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'Of Things Beyond Us As We Are': Tom Stannage and Faith in History

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The poetry of Wallace Stevens, and especially the image of the man with the blue guitar, is an intriguing thread through key works by Tom Stannage. The American poet was resolutely secular, severe about the need to be free of ideology, but deeply aware of the numinous and non-material. In the provocative, winding ballad of 1937 based on Picasso's image of *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, Stevens celebrated the power of imagination and the poet's responsibility to shape reality.¹ Similarly, from the couplet of lament that opened *The People of Perth* to the foregrounding of the artisan-writer-mentor in his manifesto on 'The Freedom to Teach',² Stannage claimed his own 'blue guitar' of historical analysis to play 'the tune beyond us as we are'.

This was often a dark vision: essentially *The People of Perth* argued that the forces of social power 'beyond us as we are' sat heavily on the poor and the outsiders, 'nothing changed upon the blue guitar'. But for Stannage the response of historians could not be resignation, instead the task was one of engagement to 'bring the world quite round' or at least to 'patch it as I can'. Meditative and metaphorical, Stannage's writing held a vision of a historical vocation. He saw the writer and teacher as called, at the deepest level of being, to give account of the record of communities and individuals because 'things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar'. This ontological understanding of history as vocation has little to do with the history of religion in conventional terms, but it sharpens our awareness of theological strands in Stannage's writing, and his treatment of the churches, including in particular the social power of Anglicanism. Opposed to fundamentalism of all kinds, but especially of the right, the religious values affirmed in his writing are those that work for the underdog, that keep a metaphorical foot in the door against righteous certainty and smug privilege.

Deeply held values or prejudices, and deeply felt emotions, emerge as social forces in Stannage's analysis. As Tom said in his historiographical reflection on the Benedictine mission town of New Norcia in 1993,

I am not ... a historian of religion. ... I have an abiding interest in the faiths by

¹ Wallace Stevens, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', in Oscar Williams (ed.), *A Little Treasury of*

² C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth: A social history of Western Australia's capital city*, Perth, 1979; Tom Stannage, 'The Freedom to Teach', Seminar Paper, Humanities Research Centre, ANU, 29 August 1999, transcript held by author.

which people live. But I remain as I was in 1966, a political historian.³

Trained on the cusp of ‘history from below’ and inducted early into the painstaking work of reading rate books and electoral returns, Stannage was committed to understanding society ‘as a process, historically constructed by people who have been historically constructed’.⁴ The non-material world of perceptions, assumptions and faith was part of that construction. Questions of whether and how things are ‘changed upon the blue guitar’ might be answered variously, but to inspire readers and students with the need for change, and the elusive confidence to seek it, was the hope at the core of Tom Stannage’s work.

Stories of faith and history

At a fundamental level, Tom Stannage was aware of the diversity of Australian religion. As Geoffrey Bolton points out, it is a commonplace of twentieth-century Australian historiography that the sons of the manse and the rectory were drawn disproportionately to Australian history.⁵ The church was not a monolith in Stannage’s experience; instead it was a vehicle where stories were told by ordinary people, given attention and a wider meaning by clergy like his Irish father, a priest of the Anglican church. As a boy he overheard the power of those stories, and later credited them with shaping his interest in social history:

stories about human experience that began on my father’s verandah with me in a verandah sleep-out did in time sort of make their mark about wanting to write about people and about the human condition.⁶

Stannage also knew that church opinion was not uniform: his father chose to celebrate the feast of St Mark over Anzac Day services on 25 April, and weathered the controversy it generated. Nor were all parishes equal in style or influence. The parish of Bassendean where Stannage grew up, and whose history project he mentored through to publication in 2008,⁷ was an outer-suburban community of workers where confidence in the church was hard-won. It was not Christ Church, Claremont, and it was as distinct from the Anglican ascendancy as Midland High School, or Perth Modern School, were from Guildford Grammar.⁸

The Anglican parish of Bassendean might not have been an establishment

³ C.T. Stannage, ‘New Norcia in History’, *New Norcia Studies Journal*, vol. 1 (1993), p. 2.

⁴ C.T. Stannage, ‘Just a Suburban Boy’, Conference paper, September 1982, typescript.

