable *spiritual potency* invests the human Image whose beauty manifests in sensible form the Beauty that is the divine attribute par excellence, and because its power is a spiritual power, this potency is *creative*. This is the potency which creates love in man, which arouses the nostalgia that carries him beyond his own sensible appearance, and it is this potency which, by provoking his Active Imagination to produce for it what our troubadours called “celestial love” (Ibn’Arabi’s spiritual love), leads him to self-knowledge, that is, to the knowledge of his divine Lord.<sup>18</sup>

In another passage in “The Stone Masons” Brabazon warns that this approach, “to the knowledge of his divine Lord”, was not an easy path nor one free from trials:

For what is man before beauty has burned  
Him clean? Before the hammers have broken his heart  
And shaped that stone for building? A dead thing  
Simulating activity;  
A clot of blood frozen in its own stare;  
A trophy to adorn Medusa’s tresses.  
Piety is easy behind closed doors  
Of hatred of the flesh; or behind the window-pane  
Of imagined sufficiency; and to imagine  
Lust and anger do not reside in that white breast.  
Said Hafiz:

    If it were spring  
    And there was a garden, and  
    One so fair offering you wine  
    In a crystal cup of inviting,  
    And at that moment  
    You refused her, — then  
    O pious one would I believe you!

O friend, piety needs to be tested  
In a fire called love; tempered in a water  
Called life, before it can become spirituality.  
Demolish your illusory shelter —

And if the wind that blows upon you  
Should have in passing caressed a form  
Straight as a mountain-ash, or a head  
Golden as wattle, and your delicate skin  
Is disturbed by tendrils of passion,  
Then see if *your* God can transmute that burning to glory.<sup>19</sup>

All the works completed by Brabazon in 1953 at Beacon Hill were not only, as mentioned previously, the fruits of his own study of love, but also his contribution towards guiding people to Meher Baba; the task which Meher Baba set him at their first meeting. In the poems of this period, Brabazon was able to convey, in a new and original style, something of the nature of love, as he experienced it, and the significance of this experience, using the language and tradition of Sufism.

In Brabazon's revitalised understanding, the essence of Sufism was nothing but the "path of love" in which, amongst the aspiring lovers of God, there was no place for any hierarchy and no pressure to conform to anything.<sup>20</sup> All lovers of God in his view were equal in responsibility. "We do not need to start at all", he stressed, "there is no forcing. We can postpone it as long as we like. It is just a question of how much each one thinks it is worthwhile starting the path in this life". And, here again, regarding his own position on this matter Brabazon was openly revealing:

From my point of view it is worthwhile, because I cannot see anything else of any value to do. I actually feel I could go into business and make money, but I cannot see any point in it. It would not hold my interest for six months. Everyone else is not necessarily in the same position. Even this preliminary basis of repeating one Name of God for half an hour daily — one will find it not so easy. Each one has to find out for himself how to do it. I managed it coming from America on the ship. You can do it too. You must find your own way. Ask yourself, or God, how to do it. It is not necessarily always easy.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of loving God, and finding a way to remember him in one's daily life, became central to Brabazon's thinking and was used by him to distinguish between the way of "pure Sufism" and the way of effort and self-attainment as exemplified in Yoga (specifically *Kundalini-Yoga*):

I would like to point out an essential difference between Sufism and Yoga. The goal is the same, but the method is different. Sufism is essentially based on, as Baba says, love for God. As you read those Masters — He tells you to read — you will see that that has been the doctrine of Sufism — love for God. Yoga is based on a method of self-attainment. By that I mean self-effort. Western critics especially who have said that Eastern teachings are unsuited to the West are thinking of Yoga. I have no criticism of Yoga, but it is not the same as the path of Sufism. As the yogi makes a tremendous self-effort, which as he advances will take him up to 18 hours a day, consciously performing spiritual and physical exercises, the Sufi bases his path on love for God. You may all at some time or other have heard or read about different centres in the human body [*chakras*]. Well, the yogi takes these centres one at a time, starting at the lowest, and by perseverance tries to open them, culminating at the one at the top. The Sufi goes right past [the lower centre and] starts with the heart, because when the heart is open, all others open naturally. Yoga is like trying to grow a plant, which opens gradually petal by petal etc. Whereas the Sufi is like the plant — but it is not thinking about itself, but only about the sun, and it opens naturally. Yoga was a path laid down in early times. Even as [Paramahansa] Ramakrishna said in the last century — we are not capable of doing Yoga. It is a path for strong men. We are just weaklings. So I presume that is why Sufism is a thing which is being established in the West.<sup>22</sup>

For those interested Sufis who were seriously resigned to pursuing "the path of love" under Meher Baba's leadership, Brabazon was keen to establish Beacon Hill as the first centre in

Australia: a place where followers of Meher Baba could gather and information could be disseminated. The development of the centre was, in Brabazon's eyes, of national importance, and the first step in the beginning of a new spiritual consciousness which he dreamed would spread across the whole continent till eventually:

The Blue Mountains and the McDonalds and Nandawar  
Will shelter hermits;  
God will sit at street corners,  
And a new race of swagmen will kiss my Darling's lip.<sup>23</sup>

The beginning of the actualisation of this dream is seen in the development plans for the Beacon Hill site, which Brabazon submitted to the local County Clerk for building approval. It was in his estimation to take about twenty to thirty years to complete, depending on available finance, and would include: a three storied stone and brick, or a stone and wood building, comprising flat-units for married couples and single rooms for single men and women students (who would come from interstate and stay as long as two to three years as trainees); a central dining room, kitchen, lecture room, library, reading room and a concert room. Provision was also to be made for an open-air lecture theatre and small individual cabins, preferably of stone, on various parts of the property for personal meditation and prayer.

Full of enthusiasm, Brabazon, who was now forty-five, threw himself into his building project with a new lease of life. He immediately extended his work load and was, at one stage, working eleven hours a day. Periodically, he was given help from various followers of Meher Baba who made the long trip up from Melbourne specifically to help with the building of the centre.

Some of these people also paid for two semi-retired masons to help Brabazon for almost six weeks. One of the masons quarried the stone, the other dressed it, and Brabazon conveyed it to the wall under construction and cemented it into place. When they left, Brabazon returned to doing all the work himself, cutting, moving, and hoisting the stone in place by the use of a pulley.

With so much practice working with stone, Brabazon felt he could now call himself a professional stone mason and even considered that he cut stone with more artistry than he had ever painted. Certainly a fine quality of workmanship can be seen in the walls which Brabazon constructed at Beacon Hill.

## II. A Change of Fortune

By early April 1953 Brabazon wrote to Sparkie with a conditional marriage proposal: if it was her “own true wish, and God’s will, I want us to become united outwardly as I believe we are inwardly.” And then later, in a letter to *Murshida* Duce — whom Brabazon informed of his offer — he wrote: “whatever her answer is or whatever Meher Baba decrees in the matter, I will feel nothing but happiness. I can no more try to ‘win’ her or persuade her, than I could try to ‘win’ myself. . . . Perhaps it is the first time in my life that I have felt humility.”<sup>1</sup>

In response to Brabazon’s offer, Sparkie was “deeply moved” but was not ready to make a commitment to marriage. Again, in a letter to *Murshida* Duce, Brabazon reaffirmed his position after hearing of her decision: “If it is [in] her life to marry, and she meets up with someone who can really give her happiness in this, no one will be happier than I. She has already given me much more than most men get in a whole lifetime . . . It is a matter of no importance what the source of her happiness is; or the direction her life takes. In the last analysis [her happiness] . . . will be solely dependent on her finding stability through and in love.”

Brabazon, in his continuing correspondence with *Murshida* Duce, expressed what “stability through and in love” which he felt Sparkie had already given him. From a philosophical perspective he wrote:

In a strict sense I do not think anyone ever loves another person. Love is an inherent quality in every heart, but it rises on *account* of another person. It takes (except in rare instance) another person to make one aware that

love resides in one. Generally when this happens, one says, “I love that person”. Sometimes (generally) when association or union with the other person is denied, the love withdraws itself again and dies, or is transferred to another one again. This is because, as I think Inayat Khan would say, it is not yet strong, it cannot stand on its own feet. Therefore in a sense, all love for another is a projection.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing with his notion of “projection”, Brabazon concluded that either “one is adequate in oneself, that is love has arisen in one, and one projects that love to another; or one is inadequate in oneself, that is love has not arisen in one, and one projects one’s wanting to another.” As a consequence of these two positions, he deduced that two attitudes arise:

In the first case, one’s attitude is: I love you, but I do not depend on a return of love from you for my happiness — my happiness is in the love which arises in me and with which I love you. In the second, one’s attitude is, I love you — for God’s sake do something about it!<sup>3</sup>

Through his relationship with Sparkie, Brabazon considered that he had arrived at some “elementary stage of the first attitude” in what had been both a painful and a liberating lesson. Finally, he felt he had gained some degree of understanding into the dynamics of human love, not merely as an intellectual concept, but what he described as a type of “minor realization”:

I say minor, because I know that the complete realization will be to know oneself both as woman and man, and neither. And I now know how a real saint (one who has dropped desire) can marry and be a perfectly good husband [maybe Brabazon had in mind here, Inayat Khan]. In fact, I believe it is not until a man has eliminated all desire for a woman, is he actually capable of really loving a woman as a woman. I believe the whole tragedy of man and woman nowadays is that this knowledge has been lost, and each one tries to possess the other; and the soul revolts

against this possession. Besides this lack, all our material and intellectual accomplishments are an empty joke.<sup>4</sup>

Although these statements have an air of detachment about them Brabazon was nevertheless deeply affected by this whole episode. And this, combined with the 11:30pm to 12:30am practice which Meher Baba had given him to do in 1952 — which had become a powerfully intense experience — had left him doing what he called “a bit of wall-staring”. For three weeks he did not answer any correspondence but remained silent and on the last week lived in seclusion.

In a passage towards the end of “The Stone Masons” it appears that Brabazon offers his farewell to Sparkie. He sings her praise, recalls what she had awakened in him, and then thanks her. It is a simple but moving passage full of humble imagery:

My beloved is a dictionary of beauty  
In which every word has many subtle meanings.  
She is a text-book in the science of love;  
A road-map of journeying; a time-table of arrival,  
And a companion of encouragement.

She is the dawn which awakened me,  
And the sky which accommodates me in my journey  
Following the track of the sun.  
Her curls are the logic of my unreason,  
And in the clear light of her eyes I seek annihilation.

I thank my Dawn, and my thank-you is my kiss,  
And my kiss is my sigh occasioned by the perfume of her  
beauty —  
The shining forth,  
From the fragile line of her immense form,  
Of the light of our Sun.<sup>5</sup>

After the end of his relationship with Sparkie Lukas, and his “wall-staring” phase, Brabazon emerged stronger and more secure in himself and was ready to enter into the next phase of his life. He felt he had learnt something about love and was ready



to reach out, in love, to other people as a poet of the people and not as some heart-broken, lonely romantic — “projecting one’s wanting [onto] another”.

Taking as a cue the blessing which Meher Baba gave in 1952 on his future “publishing works”, Brabazon decided that he should try and have his accumulated work published.<sup>6</sup> His first move was in sending his work to the Melbourne publishers whom he knew, John Reed and Max Harris. Yet while he was initially happy with their involvement, he soon became frustrated with their inability to give a clear sign of their intentions.

Reed liked Brabazon’s poetry, but Harris found it too didactic and not modernist enough for his taste; he preferred Brabazon as a painter not as a poet. Eventually Harris won the day and they rejected the body of his work. However, Reed and Harris did publish four separate pieces in their literary magazine, the *Ern Malley’s Journal*, of October 1953.<sup>7</sup> Taking this as a sort of omen of what was to come, Brabazon decided to form his own publishing company, which he named Beacon Hill Publishing. In June 1953, under this new company, Brabazon’s first collection of poems, *Proletarians-Transition*, was published. Later in the same year another volume, *Early Poems*, was produced. Brabazon’s idea was to publish his work in a series of small collections which he felt best suited the Australian poetry reading audience.

To one long-standing artist friend in Melbourne, Oswald Hall, Brabazon described the poems in *Proletarians-Transition* as short, “agitprop pieces” — recalling the Department of Agitation and Propaganda set up by the Communist Party in the Soviet Union in 1920 from which the term was derived. Indeed the poems reflect the Marxian idea that — “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”<sup>8</sup> — but, in Brabazon’s mind, real change needed to be built upon perennial, spiritual truths, not upon changing, rationally-constructed ideologies. Instead of praising the merits of shared material ownership, Brabazon’s poems challenge working people to recall their common spiritual heritage and responsibility:

This is the time of Proletarians — transition,  
When we sort out our values:  
Giving Bread its due; placing wars in their right  
perspective —  
No longer maintaining the skinny partisan view,  
But clearly recognising that each one of us  
Has been responsible for the agony and blood,  
For the terror of the earth and the air.<sup>9</sup>

*Proletarians-Transition* consists of twenty-eight short pieces and marks a distinct departure from Brabazon's trilogy of long poems. The poems are sharper and more purposeful. In the last poem in the trilogy, "The Householder", Brabazon describes his role as a type of socially committed poet and it is this role which he fulfils in *Proletarians-Transition*:

Yes, there was a war, two wars,  
"And the poet reflects the tremors of his time" —  
But it is not the poet's job to rot seed  
For future horoscopes. It is his work  
To cultivate time so that the times  
May catch hope in further endeavour;  
So that the cry of "Where?" is answered by,  
"There is the direction!" Not torture the wound  
With probing finger of doubt,  
But with clean scalpel, or balm,  
Heal the disease, and encourage new tissue.<sup>10</sup>

There is also a Whitmanesque presence in these new short works, something akin to that found in parts of Whitman's collection "A Song of Occupations" or in following lines taken from his "Passage to India":

A worship new I sing,  
You captain, voyagers, explorers, yours,  
You engineers, you architects, machinists, yours,  
You, not for trade or transportation only,  
But in God's name and for thy sake O soul.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, Brabazon openly acknowledges Whitman's influence by titling one of his poems "Song of Myself". In Brabazon's poem of this title, the last in his collection, he also makes a blatant link to Dante when he writes:

What I say from myself  
has not the minutest particle of value;  
But what I say because of Him,  
do not take lightly,  
or be absent  
when it is said.<sup>12</sup>

Here we find more than a passing reference to Dante's famous claim in *Purgatorio* (Canto 24), "I am one who when love inspires me, take note, and I go signifying after what manner he speaks within."<sup>13</sup> But perhaps equally with Whitman and Dante, if not more so, is the echo of Mayakovsky's voice, the Futurist poet of the Russian revolution who designated himself "the loud mouth Zarathustra of our day"; a poet whose boldness and authenticity Brabazon admired and whose poetry has been closely linked to Dante's.<sup>14</sup>

When Brabazon referred to his poems as "agitprop pieces" he was making an obvious link to Mayakovsky who wrote, as part of his enormous output, literally hundreds of "agitpoems".<sup>15</sup> These were directed to the peasants and workers to help them overcome their illiteracy, ignorance and religious superstitions. In Brabazon's "agitpoems" the target is spiritual ignorance.

The collection itself begins with two epigraphs. The first is from a Tahitian chant: "Awake to work for Tane, / Great God of the Artisans"<sup>16</sup>; while the second, "I am the pamphleteer of God", is more revealing. It comes from the last verse of a poem titled "Pamphlet" by the political activist and poet Luis Munoz Marin who became governor of Puerto Rico in 1948:

I am the pamphleteer of God,  
God's agitator,  
and I go with the mob of stars and hungry men  
towards the great dawn . . .<sup>17</sup>

Brabazon heard of Marin in the late forties, in San Francisco, when he was interested in Latin American art and found, in a copy of *An Anthology of Contemporary Latin American Poetry*, two of his poems, "Proletarians" and "Pamphlet." The former poem, which follows, with its bold, peasant image of a working God who toils along with all of creation, is the type of naive peasant image which deeply appealed to Brabazon's sensibilities:

A donkey  
ascending a mountain,  
slowly  
vibrating under the weight of the saddlebags  
    (His optimist ears  
    slant toward the summit.)  
A bricklayer  
setting brick upon brick.  
    (His humming is monotonous,  
    interminable.)  
God,  
hard at work with the stars.  
    (His silence is profound.)<sup>18</sup>

Dudley Fitts, the editor of the anthology, points out in his introduction that the poetry of Latin America since about 1916 had become a poetry of commitment to people, a poetry which is generally "tougher and more intellectualized".<sup>19</sup> In a single word it could be described as a poetry of liberation; liberation from decadent romanticism and the cult of the isolated and self-absorbed artist. In much of the poetry in this anthology, there is a movement away from the artist as aesthete towards the artist as a prophetic voice.

In the opening poem to *Proletarians-Transition* entitled "Present Australians", Brabazon uses such a voice—"I am a pamphleteer of God. / I am a son of my Guru. / And I bring messages to an old land" — and then goes on to deliver his message of God's oneness: "I proclaim the message which my Guru taught me, / that none exist save God, / that your material dreams are nothing but emptiness."<sup>20</sup>

The first thing that strikes the reader in all of these poems is Brabazon's concern for working people in everyday occupations. This is seen in the titles, for instance: "Song of the Accountant," "Chorus for Cooks and Waitresses," "Song for Lab. Assistants," "Song for Call Girls, Professional and Amateur." In the "Song of the Recluse," which suggests an occupation free from social responsibility, Brabazon presents the opposite view in which the recluse is seen as inextricably connected with each person in society. This poem more than any other in the collection reveals Brabazon's new found role as a poet committed to people:

I am welded inescapably to every living man and woman.  
Not for a moment can I escape my obligations.  
I work ceaselessly  
    breaking down the barriers  
    which exist between myself and me;  
between every man and woman and their fulfilment.  
If I cease for a moment  
    in my meditation and purification  
    I am loafing on *my* job,  
on my part of the construction of the New Humanity.

You have misjudged me grossly:  
You think I am an escapist from life.  
I tell you  
I have escaped into life, which I share  
    unconditionally with, and in  
                                you.

If it is a work which you do not understand,  
    be frank and admit it  
    and do not condemn.  
You hold it no shame  
    to retreat  
    every night  
        into unconsciousness;

I have retreated into consciousness;  
    I labour to make it permanent and complete.

For that is our great work  
The great task which lies before us:  
The replacing of unconsciousness  
with consciousness;  
the replacing of ignorance  
with knowledge;  
the releasing of energy  
into love,  
the turning of stones into BREAD.<sup>21</sup>

The term “New Humanity” which appears in this poem possibly holds the key to understanding the whole collection. It comes from a message of Meher Baba’s titled “The New Humanity” which states in part:

The process, by which we arrive at the new world-culture, cannot be purely *mechanical*. We can never have any vigorous world-culture by merely piling together certain isolated elements, selected from the present diversity of culture; that way, we shall only succeed in getting a patchwork of little vitality. *A hotch-potch of collected ideas can never be a substitute for a direct and fresh perception of the Goal.* The new world-culture will have to emerge from an integral vision of Truth independently of existing traditions and not from the laborious process of selection and compilation of conserved values.

The new world-culture, which will emerge from integral vision, will, however, automatically bring about *cultural synthesis*. Since the vision that inspires it will be comprehensive, it will not negate the values of diverse traditions: nor will it have merely patronising tolerance of them. On the contrary, it shall express itself through active appreciation of the essentials of diverse religions and cultures.<sup>22</sup>

In the light of this comment, *Proletarians-Transition* can be seen as Brabazon’s interpretation of Meher Baba’s “integral vision”.

In terms of Australian poetry the collection appeared as something entirely new and without any literary predecessor.

As soon as printing was completed Brabazon sent review copies to various literary journals, and had copies for sale distributed to Sydney and Melbourne bookshops. Generally sales were poor and it received only one brief published criticism which was dismissive: "Mr. Brabazon has a certain forthrightness, even if his allusions lead him into some odd metaphors. His theology seems a little weak".<sup>23</sup> After the lack of reception given to *Proletarians-Transition* within Australia, Brabazon wrote to Murhsida Duce explaining that he felt "not lonely — that is impossible. Just by myself; almost in a foreign country".

Possibly in response to the poor reception of *Proletarians-Transition* Brabazon focused his energy on continuing to build the Beacon Hill centre, but began to push himself too hard. On one occasion, as a result of his tiredness and subsequent lack of concentration, he nearly met with a fatal accident. This occurred when he loosened the wrong guy ropes of the heavy chain block he was using, which then swung and luckily just missed his head.

Ironically, however, during this period when he was feeling most isolated and physically exhausted, people unexpectedly came to him to hear of Meher Baba. In response to this development Brabazon started to give talks on his Master at places like the Theosophical, Buddhist and Gurdjieff centres where he felt people may be interested. He also presented a series of six, two hour evening lectures at Reiby Place near Circular Quay for interested newcomers.

Gradually, with more people showing interest, Brabazon started Saturday afternoon gatherings at Beacon Hill. These occasions consisted of communal physical work, a shared evening meal, followed by a talk by Brabazon. The talk was held in a small shed with a dirt floor, builder's planks stretched across empty kerosene drums for seating, and a hurricane lamp for lighting. During these sessions Brabazon used Meher Baba's *Discourses* as his central focus and illustrated various points with stories drawn from the lives of religious saints and mystics. In a sense these gatherings at Beacon Hill were a living expression of the essential message in *Proletarians-Transition*.

### III. Andhra-Paradiso

Even though some people were now showing interest in learning about Meher Baba, Brabazon was ambivalent about setting himself up as a teacher. The interest of others may have made him feel less alone (as he complained in a letter to Ivy Duce) but it certainly did not provide the consolation he received from a cable on 26th February 1954, calling him to India. He was elated to receive it. It was from Meher Baba who proposed that Brabazon accompany him on a fortnight tour of the Andhra Pradesh region in southern India. By early March he was on a plane destined to see the land which he had always dreamed of visiting since the early forties:

We left Sydney 9.30 p.m., and with the lights out  
In the 'plane, crossed over the city, a sea and ribbons  
Of light. Then the black gulf of the harbour;  
    and the North Shore  
Lights thinning into a final blanket night  
Below us. The chart shows a straight line  
Through Dubbo, Bourke, Cloncurry, Darwin; a pure  
Flight-line.<sup>1</sup>

And when the plane finally approached Calcutta he was filled with anticipation:

Then blue of sea again which, on the map, shows  
As the Bay of Bengal. Emptiness of light; and expectancy  
In my heart quietly audible over the level engine-drone.  
And then the Ganges Delta, grey-blue, slate-black fertility,  
Laced with ribbon streams of life — INDIA.<sup>2</sup>



On the first morning after his arrival, 12th March, he set out by bus to Belur Math to pay his respects at the tomb-shrines of Paramahansa Ramakrishna, his wife, and Vivekananda, his close disciple:

I felt an expectant happiness as I approached this building. At the steps of the entrance an attendant greeted me silently, and accompanied me up the long flight of steps and down the length of the building to where the statue was (of Ramakrishna). I sat down before the figure of this Master, and gazed for a long time at it and felt very happy. Then I closed my eyes and just sat silently for some time again.<sup>3</sup>

From here Brabazon went to Vivekananda's tomb-shrine which is set on two levels:

A monk was seated before a picture of the Master on the ground-level performing some ceremony. I sat down there for a while then walked up the steps to the second floor in which was only the symbol for OM. How fitting a memorial to this Master. On one level, the worship of his form; on the other, the meditation on the formless — just as he in his life taught.<sup>4</sup>

From the tranquility of Belur Math, Brabazon was thrown into the turbulence of Calcutta and felt exhilarated with its chaos:

The traffic is Rafferty's rules. The drivers drive on the horn and go hell for leather. The taxi drivers shout out at each other; and the bus conductors hang out on the step and shout the destination of their bus. I loved every minute of it.<sup>5</sup>

On 16th March, he caught the train and stopped off in Nagpur to visit the tomb-shrine of Tajuddin Baba. Later he went on to Shirdi to pay his respects at the tomb-shrine of Sai Baba. Both of these men, according to Meher Baba, had been Perfect Masters and, as such, instrumental in his advent as Avatar. Brabazon was deeply affected by the natural devotion of the Indian people and he felt very much at home in this type of atmosphere. For instance,

on returning to his hotel with a picture of Tajuddin Baba after visiting his tomb:

I [Brabazon] showed the picture to the waiter. Tears came into his [the waiter's] eyes and he joined his palms, and said, "Tajuddin Baba." I asked him did he ever meet Him, and he said, yes, when he was a little boy. He told me some wonderful stories about Him, but I cannot repeat now I still feel too moved.<sup>6</sup>

Brabazon could not get over his "wonderful fortune" since his arrival — "my head and eyes ache with it all". The highlight of his first few days in India was when he attended a film in Nagpur on the life of Shri Chaitanya which showed his initiation by his Guru. Significantly, this was on the eve of the day before Brabazon set off to meet his own Master. Brabazon described it as the first real film he had ever seen:

The dialogue was in Hindi, but since I already knew His life-story, I could follow nearly every scene and episode. Chaitanya was a brilliant intellectual Sanskrit scholar by the time he was twenty. Then he and his companions went on a visit to Gaya where he met his Guru. It was a touching scene where the Guru welcomes him as though he always knew the youth. Then that night under the full moon, the Guru begins to teach through singing the most beautiful narrative of Krishna and the Gopis. His singing is illustrated by a scene depicting the event. It was in colour, and the dancing of Radha and the Gopis was beautiful. When it came to the scene of the parting of Krishna and Radha, it was too much for the young Chaitanya and he fainted; and it gave me such a shock that tears burst out of my eyes.

... But the most wonderful part was yet to come, when he takes *Sannyas* (severs all ties), has his head shaved and is given his last initiation by his Guru, received his robe and staff and bowl and sets out on the road alone. Everywhere he went, he sang and danced to the people. He looked no

longer like a young man, but was like an incarnation of divine beauty itself . . .<sup>7</sup>

Filled with enthusiasm generated by this movie, Brabazon took the train from Nagpur to Mumbai (Bombay) and then to Pune (Poona) where he was to meet his own Guru for the second time in his life. On a deeper level, Brabazon felt this journey was also covering an inner distance to the very source of his existence, “the Soul of my soul”:

Passage to more than India — Passage  
To the very heart fibres of my soul;  
To the Soul of my soul, the Eye of the sun  
Who turns the earth and awakens each teeming day;  
Whose sweet Name parches my throat, and heaps fire  
Upon my already burning skull of iron of head,  
Cauldron of rivers of sweet cooling tears.

WHOM

I now met again, seated on the platform  
Of Poona railway station, radiant and garlanded,  
Receiving the teared-bright devotion of his devotees.  
I too, by some strange fortune, his sweet embrace.<sup>8</sup>

From Pune, Brabazon was the only Westener out of a group of forty to accompany Meher Baba on an exhaustive tour of the rich fertile area of Andhra. He could not help but notice the spiritual richness of the people in contrast to the spiritual poverty in the West, “between their wholeness and our fragmentation between their open purity and our *tamasic* self-envelopment”.<sup>9</sup>

Large crowds of up to twenty thousand came to receive Meher Baba’s *darshan* (sight of the Master) and blessing as he stopped at the various towns and villages. In all, an estimated ninety thousand people came to see him during the tour. Incredibly, to each of those who came he personally gave *prasad* (gift from the Master) of a banana which was a fruit commonly grown in this tropical region. The distribution of the fruit *prasad* would take hours as each person filed by. Brabazon was staggered as he witnessed this spectacle of love and was struck by the attentiveness Meher Baba showed to him:

Sometimes even in the midst of this, he  
Would glance up and flash a smile at me,  
Just as he had previously, as Buddha,  
Smiled on a barber who asked whether  
One of such lowly trade could follow in his Way.  
Kabir sang: "Every night is for the married woman,  
But I have no husband." Not only am I  
Unmarried, but also homeless — an exile  
In two countries. Yet he took time to flash  
a smile at me!<sup>10</sup>

Brabazon also saw people dancing, singing and presenting extempore verses in praise of their Master. It was for him an experience of a vital, spiritual culture, a proletariat which needed no transition, an "Andhra-paradiso — / With no fall, and no expulsion from the Garden: / But again with the seal of God's feet upon her earth" — and filled with a pure devotion to God:<sup>11</sup>

At another place, on leaving, a mere child climbed into our bus and sang songs about Baba, and harangued us to love him, without any signs of childish precocity, winning the respect and admiration of men who had served him for years.<sup>12</sup>

Not surprisingly, the tour secured even further Brabazon's conviction in Meher Baba's spiritual authority. He had now seen with his own eyes Meher Baba moving and working in the midst of people and their natural devotional outpourings in response to being simply in his presence. "One thing is certain," Brabazon wrote:

. . . and that is, if any one can help us to gain that freedom (which we feel is our birthright) it can only be one who not only says he has won it himself, but demonstrates his claim in his actual day-to-day living. That one alone can help us to touch the depths of ourselves, who first touches our depths.<sup>13</sup>

And later, in a subsequent passage, Brabazon describes how being in Meher Baba's company on this tour actually touched

his own “depths”. What is also significant in this passage is that Brabazon refers to Meher Baba as “as the very embodiment and manifestation of beauty and knowledge” — “beauty and knowledge” fused together in the one person. In the person of Sparkie Lukas, Brabazon had discovered beauty, but now in Meher Baba, after spending an extended period of time in his company, “beauty and knowledge” combined:

Whether Meher Baba is the totality of Godhood or not, I have personally no way of knowing — I can only measure to my own degree. But to that degree, he is the embodiment of that ideal which I call God. Since Beauty and knowledge has been the only God I have ever worshipped or pursued, and since this man appeals to my eyes as the very embodiment and manifestation of beauty and knowledge, I call him God. Not only the all-forgiveness and humour in his eyes, but the very movements of his hands and body, have unlocked regions within me which were unknown to me before. No man or woman, no flight of thought, no aesthetic experience, no sublimity of nature, has touched the depths of me as this man has. I have met no-one, or experienced no experience, which has melted my heart or sharpened my intellect as he has.<sup>14</sup>

It seemed to Brabazon that the Andhra people almost instantly recognised Meher Baba as “the totality of Godhood”. This recognition was partly due to the fact that they kept alive a belief in the periodic appearance on earth of saints and Perfect Masters, *Sadgurus*, who out of compassion spiritually guide humanity; a belief which has become lost in Western culture. And partly because the attributes of such holy figures were described in the song-lyrics and stories which the Andhra people passed on from one generation to the next. The most revered of these holy figures being the *Avatar* (the periodic incarnation of God on earth) or the God-man. Brabazon expressed the unique spiritual status of the God-man as such:

That man is the God-man who makes the path easy —  
Nay, who wipes out the path altogether,  
Goes straight to the heart of the matter  
And gives one realization of the one Self.<sup>15</sup>

While Brabazon did not receive Self-realization while travelling with Meher Baba and living with his disciples, he did receive what he described as his “first real experience of love and brotherhood”<sup>16</sup> — something, obviously, which even transcended his experience of love for Sparkie.

On returning to Australia by sea, Brabazon felt he was leaving behind what was real in life. So it is perhaps not surprising, that on his arrival he soon busied himself with writing a verse account of his Andhra travels, to keep his Indian experience alive in his mind. By April 1954 he had completed his recollections. It was a long poem extending over three parts, and he sent a draft copy to Meher Baba. In response to the poem, Meher Baba sent Brabazon various of his messages, including those he dictated on the Andhra tour, for him to select and publish along with his poem. He also requested a hundred copies of the final work to be sent to him for Indian distribution. By June 1954 the booklet entitled *Journey With God* was completed and distributed.

*Journey With God* presents for the first time in Brabazon’s published writings his belief in God’s re-occurrence on earth in the form of the God-man. It is a significant text for its theme was to take central place and undergo continual development in all of Brabazon’s subsequent poetry. The booklet, as with all of Brabazon’s writing, was aimed at a general thinking audience and was not designed as a work which simply praised Meher Baba for the satisfaction of his followers. It consisted of the poem itself, “Journey With God”, as the central piece, an “Introduction” serving as a means of contextualising Brabazon’s thought, an explanatory section titled “Note on ‘The God-man’” and a concluding section “Messages of Meher Baba”. For the reader interested in understanding Brabazon’s poetry *Journey With God* gives a clear insight into the nature of Brabazon’s early relationship with Meher Baba.

In the narrative poem "Journey With God" Brabazon introduces a new element into his work, that of devotional praising of his spiritual Master. A representative example of this is captured in the following passage from part three of the work, "Andhra-Paradiso":

And so all through a day  
And a night and another day, the train wound on  
Across dry earth awaiting the rains to bring  
Its hidden greenness into crops and sustenance,  
Bearing east God and his circle of workers, and myself  
Nowhere to be seen except within his heart,  
And in the careful hands of these his hands  
Who served his slightest sign in selfless joy.  
And arrived at Bezwada, where the crowd  
Surged forward with a great shout of joy,  
And swept us from the platform, through narrow streets  
To an open place which had been prepared,  
Where he was welcomed with music of drums  
And flutes.

And the silver platter bearing fruits  
And lighted camphor was waved before him.  
And the song of light was sung by the disciples,  
Full-throated and rich in pure intensity:  
The same song which the morning stars and  
these same men  
Had sung in the Beginning, as they circled in joy  
Around the first Christ on his first descent to earth.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously Brabazon's experience of being with Meher Baba in India had a lot to do with this new aspect in his work. Previously in 1952, after his first brief meeting with his Master at Myrtle Beach, Brabazon felt the beginning of his "true creativity". On this occasion, he felt the beginnings of another poetic urging. "Journey With God" hints at this new urging: "And there was a cry in my breast as the first notes / Of my song struggled chrysalis-like / From its agelong encasing, and spread its wings / Eagerly for flight."<sup>18</sup> The full effect of this change was not to be seen until 1959 when Brabazon published his greatest single work *Stay With God*.

# Chapter Five

## Spirituality and Art

### I. ABC of Spirituality

Before Brabazon even had time to fully reflect upon the meaning and significance of this new and struggling “cry” in his heart, he received yet another invitation from Meher Baba to visit India. This was in the form of an open invitation to all Western men over sixteen to be in Meher Baba’s company and have his *darshan*. Brabazon, along with twenty other men, mostly from America but also from Europe and two others from Australia, Bill Le Page and John Ballantyne, accepted the invitation. This time it was to be for approximately three weeks, from 11th September to 30th September.<sup>1</sup>

During this period the Western visitors saw Meher Baba working with people as he had done all his life. They witnessed him giving his blessing and personal contact to over 1500 people in a mass *darshan* program and also working with lepers, the poor, and the depressed classes of India. On one occasion when Meher Baba had assembled all the Westerners together he made the puzzling comment to Brabazon, “Francis, you sell all and follow the Cross”.<sup>2</sup> What Meher Baba actually meant by this remark is open to speculation.

But one thing is certain, at no time during his three weeks stay, nor during the period of his previous trip with Meher Baba travelling through the Andhra Pradesh region, did Meher Baba raise the issue of Sufism in Australia. And nor did Brabazon feel inclined to raise the issue with Meher Baba. As far as Brabazon was concerned Sufism had been the path which led him to Meher Baba, as it was with many other Sufis, and in doing so it had served its



ultimate function. What mattered now in Brabazon's mind, was to obey Meher Baba directly and as honestly as possible, and not let anything else get in the way.

In early October, Brabazon returned home by sea with Le Page and Ballantyne and chose to maintain silence for the duration of the trip. Again, as he left India he felt a strong admiration for India's spirituality and a growing frustration and even anger towards what he saw as the West's spiritual ignorance:

I myself pointed out, when in India, that Indians in five years can learn, at one of the Western universities, all that the West has to offer. But how long is it going to take the West to produce a Sadguru? or even a real saint? 700 years?<sup>3</sup>

This frustration at the lack of spiritual understanding in Western culture combined with his strong desire to devote his writing to Meher Baba, prompted Brabazon to write a text which would meet both these demands. He wrote to Meher Baba in India on May 1955, informing him of the new writing project which he had in mind. In his prompt reply Meher Baba gave his support to the project, and by July of that year, Brabazon had completed his first prose manuscript, the *ABC of Spirituality*.

This work was designed by Brabazon as a type of general beginner's guide, albeit Sufic in orientation, concerning aspects of the spiritual path, many of which were first raised in *Journey With God*. The significance of this piece of work is that it clearly indicates that Brabazon had come to the end of his own spiritual quest in terms of intellectual understanding. The original manuscript, written in freehand with only a few minor corrections, looks like it has been written quickly in the matter of a few sittings.

The style of the presentation closely resembles Ezra Pound's beginner's text, the *ABC of Reading*. For instance, it uses Pound's general text book format with succinct and concise sections and sub-sections demarcated with numberings and includes words written in upper case for emphasis. It also uses one of Pound's views on the practical function of critical writing. Namely:

The general ordering and weeding out of what has actually been . . . The elimination of repetitions . . . The ordering of knowledge so that the next man (or generation) can most easily find the live part of it, and waste the least possible time among obsolete issues.<sup>4</sup>

In Brabazon's case it was the "weeding out" of what he considered to be false notions concerning spirituality. The main sections of the *ABC of Spirituality* are four in number and are logically sequenced "The Path", "The Foundation", "The Method", and "The Master". In the opening section of "The Path" Brabazon presents the two broad parameters of his theme with his characteristic directness. Firstly he deals with the issue of where the spiritual path starts and finishes:

The spiritual path is the progress from oneself limited in consciousness to oneself with unlimited consciousness; from oneself as finite being to oneself as infinite Being; from the condition of bondage to the state of freedom; from ignorance to knowledge; from isolationism to universality; from alternations of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, happiness and misery, pleasure and pain, to abiding bliss. It is the longest journey one can take: and while it can be done "in the twinkling of an eye," it is usually a long drawn out affair taking an entire lifetime or even many lives, depending on the degree of preparedness, the sincerity of effort and the grace of a Perfect Master [i.e., a God-Realized being].<sup>5</sup>

And secondly, on how to travel this path, Brabazon suggests there are three ways:

1. The way of ignorance which is the way of the majority, in which one progresses slowly and painfully through the experiences of life;
2. The way of lovers, which is followed by those who have an appreciation of beauty and a tendency towards friendship and sacrifice;

3. The way of complete renunciation, in which comfort, happiness and unhappiness are disregarded and one fixes one's sight on the Goal and goes straight to it — the way of the very few.

We will assume that you are already tired of the first way, the way of ignorance, and are not attracted to the third way, the way of total renunciation; that leaves open to you the second way, the way of lovers, in which you only have to use attributes and faculties common to all human beings in a specific direction.<sup>6</sup>

One of the “attributes and faculties” which Brabazon raises in his work, and one which I now wish to focus my attention upon, is his approach to reading. This is relevant, for it gives us an inkling into how Brabazon studied and arrived at his own intellectual understanding of spirituality. As an opening comment, Brabazon claims that reading is overrated and can only prove useful if practised in a particular manner:

But you have already got into the habit of reading — that is one of the penalties of literacy. So it is now a question of using your reading to the best advantage rather than abandoning it.

It is better to read than gossip.

It is better to meditate than read.

It is better to love than meditate.

But you are at the stage of reading.<sup>7</sup>

Brabazon's phrase, “the penalties of literacy” is an allusion to an essay by Coomaraswamy, “The Bugbear of Literacy”.<sup>8</sup> Brabazon was impressed by this essay which vehemently attacked the spread of literacy as an act of imperialistic colonisation which destroyed indigenous cultures. One of Coomaraswamy's “bugbears” is that, with the advent of literacy, people generally read indiscriminately and thoughtlessly and came to know “more and more of less and less”.<sup>9</sup> From Brabazon's point of view this was the condition of Western culture, with the result that people

in the West had become increasingly removed from the essential knowledge of how best to live. In contrast to this, Brabazon saw the mainly illiterate villagers of Andhra in southern India as belonging to a culture "rich in spirituality, where devotion and song flow easily".

The first key issue in Brabazon's approach to reading is the actual selection of what to read. In this regard he shared Coomaraswamy's perception, "where there is no longer any necessary connection between one's 'skill' (now a timesaving 'economy of motion' rather than a control of the product) and one's 'wisdom,' the possibility of culture depends so much on our ability to read the best books".<sup>10</sup> Brabazon felt "the best books" were those that yielded the greatest spiritual understanding and awareness, namely, "the Scriptures and gospels of the Masters and the hymns and love-songs of the saints and devotees". These, he added, provided

. . . accounts of the fundamental laws of the universe, descriptions of the spiritual path, and precepts concerning the way of life which will bring one into harmony with these laws and get one started on the [spiritual] path.<sup>11</sup>

His selection also included Homer's *Odyssey*, which he considered to be a type of Scripture. Most modern literature he dismissed, and scathingly described it in terms reminiscent of Pound, as "that mass of unfired clay, the shapes of which, and their design, appeal to us variously at different stages of our mental adolescence".<sup>12</sup>

In brief, Brabazon's selection is based on the single principle that a reader cannot expect to obtain knowledge from ignorance, nor direction from what is essentially directionless: "words written by dead men [in the sense of unenlightened] are permanently dead. And words written by men of untruth cannot contain any truth".<sup>13</sup>

The only reliable text, as far as Brabazon was concerned, was one which was written by people who *are* the truth or who are "true seeing (saints)".<sup>14</sup> Brabazon even recommended a selection of texts which he felt had been written by such people and which

gave “a fair view of what constitutes the path, and some hints of what words like God, truth, [and] love mean”.<sup>15</sup> What is interesting in viewing this selection is the indication it gives of the scope of his own study. Brabazon’s recommended titles included:

BUDDHIST

*The Dhammapada* (The Path to Perfection), *The Vajrachhedika Sutra* (Sutra of the Diamond-Cutter of Supreme Wisdom), *The Jetsun-Kahbum* (The Biography of Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa), and *The Sutra of Wei Lang* (The Sutra of Hui Neng the sixth Zen Patriarch);

CHRISTIAN

*The Little Flowers of St Francis*, and *The Dark Night of the Soul* by St John of the Cross;

CONFUCIAN

*The Ta Hsio* (The Great Learning) by Confucius;

HINDU

*The Upanishads*, *The Ramayana*, *The Viveka-Cudamani* (The Discrimination of the Jewel-like Mind) by Shankara and all works on Vedanta written and translated by Swami Vivekananda;

JUDAIC

*The Hebraic Tongue Restored* by Fabre d’Olivet (contains a translation of the first ten chapters of Genesis);

SUFI

*The Mathnawi* of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, The Poems of Hafiz, *The Kashf Al-Mahjub* (The Revelation of the Mystery) of Al Hujwiri (The oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism), *The Mantiq Ut-tair* (The Conference of the Birds) by Farid-ud-Din-Attar, and *The Eastern Rose Garden* by Inayat Khan;

TAOISTS

*The Tao Te Ching* by Lao-tzu;

ZOROASTRIAN

*The Gathas of Zarathustra.*<sup>16</sup>

Besides these texts, Brabazon recommended the works of Meher Baba which he felt gave “the clearest and most living account of the path and its Goal” which is presently available.<sup>17</sup>

Having made this pronouncement on what to read, Brabazon next concerns himself with how to read and he starts with this initial principle:

You may be sure . . . that NONE OF THE SCRIPTURES CONTRADICT ONE ANOTHER. The apparent contradictions are due to time and place, i.e., when they were given and where they were given; but of course all of them contain errors of translation and interpretation.<sup>18</sup>

What Brabazon is basing this principle upon is his belief in the Sufi idea, supported by Meher Baba, of the divine oneness of all enlightened Masters. It follows, therefore, that whatever they say must contain the same inherent message. This, however, raises the problem of interpretation, which Brabazon cites in the case of Wei Lang (638–713), the sixth Patriarch of China who, when delivering a teaching from one of the written Buddhist Sutras, twisted every sentence round to its opposite meaning, whereupon:

One of the Monks interjected, “Sir, you are saying the exact opposite to what the Buddha said.” Wei Lang replied, “That is impossible. I bear the heart-seal of the Buddha, and therefore cannot say differently to what he said. When *you* read the Buddha’s word, you give them the opposite meaning to what he intended.”<sup>19</sup>

In this quote, the “heart-seal” represents spiritual authority, and it is this authority which makes all the difference: it is not the literal text which is the real text but the con-text — the words-as-spoken-through-the-mouth-of-the-Master-to-a-specific-audience — which is the real text, and therefore possessing spiritual authority. The

problem then is: without the presence of such an authority how can a seeker possibly hope to read a spiritual text and avoid a misreading? Besides implicitly confirming the old saying that until the mind is ready to grasp what the eye sees, words of truth carry little or no impact, Brabazon makes the point, that a right reading is dependent upon the reader having the right attitude towards the text for:

It will not be the words you read, but your feeling for the truth behind them, and for the manner of the people who wrote or spoke them which will awaken your own feeling for the same truth and for the same manner which is your own real being, which will make you a real pupil.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere in his *ABC of Spirituality* in support of this view, Brabazon writes:

Information about the path will not take you one step nearer to it. You have to *feel* the truth of its existence, and the truth behind the Master of it and the beauty and devotion of the aspirants on it; feel the personality and *manner* of these men and women. It is this feeling which will enable you to distinguish between manner and manners: to see that the manner of Confucius was nothing to do with the ceremonials and forms which he *used as a vehicle*, but that it was the same thing as “the manner of God” (*aklag-Allah*) of the Sufis which you could also call the manner of the Ajanta Cave Paintings or if you like the manner of Bach: a manner which was not *in* harmony with life, but *was* harmony itself, and constituted a way of living, and a measure by which all things were known and understood. . .<sup>21</sup>

A second point that Brabazon makes, which follows on from these comments, is that true learning is not the acquiring of information, but emerges from within a person’s own being. It is not some possession of the mind but rather the acquiring of that quality of being which is “harmony itself, and [constitutes] a way of living, and a measure by which all things [are] known and

understood". In this sense, the reading of spiritual texts should act as a type of catalyst to awaken this sense of harmony.