⁵ Geoffrey Bolton, ‘The Making of a Historian: The early life and scholarship of Tom Stannage, 1944 – 1979’, in Deborah Gare and Jenny Gregory (eds), *From the Other Side, The life and work of Tom Stannage, 1944 – 2012: Studies in Western Australian History*, vol. [x], 2014, p.x; Anne O’Brien, ‘Rethinking Blasphemy: Religious ideas in the writings of W.K. Hancock, Manning Clark and Russell Ward’, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 38, 2007, pp. 229, 243; Malcolm Campbell and Mark Hutchinson, ‘After Serle, Before the Bicentenary: A survey of academic historians’, *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, vol. 62, 1990, pp. 15-16.

⁶ C.T. Stannage, Interview with Peter Read, transcript, 19 February 1992. Copy held by Department of History, The University of Western Australia.

⁷ *Persistence in Faith: A history of St Mark’s Anglican Church Bassendean, Western Australia 1909-2009*, Bassendean, WA, 2009.

⁸ The Stannages chose Midland High School over Guildford Grammar for Tom’s early high schooling, though his family was eligible for reduced tuition fees at the elite Anglican school due to his father’s ministry. His clash with class prejudice in the history classroom at Perth Modern School is covered in his interview with Peter Read.

stronghold but his father's study opened the world of books to Stannage as a child. History books were a junior sub-section within his father's theology library. Illustrations captured his imagination (so much that he cut them out and stuck them in his school work, to his later horror), and the books became treasures that spoke of what his father valued. In the *Harmsworth History of the World* there was a narrative of tradition across time and place.⁹ It was not theology per se, but in a household that 'went to church several times on Sunday and [had] church activities in between',¹⁰ memory, belief, and story each had their own related place. As Stannage remarked in 1992, 'What I'm saying is the household thing, the Bassendean thing, was actually propelling me to be good at history, even if I hadn't thought of becoming a historian.'¹¹

The question of why some stories were forgotten in Western Australia propelled Stannage towards what theologians of liberation would call a 'preferential option for the poor',¹² and towards public controversy. His early papers 'Uncovering Poverty in WA History'¹³ and 'The Pioneer Myth',¹⁴ as well as a fuller treatment of their themes in *The People of Perth*, provoked outrage from interest groups committed to established orthodoxies. The risks were personal, professional, and, as the uninvited visitors and unwelcome phone calls he received at home indicated, absolutely real.

Holding the power-brokers of the past to account in the mining and pastoralist stronghold of Western Australia felt dangerous. We can learn much from Stannage's candid interview with the historian Peter Read regarding risk, faith and history. 'I always say to my students,' he noted,

that history is not written in a political or social vacuum. Although I've said that for a decade in classes, I hadn't actually sort of physically understood what that could mean until the mid-80s.¹⁵

Stannage was sanguine about taking the consequences of his convictions, but shaken. So histories that dared to ask the prophet's traditional questions, 'Who are the voiceless? What would they say?', bridged the distance between the historian and the advocate for change. Stannage made the connection clear to Read, but cast his stance as for social justice (particularly for a hearing for Aboriginal histories) without any hint of an explicitly theological motivation.

Significantly, in the public challenges to the integrity of his history, Stannage knew that he could count church networks as part of an infrastructure of support. He felt himself at one level to be a lone voice, conscious of the danger that advocacy

⁹ Arthur Mee, J.A. Hammerton and A.D. Innes (eds), *Harmsworth History of the World*, London, 1907 – 1909.

¹⁰ Stannage, Interview, Transcript 1, p. 7.

¹¹ Stannage, Interview, Transcript 1, p. 8.

¹² For example: James Nickoloff (ed.), *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings*, Maryknoll, 1996; Miguel De La Torre, *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians*, Louisville, 2013.

¹³ C.T. Stannage, 'Uncovering Poverty in Australian History', *Early Days: Journal of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, vol. 8, 1978; also C.T. Stannage, 'Uncovering Poverty in Australian History', in Penny Russell and Richard White and Russell (eds), *Pastiche 1: Reflections on nineteenth century Australia*, Sydney, 1994.

¹⁴ See, for example, Patrick O'Brien, 'In thanks to the Pioneers: A personal statement', Patrick O'Brien, *Quadrant*, May 1985, pp. 29, 5, 50-52; and C.T. Stannage, *Western Australia's Heritage: The pioneer myth*, Nedlands, 1985.

¹⁵ Stannage, Interview, Transcript 1, p.14.

might bring to his family.¹⁶ But he also drew on a sense of community; there were long-established relationships in the church as well as through sport that meant he would not be dismissed without a hearing. Stannage's credibility in the football world¹⁷ was matched in the Anglican community. It was, he knew,

a church constituency which would not believe that the Tom Stannage that they'd known through the Reverend Stannage with all it meant—I mean talks to church groups over the metropolitan area—could be all that bad. Indeed there might be something in what he's doing. ... I didn't feel as if I was going to be cut off from things.¹⁸

The kinship of the church was a safeguard to Stannage's reputation and he was confident of his identity in that network.

The confidence to be subversive is a key point of connection between Stannage's brand of social history and the theologies of liberation that encourage reflection on the gospel in the light of lived experience, privileging especially the experience of the poor and those without social power and influence. In that cycle of interpretation, reflection and analysis leads to action for justice and compassion.¹⁹ In the theological critique of power, organized religion often does not fare well.

Religion and power, or churches and the State

Readers looking for 'religion' in *The People of Perth* need to pay careful attention. The book's overview identifies the two prominent cathedrals as architectural features of the city but not does consider the people frequenting them; transport, libraries, administrative centres, schools and universities, parks and gardens connect with the human drama in Stannage's account, but churches are more marginal.²⁰ The convicts who appear in the book's second paragraph built places of worship for 'spiritual improvement' in a regime that left a 'spiritual' legacy.²¹ But it was more a legacy of shame rather than comfort or renewal.²² Of all the things history's people did in Stannage's reckoning at the outset of the *People of Perth*, believing was not among them. He acknowledges that people 'worried themselves'²³ about the afterlife, and took (or did not take) actions that reflected virtues they were committed to, or rejected. Yet there is nothing in *The People of Perth* of people praising God, making decisions informed by faith, risking a path for the sake of a call, or spending time in prayer.

Stannage defined the challenge of writing Perth's history as 'placing life experiences in a meaningful social context defined in this book largely in terms of the distribution of power'.²⁴ As others note elsewhere in this volume, Stannage's major

¹⁶ Bolton and Lenore...

¹⁷ See Shane Burke article, this journal [note for editors to complete].

¹⁸ Stannage, Interview, Transcript 1, p. 15.

¹⁹ For the method see John Wilken 'Christological Method: Juan Luis Segundo and Mother Teresa of Calcutta', *Australasian Catholic Record*, vol. 84, 2007, pp. 330-338; Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury, Eugene, 1976, 2002.

²⁰ Stannage, *People of Perth*, pp. 1-9.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 1.

²² On the toll of convictism see the account of Henry and Ann Haynes in Stannage, *People of Perth*, pp. 88-92.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

theme is often power and its distribution, but here the statement of his intention was caught in an unstable phrase: the sentence wobbled on just what was ‘meaningful’ and what was ‘defined by power’. A context? Or experiences? Stannage clarified in the next breath that his major theme was power and its social consequences, but the chink of openness to what was ‘meaningful’ for people remained. The author would not define success in external terms, and the book would be rough on those whose focus was power—social or otherwise—to the exclusion of meaning.

Stannage condemned the Anglican ascendancy in colonial Perth as self-interested. The opening sections of *The People of Perth* make it clear that the first community of investors shaped spiritual heritages as well as social and legal ones.²⁵ The alliance between religion and respectability is generally in the author’s sights. Stannage takes as a reference point the conservative writer to the *Perth Gazette* who enlisted God to underpin the ‘internal peace’²⁶ of a social order ‘ordained from the beginning’,²⁷ and signals his interest in how people subverted that ‘ordained pattern’.²⁸ His judgment that ‘the State served the Anglican Church and the Anglican Church served the State’,²⁹ has since been challenged by calling attention to the ‘even-handedness’ of Anglican governors toward the tiny minority of non-Conformist and Catholic adherents,³⁰ but Stannage named an Anglican hegemony with ferocious precision.