Ultimately, in Brabazon's eyes, this harmony is perfected in the being of the God-Realized or Perfect Master who is a Master of Living, the personification of all spiritual knowledge, the living "Word" made flesh, and the source and end of all words and their final meaning:

The real Scriptures are not even the Books, but were contained in the lives of the Masters — their daily actions, their friendships, their sympathies with those around them. . . . In other words, the real Scriptures were those Personalities in whom God revealed Himself in the image of Man, so that men might mould themselves in the image of God.

And the path consists not in reading one or more of these Books, and filling oneself with conceit because one can quote passages from them, and in increasing the muddle by comparing this and that commentary, but in following as literally as possible in the footsteps of one of the Christs; and Perfection is obtained when one's falseness becomes annihilated in His truth.

(For this, *The Little Flower of St. Francis* is the ideal model. And perhaps, in the West, he [St. Francis] was the only one who *did* it fully.)<sup>22</sup>

In summary, the *ABC of Spirituality* presented Brabazon's intellectual arguments for the need to follow a spiritual Master, based upon his own extensive spiritual reading. Yet no doubt, it was seeing Meher Baba in "daily action" on the Andhra tour that further sharpened his intellectual arguments, turning them into feelingful convictions which made him write so convincingly and effortlessly on this subject. In a sense the *ABC of Spirituality* was a precursor to Brabazon's most powerful work, *Stay With God*, a work which Meher Baba was soon to commission him to write, and one in which Brabazon perfectly balances his intellectual or didactic side with his emotional or devotional side.



## II. Art as a Practice of Devotion

There was one aspect of spirituality which was surprisingly not covered in any great depth in the *ABC of Spirituality* and that was the role of art in spirituality, particularly its role as a practice of devotion. This aspect of art was something which Brabazon had been grappling with for decades but now, since the Andhra tour, he felt he had arrived at some real understanding of the matter and published his thoughts in "Art as a Practice of Devotion".<sup>1</sup> This highly condensed and forthright statement, along with passages from other of his published and unpublished writings of this period, could collectively be called his *ABC of Art*. The immediate genesis of "Art as a Practice of Devotion" is rather interesting.

In May 1955 Brabazon travelled to Melbourne and stayed for two weeks. During this time he managed to see some of his artist friends from the Contemporary Art Society whom he had not seen or contacted since the early forties. He jokingly referred to them as an "ungodly crew", but was happy to be given the opportunity, at one of their gatherings, to talk about his meetings with Meher Baba and to read some of his poetry.

After returning to Beacon Hill, and as a result of his re-established contact with John and Sunday Reed at the C.A.S. gathering, Brabazon sent them in August 1955 a manuscript copy of his newly completed play "Singing Threshold".<sup>2</sup> Eventually the manuscript made its way into the hands of Barrie Reid for his critical assessment. Reid at the time was an editor of the *Ern Malley's Journal* along with John Reed and Max Harris and had met Brabazon for the first time during his Melbourne trip. In Reid's opinion the play was filled with passages of poetry which "carry

so much of the calm goodness of the world, yet overall the work suffered from a certain monotony". In a letter to Brabazon, Reid elaborated upon this comment:

First of all as poetry: the rise and fall of the voice — a very beautiful voice is the same throughout. These days of quick nervous sensibility, these faster than sound days, seem to demand a different method of a long poem e.g., Eliot's Quartets. Secondly as drama the monotony exists because there is really only one character — your own fluent and lucid personality. The so called people have no life of their own no free existence as personalities. It is a shadow play.

I turn once more to the poetry, to your own voice that seems to convey the sense of a man speaking (preaching?) for so long and passionately that the dogma at times forgets itself and we have the gift of poetry rising out of things all men share in common. It is this poetry which warms my heart, not all the sectional God-talk. . . .<sup>3</sup>

What Reid thought Brabazon's poetry lacked was something which Reid had found in the poetry of the fictitious Ern Malley whose poems were for him "an explosion — mainly because of the absolute freshness of the language, the imagery and . . . the sense of personality behind the poems" that caught "the poetic sensibility of our age".<sup>4</sup> Yet there was a section of poetry in Brabazon's play which Reid felt captured this "sensibility", and this he published in the November issue (1955) of the *Ern Malley's Journal* under the title "Death of a City".<sup>5</sup> This was also the same section which the Australian poet and critic Charles Osborne later arranged to have read on the BBC Third Program in August 1959.

Overall, Reid was correct in his assessment of the work as drama. The dialogue in "Singing Threshold" does suffer from being too poetised and dignified. In short, the work lacks dramatic tension and gives the indication that Brabazon is more of a poet than a playwright. Yet, while Brabazon was happy to have a section of his play published as poetry, he took exception

to the implication that his poetry, or indeed any poetry for that matter, needs to reflect the “quick nervous sensibility” appropriate to “these faster than sound days” of the fifties. In his notes of this period that directly address Reid’s criticisms, Brabazon strikes out with his counter claim:

Art is nothing to do with “communication of nervous sensibilities,” if by nervous sensibilities is meant personal reaction to the stimulus of environment. Nor is it a product of probing the labyrinthine complex of the psyche (such as preoccupations with sex and death either in actuality or symbols)—the former should take the logical materialistic position and set out to cure the social and economic ills of the community, and the latter get themselves psycho-analysed or processed, or whatever the latest fad [is] in the matter. Art is not a seeking in any sense, but is always a *clear statement* of a finding.<sup>6</sup>

What follows in this chapter is an attempt to try and interpret some of the implications behind Brabazon’s definition of art as a “*clear statement* of a finding”, and to examine some of issues which it generates. This is a necessary task, for one of Brabazon’s major contributions as an artist was to open up a new way of conceiving art—based on certain spiritual ideas which he outlined in his *ABC of Spirituality*. Not to understand Brabazon’s spiritual viewpoint is to miss a lot of what he has to offer and will result in a failure to see the basis of his challenge to some modernist notions of art as expounded by people like Barrie Reid.

Firstly, Brabazon felt that so-called artists who were engaged with communicating “nervous sensibilities” were not engaged in art at all. Rather, their work was only the concrete display of a mental reaction which they had suffered passively. Work of this nature could possibly be useful in personal therapy but it had no real spiritual utility; it was not creative and did not “catch hope in future endeavour” and cry out to people “There is the direction!” using clear statements.<sup>7</sup> Brabazon argued:

If we subscribe to the supersonic nervousness idea, any discussion is futile. There is no basis. One will say, my nervousness tells me so and so; and another, my nervousness so and so.

The reaction of a person's nervousness is nothing whatsoever to do with Art. Art is in spite of all nervous reactions, and their cure.<sup>8</sup>

In his writing from this period, Brabazon made the distinction between the idea of Art and its concrete expression in artworks. In a short passage, obviously again in response to Reid's letter, Brabazon makes this distinction clear:

I am not interested in your supersonic nervousness; and if you answer that this is escapism I will reply that your supersonic nervousness is escapism. I am interested in trying to find the eternal values which is Art within myself. These values are nothing to do with changes of temper of different ways of living. If you doubt this then you doubt (or perhaps you do not know of) a continuous living communication through the ages. The only thing that does change somewhat is the medium employed — e.g., change of language.<sup>9</sup>

In another note aimed at Reid, Brabazon went further and equated Art with the "Essence of the aesthetic" and with God; and human artworks with the "revelation of God in physical terms". Within this conceptual framework Brabazon proposed that the making of the "artwork" was "the manifestation of Spirit expressed through feeling and ordered by intellect in concrete terms". In this view art is seen as God's spiritual action in the world.

First and foremost, however, in Brabazon's conception was the belief that artists have to allow themselves to be made into the "artwork", that is, they have to allow themselves to be shaped into the "Image" of God if they wish to express such an "image" in their creative actions. And for Brabazon, this required the practice of devotion or to put it more simply — love:

Art, as an act of love, requires the would be artist to first of all become a lover, and by love make of himself art: something can never be obtained from nothing. Nothing is nothing, and no matter what dress is put on it, it remains nothing. Only that one who has *become* art can produce art.<sup>10</sup>

This idea that art is a practice of love fits in perfectly with Brabazon's previously discussed views on spirituality in which he promoted "the way of love" as the most efficacious way to live a spiritual life. In other words, what Brabazon is suggesting is that artists need to develop a practice of love which draws them closer to the one eternal source of Reality — which is to be found within the depth of their being — from which all creativity springs. For Brabazon, this source of creativity is the same as that which creates both the world and the artwork. It has simply been called by different names throughout history and cultures:

Belief in the idea that anything *new* is achieved in art is due to *interaction* with the shifting surface of life. The creation is not an act of the remote past, but is taking place constantly. Just as That form from which creation arises is constant, absolute and changeless, so is Art, which is simply the permanent constant from which creativeness expresses itself; and always is contemporary. Hence the illusion, usually by the onlooker and often by the immature artist himself, that something new has been created, when it is merely a new *shape* (new in the limited vision of the onlooker or artist) with which creativity (Art) has clothed itself.<sup>11</sup>

And again, along similar lines, Brabazon argues:

There is absolutely no possibility of anything new ever being done in art, nor any progression whatsoever. The history of art is merely the story — in its most prosaic manifestation, the cataloguing — of the occasions of creativeness and the forms which it forged for itself and inhabited. If this is not so, we ask, how is it possible for

people living today to enjoy a genuine aesthetic experience through an art executed in a previous time or age.<sup>12</sup>

In Brabazon's writing this idea of the one eternal source of creativity is most commonly represented by the image of an immovable creative axis, hub or pivot of the universe: an image which is similar to that found in world mythologies as an *axis mundi* where it is usually represented iconographically as a stairway, a ladder, a pole, a mountain or a tree and is the "place" where heaven and earth meet.<sup>13</sup> This is an image which is central to Brabazon's thinking and appears in his definitive work on art and spirituality, *Stay With God*, as the title of the important closing section, "The God-Man as World Axis and Living Perfection of Art". Brabazon may have first come across the term, "axis", in a Confucian work, *Chung Yung*, which he had read in translation by Ezra Pound as *The Unwobbling Pivot*.<sup>14</sup>

In this Confucian text the writer, Tsze Sze, makes the claim that the "axis" of the world is not to be found in the mundane world of existence, but in the "inborn nature", in the "heart" of a person. And more significantly still, such a person who finds this centre and remains there, becomes the living embodiment of the "unwobbling axis" of the world — the one who disturbs nothing — and is known as the "master man". This idea of an axial "master man" is how Brabazon defines a "God-man" or Perfect Master: "the World Axis". In the *Vedantic* tradition this person is also called a *Sadguru*, and in Sufism, a *Qutub*, which literally means "Pole". For Sufis, the *Qutub* is "the *insan al-kamil*, or perfect 'divine' man . . . the point around which the spiritual hierarchy revolve", and, they insist, "the existence of the world . . . depends on the presence of a *Qutub* in it".<sup>15</sup> This idea of the divine creative axis of the world could equally be applied, using the opening lines of St. John's gospel, to Christ, God incarnate: "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men".<sup>16</sup>

To find a Perfect Master, in Brabazon's view, is to find the centre of the universe and is "all that the world can give". In this regard he writes:

Knowing that one is in a state of ignorance, one has learned all that the world has to teach one — one did not come here to gain knowledge about the world, but to assume that body by means of which one can gain knowledge of God. And having, as well as acquired the necessary and suitable form, found Someone in whom the sum total of Existence, Beauty and Knowledge resides, is all that the world can give one. There is no one else to seek, and nothing else to obtain; all the rest one has picked up in the world, all one's possessions, are only so much excess baggage to be dropped as quickly as possible.<sup>17</sup>

The "Someone in whom the sum total of Existence, Beauty and Knowledge resides" is yet another of Brabazon's expression for the Perfect Master from whom all earthly existence, beauty and knowledge proceeds as creative expression. In Brabazon's conception this is what he understood to be the spiritual status shared by all the great religious Masters including Buddha, Christ, Krishna, Muhammed, Rama, Zoroaster and his own spiritual Master Meher Baba.

Having reached this point, Brabazon makes the claim that art is a spiritual practice of trying to discover this "axis" — embodied in the Perfect Master — as the deep Self of one's own self. By "Self" Brabazon is referring to the Upanishadic sense of the word: "The Self is the Adorable, who moves in dreams. He is the unalarmed, immortal Spirit".<sup>18</sup> And for Brabazon, when this Spirit is intuitively experienced by artists, and they create from this core of their being, then their work will be in the original manner of God. This, as far as Brabazon is concerned, should be the ultimate goal of each artist:

He [the Perfect Master] is the Axis around which His creation revolves. Consequently, He is the creativity in all creative acts, in all human relationships. Precisely then the path of the artist is not in [the] practice of technique or in the pursuit of [the] relationship of forms . . . but . . . [to] draw nearer to this central creativity and work in accordance with its laws, which are always constructive.<sup>19</sup>

The pressing question which now arises is how, in practice, do artists draw “nearer to this central creativity”:

How will one detect the track of a bird  
Which flies high? The Bird of the sky has blue wings,  
And it requires the crystal eyes of the heart  
To separate blue from blue. It requires  
The heart’s purely stretched ear  
To distinguish her song from the silence.<sup>20</sup>

If Brabazon’s artistic practice was to be reduced to only one word it would need to be “devotion”, and exactly what he means by this word is to be found in his manifesto statement “Art as a Practice of Devotion”. This work opens with the following salutation, and although Brabazon introduces some new terms, still central to his thinking is the idea of a Perfect Master (“True Teacher”) as the living axis-of-all-creativity or the divine archetypal artist — the “Supreme Artist”:

Art is a method of practising devotion to the True Teacher, who is the Supreme Artist; the whole universe being His creation, and man His most finished work.  
To this Artist every true artist has ever bowed, knowing that without His help he is helpless, without His inspiration he is void of any creativeness.<sup>21</sup>

Later in this piece, Brabazon states that the purpose of the artist is to work in the same manner as this archetypal “Supreme Artist” and that “the actual practice of art . . . should have only one purpose: the faithful representation of the creative purpose of God, and his [the artist’s] own self-effacement”.<sup>22</sup> For Brabazon, it is a spiritual truism that artists can either express their separate self or seek to let their spiritual Self create through them; it cannot be both, and for the spiritual Self to be expressed the separate self has to give way. In actual fact, this is how Brabazon sees art as a practice which ultimately leads to God: for artists working in this spiritual manner will eventually become totally self-effaced in union with the source of their creativity which is none other than God.



Extending his thinking further, Brabazon goes on to make a crucial distinction:

Representation [in the artwork] does not mean in the likeness of an object, but in the likeness of the *creativity* of the Creator.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, as the student attunes himself to the Supreme Artist, he begins to work in His manner.

Just as the Creator created man in His likeness (in His creativity), so the mature, humble artist again creates his work in His likeness (in His creativity).<sup>24</sup>

Later, Brabazon adds further clarification:

This representation, independent of similitude, is also the truth of the object. If another person, looking at the object and its representation, should think “They are not the same,” it would be on account of his delusion as to the significance of form.

Creativity cannot be two, as it is the one Creativity which made both the object and its representation.<sup>25</sup>

At this stage we can now simplify Brabazon’s approach to devotion as being a practice of attunement, and in the middle section of “Art as a Practice of Devotion” he gives some idea as to what he actually means by this:

Meditation on the True Teacher’s form reveals the meaning of the objective world, as all objects are found to be contained in His person.

When the movement of objects is seen as His activity, then the law of rhythm is realized.

Composition, then, assumes meaning. Previously it was based on preference. Preference is because of attachment.

Seer and seen are now known as not different.

Then is love born — which gives impartiality of vision and same-love to all things.

The resultant activity (production of art work) is creativity in likeness — perfect and complete representation.<sup>26</sup>

Here, everything we have so far discussed is gathered together. Namely, if artists want to portray some degree of Reality in their work, then they need to focus their attention on what is Real. For Brabazon, what is Real, as explained above, is the form of the True Teacher who embodies the transcendent creative source from which all existence springs. To meditate on the True Teacher's form provides, then, a direct way for artists to arrive at the source of creativity resident within the core of their own being.

And, what in fact comes to be represented — when the artist works out of this state of meditative awareness — is not a likeness of the True Teacher's form but a likeness of the True Teacher's "creativity". This creativity, Brabazon proposes, is in turn reflected in both the "rhythm" and "composition" of the art work as it is similarly reflected in all of nature. For Brabazon, then, the artwork so created can be called a contemporary representation, in concrete terms, of the one eternal creativity of God and serves as tangible proof of God's existence: for it is an image of God's ongoing creative urge and no other.

It goes without saying, that in Brabazon's case, Meher Baba was both his "True Teacher", the "Supreme Artist", and the direct source of all his creativity. Indeed, Brabazon's life, up until the fifties, is one of ever-greater convergence in which all of his aspirations, both spiritual and artistic, slowly moved towards and found their final resting place in Meher Baba.

# Chapter Six

## Master and Disciple

### I. Poet-Disciple

Although the notion of a poet living in the fifties and offering his work as a practice of devotion to an Indian-born spiritual Master was something completely foreign in the West, let alone Australia, it was a logical and natural progression in Brabazon's life as an artist. To be a type of poet-disciple was now his desire and this was soon to be tested as Meher Baba again invited him to India, the third time in two years, and asked him to write a book to be titled *Stay With God*.

On this occasion, Brabazon was to be the only Australian attending a *sahas* program planned for November 1955.<sup>1</sup> On 10th October he left Melbourne on board the liner P&O Strathnaver and arrived in Mumbai on 29th of the same month. During the voyage he kept in correspondence with his close Australian friends:

This morning after I shouted "come in" to the steward, drank some tea, and dashed water over my face, I came up on deck to a fine morning. I felt so happy with the thought of you all that I felt like weeping — as though I was coming to see you instead of going away. Which proves I am not going away from you, because in going to Baba, I am going to the heart of each of you.

Each one of you should do this daily more and more — leave each other and go to Him in thought and love. You will find that you are not further away from one another, but nearer to each other.

This is the true meaning of spirituality — coming ever nearer to the hearts of others; not becoming aloof and separate; filling the heart with ideas, metaphysical speculations and occult imaginings.

This passage is significant for it not only gives a glimpse of Brabazon's brusque joyousness but also reveals how Meher Baba, in a most natural way, had become the very centre of his life. And while some of the passengers on board the Strathnaver saw Brabazon as slightly odd, his own happy mood continued throughout the trip and is captured in some of the more humorous passages in his letters home. For instance:

After drinking my morning tea, I got up and sallied forth to the bathroom and had a hot sea-bath, rewound a blanket round my body and set off back. To my amazement there was a steel door between me and my cabin. Examining around this mysterious thing I saw a little lever by which was written, OPEN — CLOSE. So I pressed the little lever in the direction of OPEN and a fearful bell like a fire-bell started ringing. I let go the lever and fled up the passage with the blanket between me and my nakedness nearly falling off.

And another passage:

Upstairs there is a man torturing Chopin. First, Chopin was sent to torture us, now there is someone to torture Chopin. I suppose this is what is meant by Karma.

Even the menu was comically explained for a laugh:

Potatoes — Fondante Pessilles  
means baked potatoes.

Potatoes — Nature  
means, well — potatoes of course.

(A) Supreme of Fowl, is a cooked chook.

(A) Noisette of Lamb Claude, doesn't necessarily mean that they have killed the pet lamb Claude, but just any thick chop grilled.

(And) Potatoes Snow is potatoes smashed and whipped.  
Now is it all clear? Or perhaps you will never understand.  
— It takes concentration.

When Brabazon finally arrived in Mumbai, he stayed for several days before he left for Meherabad where the *sahavas* program was to be held.<sup>2</sup> Most of his time in the city was spent sightseeing and strolling the streets, and instead of being impressed with Indian culture, as on his two previous trips, he soon became disenchanted. He became aware, for instance, of a certain side of the Indian mentality which tended to popularise religious figures into mere miracle workers who, when offered token devotion, were expected to relieve the devotee of all worldly cares. He also became aware of the general lack of care and attention to details among some Indians, which left Brabazon thinking that the West could teach the East something of the practical side of spirituality. By the end of his fourth day in Mumbai he was keen to leave and reach Meherabad.

On his arrival at Meherabad, Brabazon found Meher Baba to be informal, and relaxed. In this mood Meher Baba discouraged overt acts of devotion and even down-played their importance: "To garland me, to bow down to me and to sing my praises are comparatively the three most unimportant things. . . . on the path to God-realization".<sup>3</sup> Instead, Meher Baba prescribed as the three most important things — "love, obedience and surrender", and of these he said, "there is no possibility of compromise".<sup>4</sup> And yet, he added that all three can never be forced, for essentially they are "gifts", and as such, neither the giver nor receiver of them can be under any compulsion or obligation to act. In Meher Baba's words:

Love is a gift from God to man, obedience is a gift from master to man, and surrender is a gift from man to master. The one who loves, desires to do the will of the beloved, and seeks union with the beloved. Obedience performs the will of the beloved and seeks the pleasure of the beloved. Surrender resigns to the will of the beloved and seeks nothing.

One who loves, is the lover of the beloved. One who obeys is the beloved of the beloved. One who surrenders all — body, mind and all else — has no existence other than that of the beloved, who alone exists in him. Therefore greater than love is obedience, and greater than obedience is surrender. And yet, as words, all three can be summed up in one phrase — love-divine.

One can find volumes and volumes of prose and poetry about love, but there are very, very few persons who have found love and experienced it. No amount of reading, listening and learning can ever tell you what love is. Regardless of how much I explain love to you, you will understand it less and less if you think you can grasp it through the intellect or imagination.

Hafiz describes the bare truth about love when he says:

The majesty of love lies far beyond the reach  
of intellect; only one who has his life up his  
sleeve dares kiss the threshold of love.<sup>5</sup>

Hearing this message given by Meher Baba while enjoying his relaxed company added a new dimension to Brabazon's appreciation of his Master. When the *sahavas* program ended, Meher Baba allowed him to stay on for a few extra days which were for him the most intimate and rewarding of his whole visit. It was during this time that Meher Baba asked Brabazon to write a book to be titled *Stay With God*, as a kind of sequel to *Journey With God*. This was the first time that Meher Baba had specifically directed Brabazon to write something, and for this reason Brabazon felt it was a most significant request. Instead of returning by boat Brabazon flew back to Australia and arrived on 14th December 1955.

In April 1956, just a few months later, Meher Baba once more contacted Brabazon, but this time it was to notify him that he intended to visit Australia. With the help of a few other followers Brabazon stepped up the pace of work at Beacon Hill and just managed to have a comfortable residence for Meher Baba

completed on the evening before his arrival on 9th August 1956. In Australia, Meher Baba said that the purpose of his visit was threefold: "1. To sow the seed of his Love in this country; 2. To visit and stay in the house we had built for him; 3. To gather into his Love those who loved him a little and had done a little work for him."<sup>6</sup>

During the late afternoon of the second day of his visit a verse play, "The Quest", written and directed by Brabazon, was performed for Meher Baba's entertainment.<sup>7</sup> The play's narrative followed Brabazon's own spiritual quest which led him to find his Master. What was unique about the performance was that Brabazon played the part of himself as the seeker, while Meher Baba, who was in the audience, was the one in the play whom he seeks and finds. In the various scenes, Brabazon used a chorus to act as the seeker's inner voice of guidance. To create the effect of an inner voice, the chorus remained unobtrusive and motionless throughout the play and spoke in unison in a low sonorous tone. This use of a chorus is very much in the tradition of Japanese Noh plays which Brabazon had studied, using the translations of Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, and particularly of Arthur Waley.<sup>8</sup>

After the performance, which lasted for approximately an hour, Meher Baba was visibly delighted and expressed his wish to have the play published and distributed overseas as well as in Australia. He also made the cryptic comment to Brabazon, "I am pleased with the play. It is hard to understand. I have written it and played it. When you understand, it will be clear, because the shadow is at times like the object; sometimes more, sometimes less".<sup>9</sup> In one way this could be interpreted to mean that the play had achieved exactly what Brabazon was hoping, that the work was "written" and "played" by Meher Baba in the sense of it being "written" and "played" in the manner of Meher Baba's "creativeness" as discussed previously.

The next day, 11th August, was for the general public to meet Meher Baba. Approximately one hundred and ten people attended. One who attended was a radio reporter from the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Donald Ingram-Smith,

who had a personal interest in Sufism. Meher Baba gave Ingram-Smith the opportunity to interview him personally in the morning. During this session various questions were asked to which Meher Baba responded. This interchange is useful in showing how Meher Baba evaluated and expressed his own spiritual position and activities. When asked, for instance, "What is your work in the world?" he responded:

To give My Love to awaken mankind, to make them know that everything is illusion. God is the only Reality. One who can love God can attain that Reality. All are one, but no one knows that oneness. God is within you, but there is a veil: and you yourself are that veil between you and God. God is within Me. I have taken this form to unveil all human beings to know that there is only one Reality and all else is illusion.<sup>10</sup>

When the reporter followed this response with the query "The Reality is within and without simultaneously?" Meher Baba responded:

There is no within and no without. Reality pervades. There is nothing beyond Reality, no within or without, no up or down. Reality is all over, all-pervading. So-called illusion is also Reality. Illusion is the shadow of Reality. When you walk, your shadow follows you. You do not attach any importance to the shadow, because it has come out of you, it is nothing but shadow. It is your own shadow that follows you; you do not follow the shadow. Exactly at midday, twelve noon, the shadow disappears. It is only you who are there, and the shadow has no existence at all.<sup>11</sup>

That evening, after the public gathering, Meher Baba flew to Melbourne for two days, accompanied by Brabazon and a small party of others. During this visit he and his Indian disciples were given the use of a house in the suburb of Camberwell which belonged to Dr Dennis and Joan O'Brien, both followers of Meher Baba. Brabazon was given the task of bringing meals to the house. On the morning of the second day when Brabazon was carrying



breakfast for the guests, he was suddenly struck by a powerful insight. He momentarily became aware of the vast majesty of Meher Baba's being and the state of his own inadequacy.

This realisation came with such a shock that it caused Brabazon to cry out spontaneously, "Oh fool, you fool!" Immediately, he began trembling and weeping and nearly spilt everything he was carrying. Fortunately Meher Baba came to his rescue and helped him to remain calm. In his comforting of Brabazon, Meher Baba, who had just heard him denounce himself as a "fool", told him to now "become like dust in his presence".

The phrase "to become like dust" or "to become the dust at the feet of the Master" is commonly found in Sufi poetry. It refers to the condition of self-effacement through absolute obedience to the Master's wishes. In the Sufi poetry of Ansari of Herat (1005-1090), for instance, we read:

In this [spiritual] path the eye must cease to see,  
And the ear to hear.  
Save unto Him, and about Him.  
Be as dust on His path  
Even the kings of the earth  
Make the dust of His feet  
The balm of their eyes.<sup>12</sup>

And in the poetry of Hafiz is the couplet, as translated by Meher Baba:

Oh you, if you ever get possessed by madness to realise  
God,  
Then become the dust at the feet of a Perfect Master.<sup>13</sup>

In Brabazon's understanding, Meher Baba's request for him to "become like dust" was an offer to become his disciple; it was a gift of obedience from his Master which Brabazon freely accepted. Later in his own ghazals Brabazon frequently used the image of dust to refer to his relationship with his Master and even called the title of his first book of ghazals, *In Dust I Sing*.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the rest of the day in Melbourne, Meher Baba gave Brabazon various

statements which could be seen as explaining what he meant by the phrase to “become like dust”:

Deny your false self and your real Self asserts Itself.  
Ask for nothing; you get everything.  
Renounce everything to such an extent that you eventually renounce even renunciation.  
Die in Baba. Die for Baba. Die with Baba.  
Then you will Live as Baba.  
To love me is to forget yourself completely.  
To know me as I really am, become like a child (in heart)  
and be as wise as a Man of Wisdom.<sup>15</sup>

Although most Westerners might see these assertions as extreme, as tantamount to giving up one’s personal freedom and even one’s identity, Brabazon saw them as welcome guideposts on his path to spiritual liberation. As if to reinforce their meaning, soon after Meher Baba and his party had returned to Beacon Hill, he asked for a book of Hafiz’s poetry. He randomly opened it at a page and then requested Brabazon to read. After reading the third couplet of the selected ghazal:

Sleeping and eating, self-indulgence, hath kept thee far from  
attaining the high rank of love;  
Thou wilt reach the Friend when thou becomest sleepless,  
vigilant, and foodless, selfless.<sup>16</sup>

Meher Baba, who knew the ghazal in the original Persian, interrupted the reading and commented that the translation was not adequate, and gave his own commentary on Hafiz’s words:

It is very difficult to be without wants. I want to sleep. I want to eat. These are wants. I do not want to sleep or eat, this also is a want. It is therefore rather impossible to be without wants. What is the solution? Hafiz provides one. Hafiz says, Only the Grace of the Perfect Master can make you free from all wants. Even if a wee bit of the effulgent Glory of God were to be revealed, you will become millions of times brighter than the earth’s sun.

One slight moment, if you have the fortune to drown yourself in the ocean of love, do not hesitate. That moment does not come frequently. As soon as the Master says drown, do not hesitate. Drown the moment the Master commands you to drown. Don't worry about what the world will think of you. The world will call you mad, but you should not hesitate. Even if one hair of yours is dipped in the ocean of love, you become wet eternally. In the bliss of union with the Beloved that you enjoy, there is no break. It is continuous. From head to foot you become God, if you in this path become footless and headless.

How to become footless and headless? Do whatever I tell you. Do not use mind. When the will of the Beloved becomes your will, then you are footless and headless. Yet all this is impossible. Even the very desire for union with the Beloved God is madness. So there remains only one solution, and that is to become the very dust at the feet of the Perfect Master.<sup>17</sup>

This was the final message Meher Baba gave to Brabazon and to his other followers in Australia in 1956.

## II. Writing in Australia

In 1956 after Meher Baba left Australia, Brabazon published a short pamphlet to commemorate his visit which he titled *The Birth of the Nation*. This pamphlet was much more forthright about Meher Baba than anything else he had written. Ironically, after Brabazon consciously accepted Meher Baba's offer "to become like dust in his presence" his writing became more assertive. In effect it is the writing of a poet-disciple who has an unswerving conviction in his Master and has abandoned all "worry about what the world will think" of him.

In *The Birth of the Nation* Brabazon describes Meher Baba as "the Image of Reality and Love" for this age and outlines what he considers to be the significance of this living Image for all artists, that is, people who work with "some attempted reverence and love". This short passage is a clear statement of Brabazon's artistic ideals at this point in his life; ideals which he was to later embody, in poetic form, in his next and major work, *Stay With God*:

This is the Image which is the constant challenge to our thinking and loving and working. No worker has ever attained that actionless action of work, that purity of loving, or that honesty of thinking which leaves no stain or false image in his own mind or in the minds of others, without the inspiration of this Image and its measurement. "No man can come unto the Father except by and through the Son." What we call great art and integral and integrated thinking or real living is simply this Image reflecting in hearts from which the rubbish of self-expression has been swept away, from which the non-sense of precious feelings and opinions of separative personality has been eliminated.<sup>1</sup>

The intrinsic relationship between poetry and “real living” is a central theme in Brabazon’s work from the time he first started publishing his poems in Melbourne in the forties. It is clearly seen, for instance, in the poem “Discipline is a Cover for the Weakness of the Flesh” (1942) and in *Proletarians-Transition* (1953). One aspect of this theme was the question of the role and responsibility of the artist in the establishment of a society based on the spiritual values of “real living”.

In his poem, “The Householders” (1956) Brabazon wrote, “And in the poet’s hand is the destiny of men’s children” and issued the following warning against the abusers of art, “Dissipate the line of your art, and watch life vanishing; / Thicken it, and bind your eyes with clay.”<sup>2</sup> This warning alludes to some lines which can be found in Ezra Pound’s Canto XLV, “With Usura” — “with usura the line grows thick / with usura is no clear demarcation / and no man can find site for his dwelling.”<sup>3</sup> For Brabazon, what was really at stake, as a consequence of the abuse of art, the thickening of the line of art, was the spiritual starvation of people and their subsequent incapacity to establish a constructive culture. “Our dissatisfaction”, he wrote,

is not economic or social but simply that part of us, our deepest part, which can only be nourished by that true word, is starved and with that depth of us starved, all our outer possessions constitute nothing but poverty. This also is the great divorcement which has taken place between poet and people: and so it is that poetry has ceased to be an intrinsic element of people’s lives. It is no use the poet blaming the cinema, pop-tunes, too much sport etc. It is not the people who have failed but the poet who has failed the people. When the poet again knows his job (which is not one of versification — versification is merely his tool, but the job of plumbing the depths of his own heart and integrity, and of being able to feel the hunger and need of people) then poetry will take its proper place in life. For poetry is one of the basic commodities of life: for just as surely as the body needs the rhythm of [the] heart for its sustenance, so

the mind and heart needs the sustenance and maintenance of the word for its life and well-being.<sup>4</sup>

Yet here also lay a dilemma, for according to Brabazon “there cannot be a great poet until there is a great people to accommodate him; and there cannot be a great people until there is a great poet to inspire them”. To help towards solving this dilemma, and to resurrect poetry to its rightful position Brabazon proposed:

The cultivation of our (each *one of us*) sincerity and harmony within ourselves until we become poetry. It is a mistake to think that poetry is that which is written in books — books are the by-products of poetry. Poetry is not the domain of a few poets, but is the living expression of natural people. By natural I mean absence of artificiality.<sup>5</sup>

In a real sense, to follow Brabazon’s life is to witness the journey of a poet seeking to establish a greater degree of “sincerity and harmony” in his life, and to follow his poetry is to share in the record of his attempts. Gradually, through the late fifties, as Brabazon worked on *Stay With God*, he decided to publish a selection of his earlier poetry and plays, thereby making his contribution towards elevating the state of poetry in Australia. His first collection, much of which I have already discussed, amounted to a sizeable volume of poetry which was published in September 1956, under the title of *7 Stars To Morning*; then in 1957 he published a long narrative poem, *Cantos of Wandering*; and in 1958 his plays were released, entitled *Singing Threshold*.

The first volume, *7 Stars to Morning*, was designed and produced by Edward and Shaw for Morgan’s Bookshop in Castlereagh Street, Sydney. In this volume was included the poem “7 Stars to Morning”, the poems collected under the titles “One Speaking”, and “Music in the Earth”; the manifesto statement “Art as a Practice of Devotion”; and the trilogy of long poems “Dawn through to Sunrise”, “The Stone Masons”, and “The Housholders”. Also included were three studies, “Portrait of a Young Man taking some Flowers to his Teacher”, “Portrait of a Girl”, and “On a Portrait of a Chinese Sage holding a Mushroom

in his Hand", and a collection titled "Quatrains for Refreshment" and four whimsical "Child Songs". After its release, the book generated the first response by Australian critics to Brabazon's work. The most encouraging review was published in the *Edge* magazine:

To the best of one's knowledge, Francis Brabazon is the first Australian to compose a body of poetry that does not, somewhere along the lines, insult the intelligence. There is no mistaking that in every line he understands exactly what he is saying and is endeavouring to say it with clarity; and the matter of his verse is entirely adult. . .

It is true though that the long poems in the latter part of the book read as drafts rather than finished productions, and those in the earlier part as competent translations of some admirable melodic original. This is very teasing as the matter of the verse is so finely conceived and so intelligently controlled.

One is particularly refreshed by Mr. Brabazon's many similes and metaphors drawn from the practical affairs of contemporary life, which remind one of the amoral shrewdness of the Parables of the New Testament.<sup>6</sup>

However, Charles Higham in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was not so complimentary. He reviewed Brabazon's work alongside works by the Australian poets Hal Porter and Lex Manning:

Mr. Brabazon is the most audacious of the three; he writes many immensely long elaborate chants or hymns that are marked more by rhetorical flourishes than by statements of great beauty or profundity.

A knowledge of several Eastern religions is almost certainly necessary for the full meaning of these elaborations to sink in; an index in the Eliot manner might help the uninitiated should Mr. Brabazon publish another book. . .

His short poems are his best, because in them there is, at least, a candour and simplicity and translucency of

expression that will enable the reader to decide without much ado whether Mr. Brabazon is for him.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, in September 1957, Evan Jones in *Meanjin* gave Brabazon little encouragement by marginalising him as an “eccentric” poet of little promise:

Eccentric poets do not of course regard themselves as eccentric: Mr. Francis Brabazon, it is implied on the dust-jacket of his book, is the direct descendant of Dante. Certainly he is a religious poet. But I am able to make little sense of his teaching, compounded from eastern and western sources, and as this is essentially didactic poetry it is difficult for me to criticize it. The influence of Rilke can be seen in a series of pseudo-sonnets, and of Blake in four ludicrous Child Songs. . . .

Mr. Brabazon writes elsewhere in a variety of loose forms of dubious origin, only some of which seem to the uninitiate successful.<sup>8</sup>

What is particularly interesting, concerning the wide range of comments drawn by *7 Stars to Morning*, especially between the reviewers in the *Edge* and *Meanjin*, is that it illustrates an observation which Judith Wright made concerning Australian literary criticism of the fifties. In her anthology, *A Book of Australian Verse* (1956), in which she included a sample of Brabazon’s work, “Victoria Market”, she writes:<sup>9</sup>

Australian writing, as such, suffers from the handicap of a brief and uncertain development, with its corollary of over-valuation in some directions, over-deprecations in others. It has not much more than a century and a half, in historical terms, to draw upon; much less in self-awareness; and in so narrow a horizon, hillocks may look like mountains, while a real mountain might tower out of perspective too far for full appreciation.<sup>10</sup>

Brabazon’s work at this stage of his writing career, is certainly not in any sense towering, and indeed, as a writer who started



publishing late in life it has, not unexpectedly, the signs of a writer's early work about it. There is a tendency, for instance, towards overembellishment and overwriting. Indeed all of Higham's critical comments could be substantiated by examples. But to suggest that Brabazon's work is simply "audacious" poetry or just "eccentric", as Jones concludes, is to be too easily dismissive.

According to Wright, Australian writing since its beginnings has tended to turn away from "the direction of interpretative, sensitive and experimental writing" towards the safer "vigorous descriptiveness".<sup>11</sup> Specifically, what Brabazon's work signalled in *7 Stars to Morning* was the beginning of a new interpretative voice in Australian literature; the voice of a genuine spiritual seeker and artist that spoke with deep personal conviction. Perhaps if Brabazon's work was reviewed in America, he may have been identified with those Beat poets and writers from New York and San Francisco who, like Brabazon, were also discovering the insights of Eastern philosophy and art. In Australia, unfortunately, no such movement ever existed.

But Brabazon was not entirely alone. There were two other Australian poets of his generation who were strongly influenced by Eastern ideas, specifically from the Far East. One was the Irish-born poet Max Dunn who became a Zen priest in 1955 and set up the "Zen Institute of Australia" in Richmond, Victoria; and the other the conservative, anti-modernist Harold Stewart of Ern Malley fame who also became a Buddhist. Stewart's admiration of the works of Coomaraswamy and his belief in "the transcendent unity of world Traditions"<sup>12</sup> are features he held in common with Brabazon. So too was his spiritual view of art which, as Stewart expressed it, is the "universal language of the mythopoetic Imagination, expressive channel for the Creative Spirit, which, in the 'selfless, Self-absorbed delight of art,' alone is present".<sup>13</sup>

Other interesting biographical similarities between the two poets exist. Stewart moved to Japan in 1966 and stayed until his death in 1995, supported by his Buddhist teacher Professor Bando Shojun. Brabazon moved to India in 1959, supported by his

Master Meher Baba, yet returned to Australia in 1969 when his Master died. Both wrote one book-length epic work in verse. In Stewart's case it was *By the Walls of Old Kyoto*,<sup>14</sup> concerning the cultural and religious heritage of Kyoto and his own progression from Zen to Pure Land Buddhism; in Brabazon's case, *Stay With God*, a vast survey on the theme of Reality, illusion and art. In style, however, the two poets were vastly different: Stewart was fastidious about formal poetic craft while Brabazon tended to let his poetic spirit shape its own form.