Stannage marshalled evidence from the sources themselves, but he also swung in with the phrases of a Biblical preacher entering the world of faith where his players struggled against their consciences. When a dissident worker was banished to Albany for murder in the 1830s, Stannage suggests to his readers that the colonial commandant and faithful churchman, Frederick Irwin, rejoiced:

by whose Almighty will was Perth purged of this sower of discord and evil? Mackie [the magistrate], his cousin, friend, and the Lord’s servant in this and in all things—didn’t they pray together and share the Holy Sacrament?—had done a good thing.³¹

Equally, in the 1850s, when the colonial secretary, W.A. Sandon, designed the Perth Boys’ School in line with the gothic revival, Stannage evokes the social control implied by the religious space.

Daily contemplation of it [the gothic building] made good governance more possible; it allowed men to soak up godliness and goodness; it offered the pupils lessons in citizenship equal in value to instruction from gothic text books.³²

Noting that the pupils ‘found that godliness was a stuffy condition’³³ Stannage aligns himself with the ‘philistines’ who ‘thought ventilation was necessary’ wanted more

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁰ Rowan Strong, ‘Church and State in Western Australia: Implementing new Imperial Paradigms in the Swan River Colony, 1827–1857’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 61, 2010, pp. 517–540.

³¹ Stannage, *People of Perth*, p. 46.

³² *ibid.*, p. 135.

³³ *ibid.*, p.136.

practical windows.³⁴ When Bishop Hale, who had earlier founded the South Australian mission to Aborigines at Poonindie, was confronted with the case of Lockier Burges, who was to be hanged for the murder of an Aborigine, Stannage signals there was a choice to be made: for or against power, for or against injustice. Hale did not speak out against the Burges' hanging, but neither did he protest against the gentry who sought to remove the judge.

[Burges] had worshipped in Hale's churches. Yet he had slaughtered an Aborigine. For whom should Hale pray? Who was most in need of the church's mission? In 1875 the good bishop left Perth. The wild men of the colony had proved too much for him.³⁵

In this accounting of religion in public life Hale's was not a prophetic voice against evil as Stannage saw that it might have been. His silence was not prudent; it exposed defeat.

The Anglican church in Perth was of and for the gentry; its precepts governed the courtship of respectable loving couples like Josephine Bussell and Henry Princep, its strictures denounced disruptive workers like John McKail; and its benevolence supplied Christmas presents to the Church of England Native Mission judged by the newspaper of the ascendancy as gifts from 'children of the most powerful and civilized nation in the world, to those of, we will not say the most, but we may say one of the most degraded'.³⁶ Anglicans who did not confirm respectable assumptions, like the missionary advocates for Aborigines Luis Giustiniani in the 1830s and J.B. Gribble in the 1880s, were not 'gentlemen' and the establishment moved against them.³⁷ Concerned to break open the assumption of Perth as a harmonious, untroubled community, Stannage found that any 'zeal' that carried believers beyond the normal parameters of a 'decent—Civilized—and Christian society'³⁸ was eroded by the definitive bond between gentry and a conservative church. Trouble went underground.

It was not only in the Anglican church of the ruling class that Stannage could trace division; the influence of capital also made trouble for the unity of other churches. In 1971 Stannage published an article on the electoral politics of nineteenth-century Western Australia using the correspondence between Rosendo Salvado, Benedictine monk, bishop and founder of the Aboriginal mission at New Norcia, and the Catholic bishop of Perth, Matthew Gibney.³⁹ In this article, Catholicism was of interest to Stannage as a potential force against the ascendancy of the colony's six premier families; and as a force for electoral reform and the liberalisation of society in the state's early history. But Catholicism was not monolithic either. Thus, Stannage assessed the cultured Spaniard Rosendo Salvado as a force for political conservatism, or at least as adept at befriending and finding common ground with the colony's ruling elite.⁴⁰ Stannage cautioned against the judgement of politically radical Irish

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 124.

³⁶ *Perth Gazette*, 26 December 1863, cited in Stannage, *People of Perth*, p. 110.

³⁷ Stannage, *People of Perth*, pp. 39-40, 266-7; on Stannage within the historiography of Giustiniani see Lesley Borowitzka, 'The Reverend Dr Luis Giustiniani and Anglican Conflict in the Swan River Colony, Western Australia 1836 – 1838', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 35, 2011, p. 335.