In 1957, the year following the release of *7 Stars to Morning* and its mixed reception, Brabazon published *Cantos of Wandering*, a long narrative poem about a young man coming to terms with his love for a woman. Most of the content of this work came out of Brabazon's relationship with Sparkie Lukas and his thinking through of the wider issues it raised. This work, originally written as a verse play entitled *The Great Wall*, was given a public reading at the Theosophical Society's Adyar Hall in Sydney. In 1955 a small section was later published in the magazine *Under Capricorn* under the title "The Stone Wall".<sup>15</sup> Like *7 Stars to Morning*, *Cantos of Wandering* attracted some critical attention, but it was meagre in size and substance. R. F. Brissenden in *Meanjin* never looked any further than its surface features, ignoring the work's formative ideas:

*Cantos of Wandering* is one of the most curious books of pseudo-poetry ever published in Australia. Its muddled pastiche of the Bhagavad-Gita, Rilke, Blake, Old Bush Songs and Madame Blavatsky, occasionally attains a certain crazy force. Mr. Brabazon is capable of producing images and phrases which at least have an air of poetry about them; but his notions of rhythm are primitive to say the least. . .<sup>16</sup>

At least the critic Grahame Johnston, writing in *Quadrant*, saw the work as essentially interpretative by his admission "I confess I don't really understand what Mr. Brabazon is getting at in the poem".<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Brabazon thought that the third time may be lucky, when he published in the next year his collection of verse plays, including *The Quest*, under the title *Singing Threshold*.<sup>18</sup>

Although review copies of *Singing Threshold* were sent to Australian journals such as *Australian Letters*, the work attracted no critical comment.<sup>19</sup>

In Wright's survey of Australian poets up to and including the fifties, Brabazon is not mentioned, and nor does his work fit into any of what she calls "preoccupations" in Australian poetry.<sup>20</sup> When we look beyond Australia at other English-language poets, one poet who comes into view as exerting a strong influence on Brabazon's work and having a similar poetic preoccupation is Walt Whitman.

Although Wright makes reference to Whitman's influence on the Australian reformist poet Bernard O'Dowd (1866-1953), it is only his rhetorical style and "habit . . . of catalogue making" and not Whitman as a poet that she bases her comparison upon.<sup>21</sup> In Australian poetry, there has not been a poet like Whitman, preoccupied in realizing, in experience, his true nature — in the sense of the Upanishadic teaching, "*That* [eternal Self] thou art," — and then documenting his intuitions in poetry.

The poet Malcolm Cowley in the following passage presents Whitman's doctrine regarding the Self as found in his greatest work "Song of Myself":

Whitman believed . . . that there is a distinction between one's mere personality and the deeper Self (or between ego and soul). He believed that the Self (or *atman*, to use a Sanskrit word) is of the same essence as the universal spirit (though he did not say it *is* the universal spirit, as the Indian philosophers do in the phrase "*Atman is Brahman*"). He believed that true knowledge is to be acquired not through the senses or the intellect but through union with the Self. At such moment of union (or "merge" as Whitman called it) the gum is washed from one's eyes . . . This true knowledge is available to every man and woman since each conceals a divine Self.<sup>22</sup>

This statement of belief is close to Brabazon's conception except that, in Brabazon's case, he believed in the absolute identification of *Atman* with *Brahman*. And while both poets also differed on

other matters like the Indian principle of *Maya* or worldly illusion — which Brabazon held to be true and Whitman not — both poets were seeking the same spiritual goal of Self, and filled their poetry with their intuitive findings in lines of both lyrical and prophetic intensity.

There is also a prosodic similarity between the two poets when we compare their use of the line. In Brabazon's natural style which begins with the poem "Dawn through to Sunrise", the organization of the poem, as in Whitman's poetry, is built around the syntax of the line free from the restraints imposed by metrical systems.

The line is then the logical unit; and what Charles O. Hartman points out regarding Whitman's use of the line is just as applicable to Brabazon: "Since most of the lines are end-stopped, the prosody is not one of counterpoint; the organisation is internal to the line".<sup>23</sup> To obtain then an overall unified poetic structure, both Whitman and Brabazon rely on "syntactical parallelisms . . . which range from the simplest repetitions of words to broad patterns gathering a whole series of lines into shape".<sup>24</sup>

Brabazon, however, is not as high-sounding as Whitman in his use of the line and "syntactical parallelisms", and depends more on word economy to express the force of an idea, an image, or an interpretative provocation to arrest the reader's attention. But both poets, however, write in their mother tongue and value readability and directness in their workmanship. This is poetry which has to be intoned with an ear for the expressive rhythms of speech, not simply recited, to bring out its full flavour.

Whitman and Brabazon are also linked in another more significant way. In Whitman's "Passage to India", which is a poem about the journey of a soul toward God, we find Whitman declaring: "Finally shall come the poet worthy that name, / The true son of God shall come singing his song",<sup>25</sup> and later in the same poem, he proclaims, in a fine example of his style:

Then not your deeds only O voyagers, O scientists and  
inventors, shall be justified,  
All these hearts as of fretted children shall be sooth'd,

All affections shall be fully responded to, the secret  
shall be told,  
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up  
and hook'd and link'd together,  
The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless  
earth, shall be completely justified,  
Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and com-  
pacted by the true son of God, the poet,  
(He shall indeed pass the straits and  
conquer the mountains,  
He shall double the cape of Good Hope to some purpose,)  
Nature and man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,  
The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.<sup>26</sup>

In this passage, Whitman anticipates the arrival of "the true son of God, the poet" — the Avatar. In the following passage taken from Brabazon's poetry, the actual arrival of "the true son of God, the poet" — the Avatar, in the form of Meher Baba, is announced. Here also, appropriate to this theme, are lines which speak with the same "vitality of force and sky-wide atmosphere of greatness" as Whitman's:<sup>27</sup>

You are the great Undoer, so that what shall be done  
shall be done.

The Remover who brings forward, the Stupifier  
who makes intelligent.

The Wind that levels the young wheat that the stalks  
may grow strong

in the sun; while you during the days of it growing  
attend other else, and whet with your eyes the  
scythe of its reaping —

Thou lovely one! Thou faithless one of all faith!

Thou stonecutter and gemcutter! Thou potter and  
breaker of pots!

Thou upturner and returner! Thou upheavaller  
and leveller!

Thou bender of what is straight, and Thou straightener  
of the bent!

Thou Baba! Thou lovely-Woman and glory-Man  
and Child! Thou moon-night,  
Thou star-night, Thou dawn swept of stars,  
Thou morning of sun!  
Thou alone-doer, Thou adorable and adored —  
Thou us, Thou only-alone-Self! <sup>28</sup>

### III. Kiel Mountain

While Brabazon was trying to gain some acceptance during the late fifties as an Australian poet, he was also in the midst of writing *Stay With God*, which he began in late August 1956. In December 1957, before *Stay With God* was fully completed, he received notification from Meher Baba that he wished to visit Australia for a second time and named the state of Queensland as his preferred venue. This preference came as a shock to Brabazon who, having never lived in Queensland, knew nothing of what that state had to offer. Yet keen to please his Master as fully as possible, Brabazon left Sydney by car on January 1958 and headed north to Queensland not knowing what he would eventually find across the border.

The only person whom he knew in Queensland was the poet Judith Wright who lived at Mt. Tambourine. Wright had never met Brabazon; she had only heard of him and read his poetry through her contact with the poets Max Dunn and Charles Osborne. But Wright was happy for him to visit and stay if he wished. In all, Brabazon only stayed the one night and spent a lot of his time with Judith Wright's husband Jack McKinney discussing Indian philosophy. Yet he did speak to Wright about Meher Baba and his forthcoming visit to Queensland, and his need to find a place suitable for him to stay. As a possible site, Wright suggested the picturesque country around Buderim, north of Brisbane, and Brabazon set off to assess this area for himself.

From Mt. Tambourine Brabazon reached Palmwoods, about one hundred kilometres north of the capital city of Brisbane, and camped for the night. The next morning, through conversation with a local farmer, he heard of various farms for sale in the

surrounding area. During the day he went to inspect several of these farms. Eventually he visited an eighty-acre property on the summit of nearby Kiel Mountain, with panoramic views across cane fields to the ocean in the east and to rolling blue hills in the west. This was, as far as Brabazon was concerned, the end of his search. Immediately he sent a detailed cable to Meher Baba describing the property and when he received on 2nd February the reply “excellently suitable”, went ahead and purchased the land.

By March, with just over three full months before Meher Baba’s expected arrival, work had started in earnest to prepare the site for his visit. This was planned and organised by Brabazon who led a small group of volunteers consisting of men, women and teenagers. With only a few of them having experience of physical labour, let alone specific building skills, the amount of work completed in that short time, and in muddy and wet conditions, was remarkable. The list of jobs completed included: constructing a new level road around the side of the mountain while weather proofing and improving the existing ones; moving the original farm house, in one piece, down a steep incline to a lower site; constructing a meeting hall plus tent sites, toilets, bathrooms, tankstands, beds and benches; establishing an internal telephone link-up between all the buildings; and decorating and preparing curtains and linen for the visitor’s use and comfort.<sup>1</sup>

The most important construction for Brabazon was the building in which Meher Baba was to stay. This was to be situated where the old farm house stood, about thirty metres from the summit of Kiel Mountain on its southern side. With the limited time available Brabazon chose a standard, Australian designed prefabricated farm shed to serve as this building. It was approximately twenty metres by seven metres and was most commonly used in rural Australia for storing either wool or produce. To fit in with the slope of the site, most of the building was raised off the ground and placed on stumps. Once the frame was assembled it was braced with a timber floor and covered with corrugated iron cladding, while outside a covered dirt veranda stretched along one length of the building. The only modification Brabazon included was a



row of louvre windows, facing east to let in light and air. A free standing timber room was also constructed inside at the northern end, which was to be Meher Baba's personal room. In effect the farm shed was a type of outer housing for this inner room. It was designed to be free-standing so it could possibly be removed and placed in a more permanent structure in the future. The room was made from Australian hardwoods with a ceiling of brown timber while the walls were a darker red-brown turpentine.

Progress on the site was made difficult with regular rain falls from the end of March up until the beginning of May. For everyone concerned it was exhausting work, but because of their shared purpose it was a time which brought people together in their communal effort. On occasions after a shared evening meal, Brabazon would read to those present either from the works of Shakespeare (more than likely from his sonnets), from Hafiz or passages from his own latest manuscript *Stay With God*. By 3rd June all work was completed just in time for Meher Baba's arrival. During his stay, which lasted until 7th June, Meher Baba gave discourses, told stories and met with people individually and in large gatherings as he had done on his previous visit to Sydney in 1956. Meher Baba was impressed with the beauty of the property and named it *Avatar's Abode* and said it would become a place of world pilgrimage.<sup>2</sup>

On 20th November 1958, after Meher Baba had returned to India, he sent Brabazon a personal instruction, via a cable, "Come [to India] prepared to stay at least six months and come prepared to obey Baba during this period". Brabazon departed for Colombo in January 1959 on board the S.S. *Orontes* with a two-way ticket and his manuscript copy of *Stay With God*, not knowing that he would be staying in India for the next ten years.

# Chapter Seven

## Stay With God

### I. Introduction

Having satisfactorily completed *Stay With God*, Brabazon was keen to present the manuscript to Meher Baba when he arrived in India. His life was now full of promise and anticipation: not only was he going to see his Master once more, but also his future as a writer had been given a boost by Charles Osborne, the Australian poet and critic, who had recently published one of his poems, "There was a Humming", in the January (1959) edition of the *The London Magazine* under the general title of "New Poems from Australia". In this section Brabazon's poem was placed beside the works of Judith Wright, Douglas Stewart, John Blight and others. In part of his poem Brabazon's preoccupation with art and spirituality is clearly evident:

It takes much patient labour to polish a piece of glass  
To catch the light of a star —  
It takes more to polish your heart till it  
Reflects the light of God. . .  
It takes much time to fix the image of yourself  
on a piece of canvas  
It takes more to paint the image of the Beloved  
in your own flesh. . . <sup>1</sup>

To the extent which Brabazon was able to practice what he preached, to "polish" his own heart and to "paint" the image of his Beloved Master in his own flesh, can be gauged by anyone who reads *Stay With God*.

By any standard *Stay With God* is a monumental work. It consists of over three and a half thousand lines of poetry and declares Brabazon's unshakeable conviction in God's appearance on earth as the God-man, the Perfect Master who represents the complete manifestation of the Self, the same "innermost self of each one of us".<sup>2</sup>

In Brabazon's own words it is a book written in "praise of Divinity as Man and the assurance of Man in Divinity", while at the same time it is a lyrical cry to humanity to stay with God in the person of the God-man, the Perfect Master.<sup>3</sup> In the vast compass and unity of its vision, shaped as it is in the language of contemporary thought, it is a daunting uprising of creative spirit. As literature, it is a work of power, or as John Ciardi described it, of "an enormous rising and breaking of waves".<sup>4</sup>

In *Stay With God* Brabazon's use of language is at its most expressive and direct, his thought is at its final distillation and his skill as an artist is at its sharpest; indeed, it is the consummation of all his previous writing. To a fellow writer in London, Charles B. Purdom, Brabazon wrote, "there was so much sweat put into [*Stay With God*] that I would never want to write another book; and also felt I had nothing more to say".<sup>5</sup>

Purdom, in response, thought the work was a "tremendous" piece of writing and compared it to William Blake's *Jerusalem*.<sup>6</sup> And in another letter to an Indian admirer of the work Brabazon writes, "my concern with the book [*Stay With God*] was to put my whole art into its writing".<sup>7</sup> While on a further occasion, he commented, "this book is not the outcome of [a] shallow and nervous conversion, but is the result of over half a lifetime of critical enquiry".

Brabazon's own stated intention in writing the work, besides being in response to Meher Baba's request, was two-fold. Firstly, "to seek . . . to give a contemporary picture of this Man [Meher Baba] and [secondly] to establish certain principles concerning Him, principles which are not new but are eternal [and] have been unobserved and unrecognised generally over a period of some hundreds of years". These intentions are seen in the strong

structural design of the work which is built around five separate “Books” or sections.

The full title of the work itself is *Stay With God: A statement in illusion on Reality*, and the five sections which expound and develop upon this theme are as follows: “Book I — Meher Baba: the occurrence of Reality in illusion,” “Book II — The Love Song of John Kerry: illusion singing to Reality,” “Book III — God’s Speaking: the question which Reality asked Itself and the beginning of illusion and its end,” “Book IV — The Steps to His Feet: abandoning illusion for Reality,” “Book V — The God-Man as World Axis and Living Perfection of Art: the Divine Sun of Reality shining through the mists of illusion.”

“Book I” covers Brabazon’s first intention — “to seek . . . to give a contemporary picture of this Man [Meher Baba]” while Books III, IV, and V cover his second intention concerning “unobserved and unrecognised” principles. “Book II” is a lyrical love song capturing the depth of Brabazon’s own spiritual yearning and is a precursor to his later ghazal writing.

From another perspective, Brabazon described *Stay With God* as “simply a treatise on the subject of Truth and Beauty, set forth in terms of art” — a treatise on true aesthetic values in which he draws upon his knowledge of literature and art to support his claims. For Brabazon, as we have seen, “true aesthetic values” are those which find their perfect expression in the being and form of the Perfect Master, the God-man. Consequently, in *Stay With God* Brabazon makes no distinction between what he calls a Perfect Artist and a Perfect Master. In his first entry in the “Notes” at the back of the book he states this point:

Real art is in itself the highest teaching. One who has attained Self-realization is a Perfect Artist in himself whether or not he ever opens his mouth to others. His very presence among men is a teaching to them of what they should and may become. After Realization he may remain silent; he may sing in verse the fact of Truth and describe the stages and states approaching It and comment on the persons involved in them in order to encourage others to

seek Truth as did Hafiz; or he may, like Sankaracharya, analyse non-Truth in order to prove to the others the existence of Truth. Each one of them would be no more or no less an artist than the others.<sup>8</sup>

Adding to the weight of this work are also three strategically placed prose messages by Meher Baba: the first, "Out of THAT NOTHING MIND came" appears before "Book I"; the second, "God in the Beyond-Beyond state is likened to a soundless, shoreless Ocean", appears before "Book III" — which appropriately contains Brabazon's poetic exposition on the meaning and purpose of creation — and the third, "Dreaming and Dreaming" concludes the work.

Besides these messages, Meher Baba also directed Brabazon to make certain alterations to the text itself and to write the lengthy "Foundation" and concluding "Notes" sections before the work was finally published.<sup>9</sup> These last two additions make the poem more accessible to readers not familiar with its subject matter, and perhaps this may have been Meher Baba's own intention for he wanted the book to be distributed "as widely as possible among the general public".<sup>10</sup>

## II. The Occurrence of “Reality in illusion”

The opening line of “Book I”, which begins *Stay With God*, “Wings towards the glaciers of Kailas where the first Fathers nourished / The seed of God . . . ” had its beginnings in 1941. On one of Brabazon’s jottings from this period he has written: “Stir of wings toward the glaciers of Kailas where the first Father buried the seed.” It was a line which Brabazon carried with him for eighteen years, all the time noting its possibilities, but never knowing that it would eventually begin his greatest work. In overall terms, “Book I — Meher Baba: the occurrence of Reality in illusion” is a condensed and historically accurate biography of Meher Baba’s life and activities beginning with a statement of his position as the Avatar.

Although “Book 1” is structured biographically, it is also interpretative. Throughout the text Brabazon gives his own comments on the significance of the events in Meher Baba’s life by referring the reader to incidents and stories recorded in other epic and spiritual texts. This technique of allusion serves two main functions: it forms the basis upon which Brabazon argues his case for the existence of perennial spiritual principles and ideas, as presented in the accessible form of concrete images; and secondly, it gives a quality of literary richness to the text.

This is a technique which Brabazon employs throughout all of *Stay With God*. In “Book I” alone, reference is made to Odin from Norse mythology, to Kullervo from the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, to the early Irish hero Bran and to Homer’s epic tale of Odysseus, especially his meeting with Circe.<sup>1</sup> Also in “Book 1” Brabazon makes reference to historical figures including Naropa (a North Indian spiritual Master, tenth century), the Persian Poets Jelal-ud-din Rumi (thirteenth century) and Hafiz

(fourteenth century) and to Tukaram (a Poet-Saint of Maharashtra State, India, seventeenth century).

On close inspection “Book 1” is divided into seven clearly demarcated sections, each covering an aspect of Meher Baba’s life and together forming a detailed and “contemporary picture of this Man”:

- 1) Meher Baba is identified as the Avatar;
- 2) his birth and meeting with five Perfect Masters;
- 3) he begins his work, gathering disciples, begins his silence, a period of world travel, working with the poor and the *masts*;<sup>2</sup>
- 4) time of fasting and seclusion and entering the “New Life” phase in which Meher Baba, with a small party of disciples, travelled around India begging for their food and lodging;<sup>3</sup>
- 5) “free” life phase, and public announcement by Meher Baba that he is “The Highest of the High;”<sup>4</sup>
- 6) a record of the November 1955 Sahavas in which Meher Baba gave discourses on “the ways and the way of love;”<sup>5</sup>
- 7) concluding five verses in praise of Meher Baba’s spiritual status.

These seven sections are each of a different length but make in total one hundred and eighty-three verses. The verses are in an unusual seven-line form and written in free verse which varies in tone from the comic to the heroic. The lines of the verses are long and follow the rhythms and cadences of natural speech.

The opening stanza of section one begins with a genealogy based on a particular belief in the avataric line of descent — “the occurrence of Reality in illusion” — from Lord Siva [Shiva], traditionally believed in the East to be “the First Master and World Teacher”, and including Abraham the spiritual Father of the three Western semitic religions, down to the present advent of Meher Baba.<sup>6</sup> From the lofty heights of Mt Kailas, the mythological abode of Lord Siva, Brabazon’s immense story of God’s occurrence on

earth as a man begins its long downward journey which takes a whole book of verse before it comes to rest:

Wings towards the glaciers of Kailas where  
the first Fathers nourished  
The seed of God; and Siva gentled Ganga, and Parvati  
Walked by streams of living heart. For Siva was  
Jesus before him  
And Parvati his loveliness in the earth — as was Rama,  
as was Krishna,  
As was Abraham and Zarathustra and Buddha  
and Mohammed and their loveliness —  
God's Avatar: as is now BABA. Sing, Baba,  
your descent this time on earth,  
Your Brightness in our night, your comfort  
in our separation.<sup>7</sup>

This opening stanza follows the pattern of a Homeric opening with its invocation, exposition and rising rhythm in which Brabazon calls upon his divine inspirer, Meher Baba, to “sing your descent this time on earth”. In close comparison the opening lines of Homer's *Iliad* express a similar sentiment:

Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilles  
and its devastation, which put pains  
thousandfold upon the Achaians,  
hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades  
strong souls of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate  
feasting of dogs, of all birds, and the will of Zeus  
was accomplished since that time when there stood in  
division of conflict Atreus' son the lord of men and brilliant  
Achilleus.<sup>8</sup>

This notion of “singing” the story of heroes which occurs in both opening verses has more than just a passing significance. As the modern classics scholar Andrew Ford points out, “the entire Homeric corpus refers to epic poems basically as *aoide* (singing), an action noun, a word that names poetry not as a text or aesthetic object but as activity and performance.”<sup>9</sup> Later Ford suggests that



the singer-poet like Homer “was set apart by having his own patron deities, the Muses, and a special range of themes”; and his work, “in terms of genre”, is best contextualised as “a kind of speaking that is somehow set apart from that of seers and other nonpoets”.<sup>10</sup> In Brabazon’s case his devotion to Meher Baba certainly set him apart as a poet from the literary mainstream and even the phrase “a kind of speaking” is a reasonably accurate description of his style in “Book I”.

More significant still is Ford’s comment on the presence of the Muse in poetry. In Homer’s opening lines of the *Odyssey* we find the act of invocation perfectly expressed, “Sing in me, Muse and through me tell the story / of that man skilled in all ways of contending”.<sup>11</sup> In *Stay With God* Brabazon, in similar manner, directly calls upon his Master’s help to sustain him and be the creativity in his writing.

In the past you had Vyasa and Homer and Valmiki  
and many others  
Who were your Name and yourself to leave your Name  
in impassioned prisonment  
Of words; and saints innumerable who picked up  
the threads  
Of your Name’s loveliness and wove them into  
bright-patterned verses.  
Only if you, Baba, sustain my flight, give knowledge  
to my intellect,  
And unbind the empathy of my heart, can this  
work be done —  
Not miracle, but faith: faith that is grace and  
grace your miracle.<sup>12</sup>

This act of calling upon the poet’s Master or Muse for spiritual inspiration before commencing a creative work is common to other traditions besides the Homeric. It is suggested, for instance, in the works of the two great Eastern epic poets cited above: Vyasa, the author of the world’s longest literary work the Mahabharata (106,000 verses); and Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana.<sup>13</sup> Ford maintains that in the Homeric epic tradition:

The difference that the presence of the Muses makes I have found not in artistic shaping or in factual truth but in that especially convincing and absorbing quality I have called vividness.<sup>14</sup>

This “vividness” is what makes the difference between verse and *living* poetry and is essential in epic poetry if it is to sustain its intensity over such a long period. Later in “Book 1”, Brabazon realises the extent of the daunting task he has set himself and again invokes his Master to sustain him in his writing, to be the “light” (the “vividness”) in his creativity. In this instance, Brabazon describes the need to be “enwrapt” in a “shadow-coat” of his Master’s “glory” to be able to “continue to unfold the story” of his Master’s “love”.<sup>15</sup> This need of the devotional artist to be enwrapped, or as Brabazon has also stated it, to be invested with the Master’s garment of beauty is to be found in many Eastern devotional texts.

For instance, in the epic commentary on the Bhagavad Gita the *Jnaneshvari* by the thirteenth century Poet-Saint Shri Jnaneshvar is to be found the line, “Wrap me in the garment of thy blessed favour and soon I will accomplish all this”.<sup>16</sup> This text of Jnaneshvar’s is of particular interest. It influenced all the later Poet-Saints or Sants of the Marathi *bhakti* tradition whose work in turn had a direct and enduring influence on Brabazon’s writings since he first discovered their poetry in the early forties in Melbourne. Ironically, Brabazon was now living with Meher Baba in Maharashtra state where these same poets lived and wrote centuries before.

As stated in the subtitle of “Book 1” the central theme of this first work is the idea of the periodic “occurrence of Reality in illusion”, and in this context Brabazon presents Meher Baba as the latest manifestation. Brabazon not only supports his view with argument but also relies on the force of his own conviction to convince the reader. In many passages his argument and conviction are delivered with a keen sharpness of tongue:

Ignorant men, men of domestic culture, say that  
Jesus was the first bringer  
Of love. Despicable is their doctrine, having it that  
before this  
God was loveless. And other ignorant men have it  
that love now is sealed —  
That there is no further need for His descent and  
Example. Love  
Does not admit of a first or a last: God is never of  
more nor less.  
All his bright Messengers were nothing but love  
And the essence of love, sun-bright and wholly perfect.<sup>17</sup>

Such vivid, outspoken assertion is characteristic of Brabazon's manner of writing throughout all of *Stay With God*. In Indian literature this style comes close to that of the poets of the Indian Sant tradition who spontaneously sang out their biting words to a listening audience.<sup>18</sup> In this tradition, the poet-singers cared little for priestly or social taboos and openly exposed in stark terms what they saw as forms of hypocrisy and manipulation thrust upon common people. An example of this style is the following verse of the north Indian Sant Kabir (1398—1448) which makes Brabazon's lines in the above verse appear tame:

Saints, the Brahmin is a slicked-down butcher.  
He slaughters a goat and rushes for a buffalo  
without a tinge of pain in his heart.  
He lounges after his bath, slaps sandalpaste  
on his brow, does a song and dance  
for the Goddess, crushes souls  
in the wink of an eye —  
the river of blood flows on.  
How holy! What a superior race! What authority  
in society, and how people grovel  
to get his initiation!<sup>19</sup>

This same style is also to be found in the writing of the north Indian Sufis, who like the Sants were unorthodox and emphasised love for the spiritual Master over and above religious practice

and law. Take for example the following lines from the Sufi poet Bulleh Shah (1680-1757):

Lumpens live in the Hindu temples  
And sharks in the Sikh shrines.  
Musclemen live in the Muslim mosques  
And lovers in their clime.<sup>20</sup>

For Brabazon, what the “lovers in their clime” were in love with were the “bright Messengers” of love. In verse six of “Book 1” Brabazon calls upon a wide range of figures, some mythological, others real, as examples of these “Messengers”. He cites the gods from Homer’s *Odyssey*, Pallas Athene and Apollo; the Indian Master Chaitanya (1485-1536), the founder of Vaisnava-sahajiya (a form of Krishna worship); Sankaracharya (788-820), the founder of Advaita Vedanta; and then the eighty-four thousand (which according to one source should in fact be one hundred and twenty-four thousand) prophets mentioned by Mohammed (570-632).<sup>21</sup>

And of love was Pallas Athene, because she put  
courage and wayfaring  
Into Telemachus’ heart. And of love was Apollo,  
because his sign  
Was the sun, and whatever men love is of  
the sun, whether of sky or of heart,  
Whether of creature or of God. And of love and in love  
was Chaitanya,  
For he repeated one word, “Krishna”; and  
was Sankaracharya this too,  
For he said many words explaining that all men  
were God. And  
The rest of them — the eighty-four thousand  
who were nothing but love.<sup>22</sup>

This feature of drawing the reader’s attention to figures from history or literature, which Ezra Pound exploited extensively in his *Cantos*, depends for its efficacy upon an instant recognition being made on the part of the reader. This is something which

Brabazon often risks. Yet there is still a certain energy generated, as in Pound's work, in using "great" names, and in Brabazon's case references are clearly made. This, combined with the elucidating end Notes, makes his work less obscure and potentially more enriching.

Following the poem's opening exposition Brabazon begins his outline of Meher Baba's life and activities.<sup>23</sup> This biographical section is fluent, told with the intensity of a devotee, and needs to be read in this light to be fully appreciated. Besides accurately presenting the various phases, dates and incidents which make up a biographical account, Brabazon also takes the liberty to versify one of Meher Baba's seminal messages, "The Highest of the High", which extends into seventy lines.<sup>24</sup> Throughout this section Brabazon gives an occasional glimpse into the unique nature of his own love relationship with his Master. For instance:

This delightful and frequent recurrence of God's  
pleasure  
In knowing himself, this well-pleasedness-with-himself,  
This perfect Vanity of his, is one of the amazements  
of his lovers  
And is the cause of their tears of joy and impossible sighs:  
For the lover is in love with the beauty of the beloved,  
And the essence of His beauty is his vanity;  
And all else but his beauty is vain . . .<sup>25</sup>

This is poetry which does not invite nor easily lend itself to critical analysis, for it simply presents what it has to say; and what it has to say may be of little interest to the reader. Even Brabazon himself implied this much when he wrote in the preface, "What I have written may be of some value to others; but if not, not".<sup>26</sup>

It is literary truism that a new form of poetry is always created to accommodate a new spirit; and indeed, when it is used again it recalls its original spirit. This idea is to be found expressed in the story of the poet-sage Valmiki, mentioned earlier, who, as recorded in Hindu tradition, spontaneously cried out at the senseless killing by a hunter of an innocent bird who was fearlessly

disporting itself in love with its partner. His cry formed itself into a particular rhythm which became in Sanskrit the *shloka* (grief) form. After he uttered this cry, the God Brahma addressed him: "O Great Sage, let this rhythmic phrase, uttered by thee, become poetry! It is not on account of thy reflection but, by my will thou didst express thyself thus eloquently, O Brahmin [Valmiki]. Now do thou narrate the whole story of Rama, who is the essence of virtue and full of the highest attributes."<sup>27</sup>

In regard to the new form and spirit of *Stay With God*, Judith Wright remarked, "There is no comparable work of devotion in our time, that I know of, and I think it takes its place with the authority of real sincerity."<sup>28</sup> Part of its sincerity is due to the fact that the work does not have any of the distasteful flavour of trying to win converts nor does it wallow in piety or emotionalism. What flavour is sensed comes from Brabazon's love for Meher Baba, which is presented openly.

Another distinctive aspect of the work's overall sincerity is felt in Brabazon's use of language. It is never affected, nor does it sound of anything other than a genuine and expressive Australian voice. In this light, A. K. Ramanujan's insightful remarks about the Indian *bhakti* poet Nammalvar, who was one of the first poets to write in his native Tamil language instead of the literary Sanskrit of his day, could equally apply to Brabazon's use of the Australian vernacular; it could equally apply to the poets of the Sant Tradition:

To Nammalvar, god is not a hieratic second language, a Sanskrit to be learned, to be minded lest one forget its rules, paradigms, and exceptions; he is one's mother tongue. In his view, god lives inside us as a mother tongue does, and we live in god as we live in language — a language that was there before us, is all around us in the community, and will be there after us. To lose this first language is to lose one's beginnings, one's bearings, to be exiled into aphasia.<sup>29</sup>

This exclusive use of the “mother tongue” in poetry naturally produces poems which are more personal and direct. In this use of language the poet does not so much choose words but words spontaneously come unbeckoned to give expression to his ideas and experiences; words which the poet has known and carried in his mind since his early childhood and formative years; words, which because of their long association with the poet, carry the most vitality and speak with the most vividness.

In Brabazon’s case, his language finds its roots in rural Victoria, outback Australia, and Melbourne of the thirties and forties. When one reads “Book I”, it is obvious that Brabazon is a poet who has experienced living in the Australian bush where people talk plainly and to the point. There is something refreshing for the Australian reader — if untroubled by a sense of cultural inadequacy — to hear Brabazon begin a stanza in what sounds like someone “spinning a yarn”:

Like the chap who had two valuable pots, dirty.  
One he gave  
To one man to clean, the other to another man.  
One back  
The next day, shining, but the temper gone out  
of the metal;  
The other returned after forty days of careful cleaning also  
Shining, and useful. It takes time to scour pots or  
grow tomatoes;  
It takes a lot of time to clean out a man’s heart and grow  
love in him  
So that as well as being bright with God he can be  
useful to men.<sup>30</sup>

In this verse, Brabazon has elevated the bush yarn into a parable of universal appeal. Other instances of his colourful use of Australian idiom abound, for instance, in the form of phrases like “swigging plonk”, “hard yakka”, and “irrigate an orchard with a bit of piddle”. These phrases are used in the text when Brabazon periodically leaves the main flow of his narrative to tell an additional story to highlight his point. This use of illustrative

story telling is very much in the style of Jelal-ud-din Rumi's classic epic poem, *The Mathnawi*. Two such stories in Brabazon's work are the story of Tilopa and Naropa whom Brabazon treats more like Australian swagmen than Tibetan mystics; and of Jelal-ud-din Rumi's meeting with his Master Shams-e-Tabriz which Brabazon tells with an equally dry Australian flavour.<sup>31</sup> One verse in particular expresses something of the Australian flavour of C. J. Dennis's *The Sentimental Bloke*, a work which Brabazon enjoyed and could recite.<sup>32</sup> Again, the story in this instance is essentially a spiritual parable:

The yogi bit, reminiscent of the chap who came  
to a Murshid  
Wanting God above all else. "Chuck him in the river"  
The Master said to his disciples. They did.  
When he came up  
The Master said, "Shove him under." So, two  
or three times.  
Then fished him out. Said the Master, "What didja  
want most  
When you was down there? "Air," said  
the aspirant. "Damn fool!"  
Said the Master. "If yer'd wanted God I'd 'ave  
given yer Him." <sup>33</sup>

Brabazon's use of sarcasm could also be seen to have arisen from his life in the country where it was commonly used to accentuate a person's foolish behaviour. But, as regards to the overall critical tone of "Book I", Brabazon gives his own explanation: "If I had been born in another time or place", he writes in his preface, "I would have only sung His praise — analysis and comment would never have occurred to me, they being foreign to art . . . But being born when I was and having lived my life in a portion of the world in which all utterance is contaminated by self-interest, the avoidance of comment is impossible".<sup>34</sup> However, in the best poetry from "Book I" his analysis and commentary are inseparable from his praise:



Brought up on a half doctrine we have been — music  
On instruments without completion of lovely  
speech of song —  
The lesser half: for music is in all nature, but speech  
Is alone of man: and God's sacrifice in each of his Avatars  
Is felt by all things in the earth, even stones and trees,  
But His glory is understood by men, and men, by  
leave of the saints  
Can tread the path to it, and by the grace of the  
Perfect Masters attain it.

We have been told of God's sacrifice for us,  
but not instructed  
Regarding our required sacrifice to Him —  
surely a doctrine  
For shopkeepers who don't like fair trade. We  
affirm "Unless one die — "  
And take it that affirmation is sufficient to bring  
about our death —  
Our beloved Master would never think of  
helping us along!  
It has not been lovingly explained to us that a blow  
From the hand of God is a caress from Him of most love.

The crucifixion of Avatar is continuous.  
Krishna's disciples  
Witnessed it as the Divine Flute-player, struck  
with the poisoned arrow,  
Cried His cry in their hearts to awaken.  
Jesus' disciples knew it;  
And Rama's when lotus-eyed Sita was torn from Him  
And He on the battle field and the muscles of  
His body like whip-cords  
And the sweat pouring from it. And thou, Baba, with  
your broken body  
And the thorns of our heedlessness in your gentle flesh.

Bright jewel. Bright jewel. Your greatness is in  
your humiliation,  
Your sun-glory is in your gentleness;  
From your suffering is born all singing.  
A ray, Beloved, from the jewel of your pain —  
an arrow-ray  
A sudden-rifle ray in this density called heart,  
That my soul enwrapt in a shadow-coat of your glory  
May sing you, and continue to unfold the  
story of your love.<sup>35</sup>

### III. "The Love Song of John Kerry"

John Kerry is a thinly disguised pseudonym for Brabazon. In "Book I" Brabazon refers to an Australian at the 1955 Sahavas in India and describes himself: "Beside these there was one, / John Kerry, an Irish-English-Australian, in his forty-ninth year — / Threshold, according to Hindu classical and Sufi reckoning, of old age — There for the whole month."<sup>1</sup> And in the opening lines to "The Love Song of John Kerry", Brabazon is again referring to his own life when he writes, "Back in Australia the most East of the West, / John Kerry continued the exile he had begun so and so / many millions of lives ago through his own act of waking up . . . " <sup>2</sup>

Unlike T. S. Eliot's dramatic monologue, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" with its picture of spiritual disintegration, barely hidden behind a crumbling persona of civility, Brabazon's poem presents no persona but rather exposes the intimate musing and love complaints of a lover to a seemingly indifferent Beloved whom he describes as the very "SAYING of the say which one says".<sup>3</sup> Although the shortest of all the books in *Stay With God* (twenty-four six-line verses), it contains some of the most intense lines in the whole work.

What is particularly revealing is Brabazon's description of the lover's psychological state of love-longing as he "sings" to his beloved. In Classical Sufi literature, in which poetry to God as the Beloved flourished, poems similar to Brabazon's love song can be found.<sup>4</sup> This type of poetry also influenced the Majorcan poet and Christian philosopher Ramon Lull (1232-1316) whose famous work *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved* was written in "the manner of the Sufis" who, according to Lull, "had words of love . . . which aroused great devotion in men".<sup>5</sup>

A characteristic of this type of Sufi poetry, which is evident in Brabazon's poem, is a particular attitude to intellectual learning. For instance, it is recorded that the Sufi Master Abu Sa'id (967-1049) made the remark, "The first step in this affair (Sufism) is the breaking of ink-pots and the tearing-up of books and the forgetting of all kinds of (intellectual) knowledge".<sup>6</sup> And in the poetry of Jami (1414-1492), who is regarded as one of the great Persian poets, we find the following lines:

Strive to cast off the veil, not to augment  
Book lore: no books will further thy intent.  
The germ of love to God grows not in books;  
Shut up thy books, turn to God and repent.<sup>7</sup>

Although both Abu Sa'id and Jami, like many other Sufi Masters, started out as scholars they soon came to the realization of the limitedness of the intellect as an instrument of investigation. Specifically, these poets found that the intellect could not be used to bring them to an intimacy with God the Beloved. This point is expressed by the Sufi scholars Peter Lamborn Wilson and Nahrollah Pourjavady with regard to Sufism in general:

For the Sufis, the road to spiritual knowledge — to Certainty— could never be confined to the process of rational or purely intellectual activity, without sapiential knowledge (*zawq*, "taste") and the direct, immediate experience of the Heart. Truth, they believed, can be sought and found only with one's entire being; nor were they satisfied merely to *know* this Truth. They insisted on a total identification with it: a "passing away" of the knower in the Known, of subject in the Object of knowledge. Thus when . . . the Sufi Hallaj [857-922] proclaimed "I am the Truth" (and was martyred for it by the exoteric authorities), he was not violating the "First Pillar" of Islam, the belief in Unity (*tawhid*), but simply stating the truth from the mouth of the Truth.<sup>8</sup>

What is unique about Brabazon's poem is that it is a modern version of the Classic Sufi love poem which expresses the intense

love-longing of a lover wanting to “pass away” into his Beloved. As such it expresses something of the flavour, the “taste” which arises from the “Heart” of the lover caught in such an ordeal; in effect, “The Love Song of John Kerry” is a poem of complaint. Initially the lover complains of being “wounded” by the Beloved, by “the far-shadowing spear of His glance”,<sup>9</sup> and then complains that the wound is not fatal, it has not gone deep enough.

What the wound exposes, however, and what causes its unique type of pain is the realisation that it is God who is caught in the lover and it is only the Beloved who can release Him. In other words, the lover finds him or herself caught in the middle of a divine play and from this intolerable predicament arises an intense feeling of helplessness and a yearning to be released:

Become unstuck, God, in your entrancement  
in this which is called me  
so that your own love for yourself may be  
released in a clear stream.  
Why do you allow yourself to fall into error,  
attaching yourself  
to everything you see through these eyes?  
You are the ever-free  
blissful One — I am the veil between yourself  
and you. Tear this veil  
which is between us — but if you cannot, ask  
BABA to do it for you.<sup>10</sup>

In Brabazon’s case, not only is Meher Baba the Beloved who is the divine wounder, he is also the divine comforter who alone can apply the appropriate balm. The image of the bitter-sweet wound of love is, of course, one which has been used universally. In the works of St John of the Cross are numerous examples, such as: “O burn that searest never! / O wound of deep delight!”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the twentieth-century Spanish poet Lorca, who described the Sufi love poetry of Hafiz as “sublime”, wrote of the wound of love:<sup>12</sup>

The dagger  
enters into the heart  
like a ploughshare  
into barren waste.

*No*

Don't plunge it into me

*No.*

The dagger,  
like the sunbeam,  
sets ablaze the terrible  
hollows.

*No*

Don't plunge it into me

*No.*<sup>13</sup>

This same terrible condition of being “wounded” in the heart and the psychological state that this wounding engenders is also powerfully and vividly captured by Brabazon, as in the following verses from “The Love Song of John Kerry”:

Nursing his wound never healing, but widening  
because the spearhead remained in it — widening and  
love-festering,  
sloughing off veil-flesh; widening cleanly  
and the spearhead of bliss  
entering more deeply into the flesh-veils ever  
more hungrily and healingly,  
as the sun into the earth when the farmer  
sets his plough  
more deeply into the sour subsoil where no  
sun has been before:

Each day of day-drag or day-flight curtailed  
within the three curtains of sleep-veil and  
dream-veil and awake-veil —  
sleep the forgetter and dream the distortioner  
and wakefulness  
the cruel concretizer who sets the dreams in  
solid forms, the painter  
whose brushstrokes are the bones, and whose colour  
is the teeming flesh squeezed out of tubes of nerves:

Nursing the wound nursing the wound,  
gazing with admiration  
on the face of the lovely Spearman, he was  
saying to himself:  
Small wonder and great wonder things are as they are  
and this business of Everything and Nothing.  
This business  
of being nothing and somebody, nobody feeling  
he is something.—  
Something, something in your hand, Baba,  
or else nothing before your feet.<sup>14</sup>

After this crucial point in the poem, the lover, John Kerry, attempts to persuade himself to relinquish all forms of hope and to choose instead to turn and reside within himself to achieve some semblance of repose:

Turn in yourself, John — bring back your eyes fond man  
from restless visioning. What is it to you that an  
eye is furtive,  
a lip derisive? that speech is ruined and no eyes' lightning  
indites the pages of books in lovely verse?  
Become in your seeing, blind;  
in your hearing, deaf — or ever the lovely tide of  
spring will find you  
lip-clinging to a clod of earth and your eyes  
stretched in an empty sky.<sup>15</sup>

In effect, this act of turning inward is the only course of action left for John Kerry. The lover is completely cornered with no where else to go. This is a condition in which, as Brabazon describes it, the lover is gradually ground down to nothing. In the end all the lover wants is to be immersed or to “pass away” into the beloved in an act of pure praise. But before this act of “passing away” is achieved, the lover suffers even greater separation, and his song or cry of praise is mixed with complaint:

It's no good talking to One who is the SAYING  
of the say which one says,  
because he doesn't listen because he knows exactly  
what he is going to say. —  
Tired and tired am I of myself. For the wide expanse  
of the sky  
of your bosom I cry. Awake in my heart that I may  
love you with service —  
or else be dust before your feet: anything but this  
not-even-nothing,  
nor a place in your Everything; something,  
O my Child and my Father.

The stars weep, and you have compassion on them  
in their dew to the grass  
and the wheatfields; the sun sinks in his shame,  
and you cover him  
with hiding night; but my tears laugh at me  
and my shame is naked before me.  
The prayers of the ant and the flame-loving moth  
are you answering,  
and the heavy earth-turning are you guiding with  
infinite care. —  
A song in your praise, or a mute adoration,  
is not much of an asking.<sup>16</sup>



## IV. God's Speaking

In "Book III" of *Stay With God* entitled, "God's Speaking: the question which Reality asked Itself and the beginning of illusion and its end," Brabazon moves away from the personal and lyrical quality of "Book II" into a more expository mode. In this third book he expounds upon the central theme of creation and its purpose as presented in Meher Baba's *God Speaks*, a work which begins with the paradoxical dedication "To the Universe — the Illusion which sustains Reality". For followers of Meher Baba, *God Speaks* is their most authoritative text. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, the famous oriental scholar, considered *God Speaks* to be unique and of "paramount importance". In his review of this work he wrote:

No other Teacher in our time or in any known past time has so minutely analyzed consciousness as Meher Baba has in *God Speaks*. Occidental Psychology, especially under the illustrious leadership of Dr. Jung, has made great advances in the study of the unconscious and of the dream-state; but because of its necessary adherence to the conservative methods of scientific research it has not been able, as yet, to fathom the Deep of the Seer. So, for the science-circumscribed psychologist, *God Speaks* should prove to be of paramount importance . . .

[N]oteworthy in particular are Part VIII, on the "Evolution of Consciousness," and Part IX, on the "Ten States of God," to which is attached a diagram linking together the most generally accepted Sufi, Vedantic and Christian mystical equivalents. As a whole, the book makes clear the at-onement of the essentials of the various historic religions in the light of the Gnosis of the Sufis.

Meher Baba's enlightening treatise adds much to the sum total of learning, and contributes incalculably to the enrichment of mankind, for as the Sages of Asia teach, the most intrinsically valuable of all riches, and greater than all mundane wealth, is Right Knowledge.

Nowhere is Meher Baba's wisdom more succinctly set forth than in his conclusion: "To *understand* the infinite, eternal Reality is NOT the GOAL of individual beings in the Illusion of Creation because the Reality can never be understood; it is to be realized by conscious experience."<sup>1</sup>

Brabazon's poem "God's Speaking" gives a powerful vision of the primordial journey of the soul through illusion to the realisation of Reality. This journey is propelled by God's first speaking: "Pulse of Life-force".<sup>2</sup> According to Meher Baba this "Life-force" sets the soul moving through the so-called evolutionary, reincarnational and involutionary processes of creation. It is a journey which forms itself into a circle, taking the soul back to its origin, and is the means by which the soul acquires knowledge of its own inherent reality. This reality, the soul discovers, is nothing less than the realisation of its imperishable oneness with God, the one eternal Reality of existence besides which all else is a veil of seemingness. As Brabazon expresses it in the last verse of the poem:

Once God slept — untroubled by shadow of  
dream, unknowledged  
With knowledge of good and evil, without knowledge  
even of Himself  
Being infinite Knowledge. From sleep He  
awoke and marched out  
And unfurled worlds of finiteness  
(hardness of contrariety)  
And planted them up through the seven  
Kingdoms as banners  
Of false conquest. And stood and took  
His stand in Himself-flood  
And turned it back and won back to Himself  
— stripping Him

Of not-Himself as He went: and arrived glorious  
in real conquest  
From Where He started and slept  
AWAKE-Sleep of Emptiness  
Filled with "I am God" — Power, Knowledge,  
Bliss: the Goal.<sup>3</sup>

As a work of literature "God's Speaking" presents the great mythic "picture" of God, "the penultimate truth, of which all experience is the temporal reflection".<sup>4</sup> Its content is concerned with cosmogonic ideas which Brabazon presents through the use of concrete images. What is particularly new about Brabazon's telling of this ancient story is his use of language which is contemporary and never needlessly obscure. For instance, the opening verse of Brabazon's poem reads:

Once God, that Great Being,  
Whose nature is Existence, Knowledge and Bliss, slept.  
He was like a man in deep sleep  
Who *is*, but does not know that he is.  
He had no knowledge of His knowledge  
nor experience of His bliss.  
He was like a still, shoreless Ocean which  
no wind or wave  
Moved upon. There was nothing but Him.  
There were no stars nor sun nor earth nor anything.  
All things were within Him; but since He slept,  
They also were asleep, unformed and unmanifest.<sup>5</sup>

In many ways this prosaic yet dignified style is similar to various modern translations of traditional creation myths with which Brabazon was familiar. In the opening lines of the *Popol Vuh*, for instance, the Quiche Maya creation myth, is to be found the same sense of primordial silence, expanse and emptiness:<sup>6</sup>

This is the first account of how all was in suspense, all calm, in silence; all motionless, still, and the expanse of the sky was empty.

This is the first account, the first narrative. There was neither man, nor animal, birds, fishes, crabs, trees, stones, caves, ravines, grasses, nor forest; there was only sky.

The surface of the earth had not appeared. There was only the calm sea and the great expanse of the sky.

There was nothing standing; only the calm water, the placid sea, alone and tranquil. Nothing existed.<sup>7</sup>

Another work which Brabazon knew, the creation hymn (*Nasadiya*) from the Hindu Rig-Veda creates a similar impression in the imagination of the reader:

There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomless deep?

There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond.

Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning; with no distinguishing sign, all this was water. The life force that was covered with emptiness, that one arose through the power of heat.<sup>8</sup>

Possibly the greatest influence on Brabazon's poem apart from *God Speaks* comes from Fabre d'Olivet's translation of the "Cosmogony of Moses". This work gives a scholarly and penetrating insight into the significance of the original ten chapters of the Hebrew "Book of Genesis."<sup>9</sup> Certainly Brabazon's frequent use of upper case and hyphenation of words, as in the last verse of "God's Speaking" as given above, can be traced to Fabre d'Olivet's style of translation. The following first two verses from the "Cosmogony of Moses" illustrate the profundity of this work and Fabre d'Olivet's knotted style:

1. AT-FIRST-IN-PRINCIPLE, he-created, Ælohim (he caused to be, he brought forth in principle, HE-the-Gods,

the-Being-of-beings), the-selfsameness-of-heavens, and-the-selfsameness-of-earth.

2. And-the-earth was contingent-potentiality in-a-potentiality-of-being; and-darkness (hard-making-power)-was on-the-face of-the-deep (fathomless-contingent-potentiality of being); and-the-breath of HIM-the Gods (a light-making-power) was-pregnantly-moving upon-the-face of-the-waters (universal passiveness).<sup>10</sup>

Various other points concerning Fabre d'Olivet's influence on Brabazon's work could be made.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, they both shared a similar cosmological understanding that can be summarised by Meher Baba's statement: "The Universe has come out of God. God has not come out of the Universe. Illusion has come out of Reality. Reality has not come out of Illusion. God alone is Real: the Universe *by itself* is illusion".<sup>12</sup> This idea is finely expressed by Brabazon in verse two of "God's Speaking":

All knowledge of Himself and of all things were in Him,  
But He did not know that He knew.  
Then there surged within Him the desire  
    (Whim) to know  
Who He was; and He spoke within Himself  
    the First Speech,  
"WHO AM I?" And with the utterance of this  
    First Speech  
All things in their potentiality came forth from Him.  
But all things are Nothing; and so the universe  
    of stars and suns  
Is nothing. Nothing is included in His Everything  
But is nothing in itself. But at this time, since  
    He did not know  
His knowledge, He did not know that  
    Nothing was nothing at all.<sup>13</sup>

In the next verse, Brabazon further expounds upon this idea and introduces the theme of evolution. But here he makes it clear

that it is God's original question, "WHO AM I?" which drives the evolutionary ascendancy of the soul through ever more complex forms of life until the human form is reached :

Each thing He brought forth out of Nothing and  
caused to exist  
In seemingness He, great Only Being, thought He was!  
He created stone; thought He was stone; lived as stone  
Millions of years, and then said, "Something other am I."  
He created vegetation; thought He was vegetation;  
lived as vegetation  
Millions of years, and then said, "Something other am I."  
He created in turn worms and reptiles, fishes,  
birds and animals,  
And in turn thought He was, and lived as each, of these.  
Then he created Man, and said, "This is sufficient  
for all My requirements.  
I know Myself who I am, because this is  
My own Image, Myself."<sup>14</sup>

What follows in the succeeding verses concerns itself with the theme of human reincarnation and the spiritual travail of the soul as it gradually makes its way through the veils of illusion to eventually become one with Reality.

Over the length of the poem the same central idea of God wanting to know Himself — "God's Speaking" — and the themes of evolution, reincarnation, and spiritual struggle are repeated four times in four sections. Each section, demarcated by a line on the page, is comprised of ten verses of ten lines each, forty verses in all, with an additional final verse acting like a type of musical coda. A musical analogy is also useful in describing the poem as a whole, for in the opening of each section or movement the initial idea is repeated then thematically developed with variations. This produces in effect a richly interwoven work similar to that found in a satisfying musical composition.

Robert Rouse, who was sharing his house with Brabazon when he was writing *Stay With God*, claims that Brabazon consciously modelled the structure of *Stay With God*, with its five separate

books, upon Beethoven's last quartets.<sup>15</sup> This is certainly seen to be the case when examining "Book III" and "Book IV", for they follow a definite type of musical form consisting of four related movements and it could be argued to structure the other books also.

J. W. N. Sullivan, an interpreter of Beethoven's work whose opinion Brabazon respected, describes the movements of Beethoven's last quartets as works that "radiate, as it were, from a central experience."<sup>16</sup> This makes sense when we apply this notion to Brabazon's poem and see that the one "central experience" or idea which "radiates" and is expounded upon in the four movements is the idea of the one eternal question spoken by God — "WHO AM I?"<sup>17</sup> Not only is this explicitly stated in the text of the poem at the beginning of each section or movement, it also runs, as Brabazon believed it did, through life itself, reverberating underneath the text as an implied constant presence seeking expression.

A famous poetic work which could be compared to the four movements of "God's Speaking" is T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. While both poets are concerned with profound and universal themes, Eliot's work is the dialogue of a man speaking in a minor key. It is filled with the sombre, searching tones and heavy seriousness characteristic of an age locked in a terrifying world war. Its insights, instead of liberating the mind, tend to weigh heavily upon it. In the end the work does not reach a final resolution but seeks to entice the reader with obscurity "between two waves of the sea".<sup>18</sup>

In contrast Brabazon's work is clearly set in a major key and presents a clear vision of breadth and intelligence. It stands by itself and asks for nothing else but to be heard. Markedly different is also the language in both these works. Eliot with his subdued arch style and hidden erudite allusions contrasts with Brabazon's trademark use of everyday imagery and vernacular speech which gives his writing a fresh dramatic potency:

Build we our houses with bricks of impressions, cement  
of desire  
Mixed with tears. — Build we our houses —  
So well-pleased so well-pleased —  
Come into my house wipe your feet first please  
wipe your feet —  
Sit we and talk we smile and be gay —  
No God-talk please or allusion-to-Way talk —  
God-talk and Way-talk is crank-talk not tea-talk —  
Gay-talk for you and me talk  
With sun reduced sun of venetian blinds  
In this house of me-house built by me.

Master-builder! Master-builder! — the One  
Who built this lousy little house builds also universes:  
Spins suns in burning, hums earths  
Around them; spaces them in spacelessness,  
Times them in timelessness and orders the time  
Of their ceasing from turning. Master-builder,  
Master-builder —  
Self the creator, Self the sustainer Self the destroyer; Self  
The Mirror-maker of Image of Himself.  
— Little householder,  
Bright are your tears of happiness and sorrow,  
portion self-gotten.  
Pitiable your bed and table and bowed walk  
— pitiable, and glorious.<sup>19</sup>

However, nowhere else is the work's central theme more simply yet profoundly presented than in the beginning of the fourth section or movement. As a variation to the previous sections or movements Brabazon introduces the Old Testament image of the "Tree of Life" or the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil".

What is striking in this instance is how Brabazon is able to use words with great economy and precision to bear the weight of profound thought. In the three opening verses he combines what can only be described as a profound reflection on the image of the "Tree of Life", as contained in chapter two of Genesis, with



the unifying theme of Meher Baba's *God Speaks*.<sup>20</sup> It is indeed a revealing instance of Brabazon's poetic skill both as a seer and craftsman:

Once, God slept. And awoke  
Half waking into dreaming. And spread out  
The creation as a great tree, its roots  
In the Nothing of His dream,  
Its branches and leaves and fruit in the Nothingness  
Of appearance.  
It is called the Tree of Knowledge  
Because by it God came to Self-knowledge —  
For before He ate of its fruits, He  
Even God, knew not Himself.

The Tree of Knowledge through experience  
Of "good" and "evil", its sweet and bitter  
Fruits. And because God ate  
Of these fruits and *became* God,  
They are not forbidden men. The Tree of Knowledge  
Which is the Tree of Life kept living by the  
rivers of Necessity  
And Compassion and Wisdom and infinite Love  
— the Sole Growth  
Blossoming universes and Man: the Tree on which  
God crucified Himself in limitation; on which  
Men crucify themselves, each other, and dear God.

Tree, which He spread out from His single  
breath of inquiring.  
Tree, sap of light, fruits of  
Stone-fruits and metal-fruits and tree-fruits  
And worm-fruits and fish-fruits and bird-fruits  
and beast-fruits  
And man-fruits — fruits which nourished Great God  
On His journey for Knowledge; and which, through  
eating,  
He became. And overcame.  
And became the Energy which grew the Tree.  
And became the Mind which gives it existence.  
And became God Which He always was.<sup>21</sup>

## V. The Perfect Master: The Axis

Having presented his vision of the divine theme of creation in “Book III”, Brabazon uses the following two books of *Stay With God* to give his final statements on spirituality and art. In “Book IV — The Steps to His Feet: abandoning illusion for Reality,” Brabazon expounds upon his belief in the central importance of the Perfect Master in the life of a spiritual aspirant.

This belief is to be found within traditional Bhakti Hinduism, classical Sufism and also, it could be argued, forms the basis of the spirituality of St Francis of Assisi and St John of the Cross. Not only does Brabazon present the Perfect Master as the personification of Reality but also as the only person who can bestow upon another a continuous experience of Reality.

In other words — and this is Brabazon’s defining point — final liberation, divine union or whatever it may be called, can never be achieved by self-action of any form; it is, in all instances, ultimately due to the bestowing grace of the Perfect Master. Brabazon explains this much in the verses which open “Book IV”:

So must be prepared the ground  
for the sowing, for the entering  
of the seed of light in one’s earth.  
The seed of man is the gathered light of form,  
the seed of light is the grace of the Perfect Master.

The first is coupled with death; the second  
is the cause of immortality. Following the moon path  
is rebirth; following the track of the sun  
the wheel of birth is broken — man is  
    reborn in the Deathless,  
never to return except as a Perfect Master.

Worshipping the gods of thy god, the gods of  
gadgets and guns  
one is born again where the burden may be  
re-assumed,  
where the fright and the frustration may be  
again enjoyed;  
worshipping with surrenderance and love the  
name and form of God  
to God one comes when it is the Whim  
of the Perfect Master.<sup>1</sup>

The regular form of these verses with the words “Perfect Master” occurring at the end of every last line is repeated for the entire forty verses of the poem. This simple technique powerfully reinforces the poem’s central idea that all creation ends with the Perfect Master who stands as the gateway between illusion and Reality. Much of the material in Brabazon’s *ABC of Spirituality* has found its way into this poem. For instance, what could be called his theme of “unlearning” is included and is central to the whole understanding of the work. It first appears at verse 7 — “The clearing of the ground for the sowing, for the entering / is the unlearning of learning — for learning / is your rubbish heap of conceit”. Then later in the poem at verses 12 and 13 Brabazon reintroduces it but this time adding his own commentary:

All written words are dead until you bring them to life.  
But the life you give them  
will be your own image of falseness,  
not Truth’s: Truth is contained only  
in the life-giving word of the Perfect Master.

It is better to read than gossip;  
it is better to meditate than read;  
it is better to love than meditate; but  
since you are already trapped in the coils of mental con-  
vulsions,  
read the books of the saints and “God Speaks”  
by the Perfect Master.<sup>2</sup>

Then again, at verse 29 Brabazon expounds on “unlearning” even further. At this point he introduces the concept of “impressions” which can be understood to mean the mental accumulations formed in the mind after learning has taken place, and cites them as being the direct cause in preventing the Self from realising its innate nature of love:

Self is not of the conditions or qualities it imagines —  
nor “somebody” nor “nobody” nor “accomplished” nor  
“unaccomplished”.

All these are impressions impressing mind,  
vehicle of Self.

The natural condition of Self is love — its demonstration  
is the being and life and acts of the Perfect Master.<sup>3</sup>

And then finally at verse 36 and 39 the theme is brought to a resolution:

Unlearn your learning, unhope your hopes, unlove  
your love; nothingness is becoming to those  
arisen from Nothing. Clear some ground for Love,  
Love, the entire forgetter, the only rememberer,  
the Chastener and Cherisher — the Perfect Master.

Clearing the ground is erasing the impressions  
of the mind.

Impressions are the veils between ourselves and Truth.  
When they are erased “Self stays in His native  
condition”<sup>4</sup> —

Self, the beyond-God of love from whence we once came;  
the here-God of redemption in the person of  
the Perfect Master.<sup>5</sup>

This type of poetry, like much of Brabazon’s verse, with its characteristically strong didactic pronouncements, allows itself to be easily lampooned and ridiculed. Yet its very forthrightness and sense of conviction are features that immediately strike the reader as genuine, or as Judith Wright commented, as having “the authority of real sincerity”. But most striking of all, the work

unmistakably expresses a deep and personal love for God in the form of a human person (the Avatar, Christ, Messiah, Perfect Master or *Rasool*) and a genuine concern for humanity, thus giving it an inspiring quality. Take for instance the following verses which particularly express this trait:

Remember the Love of your loves. All are pleased  
with the gift but few praise the Giver  
until another snatches away the gift. Behind the sun-days  
and the moon-nights is the glory and gentleness  
of the Sun and the Moon of the Perfect Master.

Beneath the cry and complaining for position and honour  
is the cry and weeping of the soul for  
    Self-established Existence.  
Beneath the fret and restriction is the restlessness  
and the bond-breaking and the going-forth from oneself  
to Self Who is none other than the Perfect Master.<sup>6</sup>

In the final section of *Stay With God*, "Book V" entitled "The God-Man as World Axis and Living Perfection of Art: the Divine Sun of Reality shining through the mists of illusion", Brabazon moves his focus away from "unlearning" to re-learning, or more precisely, to the soul's re-turning to "Self-established Existence". This for Brabazon is the way of love, which is the way of true art. This linking of art with love has been Brabazon's constant preoccupation, and in the opening lines of "Book V" this is nowhere more profoundly expressed:

Art is an act of love in likeness of itself — Spirit  
moulding matter into lovely form: God's compassion  
as Avatar unto men; and men's devotion to  
    Avatar as God,  
by God — for devotion is by grace alone.  
Avatar is His own act perfectly:  
before His different Names speech retreats in confusion;  
before the Living One, the One present on earth  
    in one's life,  
one can only say, "O God. O God."<sup>7</sup> And weep; and wait;

wait the round of His time and the poetry of His word  
to enform us in likeness and paint us in livingness.  
Devotion is winged sacrifice under the shadow  
of His wings  
flying to Him; an arrow crying in the night  
for dissolution  
in love's mark; the dew of morning diamonding His sun  
as a necklace for His throat: His act in us for Him.<sup>8</sup>

In a real sense this verse contains all which Brabazon has to say about the meaning of art.

To understand how he expounds upon the ideas contained within this verse throughout the rest of "Book V", it is useful to turn again to the analogy of a musical composition as previously introduced when discussing "Book III". This analogy is strongly suggested by the fact that the work starts with a dominant introductory theme (or set of ideas) entitled "Theme" in the text, which is then divided into four "Parts", (or movements) and finishes with a "Coda", as was the pattern in "Book III".

To get a sense of how this musical-type structure works, take for instance Brabazon's idea concerning the axial position of the God-man in relation to art and civilization, an idea which is contained within the work's opening verse waiting to be developed. In "Part I" Brabazon states this idea in a number of different settings, each occupying one verse in length. The different settings in "Part I" involve the different advents of the "Avatar", and each verse begins in the same way — "After Zarathustra", "After Krishna", "After Buddha", and so on. Here is the Krishna setting:

After Krishna, the singing of Vyasa meditated  
and composed in exact likeness of His acts of love;  
the singing recitations of the saints; Iliad, Odyssey;  
Edda (although not written down until by  
Saemund the Wise, 1056-1133) song of His flute  
for the first time in the hearts of the North-men; song  
self-existent, Moinuddin Chishti; magic-song capable  
of lighting lights, Tansen; Mirabai singing her way to God.  
After Krishna, the sadhana of dance, demonstrated

by David, Jelaluddin, Chaitanya, Tukaram —  
half the world dancing in the Gopi's footsteps;  
half the world listening for the notes of His flute,  
dividing them  
into ragas and modes and scales, arranging them  
into melody-offerings.  
After Krishna, Sappho, Ambrose, Qwaali,  
Bhajan, Flamenco.<sup>9</sup>

Later in the book, at verse eleven in "Part II", Brabazon recalls and elaborates upon some of the content found within this verse in the manner of a composer introducing a musical variation. And as in a musical variation, new material is introduced. In this instance Brabazon introduces new material of an esoteric nature while at the same time echoing the work's opening ideas from verse one "Part I":

Art is an act of love — an imperishable statement  
cut in stone, uttered in tones and words or  
through the movements  
of the dancer, — and thus impressed in the  
"material" of mind,  
continually contemporary and continuously  
accessible to one who loves:  
as act, self-sufficient — useless  
for thy works of progress, O man; as statement,  
revelment of the beauty of God, and proof of His eternal  
Existence.

When David or Tukaram danced before God, a harmony  
of movement was  
impressed on the minds of people who didn't even  
see the dance;  
when Solomon or Namdev sang, music was entering  
into people's lives;  
when Enoch walked with God, walking again was  
beautiful;  
when the "Friends of God" talked with Him,  
speech became lovely;  
when Mohammed offered His "5 prayers",  
the hearts of men listened and inclined toward prayer.<sup>10</sup>

In this rather complex manner the work proceeds with the key ideas undergoing transformations like a musical motif that comes in and out of a score and undergoes variations. Sometimes Brabazon modulates the key into pathos, humour or even admonishment, depending on the demands and flow of his thought and imagery. To appreciate another distinctive feature of the work which again suggests a musical analogy we need to reintroduce the perceptions of the music critic J.W.N. Sullivan concerning Beethoven's last quartets. As mentioned earlier Brabazon had made a study of Sullivan's book *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* from which this following quote is taken:

They [the four movements] do not represent stages in a journey, each stage being independent and existing in its own right. They represent separate experiences, but the meaning they take on in the quartet is derived from their relation to a dominating, central experience. This is characteristic of a mystic vision, to which everything in the world appears unified in the light of one fundamental experience. In these quartets, then, Beethoven is not describing to us a spiritual history; he is presenting to us a vision of life. In each quartet many elements are surveyed, but from one central point of view. They are presented as apprehended by a special kind of awareness, they are seen in the light of one fundamental experience. It is not any kinship between the experiences described in the separate movements themselves, but the light in which they are seen, that gives these works their profound homogeneity.<sup>11</sup>

Using Sullivan's terms (which have a distinct Sufi flavour about them) that there is a certain "light of one fundamental experience" passing through the four parts of "Book V" and this "light" comes from the "dominating, central experience" in Brabazon's life of meeting with Meher Baba, a meeting which gave rise to what Brabazon himself called the beginning of his period of "true creativity".<sup>12</sup>

In reading *Stay With God* and especially "Book V" and experiencing its forcefulness, the reader is given an impression of



the power of this “dominating central experience”. It is this quality of power which Ciardi perceived when he described the whole of *Stay With God* as “an enormous rising and breaking of waves”. This power can be felt as a distinctive quality, a deep sounding lyricism and, like the “light” in Beethoven’s quartets, it holds all the parts, not only in “Book V” but all of *Stay With God* to its centre.

To appreciate fully this expressive quality of *Stay With God* one must read the work aloud in its entirety. What, however, can be appreciated by the use of selected quotes, is the pattern of Brabazon’s thought. One important theme that is developed throughout *Stay With God* and which is fully elaborated in “Book V” is the vocation of the artist. At verse 13, Part II, “Book V”, Brabazon expresses nothing but pity for the type of mentality of which Ezra Pound is representative: “. . . with knowledge of many languages / confused and disappointed because / all of truth cannot be contained in one language”.<sup>13</sup> And then argues

Because, Mr. Pound, you don’t need ten languages to say it.

Any *one* Babel-tongue will do so long  
as one has thoroughly learned the word “turning,”  
and has turned (repented) and is facing in the direction,  
and has said, Give me a word by which I may  
know words.

Ah (ha)! this is the very and entirely bones and  
soul of the matter

of poetry — the turning and unlearning and returning;  
and the mind cheerful and high-hoped and open  
dwelling upon the heart’s tone which is the Voice of the  
Word

in a man — which was how Valmiki received  
the Ramayana;

and Homer said, “Tell me, O Virgin of God,  
thou pure Brightness,

tell me the words of my speaking — for of ourselves  
we hear only rumours and know nothing.” And thus  
every poet who is an answer to his own prayer.<sup>14</sup>

This “Voice of the Word” Brabazon also calls the “golden Thread” by which the artist moves or the “lovely Note” from which the artist “has continuous becoming”.<sup>15</sup> But these intuitional verities, as Brabazon describes them, along with the ideals of science have, in his view, regrettably been lost: “science, which once laid down the steps to Self-realization; / art, which once sang God’s likeness in the earth — / now “sciences” making machinery of exploitation, / now “arts” singing the virtues of despoliation. / Forgotten, Conceptual Verities; / forgotten, Intuitional Representation”.<sup>16</sup> “Unless a man takes his stand *against* the world of a dying civilisation”, Brabazon cries out “. . . he shall in nowise avoid ruinous belly-fat poverty; / unless a man sits down and determines the tone and colour of his heart / he shall never be able to obey the seasons nor himself. / Unless . . . and takes thought within his heart he shall in nowise / increase his stature and again become a little child”.<sup>17</sup>

Along with this understanding, and complementary to it, Brabazon presents a hierarchical yet interconnecting picture of the great scheme of life in which the artist is assigned the necessary social function of bringing the “Word” of God to people:

The Word also is food. Therefore the real artists  
meditated on the word entrusted them by their teacher  
and disciplined their seeing to His form, till their eyes  
brightened with tears and praise escaped them.  
Then at His command they in their turn spoke  
to the people  
in words or notes or line or chiselled plane  
and the people were astonished — and being thus fed,  
fed, in their turn, with the word of their work, the earth.  
And the breath of God, through the Masters and saints,  
brought the rains and the sun in due season.  
And when the floods came or drought  
they did not huddle in fear or curse the sky,  
but looked into their hearts to find the sin  
and adjusted their sacrifice to the laws of  
Nature and God.<sup>18</sup>

For Brabazon the missing link in this chain today is not the death or absence of God, but the death — predominantly in Western culture where the idea of the death of God arose — of living “Masters and saints”. In this regard Brabazon considered the Dark Ages in Western culture, when “Masters and saints” existed, to be the “Ages of Light”, while the Renaissance, when “men denied the saint in them, / and the saint in them died, and the line of the saints / came to an end . . .”, as the dawning of darkness.<sup>19</sup>

“Light” is Brabazon’s central metaphor in describing the quality or the experience of true art. “Light — flood of the mind, / and dress of the soul, — the movement of which in a man / through his hands or speech is called Art”.<sup>20</sup> “Light” that gives “. . . — the SHOCK, whereby the soul / awakens to awareness of itself; and understands / that the world is the shadow of the Real”.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, all creation in Brabazon’s understanding, is nothing but “the shadow of the Real”, and likewise all belief in self-doing is equally full of delusion and not an act of love and therefore yields no joyful shock of “Light”:

A tree is a tree. It is not creative, but reproductive,  
A man is a man and likewise creates nothing.  
The image is already in the stone, the bridge  
in steel, waiting revealment and spanning  
at the word of God in a man’s hand.  
Mind, which prompts us, “we are the doer”,  
is a mirror-house  
of distorting in which Self is deluded by being imaged  
as everything other than Self. A man  
as a man can cease from foolishness and begin to love —  
begin to repeat the Name of God in his heart,  
seek in his heart the Beloved’s lovely face,  
wait patiently for a word or a note or some intimation  
of His form and make his many notes and  
words and outlines  
pleasing to Love’s ears and eyes. Only one become  
One may create.<sup>22</sup>

At the conclusion of "Book V", the "Coda", Brabazon masterfully brings together all of his ideas and images and returns again to his opening "Theme". In the third verse of this section, he recalls the full title of "Book V", "The God-Man as World Axis and Living Perfection of Art: the Divine Sun of Reality shining through the mists of illusion", and the overall title of the work *Stay With God*, and concludes the work like the full sounding of a final resolving chord.

Art is the love of God, His-Avatar towards men  
shining self-evident-Existence in the  
    midst of seemingness  
as sun through mist-veils revealing patterned landscape  
of hills and farms and township where none were;  
awaking in men love, and they in love  
cutting their lives and works in design he lays down,  
as a stone-cutter stone fitly for house  
well conceived in dimension by master-architect.  
Stay with God in whatever shape He shapes you  
and work your works within the boundaries of that shape.  
Art is His shape of your singing light through your hands,  
through your speech, imaging His Image.

STAY WITH GOD.

Let the *Dream* dream out the staying and the going  
    of your form  
or million forms — they are not you who ever  
    stays with God.<sup>23</sup>

# Chapter Eight

## Living in India

### I. A Period of Adjustment

In a real sense, the manuscript of *Stay With God*, which Brabazon was carrying on board the *S. S. Orontes* on his way to India, was his life: it represented the depth of his mind and the cry of his heart and he was soon to offer it in person to his beloved Master.

After a short stopover at the Cocos Islands and three more days at sea, Brabazon disembarked at Colombo, took the night train across Ceylon (Sri Lanka), a ferry across the straits to India, and then a train across India itself, via Madras to Pune. The morning after he arrived in Pune he was interviewed for nearly two hours by twenty of the press at The Pune Coffee House and then spent the rest of the day meeting people and visiting places associated with Meher Baba's early life.

In the evening he gave a talk to about three hundred people, including professors and students from the Pune University. After two hours, when the chairman brought the meeting to a close, Brabazon had so impressed the audience with his knowledge and understanding of Indian philosophy and spirituality that a number of them climbed up onto the stage where he was seated, seeking to ask more questions and to have his autograph. Eventually he had to force himself through the gathered crowd to a nearby car and be driven away.

The next day, 27th January, Brabazon set off on the last leg of his long journey to Meher Baba's residence near Pimpalgaon-Malvi, which is a rural village lying near the eastern edge of the Deccan plateau in Maharashtra State. On his arrival he was greeted by Meher Baba and made to feel most welcome. The

property where Meher Baba lived with his *mandali* or disciples, called Meherazad (*azad* meaning “free”), was surrounded by cultivated fields, mostly of millet which was the staple crop for the local villagers, and by open countryside. In the fields cattle were used to pull a single ploughshare and prepare the land for the sowing which was done by hand; water was drawn from open wells and threshing depended on a windy day.

The countryside reminded Brabazon of parts of outback Australia except for the occasional temple situated on the top of some nearby hills. Ahmednagar, the closest town, was 14 kilometres south, and the closest city, Pune, another 177 kilometres to the southwest. Brabazon’s personal residence at Meherazad was a single room which consisted of a stone floor, bed, wardrobe, a table and chair for his writing and two windows. In one of his early letters home, 7th February 1959, Brabazon wrote:

There are no words by which to convey to you the life with BABA, so I will have to mention only the “physical” acts of it. We, that is the men-mandali and myself, spend the morning with BABA. Then BABA leaves us to have lunch and each goes to his appointed task. Mine is — guess — writing. Each morning for one hour BABA listens to my new book “Stay With God” being read out to Him and He has me note down additional points which I work on during the afternoon, also on an Introduction and Notes which He requires to be done.

In the evening we have supper, before which on BABA’s orders I take a walk for half an hour, and after which there is some talk and perhaps a bit more work and then to bed. It doesn’t sound much, but it is a full day, which seems over soon after we begin it. The mandali all look after me as after a young green brother, helping to get accustomed to their way of life.<sup>1</sup>

Here we find the two tasks which were to occupy almost all of Brabazon’s time when he first arrived in India: working on *Stay With God*, and adjusting to his new environment. In the

beginning, however, Brabazon was simply overjoyed to be living at Meherazad and transported by the wonder of it all. Here he was also able to hear first-hand accounts of stories of love for Meher Baba which he could only describe as “extraordinary”: from Andhra, men were travelling on foot, begging for food and boldly presenting Meher Baba’s message to the people they met; from Hamipur, Uttar Pradesh (north-central India) another group had reached Srinagar in Kashmir and were able to obtain an audience with the Maharaja of that state; there was yet another story of Meher Baba miraculously appearing to a group of people while they entertained him with devotional singing. All these occurrences and others of selfless service and devotion convinced Brabazon that similar stories of the past, for instance from the lives of the Maharashtrian poet-saints, were not fabrications.

And yet even while living in this remote Indian setting, in very simple conditions, Brabazon did not abandon his role as a modern Western writer. He was happy, for instance, to accept a request to deliver an address at the Bombay Press Conference on 25th February 1959, which he entitled “The Lord is Our Brother.” In his talk Brabazon stressed the practical importance of finding God as a presence in the midst of daily activity. In part he said:

The Avatar is our eternal Lord and Play-fellow. He loves the play He Himself created; He loves our playing of the roles of his play and He loves playing with us in these roles. When we realise this our fears will vanish and there will be no “Saviour” to seek — only our Brother to serve in surrender and joy. In this surrender we will discover that our brother in life is our brother — not our enemy and competitor or means whereby to obtain more and more of the world’s goods — and in this realization there will occur the dawn of a New Humanity in which “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Works”<sup>2</sup> will be the normal commerce among men.<sup>3</sup>

Just a few months after his Mumbai talk, Brabazon’s role as a modern writer again surfaced when he was delighted to give his permission to (and receive payment from) the B.B.C. Third

Programme to include his dramatic poem “Death of a City” in a half-hour broadcast of Australian poetry on 1st August 1959.<sup>4</sup> This was again due to the promotion of his work by the Australian poet and critic Charles Osborne, who had admired this particular poem when it was first published in the *Ern Malley's Journal* in 1955.

With the advent of the hot summer months in the middle of the year, Meher Baba and his *mandali* left Meherazad and went to Pune where it was cooler. In Pune they were given the use of a palatial residence, Guruprasad, by the owner, the Maharani of Baroda. Guruprasad was very spacious but as it was close to the busy centre of Pune it did not escape the noise of city traffic. For Brabazon, being a writer, noise was a problem and so he readily agreed to have arranged for him alternative accommodation in a quieter part of the city at the residence of K. K. Ramakrishnan. When Meher Baba asked Brabazon if he could be at Guruprasad by nine in the morning to read to him his additions to *Stay With God*, Brabazon replied that he could easily cycle the distance from Ramakrishnan's and be on time.

The first morning, Brabazon arrived at quarter to nine and found Meher Baba already waiting and thought that, for the next day, he must come earlier as Meher Baba tended to be early. But progressively, no matter how early Brabazon arrived Meher Baba was always waiting for him, which left Brabazon feeling extremely anxious and bewildered, for the last thing he ever wanted was to displease his Master. It eventually got to the stage that Brabazon was struggling to arrive by seven.

In contrast to the happy days at Meherazad, Pune was quickly turning into a nightmare for Brabazon:

In Pune I was always exhausted. Many times I felt that there was no way out of the humiliation of defeat — that I would have to go to Baba and say that I had reached my limit — yet, the very thought of doing so, became absurd. Yet I was heartened to face another day by the fact that the “veterans of the Lord” [the resident *mandali*] were not entirely unaffected — they too were suffering from exhaustion. At night I would go to bed around 10, and



after wondering for a couple of hours how one went to sleep, I would go outside for a couple of hours — hardly even thinking, just in a sort of stupor. Then I would go to bed and sleep until Ramakrishnan brought me a cup of tea at 5:30. Then after breakfast of bread and jam we would get on our bikes and ride the six miles to Guruprasad for the first session at 7. By 8 o'clock I would feel a complete blankness overwhelming me and my eyes would just close — I had no power at all to keep them open — and I would hear the snapping of Baba's fingers and force my eyes open and he would rebuke me for falling into sleep. I changed my position in the hall and sat along a wall so that I could surreptitiously bang my head on it — but even that didn't prevent the dreadful blankness overpowering me. The other men, between sessions, used to take naps, but the moment I was also free to do this, I became instantly awake! I had never before felt so continuously blank and stupid.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, one morning, after Meher Baba complained to Brabazon about his lateness, it was the last straw. Brabazon broke down and wept and poured out his troubled state of mind. After Meher Baba consoled him it was agreed that he would leave Ramakrishnan's residence and stay at Guruprasad to be always near and ready whenever Meher Baba called him. Although it was not explicitly stated, the clear message for Brabazon, which came out of this whole episode, was that he was not asked to come to India and be a professional writer but rather, first and foremost, to simply live with Meher Baba, to be in his company; writing was to be secondary.

Later in this same year, 3rd September, Brabazon wrote a poem which was later published, "The Manner of God." This was one of the first poems which he wrote since his arrival in India and one of his first attempts to poetically document what it was like living with Meher Baba. It consisted of a series of statements of praise which, while extolling the attributes of his Master, also suggests Brabazon's deepening absorption in Meher Baba's personal presence. In some ways, the poem could be seen as marking a

turning point in Brabazon's life as he crossed the threshold into the life of a resident *mandali*:

The True Teacher teaches one nothing;  
he is Knowledge itself  
and his person is a continuous song of Knowledge:  
to be in his presence is to be bathed in the waters of life.  
He is That which all systems of knowledge try to define,  
with whom all thought seeks union.  
He is the glory and finality of the process of creation,  
and beyond that — and the infant God in one's heart.  
To him there is no distinction of teacher and pupil:  
he is Truth and the Path to it:  
for our sake he again treads that path  
and invites us to accompany him to our own Self.  
He does not give one lectures and sermons on Truth;  
tell one, "This you shall do or not do";  
his discourses and parables are his delightful conversation  
from friend to friend walking in a dew-filled morning  
lit with the sun.  
He does not order one to sit apart from one's fellows  
amidst the clamour of one's mind,  
but invites one to sit with him while his Silence  
hushes the day  
and paints the sky with the glory of evening.  
His eyes are the stars that watch over you through  
the night.  
His love is the sun which awakens you in the morning.  
The blessing of his hand wipes out ignorance  
in a moment  
and the footprints of his feet are the Way to eternal life.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, during this testing period of adjustment of living with Meher Baba, Brabazon, nonetheless, managed to complete the detailed "Introduction" and extensive "Notes" sections and other requested alterations to *Stay With God*. When all these additions were finalised, the revised text was sent to the publisher in Australia, Edwards and Shaw.

Subsequently, the first published copy of the book arrived at Meherazad on 7th October 1959. Before taking the book out of the wrapping in which it was posted in the mail, Brabazon presented it to Meher Baba on a large platter decorated with freshly picked wild flowers, so his Master could be the first to see and hold it. Meher Baba was extremely pleased with all aspects of the book and praised it highly. Eventually he autographed two hundred copies and had them sent to some of his followers in America, Europe, England, Africa, Australia, India, Pakistan, Aden, Colombo and Iran. In the immediate days that followed Brabazon became his own publicity agent and was busy organising reviews in India and overseas, plus overseeing the book's international distribution with the help of some of his friends in Australia.

In India, *Stay With God* was widely reviewed and generally received favourable criticism. The influential *The Times Of India* described Brabazon as "a true artist or poet", and his work as having "originality and charm", while *The Journal of the University of Bombay* remarked, ". . . there can be no doubt that by his [Brabazon's] insistence on the deepest spiritual values, he had lifted us . . . out of the arid materialism of our times . . ." <sup>7</sup> The reviewer in *The Aryan Path* noted that the work reminded him in places of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. <sup>8</sup> Other more non-committal Indian reviews can be found in the Calcutta newspaper, *The Sunday Hindusthan Standard*, and in both the journal *The Vedanta Kesari* and *The Hindu Weekly Magazine* from Madras. <sup>9</sup> In the *Pakistan Quarterly*, *Stay With God* was well received: "What is most inspiring however is the total spiritual appeal of the writing, and its lofty and ennobling purpose. One may not agree with the mystical doctrines he preaches, but the overall effect is inspiring". <sup>10</sup>

In Australia where review copies of the book were sent to several of the major city newspapers, the comments were discouraging. For instance, from the *West Australian* (Perth): "Let me admit my inability to receive much illumination from Francis Brabazon's *Stay With God* . . . the thought does persist that perhaps the difficulty lies in him"; from the *Courier Mail* (Brisbane): "the contents will appeal only to those who share Brabazon's

theories".<sup>11</sup> However, from the *Country Life* (Sydney) the positive remark was made that the work was a "mural of no mean order".<sup>12</sup> While over the broadcast of the *National Network Book Review* of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Queensland poet and critic David Rowbotham commented, "*Stay With God* is therefore rare philosophy . . . its contents are set out in stanzical form, if you will, you can make poetry out of it. Personally, I won't".<sup>13</sup>

Later Rowbotham privately suggested: "The difficulty of recognising the work as poetry perhaps lies in its expression in our language of Indian thought".<sup>14</sup> In this latter comment Brabazon saw what he considered to be a typical example of the "deplorable lack of definition that makes our [Australia's] art-criticism level so low" and justified his remark as follows:<sup>15</sup>

If Mr. Rowbotham means philosophical thought, there are six classical schools of Indian philosophy alone ranging from Monism to Atheism and including numberless subdivisions.<sup>16</sup> If he means "vernacular thought," the thoughts of the common people, I cannot read or write in any of their languages so it is impossible for me to reflect even any one section of this thought. I neither propound any one, or a mixture of, Indian philosophy, nor do I advocate some "Indian way of living" <sup>17</sup>

A similar type of remark to Rowbotham's came from J. B. Priestly who was sent a copy of *Stay With God* through the suggestion of a mutual friend C. B. Purdom. Priestly wrote, "I have already read your introduction and dipped into the book . . . but I have never found Indian thought very attractive in spite of the grandeur and sweep of its metaphysics. There is about it too much nothingness for my rather earthy taste."<sup>18</sup> Brabazon responded to Priestly's comments in much the same fashion as he did to Rowbotham's:

. . . may I respectfully remind you of the "earthiness" of the best Indian art as exhibited, say in the Ellora caves? Can one altogether separate a people's art and thought?