³⁸ Cited in Stannage, *People of Perth*, p. 39.

³⁹ C.T. Stannage, 'Bishops Gibney and Salvado and West Australian Politics, 1889 –1897', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 6, 1971, pp. 274-85.

⁴⁰ Stannage, 'Bishops Gibney and Salvado', p. 279.

Catholic John Horgan in the late 1880s that Salvado was ‘the biggest squatter of them all’,⁴¹ but cited it to demonstrate that Salvado’s political alliances were not with the Catholic Irish. Stannage’s discussion of the difference between Gibney and Salvado on the issue of government support for church schools argues that Salvado’s network of influence in the gentry-landholding circle was more important to him than the threat (if he saw it as a threat) to Catholic education. Taking for granted the wealth of New Norcia and Salvado’s capacity as a businessman, Stannage’s article was again a manifesto against assumptions of an easy consensus in West Australian communities.

Research enabled in community

The Salvado-Gibney article was informed by Stannage’s long-standing interest in electoral politics, and was made possible by access to sources facilitated by friendship. The archive at New Norcia, and Stannage’s collaboration with Abbot Placid Spearritt in the 1990s, would also provide the impetus to articulate a vision of the next steps in historical research and writing on the Benedictine mission town. In a short paper for the inaugural New Norcia Studies Day in 1993, Stannage set the former mission in the existing landscape of colonial and imperial scholarship, and then argued surprisingly for a new frame ‘less of analysis perhaps, than of faith’.⁴² What did he mean by that?

The affirmation of faith as history’s crucible dovetailed with Stannage’s reflections⁴³ on the loss of focus within, and status of, academic history in Australia. Stannage confessed a long-standing anxiety that so much attention since the 1970s to the stories of oppression meant that ‘the trade of history [was] weakened, uncertain of its mission, unable to go back [to Imperial themes] (as the New Right wants), ineffective, a servant of what?’⁴⁴ He urged the discipline to give attention to other strands of human experience: joy as well as sorrow, and the life of faith as well as the fight for freedom. Classically he cited the sources themselves as pointing the way: the Benedictine traditions at New Norcia stretching back to the sixth century were at the heart of explaining life in this community.⁴⁵ The story of the mission town is large, connecting themes across empire, race, class and gender, as well as religion. It offered a close focus for scholarship but not a narrow one. Stannage concluded by advocating a coherent and three-part approach to future historical analyses of New Norcia—an agenda for work that needed to be: ‘spiritually bound, intellectually aggressive and socially assured’.⁴⁶ These three touchstones remain important guides for work in religious history more broadly, and not only in Australia.

These qualities, unexplained further, are rich but not transparent: spiritually bound, intellectually aggressive and socially assured. They challenge historians (of religion and of belief more generally) to consider, first, what it means to be accountable to (or bound by) traditions of commitment, spiritual and otherwise; and also to examine the claims of communal identity, denominational surely, as well as intellectual and broadly formational. Secondly, there is a challenge to engage with the priority of rationality over faith in traditional historical explanation, including within

⁴¹ *Western Mail*, 26 May 1888, cited in Stannage, ‘Bishops Gibney and Salvado’, p. 279.

⁴² Stannage, ‘New Norcia in History’, p. 8.

⁴³ See C.T. Stannage, ‘Sins of Omission: Direction for Australian History’, *Australian History Teacher*, November 1987; and Tom Stannage, ‘The Freedom to Teach’, in Gare and Gregory, pp. [?].

⁴⁴ Stannage, ‘New Norcia in History’, p. 7.

⁴⁵ See also Katharine Massam, ‘Tom Stannage’, *New Norcia Studies*, vol. 20 (2012), p. 69-70.

⁴⁶ Stannage, ‘New Norcia in History’, p. 8.

the history of the Australian churches, and to consider the methodological tools required to include the numinous in intellectual narratives. Finally, the challenge is to explore what the awareness of faith and belief adds not only to (Australian) historical writing, but also to (Australian) public life. Essentially, Stannage asks if we might dare to take ‘the soul’ seriously as a category of historical analysis. It is quite a vision, as Stannage also admitted in his closing line: ‘What a challenge!’⁴⁷ His agenda for New Norcia, he argued, would liberate it from ‘an internalised and locked frame’; it was also a way forward for history itself.