However that may be, I trust that you may find that my theme is not specifically “Indian”, but rather belongs to that body of spiritual tradition found in all places at different times (you will note that I treat the Iliad and Odyssey also as “Scriptures”); and I trust that in my actual writing you may find something good and solid of the earth, for I spent my formative years close to it and I believe that my best figures spring from it.<sup>19</sup>

Brabazon also sent a copy of *Stay With God* to Ezra Pound. He was encouraged to do so by an American poet friend, Jeanne Robert Foster, who personally knew Pound. Brabazon was somewhat reluctant to send him a copy in view of some of the negative remarks he made about him in the book, although in the “Notes” section he wrote that he considered Pound to be “the greatest writer in English in this century”.<sup>20</sup> In the end he sent a copy along with a brief note expressing his personal regard for him as a teacher of modern poetry:

Under separate cover I am sending you my book *Stay With God*. In doing so I am not unmindful of your “Leave an old man alone,” but at the same time it is the only way I can acknowledge my debt to you. I hope that you may find in it some reasonable workmanship.<sup>21</sup>

Regrettably, Pound never replied to this note nor acknowledged receipt of *Stay With God*, however his case was only one instance of an incredible amount of international correspondence which the publication of *Stay With God* generated.<sup>22</sup> Often Brabazon would finish answering letters in the evening with a sore right hand from continually writing.

Although *Stay With God* was ignored by some reviewers, while others gave it negative criticisms, Brabazon was not unduly concerned. All that really mattered to him was that it pleased Meher Baba and with that he felt inwardly and completely satisfied.

## II. Staying with Meher Baba

In addition to his work publicising and defending *Stay With God*, Brabazon was also engaged in the process of helping to edit a selection of Meher Baba's recent discourses and had commenced collecting material for a book on Meher Baba's life.<sup>1</sup> Life indeed was very active at Meherazad, but Brabazon found himself totally sustained by his Master's presence which he felt permeated the very atmosphere of the place. Naturally, being an artist, Brabazon felt the need to capture something of what he was experiencing. Instead of poetry he found himself turning to the greater lyrical possibilities offered by song.

The initial idea of composing songs may have come to him from hearing the farmers in the nearby fields singing Indian spiritual songs as they worked. He was moved by the rhythm and the gusto with which they sang and how one singer would lead and the others follow.

This scene of farmer's singing and working in unison touched Brabazon deeply while, at the same time, reminding him of the West's poverty in this respect. In recalling his first experience on hearing farmer's sing as they worked, Brabazon wrote:

[The farmers] sing while they harvest. The songs are songs  
of thanksgiving for the harvest, such as:  
See how many of our relatives have come to help us!  
And there is work for them all —  
It is such a fine crop that God has given us.  
Or they are songs of devotion mostly centering around the  
Infant or Child Krishna. The leader, the owner of the  
field, sings:  
We hung the cradle of Krishna on the tree.

And the rest, as they swing their reaping hooks for the pulse  
or pull up the *jawari* [grain crop] answer:  
We swing the cradle.  
Or the song may be but devotionally mischievous, like:  
These (the crops) are flowers in the Beloved's garden.  
The gardener is away; let us steal the flowers while  
he is away.<sup>2</sup>

And in the following comment Brabazon gives what could be described as his simplified notion of spirituality, which is "thinking *all the time of God* in whatever one is doing, and because of this remembrance the heart sings". Indeed, this was what was happening to him:

When we speak about what the East has to learn from the West, we know precisely what we mean — we mean technology. But when we speak of what the West can learn from the East, we are thinking vaguely of something called spirituality. The thinking is necessarily vague because although the word is an English word it no longer has any precise meaning — it is something to do with someone called God, or with some sort of "wisdom," or with mahatmas (what *is* a mahatma?), or with yogis (*what* is a yogi?). The very simple fact that spirituality consists in the mind thinking *all the time of God* in whatever one is doing, and because of this remembrance the heart sings, does not occur to us. In reference to ourselves we think of spirituality and something called the "spiritual path" as something we will *take up* when we have more time! "One of these days after I have got my business in order and my children settled (for God's sake settled in what? — in the very condition from which we would escape from when we have time!) I will devote my whole time to it." Which means we never will (see *Stay With God*, Book IV). . .

All that the West can learn from the East — if it wishes to learn — is to let its mind repeat the Name of God and its heart sing His praise while it works. Any fool can start repeating God's Name. We would not have to learn this

from India *if* we remembered our own early tradition. It is simply that we have forgotten about it, and the Indians are still doing it. And there is their wonderful fund of stories telling of the *results* of mind-repetition and heart-singing. And there is the example before one's very eyes of men and women and children who *live* this way. When a whole people has been doing this for thousands of years, something beautiful has happened in them: you see a youth minding cattle who looks like a young god; you see a woman carrying a pitcher of water on her head with a look of eternity in her eyes.

Nothing *mysterious* — just something that sings.<sup>3</sup>

On other occasions, Brabazon heard a different type of Indian singing. One such time was when he accompanied Meher Baba on a visit to the villagers of Arangaon 10 kilometres south of Ahmednagar, near Meherabad, where Brabazon had stayed on his second visit in 1954. In this instance, all the villagers had gathered in front of Meher Baba and sang directly to him. Brabazon was again moved by this experience:

It is in this type of singing that you get the full group-force of a lot of people gathered together. Our hymn-singing is not even a shadow of it. In a hymn-singing there is an emotional release which, on certain occasions with a large crowd can amount to a mass-hysteria. But in an *Arti* [song of personal dedication to the Master] there is intensity coupled with such a naked simplicity — it is as though each one was singing alone to his God. Possibly with its proper setting, in the chapel of an Order, Gregorian chanting may be similar.<sup>4</sup>

By May 1962, Brabazon had completed a collection of twenty-five of his own song-lyrics which he presented to Meher Baba who then asked for them to be published.<sup>5</sup> The lyrics were simple and written to folk or popular songs mainly from Ireland, and North and South America. For instance, Brabazon's song "The Journey" is based on, "I Know Where I'm Going", from Sean



O'Casey's play *Time to Go*, and "The God-Man", on Leadbelly's popular American folk tune the "Boll Weevil".<sup>6</sup>

For the published collection Brabazon gave the folksy title *Let Us the People Sing*. Although these songs are, as Brabazon himself admitted, "raw beginnings", they are nevertheless important in his body of work for they represent a turning point in his writing: the beginning of a collection of "songs directly in God's praise".<sup>7</sup> Once again, it can be seen that Brabazon's shift to writing songs is a logical progression in his life as an artist. For instead of seeking beauty and truth he was now, as far as he was concerned, living with the essence of beauty and truth in the form and person of Meher Baba, and this, naturally, caused him to sing. But this was certainly not the end of Brabazon's life as a serious poet, but rather the beginning of another poetic phase in his life which would eventually lead to the creation of the English ghazal: a poetic song form in which the Lover directly sings to his or her Beloved.

In June 1962, Brabazon suggested to an Indian friend, C. D. Deshmukh, that Deshmukh should try and organise a performance of *Kirtan* (communal chanting and singing to God) in English instead of in the local Marathi language. This was a novel idea for its time and also rather daring, since *Kirtan* was a strongly traditional form of Hindu singing. Nevertheless, it was attempted on two separate occasions, once in Pune on 17th June and again in the central Indian city of Nagpur on 9th July. At both of these performances some of the lyrics from Brabazon's book *Let Us the People Sing* were set to Indian melodies and sung along with some short English poems composed by Meher Baba and others.<sup>8</sup> The Pune performance was so well received that it rated a column in the *Nagpur Times* under the heading "Novel Experiment." The following short excerpt from the article must have both pleased and amused Brabazon:

As the Pandits say, neither music nor spirituality know any artificial divisions of language. In the Pune Kirtan, one Kirtankar made a simple proposition, namely, that God must be deemed to understand [the] English language also and there is nothing strange or awkward in offering Kirtan Homage to Him in English. Some who think that

Indian tunes might ill fit English compositions will find their theory disproved.<sup>9</sup>

Also in 1962, a major event took place in Pune, from 1st to 4th November: the first-ever, international gathering of Meher Baba's followers. To record this event for posterity, Meher Baba asked Brabazon to write an account of the occasion. Brabazon commenced this writing project when he returned to Meherazad in December, and by March 1963 it was completed. Shortly thereafter it was published in Australia under the title *The East-West Gathering*.

The book consisted of prose passages which supplied factual details and commentary interspersed with lyrical verses which captured something of the experience of being present and participating at the gathering. Brabazon described his new work as "the song-story of an event unique in history".<sup>10</sup> Of the numerous poems included in the book most, as in *Let Us the People Sing*, were based around popular Western folk songs, with some obvious examples. For instance, the following verses are based on Robert Burns's lyric "Comin' Thro' The Rye":

When a body meets a body  
comin' thro' the rye,  
says a body, see the mushrooms  
how they grow so high.  
They were small and flat and round  
look at them today!  
Each one can raze a city to the ground —  
time folk learnt Love's way.<sup>11</sup>

These two verses also prove the point that while Brabazon was living the life of a spiritual disciple in India, he did not see himself as being removed from the wider socio-political world in which he lived. These lines obviously reflect the tense political atmosphere of 1962 when the Cuban confrontation between the East-West superpowers was occurring and the possibility of an atomic war was ever-present.

However, not all the poems in *The East West Gathering* were drawn from the Western folk tradition. Brabazon also used traditional Eastern poetic imagery not only directly, as in his reference to the famous Eastern tale *The Conference of the Birds* in the lines, "In Attar's story thirty birds / set out for Mt. Kaf; / To Pune came three thousand odd / to weep and laugh", but also on a more subtle level.<sup>12</sup> Take, for instance, the opening image from one of his poems: "The moon was low / a silver sickle on a field of blue / when I met you / and loved you with a love I could not know / would break my heart", which is a play on a couplet by Hafiz, "I saw the green meadow of the sky and the sickle moon, / And remember my own life's field and the time of harvest".<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, the image contained in Brabazon's lines "My lovely white Dove his bright feathers shed / and sang his sweet song no more; / my Joy and my Love fell and lay as one dead, / and so I opened the door" recalls Rumi's, "If my soul-bird does not fly towards Love — / The plumage of that bird may be plucked out!"<sup>14</sup> In a real sense the poetry of *The East-West Gathering* is a mixture of eastern and western elements. For many of the easterners who followed Meher Baba, the devotional flavour of this work was more to their liking than the critical tone of *Stay With God*.

One poem in *The East-West Gathering* is worth particular comment not only as the most innovative in the book but also as a possible precursor to Brabazon's English ghazals:

Embers are cinders after the pain of burning  
Is ended. And ash is cold after rain.

There was music and laughter in the early night,  
But music and stars both die in the morning light.

Hope extended is a net drawing dead fishes,  
And the exultant wave embraces barren beaches.

Religion is singing; but since song dies, who can prove  
That his God is the greater truth, his Beloved the fairer love?

In the end one can lay down only one ethic:  
Love abhors hypocrisy in poet, banker or beatnik.

The lights dim, and the dance ends always on a half-close;  
Oh, that from the dawn-ash the Nightingale begins its  
song to the Rose!

Love is the gift of the Master; it became in the billow:  
The Rose is God's lips left on the Bride's snowy pillow.<sup>15</sup>

Besides the obvious use of Eastern images like the "Nightingale" and the "Rose", this piece exhibits other ghazal characteristics which Brabazon was to further use and refine. Firstly, the poem consists of a series of couplets which are not linked by a strong narrative or logical line but rather fall as the feeling dictates. Because of this seeming lack of structure the poem creates a sense of suspension in which a mood can enter into the work. The mood is that intangible quality which unifies the ghazal and can be as varied and as complex as human feelings can generate. In the above instance the mood and the surreal-type images are fused and strongly suggest the ephemeral nature of existence.

The final couplet in any ghazal is crucial for it literally puts the poet's worth on the line. Here, in a matter of two lines, the poet has to pierce the reader's heart with a new depth of thought and feeling. In Brabazon's last couplet he creates an all-encompassing picture of love as originally contained in God's breath passing over the primordial waters of creation — "it came in the billow" — and reaching its consummation in the love between the Lover and the Beloved. The striking image in the last line, "The Rose is God's lips left on the Bride's snowy pillow", is a provocative play on traditional ghazal imagery.

As *The East-West Gathering* was published in Australia copies were sent to various magazines to be reviewed. Most comments were dismissive and brief. The *Overland* gave one sentence, "Francis Brabazon in his *The East West Gathering*, ecstatically paeans a man whom he regards as God"; while the *Bulletin* made no critical comment other than to say that Brabazon was not "primarily preoccupied with poetry".<sup>16</sup> The book, however,

was slammed by S. T. Barnard who in the *Australian Book Review* reviewed it under the sarcastic title “Rum Baba” with such belittling comments:

Francis Brabazon has been around the place since the dark Melbourne days of the young Nolan and the young Tucker. At this time, Brabazon was a primitive painter, and an attendant at the Melbourne Art Gallery. Since then he has gone on the gurus, and, by courtesy of Edwards and Shaw, has uplifted us with several volumes of mystical outpourings. Perhaps we have not uplifted ourselves as much as we should to the Himalayan level of Brabazon’s soul.

. . . It appears that God is incarnate at the moment and lives in Pune . . . and his name is Meher Baba; he looks very much like Adolphe Menjou in a nightie, and wears a paper lei round his neck . . . It seems that Meher Baba invited 5,000 people to a gathering in Pune recently where he gave everyone a kiss, and told them “that all things, including the stars, are within us”. (Hasn’t God-Man pinched that phrase from somewhere else?).

. . . The Europeans [at the Gathering] were given a special Cook’s tour of Baba-land, including the tiny cabin “in which he had beat his head during his spiritual agony after his knowledge that he was God”. (Why the Deity should beat his incarnate brains out on the wall on discovering His Deity is beyond a simple surfy like myself.)<sup>17</sup>

After this review Brabazon lost confidence in the capacity of Australian reviewers to give serious attention to his work and decided to totally ignore the Australian literary establishment from this point onwards.

### III. The Ghazal

When Brabazon arrived to stay with Meher Baba in 1959 he soon became aware of his Master's love for Hafiz's ghazals, particularly when they were sung. From first-hand experience Brabazon writes:

The ghazals of Hafiz and his successors [the ghazals of Persian and Urdu poets from the fifteenth century onwards] were the only poetry that Meher Baba really *enjoyed*. Although occasionally he would quote a verse of Tukaram or Kabir, with the ghazal writers he was the Wine Master filling our cups with the various types and vintages. Similarly, although he sometimes listened to Indian devotional songs and classical music and to Western popular songs and spirituals, he only really enjoyed ghazal singing and its most popular form, *qawaali*. [a singer accompanied by a few instrumentalists]

. . . when there was a really good ghazal singer — one whose heart was tuned to the *cry* of love and its courtesies of complaint and whose throat was a threshold to the Beloved's presence — Baba would sit up all night listening, commenting, revealing the hidden treasure in the verses.<sup>1</sup>

Meher Baba's father, Sheriar Mundegar Irani, had an undying love for the ghazals of Hafiz. He could recite from memory large passages from his works, in the original Persian and, due to his fervour and knowledge of the text, could pass on to his listeners something of their flavour, or "taste" (*za'wq*) of love and longing. Perhaps because of this, Meher Baba was reading Hafiz by the age of nine and, in his twenties, started writing ghazals of his own

under the pseudonym of Huma.<sup>2</sup> These ghazals were composed using a mixture of classical Persian and the Indian languages of Gujarati and Urdu.

All through his life, Meher Baba enjoyed listening to recitations of Hafiz's poetry. When he came to Sydney in 1956, he not only had Hafiz read out, but also took great care in explaining the meaning behind Hafiz's words and pointed out lines which were misquoted or incorrect. For Brabazon, this may well have been his first real experience of the spiritually-charged atmosphere created by the ghazals of Hafiz and of Meher Baba's intense enjoyment of them.

Meher Baba's high regard for Hafiz is evidenced by the fact that in his book *God Speaks*, his most important work, he often quotes Hafiz to illustrate a point. He even suggested that Hafiz's poems "engenders feelings which ultimately lead to illumination".<sup>3</sup>

Apart from listening to Hafiz's ghazals sung by a *qawaali* singer, periodically while at Meherazad, Meher Baba would request one of his *mandali*, Ali Akbar Shapurzaman (Aloba) who was fluent in Persian, to read to him from Hafiz's *Divan* (collected works). During these readings, in which Brabazon and the other *mandali* would be present, Meher Baba would give, for Brabazon's benefit, an in-depth English translation which revealed the hidden subtleties within Hafiz's lines while conveying the full flavour of the original. Although nothing was said at the time, with hindsight it seems that it was during these sessions that Meher Baba began to instill into Brabazon's poetic consciousness something of the spiritual quality of Hafiz's poetry.

A more explicit exercise in Brabazon's tutelage occurred in Pune in November 1962 during the occasion of the East-West Gathering. At this time, Meher Baba gave a first-draft English translation, which he had made of one of Hafiz's Persian ghazals, to Brabazon to versify into a tighter form. When Brabazon had completed his task, Meher Baba asked him to read out the fruits of his effort to the large group of Westerners who were present for the East-West Gathering. This was the first time that many of them had heard Hafiz recited in clear meaningful language. Judging from this event, it appeared that Meher Baba wished not only Brabazon

but all of his Western followers to have some experience of the ghazals of this Master poet. The versification which Brabazon read is as follows:

Although you have not received love's guerdon,  
One day this desert will become a garden —  
so be not grieved.

Do not turn your heart away, nor expostulate  
Against the Beloved, but bear your present state —  
and be not grieved.

Let this disgusted mind and troubled heart be stilled  
One day desire for union will be fulfilled —  
so be not grieved.

Behind the curtain a secret game is being played  
That you know not, so don't give up nor be dismayed —  
or grieved.

Once you have set out for the Beloved's abode  
Do not let mere stones and thorns turn you from  
the road — or be much grieved.

Maya [principle of illusion] will do her best to  
thwart your labour,  
But when you have a captain like Noah you will  
reach safe harbour —so be not grieved.

When this Friend is the same as God don't plague  
him with petitions,  
But suffer gladly love's rules, trials and conditions —  
and be not grieved.<sup>4</sup>

Gradually, and with Meher Baba's continued encouragement and subtle guidance, Brabazon became increasingly interested in the idea of creating an English ghazal in the tradition of Hafiz. Not only because it would be a new Western literary form of love poetry for him to explore, but also, since it was his Master's favourite poetry, it provided him with an opportunity



to possibly please his Master. Thus he began collecting and studying English translations, by Meher Baba's *mandali*, of ghazal poets whose work Meher Baba also enjoyed: Giger Moradabadi, Seemab Akberabadi, Mirza Ghalib, Paiyaam, Jafri and others. At this time, English translations of these poets were for the most part nonexistent.

But soon after this positive beginning there came a period in which Brabazon felt that Meher Baba had lost interest in the idea of an Hafizian English ghazal. Brabazon first became aware of this trend when, during the poetry readings when Hafiz was read aloud in the Persian, Meher Baba, for some unknown reason, appeared to ignore Brabazon's presence and discontinued giving any English translations for his benefit. Consequently, Brabazon now found these reading sessions frustrating to such an extent that he loathed even having to attend.

This feeling of frustration continued to grow in Brabazon until, on one of these occasions, Meher Baba asked him why he was looking so despondent and, in the hope of cheering him up, said he would grant him any wish he so desired. Having held back his frustration for so long, Brabazon thoughtlessly blurted out that he did not wish to hear the name of Hafiz ever again. According to Bhau Kalchuri, one of Meher Baba's *mandali* who was present at this time, this incident marked a turning point for Brabazon. For soon after, on the same day, Brabazon wrote what he himself considered to be his first English ghazal within the tradition of Hafiz.

The meaning behind this sequence of events, which was obviously orchestrated by Meher Baba, invites speculation: perhaps Meher Baba wanted Brabazon to concentrate upon the sounds and rhythms of Hafiz in the Persian and so withheld giving him an English translation; or perhaps he purposively wished to create frustration in Brabazon so it could be later channelled into a positive creative force. At any rate, from this point onwards, Brabazon continued to write ghazals in the Hafizian style and began reading his efforts to Meher Baba who took great delight in finding the same "cry of love and

its courtesies of complaint” which filled Hafiz’s ghazals, in Brabazon’s new English form.

Perhaps one reason why Meher Baba enjoyed Brabazon’s ghazals so much is that they, like those of Hafiz, were full of wisdom yet earthy and entertaining. Not only did they capture a wide variety of moods ranging from the festive to the sombre but they also dealt with both the absurd and deeply philosophical aspects of life; and in some instances, all within the confines of a single ghazal.

According to Michael C. Hillmann, Hafiz’s ghazals came at the end of an era in the Persian poetic tradition and represented the perfected form of that tradition:

. . . [The] final harmony of the separative strains of descriptive, amatory, didactic, homiletic, mystical, and panegyric expression which developed severally and then partially merged in earlier periods of Persian poetry.<sup>5</sup>

Brabazon’s ghazals are certainly not the “final harmony” of anything but are rather the start of a new English form. However, they are, according to Brabazon, “based on the Persian *ghazal*, perfected by Hafiz 600 years ago and carried down in the Urdu language to the present day”.<sup>6</sup> The critical issue here is that Brabazon’s ghazals, as he rightly points out, are not imitations of the Eastern ghazal (Persian or Urdu) but only “based” upon them.

In fact, Brabazon’s ghazals represent a genuine new English form of poetry created from the marriage of the essence of one poetic tradition, the Eastern ghazal, with the form of another poetic tradition, the Western sonnet, and as a result of this marriage an entirely new form has been created. This new English form, in Brabazon’s hands, allows Western readers to have a first hand experience (not via a translation of an Eastern poet) of the unique quality of the Eastern ghazal tradition of Hafiz. In a sense, they are a direct “translation” of the spirit of Hafiz’s ghazals.

On a personal level, Brabazon’s ghazals are the final consummation of his life as a spiritual seeker. What this amounts to is his arrival at an unshakeable certainty that the Beloved, who is both his creative Self and his Master Meher Baba, are one and

the same and the source of his creativity. This final certainty, as Brabazon points out, is not at all consoling:

And so one arrives at the painful conclusion that the Beloved alone exists — which means that oneself doesn't. And that's a terrible predicament to find oneself in — for one is still *there*!

The only solution I found was to accept the position: "You alone are and I am not, but we are both here." <sup>7</sup>

This shocking situation of feeling somehow non-existent and yet at the same time existent in the Beloved is the spiritual state out of which Brabazon's ghazals arose. Everything else that the ghazals contain can be classified as commentary which moves away from this centre and returns to it. In this context, the words of Ahmed Ali are relevant: "the word 'ghazal' means the agonised cry of the gazelle when it is cornered after the chase and realises that the game is up. The atmosphere of sadness and grief that pervades the ghazal, thus, truly reflects its origin in both this and the dedication to love and the beloved".<sup>8</sup>

At this point in his life, all that really mattered for Brabazon, all that was real for him on earth, was the experience of love and longing in the relationship between the Lover and the Beloved. Of this relationship he writes:

. . . that [it] is never wholly fulfilled until the Lover ceases to exist in himself and passes away in the Beloved.

This relationship has its root in the very nature of God, which is love. As Baba has explained it: "God is Love. And Love must love. And to love there must be a Beloved. But since God is Existence infinite and eternal there is no one for Him to love but Himself. And in order to love Himself He must imagine Himself as the Beloved whom He as the Lover imagines He loves." <sup>9</sup>

In another revealing statement, Brabazon suggests that the ghazal is the only "poetical form capable of expressing all the shades of the impossible relationships of lover and Beloved" — which are variations of the "cry" of the lover as he or she becomes

consumed in the Beloved's all-in-allness.<sup>10</sup> In other words, it is a form of poetry which attempts to give voice to something virtually "impossible" to understand — incomprehensible — outside of the actual experience itself of the relationship between the lover and the Beloved. Which, in fact, is why Brabazon could not have written the ghazals earlier because he was never in such a relationship.

More than Meher Baba's indirect tutelage of Brabazon in the form of the ghazal, it was the direct and continual experience of the lover-Beloved relationship which Brabazon enjoyed (or endured, depending on the mood at the moment) as one of Meher Baba's *mandali*, living with him day in and day out, which made the ghazals possible.

Furthermore, this is possibly why Brabazon claimed that the Hafizian ghazal is a form which has never before existed in British-American literature because "the lover-Beloved dilemma was not part of the British-American consciousness". In this remark Brabazon is most probably referring to English writing after the mid-seventeenth century when American (English) literature began with the Puritans, and the Neo-Classical Period (c. 1660-1800), the Age of Reason, began in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

As Brabazon continued to write ghazals, his relationship with Meher Baba took on a new dimension: he became a kind of court poet, employed to write on demand, with Meher Baba as his patron. Evidence that he assumed such a position is supported by the fact that he was often directed by Meher Baba to write a ghazal based upon the rough outline of a couplet which Meher Baba had composed, or directed to write a specified number of ghazals.<sup>12</sup>

An example of this former instance is when Meher Baba gave Brabazon the following lines: "One who crosses the ocean all the time has time to play with pebbles on the seashore. / But when there is a storm raging he has no time to play with pebbles", which Brabazon re-shaped into the couplet: "The Master of ocean-crossings may enjoy playing with pebbles on the seashore, / But He has no thought of pebbles when He is on the bridge amidst the storm's roar", and later incorporated this couplet into a whole ghazal.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, the last couplet of this particular ghazal: "Though ocean-born, who among us is ready to embrace the ocean? / Take it easy, Francis, first of all we have to get out of this sea of illusion", is one of the few instances in which Brabazon followed the ghazal tradition and incorporated his name into the last lines.

It is also worth noting, at this point, that Brabazon never mentions Meher Baba's name in any of his ghazals, (he actually went out of his way to leave it out) but writes within the ghazal tradition, as established by Hafiz, of using only general names: "the Beloved", "the Master", "the Tavern Keeper" etc. This lack of specificity allows different readers to be able to relate directly to the ghazal's content irrespective of who their Beloved is, or even, of any spiritual outlook they may or may not have.

In coming to a further understanding of this new English ghazal form it is useful to examine some existing studies on the ghazal tradition and its poets. Many English studies now exist, mostly written since the mid-fifties, which address this subject. One such study is by M. Jueeb on the life and work of the Urdu ghazal poet Ghalib (1797-1869), a poet whose ghazals Meher Baba enjoyed and whose work Brabazon had studied in English translations. In this work Jueeb remarks:

The poetic tradition which Ghalib represents was more than literature, more than culture. It expressed, vigorously and coherently, the response of human nature to the problem of human existence. It was a fusion of elements that were philosophical, mystical and aesthetic, also elements that were essentially trivial and ephemeral. The fusion took place in man, and could not take place outside him, in a system of philosophy or mysticism or aesthetics, certainly not in religious dogma.<sup>14</sup>

In Brabazon's estimation, this diverse "fusion" taking place inside a person is nothing but the play of "the divine love game" acting itself out in the soul of the poet and seeking release.<sup>15</sup> The critic Aijaz Ahmad alludes to this same idea when he writes that the ghazal is:

. . . a poetry of intense moral privacies; and of love — not *about* love, but *of* love. Love is the great, over-arching metaphor because love is conceived as the basic human relation and all life is lived in terms of this relation — even when those terms are terms of failure.<sup>16</sup>

And again, in the words of K. C. Kanda, “Although the ghazal deals with the whole spectrum of human experience, its central concern is love.”<sup>17</sup>

Also relevant to understanding Brabazon’s ghazals, are some of the comments of A. J. Arberry in his discussion on Hafiz’s unique use of the ghazal form. For instance, Arberry’s remarks on Hafiz’s underlying attitude to life could equally apply to Brabazon’s:

We have referred already . . . to what we have called his [Hafiz’s] philosophy of unreason, which constitutes the central core of the poet’s message. It is not of course suggested that Hafiz was the first Persian to discover, or to teach, that life is an unsolvable mystery. . . . What Hafiz did was rather to isolate this element from the mass of related and unrelated matter in which he found it embedded, and to put it forward as the focal point from which all theory, and all experience too, radiated. It was his justification for rejecting alike philosophy and theology, mosque and cloister, legalistic righteousness and organized mysticism; it enabled him to profess his solidarity with the “intoxicated” Sufis like the martyred Hallaj . . .<sup>18</sup>

This type of attitude is reflected throughout Hafiz’s writing. Take for instance the following couplets:

Intellect and knowledge have no access to the (Divine)  
scheme of things;  
Why spend therein your weak ideas and opinions?  
  
You will not be able to fathom one single iota from the  
secrets of existence;  
Even if you were to circumscribe the whole universe  
with your mind.<sup>19</sup>

Hafiz's response to this situation, like Brabazon's, is not to lie down and die because of the inadequacy of reason, but rather to follow the dictates of the heart, to follow the path of love. In Hafiz's ghazals, however, he warns the reader that this path is not easy, and like any journey into the unknown, it requires a guide who knows the way and a willingness on the traveller's part to exactly follow the guide's instructions:

Beware of stepping into the path of Love without a guide,  
Because on my own I exerted in a hundred different  
ways, but failed.

Go, Hafiz and serve the old tavern-keeper (Master),  
Hold fast to his garment and discard everything.<sup>20</sup>

In the opening poem of Brabazon's second book of ghazals, *The Beloved is All in All*, there is to be found obvious parallels with this Hafizian outlook on life:

The young banana plants are birds with green wings  
rising from the ground;  
Such was my spirit when I still thought that beloved  
God could be found.

Now that I have strained the universe through my  
heart-sieve without finding a trace  
Of his Reality, I have ceased from search and  
await his date of Grace.

Out there is nowhere, nothing — only the  
Beloved's shadow  
Embroidered with star-stitches which the darkness  
causes to glow.

When God first threaded our souls on his breath  
for a necklace,  
He gave every one his own beauty and His singing-place.

With the first breaking of his Silence there streamed forth  
the light which became my eyes;  
When He breaks his Silence this time may I be  
hurled beyond mere paradise.

All works are but attempted corrections of one  
initial error.  
This is the sum of knowledge: Truth is in the dust before  
the Master's door.

Since hands must work, use them to fashion  
a cup for wine.  
Then await his favour, and all other offers decline.<sup>21</sup>

The forthrightness and clarity of this fine ghazal makes it difficult to say anything about it by way of interpretation; nothing is hidden to be exposed and the reader either accepts what Brabazon has to say or not. What can be felt, however, rising up from underneath the lines is something of the "cry" which Ahmed Ali speaks of, "the cry of the gazelle when it is cornered".

Yet, in the midst of this "cry", Brabazon also makes general comments which can be found illuminating, as in: "All works are but attempted corrections of one initial error. / This is the sum of knowledge". But here it needs to be stressed that these comments, as with the comments in Hafiz's ghazals, are not something over and apart from the dynamics of the "lover-Beloved dilemma" but rather are reflections on life and living in the light of this "dilemma".

The idea of the "lover-Beloved" relationship being unresolvable, a dilemma, plays itself out in this ghazal in the way that Brabazon mixes seemingly opposite elements. For instance, he mixes longing, as in the line, "When He breaks his Silence this time may I be hurled beyond mere paradise" with resignation, as in the last couplet — "Since hands must work, use them to fashion a cup for wine. / Then await his favour, and all other offers decline." In other of his ghazals, praise is mixed with complaint, sobriety or duty with drunkenness.



Other general characteristics of Brabazon's unique ghazal style can be seen by examining a selection of his couplets. (A more detailed examination of his ghazal style will be covered in the following section.) Firstly, there is no hint of meditative absorption being used to create these works, as in his earlier collection of poems, for instance, in "One Speaking". Nor of the sometimes jarring tone of didacticism which can be found in his poetry up to and including *Stay With God* — although in his ghazals Brabazon boldly states exactly what he thinks, which for some readers may be affronting.

In his ghazals, Brabazon has found his own voice and speaks without artifice. Sometimes it is to himself, to others, or to his Beloved. It is a voice which is bare, unadorned; which has finished with any literary or spiritual pretensions, and its directness and simplicity is its strength and appeal. The long lines which Brabazon uses in his couplets, often involving enjambment, accommodate the natural flow of his speech. Through the ghazals he recalls and relives certain aspects of his life from the standpoint of his present experience. For example:

I came here in ignorance, but have  
    accomplished wisdom's supreme goal —  
That to which all men journey — the meeting of the  
    Beloved of one's Soul.<sup>22</sup>

or:

Every thing is solid, but no thing has permanence.  
    As in a dream  
Eyes and lips that I have cherished appear as bright  
    bubbles on a stream.<sup>23</sup>

Brabazon's style has certain re-occurring features. When, for instance, he expresses his state of longing, he often reverts to imagery which has a distinct surrealistic quality:

By the time the sun sang from my house-top  
    his first golden note,  
My spirit was a snuffed candle's smoke that had  
    become a throat.<sup>24</sup>

While, in contrast, many of his satirical reflections are very dry and very earthy:

Hunger is love; and love is nothing but  
unending hungers. . .  
Don't come near us you science-spirituality mongers! <sup>25</sup>

or:

Yet there are many who still talk about the poet's craft!  
Shove them out to sea on a sail-less and rudderless raft. <sup>26</sup>

or:

There are men and women. And there is the  
third sex who wear robes of saffron or black —  
Eunuchs, not for the kingdom of heaven's sake, but  
for belly and treasure-stack. <sup>27</sup>

When, however, Brabazon addresses his Beloved, his remarks are either that of praise:

The sun is no more than ash from one spark  
of your divine fire,  
The earth's forms are but your beauty's reflection  
caught in desire. <sup>28</sup>

or complaint marked by courtesy:

Beloved, another dawn sky bears drought's red stain.  
Forgive us if sometimes hot stone cries for cool rain. <sup>29</sup>

While it was his Beloved, Meher Baba, who taught Brabazon the form of the ghazal, it was his experience of living with Meher Baba that provided him with the content of his ghazals. On many occasions, Meher Baba now referred to Brabazon as his "modern Hafiz".

## IV. The Form and Flavour of Brabazon's Ghazal

For those who are interested in more commentary on this new form of poetry and the particular flavour of love which Brabazon gives to it, the following pages are given.<sup>1</sup>

In his initial experimenting with the ghazal form, Brabazon cites his lifetime love of the sonnet and saw his first attempts as a "superimposition" upon the "dignity of the sonnet structure". In Brabazon's published ghazals the only visible remnant of the sonnet form is seen in his strict use of fourteen lines; in other non-English ghazals the lines can vary from ten to thirty or five to fifteen couplets. Eventually, Brabazon replaced the sonnet structure with what he called "an inner order of sequence of images".

What Brabazon actually means by "an *inner* order" is suggested by two of Hafiz's translators, Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs, whose English translations clearly influenced Brabazon's ghazal style. Avery and Heath-Stubbs present the case that the pre-Attic lyrical poetry of Greece, the poetry before Aristotle of which Pindar's odes are an example, is a type of poetry which is close to Hafiz's style. In their view, pre-Attic lyrical poetry was not conditioned by Aristotle's "logical principle that a poem shall consist of beginning, middle, and end", but was "bound together by the symbolic unity of their leading images." And this "very similar principle", they suggest, "is discernible in the poems of Hafiz".<sup>2</sup> Specifically, in regard to Hafiz's use of imagery, Avery and Heath-Stubbs write:

Each couplet is linked to others in the same poem by a leading image or idea, or by the repetitions of a single word, though often in a varying sense. But the links are not necessarily explicit, but are often suppressed, depending on subconscious association. Sometimes a couplet is linked to the one which immediately succeeds it. More often, perhaps, it has a closer connection with the next couplet but one, so that the several couplets of the poem may be linked alternatively. This latter technique produces something analogous to the “arabesque” principle in design . . .

Finally, the composition of the poem as a whole is circular rather than linear: a leading image or word in the first couplet is repeated or paralleled in the concluding one. This circular principle of composition finds an analogy in contemporary Persian miniature painting. And indeed the whole of Hafiz’s imagery, alike in its vivid sense of detail and of bright colour, and in its subject-matter . . . offers many parallels to the art of the Persian miniaturists.<sup>3</sup>

Brabazon’s use of imagery in his ghazals does suggest, at times, something of the vividness which is found in the bright world of the Persian miniature, but within a poetic landscape of his own making. What, however, does come to mind most consistently, is not so much a scene but a sense of emptiness, an emptiness which Brabazon originally felt in outback Australia.

It is worth recalling that Brabazon spent a period of time in the late twenties working as a young man in Menindee, north-west New South Wales, one of the most desolate regions in all Australia, a place where he felt “a great emptiness, which was to remain with him for the rest of his life”. And in the open landscape surrounding Meherazad where Brabazon lived and wrote his ghazals in India a similar sense of emptiness can be felt.

In addressing Avery and Heath-Stubbs’s points regarding the “linking” of couplets through the use of a “leading image or idea, or by the repetition of a single word” and of the circularity of the ghazal form we need to examine one of Brabazon’s ghazals in

detail to see how this works in practice. The following ghazal is from *In Dust I Sing*:

The wells are drying up, but the mercy of God flows on;  
The dust storms obscure the sun, but the  
    shining Word goes on.

Though this may not make any sense one need  
    not be an idiot —  
One cannot see a minute, yet the stream of time flows on.

If one asserts self, one cannot deny self's creator;  
Though one stays outside the theatre, the dialogue  
    flows on.

God *is*; and he is merciful. Then why not rain's healing?  
The pupil labors at spelling, but language still flows on.

If you believe in rose, you must believe in that virtue  
Which engenders rose for you; though she dies,  
    it still flows on.

Future is already becoming out of this moment;  
The debtor is already solvent in time which flows on.

Don't put the Master in mind's dock. If we have  
    to rehearse  
Death by dying of thirst, it's because God's mercy flows on.<sup>4</sup>

The leading idea of this ghazal is God's ever-present and sustaining mercy which Brabazon fuses with the image of "flowing" as expressed in the phrase from the first couplet, "the mercy of God flows on". And it is this axial idea/image which links the couplets and gives the work its "symbolic unity", or to use Brabazon's term, "inner order". There is also perhaps an association, for some readers, with a line from Rumi's *Masnavi* : "Do not seek water, (but) get thirst, so that the water may gush forth from above and below."<sup>5</sup>

Although each couplet is linked thematically, through the axial idea/image, they can be read in isolation and still make sense — another traditional ghazal characteristic. The strongest link is between couplet 1 and couplet 7 which gives the poem a sense of circularity and of resolution, “as if the necklace of images has at last been clasped, and the end gathered into the beginning in a statement of definite clarity”.<sup>6</sup> An examination of each couplet now follows:

Couplet 1

The wells are drying up, but the mercy of God flows on;  
The dust storms obscure the sun, but the  
shining Word goes on.

The idea/image is first introduced using a paradox: “The wells are *drying up* but the mercy of God *flows on*”. In the second line, this idea is again stated but using a different image, that of a dust storm, while maintaining the implied image of drought. The second line elaborates upon the idea of God’s omnipresence by suggesting a type of analogical argument: just as the sun is always present but can be obscured from the viewing eye by a dust storm, so too, can the reality of God, who is always present, be “obscured” from our “sight” due to our spiritual blindness.

Couplet 2

Though this may not make any sense one need  
not be an idiot —  
One cannot see a minute, yet the stream of time flows on.

In the second line of this couplet Brabazon introduces the concept of time — “One cannot see a minute, yet the stream of time flows on”. The fact that one cannot see a minute, yet the existence of a minute cannot be denied, is used by Brabazon, again analogously, to point to an insight: that although one cannot see God it does not follow that God does not exist. The image, “the stream of time flows on”, links with the ending of line one and two in couplet 1 and with the second line of all the subsequent couplets. The end words, “flows on”, set up a refrain (*qafia*) suggesting

that the constant flow of water is like the constant flow of God's mercy.

Couplet 3

If one asserts self, one cannot deny self's creator;  
Though one stays outside the theatre, the dialogue  
flows on.

This couplet confirms a pattern, set up in couplet 2, that continues till the end of the ghazal: an opening statement or image is presented and then responded to. In this couplet the line "If one asserts self, one cannot deny self's creator" is the opening statement. In response, Brabazon introduces a new image, that of spoken words (theatre dialogue), "flowing on" which links back to the similarly imperative statement of line two couplet 2, of time "flowing on." The image of a person standing outside a theatre unaware of dialogue happening inside, again, analogously raises the possibility that the "Word", from couplet 1, may be "speaking" without a person "hearing" it.

Couplet 4

God *is*; and he is merciful. Then why not rain's healing?  
The pupil labors at spelling, but language still flows on.

The opening statement of this couplet, "God *is*; and he is merciful", presents the poem's central idea, its truth claim, without the embodiment of imagery. A question follows, "Then why not rain's healing?", which remains unresolved until couplet 7. The next line introduces another new image, that of written words (spelling), "flowing on" in the same way, and to the same effect, in which the image of spoken words was used in the previous couplet.

Couplet 5

If you believe in rose, you must believe in that virtue  
Which engenders rose for you; though she dies,  
it still flows on.

In this couplet Brabazon makes a shift in his line of thinking and alludes to the opening lines of the “Prologue” in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer was an exact contemporary of Hafiz):

When in April the sweet showers fall  
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all  
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power  
As brings about the engendering of the flower<sup>7</sup>

Here we have terms that can be linked with Brabazon’s ghazal: “sweet shower fall” and “liquor of such power” — with God’s flowing mercy; “drought” — with wells drying up and dust storms; and “brings about the engendering of the flower” — with “which engenders rose for you”. This allusion adds an obvious richness to the ghazal.

Couplet 6

Future is already becoming out of this moment;  
The debtor is already solvent in time which flows on.

This couplet links back to couplet 2 in that it raises, once more, the issue of the nature of time but deals with it more deeply. Time, in Brabazon’s view, is not something which “passes by” in a regular linear fashion but rather “*becomes out of this moment*” and “flows on”; in other words, philosophically speaking, the concepts of time-past and time-future are deceptive; in reality, in Brabazon’s view, there is only “this moment”, time-now, in which “God *is*” — as stated in couplet 4. When Brabazon writes that “Future is already becoming out of this moment” and “The debtor is already solvent in time which flows on” he is, again, directly pointing to the axial idea of God’s eternal presence and eternal mercy.

Couplet 7

Don’t put the Master in mind’s dock. If we have  
to rehearse  
Death by dying of thirst, it’s because God’s mercy flows on.



Brabazon states in the first line “Don’t put the Master in mind’s dock”, as if to say, don’t question the Master who is beyond the mind’s grasp of understanding. And heeding his own advice, in the next sentence, he simply states a conviction which lies beyond the mind’s comprehension: “If we have to rehearse / Death by dying of thirst, it is because God’s mercy flows on”. And while this couplet strongly links back to couplet 1 giving a satisfying circular form to the ghazal, the last sentence, because of its paradoxical nature, leaves the reader in a state of suspension. This is typical of the last couplet of a ghazal; it invariably contains an element of surprise.

Although the rhyme scheme of this particular ghazal, aabacada et cetera follows the conventional Hafizian ghazal pattern, Brabazon has not chosen it in imitation of Hafiz, but rather to reinforce the poem’s central idea. Invariably, Brabazon’s rhyme is aabbccdd et cetera as in the previously discussed ghazal, “The young banana plants are birds with green wings rising from the ground”. The reason Brabazon sacrifices the strict rhyme pattern of the conventional ghazal form (which suits the Persian and Urdu languages better than English) is for the same reasons that Avery and Heath-Stubbs sacrifice it in their English translations; namely, to preserve the sense of improvisation and the colloquial tone which characterise Hafiz’s ghazals. But this sacrifice is no loss, for the spontaneous love-cry of the heart, the essence of the Hafizian ghazal, is allowed to be felt in the process.

As in any established literary tradition, lines from one poet bring to mind lines from other poets. This is particularly the case with ghazal poets whose themes invariably revolve around the inexhaustible topic of love. Through this process of recollection, the reader’s (or, more typically, the listener’s) enjoyment is increased as it allows those lines to be examined from a slightly different angle, providing new avenues of meaning and a greater depth of understanding. The last line of Brabazon’s ghazal examined above, for instance, could possibly call to mind some lines of Rumi’s:

What is bounty without a beggar? Generosity without a guest? Be beggar and guest; for beauty is seeking a mirror, water is crying for a thirsty man.

Hopelessness and need are a tasteful bezel for that ruby. Your poverty is a Burak; don't be a coffin riding on other's men's shoulders.

Thank God! you hadn't the means or you may have been a Pharaoh. The prayer of Moses was, "Lord, I am in need of Thee!"

The Way of Moses is all hopelessness and need and it is the only way to God. From when you were an infant, when has hopelessness ever failed you?<sup>8</sup>

In many of his other ghazals, Brabazon's use of conventional Eastern poetic idioms including "the wine shop", "the tavern", "the Beloved's tresses", "the street of love", revelry in the tavern when the "Master vintner" is pouring the wine, gives his work, for the uninitiated Western reader, a strange inaccessible quality. However, with the ever-increasing number of publications of English-translated ghazals by Rumi and Hafiz, whose work is filled with these idioms, this initial strangeness is bound to disappear.

The increasing popularity of translated Sufi poetry amongst Western poetry readers is a unique contemporary phenomenon and one that indicates a growing appreciation of the "taste" or "flavour" of love and longing which they express. And just as the English sonnet, based on the Italian form, entered into the mainstream of English literature in the early part of the sixteenth century, so might also prove the fate of the Persian-based, English ghazal in the near future.

The flavour of love in any poet's work is both unique and universal: unique, because it arises out of the experience of a specific lover-Beloved relationship, and universal because human relationships based on love are universal. To present this aspect of the flavour of love in Brabazon's ghazals is difficult, for it is something which cannot be conveyed in a casual reading. However, if we use part of Meher Baba's message, "Stages of Love", and intersperse it with selected couplets, the reader may

sense something of this; certainly no analytical discussion is going to achieve this objective.

This particular message and format have been chosen for two reasons.<sup>9</sup> Firstly, it is Meher Baba whom Brabazon admits gave him the “content of these poems” which are essentially of love; and secondly, because this particular message is taken from Meher Baba’s book *The Everything and the Nothing*, which Brabazon helped to edit in the early sixties, during which time he began to write ghazals.<sup>10</sup> Here, then, is part of Meher Baba’s message, “Stages of Love”:

When lust goes love appears; and out of love comes longing. In love there can never be satisfaction, for longing increases till it becomes an agony which ceases only in Union. Nothing but union with the Beloved can satisfy the lover. The Way of Love is a continual sacrifice; and what gets sacrificed are the lover’s thoughts of ‘I’, until at last comes the time when the lover says, ‘O Beloved! will I ever become one with you and so lose myself forever? But let this be only if it is your Will.’ This is the stage of love enlightened by obedience.

Now the lover continuously witnesses the glory of the Beloved’s Will; and in the witnessing does not even think of union. He willingly surrenders his entire being to the Beloved, and has no thought of self left. This is the stage when love is illumined by surrender.<sup>11</sup>

Although what follows is a very arbitrary selection of couplets — they are certainly not selected on some inner understanding of Meher Baba’s message of love — this exercise, nonetheless, provides a way for a substantial number of couplets to be presented, thus allowing the reader to get a sense of the desperateness of Brabazon’s love-longing, his moments of ecstasy, his world weariness, and his hard-won wisdom. The selection follows:

“When lust goes”;

Male-glisten and female-glisten with greater  
or lesser reflection.  
Take away the bubble, and the drop loses its attraction.<sup>12</sup>

“love appears”;

The eternal Awakener of lovely spring  
Has waked all the earth, and hearts and birds  
and flowers sing.

We the Love Street pavement poets do not lag behind  
In praise — praise is our sickle through the garden  
of mind.<sup>13</sup>

“and out of love comes longing”;

The immensity of a past that had no beginning,  
Of a future which will have no end: this is my singing;

This, and the lover who has escaped from illusion  
and now faces  
The fearful *chasm* between him and where eternal  
union’s grace is.<sup>14</sup>

“In love there can never be satisfaction, for longing increases till  
it becomes an agony which ceases only in Union”;

Word; words: bubbles streaming from a bubble  
— yet so great a load!  
They could not be heavier if they were drops  
of liquid lead.

Dear Magician, what terrible things you pull out  
of your hat:  
Suns, words, hearts, bombs and tears — your  
Continuing Creation Act.

Let me lose all words, Beloved, except those strong,  
soft words that cause the tears  
Which fill the chasm of separation, that I may  
cross over from what appears.<sup>15</sup>

“Nothing but union with the Beloved can satisfy the lover”;

Every heart reflects the divine Beloved; the lover is he  
Who would shatter his heart-mirror and set  
the Beloved free.

Each cell of our blood sings your Song — the pity is,  
each is double-tongued and two-faced!  
Each soul is a ray of your Sun; it is by, and before,  
himself that each is disgraced.

Millions of times, Beloved, You have come to us and  
sung your Original Song;  
“The Beloved is All-in-All: to him alone does  
the Earth, and you, belong.”<sup>16</sup>

“The Way of Love is a continual sacrifice; and what get sacrificed  
are the lover’s thoughts of ‘I’”;

If singing doesn’t take one into love’s divine presence,  
Of what avail the smoke of words offered as incense?

I-talk momentarily brightens the bubble;  
But only its denial lightens its trouble.

Set sail! set sail! Steer into the teeth of the  
storm’s violence:  
There also is the kiss that seals all lips in silence.<sup>17</sup>

“until at last comes the time when the lover says, ‘O Beloved! will  
I ever become one with you and so lose myself forever?’”;

Yes, I have done better than most with the  
moments of lyric chances:  
I used once to visit a wineshop where were poured  
cups of love-glances.

That was also illusion — the better part of dreaming,  
In which Reality was covered only thinly with seeming.

Now there is only the long wait (what matter in  
desert or green plain?)  
For the world and myself to be swept away in  
another forty days rain.<sup>18</sup>

“But let this be only if it is your will.’ This is the stage of love  
enlightened by obedience”;

There will come the day when I shall go forth in  
love and trust  
As a bride to my Lord Myself’s house in the Street of Dust.

He-myself has promised me this final consummation,  
Ending this impenetrable night of dull stone’s station.

I see the world of creation as a vast ocean  
Escaping from itself, yet trapped in its own tidal motion.

Across the black waters shines my Beloved’s glorious face  
As a sun newly risen, compassionate, shedding grace.<sup>19</sup>

“Now the lover continuously witnesses the glory of the Beloved’s  
Will, and in the witnessing does not even think of union”;

So we spent the night — I, at last, the seeker who  
no more seeks.  
And now over the house-tops steps the girl with  
the rosy cheeks.

The morning breeze bears the scent of honeycomb  
and bark:  
From the ocean’s rim shoots up the sun’s  
first burning spark.

In a fly’s wing-space I see the world I left,  
the world of pain —  
And I brush his hand with my lips as he  
fills my glass again.<sup>20</sup>

“He willingly surrenders his entire being to the Beloved, and has no thought of self left”;

Everything is good, but nothing has any sense;  
And all postures except that of dust are mere pretence.

In each grain of dust there is every form of precious stone;  
In each grain of dust the seed of poetry has been sown.

It awaits but a drop of spilt wine to give it voice —  
When, compared with its singing,  
all other music is noise.<sup>21</sup>

“This is the stage where love is illumined by surrender”;

When the lover’s lips have become a rose and his eyes  
a nightingale’s tongue  
The Beloved listens with pride and joy to every note  
that is sung.<sup>22</sup>

# Chapter Nine

## Because of Love

### I. New Writing

Throughout the sixties at Meherazad, Brabazon did not travel anywhere apart from the summer trips to Pune with Meher Baba and the rest of the *mandali*, and nor did he do anything else apart from his writing. Year in and year out remained the same. The only break in the daily routine at Meherazad was when visitors occasionally arrived to see Meher Baba, and even these occurrences became less frequent as the sixties progressed.

Although it was an uneventful period it was not inactive. Meher Baba became more and more involved in doing what he called his “universal work” which required him to become increasingly secluded and out of the public gaze. His work was such that it gradually took its toll on his health, and the resultant strain on his physical body, which had already endured two severe car accidents, was punishing.<sup>1</sup> The *mandali* at this time were active in seeing to Meher Baba’s needs and wishes, making sure that their Master’s ordeal was no more demanding than it had to be.

For his part, Brabazon would be asked to entertain Meher Baba by reciting to him his ghazals or other of his latest poems. This new task of writing to entertain and thus please his Master became Brabazon’s new preoccupation as a poet. In a statement Brabazon wrote towards the end of the sixties, the extent to which this preoccupation became all-consuming is made evident — “to entertain the Beloved is the only valid reason for a poem. But he is never entertained unless the original idea is shaped in his Shape.”<sup>2</sup> And yet, ironically, it is in Brabazon’s poetry written



during the sixties that we find his own individual and distinctive style reaching its maturity. In a real sense Brabazon's writings of this period reflect something of the dynamics of his relationship with Meher Baba. It shows that Meher Baba gave Brabazon total artistic freedom in his work while Brabazon focused all his poetic skills on pleasing Meher Baba.

Brabazon's recitations usually occurred when Meher Baba would visit and stay with the men *mandali* for approximately three to four hours in the morning in what was called the *Mandali* Hall. In a letter from this period to one of his Australian friends, Brabazon wrote, "believe it or not [Meher Baba has me repeat the ghazals] so that He can memorise them and quote them in 700 years time, just as in this Advent He had been fond of quoting Hafiz!" When recalling this same event on another occasion, Brabazon described it, half jokingly, as an example of Meher Baba's humour.<sup>3</sup> There was one particular ghazal, however, which Meher Baba had Brabazon read over a dozen times — obviously he found it deeply affecting:

The evening pianos have faltered into silence  
— because of love.

The night trumpets have wailed their last notes of violence  
— because of love.

How earnestly we pursue our roles in God's great game  
— because of love.

The freshening dream . . . the kiss, ever new and the same  
— because of love.

Who, if he could hear his own voice, would go on singing  
— because of love?

The end remains covered, else few would make a beginning  
— because of love.

The difference between being pelted with eggs and  
showered with roses — because of love.

Is less one of talent than one's fate-share which time  
discloses — because of love.

We sleep; sometimes we dream; and awaken to a new day  
— because of love.  
A billion years of wayfaring; yet still we don't know the way  
— because of love.

We would not yet even have broken out of the Beast-cage  
— because of love.  
If it were not for God-Man's compassion and holy rage  
— because of love.

Tomorrow is another day for the battle's violence  
— because of love.  
The few remaining hours of the night are for wine and  
silence — because of love.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, every answer to every question in Brabazon's life now converged into these three words: ultimately, he felt bound "because of love", and he knew his eventual freedom was assured by Meher Baba "because of love". Even Meher Baba described his life in these terms: he allowed himself to be bound and to suffer in human form, "because of love", so as to release humanity of its ignorance.<sup>5</sup>

Yet for Brabazon, the great paradox, the great "dilemma", in staying with Meher Baba was that in the midst of it all, he was still conscious of his own limited nature. On the one hand, he was aware of Meher Baba's total and unconditional love for him; while on the other, of his own condition of "loneliness and lust". And, surprisingly, it was his Master's love for him which was the hardest to bear.

The most frequent image which Brabazon used in his ghazals to describe this aspect of his experience of staying with Meher Baba was that of being ground to dust. In one of his ghazal couplets, for instance, he writes: "Philosophy will get us nowhere — that's why the Mills were set up. / But it's a long process to dust — and once started, there's no let up."<sup>6</sup> The following extract, written by Brabazon at Meherazad in 1966, gives a revealing sense of his personal experience of this "grinding" love and makes a connection with the theme of the preceding ghazal:

I have been here 7 years now. Seven terrible years of loneliness and lust — and love. It is because of love that I stay here. It will eventually overcome the loneliness and the lust; for the very purpose of life is the overcoming of these things by love. And where could I go anyway where the enemies would not be? True, they could be forgotten in the talk of men and the beds of women but only temporarily; the war would still go on.

The lust and the love have been with me since childhood — the first when I was ten years old . . . ; the second, a few years later when I became aware of beauty in poetry and music and the stars and the changing seasons.

. . . But harder to bear than the lust and the loneliness is the love. I am besieged and made breathless by its beauty; I am broken by its compassion and forgiveness; I am crushed by its immensity filling all space; it is a mill which is grinding me to dust. But it doesn't fill my loneliness nor grind down my lust. It will take its own time. That time may be this lifetime or many lifetimes. Time is incalculable, for time has no real existence. There is only absence and presence, separation and union. Time is way of reckoning duration of absence, incidents of separation. When it pleases Love it will stretch out its hand, [and] the loneliness and the lust will vanish and I will arise from the bitter dream of them and come out into love's morning singing the ancient song which is made new again by each as he awakens from dreaming: I and my Beloved are one.<sup>7</sup>

Yet what allowed Brabazon to happily endure love's "grinding" and even to forget about some imagined future day of liberation was his writing; writing — "because of love" — that named and praised the ways of love. The experience of writing allowed Brabazon to draw inwardly closer to Meher Baba, the Beloved of his Soul; while the new experience in his life, of reading his work to Meher Baba and witnessing his Master's pleasure in his efforts, allowed him to repeatedly confirm that inner connection. This dual occupation of writing for and then reading to Meher Baba kept

Brabazon spiritually alive. It was the one thing he asked Meher Baba not to deny him:

To acquire this body for you, millions of others have I  
burned;  
So there can be no question of my asking for it to be  
returned.

I crave not union, but service: to usefully fill in the days.  
I ask you not to take away my occupation of praise.

I have no complaint at all about having been turned into  
stone —  
So long as I can still sing, no matter how dull the tone.

In order for my soul to become dust at your dear feet  
The stone-crushing must go on until the job is complete.

And I'm all for it: for only pure dust truly sings  
As it awaits the fan of your dress, when you pass, to give it  
wings.

Born of your Song, singing I went out in the long-ago,  
And the stream of my praise for you has never ceased to  
flow.

I have given myself to you, Beloved, but do not deny  
Me the service of praise — for without that love is an empty  
cry.<sup>8</sup>

But not all of Brabazon's "praise" was in the form of ghazals. He tried his hand using other forms, but always his work was read to Meher Baba first before it was ever published; and always it was done "because of love" — in his Beloved's service. For instance, by the mid-sixties he had completed a selection of twenty-four nursery rhymes which he entitled *Four and Twenty Blackbirds* and read them to Meher Baba who was amused upon hearing a couple of the pieces. Brabazon's idea was to write something, based on traditional English rhymes, which would "replace the nonsense that kids are taught".

While some of the resultant poems were child-like, many were over-laden with meaning and lacked an appealing rhythmic quality which is characteristic of popular children's rhymes. However, like his song-lyrics in *Let Us the People Sing*, they were "raw beginnings" and a start in the creation of children's verse of real spiritual value. For instance:

Jack and Jill were man and wife  
Who started to climb the hill called Life  
On the top of which, so said some Seer,  
Was a spring of water cool and clear.

Half way up they began to tire  
Half way up they lost their first desire;  
Jack let go and tumbled down,  
Jill followed closely, each broke his crown.

The moral of the story is,  
It isn't so easy to get real bliss;  
And to go mountaineering without a Master  
Is the surest way to invite disaster.<sup>9</sup>

With the increased circulation of his poetry, Brabazon began to receive correspondence from those followers of Meher Baba who were aspiring poets and artists. One such letter came from a young poet in India, Nandi, who asked Brabazon if he could write a Foreword to his first book of poems. Although Brabazon declined the offer he did give some general words of advice to the young poet. In his comments, Brabazon distinguishes between "personal devotion" — which he linked with "personal expression" — and "the art of Poetry", and makes a definitive statement on the struggle involved in "the writing of a good poem":

Now the purpose of a "Foreword" is to praise, or recommend. So I am at a loss to know why a lover of Meher Baba wants his expressions of love for Meher Baba praised or recommended. What is it to him if another praises or condemns his personal devotion to his Beloved? Neither

will bring nearer the continuous Presence [of Meher Baba] which the lover craves.

But if your verses are other than personal expression, if they are first attempts in the art of Poetry, and your desire is to become a poet and perhaps serve Meher Baba's great Cause through this form of art — then you must be prepared for the heartbreak of years of writing, critically examining what you have written, discarding or rewriting again and again. I know of no other way of achieving the almost impossible — the writing of a good poem.

Showing your poems to friends who know nothing about the art of Poetry and accepting their praise, and publishing poems that you have not critically examined, is about the surest way to not become a good poet.

I do not want to discourage you, dear friend, rather would I encourage you to the utmost — for a good poem is a grand thing. But it is always the result of your patient labour and study. Just as one cannot pick up a musical instrument and get music out of it (no matter how great is one's desire to do so) but must practise and study of many years, so it is with poetry — one cannot pick up the instrument of language and get poems out of it without years of practice and study.

If you are gifted, in 10 years you may play the instrument well. In my own case 40 years has not been sufficient.<sup>10</sup>

As part of his own continual learning process as a poet, Brabazon never stopped experimenting with different poetic forms; a point which is confirmed by the variety of poetic forms already present in his published works. Often his experimentation would start as a response to a poem he read and often by a fellow modern poet.<sup>11</sup> Examples of his experimentations during the sixties are five long poems: "A Dream of Wet Pavements", "Elegy for the Young Poets", "The Ballad of the Rhyming Knight", "After the Flood" and "Hymn to God the Man". And again, as usual, these were all read to Meher Baba for his entertainment.

Meher Baba agreed with Brabazon that these poems should be published by a respected literary publisher and not privately, as with his other books of verse. He also told Brabazon to eventually publish his ghazals but not to give out copies until they were published.<sup>12</sup> In the back of Brabazon's mind was the idea that both his ghazals and his long poems needed to be read by a thinking audience and to be reviewed in responsible literary magazines and journals. Most definitely, he did not want what he called an "occult" publisher to be used and his work treated as some "treatise of mysticism". Rather, he wanted his work to be viewed as literature, as attempts at new writing, and thought that the five poems, when suitably published and distributed, could prepare the way for the reception of the ghazals.

In 1966 he submitted one of the five poems, "Elegy for the Young Poets" for the Greenwood Prize offered by The Poetry Society of London. The poem was acclaimed by the judges to be by far the best longer poem submitted. Eventually, the full collection of long poems did get published in 1971 by the John F. Kennedy University Press under the title *The Word At World's End* — a title which alludes to William Morris's Victorian romance *The Well at the World's End*. The fact that the poems deal with sociopolitical issues also links them to Morris's writings.

In the following selection of verses from the first poem in the collection, "A Dream of Wet Pavements", we can see Brabazon experimenting with a tightly controlled form and hard-hitting imagery to create a confronting satirical work which openly attacks and exposes the underbelly of a society built upon power-hungry ideologies. As a work it belongs to the prophetic tradition of poetry and combines characteristics found in the writings of the Old Testament prophets like Amos with that of Bob Dylan. It is a powerful call from within the social wilderness of our times to return to God, and it is sounded with the unrelenting rhythmic force of a modern protest song, something Dylan might sing with a driving rock-beat. For example:

Thieves, with all the delicate graces  
of shaven chins and double faces,  
are brought back from minor disgraces  
to occupy the highest places.<sup>13</sup>

or:

Big Fist's con-men, puff-cheeked, slit-eyed  
as swine in sty, have multiplied  
beyond pig comfort. They trot-slide  
in the cool evening in their pride.

Pig snouts held high like flags, they glide  
so smoothly and so satisfied,  
and bow and smile, as they trot-slide,  
grunt greetings that are grunt-replied.<sup>14</sup>

or:

The poet laureate, they decide,  
shall be he who has best supplied  
them with their grunts, squeals, versified  
in meters matching their short stride.<sup>15</sup>

But as well as presenting these images of corruption and  
gluttonous self pride Brabazon sounds a note of hope; gives the  
reader an impulse for a deeper searching to take place:

Beneath all this which is or seems,  
behind the crude electric screams  
which wet pavements shape into dreams,  
Self floweth in perennial streams.<sup>16</sup>

It is impossible to convey the magnitude and sustained force  
of this work which extends for an amazing ninety-five verses.  
Incredibly, Brabazon does not release the tension in the work  
until the last word in the last verse of the poem and does so in  
a heart-piercing manner. In the final verses, leading up the last  
verse, Brabazon closes his dreadful "night-song":



I close my song — the night is spent  
    where patient rats gnawed tired cement  
    and virgin veils were rudely rent  
    and axes slew the innocent:

From which the speakmen made much hay  
    while buds of girls sang the roundelay,  
    ‘The WIDE SMILE for the Better Day’ —  
    the line that Big Fist knew would pay.

A night-song in an iron night  
    now sicklied over with the light  
    of broken trumpets’ desperate flight  
    that once blazed with fluorescent might —

From which wet pavements shaped dim dreams  
    that whispered, There is more than seems:  
    behind, beneath our fitful gleams  
    there flow perennial love-streams.<sup>17</sup>

In the next, the second-last verse, the reader is given a scene: a high plateau where the dawn breaks on desolation and remoteness, where even vultures, the birds of death, cannot fly but are condemned to “roam”:

The dawn breaks for us on a high  
    plateau beneath a cold, glass sky  
    where even vultures do not fly —  
    to roam like beasts with wordless cry.<sup>18</sup>

After being stunned by this surreal scene, at the beginning of the last verse, the reader is presented with possibly one of the most stark depictions of the law of karma ever written. What follows and completes the verse is Brabazon’s piercing blow — an image of the suffering Christ, the God-Man, trudging across humanity’s cold heart. The last word of the verse, “Cross”, breaks the relentless rhyming pattern of the poem in a way that is analogous to how God-Man breaks the relentless bonds of karma through his suffering. What is left is a chilling silence:

The emptiness is a steel vice  
which holds us till we pay the price  
our lives have fixed. Across our heart's ice  
God-Man stumbles with his huge Cross.<sup>19</sup>

The second of these long poems, "Elegy for the Young Poets", which may have been triggered by Nandi's letter to Brabazon, thematically follows on from the preceding poem. The opening verses with its call to young poets to "listen to their heart's tone" is a call for them to listen to their deeper "Self [which] floweth in perennial streams":

The young poets go by, on coral feet they go,  
So cruelly slow —  
Searching the corners of their eyes for definitions;

Searching for freedom amongst the prohibitions,  
Greeting vague recognitions,  
Not yet having learnt to listen to their heart's tone.

For the meaning of things is in that word alone  
Which was sown  
In the heart when the Word first escaped God's lips.<sup>20</sup>

And again, "Big Fist" appears, the exemplar of greed and corruption manifest in self-serving regimes:

On antennae that Big Fist pokes up into the skies  
The young poets have hurt their eyes.  
They listen for the Voice of the Dawn —  
but hear only the Brute

Tramping the night and devouring the fruit.<sup>21</sup>

Then later:

The people, yes; but science has betrayed the people.<sup>22</sup>  
And God is merely a steeple  
Of a church where a priest thumbs through his brief.

The young poets have not been trained to carry  
    burdens of grief.  
They seek relief  
In every new twist of thought and feathered theory.

Time counts down the hour to the zero of bankruptcy.  
Gut-god Democracy  
Discusses peace with the brain-spattered Communist Heel.

The armies of Big Fist march out like spokes in a wheel  
Crying, 'Panchasheel! Panchasheel!'  
Big Fist's mother quietly broods and wonders and frets.<sup>23</sup>

Once more, Brabazon brings this theme, as in the first poem, back to the God-Man and specifically, his suffering for all humanity. The following sentence, "God-Man enters Seclusion — / He must suffer for us the full sum of our violence" — is a reference to Meher Baba's present period of seclusion at Meherazad and his "universal work". The poem, as in "A Dream of Wet Pavements", finishes in an arresting manner:

Big Fist has taken to doing somersaults and head-stands  
To renew his glands.  
The young poets study metaphor and allusion.

Man has become a sickness, a haemorrhoidal protrusion  
Of himself. God-Man enters Seclusion —  
He must suffer for us the full sum of our violence.

Naked within each heart bearing all the pain and  
    defilements  
He stands in his perfect Silence.  
His sweat is upon his body as a million lashes.

Something splashes  
On my hand. I look up. The night  
Is a cave through which the moon races.<sup>24</sup>

The next poem in this quintet, "The Ballad of the Rhyming Knight", breaks the intensity of the first two poems with its comical

passages and its crazy juxtaposition of images and ideas which jump across historical time frames. For instance:

The Knight rides very earnestly  
To slay the badmen one, two, three.  
Milkmaids, the fairest in the country,  
Dance with Krishna beneath a tree.

William lands at Hastings town;  
Harold with arrow in eye is down.  
The referee counts verb with noun  
And Joe Louis retains the crown.

Columbus sails West to come East;  
But Ericson, L., got there first.  
Psychologists have taped the Beast.  
Desire for life is Tishna (Thirst).

The Sower keeps going out to sow  
A crop that Tax, not he, shall mow.  
They drive cars fast — but Fangio  
Scooped five years' Grand Prix in a row.<sup>25</sup>

But there is a punch line, again in the following closing verses of the poem, in which Brabazon suggests that the "Knight", who is guided by love for his "Lady", is on the right path as he travels through a world of happenings and ideas, as conveyed in the poem's bizarre juxtaposition of such things:

The Knight rides on with rhymed lay  
On lips, for lips are all his pay:  
Two lips, two eyes, hair like mown hay  
And breasts as fleece on shearing day.

He rides and sings, and hobble-chains  
Jingle along the leafy lane;  
He rides for love, and love restrains.  
Panchakosh subtract — Atman remains.

He rides and rhymes and sings his say  
To arbored Lady — he sings when they  
Shall meet in bed to love and pray.  
The knight is not far from the Way.<sup>26</sup>

The fourth poem in the collection, “After the Flood”, is a soliloquy in which one survivor from amongst a group of others, talks openly to God. The survivor’s utterances are a mixture of condemnation and praise, but through it all one can sense Brabazon attempting to reach out through his words to comfort his presently suffering Beloved. The following lines come after the depiction, in the opening of the poem, of a group of survivors coming together “after the fall of the cities” and gathering “together in silence / in an open place / in a new morning / empty / but for the sun / newly risen out of the ocean.”

And one found voice for all of us:  
We have to admit, God, that you did the right thing.  
We had become loused-up. A man’s word  
Had the stink but not the weight of his turd.  
We had forgotten, every son-of-a-bitch of us, how to sing.  
What is a man until he has been drowned  
And has risen again from the flood-of-you?  
With a river of song in his mouth, has found  
His own shape in the image of the blood-of-you?  
In everything we had been wrong.  
We did not believe that God-Man was your face,  
That in his Word was the total Grace —  
Already present in the Creation Song.  
We had lost the gift of high decision.  
We had conceived that tomorrow was merely  
today’s revision.<sup>27</sup>

Towards the end of the poem, Brabazon makes his final comments on “Big Fist” whose existence, he concludes, could not have been possible if it were not for “our unlove”:

We knew it was all a dirty trick  
Played on us by Big Fist and those who licked  
His shoes. So — but his number-one side-kick  
Was our unlove. We for ourselves baited  
The rat-trap of cities, and arranged for our souls to be crated

---

Leaving fair Earth for the men she long had waited.

We were men with broken feet on betrayed journeys —  
Alone in companies under a cold glass sky,  
Wordless, like that of beasts was our cry —  
Into the last days of the Great Heart-freeze.<sup>28</sup>

The final poem, “Hymn to God the Man” is a work of pure praise and occurs in Brabazon’s poetic sequence of events, when God speaks his “infinite Word” in the frozen heart of humanity: “the same Primal Word which stirred / in the Womb of the Great Dark / and one spark of which / issued as all the blazing suns / in which were hidden Earth / and the seed of men — the to-be-perfect ones.”<sup>29</sup> The poem opens with the following lines which celebrate the defining attributes of the God-Man — “Whole God: Perfect Man” — and brings to mind his role as the one who suffers for humanity’s “unlove”:

Beloved God,  
All the earth is singing you  
In the impermanent materials of stone, leaf and heart:  
Singing you, yearning, leaning towards  
Your reaping.

God-the-Father-the-Son of yourself:  
Whole God: Perfect Man.  
Cherisher of the sap in all things;  
Destroyer of the worn-out, the false of all things;  
Releaser of the love in all things, which,  
Locked in the prison of heart, in leaf and stone,  
Raises itself in longing towards your reaping.

You are the perennial and glorious Avatar,  
The human and lovely Rasool,  
The sudden and beautiful Christ,  
Who stoops to Man-state, and walks the earth  
Carrying the Cross of our violences,  
Of our little stupidities of progress  
To other than God — our own perfect Self state — <sup>30</sup>

During the latter years of the sixties, when Brabazon was continuing to entertain his Beloved with his latest poetry, Meher Baba's health started deteriorating evermore rapidly. It seemed that the strain of his inexplicable "universal work" was demanding what little remained of his physical stamina.

During the last days of January 1969, Meher Baba's "body manifested severe spasms" which he said was his form of "crucifixion".<sup>31</sup> And then, on the last day of this month, around noon, he suffered a most severe spasm, during which time his pulse rate fell to nothing and he stopped breathing. For all the gathered *mandali*, the unthinkable had occurred, their Beloved was no longer physically present with them. As can be imagined, their minds were filled with a great sense of loss mixed with bewilderment as if the world had suddenly stood still. Eruch Jessawalla, one of Meher Baba's closest *mandali*, tried to revive his Master through mouth to mouth resuscitation for nearly half an hour, with Brabazon and another *mandali* member, Bhau Kalchuri, relieving him when he became periodically exhausted. In the end it was to no avail, Meher Baba never regained physical consciousness.

Although this was a tremendous shock, the men *mandali* were still able to compose themselves enough to realise the urgent need to inform all of Meher Baba's followers, world-wide, as to what had happened. To this end, they gathered in Brabazon's room to discuss the wording to be used to announce this shattering news. The final statement, which Brabazon helped to compose, declared the loss of Meher Baba's physical presence at the same time as it affirmed his universality:

Avatar Meher Baba dropped his physical body at twelve noon 31st January at Meherazad to live eternally in the hearts of all his lovers. Beloved Baba's body will be interred at Meherabad, Arangaon on 1st February at 10 a.m. in the tomb he had ordered to be built long ago.

Brabazon was one of the *mandali* who took Meher Baba's body to his tomb at Meherabad. It lay, without decomposing, in an open crypt for seven days during which time thousands of his lovers and followers came to see his face for the last time.



## II. Now We Face the Ocean

Later in 1969, with no further role to play in India as his Master's poet, Brabazon returned to Australia. He took up residence at Avatar's Abode, the property on Kiel Mountain in Queensland, and stayed in the house in which Meher Baba stayed in 1958, now called Baba House. There was no hot water and only basic amenities but Brabazon never seemed to bother about these things and happily, as he had always done, continued with his writing. But now he had to face the crushing reality of living and writing in a world without his Beloved's presence in it.

In June 1969, at the eleventh anniversary celebrations of Meher Baba's visit to the property, he gave his first talk since his arrival:

I have returned to Australia after staying with God for ten years; and I bring you the most astonishing news: God has died, and is most living. . . . By night [on 31st January 1969] the news of the Beloved's passing had reached lovers across the world. In the older ones, when the shock passed, there was a great surge of love and joy. In the young who had not seen their Beloved's Man-form a new heroism was born to support their love, and the first line of a new poetry was written: 'Now we face the Ocean'.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the audience who heard these words were young people who had only recently found out about Meher Baba. In Meher Baba's writings they discovered someone who directly answered their spiritual needs with a sense of rightness, and whose exposition on the meaning and purpose of existence, extended and gave form to their vague surmising. Hearing Brabazon speak after returning from living with Meher Baba, was for them a moment of confirmation and inspiration.

In turn, Brabazon saw in the ever-growing number of young people who visited Avatar's Abode, Meher Baba mysteriously present and active in their hearts. And just as Brabazon had written to entertain Meher Baba in India, he now continued to do the same thing in Australia; but this time, it was to entertain his Beloved in the hearts of these inquiring young people who kept turning up at his door.

Through his experience of staying with Meher Baba for ten years, Brabazon knew, first-hand, what pleased his Master, and it was this kind of direct knowledge which he was able to impart to others. For instance, Brabazon was present when Meher Baba responded disapprovingly to the growing and indiscriminate use of drugs amongst young people in the West, who misguidedly thought that the use of drugs could facilitate spiritual enlightenment. Through witnessing these events, Brabazon was able to speak with authority to young people on Meher Baba's attitude to drugs, and even wrote a small pamphlet on the issue for their benefit. In part he wrote:

No mind-changing or consciousness-expanding drug can help one step on the way to the inner Self because mind does not have to be changed nor does consciousness have to be expanded, for as soon as the soul emerged from the processes of evolution as a human being it had full consciousness — full, fully evolved and complete in every respect and it cannot be 'changed' or 'expanded', increased or decreased.

What has to happen now in each one is that mind has to be emptied of all the impressions which colour consciousness and cause one to identify with what one is not. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Brabazon was also active in establishing the anniversaries of Meher Baba's two visits to Australia as times of remembrance and entertainment, and wrote plays and songs to be performed on these occasions.<sup>3</sup> He always encouraged followers of Meher Baba, both within Australia and overseas, to write their own

plays, poems and songs and to perform them to others — to entertain the One Beloved resident in the hearts of each other.

He was particularly interested in hearing his ghazals set to music and felt that when sung with genuine feeling, the ghazals offered an artistic experience that was entirely new to Western audiences, and one which could serve to revitalise Western spiritual music. Surprisingly, although Brabazon wrote songs he never set any of his own ghazals to music.

Each year, after the June anniversary in Queensland, Brabazon would travel by train to Sydney with a small group of performers to be present at the August anniversary celebrations held at Meher House, Beacon Hill. Under his guidance the anniversaries became vital, performance-centred events in which people wanting to know more about Meher Baba were invited to attend. Brabazon did not want them to become staid and formulaic like some church service but rather heart-felt and challenging, like good art; something which sought to awaken and satisfy the inherent need, within each member of the audience, for beauty and truth. In his view, the anniversaries should inform an audience about Meher Baba, as the living embodiment of beauty and truth, in a way which appealed both to the heart and the mind.

Since his arrival in Australia, Brabazon was requested to give public talks and make television and radio appearances, but always declined these offers. He was invited, for instance, in 1970 by an American Meher Baba follower, Harry Kenmore, to speak in New York and then to tour the country. In his letter of decline to Kenmore, Brabazon makes mention of the deterioration in his health and what, unbeknown to him, was the early signs of Alzheimer's disease. Besides stating the fact that he had only "minimum physical energy" he listed that he was now suffering from deafness, memory lack and from an overall dullness in his mental capacities and concluded: "If I were a young man with mountains of love and rivers of energy it would be a different matter; but I am not".<sup>4</sup>

In 1972, in response to another American, Irwin Luck, who wished to film Brabazon speaking about his life as a poet living with Meher Baba he replied: "But I have already recorded these

things in my books . . . in great detail, and with the publication of the ghazals . . . the record will be complete. By “complete” I mean complete. I will have said completely what I have to say — and filming me speaking passages from these books will not add one iota to the record.” And then, in a comment which could possibly be read as another early sign of Alzheimer’s disease: “For some time now, whenever I try to read, or to talk about Baba, Baba shuts my mouth. It seems that He Himself is satisfied with the record I have made.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1973, Brabazon returned to Meherazad and stayed for a couple of weeks. In contradiction to his above statement, he spoke fluently on the pressing issue, at least for followers of Meher Baba, on the meaning of Meher Baba’s physical passing. He talked about his Master’s “covering of his form” as ultimately an act of compassion:

Four years ago beloved Baba covered his form with the veil of his compassion so that we would be led (or be driven) to seek him in the reality of himself instead of clinging to him in the Shape of his love. He came that we might see and he went so that we could know. By his act of dropping his body he showed that he expected us to seek his reality, and he challenged us to measure up to his expectation.

. . . He was a drop of wine on the rim of the cup of our carousing that we desired greatly to taste, but which slipped down into the body of the ruby liquid so that we would not taste one drop but drink the whole cup.

He was a Silence that broke into thousands of melodies and then returned to itself so that we could sing and dance and Be Happy along the roads to his door.

He was himself, the Original Unique One, who eternally is, giving each of us his own unique experience of him — thus proving that the ultimate Realisation of each will be unique.<sup>6</sup>

In 1977, Brabazon again returned for a short stay at Meherazad. At the end of this particular trip he suddenly became seriously ill and was taken to the Mumbai hospital. He was running a very high temperature, having four antibiotic injections daily, and lost his appetite completely. The doctors were baffled as to what he was suffering from but, as a result of his illness, a speech defect which he had in the past, began to recur and continued to recur after he returned to Australia.

Despite his return trips to Meherazad, Brabazon was content to be living once more in Australia. Indeed, all through the seventies, he felt Meher Baba's unmistakable and spiritually refreshing presence on Avatar's Abode and for this reason, saw the property as a spiritual treasure for all seekers after truth:

Avatar's Abode is a stopping place on the road to the Beloved, for he stopped here on the road to our hearts and took over the lives of those who came and gave themselves to him. The place was acquired at his request and he gave it the name it bears.

... Your destination is your own heart in which the Eternal Ancient One lives, but because Avatar Meher Baba the all-loving One stayed here, the perfume of his love may refresh and strengthen you on your way ...<sup>7</sup>

Also, during this period while living at Avatar's Abode, Brabazon saw the publication of several of his works: *The Word At World's End* (1971); *In Dust I Sing* (1974), his first collection of 150 ghazals; *Four and Twenty Blackbirds* (1975); and *The Wind of the Word* (1976), his poetic autobiography in which he makes the following general observation. The last sentence of this quote recalls to mind Brabazon's ancestral family motto, "My Life is Devoted", but in his case "... Devoted to Love":

Neither the horse nor the tractor  
neither the buggy nor the motor-car  
neither the township nor the city  
neither the piano and fiddle nor the sophisticated band  
neither the oral yarn nor the written book matter.

*All that matters is the love  
with which one does what one does —  
the love and the song in one's words.<sup>8</sup>*

Brabazon's final work, published in 1978, *The Silent Word: Being some Chapters of the Life and Time of Avatar Meher Baba* [1894-1922], marked another new form of writing for him: a prose biography. In its introduction he sets the stage for the reader, by presenting a vision of the God-Man's eternal presence as the One who "became as soon as we were". It is a deep and prophetic piece of writing and while it is one of the last pieces he was to write and publish, it exhibits all the features which characterise his best work: directness, economy and readability. But most of all it affirms his personal and unswerving conviction in the eternal presence of the God-Man — "the same One God-Man, the same Waiting One" which people have sought from time immemorial and the One which he found, in his lifetime, as Meher Baba:

There was a time when God-Man was not. Neither was anything. There was only the eternal Is-state of God. He became as soon as we were; and having come, he will never leave us. If we seek to live wisely or abandon ourselves to folly, if we live and serve others or remain in the cold prison cells of ourselves, *he is with us*. He is with us whatever we are doing; there is nowhere else he can be: he is with each one of us till the end of each one's little world.

Because we cannot understand his time-scale of timelessness we speak of his coming to us and his going away. But there is nowhere from which he may come: he is always here — standing outside the doors of our hearts, knocking so discreetly in case we are not ready to be disturbed. And when we do open to him and he sees the drunken riot going on inside he silently withdraws. His seven hundred years' instant [minimum period between Avataric advents, according to Meher Baba] will pass in an instant and he will knock again.

He comes his not-coming — just as the sun rises its not-rising. The sun's rising is only because the earth turns about

it; it is always where it is “waiting” for each piece of earth to receive its light. So, beloved God-Man is eternally where he is — here with us. If we could really grasp this we would become Self-realized instantly and remain where we are — neither coming in fresh birth nor going in another death. And this experience requires nothing but his ever-present Grace in his ever-present person — and for our hearts to be empty when he knocks.

In the instant of his knocking and our opening and his withdrawal and his coming in, well-pleased with the spotlessness of our house, is contained the whole drama of our existence from the beginningless beginning of things, and the entire love game of the Lover and the Beloved: he as lover seeking a beloved through whom to realize his love-nature; we as lovers so greatly desiring to pass away into him that we allow our houses to fall into ruin and we become dust dancing before the threshold of his beautiful feet.

Time ceases. The world’s tomorrow is but an extension of the false dream which was yesterday, and today was our possessing and nourishing it.

God-Man is always the same One God-Man, the same Waiting One in a change of dress with a new name, crucified, playing his flute, gently knocking on our doors. We know this. We know he is the indescribable Beloved who *is* before the world was; who waits for a spark of love in our hearts to be blown by the breath of devotion into a broom of flame with which to sweep out the strangers who for ages have been devouring our substance; who smiles as our neglected houses fall into dust (and who laughs when empires crumble in ruins).<sup>9</sup>

In the following year, 1979, after the publication of this statement Brabazon was invited to present some of his work at the highly-regarded Poet’s Festival at Montsalvat in Eltham, Victoria. The Festival venue was not far from the city of Melbourne where Brabazon first discovered artistic beauty some

fifty years earlier when witnessing Anna Pavlova dance, and later struggled as a musician, painter and poet. In a letter to the organisers he wrote, in part, that he was very pleased to receive the invitation, that he would like to attend, but would not be able to personally read his poetry. It seems, by this stage, that Brabazon had simply lost confidence in his ability to speak in public:

... I am an old man with forty years of work behind me; and although still intensely creative cuts a rather foolish figure when he takes to the platform. (The old man for reflection the young man for battle.)<sup>10</sup>

Regrettably, due to some last-minute changes, Brabazon was unable to attend the Festival. However, in 1980 he did travel to Melbourne, but this time, it was to make contact with his brother Cyril who was suffering from ill health. Cyril, who had not seen Brabazon since the forties, was at the time living in a nursing home and could not believe his eyes when his brother appeared; he thought he had died. Cyril informed Brabazon that he had been feeling very isolated, until his arrival, as their other brother Dennis had only recently passed away. Out of his loving concern for Cyril, Brabazon made some tentative plans whereby he could move to Avatar's Abode and live with him, but these never eventuated as he died soon after Brabazon had returned to Queensland.