Faith in History

It was faith *in* history itself, including the potential to enable social transformation and the freedom to nurture new scholarship, that was at the forefront for Stannage. The tools to enable the historical work had always been significant: his commitment to sources first, followed by direct engagement with them in teaching meant undergraduate students from their first year were writing essays on questions they defined themselves with the central rubric: ‘Be Bold’.⁴⁸ Consistent with this were his engagement with publishing programs for facsimile editions of historically important texts through UWA Press; priority work with archives, museums, galleries, or sheds with assorted papers;⁴⁹ and an eye for promoting student work to make it (and its footnotes) available for teaching. As skills to handle those tools of the craft, Stannage argued increasingly for reflective capacity and courage to engage evidence well and see the questions clearly. Confidence was central. He reported on his study leave in 1990-1991 with one sentence, saying simply: ‘It was a quiet, reflective leave, very necessary to gain the confidence necessary to write a general history of Australia.’⁵⁰ Expanding this at the behest of administrators he offered evidence of reflection rather than archival industry:

In mid Tasmania I drew sketches of Ross on themes relevant to my history. I spent a lot of time contemplating the Ross Bridge and thinking about relationships both spatial and social, as I did later at Richmond. In Hobart I went to the Museum and to the Art Gallery. I spent a lot of time looking at Law’s busts of Aboriginal people.⁵¹

The report attracted marginal exclamation marks from an exasperated pen, but he claimed the space to hone personal capacities alongside intellectual ones. This was history requiring ontological commitment; this was history, as vocation.

Even in the early 1990s Stannage therefore hoped to write a history of Australia. It was never published, though a manuscript was completed a decade later.⁵² One working title for the project was *Australia: The Imagined Nation*. His agenda for the telling of Australian history was to grasp, as the poet Gwen Harwood did ‘what we have made in this country of the nature and names of love’.⁵³ He

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Stannage, ‘Freedom to Teach’, p. 10.

⁴⁹ ‘The Churches’ were a separate category of his service outside the university, see C.T. Stannage, Confidential Promotion Application, 18 March 1997, File No. 09 07001 403, UWA Archives.

⁵⁰ C.T. Stannage, Study Leave Report, 1991. UWA.

⁵¹ C.T. Stannage, Revised Study Leave Report, 1991. UWA.

⁵² Tom Stannage, [title], unpublished manuscript, 2001. Maria Stannage. [DG to provide reference].

⁵³ Stannage, ‘Freedom to Teach’, p. 6.

signalled, therefore, a ‘forensic engagement with the past’ that was anything but detached. It demanded the same nuanced awareness of evidence as explorations of belief. This ‘imagined nation’ would not have been written up from a card-index of facts. Instead, as the extract from his unpublished manuscript in this volume, ‘Wythenoes in Gondwanaland’, shows, it drew attention to the affective, emotional realities of the past and aimed in turn to provoke reflection and debate.

Stannage’s reflections on teaching intersected with this discussion of transcendence and the non-material dimensions of historical work. Thinking metaphorically was a goal. Image, allusion, playful and subversive lecture titles were his stock in trade; students were forced to engage with metaphor in order to grasp the coherence in the subject matter. He considered teaching subjects on ‘Colours in History’, ‘The Blue Guitar in History’, ‘The Night in History’.⁵⁴ Thinking metaphorically is also at the heart of the theological enterprise; reading texts well depends upon it, especially reading Biblical texts. Without capacity for metaphor belief becomes fundamentalism; Stannage imbued his teaching with metaphor and disdained the encroaching fundamentalisms of bureaucracy. It was driven by Thatcherism, he argued, and conjured a biblical image of this ‘Lazarus-like lion’ that enabled Enoch Powell ‘kneeling down in church [to remember] how much we should thank God for the gift of capitalism’.⁵⁵ The agents of Staff Development were to be feared as much, in another evocative image, as well-intentioned nineteenth-century missionaries who ‘strangled a vital culture almost to death’.⁵⁶