In 1981 Brabazon was sent a copy of *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaloddin Rumi* by Annemarie Schimmel and was thrilled to find that the author made mention of *Stay With God*, calling it "a modern mystical epic".<sup>11</sup> This was a significant moment for Brabazon for it was the first time that his work had been acknowledged by a highly regarded international scholar. It was the sort of recognition which he always wished his work might receive, for it exposed his writing to an audience who already knew something about what he was talking about. It also raised the possibility that his work may attract more understanding reviews and publicity; something which it had not yet received.



During the early years of the eighties, Brabazon's health gradually deteriorated even more with the advance of Alzheimer's disease and in his last months he was confined to his bed. The community of Meher Baba followers who had settled in the area, since Brabazon's return from India, cared for him until he passed away on 27th June 1984. A simple ceremony marked the occasion of his funeral, songs were sung and poems read. He was buried under some pine trees on the eastern side of Kiel Mountain which looks out across a valley of mostly sugarcane farms to the ocean. A large uncut rock marks his grave site upon which a simple plaque reads: Baba's Poet.<sup>12</sup>

A poet is a man condemned to exile  
Because within his heart there is no guile;

A philosopher without a system's rule  
Having mastered and transcended every school.

A poet is an old man in a child,  
Wise to the world yet easily beguiled;

He goes to bed cold sober every night  
And wakes dead drunk to welcome morning's light.

A poet is a ruin over treasure,  
A deep ocean that none but God can measure;

He eats with dogs, his pillow is a stone,  
He swings on gates of tide, and tunes bees' drone.

A poet is a stronghold you can trust.  
A poet is a bit of singing dust.<sup>13</sup>



*top left* Percy Brabazon.

*top centre* Francis as a young child.

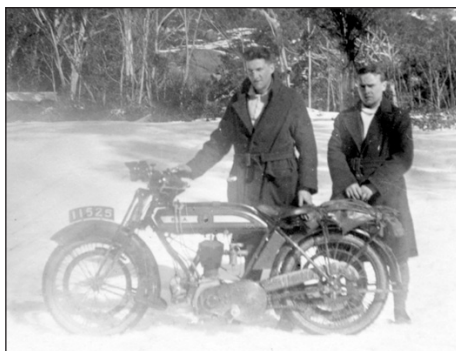
*top right* Florence May Bayst.

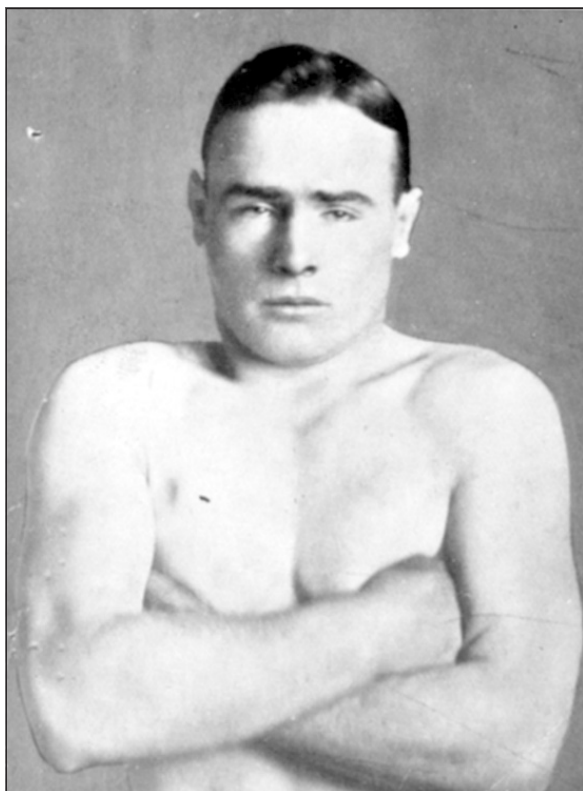
*above left* Baby Bernard Francis.

*above right* The three brothers  
(l to r) Cyril Percy, Dennis George and  
Bernard Francis.

*right* Dennis and Francis standing  
by the motorbike they used to travel  
around the Glenrowan district.

*bottom right* Francis ploughing a field  
on the Glenrowan property.





*top left* Vineyards at Glenrowan which Francis helped plant.

*top right* Dennis in "The Joke" which he rowed down the Murray River in 1924.

*above left* Dennis and Francis building a concrete dam in the late twenties on the "rock and rabbit" farm.

*above right* Francis on horseback in the Warburton Ranges in North East Victoria.

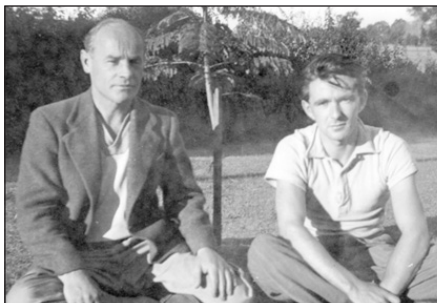
*left* Francis in the early thirties in Melbourne when he was earning money as a professional wrestler.



*top left* Brabazon outside the von  
Frankenberg's home, mid-forties.

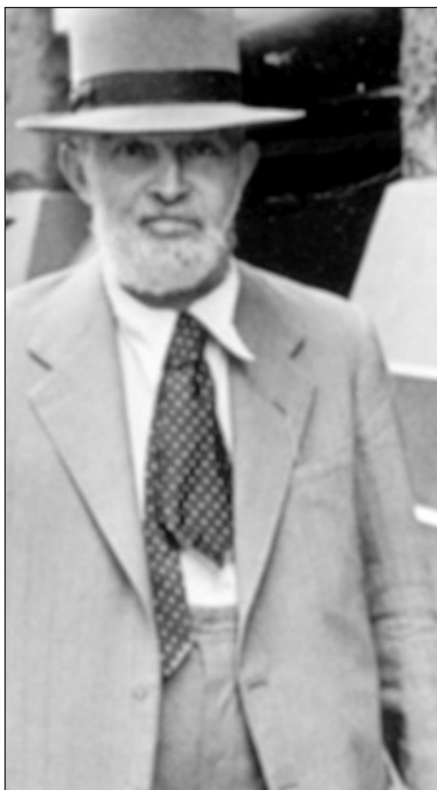


*top right* The house in Camden  
designed by Baron von Frankenberg.



*centre right* Brabazon with the young  
Melbourne artist Oswald Hall.

*right* Baron von Frankenberg.





*above and below* Brabazon meditating,  
Fairfax, Marin County, California.



*above* Brabazon in 1946, about the time  
he completed his collection *One Speaking*  
and travelled to California to meet  
Murshida Rabia Martin.

*below* Sierra Nevadas 1947.







*top left* Brabazon in Yosemite National Park with friends, Jack and Lillian Kendall.

*top right* Folk dancing classes, San Francisco, California.

*above* Shireen Phelps for whom Brabazon wrote the poem, "Shireen: Lament for the Death of a Young Air-Woman."

*right* Early days at Beacon Hill, 1949.







*opposite page — top left  
and right* Brabazon's  
stone cabin which he  
built for himself in  
1949 at Beacon Hill.

*opposite page — bottom  
left and right* Building  
Meher House in the  
early fifties.

*above* Brabazon (third  
from left) with a group  
of volunteer workers  
on the Beacon Hill  
site in the early fifties,  
at about the time he  
completed *Proletarians*  
— *Transition*.

*right* Building Meher  
House in the early  
fifties.







Sparkie Lukas, 1952, Myrtle Beach.

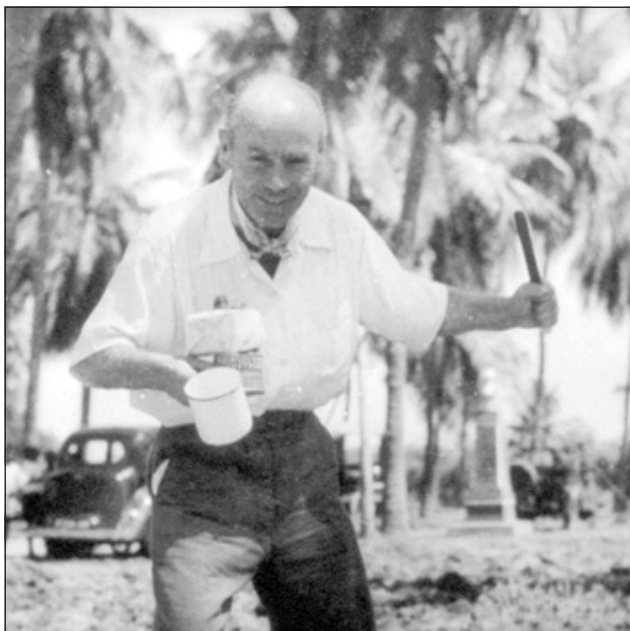


Meher Baba in Meherazad, India, February 1952, just three months before Brabazon was to meet him for the first time in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

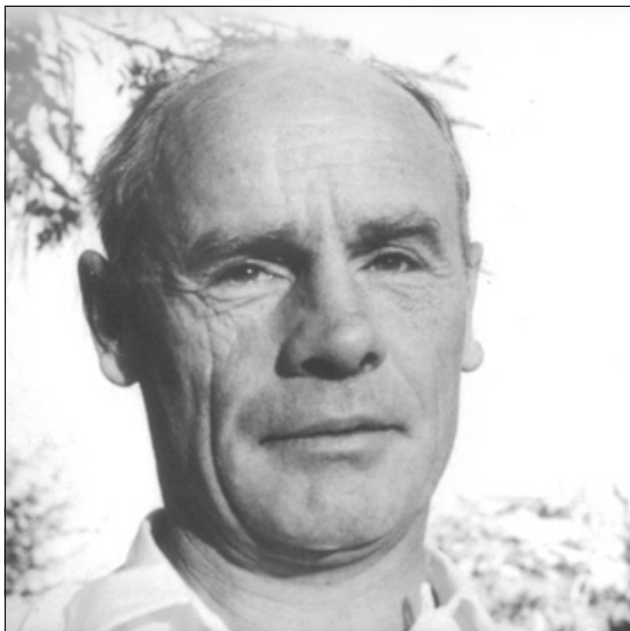


Andhra Tour, February – March 1954, Brabazon standing behind Meher Baba.

*right* Andhra Tour,  
February – March  
1954.



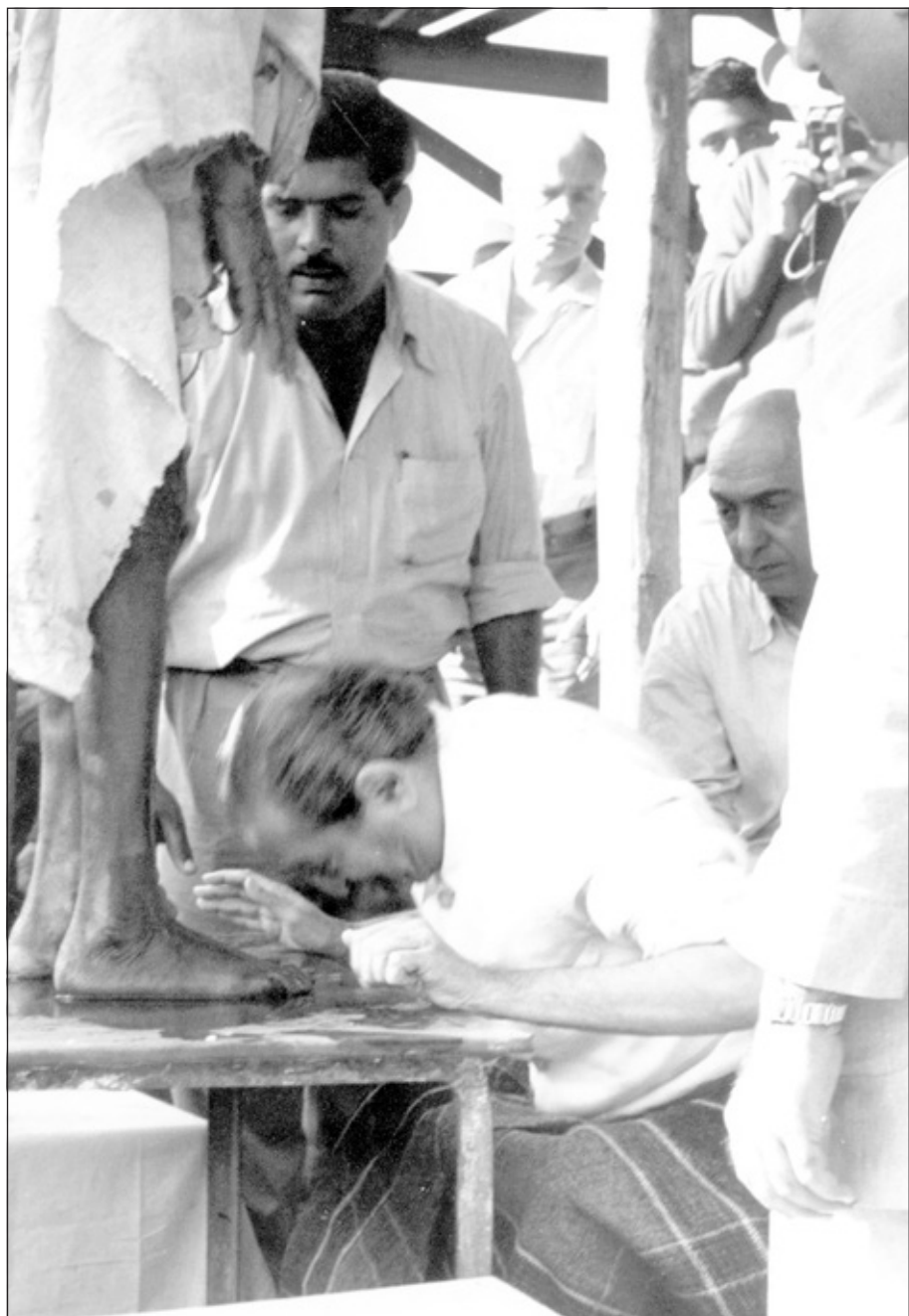
*right* The poet, some  
time in the fifties.





Brabazon (second from left, in front) in India, with Meher Baba, September 1954.

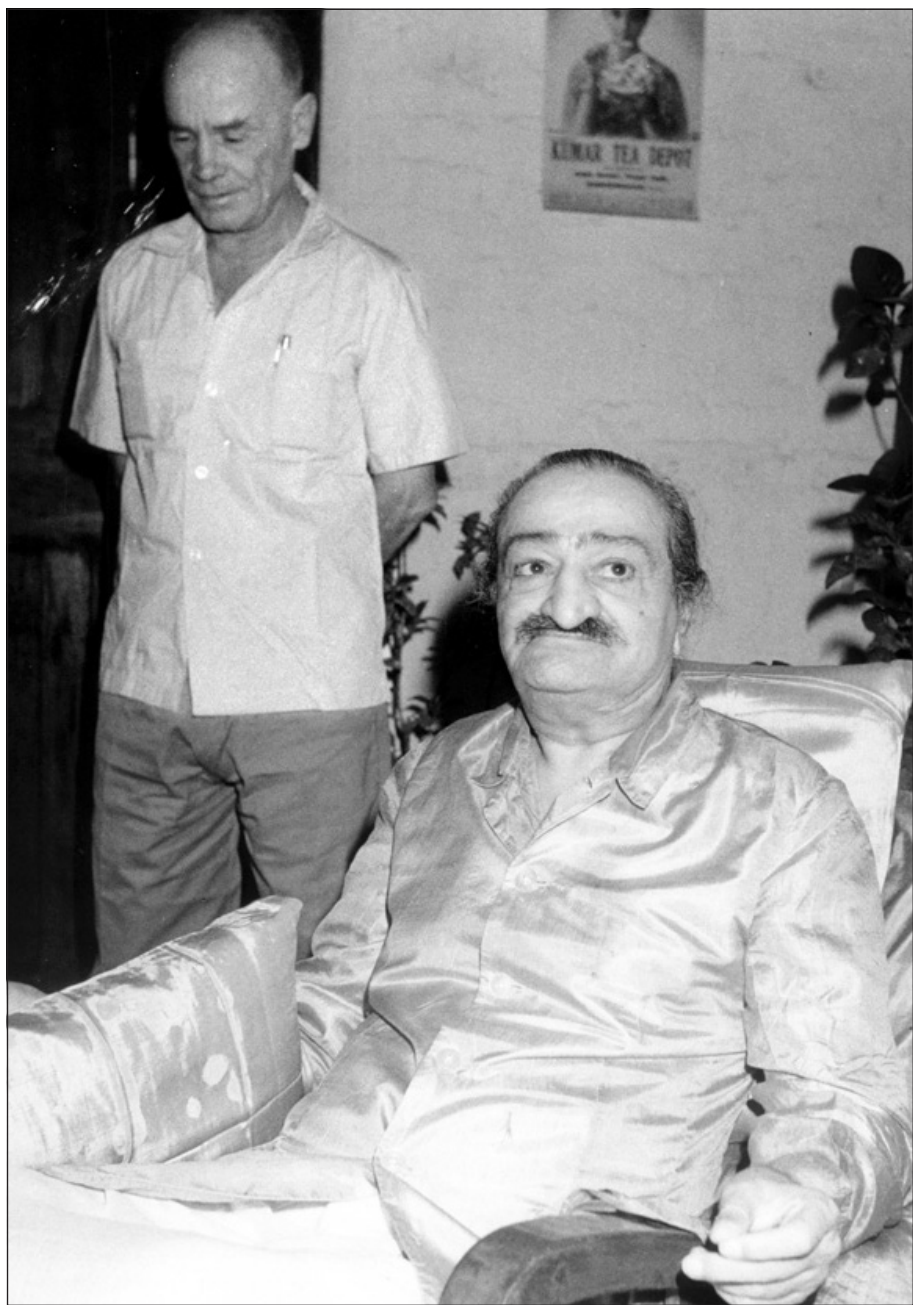




Brabazon (at back, left of centre pole) observing Meher Baba washing and bowing down to the feet of a poor person at Meherabad, November 1955.

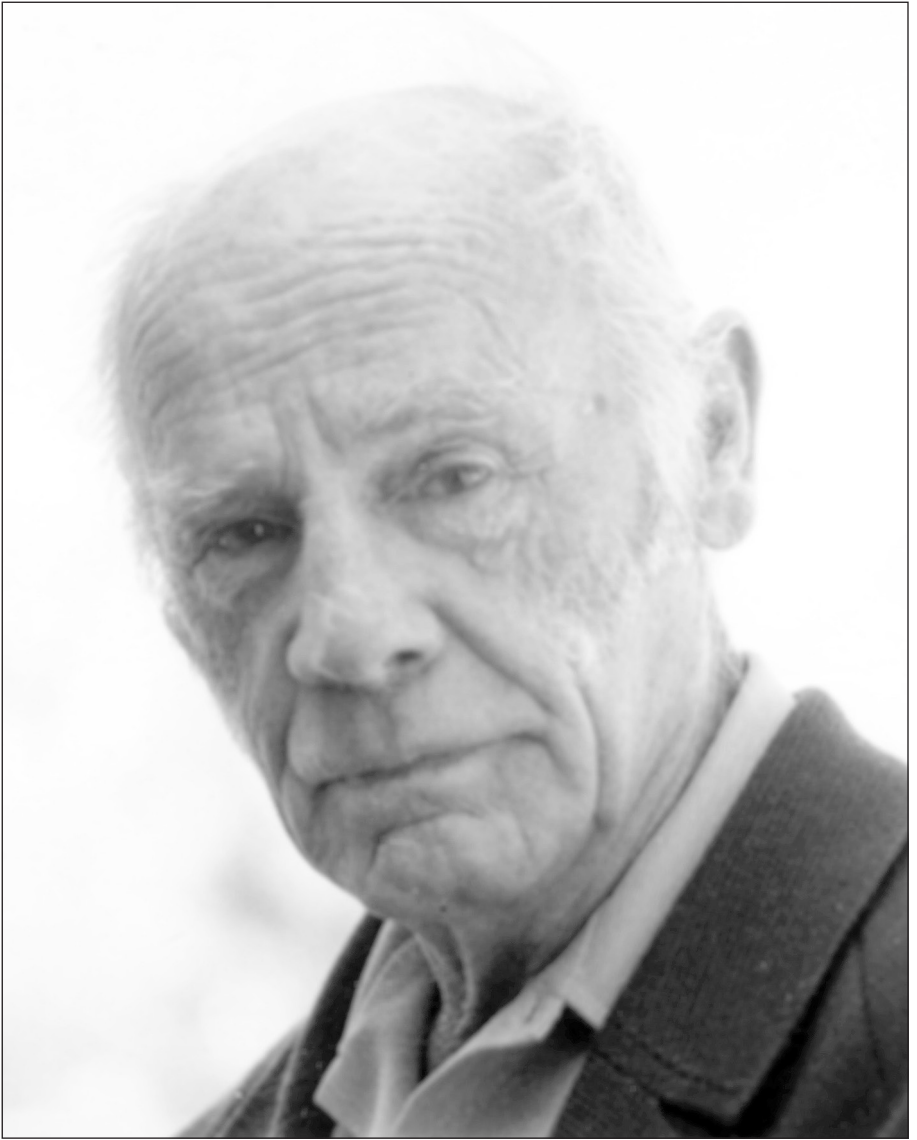


Meher Baba at Pune, 1964, during the period when Brabazon was writing English ghazals.



Brabazon standing beside Meher Baba, Ahmednagar, 1965.





Brabazon at Avatar's Abode in the late seventies.

## Introduction

- 1 Other Australian poets who have attempted to write using the ghazal form include Judith Wright, *A Human Pattern: Selected Poems* (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1990) 234-242; K. F. Pearson, *The History of Colour* (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1991) 78; Philip Salom, *Sky Poems* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987) 50-51; and Kevin Hart, *New and Selected Poems* (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1995) 6-7.
- 2 Ahmed Ali, *The Golden Tradition: An Anthology of Urdu Poetry*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1973) 12.
- 3 In Paul Smith's book on Hafiz he cites over one hundred English publications of Hafiz's poetry, the first was published in 1771. Refer to Paul Smith *Divan of Hafiz* (Melbourne: New Humanity Books, 1986) 242-254. The latest edition of translation is by Elizabeth Gray, *The Green Sea of Heaven: Fifty ghazals from the Diwān of Hafiz* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1995).
- 4 For Brabazon's anthologised works refer to: Judith Wright, ed., *A Book of Australian Verse* (Oxford: UP, 1956) 129; Kevin Hart, ed., *The Oxford Book of Australian Religious Verse* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1994) 18.
- 5 Paul Smith, however, published Brabazon's "A Dream of Wet Pavements". Refer to Paul Smith, ed., *Pie Anthology* (Melbourne: Whole Australian Catalogue Publications, 1974) 50-56. An enthusiastic response to Brabazon's ghazals has come from the literary critic Hector V. Morel who lives in Argentina. Morel admires Brabazon's work and quotes from his ghazals in Spanish. Refer to Hector V. Morel, "Los Poetas Y Sed De Infinito," ["The Poets and their Thirst for the Infinite"] *Anuario Americano Kier* 1991: 166-181.
- 6 The period of Classical Sufism extends from the birth of Mohammed (570 ACE) and ends with the death of Abd al-Rahman Jami (1492 ACE). Refer to R. S. Bhatnagar, *Dimensions of Classical Sufi Thought* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984) xiv.

## Chapter One — Life in England

- 1 For a coverage of the family's history in Ireland refer to Reginald Brabazon, *Memories of the Nineteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1923) 134-137. It is interesting to note that Lord Reginald Brabazon, the 12th Earl of Meath, a philanthropic aristocrat, visited Melbourne and Sydney in 1892, twenty years before Percy Brabazon decided to emigrate to Australia. Also of passing interest is the one famous artist in the family, Hercules Brabazon Brabazon [double name] who was a water-colourist of whom Ruskin is reported to have made the remark, "Brabazon is the only person since Turner at whose feet I can sit and worship and learn about colour". Refer to C. Lewis Hind, *Hercules Brabazon Brabazon 1821-1906: His Life and Art* (London: George Allen & Co. Ltd., 1912) 6.

- 2 Asa Briggs, ed., *William Morris: Selected Writings and Designs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) 36.
- 3 It is worth noting at this point, the extent of Morris's enduring influence on Francis. More than any other work by Morris, Francis was most inspired by his translation of the Norse epic, the *Völsunga Saga*, and agreed with Morris's estimation that this saga "should be to all our race [Northern European] what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks". In Francis's own epic-like poem *Stay With God*, written in the fifties, he alludes to the Völsunga heroes as models of courage and determination. He also in this same work, quotes from Morris's story on socialist morality, *A Dream of John Bull*. Later in 1971, Francis was still considering Morris when he titled a collection of his poems *The Word at World's End* which is a play upon the title of one of Morris's romances, *The Well at World's End*.
- 4 James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night and other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1932) 21.

## Chapter One — On the Land

- 1 Taminick is a small farming town about six and half kilometres from Glenrowan.
- 2 *TWOTW* 14.
- 3 *SWG* 7.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives. In one of his poems written while in India in the sixties, Brabazon recalls "I was a prince when I used to drive a straight shining furrow." Refer to *TBLAIA* 10.
- 5 *SWG* 7.
- 6 His first published poem was "Benevolent Shapes". Refer to *A Comment* Sept. 1941: n. pag.
- 7 *EP* 17.
- 8 *EP* 16.
- 9 Quoted by Dennis in J. Larkins and B. Howard, *Great Australian Book of Nostalgia* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1975) 9.
- 10 *TWOTW* 6.
- 11 *TWOTW* 7.
- 12 *TWOTW* 4.
- 13 Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (Norwich: Pemberton Publishing, 1968) 437.
- 14 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.

## Chapter Two — Discovering Art

- 1 *EP* 6. These lines are in accord with the Australian Jindyworobak poetic tradition.
- 2 *TWOTW* 1.
- 3 Quoted in Brian Elliott, *The Jindyworobaks* (St Lucia: Queensland UP, 1979) 289.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 5 Refer to Edward H. Pask, *Enter the Colonies Dancing: A History of Dance in Australia 1835-1940* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1979) 120.
- 6 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 7 *SWG* 7.
- 8 Brabazon later published a poem entitled "Victoria Market". It is included in Les A. Murray, *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1987) 137.
- 9 *TWOTW* 9.
- 10 *TWOTW* 12.
- 11 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 128.
- 12 Nietzsche 129.
- 13 *TWOTW* 10.
- 14 The Australian writer Alister Kershaw in recalling the thirties and forties in Melbourne commented: "Australian bookshops used to be overloaded with imported literature, no argument about that". Refer to Alister Kershaw, *Hey Days: Memories and Glimpses of Melbourne's Bohemia 1937-1947* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1991) 12. An important anthology for Brabazon at the time was Mark Van Doren's, *An Anthology of World Poetry* (London: Cassell and Company, 1929). Brabazon cherished this book and referred to it as his "bible". Some of the diverse artistic interests which Brabazon pursued while living in Melbourne from the mid-thirties to the early forties included: Polish, German, Italian, and Mexican music; Russian dancing and poetry; French painting and poetry; Chinese philosophy and the art of Japanese tea making; Indian sculpture and the Upanishads; Icelandic and Finnish sagas.
- 15 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 16 In Brian Adams' biography of Nolan, Brabazon is referred to as his friend along with Arthur Reed. Refer to Brian Adams, *Sidney Nolan Such is Life* (Hawthorn: Century Hutchinson, 1987) 18. In Jane Clark's work on Nolan, Brabazon is said to have begun his friendship with Nolan in 1936 and is described as a "... poet, mystic, 'primitive painter', National Gallery of Victoria attendant and owner of a substantial philosophical library". Refer to Jane Clark, *Sidney Nolan: Landscapes and Legends* (The Rocks Sydney: International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1987) 15.
- 17 Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (Ringwood: Victoria, 1981) 25.

- 18 *TWOTW* 12.
- 19 J. W. N. Sullivan, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*. (1927; London: Unwin Books, 1975).1.
- 20 Friedrich Kerst and Henry Edward Krehbiel, eds., *Beethoven: the man and the artist, as revealed in his own words* (1905; NY: Dover, 1964) 104.
- 21 Kerst and Krehbiel 106.
- 22 *EP* 20.
- 23 Haese 38.
- 24 In Haese's study Brabazon is mentioned as belonging to an "outer ring" of Melbourne artists along with Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, John Percival, John Sinclair, Peter Cowan, Reg Ellery, Harry Roskolenko, Clive and Janet Nield, Danila Vassilieff, Martin Smith and Michael Keon who "came and met at Heide", the home of the art patrons John and Sunday Reed. Refer to Haese 276. However, Burke lists Brabazon as a regular at Heide along with Arthur Boyd, Yvonne Lennie, John Percival, Mary Boyd, Danila Vassilieff, and Max Harris. Refer to Janine Burke, *Joy Hester* (Elwood: Greenhouse Publications, 1989) 45. But Brabazon never fully aligned himself with any contemporary school of thought or artistic movement. As a result of his independence he was later and more accurately referred to as "a somewhat shadowy legend among Australian individualists". Refer to Noel Macainsh, *Overland* No. 29, April 1964: 62.
- 25 For an appraisal of the effect of this showing upon the artistic world in Melbourne, refer to Haese 61-65.
- 26 Matthews, as described by Haese, was like Bayliss in that he was an intellectual and understood something about French Modernism. Refer to Haese 21.

## Chapter Two — The Spiritual Search

- 1 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives. Brabazon's picture of gloom is reminiscent of Albert Tucker's stark depiction of Melbourne in the forties especially in his "Images of Modern Evil" paintings.
- 2 For Ramakrishna's life refer to Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, 6th edition (1944; Madras: Shri Ramakrishna Math, 1974).
- 3 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 4 For Swami Vivekananda's complete works refer to Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* 8 vols (1847; Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990).
- 5 This term is similar to the one used by Hazarat Inayat Khan, the spiritual leader of the Sufi Movement which Brabazon was later to join. Inayat Khan's term is "the Spirit of Guidance", which he also calls the "Divine Mind", and writes, "Intuition, inspiration, vision, or revelation, all have the Divine Mind as the Source from whence every kind of revelation

comes". Refer to Hazarat Inayat Khan, *The Unity of World Religions* 2nd ed. (Holland: N. Kluwer-Deventer, 1949) 143.

- 6 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives. These translations were originally published in 1930. Various reprints of these volumes have occurred through the publishers Motilal Banarsidass of Delhi: *The Life of Tukaram* (1980); *The Life of Eknath* (1983); *Bahina Bai* (1985). However the text, Justin E. Abbot and Pandit N. R. Godbole *Stories of Indian Saints* (1933; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), contains stories of all the Maharashtrian Saints from the original six volume collection.
- 7 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives. Verses St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. E. Allison Peers (1933; New York: Image, 1959) 33.
- 8 St. John of the Cross 34.
- 9 Quoted in Roger Lipsey, ed., *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Works* (Princeton: UP, 1977) 203. It is interesting to note in Lipsey's biography that Coomaraswamy was deeply influenced by William Morris (258-264).
- 10 Roger Lipsey, ed., *Coomaraswamy: 1: Selected Papers: Traditional Art and Symbolism* (Princeton: UP, 1977) 18.
- 11 Brabazon had studied Ernest F. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, 2 vols. (1913; New York: Dover, 1963).

## Chapter Two — The Sufi Movement

- 1 A complete set of the writings of Hazarat Inayat Khan is available in 12 volumes published by Barrie and Jenkins: London, reprinted 1973. His autobiography is also available under the title: *Biography of Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan* (London: East-West Publications, 1979). A recent work, H. J. Witteveen, *Universal Sufism* (Melbourne: Element, 1997) gives a useful overview of the Sufi Movement; Witteveen, at the time of writing his work was the Vice President of the International Sufi Movement founded by Inayat Khan. Inayat Khan was also a close friend of the Zen Master Nyogen Sensaki (1876-1958) who was one of the first teachers to introduce Zen to the West. Refer to Nyogen Sensaki and Ruth Strout Mc Candles eds., *The Iron Flute 100 Zen Koan* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1964) 155-165.
- 2 W. D. Begg, *The Holy Biography of Hazarat Khjwaja Muinuddin Chishti* (The Hague: East-West Publications, 1977) 17.
- 3 According to one of Inayat Khan's followers, "by the time he left India, Inayat Khan had received the training in what may be called 'Four School Sufism', which is to say, in the Chishti, Kadri [Qadiri], Suhrawardi [Suhrawardi], and Naqshibandi Schools. The Sufism that was presented in the West [the Sufi Movement] was basically a synthesis of these". Refer to Samuel L. Lewis, *Sufi Vision and Initiation* (San Francisco: Sufi Islamia, 1986) 21.
- 4 Lewis 21 and Jean Overton Fuller, *Noor-un-nisa Inayat Khan* (London: East-West Publications, 1971) 31.

- 5 Fuller 31.
- 6 Richard Burton, *The Kasidah of Haji Abdu El Yezdi: A Lay of Higher Law* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1880).
- 7 Selma Al-Faqih Hassen, "A Short History of Sufism," *Sufism* (San Francisco: Sufism Reoriented, 1971) 4.
- 8 Ali B. Uthman Al-Jullabi Al Hujwiri, *Kashf Al-Mahjub of Al Hujwiri: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (1911; London: Luzac and Company, 1976) 34.
- 9 For a revealing study of the connection between Christianity and Sufism refer to Margaret Smith, *The Way of the Mystics: The Early Christian Mystics and the Rise of Sufism* (1931; NY: Oxford UP, 1978) 153-243.
- 10 Inayat Khan, *The Way of Illumination* (A Guide-book to the Sufi Movement) (Southampton: The Camelot Press, n. d.) 21.
- 11 Inayat Khan, *The Way of Illumination* 27.
- 12 Refer to *Social Gathekas: Verbatim Lectures of Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan to be read at the World Brotherhood Meetings* (Camden: The Australian Branch of the Sufi Society, n.d.) Series 1, Social Gathekas 7.
- 13 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.

## Chapter Two — Art from Mediation

- 1 Brabazon later published this poem in a slightly altered form. Refer to *EP* 29.
- 2 Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: the Tao Te Ching and its place in Chinese Thought* (1934; London: Unwin Books, 1977).
- 3 Waley 44-46.
- 4 Very few of Brabazon's painting have survived, however, some are held privately.
- 5 Janine Burke, *Joy Hester* (Elwood: Greenhouse Publications, 1989) 47.
- 6 EP37.
- 7 Max Harris, letter to the author, 23rd May 1990. After this exhibition Brabazon did not publicly show his work again although he went on painting for several more years.
- 8 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 9 Bhagwan Shree Patanjali, *Aphorisms of Yoga* trans. Shree Purohit Swami (1938; London: Faber and Faber, 1973) 25 and Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga: or Conquering the Internal Nature* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1942 [sixth ed.]).
- 10 Patanjali 25.
- 11 Patanjali 25-26. Similiar ideas can be found within the writings of other spiritual teachers. For instance, the Taoist sage Chuang Tzu (BCE 369-286): "If you put your body in the correct posture and concentrate on the One, the Heavenly harmony will descend upon you. Hold on to your inner awareness and unify yourself with the Absolute. God will lodge within you, and you will abide with *Tao*. This achievement will fill you

with joy. You will be like the newly born calf, gazing but not seeking anything.” Quoted in Chang Chung-yuan, *Creativity and Taoism: A Study of Chinese Philosophy, Art and Poetry* (London: Wildwood House, 1963) 123.

- 12 Brian Adams, *Sidney Nolan: Such is Life* (Hawthorn: Hutchinson, 1987) 156-157.
- 13 Jane Clark, *Sidney Nolan: Landscapes and Legends* (The Rocks: International Cultural Corporation of Australia Limited, 1987) 71.
- 14 *Dikar* is a systematic method of prayer in which the rhythmic invocation of God’s name is united with breathing techniques.
- 15 Oswald Hall was an accomplished painter who won the prestigious National Gallery of Victoria’s travelling scholarship in 1938.
- 16 7STM 16.
- 17 7STM 11.
- 18 7STM 11.
- 19 7STM 12.
- 20 7STM 15.
- 21 Refer to Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984). An interesting Australian poetic version of the tale is by Anne Fairbairn, *An Australian Conference of the Birds* (North Fitzroy: Black Pepper, 1995).
- 22 Farid ud-Din Attar 16.
- 23 7STM 16.
- 24 7STM 16. In this context, Brabazon’s use of the hyphenated word “Human” means “God-mind”.
- 25 7STM 16-17.
- 26 7STM 17.
- 27 7STM 17.
- 28 Bhagwan Shri Hamsa, *The Holy Mountain Mansarovar and the Mount Kailas: Being the Story of a Pilgrimage to Lake Manas and of Initiation on Mount Kailas in Tibet*, trans. Shri Purohit Swami (1934; Delhi: Indian Bibliographies Bureau, 1986). In Brabazon’s work *Stay With God* (1959) a section from Hamsa’s work (179-181) is to be found as illustrative of the bond of mutual love between a devotee and his Master. Refer *SWG* 95-96. It is a curious feature that throughout Brabazon’s life he shows a strong attraction for things Tibetan. In a poem written in the 50s there is the curious line “In New Orleans I came across mention of my Tibetan Glory.” Refer to 7STM 92.
- 29 According to Hari Prasad Shastri, Mahatma Dattatreya wrote only one important text, the *Avadhut Gita*, which Shastri describes as a classic text for “advanced students of Indian metaphysics who have learnt self-control to an appreciable extent, risen above the prejudice of this or that religion, and made the ultimate Reality — Truth — their sole God; it is for those who practice detachment in daily life and are eager to realise God at any cost.” Refer to Mahatma Dattatreya, *Avadhut Gita*, trans. Hari



Prasad Shastri (1934; London: Shanti Sadan, 1968) 7. This description could be seen to summarise Brabazon's own spiritual aspirations at this time of his life.

30 Hamsa 181.

31 Hamsa 181.

32 7STM 11.

### Chapter Three — Camden, N.S.W.

1 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.

2 Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (1914; New York: Schocken Books, 1975) 68.

3 Nicholson 70.

4 For an account of Homer's greatness which *Sheikh* Momin would have shared with Brabazon, refer to the "Discourse upon the Essence and Form of Poetry" in Fabre d' Olivet, *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras: Explained and Translated into French and Preceded by a Discourse upon the Essence and Form of Poetry Among the Principal Peoples of the Earth*, trans. [into English] Nayan Louise Redfield (London: Putnam, 1925) 5-112. It is worth noting that the translator Nayan Louise Redfield was a pupil of Hazarat Inayat Khan and possibly knew Baron von Frankenberg.

5 *Social Gathekas* 2: 1.

6 *Social Gathekas* 2: 2.

7 7STM 19-36.

8 7STM 32.

9 7STM 26.

10 7STM 29. "One Speaking Two" was also published in *Ern Malley's Journal* vol. 1 no. 3 October 1953: 23

### Chapter Three — Fairfax, California

1 Meher Baba, *Discourses*, vol. 1-5 (Ahmednagar: Meher Publication, 1941).

2 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.

3 A *Khalif* like a *Sheikh* is a teacher. For a collection of Samuel Lewis's writings and a biographical survey of his life refer to Neil Douglas-Klotz ed., *Sufi Vision and Initiation: Meetings With Remarkable Beings: Samuel L. Lewis* (San Francisco: Sufi Islamia/Prophecy Publications, 1986).

4 For a selection of his poetry refer to Murshid Samuel Lewis, *Siva! Siva! Crescent & Heart* (San Francisco: Sufi Islamia/Prophecy Publications, 1980).

5 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.

6 Brabazon's connection with these artifacts was through a newly published book at the time. Refer to E. Boyd, *Saints and Saint Makers of New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Laboratory of Anthropology, 1946).

- 7 This is taken from a poem “Dawn through to Sunrise”. Refer to *7STM* 91.
- 8 Later published in *7STM* 51-68.
- 9 *7STM* 64.
- 10 Samuel Lewis, *Siva! Siva! Crescent & Heart* (San Francisco: Sufi Islamia/Prophecy Publication, 1980) 77.
- 11 *7STM* 66.
- 12 *7STM* 59.
- 13 *7STM* 61.

### Chapter Three — Beacon Hill to New York

- 1 Bill Le Page, *The Turning of the Key* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1993) 7.
- 2 While Brabazon returned to Australia as a *Sheikh*, *Sheikh* Momin, under *Murshida* Duce’s directions, was elevated to the higher degree of *Khalif*.
- 3 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 5 John A. Grant, *Practical Spirituality with Meher Baba* (Sydney: Merwan Publications, 1987) 3.
- 6 *7STM* 131.
- 7 *SWG* 97.
- 8 Refer to Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, trans. Barbara Reynolds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 29.
- 9 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 10 *7STM* 92.
- 11 *7STM* 96-97.

### Chapter Three — Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

- 1 Meher Baba was observing silence at the time and had maintained continual silence since 1925. He communicated to those around him either by a series of hand gestures, which his close disciples were able to interpret, or he would spell out his message on a hand-held alphabet board.
- 2 Ivy Oneita Duce, *How a Master Works* (Walnut Creek: Sufism Reoriented, 1975) 84-85.
- 3 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 5 According to Meher Baba, the traditional Sufi term “*fana* means ‘passing-away-in.’ *Fana* has two stages: the first stage of *fana* is the conscious experience of the absolute vacuum state, and the second stage of *fana* or *fana-fillah* is the conscious experience of the ‘I am God’ state”. Refer to Meher Baba, *God Speaks* (Sufism Reoriented, third printing, 1997) 125. And, “The Sufi term *baqa* means ‘abiding-in’. To come down to normal consciousness from the super-conscious ‘I am God’ state and

to experience the ‘abiding-in’ God state would mean getting established in the very life of God. Thus in *baqa* the life of God in a human being is established. This means that in *baqa* man establishes himself as God consciously”. Refer to Meher Baba, *God Speaks* 131.

- 6 Duce 85.
- 7 The “Full Free Life” was the name given by Meher Baba to a particular phase of his work. For some details of this phase refer to *SWG* 47.
- 8 *JWG* 4.
- 9 *7STM* 94.
- 10 *7STM* 99.
- 11 *7STM* 98.
- 12 *7STM* 99.

## Chapter Four — The Pamphleteer of God

- 1 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 2 Francis Brabazon, *Journey with God* (Sydney: Beacon Hill Press, 1954)  
3. But it was not as a student of comparative mysticism that led Brabazon to Meher Baba but as an artist in search of beauty and truth. Brabazon, in clarification of this point, later wrote: “My meeting with Meher Baba was not the result of an interest in mysticism, but was . . . the result of my search for Beauty and Truth. I did for a long time investigate the subject of mysticism and associated with people who were “mystically-minded.” I found out that mysticism has, as art, its own reality and that this reality was something other than what the “mystically-minded” imagined, just as the reality of art is other than what the “art-minded” imagine. Both art and mysticism are legitimate ways to the final reality of Being or Self, but each demands a life exclusive to the pursuit of its own “method.” Each is suited to a particular temperament, and mine is not mystical. . . . An artist’s business is with *this* world, not with some other. . . . Mysticism, as I found out, is in its true meaning the science of the inner planes of consciousness practised according to a certain method.” Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 3 Taken from the rough notes recorded by one of the Sufis present at this meeting.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 5 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 6 Quoted in Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989) 40-41.
- 7 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 8 Quoted in Paul Blackburn, trans., *Proensa: An Anthology of Troubadour Poetry* (Paragon House: New York, 1986) 97.
- 9 Quoted in Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New Directions: New York, 1968) 237.
- 10 William Anderson, “Introduction,” *The New Life La Vita Nuova* by

- Dante (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) 26. For a study of Ibn Arabi's love poetry see Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: UP, 1969) 136-175.
- 11 Refer to Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton: UP, 1969) 136-175.
  - 12 Reynold A. Nicholson, trans., *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi Books I and II* (1926; Gibb Memorial Trust: Cambridge, 1960) 132-133.
  - 13 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
  - 14 *7STM* 116.
  - 15 *7STM* 114-115.
  - 16 *7STM* 101-140.
  - 17 *7STM* 115-116.
  - 18 Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: UP, 1969) 164.
  - 19 *7STM* 116-117.
  - 20 In this regard, it is significant to note that after he returned to Australia in 1952, Brabazon never again used the term *mureed* when addressing other Sufis, nor the title of *Shiekh*, *Khalif*, or *Murshid* for himself; these terms, it seemed, held at this point in his life very little importance.
  - 21 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
  - 22 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
  - 23 *7STM* 96. The McDonalds and the Nandawar are Australian mountain ranges.

## Chapter Four — A Change of Fortune

- 1 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 2 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 3 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 5 *7STM* 127-128.
- 6 Richard W. Watson, *Meher Baba and Sufism: a Personal View* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1972) 14.
- 7 These were "Morning", "Victoria Market", "One Speaking Two" and "Reflection". Refer to *Ern Malley's Journal* vol. 1 no. 3 (1953) 21-24.
- 8 K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1973) 121-123.
- 9 Unpublished verse.
- 10 *7STM* 135.
- 11 Walt Whitman, *The Portable Walt Whitman*, ed. Mark Van Doren, (New York: Viking Press, 1973) 276.
- 12 *PT* 23.
- 13 Translation quoted in Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 24.

- 14 This is the Zarathustra of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Refer to Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., *Modernism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 259. Interestingly, the Australian poet, A. D. Hope, cited Dante as Mayakovsky's "closest [literary] neighbour". Refer to A. D. Hope "Correspondence," *Southerly* vol. 4 no. 2 (1943) 31- 33. Mayakovsky is also similar to Brabazon in his experience of a type of spiritual love through a woman, in Mayakovsky's case it was Lili Brik. Refer to Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Love is the Heart of Everything: Correspondence between Vladimir Mayakovsky and Lili Brik 1915-1930*, ed. Bengt Jangfeldt, trans. Julian Graffy (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986).
- 15 For a selection of Mayakovsky's "agitpoems" refer to Herbert Marshall, ed. and trans., *Mayakovsky* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1965) 148-156.
- 16 Refer to "Greeting of Tane," *The Unwritten Song*, vol. 2, ed. Willard R. Trask (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) 71.
- 17 Dudley Fitts, ed., *An Anthology of Latin American Poetry* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1947) 225-227.
- 18 Fitts 225.
- 19 Fitts xi.
- 20 *P-T* 3.
- 21 *P-T* 18-19.
- 22 Peter Rowan, ed., *Avatar Meher Baba's Messages for the New Humanity* (Avatar Publications: Eltham, 1971) 13.
- 23 Scrutarius, "Book Review," *Walkabout* Vol. XX No. 3 (1954): 46.

## Chapter Four — Andhra Paradiso

- 1 *JWG* 5.
- 2 *JMG* 7.
- 3 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 5 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 6 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 7 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 8 *JWG* 8. These images of "burning skull" and "cauldron of tears" refer to Brabazon's experience from the spiritual practice which Meher Baba had asked him to do when they first met at Myrtle Beach in 1952. When doing this practice for nine months, as prescribed, Brabazon felt his throat becoming parched, his skull becoming heated and he would begin weeping.
- 9 Francis Brabazon, "Journey With God," *The Awakener* vol. 2, no. 1, (1954): 15.
- 10 *JWG* 11.
- 11 *JWG* 12.
- 12 *The Awakener* vol. 2, no. 1, (1954): 15.
- 13 *JWG* 16.

- 14 *JWG* 17.
- 15 *JWG* 17.
- 16 Quoted in Bill Le Page, *The Turning of the Key: Meher Baba in Australia* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1993) 15.
- 17 *JWG* 9.
- 18 *JWG* 9.

## Chapter Five — ABC of Spirituality

- 1 For a full account of this occasion refer to C. Purdom and M. Schloss, *Three Incredible Weeks with Meher Baba* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1979).
- 2 *Three Incredible Weeks* 59.
- 3 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 4 Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954) 75.
- 5 *ABC* 1 (an unpublished manuscript).
- 6 *ABC* 2.
- 7 *ABC* 27.
- 8 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Am I My Brother's Keeper* (1947; New York: Book for Libraries Press, 1967) 19-35.
- 9 Coomaraswamy 26.
- 10 Coomaraswamy 19.
- 11 *ABC* 13.
- 12 *ABC* 14.
- 13 *ABC* 28.
- 14 *ABC* 28.
- 15 *ABC* 30.
- 16 Selected from *ABC* 31-33.
- 17 *ABC* 31.
- 18 *ABC* 13.
- 19 *ABC* 16. This story is taken from A.F. Price and Wong Mou-Lam, trans., *The Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Hui Neng* (1947; Colorado: Shambhala, 1977).
- 20 *ABC* 30.
- 21 *ABC* 29.
- 22 *ABC* 15.

## Chapter Five — Art as a Practice of Devotion

- 1 *7STM* 77-78.
- 2 Later published in a collection of Brabazon's plays. Refer to *ST* 13-58.
- 3 Barrie Reid, letter to Brabazon, 13th September 1955.
- 4 Quoted in Colin Wilson, "Ern Malley," *Ern Malley's Collected Poems* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 1993) 51. Ern Malley was a pseudonym used by

two conservative Australian poets, Harold Stewart and James McAuley in their attempt to trick and ridicule the modernist poetry movement in Australia. Barrie Reid, along with other Modernist Australian poets, was convinced that Ern Malley's work was genuine. The whole episode proved to be the greatest hoax in Australian literary history.

- 5 Francis Brabazon, "Death of a City", *Ern Malley's Journal* vol. 2 no. 2 (1955) 28-31.
- 6 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 7 *7STM* 135.
- 8 This view, as with much of Brabazon's thinking on this matter, was in close agreement with his mentor Coomaraswamy; their comments are also delivered with the same tone of frustration: "If, indeed, the whole of art were to 'express emotions,' [or 'nervous sensibilities'] then the degree of our emotional reaction would be the measure of beauty and all judgement would be subjective, for there can be no disputing about tastes. . . . To equate the love of art with a love of fine sensations is to make of works of art a kind of aphrodisiac. The words 'disinterested aesthetic contemplation' are a contradiction in terms and a pure non- sense." Refer to Roger Lipsey, ed., *Coomaraswamy 1: Selected Papers Traditional Art and Symbolism* (Princeton: UP, 1977) 14. The phrase, "disinterested aesthetic contemplation" can be found in F. R. Leavis's work, *New Bearing in English Literature* (London, 1932) 123.
- 9 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 10 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives. In the Upanishads it states: "Whatever binds mortal with immortal, they [the wise] call truth." Refer to Shree Purohit Swami and W.B. Yeats, trans., *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970) 109. And the manner in which Brabazon attempted to bind "mortal with immortal" can be described as a type of yoga (to "yoke" or "join"). More specifically, in Brabazon's case, it was a form of devotional or love yoga in which the artist was yoked to God through love. In Hindu terms this is called *bhakti* yoga and hence we could interpret the title of his work "Art as a Practice [a yoga] of Devotion [*bhakti*]"'. Elsewhere Brabazon writes: "It should be remembered that Yoga is not particularly Indian. The Sanskrit root of the word is "to be yoked." Cf. Jesus, "My yoke is easy." It also has its forms in Chinese and Christian mysticism. St. Francis [of Assisi] and St. John of the Cross could quite well be called Bhakta-Yogis, or ones who had become yoked to God through love." Refer to Brabazon, *JWG* 25.
- 11 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 12 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 13 For a detailed analysis of this symbol refer to Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Princeton UP, 1971) 12-17.
- 14 Ezra Pound, *Confucius: The Unwobbling Pivot, The Great Digest, The Analects* (NY: New Directions, 1969) 95-188.

- 15 Nasrollah Pourjavady and Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Kings of Love: The History and Poetry of the Nimatullahi Sufi Order of Iran* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978) 40.
- 16 John 1:3-4.
- 17 *ABC* 40.
- 18 Shree Purohit Swami 114. This idea of “Self” is also what Stephen Mitchell understands to be Whitman’s usage in his poem “Song of Myself” i.e., “Song of My Self”. Refer to Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ed. Stephen Mitchell (Boston: Shambhala, 1993) xiv.
- 19 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.
- 20 *7STM* 113-114. This image of “the Bird of the sky” is to be found in Rumi’s poetry: Reynold A. Nicholson, trans., *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*, Books I and II (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust) 25-26.

The bird is flying on high, and its shadow is speeding on the earth,  
flying like a bird:  
Some fool begins to chase the shadow, running (after it) so far that he  
becomes powerless (exhausted),  
Not knowing that it is the reflexion of that bird in the air, not knowing  
where is the origin of the shadow.
- 21 *7STM* 77.
- 22 *7STM* 77.
- 23 The Australian poet Les Murray found this sentence to be the best account he had read “of why we feel joy in getting something right” and described it as “the joy of communing prayer.” Letter to the author 5th September 1988.
- 24 *7STM* 77.
- 25 *7STM* 77.
- 26 *7STM* 77.

## Chapter Six — Poet-Disciple

- 1 *Sahavas* means sharing the company of the Master.
- 2 Meherabad lies fifteen kilometres to the north of Ahmednagar, approximately three hundred and twenty kilometres east of Mumbai. It is a place where Meher Baba worked and is now where his tomb-shrine is located.
- 3 Meher Baba, *Listen Humanity*, ed. D. E. Stevens (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1967) 16.
- 4 Baba 16.
- 5 Baba 16-17.
- 6 John A. Grant, *Practical Spirituality with Meher Baba* (Sydney: Merwan Publications, 1987) 24. For a full coverage of Meher Baba’s visit in 1956 refer to Grant 17-60 and Bill Le Page, *The Turning of the Key: Meher Baba in Australia* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1993) 58-74.



- 7 The play was later published along with other of Brabazon's plays. Refer to *ST* 77-103.
- 8 Refer to Ezra Pound, *Translations* (New York: New Directions, 1963) 213-362. For Waley's translations refer to *The No Plays of Japan* (1921; Unwin 1988).
- 9 Grant 33.
- 10 Le Page 66-67.
- 11 Le Page 67.
- 12 Sardar Sir Jogendra Singh, trans., *The Invocations of Sheikh Abdullah Ansari* (London: John Murray, 1959) 43.
- 13 Meher Baba, trans., "Avatar Meher Baba's Translations of Hafiz of Shiraz," *Pie Anthology*, ed. Paul Smith (Melbourne: Whole Earth Catalogue, 1974) 218.
- 14 In one of Brabazon's ghazal couplets written later in India he writes: "I dwell in dust and sing, and my song is most sweet; / For although I lie prostrate I do not entreat." Refer to *IDIS* 83.
- 15 Grant 51.
- 16 Hafiz, *Selections from the Rubaiyat and Odes of Hafiz the Great Mystic and Lyric Poet of Persia*, trans., A Member of the Persian Society of London (1920; London: Stuart and Watkins, 1970) 93.
- 17 Grant 56-57.

## Chapter Six — Writing in Australia

- 1 *TBOTN* 3.
- 2 *7STM* 135-136.
- 3 Refer to Ezra Pound, *Selected Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967) 67.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 5 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 6 W. F. "Review of 7 Stars to Morning," *Edge* 1956 no. 3.
- 7 Charles Higham, "Three Australian Poets," *Sydney Morning Herald* 26th Jan. 1957:12.
- 8 Evan Jones, "Nice Neighbours and Eccentrics," *Meanjin* Sept. 1957: 325-328.
- 9 Brabazon's selected poem was "Victoria Market." Refer to *EP* 43.
- 10 Judith Wright, ed., *A Book of Australian Verse* (1956; Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1962) 1.
- 11 Wright 3.
- 12 Harold Stewart, *By the Old Walls of Kyoto: A Year's Cycle of Landscape Poems with Prose Commentaries* (New York: Weatherhill, 1981) xxii-xxiii.
- 13 Harold Stewart, trans., *A Net of Fireflies: Japanese Haiku and Haiku Paintings* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1960) 148.
- 14 Stewart, as above.

- 15 Francis Brabazon, "From 'The Stone Wall' a Verse Play," *Under Capricorn* Dec. 1955: 10-14. The use of the word "wall" in both the earlier titles is a reference to the following quote from the Chandogya-Upanishad: "Self is the wall which keeps the creatures from breaking in. Day and night do not go near Him, nor age, nor death, nor grief, nor good, nor evil. Sin turns away from Him; for Spirit knows no sin." Refer to Shree Purohit Swami and W. B. Yeats trans., *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) 109.
- 16 R. F. Brissenden, "Poetry Chronicle" *Meanjin* April 1958: 100-104.
- 17 Grahame Johnston, "Reviews" *Quadrant* vol. 2 no. 3 1958: 92.
- 18 The title itself comes from a line in a poem by the Latin American poet Efrain Huerta "We are in the dawn's sound / on the threshold of wisdom." Refer to Efrain Huerta, "The Sounds of Dawn," *An Anthology of Latin American Poetry*, ed. Dudley Fitts (Norfolk, Conn.: New Direction, 1947) 339-341.
- 19 The *Australian Letters* was a quarterly review of criticism and writing edited by Bryn Davies, Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris.
- 20 Judith Wright, *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1965).
- 21 Wright, *Preoccupations* 73.
- 22 Malcolm Cowley, ed., *Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) xxi.
- 23 Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (Princeton: UP, 1980) 122.
- 24 Hartman 122.
- 25 Walt Whitman, *The Portable Walt Whitman*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) 279.
- 26 Whitman 279.
- 27 Sri Aurobindo's comments on Whitman. Refer to Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1985) 173.
- 28 *SWG* 62.

## Chapter Six — Kiel Mountain

- 1 Bill Le Page, *The Turning of the Key: Meher Baba in Australia* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1993) 105.
- 2 For a full account of Meher Baba's 1958 visit refer to John Grant, *Practical Spirituality with Meher Baba* (Sydney: Merwan Publications, 1987) 92-125, and Bill Le Page, *The Turning of the Key: Meher Baba in Australia* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1993) 110-138.

## Chapter Seven — Introduction

- 1 Francis Brabazon, "There was a Humming," *The London Magazine*, ed. John Lehmann vol. 6 no. 1 (1959): 23.
- 2 *SWG* 9.
- 3 Brabazon letter to, A. C. S. Chari, 26th September 1959.
- 4 John Ciardi was at the time when he made this comment the editor of the *New York Saturday Review* and Professor of Literature at Rutgers University N. J. Refer to Jeanne Robert Foster (American poet), letter to Brabazon 29th July 1960.
- 5 Brabazon, letter to Charles B. Purdom, 17th August 1960.
- 6 C. B. Purdom, *The God-Man: The Life, Journeys and Work of Meher Baba with an Interpretation of his Silence and Spiritual Teaching* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964) 351. Blake's own introductory comments to *Jerusalem* under the section "Of the Measure, in which the following Poem is written", could quite easily apply to Brabazon's approach to *Stay With God*: "When this Verse [*Jerusalem*] was first dictated to me I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakespeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming; to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts — the mild & gentle for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts: all are necessary to each other. . . ." Refer to Alicia Ostriker ed., *William Blake: The Collected Poems* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977) 637.
- 7 Brabazon, letter to A. C. S. Chari, 10th October 1959.
- 8 *SWG* 156.
- 9 Some comments on Meher Baba's involvement with the text are to be found in Robert Rouse, *The Making of a Book* (Woombye: Privately published, 1996) 1-17.
- 10 Manija Sheriar Irani, *82 Family Letters to the Western Family of Lovers and Followers of Meher Baba* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1976) 59.

## Chapter Seven — The Occurrence of "Reality in illusion"

- 1 *SWG* 34-35.
- 2 According to Meher Baba *masts* are "Souls on the spiritual path experiencing the state of God-intoxication". Refer to Meher Baba, *Discourses* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1987) 414. For an extensive coverage of this phase of Meher Baba's life refer to William Donkin, *The Wayfarers: An account of the Work of Meher Baba with the God-intoxicated, and also with Advanced Souls, Sadhus, and the Poor. Fully*

*illustrated with many Photographs and Maps* (Ahmednagar: Meher Publications, 1949) 1-405.

- 3 For full details of this phase refer to Swami Satya Prakash Udaseen, ed. *The New Life of Avatar Meher Baba and His Companions: A compilation of all the 34 New Life Circulars* (Hyderabad: The Meher Vihar Trust, 1967) and also, D. E. Stevens, Rick M. Chapman, James M. Hastings, Gary and Patty Freeman eds. *Tales from the New Life with Meher Baba narrated by Eruch, Mehera, Mani and Meheru* (Berkeley: The Beguine Library, 1976).
- 4 For full documentation refer to *Meher Baba, The Highest of the High: 7th Sept. 1953* (Ahmednagar: Meher Publications, Nov. 1953) 1-8.
- 5 *SWG* 54.
- 6 *SWG* 156. For a discussion of the avataric concept refer to Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation: A Comparison of Indian and Christian Beliefs* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982); Ian Davie, *Jesus Purusha: A Vedanta-based Doctrine of Jesus* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1985); R. A. Nicholson, "The Perfect Man," *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (1921; Cambridge: UP, 1985) 77-142.
- 7 *SWG* 19.
- 8 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: UP, 1961) 59.
- 9 Andrew Ford, Homer: *The Poetry of the Past*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) 15.
- 10 Ford 16.
- 11 Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Anchor Books, 1963) 1.
- 12 *SWG* 19.
- 13 Refer to Hari Prasad Shastri, trans., *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, vol. 1 (London: Shantisadan, 1976) 12, and for the central text in the Mahabharata, the "Bhagavad Gita", refer to Shri Purohit Swami, trans., *The Geeta* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) 69-71.
- 14 Ford 57.
- 15 *SWG* 27.
- 16 Shri Jnaneshvar, *Jnaneshvari*, trans. V. G. Pradhan, ed. H. M. Lambert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969) 314.
- 17 *SWG* 19.
- 18 Refer to Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod eds., *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987) 61-214.
- 19 Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh, trans., *The Bijak of Kabir* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983) 46.
- 20 K. S. Duggal, trans., *Saint Bulleh Shah: The Mystic Muse* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1996) 13.
- 21 For a detailed study of Chaitanya refer to Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaisnava-sahijiva Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: UP, 1989) 25-67. An interesting text placing in doubt the often levelled charge that no *bhakti* exists in Sankaracharya's

advaita teaching is *The Hymns of Sankara*, trans. T.M.P Mahadevan (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986). This is noteworthy considering the fact that Brabazon mentions Sankaracharya several times in *Stay With God*. According to Islamic tradition, Mohammed mentioned 124,000 prophets and 313 messengers. Refer to Annemarie Schimmel, *And Mohammed is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1985) 56. Later in *Stay With God* (109), Brabazon again mentions “84,000 Prophets” and writes that this figure was stated by Shaykh Abu’l Fadl Hasan (tenth century); but this is also misquoted. The correct reference reads: “all the hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets were sent to preach one word. They bade the people say “Allah” (God) and devote themselves to Him.” Refer to R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (1921; Cambridge: UP, 1985) 7.

22 SWG 20.

23 SWG 20.

24 SWG 47-49. For the original message refer to Meher Baba, *The Highest of the High* (Ahmednagar: Meher Publications, 1953) 1-8.

25 SWG 22.

26 SWG 8.

27 Valmiki, *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, vol. 2, trans. Hari Prasad Shastri (London: Shantisadan, 1976) 11.

28 Judith Wright, letter to Brabazon, 1st August 1960.

29 Nammalvar, *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Visnu by Nammalvar*, trans. A. K. Ramanujan (Princeton: UP, 1981) 137.

30 SWG 24.

31 SWG 27-28 and 28-29.

32 C. J. Dennis, *The Sentimental Bloke* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1915).

33 SWG 32.

34 SWG 7.

35 SWG 26-27.

## Chapter Seven — “The Love Song of John Kerry”

1 SWG 50.

2 SWG 59.

3 Of Eliot, Brabazon wrote: “the most representative poet of the present peculiar English mentality which is the result of declining power without any spiritual basis upon which to rest and re-grow.” Refer SWG 164.

4 For an important treatise on love written during this period, “which deals with the metaphysical nature of love, the divine qualities of the beloved, and the spiritual states and psychology of the lover”, refer to Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits: The Oldest Persian Sufi Treatise on Love*, trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady (London: KPI Limited, 1986) Also refer to Annemarie Schimmel, “The

- Voice of Love: Mystical Poetry in the Vernaculars,” and “God’s Beloved and Intercessor for Man: Poetry in Honor of the Prophet,” *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry of Islam* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 135-212.
- 5 Refer to Anthony Bonner ed. and trans., *Doctor Illuminatus: A Ramon Lull Reader* (Princeton: UP, 1993) 180.
  - 6 R. E. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (1921; Cambridge: UP, 1985) 21.
  - 7 Nuruddin ‘Abd-Ur-Rahman Jami, Lawaih [*Flashes of Light*] *A Treatise on Sufism*, trans. E. H. Whinfield and Mirza Muhammad Kazvini (1906; London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1978) 35.
  - 8 Peter Lamborn Wilson and Nashrollah Pourjavady, trans., *The Drunken Universe: An Anthology of Persian Sufi Poetry* (Michigan: Phanes Press, 1987) 1-2. For a full account of al-Hallaj’s life and the central role he plays in Sufism, refer to Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: UP, 1982).
  - 9 *SWG* 59.
  - 10 *SWG* 60.
  - 11 St John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle and Poems*, trans. E. Allison Peers (1934; Kent: Burns and Oates, 1987) 448.
  - 12 Federico Garcia Lorca, *Deep Song and Other Prose* (New York: New Directions, 1980) 37.
  - 13 Federico Garcia Lorca, *Poem of the Deep Song* (1931; San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987) 25.
  - 14 *SWG* 59.
  - 15 *SWG* 60.
  - 16 *SWG* 61.

## Chapter Seven — God’s Speaking

- 1 Refer to the pamphlet *Out of the Ocean – Depths of Meher Baba’s Silence “God Speaks”* (Ahmednagar: Adi K. Irani, n.d.) 1-2.
- 2 *SWG* 73.
- 3 *SWG* 79-80.
- 4 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Maonharlal, 1975) 6.
- 5 *SWG* 69.
- 6 Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley, English trans., *The Popol Vuh* trans. Adrian Recinos (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1950). Brabazon had a copy of this particular translation in his library.
- 7 Goetz and Morley 81.
- 8 Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, trans., *The Rig Veda* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) 25.
- 9 Fabre d’Olivet, *The Hebraic Tongue Restored and the True Meaning of the Hebrew Words Re-established and Proved by their Radical Analysis*, trans. Nayán Louise Redfield (Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1991, first

- published in English 1921) 24—346.
- 10 Fabre d'Olivet 25 and 27. The Sufi writer Shabaz Britten Best in his work on Genesis glosses Fabre d'Olivet lines to read simply: "1. In the beginning ÆLOHIM, the BEING of beings, The Supreme Being, created in principle the potential existence of the Heavens and the Earth; — causing transmutation in the Abstract Essence of His Own Being. 2. And the Earth was contingent potentiality without form, and Darkness permeated the deep and infinite Space; then the Breath and Divine Spirit of ÆLOHIM animated the face of the Waters — the entire Unmanifested Cosmic Substance, with pregnant Life." Refer to Shabaz Britten Best, *Genesis Revised: based on Fabre d'Olivet "Hebraic Tongue Restored"* (Surrey: Sufi Publishing Co., 1964)
  - 11 Of particular interest is Fabre d'Olivet's translation of Æloah for God — "that-HE who-is, the plural of which Ælohim, signifies exactly HE-they-who-ARE: the Being of beings" which is the understanding Brabazon uses in his poem. Refer to Fabre d'Olivet 28.
  - 12 Swami Satya Prakash Udaseen, ed., *The Life Circulars of Avatar Meher Baba* (Hyderabad: The Meher Vihar Trust, 1968) 49.
  - 13 *SWG* 69.
  - 14 *SWG* 69.
  - 15 Robert Rouse, *The Making of a Book* (Woombye: privately published, 1996) 5.
  - 16 Refer to J.W.N. Sullivan, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* (1927; London: Unwin, 1975) 113.
  - 17 *SWG* 69.
  - 18 T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944) 59.
  - 19 *SWG* 78-79. The term "God-talk" is most probably taken from Barrie Reid letter, of 13 September 1955, to Brabazon. Refer to p 119.
  - 20 For the "Tree of Life" theme refer also to Fabre d'Olivet 65-93.
  - 21 *SWG* 77.

## Chapter Seven — The Perfect Master: The Axis

- 1 *SWG* 83.
- 2 *SWG* 84.
- 3 *SWG* 87.
- 4 This is a quote from the Indian Sage Patanjali. Refer to Shree Purohit Swami, trans., *Aphorisms of Yoga* by Bhagawan Shree Patanjali (London: Faber and Faber, 1973) 25.
- 5 *SWG* 88.
- 6 *SWG* 87.
- 7 This is a reference to an incident in the life of St Francis that was one of Brabazon's favourite stories. It recalls how Lord Bernard, a rich and wise nobleman of Assisi, while staying with St Francis, secretly watched the saint throughout the night repeating the same simple words "My God

and my all!” By morning Bernard was so moved by the saint’s love and devotion for God that he decided to become his companion for the rest of his life. Refer to Raphael Brown, trans., *The Little Flower of St Francis* (NY: Image Books, 1958) 42-45.

8 *SWG* 91.

9 *SWG* 92.

10 *SWG* 111.

11 J. W. N. Sullivan, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* (London: Unwin Books, 1964) 113.

12 *JWG* 4.

13 *SWG* 111. This assessment is not far removed from Pound’s own comments on his work towards the end of his life: “My writing. Stupid and ignorant all the way through. Stupid and ignorant. . . . Any good I’ve done has been spoiled by bad intentions — the preoccupation with irrelevant and stupid things”. Refer to Michael Reck, “A Conversation between Ezra Pound and Allen Ginsberg,” *Ezra Pound*, ed. J. P. Sullivan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 354. A more poignant assessment of Pound’s life is to be found in his own Addendum to “Canto 100”:  
M’amour, m’amour

what do I love and

where are you?

That I lost my center

fighting the world.

The dreams clash

and are shattered —

and that I tried to make a paradiso terrestre.

14 *SWG* 112.

15 *SWG* 126.

16 *SWG* 95.

17 *SWG* 118.

18 *SWG* 125-6.

19 *SWG* 94-5.

20 *SWG* 118.

21 *SWG* 122.

22 *SWG* 123-4.

23 *SWG* 154-5.

## Chapter Eight — A Period of Adjustment

1 Unpublished note from Brabazon’s archives.

2 This quotation is one of the precepts given by Zarathustra.

3 Francis Brabazon, “The Lord is Our Brother,” address, Bombay Press Conference, Bombay, 25th February 1959.

4 This poem was originally a scene in one of Brabazon’s plays. Refer to *ST* 46-53.



- 5 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 6 Francis Brabazon, "The Manner of God," (Kakinada Andhra: Meher Mandali, 1959).
- 7 "Book Reviews: Religion and Philosophy," *The Times of India* 28th February 1960: 6.  
M. F. Colaco, rev. of *Stay With God*, by Francis Brabazon, *Journal of the University of Bombay* September 1959: 166-167.
- 8 "New Books and Old," *The Aryan Path* August 1960: 369.
- 9 "New Books," *The Sunday Hindusthan Standard* 8th May 1960: 2.  
"Review and Notices," *The Vedanta Kesari* vol. XLVII no. 4th August 1960: 205.  
*The Hindu Weekly Magazine* 10th January 1960.
- 10 *Pakistan Quarterly* July 1960.
- 11 *West Australian* 25th December 1959.  
*The Courier Mail* 31st September 1959.
- 12 *Country Life* 13th November 1959.
- 13 Broadcast over the National Network (ABC) 10th January 1960.
- 14 Barry N. Elliot, letter to Brabazon n.d. (c. January 1960).
- 15 Brabazon, letter to Barry N. Elliot, 6th February 1960.
- 16 Brabazon is here referring to the classic text by Friedrich Max Muller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* (1899; New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1988).
- 17 Brabazon, letter to Barry N. Elliot, 6th February 1960.
- 18 J. B. Priestly, letter to Francis Brabazon, 6th July 1960.
- 19 Francis Brabazon, letter to J.B. Priestly, 25th July 1960.
- 20 *SWG* 165.
- 21 Francis Brabazon, letter to Ezra Pound, 7th February 1960.
- 22 A copy of *Stay With God* was also sent to Eleanor Roosevelt with the covering note: "The enclosed copy of "Stay With God", by Francis Brabazon, is being presented to you, at the request of the author, as a token of respect and affection for yourself personally and also in tribute to your magnificent career of public service. It is his earnest wish that you may enjoy reading this unusual volume, which has just been published in Australia."

## Chapter Eight — Staying with Meher Baba

- 1 These were later published with an introduction by Brabazon. Refer to Meher Baba, *The Everything and the Nothing* (Sydney: Meher House Publications, 1963). The only biography of Meher Baba which Brabazon wrote was in prose and published much later in his life. Refer to Francis Brabazon, *The Silent Word* (Sydney: Meher Baba Foundation, 1978).
- 2 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 3 Brabazon, letter to friends in Australia, 14th February 1960.
- 4 Brabazon, letter to friends in Australia, 14th February 1960.

- 5 Refer to Francis Brabazon, *Let Us the People Sing* (Pune: Meherjee A. Karkaria, 1962).
- 6 Sean O' Casey, *Five One-Act Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1958) 160 and *LUTPS* 18-19. Moses Asch and Alan Lomax ed., "Boll Weevil," *The Leadbelly Songbook* (N. Y. : Oak Publications, 1962) 23 and *LUTPS* 10-12.
- 7 *LUTPS* Preface.
- 8 A small booklet was later published which contained all the English lyrics. Refer to *Meher Kirtan* (Nagpur: Subodh Sindhu Press, 1962).
- 9 Nana Kher, Novel Experiment: Kirtan in English, *Nagpur Times* 22nd July 1962.
- 10 *TEWG* Preface.
- 11 *TEWG* 6.
- 12 Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds* trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), and *TEWG*: 9.
- 13 *TEWG* 28, and Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs, trans., *Hafiz of Shiraz* (London: John Murray, 1952) 58.
- 14 *TEWG* 48, and Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (N. Y.: Columbia UP, 1982) 131.
- 15 *TEWG* 17.
- 16 Noel Macainsh, rev. of *TEWG*, *Overland* April 1964: 62, and R. A. Simpson, rev. of *TEWG*, *Bulletin* 15th February 1964: 46.
- 17 S.T. Barnard, rev. of *TEWG*, *Australian Book Review* 1963:45.

## Chapter Eight — The Ghazal

- 1 *IDIS* Preface.
- 2 For an English translation of ten of the forty ghazals written by Meher Baba refer to Naosherwan Anzar, trans., *The Master Sings: Meher Baba's Ghazals* (Mumbai: Zeno Publishing Services, 1981).
- 3 Paul Smith, *Divan of Hafiz* (Melbourne: New Humanity Books 1983).
- 4 Unpublished. For another English version of this same poem refer to Paul Smith, *Divan of Hafiz* (Melbourne: New Humanities Books, 1983) 284. According to Michael Craig Hillmann literary criticism and analysis of Hafiz's ghazals only started in the the 1960s. Refer to Michael Craig Hillmann, introduction, *The Divan-i-Hafiz*, trans. H. Wilberforce Clarke (1891; Maryland: Iranbooks, 1998) AA.
- 5 Michael C. Hillmann, "Afterword," *Hafez: Dance of Life*, trans. Michael Boylan (Washington: Mage Publishers, 1988) 96.
- 6 *IDIS* iii.
- 7 *TTFB* 4.
- 8 Ahmed Ali, trans., *The Golden Tradition: An Anthology of Urdu Poetry* (NY: Columbia UP, 1973) 12.
- 9 *IDIS* iii. Meher Baba's quote is from *The Everything and the Nothing* (Sydney: Meher House Publications, 1963) 9.

- 10 *TTFB* 4.
- 11 *TTFB* 4.
- 12 In a talk given by Brabazon at Guruprasad he recalls Meher Baba asking him to write thirty ghazals. Refer to *TTFB* 4.
- 13 Given to Brabazon on 28th May 1968 at Guruprasad, Pune. For the ghazal in question refer to *TBIAIA* 94.
- 14 M. Mujeeb, *Ghalib* (New Delhi: Sakitya Akademi, 1969) 31.
- 15 *IDIS* iii.
- 16 Aijaz Ahmad, *Ghazals of Ghalib* (NY: Columbia UP, 1971) xxiii-xxiv. This book consists of a group of modern American poets, W. S. Merwin, Adrienne Rich, William Stafford, Mark Strand and others, and their attempts at reconstructing Ghalib's ghazals in English using literal translation of his poems by Aijaz Ahmad. Ahmad suggests that the "variety of interpretations" from the English poets is "indicative of the evocativeness of the poetry of Ghalib." I would suggest that it is also indicative of the fact that the essence of the ghazal is not yet fully understood by these poets, and this is where Brabazon's work is relevant.
- 17 K. C. Kanda, *Masterpieces of Urdu Ghazals: From the 17th to the 20th Century* (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1992) 4.
- 18 Arthur J. Arberry, ed. and trans., *Fifty Poems of Hafiz* (Cambridge: UP, 1953) 31.
- 19 A. Ghani Munsiff, trans., "Some Ghazals of Hafiz," *Pie Anthology*, ed. Paul Smith (Melbourne: Whole Earth Catalogue, 1974) 227 and 229.
- 20 Munsiff 224. In Hafiz's life his Beloved Master was Mohammed Attar (c. 14th century) of whom Hafiz wrote: "I am the disciple of the old tavern keeper and what need is there for you, oh *Sheikh* to be annoyed with me? / The irony of the situation is that you promised (the solution of life's riddle) and He fulfilled it." Refer to Munsiff 228.
- 21 *TBIAIA* 1.
- 22 *TBIAIA* 38.
- 23 *TBIAIA* 40. Brabazon's relationship with Sparkie Lukas comes to mind when reading this couplet.
- 24 *IDIS* 149.
- 25 *IDIS* 104.
- 26 *IDIS* 149.
- 27 *IDIS* 77.
- 28 *TBIAIA* 39.
- 29 *IDIS* 9.

## Chapter Eight — The Form and Flavour of Brabazon's Ghazal

- 1 For an analysis of another version of the English ghazal form refer to John Hollander *Rhyme's Reason* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 66-67.
- 2 Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs, trans., *Hafiz of Shiraz: Thirty Poems*

- (London: John Murray, 1952) 11. Avery and Heath-Stubbs also make the point that the “logical principle” of Aristotle “has been tacitly accepted by post-Renaissance European criticism until our very day” — a point that would not have been wasted on Brabazon.
- 3 Avery and Heath-Stubbs 11.
  - 4 *IDIS* 103.
  - 5 Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Mathnawi Books III and IV*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (1930; Cambridge: Gidd, 1982) 180.
  - 6 Avery and Heath-Stubbs 14.
  - 7 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. Nevill Coghill (Middlesex: Penguin, 1977) 21. In other ghazals, Brabazon makes reference, either directly or indirectly, to other books and poets he had read. For instance: “In the Street of Barefoot Lovers there are peddlers of song, clowns” (*IDIS* 66) is from Joseph Foster, *Street of the Barefoot Lovers* (London: Alvin Redman, 1954); “Our concern is with hunger and love, bread and bed . . .” (*IDIS* 104) is from Lionel Britton, *Hunger and Love* (London: Putnam, 1931); and the poet Rimbaud is mentioned directly “Who for fame and following did not care a fig, / But just loved. Yes, young Rimbaud would have come in big.” (*IDIS* 45) — in India, Brabazon had a copy of Rimbaud’s *The Illuminations* sent to him. And lastly, by way of example, Brabazon wrote a response to a poem he had read by the blind Irish poet Raferty, one of the last of the wandering Gaelic poets; the last verse of Raferty’s poem reads “Behold me now, / And my face to the wall, / A-playing music / Unto empty pockets.” (Mark Van Doren, ed., *An Anthology of World Poetry* (London: Cassell, 1929 p. 1135) while Brabazon’s opening couplet reads “Now am I also with my face to a wall, Raferty, aplaying music unto empty pockets; / Eyes without light — not blind as you were, but stone of stupor sunken in sockets.” (*IDIS* 144).
  - 8 Daniel Liebert, trans., *Rumi: Fragments and Ecstasies* (Santa Fe: Source Books, 1981) 41.
  - 9 This procedure has been used before by Hank Mindlin using couplets from ghazal poets in the Hafizian tradition, but other than Brabazon. Refer to Hank Mindlin, “Hafiz and the Ghazal,” *The Awakener* vol. XIV nos. 3 and 4 (n. d.): 36-37.
  - 10 *IDIS* Preface.
  - 11 Meher Baba, *The Everything and the Nothing* (Sydney: Meher House, 1963) 10.
  - 12 *TBIAIA* 80.
  - 13 *IDIS* 99.
  - 14 *TBIAIA* 74.
  - 15 *TBIAIA* 90.
  - 16 *TBIAIA* 70.
  - 17 *IDIS* 11.
  - 18 *TBIAIA* 68.

- 19 *IDIS* 150.
- 20 *IDIS* 80.
- 21 *TBIAIA* 40.
- 22 *TBIAIA* 40.

## Chapter Nine — New Writing

- 1 Besides two car accidents, Meher Baba's life was full of demanding activities which also took their toll on his physical body. These included extensive travel to be in the company of his lovers and followers — often under extreme hardship — of work with the poor, the lepers and the destitute; and of bowing down to the feet of thousands of people.
- 2 *TWAVE* Preface.
- 3 *TTFB* 4.
- 4 *IDIS* 35.
- 5 Meher Baba said "I know three things: I am the Avatar in every sense of the word. Whatever I do is the expression of my unbounded love. I suffer infinite agony eternally through your ignorance". Refer Meher Baba, *The Everything and the Nothing* (Sydney: Meher House, 1963) 42.
- 6 *IDIS* 8.
- 7 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 8 *TBIAIA* 11.
- 9 *FATB* 13.
- 10 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives. While living in India, Brabazon attempted to learn Hindi but could never master it.
- 11 In India Brabazon was sent the following modern works of poetry: Jean Cocteau, "Leoun," trans. Alan Neame, *Agenda*, vol. 2 no. 3 (1961) 1-16; Tom Gunn and Ted Hughes, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962); Robert Lowell, *Imitations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962); and A. Alvarez, ed., *The New Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).
- 12 This did not occur until 1974, five years after Brabazon had returned to Australia.
- 13 *TWAVE* 9.
- 14 *TWAVE* 13.
- 15 *TWAVE* 14.
- 16 *TWAVE* 19.
- 17 *TWAVE* 25-26.
- 18 *TWAVE* 26.
- 19 *TWAVE* 26. This final image recalls the more triumphal Christ-image created by the Russian poet Alexander Blok in the last lines of his long poem "The Twelve" — a work which Brabazon admired:  
Gentle stepping through the blizzard,  
With pearly mantle covered,  
White-rose crown upon his head —  
JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD.

- 20 *TWAVE* 29.
- 21 *TWAVE* 31.
- 22 The opening words to this line may be a reference to Carl Sandburg's collection, *The People, Yes* (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1936).
- 23 *TWAVE* 42-43. Brabazon supplies the footnote for the word "Panchasheel": panch, 5; sheel, principles. Used in the Sino-Indian dispute, meaning the 5 Principles of Coexistence.
- 24 *TWAVE* 45.
- 25 *TWAVE* 50. The rhythm of the poem is base on the Jamacian folk song "Linstead Market".
- 26 *TWAVE* 53. A footnote reads: "Panchakosh" = 5 sheaths which surround *Atman* or Self.
- 27 *TWAVE* 58.
- 28 *TWAVE* 63.
- 29 *TWAVE* 64-65.
- 30 *TWAVE* 69-70.
- 31 Manija Sheriar Irani (Meher Baba's sister) 82 *Family Letters to the Western Family of Lovers and Followers of Meher Baba* (South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1976) 345.

## Chapter Nine — Now We Face the Ocean

- 1 *TTFB* 7-9.
- 2 Francis Brabazon, *Meher Baba has said about Drugs*, n.p. (c. 1973).
- 3 Refer to *TGBOP*. Many of the songs collected in this volume were written after Brabazon returned to Australia. One memorable play written by Brabazon, but as yet unpublished, "Being is Dying by Loving" (the title is taken from one of Meher Baba's statement) was performed as part of the 1973 June Anniversary celebrations held at Avatar's Abode. It consisted of twenty-five separate items including songs, skits and narrative passages and touched on a wide variety of social issues, for instance, the relationship between men and women and the generation gap between fathers and sons.
- 4 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 5 Unpublished note from Brabazon's archives.
- 6 Francis Brabazon, *The Meher News Exchange: East and West* vol. 2 no. 1, March 1973: 1.
- 7 Francis Brabazon, *Introductory pamphlet to Avatar's Abode*, n.p. (c. 1974).
- 8 *TWOTW* 16.
- 9 *TSW* 3-4.
- 10 Francis Brabazon, letter to Montsalvat Poetry Festival organisers, 7th July 1979.
- 11 Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaloddin Rumi* (London: East-West Publications, 1980) 396.

- 12 A second collection of his ghazals was published posthumously in 1988.  
Refer to *TBLALA*.
- 13 *IDIS* 14.

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