Stannage’s interest in transcendent values and virtues was also reflected in a vehement conviction that knowledge that mattered could not be commodified, but that it would change people. He held that faithful engagement with the stories of the past opened new horizons, empowered genuine research questions, and refined perspectives. His seminar paper on ‘The Freedom to Teach’ delivered in 1999 and 2000, offered examples of individual students who had flourished because, as one student indicated in a pre-exam reflection, the enterprise of research in a community of equals empowered them. ‘This is what I’ve noticed during tutorials this year,’ he declared:

Every single person is truly touched by what they have discovered through their own research. Set an exam which will let our creative juices flow. Questions which allow us to examine the general outcome of events and how they fit into history in general; something that releases the power of our own interpretation.⁵⁷

Most at stake in the battle against programmatic delivery and narrow bureaucratic control that Stannage waged in his ‘Freedom’ paper, was the individual engagement of teacher and student and the capacity to respond to students’ particular interests and commitments.

The discourse of teaching and the discourse of faith overlap in the writings of Tom Stannage. Listening was a key teaching strategy. This is a contemplative stance. Stannage resourced it with the work of Hugh Mackay on the social value of community and the personal, but the reflective attention to the other, ‘to listen to our

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 11.

students until their own historical voices are heard clearly and strongly',⁵⁸ echoes religious traditions of prayer. Listening emerges as the central virtue of teaching; in a passage that shares biblical cadences with the epistles of Paul, Stannage identifies listening as an act of commitment demanding time and patience, generosity and a gift of acceptance (though not necessarily agreement). Most significantly, genuine listening was mutual and risky. Stannage did not use those words, but held that:

Listening is also an act of courage, making ourselves, as teachers, intellectually vulnerable but seriously considering the ideas of the students even if they might be outside our comfort zones.⁵⁹

These are spiritual qualities, demanding maturity and discipline. This kind of history and history teaching, alive to emotion and conviction, kept personal stories at the centre of investigation. It was a safeguard for freedom as it guaranteed intellectual rigour.

Rigour itself bridged categories, and held another, perhaps the most significant, key to personal integration. The discipline of the sporting field had long blended into spiritual asceticism, first in the Greek and Roman world and then in Christian traditions of scholarship.⁶⁰ Working closely with John Todd in the oversight of football in Western Australia, Stannage drew directly on Todd's coaching strategies to insist that students, like players, give of their best, boldly.⁶¹

I observed [Todd's] sheer impatience with under-performers; I realized that in university I had been a bit soft with quite able people rolling along, so I started to give them 'half-time lectures'. I didn't take them behind the grandstand and give them a thrashing, but I became firmer with students who had 'this much' ability and I sensed were giving only 'this much', and worked harder with them.⁶²

Religion and sport shared a vocabulary, a series of metaphors—testing, trial, running the race, prize, champion, confidence, faith—that Stannage applied to the academy. He noted Todd had been tested by injury, and believed that strengths could come from physical pain and social struggle.⁶³ History was not a game, but it was a vigorous personal contest for the hearts and minds of the community.

The end-point of metaphysical contest is always hidden from public view. We can sense deeply held conviction, brave experiment, false steps, dashed hopes, exhilarating achievement and enduring commitment. It all points away from neat conclusion and draws instead towards an image. Like Stannage, we can return to the figure hunched over the blue guitar, singing anthems of the people for a new reality, 'Above the arrowy still strings/ The maker of a thing yet to be made.'⁶⁴ And then at the twelfth stanza of Wallace Stevens, there is another twist, not ever cited by Stannage so far as I know, but just as surely holding the scholarly vocation he

⁵⁸ Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach', p. 6; citing Hugh Mackay, *On Listening*, on p. 10.

⁵⁹ Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach', p. 11.

⁶⁰ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited by Arnold Davison, translated by Michael Chase, Malden, Mass., 1995; William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, Oxford and New York, 2004.

⁶¹ Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach', p. 10.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶³ Stannage, *Freedom to Teach*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ Cited Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach', p. 1.

preached and the costly academic vision he hoped for:

Tom-tom c'est moi. The blue guitar
And I are one. ... Where
Do I begin and end? And where,
As I strum the thing, do I pick up
That which momentarily declares
Itself not to be I and yet
Must be. It could be nothing else.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Stevens, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', in *Treasury of American Poetry*, pp.344-5.